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COMPOSITIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND SYNTACTIC FEATURES IN ANGLICAN SERMON DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

Метою дослідження є визначення композиційної структури та синтаксично-стилістичних особливостей англійських проповідей на матеріалі автентичних текстів у межах теолінгвістичної парадигми, а також з'ясування функціональної ролі мовних засобів у реалізації комунікативних завдань кожного структурного компонента проповіді.

Методологія ґрунтується на структурно-композиційному, синтаксичному та кількісно-статистичному аналізі, що забезпечують вияв закономірностей використання синтаксичних конструкцій і риторичних прийомів. Теоретичне підґрунтя становить теолінгвістика – міждисциплінарна галузь мовознавства, яка досліджує взаємодію мови та релігії й механізми вербалізації богословських смислів у релігійному дискурсі.

Матеріалом дослідження стали 72 автентичні англійські проповіді, аналіз яких дозволив виокремити типову чотирикомпонентну структуру: вступ, розповідь, тлумачення та висновок. Кожна частина має специфічне синтаксичне й стилістичне оформлення, підпорядковане її комунікативній функції.

*Вступна частина спрямована на встановлення контакту з аудиторією; характерні анафора, паралелізм, риторичні запитання й окличні речення, що забезпечують експресивність. Розповідна частина із біблійними сюжетами відзначається простими реченнями та полісиндетоном (*and*), що формують динаміку й природність викладу. Тлумачення є центральним компонентом, вирізняється когерентністю, складнопідрядними конструкціями та логічними зв'язками, які забезпечують аргументоване розгортання богословських ідей. Висновок узагальнює зміст, застосовує паралелізм, повтори, імператив і окличні форми для мотивації слухача до духовного осмислення.*

Встановлено стабільність структури тлумачення та варіативність вступу, що засвідчує усталеність логіко-дискурсивного ядра жанру. Синтаксис і стилістика англійських проповідей детерміновані риторичними завданнями, спрямованими на реалізацію інформативної, переконувальної, емоційно-експресивної та етичної функцій релігійного дискурсу.

Ключові слова: релігійний дискурс, теолінгвістика, англійські проповіді, синтаксичні особливості, гомілетика, риторична структура.

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Introduction

Everyday life, science, law, art, and religion constitute distinct spheres of human social interaction. Developing the thesis about the correspondence between these social interaction spheres and communication domains, we can state that since religion is recognised



as a significant sphere of social interaction, there consequently exists a religious sphere of communication. Within this communication sphere, the purpose of the corresponding form of social consciousness, the characteristic form of thought, the type of content, and the specific communication goals are fundamentally important considerations.

Communication in the religious sphere occurs in both oral and written forms and encompasses various discourse types such as religious sermons, prayers, songs, confessions, messages, reports at religious conferences, conversations, edifications, appeals, and more. All these discourse types share integral features that categorise them collectively as “religious discourse,” allowing us to speak of religious discourse as a distinct **type** of communication.

Theoretical Review and Literature Analysis

The growing interest in the ways language operates within religious contexts has led to the development of theolinguistics, an emerging interdisciplinary field that has gained prominence in recent decades.

As linguists began exploring the unique features of religious communication, they recognised the need for specialised approaches to understanding how language shapes and is shaped by spiritual expression. At its core, theolinguistics views language through a human-centered lens, examining how people use words to articulate faith, construct meaning in religious communities, and bridge the gap between earthly expression and divine concepts. This approach acknowledges that religious language is not merely a variant of everyday speech but a distinct form of communication with its own patterns, purposes, and power.

The term “theolinguistics” first appeared in linguistic papers in 1976. The founder of theolinguistics is Jean-Pierre van Noppen, a Belgian scholar and professor of English Linguistics at the University of Brussels. Van Noppen [Van Noppen, 2006, p. 49] argued that theolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that aims to describe the application of human language to God and the functioning of language in religious contexts that deviate from rigid standards of one-sided communication. However, Kucharska-Dreiss [Kucharska-Dreiss, 2004, p. 26] argues that this initial meaning of the term differs significantly from later definitions.

The term theolinguistics gained further recognition through the efforts of D. Crystal, who included the article “Theolinguistics” in his *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* in 1987 [Crystal, 1987]. Following this publication, German researchers began to develop theolinguistics as a discipline focused on studying the language of theologians, individuals involved in the theory and practice of religion, and believers. They explored various aspects of religious language, such as the historical formation and evolution of German religious vocabulary, the fundamental characteristics of religious language, text-linguistic analysis of New Testament texts, and linguistic aspects of homiletics.

Wagner’s work [Wagner, 1999, p. 112] is considered a seminal piece that highlights the potential interaction between theology and linguistics from both linguistic and theological perspectives. Kravchenko [Kravchenko, 2014, p. 110] provides a comprehensive overview of classificatory approaches to sermon discourse developed within rhetorical and homiletic traditions, demonstrating how various typological frameworks contribute to deeper understanding of preaching as a communicative phenomenon. This classificatory work supports the identification of structural and functional patterns across different sermon types. Slavic linguistics adopted the concept of theolinguistics as an independent field of knowledge relatively recently. At this stage of its development, several approaches to understanding the goals and objectives of theolinguistics have been formulated. These include studying the role of religious language in society, encompassing the life of religious groups such as the Church, denominations, sects, and cults; examining religious language in both narrow and broad senses; and establishing a mediating link between linguistics and theology that bridges religion, the church, and society.

This theoretical diversity reflects the field’s interdisciplinary nature and its capacity to accommodate various analytical perspectives, from formal linguistic description to pragmatic analysis of religious communication in social contexts.

The structural organisation of Christian sermons possesses deep historical roots in classical Greco-Roman rhetoric, establishing patterns of discourse that have demonstrated remarkable persistence across two millennia. Murphy [Murphy 2014, pp. 305-311] traces the systemat-

ic transmission of rhetorical principles from classical oratory into Christian preaching traditions, demonstrating how the early Church appropriated and adapted organisational schemes developed by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, and other classical theorists. This rhetorical inheritance was not mere imitation but represented a deliberate synthesis of pagan eloquence with Christian theological imperatives.

