ABSTRACT

Christianese: A Conversation Analysis of the Dialect of Evangelicals

Daniel B. Notman

Director: Clay Butler, Ph.D.

This thesis analyzes two conversations between groups of American college students: one group of male roommates who attend the same church and one group of small-group leaders planning their group's activities. The two discussions, between 40 and 50 minutes each, were video-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for Christianese—a religiolect predominantly spoken by Christians in the company of other Christians. This thesis makes use of Conversation Analysis (CA) and linguistic theories of frames, identity, and group membership. The primary insight gleaned from the conversations is that speakers use Christianese to prove their identity as Christians and their membership in the larger community of Christians. Six strategies for solidifying this in-group membership are examined: allusions to the Bible, allusions to larger Christian culture, religious topic choice, framing extended statements as mini-sermons, Christian-specific jargon and phrasing, and backchanneling.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

_____

Dr. Clay Butler, Department of English

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

_____

Dr. Elizabeth Corey, Director

DATE: _____

CHRISTIANESE: A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF THE DIALECT OF

EVANGELICALS

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

By

Daniel Notman

Waco, Texas

May 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

When individuals speak, their language reveals far more than the semantic

contents of the words. Their choice of diction, intonation, and body language can reveal

how they see the world, how they perceive themselves, and how they want others to

perceive them. Language even discloses speakers' conceptual frameworks and

understanding of the world around them. Additionally, language performs a host of social

functions. When people speak, they align themselves with certain groups or values,

whether consciously or unconsciously. What people say, when they say it, how they say

it, and to whom they say it all help reveal fundamental group dynamics, such as who

qualifies as part of the group and who does not. Speakers embed a wealth of information

in their conversational offerings.

One particularly revealing aspect of a speaker's language is his or her dialect, a

particular form of language that is peculiar to a specific region or social group. Chambers

and Trudgill (1998) note that a dialect of a language is grammatically, lexically, and

phonologically different from other varieties of the language. When most people hear the

word *dialect*, they think of phonological and lexical peculiarities of a geographical

region, although social dialects are just as significant as regional dialects. Social dialects

reveal people's involvement in certain groups, or at least their understanding of the

groups' underlying mechanisms. Because social identities are flexible and somewhat

amorphous, it is difficult to establish concrete divisions that delineate between social

dialects. Leiter (2013) notes that similar haziness surrounds religiolects, which Hary

(2009) describes as language varieties used by religious communities. Controversy

persists among linguists about whether religiolects are legitimate dialects or simply

amalgamations of religiously-imbued features incorporated into preexisting regional or

social dialects. Leiter makes the following case for the validity of religiolects:

> Distinguishing a given variety as a "dialect" is thus a useful tool in illuminating the unique sociocultural character of its community of speakers. Moreover, using the term "dialect" to refer to a variety that has become a means of communal identity construction lends distinctiveness and, therefore, legitimacy, to that identity. It also cognitively groups speakers together, a device that permits logical analysis of the variety and of its linguistic community (as opposed to determining that its features are simply dependent on the individual speaker) (2013, pp. 10-11).

Therefore, the present study will use the term *religiolect* to describe a religiously-

influenced language variety.

This thesis examines a very common religiolect in the United States, playfully

termed *Christianese*. Both Christians and many non-Christians are familiar with the

spiritual-sounding but somewhat abstruse constructions that make up Christianese. But

speaking Christianese entails more than merely dropping a "praise God" after receiving

pleasant news. Rather, a set of social and spiritual mores governs the identity expression

of Christianese. While numerous bloggers and preachers have pontificated about

Christianese, little formal academic research has been conducted into the religiolect. This

thesis is an attempt to help fill that void.

In the following pages, the conversations of two groups of American college

students are examined. The first is a group of seven male roommates who convene

weekly at a "house meeting" to discuss the past week and the events of one another's

lives. The second is a group of four leaders of a college "lifegroup," a small group of

fifteen to twenty college students that meets to read the Bible, pray, worship, and spend

time together. Distinct to these conversations is Christianese—a sociolect of evangelical Christians that teems with allusions to the Bible and to a larger subculture of Christians. The two groups examined are young, evangelical Christians who are a part of this larger Christian culture, and whose sociolect, Christianese, reflects this involvement.

Using Conversation Analysis (CA), this paper investigates how the use of Christianese indicates how the speakers conceptualize and portray themselves and God. One specific pragmatic consequence of Christianese in conversation is highlighted: because Christianese arises from a larger Christian culture, speakers use Christianese to demonstrate their in-group membership and connectedness to that culture. Six of the numerous techniques for attaining this membership and connectedness will be examined here. These six strategies are alluding to the Bible (indirectly and directly), alluding to aspects of contemporary Christian culture, shifting the conversation towards religious topics, framing longer addresses like a preacher or pastor frames a sermon, using metaphors and jargon specific to Christianity, and backchanneling.

The second chapter of this thesis explores the relevant literature on pragmatics and Christianese that will prepare the reader for the eventual data analysis. The third chapter introduces the history of Conversation Analysis and defends CA as a valid procedure for empirical research. The fourth chapter presents the analysis and examines six strategies of Christianese speakers as they pertain to in-group membership and member identity. The final chapter will summarize the findings and will briefly discuss practical applications of the conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This literature review will introduce several linguistic and pragmatic theories helpful to understanding Conversation Analysis. These theories will investigate concepts such as contextualization, the linguistic frame, face and politeness, backchanneling, and semantic roles. This chapter will also detail recent studies that parallel and inform the current research. These recent studies investigate topics such as Christian group dynamics, Christian group identity, the relationship between language and Christianity, and the history and characteristics of Christianese. The prevailing linguistic theories and recent research into Christian lingo will later be used in analyzing a pair of conversations between evangelical students who use Christianese.

Thematic Relations

Before exploring the foundational sociolinguistic theories this thesis will draw on, the one "grammatical" theory this research applies will be explored: semantic relations. Kiparsky (2002) holds that semantic roles originated with Indian grammarian Panini as early as the seventh century BCE, but Gruber (1965) is credited with the modern hypothesis. In theorizing on the lexical functions of words, Gruber proposes that noun or noun phrases assume semantic roles (agent, recipient, etc.) depending on the context of the sentence. According to this categorization, a semantic agent is one who deliberately performs an action, as is *Alex* in the sentence: "Alex ate his sandwich." A semantic recipient acquires something during a change of ownership, as is *Beau* in the sentence: "I

sent Beau the letter." A semantic beneficiary is the entity for whose benefit an action

occurs, as is *Beau* in the sentence: "Alex bought Beau a burrito." The particular semantic

role is expressed with respect to the action or state described by the verb of a given

sentence. In order to emphasize different parts of the sentence, speakers can reword

sentences and assign different semantic roles to words. For example, note that the

sentence "A burrito was bought for Beau by Alex" communicates the same basic

information as "Alex bought Beau a burrito," but different subjects are emphasized in the

two sentences.

<center>*Contextualization and the Linguistic Frame*</center>

Integral to conducting Conversation Analysis is understanding how the

participants contextualize their interaction. For example, if a linguist were examining a

transcript of fictional friends Alex and Beau badgering one another, the linguist would

need to understand whether the participants think of the interaction as harmless banter or

sharp disagreement. Gumperz (1992) discusses contextualization as the process through

which situational and linguistic details become significant in an interaction. Gumperz

also defines contextualization cues as signaling mechanisms speakers use to indicate the

communicative goals of the activity. Contextualization cues can surface in details such as

prosody (intonation, stress and accenting, pitch register shifts), tempo, pausing and

hesitation, overlapping of speaking turns, word choice, and formulaic expression. Koester

(2006) combines contextualization with the concept of the linguistic frame, noting that

interlocutors' interpretations of the present activity are guided by both contextualization

cues and frames.

