

The Communication of Immortality: A Description of Verbal Devices in the Genre of the Sermon

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ABSTRACT As one of the cultural means of facing death, the sermon performed shortly before burial has been identified as a dynamic space within the rigid structure of mass. But just how is the sermon constructed and how do verbal devices used in this genre guide production and interpretation of experiences about death? The study on the genre of a sermon aims at identification and description of verbal devices that interact reflexively with contextual presuppositions based on the cosmologies underlying the Christian understanding of death. Using principles from genre analysis, interactional linguistics and ritual analysis, the study analyzes five video recordings of the performance of the sermon in Bukusu funeral events. The Bukusu people occupy the Western Kenya region on the border between Kenya and Uganda. The topic of facing death is critical among the Bukusu people because here, in most cases, natural death is non-existent. Thus, communicating immortality becomes a crucial means of bonding the bereaved and instilling hope, thereby combating fear. Being at the interface between discourse analysis and anthropological linguistics on the one hand and religion on the other, this study is a contribution to the discussions about the role of communicative genres in the communication of immortality.