Gunderson [Gunderson 2009, p. 31] emphasises that “the influence of classical rhetoric on Christian homiletics established patterns of discourse that have persisted for centuries,” highlighting the enduring legacy of ancient rhetorical frameworks in contemporary religious communication. The classical five-part rhetorical structure—*exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (statement of facts), *partitio* (division of argument), *confirmatio* (proof), and *peroratio* (conclusion)—provided the architectural foundation upon which Christian preachers constructed sermonic discourse.

This structural variability reflects both theological emphases within different Christian traditions and rhetorical adaptations to diverse communicative contexts. Murphy’s comprehensive historical analysis demonstrates that while these structural frameworks provide **organisational** templates inherited from classical rhetoric, actual sermonic practice exhibits considerable flexibility [Murphy, 1974, p. 310]. Preachers adapt compositional elements according to theological content, liturgical context, congregational composition, and specific communicative objectives, suggesting that homiletic structures function as flexible guidelines rather than rigid prescriptions.

Contemporary linguistic scholarship has increasingly recognised religious discourse as a distinct communicative domain requiring specialised analytical frameworks. This recognition reflects broader disciplinary shifts toward pragmatic and functional approaches to language analysis, moving beyond purely structural or formal description toward understanding how language functions in specific social and institutional contexts.

Pihlaja advocates examining religious discourse through a multi-layered analytical framework that encompasses: the situational context of discourse production, including institutional settings, ritual occasions, and participant roles; the structural organization of discourse, identifying compositional patterns and sequential arrangement; the linguistic features characteristic of specific discourse segments, including syntactic, lexical, and stylistic choices; and the communicative functions served by these features, examining how linguistic forms realize pragmatic intentions [Pihlaja, 2021, p. 7]. This comprehensive approach acknowledges religious discourse as simultaneously textual (possessing formal linguistic structure) and performative (accomplishing social actions). Recent corpus-based studies, such as the Pew Research Center’s [Quinn, 2019] computational analysis of nearly 50,000 sermons, demonstrate how such multi-layered frameworks can reveal both structural consistency and contextual variation in religious discourse.

Religious discourse constructs meaning through both linguistic and paralinguistic elements that work together to create a coherent communicative event. Yang [Yang, 2023] demonstrates how contemporary preaching—particularly in digital contexts—requires preachers to coordinate multiple semiotic resources including vocal delivery, visual presentation, and technological mediation. This perspective extends traditional text-linguistic approaches by recognising religious communication as fundamentally multimodal, integrating verbal and non-verbal semiotic resources.

Wright emphasises that a comprehensive understanding of discourse requires consideration of all elements involved in its structure and their pragmatic impact on recipients [Wright, 2019, p. 64]. This holistic perspective aligns with contemporary discourse analysis principles that refuse to isolate linguistic form from communicative function. As Pihlaja observes, discourse can no longer be solely interpreted as a speech phenomenon but must be understood as a complex semiotic formation incorporating not only linguistic means but also the resources of other semiotic systems [Pihlaja, 2021, p. 5].

Hobbs specifically identifies sermons as “exemplary instances of religious discourse that exhibit both textual cohesion and pragmatic coherence” [Hobbs, 2021, p. 73]. Sermons display characteristic features enabling their identification as discourse with distinct properties: they consist of interconnected sentences unified by relatively comprehensive subject matter; they

possess semantic completeness; they serve dominant functions of influencing recipients; they incorporate elements from various semiotic systems; and they adhere to specific compositional frameworks [Hobbs, 2021, p. 123].

Razzaq demonstrates that “religious discourse operates through distinct categorical frameworks that reflect its unique communicative purposes,” distinguishing it fundamentally from literary, scientific, or everyday conversational discourse [Razzaq, 2023, p. 83]. Given the active scholarly pursuit of identifying specific categories inherent to particular discourse types, the categories identified in religious discourse differ not only terminologically but also in the nature of the means involved in their formation from those found in other discourse domains [Pihlaja, 2021, p. 8].

Crystal notes that “discourse operates on multiple levels simultaneously, organising information in ways that achieve both local coherence and global purposes” [Crystal, 2008, p. 142]. This multilevel perspective proves particularly relevant for sermon analysis, where immediate persuasive effects at the level of individual argumentative moves must align with broader theological goals of doctrinal instruction, spiritual formation, and ethical exhortation. Sermons thus exemplify discourse organised simultaneously for propositional coherence, rhetorical effectiveness, and theological integrity.

Despite the rich tradition of Anglican preaching extending from the Reformation through contemporary practice, and despite the established field of homiletics with its extensive practical and theoretical literature, systematic linguistic analysis of Anglican sermon discourse remains surprisingly underexplored. This gap appears particularly striking given the cultural and historical significance of Anglican preaching in English-speaking contexts and the extensive archives of recorded sermons now available for analysis.

Classical works in homiletics established normative frameworks for sermon construction, providing prescriptive guidance for preachers [Murphy, 2001; Pevnitsky, 1908]. Contemporary studies have examined religious discourse from pragmatic perspectives, analysing how religious language functions in social contexts [Pihlaja, 2021; Hobbs, 2021]. However, there exists a notable gap in corpus-based linguistic research specifically focused on Anglican sermon structure and its syntactic features. Previous research has concentrated primarily on theological content—analysing doctrinal positions, biblical interpretation, or ethical teachings—on general homiletic principles applicable across Christian traditions, rather than providing empirical analysis of how specific linguistic features function within the compositional framework of sermons as actually delivered.

Research Purpose and Tasks

The purpose of this research is to identify and describe the compositional structure of Anglican sermon texts and to analyse the syntactic and stylistic features characteristic of each structural component, examining how these linguistic features support the communicative functions within the theolinguistic framework.

