Abstract

Intra-speaker variation can occur in all types of interaction. These variations reveal themselves in all levels of linguistic features from phonological to discourse and can result from changes in setting and audience. This research focuses on the ways in which the discourse features of a Christian minister differ during the sermon at a Sunday morning church service compared with that of an evening service advertised as “a different kind of worship experience for all ages” (christchurchnashville.org). Research on sermon features is not new, as many linguists have looked at the features of African American sermons (Hamlet, 1994; Pitts, 1989; Wharry, 2005). Additionally, linguists have focused on how speakers manipulate language depending on their audience (Bell, 1984, Coupland, 1980). However, the link between these two areas has not been delved into deeply in terms of how sermon style can be used by the same speaker to meet different goals with different audiences. In this research, I compared the morning and evening sermons given on the same day by the same speaker. The general findings are that the morning sermon complies with what is expected of the register and genre in terms of the level of preparedness, the structure, and the formality. The evening sermon, however, does not seem to meet the same expectations, as the minister appears to take liberties in terms of the expectations of the register, the structure, and the level of formality. This suggests that there may be prototypical examples of a specific register as well as those that still can be categorized within the register but not conform entirely.