Goffman (1974) defines a frame as the definition that participants give to the current social activity. Returning to the earlier fictional example, if Alex and Beau frame the other's remarks as playful repartee, they will respond differently than if they frame the remarks as abrasive criticism. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) comment that humans use jargon, catchphrases, stories, and metaphor as helpful techniques for framing events and experiences. Frames exist as a joint production between interlocutors and observers, requiring that frames be synchronized. If Alex frames the interaction as mere banter, but Beau frames it as the release of pent-up frustrations, the mismatching of frames leads to misinterpretation and miscommunication. The dynamic nature of conversation makes interactions subject to frame shifts, but if all participants in the interaction do not participate in the shift, miscommunication will likely occur. Goffman also notes that frames affect hearers and bystanders as well. He theorizes that a participation framework governs who is involved in an interaction and what roles that individual plays. According to Goffman, speakers assume different roles depending on whether they have authored the ideas they are expressing or have expressed another's ideas. Likewise, the role of the hearer changes. In Goffman's postulates, a speaker can exist as an addressee, an auditor, an overhearer, or an eavesdropper, depending on whether the hearer is known to the group, ratified by the group, and addressed in the group.

Face and Politeness

Also integral to sound Conversation Analysis is understanding how participants navigate their public self-image. As a central tenet of their politeness theory, Brown and Levinson (1987) discuss the concept of face. Sociolinguists have long debated the definition of face, and some researchers such as Yutang (1935) originally held that face

could not be defined. Brown and Levinson agree with Goffman (1955) and describe face

as the public self-image that members want to claim for themselves. Brown and Levinson

hold that face can be subdivided into two components. *Negative* face desires freedom of

action and freedom from imposition, while and *positive* face desires appreciation and

approval of self-image. According to Brown and Levinson, in human interaction, people

must often commit face-threatening acts (FTAs), so they employ various politeness

strategies to mitigate the severity of the FTAs. Many researchers (Eelen, 2001 and

Kasper, 1990) have heavily critiqued the framework, arguing that Brown and Levinson

underestimate the volume of nonverbal cues and fail to account for how different cultures

implement politeness strategies. Nevertheless, politeness theory has since been widely

applied.

   To enhance positive face, speakers may choose to use linguistic backchannels.

Yngve (1970) coined the term *backchanneling* as a method for a social group to establish

its identity. During backchanneling, a speaker receives brief messages from hearers, but

does not relinquish his or her turn as speaker. Ward and Tsukahara (2000) compare

prosodic features that trigger backchannel responses in English and Japanese. They cite

yeah, *uh-huh*, *hmm*, *right*, and *okay* as popular backchannel devices in present-day

American English. Backchannels are an example of what Malinowski (1936) calls phatic

communion, expressions which offer no information of value but which establish and

maintain social bonds between participants.

<p align="center">*Group Dynamics and Social Identity*</p>

   Social bonds are established between individuals especially quickly if they belong

to the same community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) first defined communities of

practice as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." Sharing information and experiences together allows members to learn from one another and to develop personally. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (1992) note the sociolinguistic consequences of communities of practice, arguing that communities of practice share not only common interests but also ways of thinking and talking as a group. Therefore, members' learned linguistic practices articulate the group identity. Mills also notes how communities of practice influence group member language, observing that "[…] the context and community of practice within which speech takes place is crucial in determining the way that speech will be judged" (p. 194). Bucholtz (1999) surveyed how "nerd," "burnout," and "jock" social groups interacted with one another at a California high school. Bucholtz found that the three groups formed two primary communities of practice. While the "burnout" and "jock" groups were perceived at two different extremes on the high school's social spectrum, Bucholtz grouped them into the same community of practice, united by the desire to appear "cool." On the other hand, the "nerd" group constituted a second community of practice, characterized by the absence of desire to appear "cool."

As anyone who has been to high school can substantiate, jocks are not intrinsically jocks. Because all identities are mutually constructed, merely talking like a jock does not make anyone a jock. The *bona fide* jocks must ratify another student's proposed identity as a jock, since group membership is always co-negotiated. Smith and Bekerman (2011) assert that group identity may not be claimed *a priori*. Instead, other interlocutors must ratify claims of membership via discourse. Smith and Bekerman cite Sterling (2002), who writes:

> Speakers construct their identities by careful choice of the appropriate linguistic features that will convey the specific social information that identifies them as part of a particular speech community [...] Just as linguistic choices create and maintain power and solidarity dimensions of role relationships, speakers can also use language to indicate social allegiances, that is, which groups they are members of and which groups they are not (pp. 1-2).

If a high school male wants to become a jock, he would greatly benefit from imitating how jocks uphold their identity and act around others. Ochs (1988) argues that the relationship between language and social identity is guided by the interlocutor's understandings of how acts are resources for structuring specific social identity. Furthermore, Ochs (1993) narrows the focus from social identity to social group membership, noting that membership in a social group depends on the member's knowledge of local conventions for building social identities. Psathas (1999) agrees, writing that group membership is expressed by participating in the set of norms associated with that particular group. Another way to legitimize identity in a social group is by using the jargon and slang associated with the group. The *Dictionary of Media and Communication Studies* defines jargon as "[t]he specialist speech of groups of people with common identity…that is, the in-language of people with specialist knowledge or interest" (Jargon, 2015). Slang, however, refers not to specialist speech but to informal words and expressions considered nonstandard in the speaker's original dialect or language. (In the context of Christianese, for example, a theologically-dense lingo of seminarians more closely resembles jargon, while the lingo of a layman's Bible study is probably closer to slang.) When speakers forgo their standard dialect for slang, they take a step toward acclimating fully in that social group. Naturally, in-group members will reflect this identity in their speech to maintain this group's identity.

Christian Group Membership

If a goal of the speaker is to build camaraderie with the listeners, using speech the listeners understand would help. Chen (1997) discusses strategies speakers employ to make references that hearers are likely to understand. Chen observes that in making these references, speakers make use of "common ground," and that a person's group or category membership serves as a good indicator of the exact nature of that common ground. Recent research confirms that Christians use the Bible as this source of common ground. Rackley (2014) studied the youth groups of a Mormon and a Methodist church and how the students at these churches construct and affirm their identity as youth group members. Rackley contends that quoting from the Bible "represented ways of engaging with religious texts […] that distinguished religious youth as knowledgeable insiders of particular religious communities" (p. 424-425). Rackley's study testifies that quoting Scripture functions as identity formation, considering that when youth demonstrate knowledge of the Bible to one another and the congregation at-large, they further integrate themselves into the "family of believers." Lehtinen (2004) maintains that quoting Bible verses becomes remarkable only when a verse is properly applied to the context of the conversation. In his study of Seventh-Day Adventist Bible studies, Lehtinen argues that the participants' conversation must intersect with the hearer's interpretation of a given passage to make "the Bible story relevant to the participants by opening up a place in the story for them to identify with" (p. 53). Such Bible quotations can also restructure how participants interpret church activities. Borker (1986) notes that the "weaving together of biblical symbols," such as references and allusions to the Bible, develop a semantic coherence throughout a Brethren church service that contributes to

the participants' notions of the meaning of the service. Shoaps (2002) discusses entextualization (text-building) strategies in two Assemblies of God churches, arguing that pastors and congregants who highlight the situatedness of a biblical text in a particular context appear to have an intimate connection with God.