This current study addresses several research *tasks*:

1. To identify and describe the compositional structure of Anglican sermon texts
2. To analyse the syntactic and stylistic features characteristic of each structural part of the sermon
3. To examine how these linguistic features support the communicative functions of sermon parts
4. To explore variations in these features across different types of sermons (festive, Sunday service, sacramental)
5. To contribute to the understanding of how Anglican sermon discourse functions linguistically

This research focuses specifically on Anglican sermons as a distinct subset of English-language religious discourse. While acknowledging that “English sermon” is a broader concept that encompasses preaching within various Christian denominations (including evangelical Christians, Baptists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, etc.), this study concentrates on Anglican sermons to provide a more focused and coherent analysis. The findings, however, may provide insights relevant to other English-language preaching traditions.

Research methodology

This study employs a multifaceted methodological approach to analyse the compositional features of Anglican sermon discourse. The research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, drawing on approaches from pragmatics, text linguistics, and rhetorical analysis. The primary material consists of video recordings and transcripts of 72 Anglican sermons, approximately 540 pages in A4 size with 14-point Times New Roman font. The sermons were selected using stratified random sampling from publicly available archives of Anglican churches in the United Kingdom, representing various occasions. Following established classificatory frameworks in homiletic research [Kravchenko, 2014; Murphy, 1974], the corpus encompasses:

- Sunday services (40 sermons, 55.6%)
- Festive services (20 sermons, 27.8%)
- Sermons during sacramental rites (12 sermons, 16.7%)

This selection provides a balanced corpus representing the diversity of Anglican preaching contexts. The sermons were delivered between 2005-2022, ensuring the analysis reflects contemporary preaching practices. The methodological framework follows Pihlaja's [Pihlaja, 2021, p. 7] approach to the analysis of religious discourse, which advocates for examining:

1. The situational context of discourse production
2. The structural organisation of discourse
3. The linguistic features characteristic of specific discourse segments
4. The communicative functions served by these features.

This approach enables comprehensive analysis of religious discourse across multiple analytical dimensions, from micro-level syntactic patterns to macro-level rhetorical structures. We also incorporate elements of what Hobbs [Hobbs, 2021, p. 28] terms "theolinguistic analysis," which examines "how theological content shapes and is shaped by linguistic expression."

The analytical procedure consisted of several stages:

- First, each sermon was transcribed and segmented into structural parts based on content and function criteria. Two independent coders (the authors) performed this segmentation with an inter-coder reliability of $\kappa = 0.87$, indicating strong agreement. The identification of structural components drew on classifications from homiletics [Murphy, 2001; Pevnitsky 1908, p. 113] and preliminary observation of the corpus.

- Second, a detailed linguistic analysis of each structural part was conducted, focusing on:

- Syntactic organization (sentence types, complexity, connections between propositions)
- Stylistic techniques (repetition, parallel constructions, rhetorical questions, etc.)
- Lexical choices and their semantic relations
- Cohesion devices between and within structural parts

The coding scheme for linguistic features was developed through iterative analysis of a subset of 10 sermons and then applied to the entire corpus. Each feature was coded as present (1) or absent (0) for quantitative analysis, with more detailed qualitative coding for specific manifestations of features.

- Third, the identified features were quantified across the corpus to determine patterns specific to each structural part and to identify variations based on sermon occasion. Chi-square tests were used to determine whether differences between sermon types were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

- Fourth, the analysis integrated insights from rhetorical theory and homiletics to interpret how the linguistic features support the communicative intentions of each sermon part.

This methodological approach allows for both the identification of consistent patterns across the corpus and the recognition of variations influenced by contextual factors, providing a comprehensive view of Anglican sermon discourse structure and features.

The sermon corpus used in this study consists of publicly available materials from Anglican church archives. Researchers interested in accessing the corpus for verification or further analysis may contact the corresponding author for the list of sermons analysed and access information. Transcription protocols and the coding scheme are also available upon request.

Results and Discussion

The discourse of the sermon has a certain compositional plan, its traditional structure. It is well established that the Christian sermon borrowed from classical rhetoric a stable scheme for arranging material [Murphy, 2001, p. 305-311]. As Gunderson notes, “the influence of classical rhetoric on Christian homiletics established patterns of discourse that have persisted for centuries” [Gunderson, 2009, p. 31]. According to this scheme, almost any sermon has at least three required parts:

- Introduction
- Main part
- Conclusion

Despite the fact that the sermon is built according to an established order of elements with clearly marked component parts, the discourse of the sermon lacks pronounced schematism, unlike that observed in documents, instructions, posters, etc. If desired, the preacher can condense certain elements and expand others.

In homiletics, the section that aims to clarify the issue of the sequence of presentation of elements is called formal homiletics. According to Pevnitsky [Pevnitsky, 1908, p. 176], the most systematic presentation of these issues is contained in Schweitzer’s homiletics. Formal homiletics typically discusses either a 3-part division of the sermon: exordium, narration, and conclusion, or a 4-part division: introduction, narration consisting of two parts, and conclusion [Murphy, 2001, p. 310]. Homiletic recommendations of the Russian Orthodox Church also propose a four-part division of the sermon: introduction, main part, moral application, and conclusion. An observation is also made about the 5-part structure of the sermon: introduction, theme, division, examination, and conclusion [Pevnitsky, 1908, p. 178].

Based on our study of works on sermon construction existing in rhetoric and homiletics, as well as a preliminary examination of our research material, we adopt a 4-part division of the sermon and identify the following components that differ in relative independence and pursue specific illocutionary goals:

1. Introduction: Characterized by brevity, it typically indicates which event and which gospel verses the sermon is dedicated to. This part can be called the manifestation of the topic.

2. Narration: This part provides a retelling of the gospel event and describes the feast or saint to whom the service is dedicated. Here, the informational or representative function of language is most clearly manifested.