Numerous other studies have examined the impact of Christian language on the way Christians think of themselves and conduct themselves. Howell and Dorr (2007) have demonstrated that the rhetoric of Christians can frame their current activity. Howell and Dorr discuss how college-aged students participating in short-term missions trips at a Christian college contextualize what they consider a divine mandate to participate in short-term missions. By augmenting distance between themselves and their destination, using language of relocation and reentry, and discussing a response to a "call," the college students portray themselves as pilgrims and frame their "journey" as a holy pilgrimage. Similarly, Lie (2012) observes that for Chinese Indonesian evangelicals, the use of the word *evangelism* reveals how one branch of Christianity has constructed a group identity as messengers of their faith. Corwin (2014) concludes that praying in front of others in a Catholic convent performs several social functions. Not only are speakers petitioning the divine, but they are also communicating social support to other prayer participants. Church leaders also have a pivotal role in helping their congregations properly conceptualize faith-related topics. It is sometimes incumbent on ministers to reprimand a congregation or group from the pulpit if their particularly flagrant behavior endangers themselves or the church. While some ministers can boldly rebuke their congregations without batting an eyelash, Dzameshie (1995) notes that others make use of Christian argot as a politeness strategy because of its indirectness. He argues that "in

the church family, cardinal principles of interpersonal relationships such as love, friendliness, respect, humility, and gentleness are expected" (p. 195). Therefore, ministers who want to soften the FTAs they commit in front of the congregations they oversee may employ Christianese so that the process of rebuke resembles shepherding more than chastising.

Christianity and Language

Within the Christian faith, the centrality of language cannot be overestimated. Alexander (2008) comments on Christianity's logocentrism, stating that Christianity has "a profound reverence for the word, and a strong belief in the power of speech" (p. 86). Leiter (2013) emphasizes the theological implications of language for Christianity:

> Especially within the opening five verses of the Hebrew Bible, language itself is accentuated as utterly consequential. It is the performative tool of creation: there was only emptiness and darkness in the universe until an all-powerful being used language and "said" that there should be light; there were no days until this creator assigned descriptive words to "day" and "night" (Genesis 1:1-5). In the New Testament, language is again emphasized as the tool of creation and is even described as a part of God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). As is written in the cornerstone text of Christianity, our world would not exist in the most literal sense without language. (pp. 6-7).

Thousands of years later, language is still indispensable to Christianity. Practically, language enables pastors to communicate messages on Sunday mornings. Christians use language to sing worship songs and to "witness to" (share their faith with) non-Christians. For evangelical Christians especially, who deem the Bible an unrivaled and authoritative text, written language is unequivocally powerful. For this reason, translating the Bible into all the world's living languages has become the nonpareil means of evangelism for organizations such as SIL International. Sturgill (2004) encapsulates the

centrality of language in Christianity, stating that "the work of the church is fundamentally communication" (p. 166).

The Nature of Christianese

Although most Christianese speakers are evangelical Christians, not all varieties of English spoken by evangelicals universally qualify as Christianese. Put another way, just because a Christian is speaking English does not mean he or she is speaking Christianese. Therefore, it is important to define *Christianese* and isolate some of its prototypical characteristics.

According to Leiter (2013), the term *Christianese* was first used to profile a distinct language variety in the subculture of evangelicals in 1968. During the 1970s, American institutions of higher education and at-large culture embraced an influx of non-Western spiritual practices. Although most Protestant faith traditions declined in membership and prestige during this decade, evangelicalism and evangelical subculture experienced a revival of sorts. *Time* and *Newsweek* deemed 1976 "The Year of the Evangelical," a moniker aided by presidential candidates Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter's public espousal of born-again Christianity (Leiter, 2013). Through this spotlight on mainstream American evangelicalism, Christian lexicon went from arcane to familiar. This visibility was accelerated by the Ecumenical Movement of the 1980s and 1990s, which led "Christians of all sorts [to] talk with all sorts of other Christians where they perhaps did not before" (Heather, 2000, p. 275). Heather recounts that as evangelicals identified differences and shibboleths in one another's patterns of discourse, they conglomerated the various dialects they heard under an umbrella whimsically dubbed "Christianese."

McQuerry (1979) and Williston and Kinloch (1979) conducted some of the earliest academic research on Christianese. McQuerry made the observation that while elements of Christianese may surface in various Christian (and even non-Christian) communities, the dialect is used most often and least self-consciously by evangelicals. She astutely observes that while idiosyncratic and sometimes unintelligible language is characteristic of Christianese, even more telling than the lexical choice is the "freedom and spontaneity of its use" (p. 148). Williston and Kinloch analyzed the speech of non-denominational Christians in southeastern Canada and first called attention to several quintessential characteristics of Christianese, including the addition of specialized meanings to preexisting English words. The authors observed that many of these colloquial phrases and alternative word senses developed from preexisting biblical metaphors. For example, various New Testament writers describe the church with metaphors including a body, a building, and a bride. Consequently, in modern Christianese, *church* is used to describe both the building in which Christians meet and the Christians themselves.

Coleman (1980) joined the conversation soon after, observing several ways the evangelical worldview affects Christianese syntax. For example, attributing "every good and perfect gift" to God prompts many speakers of Christianese to use passive verb phrases where most English speakers would use an active verb, such as in "I was enabled to […]" or "I felt called/led to […]" (James 1:17, NIV). In describing a magnanimous action of theirs, rather than overtly mention their benevolence, some Christianese speakers describe the interaction as mutually beneficial. This reflects the theological belief that Christians are not solely responsible for their acts of kindness. Therefore, those

speakers use the preposition *with* to make the interaction more symmetrical, as evidenced by the example "Amy had fellowship with her."

Leiter (2013) has conducted some of the most thorough academic linguistic research on Christianese and church lingo of the American south. Leiter surveyed evangelical students at Emory University and examined profiles and language on evangelical websites such as ChristianMingle.com. She concluded that Christianese merits the label "dialect" and constructs and maintains a collective identity among the individuals who speak it. Leiter proposed six unique definitions of Christianese, including "phraseology used by Christians that non-Christians would not understand" and "special vocabulary with particular meanings used within Christian communities" (p. 15). These definitions are helpful in communicating nuanced characteristics of Christianese. However, for the purpose of the present conversation, the sixth definition proposed by Leiter will be given to Christianese for its broadness: "language used by evangelical Protestant Christians" (p. 16).

Since Christianese is spoken chiefly by evangelical Christians, it is also important to define *evangelical*. Although the definition of *evangelical* is evolving, Eskridge (2014) credits David Babbington with the seminal scholarly definition: evangelicals are Protestant Christians who believe in proselytizing non-Christians ("conversionism"), expressing and demonstrating the gospel through missionary and social justice efforts ("activism"), holding the Bible in high regard ("biblicism"), and emphasizing Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross as the sole means of redemption ("crucicentrism"). As an addendum to Eskridge's definition, historian George Marsden has suggested a fifth distinctive of evangelicalism—trans-denominationalism—which "takes into account

15

evangelicals' pragmatic penchant for cooperation in support of shared projects and evangelistic efforts" (Eskridge, 2014). Under this umbrella, churchgoers as disparate as Presbyterians and Pentecostals can qualify as evangelicals, as can non-denominational Christians, who have surged in number over the last ten years (Stetzer, 2015). Like evangelicalism's composition and size, public perception of evangelicalism is also rapidly changing. In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, much of America affiliates evangelicals not only with Christian faith, but also with conservative political leanings and the Trump presidency (Shellnutt, Press, & Zylstra, 2016). This thesis does not pay attention to the political views of its participants, and will use the term evangelical to describe the participants' faith as congruent with Babbington's definition of evangelicalism.

In contemporary Christianity, attitudes surrounding the term *Christianese* are split. Most scholars and contemporary Christians use *Christianese* to refer to the religiolect, although terms such as *churchspeak* have appeared in notable media such as relevantmagazine.com. Some Christians use the term contemptuously, eschewing *Christianese* as a dissimulating language that lacks meaning. According to Leiter (2013), while most Christians note Christianese's unfortunate tendency to exclude others, a small minority, including Christian author Brad Kallenberg, champion the ease with which Christianese speakers can communicate complex Christian concepts. For this study, *Christianese* will be used as a neutral term.