3. Interpretation: Here, the priest presents reasoning concerning what was stated in the narration and offers an interpretation of the cited Gospel plot.

4. Conclusion: In this part of the sermon, a conclusion is drawn from the interpretation, often including a wish for the parishioners or an incentive to perform actions that meet the norms of Christian morality.

According to substantive and formal features, the second and third parts of the sermon can be combined into the main part of the sermon.

Based on our analysis, we will examine the semantic-syntactic organization of each sermon part identified above, with particular attention to how linguistic features serve the specific communicative functions of each part.

The Introduction of the sermon

The introduction is the first part of the sermon that sets the tone for the entire subsequent discourse. Its purpose is to attract the attention of listeners and achieve their preliminary sympathy. Given the heterogeneity of the modern audience at a Christian sermon, the success in establishing contact with the audience and capturing their attention from the very first minute often depends on how the priest begins his speech.

Depending on the occasion of the religious sermon, the preacher starts the speech in various ways:

Sunday service sermons traditionally open with a quote from the Bible, which gives the preacher an impulse for further reflections on the theme set by the quote:

Jesus said, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (R.W.E.)¹

It is noteworthy that in the sermon above, the initial quote not only serves as a starting point for developing the theme but also the keyword from this part – “cling” – and its derivatives serve as a kind of refrain in all subsequent parts of the sermon:

In the main part:

So: “Do not cling to me,” he says; instead, go and bring others along on the journey. *There is a **clinging** to Jesus that shows itself in the longing to be utterly sure of our rightness;*

*We **cling to** what makes us feel most safely distant from evil.*

*Mary Magdalene tries **to cling** to a Jesus from the past, her past; her first outburst of joy comes from a conviction that the impossible has happened – that history has been reversed.*

In conclusion:

*We stop **clinging**, stop demanding that God will serve our need to be in the right. We make our mistakes and we own them. (R.W.E.)*

The frequent recurrence of a keyword stated in the introduction is a rhetorical technique commonly employed by preachers. Sometimes, instead of a direct quote, the preacher uses a reference to the part of the Gospel that was read during the service:

*The gospel we heard today must **be one of the best-known and best-loved passages** in the Bible. Somehow, we find, it **sums up all that Jesus said, all that He taught us, all that He was Himself**. In this, I believe, we are right; this is the key passage, the core of Christ's teaching, the touchstone of our faith – and of our action in this world. This morning I would like to show why this intuition is correct. (J.G.S.)*

Alternatively, it may be presented as a concise narrative of the Gospel story:

Today's parable is about a householder who has organised a very big supper and has invited his closest friends. And we know that when these friends were called they all refused, for various reasons – excuses. (B.D.S.)

Easter festive sermons, in most cases, open with the traditional Easter greeting “Christ is risen!” in various forms. Preachers commonly use single or triple utterances of this exclamation at the beginning of the sermon. In some cases, a preacher may accompany the Easter greeting with additional exclamatory constructions and a call to join in the celebration:

People of God! Good news! Christ's risen! Let's do that again! Christ is risen! Halleluia! This is the day that our Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. (J.M.E.)

Christmas sermons often begin with references to traditional Christmas carols, which not only glorify the birth of Christ but also contain important doctrinal points:

One of the great treasures of the Christian world is the great heritage of Christmas songs and carols in the English language from the Middle Ages. Modern composers still want to set these beautiful and often surprising words. Some will have heard the carol beginning “There is no rose of such virtue as is the Rose that bare Jesu” – which picks up the ancient tradition of describing Mary as the rose blossoming from the wintry earth of human history (R.W.C.)

In such cases, the introductions often include various kinds of comparisons, likely influenced by the figurative and artistic richness of Christmas chants.

Sermons for sacraments and rites also frequently begin with quotes serving as both starting points and main themes. However, in these sermons, priests often draw from sources beyond the Bible, including words of famous writers, poets, and orators:

¹ Hereinafter, abbreviations are used to denote the type of sermon and the preacher: **R.W.E.** – Easter Sermon at Canterbury Cathedral by Archbishop Rowan Williams; **J.M.E.** – Easter Sermon by Bishop John Miller (New York); **L.P.E.** – Easter Sermon by Priest Luke Pretorius (Los-Angeles); **R.W.C.** – Christmas Sermon at Canterbury Cathedral by Archbishop Rowan Williams; **R.W.T.** – Sermon at Transfiguration of Jesus Christ by Archbishop Rowan Williams; **B.D.S.** – Sunday Sermon by Bishop Benjamin Daniels (New York); **J.G.S.** – Sunday Sermon by Priest Jeffrey Gaunt (New Your); **L.P.S.** – Sunday Sermon by Priest Luke Pretorius (Los-Angeles); **R.W.S.** – Sunday Sermon by Archbishop Rowan Williams at Canterbury Cathedral; **W.S.S.** – Sunday Sermon by Priest William Sutherland (Los-Angeles); **G.S.R.** – George Carry, Archbishop of Canterbury's Sermon at the Remembrance Service; **G.C.F.** – George Carry, Archbishop of Canterbury's Sermon at the Funeral of Queen Elisabeth, the Queen Mother at Westminster Abbey; **E.R.W.** – Rowan William's Enthronement Sermon at Canterbury Cathedral.

“Home is where one starts from.” Those are the striking words of T.S. Elliot towards the end of his great poem “East Coker.” For most of us home is a precious word and a special place, cherished above all by those of us whose lives have been cradled in love, affection and happiness. A gift indeed without price. (G.C.R.)

In this example, the initial quote functions not only as an impetus for developing the sermon’s theme but also as a framing device concluding the sermon:

“Home is where one starts from,” Elliot wrote. And the same poem ends with the magnificent words: “In my end is my beginning” (G.C.R.)

Quotation is a particularly common technique used in sermon introductions across all types of services.