Conclusion

This literature review has walked through several fundamental linguistic theories: contextualization, the linguistic frame, face and politeness, backchanneling, and semantic

roles. This chapter has also detailed previous studies on group dynamics and group identity among Christians, the relationship between Christianity and language, the history of Christianese, the archetypal characteristics of Christianese, and the modern-day attitudes toward Christianese. These theories and case studies form the backbone of the coming Conversation Analysis of two samples of college-aged evangelical speakers of Christianese.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction to Conversation Analysis (CA)

This study employs an approach known as Conversation Analysis (CA).

Linguists, anthropologists, and other social scientists use CA to study conversation and

the broader social interactions that surround both verbal and nonverbal conduct. As

Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) state, the principal purpose of CA "is to discover how

participants understand and respond to one another in their turns at talk" (p. 12). When

two individuals have a conversation, "metamessages" and subtle details are

communicated not only through words, but also through extralinguistic features. People

implicitly know that the production of talk is governed by tacit guidelines. These

guidelines allow interlocutors to infer, for example, that someone may be seeking to end

a conversation by pointing their body away from other participants or by giving

increasingly terse responses to others' questions. CA explores these implicit procedures

in order to describe how participants "produce and recognize meaningful action" in

conversation (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 7).

When CA emerged in the 1960s, language was almost exclusively studied for its

structural components, such as syntax, phonetics, and morphology (Hutchby & Wooffitt,

2008). Linguists during this period primarily studied the formal properties of language,

not its everyday use. Unlike these formal properties, conversation was deemed "chaotic

and disorderly" (ten Have, 1999, p. 3). Even the celebrated linguist Noam Chomsky held

that because of its disjointedness, everyday speech did not merit in-depth structural

analysis (Chomsky, 1965). But the trailblazers of CA disagreed with this conclusion, observing structure amidst the disarray. Harold Garfinkel laid a foundation for CA by pioneering *ethnomethodology*, the study of how people perceive and produce the social order by which they live (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Garfinkel posited that people could comprehend and justify their actions in social situations, but he did not know how to note the observed but somewhat muted characteristics of human interaction empirically. Sociologist Erving Goffman built on this concept, coining the phrase "interaction order" to represent how people organize their everyday behavior (Liddicoat, 2007).

These ideas struck a chord with sociologist Harvey Sacks and his close colleague Emanuel Schegloff (Sacks, Jefferson, & Schegloff, 2005). These researchers performed three studies pivotal to the development of CA (ten Have, 1999). First, during the 1960s, Sacks analyzed recorded calls to the Los Angeles Suicide Prevention Center, where he worked. He observed that hotline employees had strategies to obtain callers' names subtly, but also that hotline callers had strategies of their own to evade the employees' tactics. From this research, Sacks developed groundbreaking ideas about pragmatic phenomena such as topic organization, speaker selection preferences, and conversational openings and closings. Perhaps most importantly, Sacks posited that the function and meaning of an utterance hinge on its sequential position, an idea that laid the foundation for modern CA. Second, Schegloff (1968) analyzed the openings of telephone calls to the Disaster Research Center at Ohio State University. Schegloff observed that speakers, unassured that a potential listener is engaged in the conversation, may secure their attention via a summons-answer sequence, which helps speakers gain the attention of the chosen interlocutor. From this research, Schegloff further validated that observable,

underlying rules structure conversation. Third, Sacks and Schegloff together (1974)

analyzed the way conversations come to a close. The researchers observed that

conversations do not naturally close themselves, but interlocutors employ specific

strategies to signal the end of a conversation to other interlocutors. From this research,

Sacks and Schegloff developed theories about pre-closings, adjacency pairs, and turn-

taking procedures.

How to Conduct CA

Conducting CA requires four main steps: recording interactions, transcribing the

talk, analyzing selected portions, and publishing the research (ten Have, 1999). First, the

researchers record conversation. ten Have argues that for CA, using audio and/or video

recordings as the medium of data collection enables researchers to examine interactions

again and again. Revisiting the data allows researchers to draw new conclusions from the

myriads of nuances present in every interaction. Second, the researchers transcribe the

conversation. While different analysts use different transcription systems, Gail

Jefferson's conventions are the most commonly used (Sacks, Jefferson, & Schegloff,

2005). Unfortunately, transcribed data is necessarily incomplete; no written transcription

can fully encapsulate *how* an utterance was said quite like a recording can. However,

when relying solely on a recording, researchers cannot visualize the sequence and flow of

utterances while listening in real-time. When researchers study a transcription, they can

more easily understand the context surrounding an utterance. ten Have argues that

because transcripts are subjective to what one researcher deems significant, researchers

should create their own transcripts to catch subtleties in the data other researchers might

ignore. Third, the researchers analyze the data. If the researchers approach the data with

preconceived notions, it will be easier for them to prooftext the desired results into the data. However, if the researchers approach the data without specific conclusions in mind, the eventual findings will be rooted in the data rather than from the biases of the researcher. While researchers should inform their research by reading about related studies, researchers should not allow preconceptions about the data to cloud their analysis. Finally, the researchers publish their data and share their findings with others.

Criticisms of CA

As a qualitative method of conducting research, CA has been subject to its fair share of criticism. Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) note that one recurring criticism of CA is its "irrelevance" when compared to the scientific method (p. 2008). Despite the hesitancy with which it was met, CA has proven useful in analyzing countless topics throughout the social sciences, from political rhetoric to human-machine interactions. Although formulating a hypothesis at the end of the study is counter-intuitive to the scientific method and other research methodologies, it would be almost impossible to study conversation and interaction objectively if the hypothesis were formed earlierin the process. A second criticism of CA is that while it touts to capture natural interaction, the presence of audio and video recording equipment renders the findings unnatural. While many people would indubitably converse and interact with one another differently in the presence of these technologies, the present study did not seem to suffer much from their presence. In both videos, participants casually referenced the camera once but seemed to have forgotten it was there minutes later. While CA studies are not perfectly natural, this does not repudiate the validity of CA in the same way that other studies are not irrevocably ruined by requiring consent before interviews. The final criticism of CA

21

addressed here is that researchers are not privy to tacit customs and practices of the subjects they are analyzing. This criticism is legitimate; it seems counterintuitive for researchers to draw conclusions about conversational procedures when they are not well-acquainted with the procedures and practices of the participants' group. However, for the present study, this criticism should not be of particular concern. The primary researcher attends both the same university and the same church and is, in fact, a participant in one of the conversations. Therefore, the primary researcher is well-acquainted with the norms surrounding both groups of students.

Present Study

In discussing the present study, it is imperative to note the difference between conversation analysis (CA) and the larger domain of research to which it belongs, discourse analysis (DA). While CA focuses strictly on the systemic organization of conversation, DA takes into consideration the conversation's context and the participants' culture in its analysis (ten Have, 1999). Because the setting and circumstances of an interaction factor into DA, DA is influenced by participants' membership, knowledge of group culture, and psychological reasoning. Pure CA, however, can only reach certain conclusions about the rules surrounding an interaction because it emphasizes the procedures and not the cultural context. The present study uses CA within the larger realm of DA and incorporates context and culture into its analysis.

Concerning the data collection of the present study, two conversations of college-aged evangelical students were video-recorded with participants' consent. At the time of the recording, all participants were students at the same university and attended the same church, both located in Waco, TX. All participants were active members of the church's

college ministry, which involves regularly attending Sunday morning worship, Wednesday night college service, a weekly co-ed small group of college students called a "lifegroup," and weekly discipleship with mentors for accountability and spiritual growth.

For both recordings, a researcher set up a video camera to record the conversations. The researcher then left the room so that the figures displayed in the video were the only figures present during the recording. All participants were given pseudonyms to respect their privacy. The two conversations were then transcribed according to Gail Jefferson's Conversation Analysis notation system. A list of transcription notations used in this thesis can be found in the Appendix. The first video captures a weekly meeting that occurs between seven roommates: Bill, Carl, Kevin, Mark, Matt, Nick, and Steve. During this meeting, each roommate takes a turn to discuss his highlights, struggles, and any new information from the previous week. This first conversation lasted about 48 minutes. In the data analysis, "13Roommates" will be used to refer to this conversation. The second video captures four leaders of a college lifegroup: Anna, Art, Dean, and Karla. During this meeting, the leaders plan activities for the evening's meeting, including the topic of discussion, the order of events, and logistical details including snacks, announcements, and transportation. The author of this paper was one of the four participants in this dialogue. This second conversation lasted about 42 minutes. In the data analysis, "16Lifegroup" will be used to refer to this conversation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

This chapter will use Conversation Analysis to examine the discursive strategies used by speakers of Christianese. While these discursive strategies accomplish a number of social goals, the key insight from the two discussions is that speakers use Christianese to prove their membership to one another in a larger group of fellow Christians. This chapter will investigate six methods Christianese speakers use to demonstrate this membership.

When speakers use Christianese, they make statements about their identity and the social groups to which they belong. Both conversations in this study occur in an explicitly Christian setting or between fellow insiders. Leiter (2013) notes that under these circumstances, Christianese is especially likely to be used. One plausible explanation for this phenomenon is that conversations between insiders tend to focus on Christianity more so than conversations with outsiders. Therefore, using a dialect imbued with religious undertones would seem appropriate. While speakers certainly use religious dialects in discussing religious topics, the subject of conversation need not be religious for Christianese to appear. For example, Extracts 1 and 2 concentrate on golf clubs and a cut on one of the speakers' arms, not on intrinsically religious topics. Nevertheless, speakers still sprinkle Christianese into the conversation. Therefore, topic choice cannot be the sole motivation for the speakers to use Christianese. Furthermore, Leiter observes that Christianese emerged as a distinct language variety only within the past fifty years. For the previous thousands of years, "pre-Christianese Christians" had some method of

discussing religious subject matter without employing the religiolect. Therefore, religious factors cannot comprehensively account for the use of Christianese. As the following examples indicate, a speaker uses Christianese to indicate to others that he or she is an "insider."

Speakers of Christianese seek to demonstrate in-group membership, connecting themselves both to one another and to a larger Christian culture. While this "proof of membership" may occur subtly in intonation patterns, hand gestures, or other linguistic idiosyncrasies, the appeal to connectedness in Christian culture is made especially evident via allusions and phraseology incorporated in conversations. Here, six strategies used by speakers to solidify this in-group membership will be examined—allusions to the Bible, allusions to larger Christian culture, religious topic choice, framing extended statements as mini-sermons, Christian-specific jargon and phrasing, and backchanneling.

Allusions to the Bible

References made by speakers of Christianese to specific Bible verses assume common ground between interlocutors. Because members have a shared awareness of the Bible, incorporating verses from the Bible into ordinary dialogue greatly aids members' positive faces and helps prove in-group membership. In Extract 1, Matt is telling his roommates about his new pair of golf clubs, for which he paid significantly less than their original value. One of his roommates, Steve, interrupts Matt with the phrase "immeasurably more."

Extract 1: *Immeasurably More* **(13Roommates, 16:21)**

```
1  Matt        So for fifteen bucks I got like a whole set of [golf clubs] and=
2  Kevin                                                         [wow     ]
3  Matt        =A [golf bag              ]
4  Steve          [Immeasurably more]
5  Matt        Yeah immeasurably more
6  Nick        ((murmured)) than you can ask or imagine
```

In line 4, Steve references Ephesians 3:20 (NIV), "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us." In line 5, Matt repeats Steve's statement, confirming the relevance of Steve's allusion. In line 6, Nick joins Matt and Steve, continuing the verse after Matt confirmed Steve's allusion.

Matt's statement in line 5, "yeah immeasurably more," is important in solidifying the connectedness and in-group membership sought by the roommates. In confirming Steve's interruption, Matt demonstrates that he understands the allusion, and he publicly confirms Steve's ability to think quickly on his feet and to make connections between Matt's story and the Bible. This connection enhances both Matt's positive face and Steve's positive face. When Nick adds to Steve's assertion, Nick helps his positive face as well and demonstrates his own awareness of what has occurred. Perhaps most importantly, Steve's decision to incorporate Scripture in front of all his roommates greatly aids his positive face. Steve demonstrates an awareness of the Bible, a shared feature which the group-at-large clearly prioritizes. Showcasing this knowledge affirms Steve's membership in the group and prompts Matt and Nick to confirm their awareness of the Bible and, subsequently, their membership in the group. All three speakers' faces are consequently enhanced in the presence of their roommates.

A similar instance occurs five minutes later in the conversation. Steve proves his knowledge of the Bible yet again, although the entire group does not hear his reference. When Carl reveals that his arm is bleeding, Steve jokingly compares Carl's cut to a severe punishment in antiquity.

Extract 2: *Forty Lashes* (13Roommates, 21:17)

```
1   All             ((roommates talking over one another, several conversations
2                   ((occurring simultaneously))
3                   ((looking at his arm and elbow, examining the cut))
4   Steve           ((to Carl)) you got like forty lashes
5   Carl            I know right (.) One minus (1.0) one minus forty
```

There are a couple ways to interpret Steve's utterance in line 3. Steve is alluding to a Roman tradition which held that forty lashes would kill a person, so a sentence of forty lashes minus one was as close to a death sentence as one could get. Steve may be specifically referencing 2 Corinthians 11:24 (NIV), "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one," although he may simply be alluding to the practice apart from its mention in the Bible. Either way, in line 4, Carl enthusiastically responds to Steve's statement, saying "I know right?" Then, much like Nick in Extract 1, Carl provides more context, adding the "minus one" that follows the forty lashes in the biblical text.

In the minute leading up to Extract 2, the tone of the room shifts from attentive (to a story Matt was telling) to concerned (for Carl's arm). With his comment in line 3, Steve introduces a humorous frame into a somewhat serious situation. This has several pragmatic consequences. For one, Steve could be confirming that Carl's health is not in immediate danger and makes a light-hearted joke to signal to the group that Carl has handled the cuts on his arm well. Steve could also be making an observation that Carl

does not have merely one cut on his arm, but several, resembling someone who has been intentionally cut multiple times. In this instance, Steve would be demonstrating care for Carl and used the joke both to introduce a humorous frame and to validate that Carl's physical pain is warranted. While very unlikely, Steve could have insinuated that the cut on Carl's arm was killing him. After all, Steve uses with Carl the term "forty lashes," enough to kill a person, not "forty lashes minus one," which would still hypothetically leave someone alive. In this instance, Carl's clarification in line 4 (saying "one minus forty") could be his way of correcting Steve on a misquotation of the Bible, or it could represent Carl disagreeing with Steve and communicating that the cuts on his arm would not, in fact, kill him. Unlike Extract 1, only some members of the group are aware of Steve's comment in Extract 2. Carl and Steve have still enhanced their positive faces, but in-group membership is only confirmed between the two of them rather than among the entire group.

Speakers of Christianese pepper passages of the Bible into conversation not only for humorous effect but also to substantiate their connection with God, as seen in a third example. When the lifegroup leaders meet, Dean opens their meeting with a prayer, in which he quotes a verse from the New Testament.

Extract 3: *Two or More* (16Lifegroup, 1:37)

1	Dean	Jesus thank you for um the opportunity to (.) get to <u>lead</u> your
2		people and thank you for um thank you for being present
3		where two or more are gathered. God I pray that you'd be in
4		lifegroup tonight, that you'd guide our conversations and um
5		and in worship draw our hearts closer to you. Uh God we love
6		you and we give you all the glory, in Jesus' Name, Amen

Shoaps (2002) notes that the way a speaker highlights the context of a verse or passage from the Bible contributes to the purported intimate connection with a higher power. In this example, Dean references Matthew 18:20 (NIV), "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." Dean highlights a verse which declares that God is seemingly present in the group. In using this verse, Dean acknowledges the implied presence of a higher power and enhances his purported connection with God in the presence of his peers.