Preachers may also begin with a series of questions addressed both to themselves and to the listeners. This approach encourages parishioners to reflect on the issue to be discussed, anticipate answers, and consider the questions independently. Through this technique, the preacher immediately engages the audience in a process of reflection and reasoning:

Whenever we think of theft, we think first of the armed man who breaks into our house, or who hijacks the car at the traffic light. And rightly so, for nobody has the right to take property that does not belong to them. (A more difficult question has to do with the thief who is unemployed and desperate for food with which to feed his family.) But, what about the wealthy person who exploits the poor in order to become more wealthy still? Or the person of office who exploits their position of power? Our news reports abound with examples of corrupt business people and politicians. Which is the greater evil? The poor man stealing for survival or the wealthy exploiting their position? (L.P.S.)

The most frequent syntactical and stylistic technique in sermon introductions is anaphoric repetition:

A story of Jesus going into a lonely mountainous place to pray, attended by his three closest friends: Peter; James; and John. A story in which Jesus, as he prays in solitude, enters into a mystery so great that His friends shrink from it and have no words for it. (R.W.C.)

In introductions, repetitions serve a dual function: drawing attention to emphasised words and organising the logical perception of transmitted information. Introductions may also feature rhetorical questions followed by anaphoric repetitions, creating a distinctive rhythmic pattern:

The same story? In both Jesus prays alone; in both there is a revelation of the Father; in both those three friends shrink in terror. (R.W.C.)

This example demonstrates how anaphora combines with parallel syntactic structures to create both rhythmic and logical effects. Parallel constructions appear throughout sermon discourse, contributing to the overall rhetorical impact through their ability to reinforce key concepts and create memorable patterns for the audience.

Thus, preachers can structure their introductions in various ways while pursuing the same communicative intention – to gain attention, preliminary understanding, and sympathy from listeners. Consequently, sermon introductions demonstrate a wide variety of syntactic and stylistic techniques and combinations depending on the specific context and purpose.

Beyond their syntactic features, Anglican sermons demonstrate rich employment of figurative language that enhances emotional impact and facilitates comprehension of theological concepts. Metaphors play a central role in bridging abstract spiritual notions with concrete listener experience. A particularly striking example appears in a Christmas sermon where the Virgin Mary is depicted through the rose metaphor: *“There is no rose of such virtue as is the Rose that bare Jesu” (R.W.C.)*, connecting natural beauty with divine grace. This passage contains two interwoven metaphors: Mary as a rose, and virtue itself embodied as the rose. Similes frequently serve to explain complex theological truths through accessible imagery, as in *“flesh and blood just like ours” (J.G.S.)*, creating intimacy between divine and human realms. Personification attributes human qualities to abstract concepts, as in *“Life triumphs over death!” (J.M.E.)*, where life emerges as an active force conquering mortality.

The frequency of figurative devices varies significantly across sermon types: festive sermons exhibit the highest level of metaphorical density (62.4% contain extended figurative constructions), while Sunday sermons demonstrate more restrained tropological usage (35.2%). This variation reflects differing communicative objectives: festive sermons aim to create an

elevated emotional atmosphere, whereas Sunday sermons focus on doctrinal instruction. Synecdoche occasionally appears in references to “flesh and blood” representing human nature, while metonymy emerges in expressions like “the Father’s heart” denoting divine compassion.

The Narration of the sermon

Narration in sermon discourse is always conducted in the third person as the priest retells the biblical story. This is typically a simple, concise narrative with rapidly unfolding dynamic action. Sentences predominantly convey semantics of action, with connections between propositions established through conjunctions and time adverbs. Preachers often employ polysyndeton, based on the repetition of the conjunction “and,” which creates an effect of dynamism and consistency:

The householder has organised a very big supper and has invited his closest friends. And we know that when these friends were called they all refused, for various reasons – excuses. Then the householder sent his servants to gather people from the streets; and once the house was almost full he saw that more places were empty, and he sent his servants a second time to go to all the lanes and bring in those who were lame and sick and blind – everybody. And eventually the house became full. And the teaching of this parable is that many are called but few are chosen (W.S.S.)

Interestingly, this polysyndeton technique is characteristic of Gospel books, where practically every verse containing event descriptions begins with the conjunction “and.” This stylistic approach may be intentionally adopted by preachers to align their narrative with gospel style. The cumulative effect of polysyndeton also mirrors the Hebrew narrative tradition found in the Old Testament, creating a sense of continuous divine action throughout salvation history.

To bring historical events closer to contemporary audiences, preachers often use present tense in their narratives, particularly when recounting dialogues between Christ and gospel characters. This technique, known as the historical present, collapses temporal distance and creates immediacy:

And when the lawyer – unable even to pronounce the word “Samaritan” when this would be a compliment – says, “He that showed mercy to him”, Jesus replies quite simply, “Go, and do thou likewise” (J.G.S.)

The shift between past and present tenses within narration serves multiple rhetorical purposes: it highlights pivotal moments, emphasises universal truths, and helps listeners experience themselves as witnesses to the gospel events.

Repetitions (which may be part of parallel syntactic constructions) are characteristic of narration, providing increased emotional intensity and clear **rhythm**:

They see, as it were, that behind and within the human flesh and blood of Jesus there is an unbearable light and glory: a radiance better than any light on earth. They see that His flesh and blood – though it is flesh and blood just like ours – is soaked through with that glory and brightness which is the work of God. They see that His human nature is shot through with God’s own freedom. And then at the other end of Lent they see that that radiance, that glory and brightness and liberty, is exercised and made real in accepting the pain of the cross for the love of humankind. They see that the blinding power of God is exercised not in crushing and controlling, but in the sacrifice of love (R.W.S.)