This extract differs from the previous two in several ways. In the first two extracts, roommates are having a conversation when one of them incorporates a reference to the Bible. In this example, Dean is praying aloud in front of his peers. The evangelical Christian ritual of praying aloud in the presence of others has several complicated pragmatic consequences. On the one hand, most Christians would likely still characterize this as a conversation, considering that mainline Protestant churches conceptualize prayer as conversation with God. However, it seems imprecise to call God an interlocutor in this conversation, considering Dean does not seem to take the time to listen, but rather talks at God and petitions God for divine favor at the night's meeting. Scenarios of praying aloud also leave the others present in an ambiguous position. Technically, Anna, Art, and Karla are audience members in a conversation of which they are not a part. However, much like someone having a telephone conversation in the presence of others might be inclined to speak differently knowing they have an audience, Dean might very well have spoken differently knowing that three of his peers are "eavesdropping" on his conversation with God. Using Goffman's (1974) terminology, Anna, Art, and Karla would most aptly be described as "auditing" the conversation, since they are known and ratified by Dean, but

never directly addressed. By volunteering to pray at the beginning, Dean consents to having the others hear him thank God and make requests of God. By remaining present, Anna, Art, and Karla become participants in the prayer, even though they do not verbally participate. Goffman terms this setup a "participation framework," which governs who is involved in a particular interaction and what roles they play. In this participation framework, all four leaders maintain involvement in the prayer: one contributes the prayer, and the other three make respectful gestures such as bowing their heads, closing their eyes, and maintaining silence.

Unlike the first two extracts, no one confirms Dean's allusion to Scripture. On the one hand, it would seem inappropriate to interrupt Dean while he has a conversation with someone else. In some Christian circles, this would demonstrate a lack of respect for the speaker or even for God. On the other hand, in other contemporary Christian circles, it is appropriate and even praiseworthy for Christians to validate one another by interrupting prayers with statements such as "Amen!" or "Yes, Lord." Interjecting oneself into another's prayer is a public demonstration of your engagement and agreement, aiding both speakers' positive faces. In Extract 3, none of the others verbally validate Dean's allusion to Scripture or anything else he includes in his prayer. Additionally, none of the others nodded their heads or changed their body language in a way that would indicate approval. As a result, no in-group camaraderie was overtly displayed in this interaction.

There is an underlying difference between the first two extracts and the third extract that makes the first two funny but not the third. In Extracts 1 and 2, the roommates are having a weekly discussion. Even though the discussion regularly plunges into religious topics, the overarching frame is still common: roommates discussing one

30

anothers' weeks. The roommates likely found the incongruity of a sacred reference in an ordinary frame humorous. On the other hand, in Extract 3, the overarching frame is prayer, which is an intrinsically sacred activity. By referencing a Bible verse in this frame, Dean demonstrates an awareness of what actions are appropriate in the frame "prayer." The congruity of Dean's sacred reference in a sacred frame is appropriate, so the lifegroup leaders did not laugh. In fact, in most Christian circles, inviting laughter or levity into a sacred frame such as prayer would be highly malapropos. When Anna asks the group if anyone would like to pray, Dean and Art respond simultaneously, producing a brief moment of levity (*16Lifegroup*, 1:25). However, Dean pauses and finishes chuckling before he prays, avoiding an impropriety of Christian culture and ensuring that humor does not enter the sacred frame.

Allusions to Larger Christian Culture

While the Bible serves as the chief holy text for the Christian faith, contemporary Christian culture encompasses far more than the Bible. The second way speakers of Christianese demonstrate in-group membership is by alluding to the larger Christian culture. Christianese arises from a large culture of Christians throughout America and around the world. Many Christians from different denominations and geographic locations practice similar rituals and forms of worship, thus forming a larger Christian culture that transcends the specific culture of a local church. Take, for instance, the videos *Shoot Christians Say* and *Sh*tuff Christian Girls Say*, which have garnered millions of views on YouTube (Crosby & Stanton, 2013; JJMVids, 2012). Both videos feature montages of actors glibly using Christianese phrases in dialogue with other Christians. In watching these videos, Christians of numerous backgrounds can recognize

and poke fun at the idiosyncrasies of Christian culture and the colloquial vernacular that often accompanies it. By demonstrating familiarity with aspects of this culture, speakers demonstrate their in-group membership in a "family of believers."

In Extract 4, roommate Steve shares about his week, and his answer references a famous hymn.

Extract 4: *Prone to Wander* (13Roommates, 29:35)

```
1   Steve       It really has been like (0.5) the places where I believe that I'm
2               alone and where my actions have affected other people in
3               places where I'm like most prone to (.) like
4   Nick        Wander
5   Steve       Yeah
6               ((murmured laughter))
7   Steve       Prone to wander and I feel it
8   Matt        Prone to leave the Lord your God
9   Nick        ((singing the line 'prone to wander and I feel it'))
10  Steve       But no but seriously just like the places where I I like walk in
11              the flesh in the most um (.) and I really like I don't I don't
12              want that
```


One commonality between members of this group is the shared importance of faith. The roommates share this common passion and interact regularly with one another around mutual engagement in that endeavor. Bucholtz (1999) calls such aggregates of people "communities of practice." This non-linguistic commonality is articulated through language in order to cement the collective identity of the group. In Extract 4, Nick completes the phrase "prone to wander," a verse from the famous hymn "Come Thou Fount" (Robinson, 1757). After Steve confirms the relevance of Nick's interruption with "yeah" in line 5, the remaining roommates begin quietly snickering and murmuring to themselves, amused by the allusion as well. According to Coates (2007), it is widely recognized that shared laughter nurtures group solidarity. The seven roommates have

here demonstrated that the entire group, not just select individuals, prioritizes its faith and is well-acquainted with a Christian culture beyond themselves.

Although worship music is a central part of contemporary Christian culture, speakers of Christianese can allude to other cultural aspects besides popular song lyrics. Referencing famous pastors, worship leaders, or churches would also connect Christians to the broader community of Christians. Knowledge of well-known ministries could also connect Christians—in the lifegroup leader dialogue, Anna makes the comment "that's kind of like a Sozo point," referencing a counseling and healing ministry known in charismatic Christian circles. Millions of Christians across America and around the world would recognize the allusion in Extract 4, since "Come Thou Fount" is among the most widely known of all Christian hymns. On the other hand, not all such allusions are as easily understood, especially considering how many different denominations and "styles" of Christianity prevail in the 21st century. In Extract 5, lifegroup leader Karla makes a somewhat cabalistic reference to Christian subculture.

Extract 5: *Spirit of Adoption* (16Lifegroup, 40:37)

```
1  Anna      When you're talk[ing]
2  Dean      ((with hesitation)) [yeah]
3  Anna      I keep hearing, like, 'orphan' (2.0), like
4            ((raises left hand)) 'daughter,' 'son,' like from being uh, going
5  Karla     ((moving head back and forth, singing lyrics to a song))
6            Spirit of adoption
7  Anna      ((pointing at Karla)) Yeah, from orphan to a son. I think
8            ((pointing)) that's why I was thinking that actually probably
9  Karla     ((nods))
```

In Extract 5, Karla interjects with the phrase "Spirit of Adoption," a chorus and song title from Jason Upton, a little-known Christian worship artist (Upton, 2007). Upon hearing Karla's interjection, Anna points at her and says "yeah," while Art smiles and

exhales air from his nose as if laughing softly. Dean, who does not know the song, smiles softly but demonstrates no other change in body language. It is possible that Dean "got" Karla's joke and found it humorous but simply did not make any noticeable or boisterous display of approval to signal this to the others. But because Anna and Art publicly recognized her obscure reference, Karla enjoyed camaraderie with each of them. The one other person present, Dean, was omitted from the public connection made by the other three. Even if Dean knew the song and "got" the reference, Dean did not build camaraderie with the other two because he did not publicly affirm Karla's humor like Art and Anna did.

Extract 5 highlights an inevitable characteristic of the collective identity that accompanies Christianese: in-groups and out-groups. Reminiscent of an "inside joke," Extract 5 highlights a contrast between "insider" and "outsider" speakers. Inevitably, a distinct group cannot include some members without excluding others. Leiter (2013) notes that by using Christianese, speakers simultaneously exclude "outsiders" and psychologically unite as "insiders." The desire for exclusion does not motivate the vast majority of Christianese use; in Extracts 1, 2, 4, and 5, the speakers dipped into Christianese to capitalize on an opportunity for shared humor. Nevertheless, the formation of in-groups and out-groups is simply a natural consequence of any sociolect, including Christianese. Even using the term *Christianese* to describe the way many evangelical Christians talk leads speakers to conceptualize themselves as members of a clearly defined group.

Of the two conversations discussed in this study, one occurs in an explicitly Christian setting, and the other, while not expressly religious, still occurs between fellow

insiders. Therefore, the in-group/out-group dynamics are far more nuanced, considering that all members present have insider information on most of the references. For the basis of comparison, Extract 6 will examine individuals without insider status. Lewis (2002) heralds the well-known, irreverent television show *The Simpsons* as the most religious television show currently airing. He notes that main characters satirize the false piety of American religious expression, but also frequently turn to God themselves during moments of crisis. The show also contains a quintessential example of Christianese as satire in popular culture in the language of recurring character Ned Flanders and his sons Rod and Tod. Extract 6 reproduces a humorously sacrilegious scene from *The Simpsons Movie* (Silverman, 2007). In the following scene, the First Church of Springfield has already begun its service, while, outside the church, the Simpson family is preparing to walk in late.

Extract 6: *Praise Jebus* (The Simpsons Movie)

```
 1  Marge       I hate being late
 2  Homer       Well I hate going. Why can't I worship the Lord in my own
 3              way by praying like hell on my deathbed?
 4  Marge       Homer, they can hear you inside
 5  Homer       Rela:x (.) Those pious morons are too busy talking to their
 6              phony-baloney God
 7              ((Simpson family enters, audience stares at them, family
 8              quickly sits down))
 9  Homer       ((To congregants)) How you doin? Peace be with you, praise
10              Jebus
```

Often times, among a group of evangelical Christians, the presence of Christianese in an individual's conversational contributions suggests insider status, and the absence of Christianese suggests outsider status. Lines 2-6, however, indicate that Homer Simpson does not wish to be considered an insider among this group. Nevertheless, likely in adhering to social norms, he feigns interest, especially after the

audience stares blankly at the family. In lines 9-10, Homer, an outsider, attempts to use Christianese to portray himself as an insider to others. Not unlike many present-day Christians, Homer uses the phrase "peace be with you" when he enters the church. Jesus encourages his disciples in John 20:21 with this phrase, and Catholic masses around the world have incorporated into their liturgy a time for congregants to wish peace on one another with this phrase. Therefore, Homer has used Christianese to demonstrate an awareness of the group's traditions and even a familiarity with its holy text, probably in an attempt to mitigate the severity of his late entrance. The Christianese in Homer's next phrase, however, has the opposite effect. In stating "praise Jebus," a cheeky replacement for "praise Jesus," in a sacred place of worship, Homer communicates one of two things, both of which testify indisputably to his status as an outsider. The first option is that Homer does not know that the central figure of Christianity is named Jesus rather than Jebus. Homer brands himself as an outsider by demonstrating an unfamiliarity with the believed son of God. The second and more incriminating option is that Homer does know the figure is named Jesus and not Jebus. But in concert with his flippant and contemptuous attitude revealed in lines 2-6, Homer intentionally misspeaks and suggests that he prefers not to devote the time or brain space to learn the five-letter name of the central deity of the Christian faith. Whichever of these options is the case, Homer's misuse of Christianese has alienated him from, rather than united him with, the First Church of Springfield.

Topic Choice

A third strategy speakers of Christianese use to verify in-group membership and group identity is selecting intrinsically religious topics for conversation. As addressed

earlier, interlocutors speak in Christianese when discussing commonplace topics that are not inherently religious, so the use of Christianese cannot be attributed entirely to topic choice. However, introducing religious topics into conversation provides speakers an opportunity to initiate interest in topics of faith and solidify in-group membership.

Extract 7 gives Nick's answer to the posed question "Well how was everyone's weeks?" Nick was the second roommate to answer the question.

Extract 7: *Time with God* **(13Roommates, 5:16)**

```
1    Nick            Hahaha my week (1.0) has been really really good. I've been
2                    a little tired but (.) time with God has been super consistent
3                    and like (.) refreshing=
4    Matt                              =That's awesome
5    Nick            Lifegroup on Tuesday was really bomb=
6    Matt                                       =Whoa
7    Nick            Encouragement like all over
```

When asked about his week, Nick begins his answer by referencing success in his recent "time with God," which he repeats two more times throughout the dialogue. In fact, all seven roommates discuss their personal faith development during the week, and five roommates specifically describe their "time with God" or "time with Jesus" a total of twelve times during the dialogue, as if they are working off the same script or topic checklist for the conversation. Nick continues in lines 5 and 7, discussing the success of his lifegroup and the prevalent encouragement that contributed to its success. When given the opportunity to talk about his week, Nick began by touching on his faith. Considering every roommate brought up topics of faith in the synopsis of his week, the group had likely established discussing faith as an expectation in each individual's summary. As Nick discussed his "time with God" (an individual spiritual discipline) and his time in lifegroup (a communal spiritual discipline), he drew on values clearly prioritized by the

group, thus marking himself as a member. Sacks & Jefferson (2005) describe such activities as "category-bound actions," which can provide outsiders with inferences about the standard activities of the group's incumbents. For the roommates, and for other groups with speakers of Christianese, discussing individual time spent in faith-enriching activities and communal time spent with other Christians are category-bound actions that distinguish members from non-members.

Statements as Mini-Sermons

As a fourth strategy to demonstrate in-group membership, Christianese speakers may frame extended statements as mini-sermons, following the same format as many preachers or pastors delivering messages from a church pulpit.

Extract 8 highlights Carl, the first of the roommates to talk during the "house meeting" about his past week. In Extract 8, Carl discusses how the past week has been difficult for him, considering his fiancée lost her wedding ring and he struggled academically. The structure he uses to convey this information to his roommates warrants closer consideration.

Extract 8: *Valuable Lesson* (13Roommates, 0:15)

```
1   Carl      I can go first cause this week has been rather rough for
2             multiple reasons and I feel like every day this week it's
3             getting so much better now so praise God I'm so thankful
4             that no matter what we go through Jesus gives his like
5             blessing
6             […]
7             So praise God at the end of the week it was so long
8             […]
9             I just have to catch up on a lot of homework and test up that
10            just like last week took a backseat as it rightfully should (.) so
11            (1.0) this week started off rough, but I've learned a valuable
12            lesson that in any situation, no matter what you really go
13            through, Satan can attack you at any moment and if that's ever
14            gonna cause your faith to be like wavering then it's good to
15            renew your faith so it was a challenge, definitely was
```

38

Extract 8 contains Carl's final sentences of his nearly four-minute synopsis of his week. As demonstrated in lines 1-5, Carl begins his synopsis by almost immediately invoking praise of God. From the beginning of his turn, Carl demonstrates to his roommates an awareness of God and a desire to center his remarks on God. In this same way, when preachers first approach the pulpit, they often open their message with a prayer or invocation of God's faithfulness as a way of grounding the subsequent message in something or someone beyond themselves. After Carl progresses through the story of his girlfriend's losing her wedding ring, the complications and logistics of planning a wedding, and the decline of his academic performance, Carl utters "so praise God" in line 7 almost three minutes after his opening. Interspersing statements such as "praise God" enables Carl to direct the focus of the conversation away from himself and towards God. Line 7 is preceded and followed by statements that have no discernible semantic connection to faith or praise of God, and his statement would have been perfectly grammatical without the "praise God" comment. However, Carl reintroduces God as a character in the story he tells so as not to deviate too strongly from the primary purpose of his discussion—to celebrate God. Similarly, preachers intersperse praise to God throughout the delivery of their messages. For example, preachers often begin extended oratories with anecdotes or comical stories so as to hook the audience's attention or to ground an abstraction of faith in terms with which the audience is familiar. In an attempt to prevent their story from dominating and overshadowing the purpose of the sermon, a preacher may interject "praise God" or "Amen" as a way of reminding the audience of the main purpose of the sermon. As preachers communicate the main points of the

message, they may continue to punctuate their delivery with the same interjections, redirecting the focus of the message to someone other than themselves.