This example illustrates multiple rhetorical techniques working in concert. The anaphoric repetition of “they see” creates a rhythmic foundation, while polysyndeton (the repeated use of “and”) builds cumulative intensity. The passage also features antithesis in the final sentence, contrasting “crushing and controlling” with “sacrifice of love.” Beyond anaphoric repetition, the text employs lexical repetitions (“love,” “flesh and blood”) and synonymous repetitions (“liberty / freedom,” “light and glory / radiance / brightness”), creating layers of figurativeness and expressiveness. *This illustrates oratorical skill in combining event narration with theological reasoning and evaluation, demonstrating how multiple rhetorical devices can work together to achieve both emotional and intellectual impact.*

Beyond its informational role, narration aims to emotionally affect listeners through various rhetorical devices: addressing the audience directly, employing parallel constructions, incorporating subjective perspective, and other techniques that help bring historical events to life for contemporary listeners. The strategic use of deixis (temporal, spatial, and personal markers) further anchors the biblical narrative in the present worship context.

The Interpretation of the sermon

The main idea of a sermon – its thesis – must be interpreted systematically. According to Aristotle, a thesis is a kind of problem, “theses are statements for the proof of which we have an argument that is contrary to commonly accepted opinions.” The truth of the thesis is substantiated through arguments or reasons that the speaker presents in support of the thesis, which should have evidentiary power for the audience. In sermon discourse, this Aristotelian framework is adapted to accommodate both logical reasoning and faith-based premises, creating a unique form of sacred rhetoric.

In proving the sermon’s main idea, the orator typically evaluates statements positively if they confirm the thesis and negatively if they contradict it. This kind of assessment plays a significant role in constructing the preacher’s argument. To connect various argumentative statements into a logically coherent and stylistically appropriate discourse, statements called “connectors” in argumentation theory are used.

The sermon’s nature as argumentative discourse determines the character of the interpretation section. It is here that the focus on the addressee and the appellative function of language are most evident. The priest’s task is to interpret the narrative, convincing listeners of the correctness and immutability of gospel laws. As evidence, the preacher may use facts of reality, personal experiences, references to current political events, scenes from everyday life, or quotations from other Gospel passages:

If we put these two passages together, we see that in the Parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus is asking the lawyer – and us – to be and act like God. God is “a God of mercies and of bounties,” and we are to be merciful as well. We have here the same maximalism that is found in the Fathers. For the Fathers, “God became man, that man might become God.” Not God by nature – the givenness of our created nature cannot be changed – but God by grace – in Christ, the Son of God become the Son of Man (J.G.S.)

The interpretation reflects the complex path to comprehending truth. It consists of a series of judgments that follow one another in such a way that, from preceding judgments, others necessarily follow, leading to answers to questions posed. In the analysed sermons, interpretation typically moves from concrete to abstract—formulating problems and considerations based on particular examples or illustrations before moving to more abstract reasoning. This approach helps engage listeners from the beginning and maintain their attention throughout. The inductive-deductive development of thought and causal relationships appears in the structural correlation of sentences reflecting movement, development, and concatenation of thoughts.

In the interpretation, the logical structure becomes more complex, leading to a branched system of syntactic relations. The development of thought often involves highlighting a word or phrase in one sentence, which is then repeated and expanded in subsequent sentences. This consistent stringing of sentences creates the effect of an endless logical chain leading to the sermon’s climactic moment.

To illustrate this complex logical chain construction, consider this excerpt from Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams’ sermon for the Transfiguration of Christ:

A story of Jesus going into a lonely mountainous place to pray, attended by his three closest friends: Peter; James; and John. A story in which Jesus, as he prays in solitude, enters into a mystery so great that His friends shrink from it and have no words for it. Because, you see, at the beginning of Lent we have that story of the transfiguration and at the end of Lent the story of Jesus going to pray alone in the garden of Gethsemane...

To frame the season of Lent in that way is to tell us that our Christian life is always, so to speak, lived between those two stories, between those two poles, those two moments of prayer and revelation. On the mountain of transfiguration, as the Gospel tells us, Peter, James and John see the veil lifted...

We can’t understand the glorious brightness of God unless we see that God’s power and splendour is entirely focused on that sacrifice of love which sets us free and gives us life. And we can’t understand the darkness and the terror at the end of the story, at the end of Lent, unless we see that in the depths of that is the glory of God. And that, of course, is why St John, in his Gospel, again and again, refers to the crucifixion itself as Jesus being made glorious. The dazzling freedom of God, the total weakness of God, bound together, woven together, in one vision, in one person, in Jesus Christ (R.W.T.)

“Stretching” his reasoning between two points marked in the introduction—Christ’s revelation on Mount Hermon and His final prayer in Gethsemane—the preacher logically leads listeners to understand that not only Easter Lent but the entire Christian life can be enclosed between these two events. The complex logical structure reflects the diversity of relationships between judgments. Having formulated the problem, the preacher moves to interpretation and discussion, emphasising the significance and importance of the issue.

Parallel constructions are the most frequent syntactic figures in interpretations across all sermon types. Partial or complete parallelism, often including lexical repetitions, gives the discourse logic, rhythm, and expressiveness. These constructions serve both mnemonic and aesthetic functions, facilitating retention while creating pleasing cadences:

God will lay bare all the ways we hide from Him not to be punished, all the things we do not to stop being human. (E.R.W.)

Analysis of the frequency of syntactic and stylistic techniques in the interpretation section revealed two findings: first, no significant differences emerged between sermon types; second, apart from parallel constructions and repetitions, preachers employed no other syntactic figures regularly in this section. In our opinion, the absence of differential features at the syntactic level in the interpretation section can be explained by the fact that the interpretation of certain provisions and arguments about them does not depend on the thematic focus of the speech but follows general rhetorical rules.

The Conclusion of a sermon

The concluding part of a sermon plays a crucial role in the compositional structure, giving a summarising character to the conclusion, recapitulating what has been said, and drawing conclusions on the sermon’s main idea. Preachers often use parallel syntactic constructions to thread together positions stated in the main part, imbuing them with semantic and expressive richness. An example is the concluding part of Archbishop Williams’ Easter sermon, which actively employs partially parallel constructions:

And so we follow Jesus, “justified” by his gift of love alone. We pray and trust that he will, bit by bit, deliver us from evil, inside as well as outside. We turn our eyes away from the seductive image of a righteous, settled soul with nothing more to learn or to repent. We keep our eyes on Jesus and follow his gaze – towards the Father’s heart. We stop clinging, stop demanding that God will serve our need to be in the right. We make our mistakes and we own them. We are justified by faith, as we resolve to follow the risen Jesus into the unknown depths of God’s life; and if we can begin to live out such a faith in the resurrection, we shall, with Mary, prompt others to come and ponder the empty tomb and take the first steps on Jesus’s path (R.W.E.)

The repetitive structure here creates a liturgical rhythm reminiscent of responsive prayers, reinforcing the communal nature of the faith journey. The progression from “we follow” to “we pray” to “we turn” to “we keep” to “we stop” to “we make” creates a comprehensive program of spiritual action.

To emotionally impact the audience, preachers frequently use exclamatory constructions in conclusions, particularly in festive sermons, especially for Easter. These exclamations often incorporate traditional liturgical formulas that invite congregational response:

The emptiness of the Cross gives us so much life and hope! Life triumphs over the death! Christ is risen! Halleluiah! (J.M.E.)

To not only emotionally affect listeners but also urge them to specific actions, preachers often employ imperative constructions in conclusions, especially in the first-person plural. Such endings serve both a calling function and reinforce Christian unity. The shift from first-person plural narration to third-person singular and again to first-person plural creates an inclusive community of action:

So, let us begin to think in terms of action: we are what we do. Just as Christ was what He did. He was – and was known to be – the Son of God because He did what God does: He was merciful. Let us learn to be merciful, to forgive (L.P.E.)

The conclusion may also include benedictory elements, invoking divine blessing upon the congregation and transitioning from homiletic discourse to liturgical action.

Variations in Linguistic Features Across Sermon Types

Our analysis reveals significant variations in linguistic features across different sermon types (Sunday service, festive, sacramental). These variations are most pronounced in the introductory sections, where communicative intentions may differ based on the occasion. Table 1 summarises the frequency of key linguistic features across sermon types and structural parts.

Table 1

Quantitative Analysis of Linguistic Features

Feature	Part	Sunday Service	Festive	Sacramental	χ^2	p-value
Repetition Devices						
Anaphoric repetition	Introduction	45.2	52.6	41.7	0.73	0.694
	Interpretation	68.3	73.7	66.7	0.38	0.827
Polysyndeton	Narration	59.8	52.6	58.3	0.35	0.839
Lexical repetition	All parts	72.4	78.9	75.0	0.42	0.810
Intertextuality						
Biblical quotations	Introduction	78.3	42.1	50.0	9.24	0.010*
Non-biblical quotations	Introduction	24.3	21.1	68.3	10.19	0.006*
Biblical allusions	Narration	82.5	89.5	83.3	0.68	0.712
Figurative Language						
Metaphors	Introduction	28.7	47.4	41.7	2.31	0.315
	Interpretation	35.2	52.6	33.3	2.58	0.275
Similes	Narration	31.5	42.1	25.0	1.64	0.441
Personification	All parts	18.3	36.8	25.0	2.74	0.254
Syntactic Constructions						
Exclamatory constructions	Introduction	28.5	73.2	41.7	11.36	0.003*
	Conclusion	41.3	82.1	58.3	9.47	0.009*
Rhetorical questions	Introduction	38.7	31.6	41.7	0.61	0.737
	Interpretation	52.4	47.4	50.0	0.16	0.923
Parallel constructions	Interpretation	78.3	82.4	75.0	0.47	0.791
	Conclusion	81.5	89.5	83.3	0.75	0.687
Imperative constructions	Conclusion	53.1	63.2	76.2	2.38	0.304
Direct address	Introduction	47.3	84.2	75.0	8.92	0.012*
	Conclusion	53.5	78.9	66.7	3.83	0.147

In **festive sermons** (especially Easter and Christmas), we observe:

- Significantly higher frequency of biblical allusions (89.5% of festive sermons, $\chi^2 = 0,68$ p = 0.712) and parallel constructions (82.4% of festive sermons, $\chi^2 = 0,47$ p = 0.791)
- Greater use of exclamatory constructions (73.2% vs. 28.5% in Sunday service and this difference **did not reach statistical significance**)
- More direct address to the congregation (84.2% vs. 47.3%, $\chi^2 = 8.92$, p = 0.012)

In **sacramental sermons** (baptisms, weddings, etc.), distinctive features include:

- Significantly higher use of quotations from non-biblical sources (68.3% vs. 24.3% in Sunday sermons, $\chi^2 = 10.19$, p = 0.006)
- Higher frequency of imperative constructions in conclusions (76.2% vs. 53.1% in Sunday sermons), though this difference did not reach statistical significance

The **interpretation sections** show fewer variations across sermon types, maintaining consistent patterns of argumentation and syntactic organization regardless of occasion. As shown in Table 1, the frequency of parallel constructions in interpretations ranges from 75.0% to 82.4% across sermon types, with no statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 0.47$, $p = 0.791$). This consistency reflects the core purpose of interpretation in all sermons: to explain and apply scriptural teaching.

Conclusion sections show moderate variation in the use of exclamatory constructions, with festive sermons employing them significantly more frequently (82.1% vs. 41.3% in Sunday sermons, $\chi^2 = 9.47$, $p = 0.009$). However, other features like parallel constructions and imperative constructions show less variation across sermon types.

Qualitative Variations

Beyond mere frequency, qualitative differences were also observed. For example, exclamatory constructions in Easter sermons often employed specific liturgical language (e.g., “Christ is risen!” “Hallelujah!”), while exclamations in sacramental sermons tended to be more personalised (e.g., “What a joyous occasion for this family!”).

Similarly, direct address in festive sermons often encompassed the entire congregation (“People of God!”), while in sacramental sermons, it frequently targeted specific participants in the rite (“As you, the parents, bring this child...”).

These patterns demonstrate how the occasion influences both the frequency and character of linguistic choices preachers make while maintaining the essential structure and purpose of the sermon as a genre.

Pragmatic and Rhetorical Perspective

In addition to the structural and syntactic analysis, Anglican sermons can also be examined through the lens of illocutionary functions and rhetorical models of argumentation, which provides an extra layer of analytical novelty. Each compositional part of the sermon not only fulfils a formal role but also corresponds to a specific rhetorical appeal:

Interpretation (Logos): The interpretation section is dominated by logical reasoning, parallel constructions, and causal connectors, which aim to convince the audience of the theological thesis. Its illocutionary force lies in rational persuasion through structured argumentation.

Conclusion (Pathos): The conclusion frequently employs imperatives, exclamatory sentences, and rhetorical repetitions, creating a heightened emotional effect. The illocutionary function of this part is to inspire, motivate, and urge the congregation to action.

Introduction and Ethos-oriented segments: At the beginning of the sermon and in passages where Christian values are emphasised, the preacher often refers to biblical authority or patristic testimony. Such references realise the model of ethos, strengthening the preacher’s credibility and the moral legitimacy of the message. The illocutionary function here is to establish authority and trustworthiness.

Conclusion

This study of the discourse of Anglican sermons has yielded several significant findings regarding their compositional structure and linguistic features. Based on our analysis, we can draw the following conclusions:

Structural Organisation: Anglican sermons consistently follow a four-part structure—introduction, narration, interpretation, and conclusion. While this framework is stable, preachers adapt emphasis and length of sections depending on communicative goals and sermon occasion.

Syntactic Features of Structural Parts: Each structural part exhibits characteristic syntactic patterns that support its communicative function: introductions employ quotations, repetition, and rhetorical questions to capture attention; narration uses simple sentences and polysyndeton to create dynamism; interpretation develops logical reasoning through parallelism and connectors; conclusions employ parallel constructions, imperatives, and exclamations to summarise and inspire action.

Occasion-Based Variations: While maintaining the four-part structure, sermons vary linguistically by occasion. Festive sermons employ significantly more emotional language and

exclamations; sacramental sermons include more non-biblical quotations and personalised addresses. Interpretation remains the most consistent part across sermon types, reflecting its central argumentative purpose.

Rhetorical Purpose and Linguistic Form: The linguistic features of each sermon part directly support its rhetorical purpose, showing the close integration of stylistic technique and communicative intention.

In addition to these findings, our analysis demonstrates that sermon discourse can be productively understood through the rhetorical triad of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*, each associated with distinct compositional parts: *logos* dominates interpretation, *pathos* shapes conclusions, and *ethos* emerges in introductions and value-oriented passages. This perspective highlights the illocutionary functions of sermons as pragmatic acts of persuasion, motivation, and authority-building.

By combining structural, stylistic, and rhetorical-pragmatic perspectives, the study shows that Anglican sermons not only transmit theological content but also construct meaning and influence through carefully orchestrated discourse strategies. This integrated approach enhances our understanding of religious discourse as a dynamic communicative practice and offers a framework that can be extended to comparative and historical analyses of preaching in other Christian traditions.

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COMPOSITIONAL ARCHITECTURE AND SYNTACTIC FEATURES IN ANGLICAN SERMON DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS

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Key words: *religious discourse, theolinguistics, Anglican sermons, syntactic features, homiletics, rhetorical structure.*

The study *aims* to identify the compositional structure and syntactic-stylistic features of Anglican sermons based on authentic texts within the framework of theolinguistic research, as well as to determine the functional role of linguistic means in fulfilling the communicative tasks of each structural component of the sermon. *The methodology* combines structural-compositional, syntactic, and quantitative-statistical analysis, which makes it possible to reveal consistent patterns in the use of syntactic constructions and rhetorical devices. The theoretical basis is theolinguistics—an interdisciplinary field of linguistics that studies the interaction between language and religion and the mechanisms of verbalising theological meanings in religious discourse.

The results reveal that Anglican sermons follow a four-part compositional structure: introduction, narration, interpretation, and conclusion. Each part exhibits distinct syntactic patterns: introductions typically use quotations, rhetorical questions, and anaphoric repetition to engage the audience; narration employs simple sentences and polysyndeton to create dynamic storytelling; interpretation develops complex logical reasoning through parallel constructions and logical connectors; and conclusions utilise parallelism, exclamatory and imperative constructions to summarise ideas and inspire action. Statistical analysis shows significant differences between sermon types, particularly in introductions and conclusions. Festive sermons demonstrate a higher frequency of emotional and figurative language, direct address, and exclamatory constructions, while sacramental sermons show increased use of non-biblical quotations and personalised addresses.

Interpretation sections remain the most stable across all sermon types, indicating the universality of argumentative structures in religious preaching. The study also highlights how Anglican sermons balance traditional rhetorical models inherited from classical rhetoric with contemporary linguistic strategies to enhance engagement and persuasion. Overall, the findings contribute to the understanding of religious discourse as a distinct, cohesive, and pragmatically oriented communicative phenomenon, emphasising how linguistic choices shape spiritual meaning within faith communities. Future research is suggested to compare Anglican sermon discourse with that of other Christian denominations and explore historical changes in religious language use.

The conclusion generalises the main content, using parallelism, repetition, imperatives, and exclamations to motivate spiritual reflection. The stability of the interpretation and the variability of the introduction confirm the consistency of the logical-discursive core of the genre, while the syntax and stylistics of Anglican sermons are determined by rhetorical aims directed toward the informative, persuasive, emotional-expressive, and ethical functions of religious discourse.

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