As Carl wraps up his speaking turn, he summarizes the main ideas of the previous three and a half minutes of talking. However, Carl notably includes in his conclusion a practical takeaway from the experiences of his week. In lines 11-12 of Extract 8, Carl shares with his roommates what he has "learned as a valuable lesson." This statement is a significant contextualization cue, signaling to hearers that Carl is not merely telling a story. If a speaker utters "praise God" while he is telling a story, that does not necessarily mean he is preaching; he could simply be using his religion's parlance to express gratitude or joy. Similarly, summarizing the main points of a speech is not strictly characteristic of preaching; it is useful in any lengthy oration. However, communicating a lesson is a hallmark not of storytelling, but of teaching and preaching. Contemporary homiletic theory emphasizes the importance of constructing a sermon with a practical application for listeners in mind. In delivering sermons, pastors often follow a similar format by closing with a synopsis of the message's main points. From there, the pastor may challenge the congregation with a practical application for them to relate the sermon to their day-to-day lives. When Carl delivers a practical lesson from his week, he orients himself as one who understands the lesson at hand and imparts experience to those listening. With the closing moral lesson, Carl's stories even resemble parables, stories of familiar things that help others understand spiritual truths. He explicitly warns his hearers in line 13 that "Satan can attack you at any moment" and reminds them in lines 14-15 that "it's good to renew your faith." With these comments, Carl's speech has become both narrative and didactic.

In framing his speaking turn as a mini-sermon, Carl frames himself as a pastor speaking to his congregation. Although Carl does not explicitly quote any verses of the Bible, he does appeal to several Christian principles: that "Satan can attack you at any moment" and that "it's good to renew your faith." As revealed in Extracts 1, 2, 4, and 7, the roommates clearly prioritize the Bible and their faith. Students who prioritize their faith respect the opinions and insight of preachers. Therefore, for Carl to assume the identity of a preacher around such students elevates him to a position this group highly esteems. This respect would grant more legitimacy to Carl's exhortations in lines 12-15. However, Carl's subtle conversion into a preacher is risky—like all sermons, Carl's message would be subject to evaluation and critique. In the company of students who understand the Bible well, Carl may not have intended to invite feedback on his delivery, he may have simply wanted to chronicle the events of the past week.

Christian-Specific Jargon

The fifth method speakers of Christianese employ to affirm in-group membership is using Christian-specific jargon and phrasing. Leiter (2013) includes in her multifaceted definition of Christianese "special vocabulary with particular meanings used within Christian communities." Knowledge of lofty theological terms would certainly delineate insiders from outsiders unfamiliar with the complexities of Christianity. In fact, to non-Christians, even fundamental theological terms such as "sanctification" or "Trinity" might seem esoteric, considering they are seldom used outside of the Christian context. But Christianese is primarily spoken and perpetuated not by theologians but by everyday evangelicals. Therefore, most dialects of Christianese feature terms with which even

outsiders are familiar. However, these terms are often rooted in metaphors or carry with them nuanced meanings that insiders recognize but outsiders do not.

One such obstacle, semantic ambiguity, can muddle clarity in any language. Concerning ambiguity, Christianese is complicated by persistent polysemy, the coexistence of many possible meanings for a word or phrase. Take, for instance, the versatile word *word*. Any English speaker, religious or not, can identify a word as a sequence of letters which together compose a meaningful element of speech or writing. However, not all English speakers could identify the slang use of "word" as synonymous with "amen" or "indeed." According to Smitherman (2000), "word" is used especially among younger English speakers as "an affirmative response to a statement or action." Similarly, Christianese metonymically attributes several definitions to *word*.

Extract 9: *Word*

9A. (13Roommates, 29:10)

```
1   Steve      Jimmy's message this morning was like really pertinent to
2              what was goin on and really th-th-the best word that I got
3              from it was like there's no such thing as like a solo act or a
4              solo action
```

9B. (16Lifegroup, 8:00)

```
1   Anna       And you::: you often like want the word that opens up the
2              room
3              ((Art sits back))
4   Anna       You know?
```

9C. (16Lifegroup, 13:35)

```
1   Dean       I think it would be (.) especially with the: prayer night
2              happening after this I think it would be good to dive into the
3              Word, tonight, and get just like maybe discussing a passage
```

In Extract 9A, Steve talks about "the best word that I got from this morning," referring to a sermon given by the church's senior pastor. In this instance, *word*

represents an idea communicated during the sermon, not an individual word out of one of the pastor's sentences. In Extract 9B, Anna talks about "the word that opens up the room." In this instance, Anna uses *word* to refer to a specific message supposedly communicated by God that should be communicated to the others in the room. In Extract 9C, at 13:35, Dean talks about "diving into the word." In many Christian circles, the *Word* is synonymous with the Bible, based off biblical passages such as Hebrews 4:12 which refer to "the Word of God" (NIV). In this instance, Dean uses *word* to refer to the Bible. Adams (2009) posits that using slang (such as knowing and employing *word* properly) is a key component to acclimating fully in a social group. The lexicosemantic difficulty comes when a single term, such as *word*, carries such a variety of meanings. Considering Christianity is a logocentric tradition with a profound reverence for the Bible, *word* is pregnant with meaning in Christian tradition and, subsequently, in Christianese.

Additionally, metaphor pervades Christianese. Philosophers of language and linguists alike have found articulating a comprehensive theory of metaphor rather elusive. Leading humanist scholar Frye (1991) states that many of Jesus' teachings in the New Testament are "metaphors to live in." As mentioned earlier, one key tenet of evangelicalism, biblicism, maintains that the Bible is the ultimate authority on Christian conduct and doctrine. Because many evangelical Christians accept the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and conduct, many speakers of Christianese have applied biblical metaphors as the foundations of their personal moral code. For these Christians, metaphor is not simply an elevated rhetorical device to elucidate spiritual tenets; metaphor is the way they have conceptualized these tenets. Divorcing themselves from the metaphors

43

embedded in their thought processes would require a rethinking of many theological principles.

In Extract 4, roommate Steve mentions that he is "prone to wander, and I feel it" and that he fears "the places where I, I walk in the flesh in the most." In this extract, Steve makes use of two common metaphors in Christianese: the flesh and wandering. Rather than referring to his muscle or skin, Steve uses *flesh* to refer to personal desires that are disobedient to God's commands. Those present in the group likely understand the semantic connection, considering English translations of the Bible use the word *flesh* as coterminous with *innate tendency to sin*, as in Romans 8:4-5. The notion of wandering is also probably familiar; Howell and Dorr (2007) observe that Christians conceptualizing what they consider a divine mandate often use the metaphor of wandering. Where many Christians may use *wandering* to portray themselves as pilgrims on a particular journey, Steve uses *wandering* and to portray himself as a vagabond on a particular journey, intimating his tendency to stray from an imagined path. *Wandering* is used to represent not merely the process of physical wandering, but also the process of internally navigating a sometimes imprecise call from God. Steve uses *wandering* to connote a state of spiritual uncertainty characterized by lack of direction. This metaphor originates from a plethora of Bible verses such as Psalm 119:11 and Matthew 7:14 that liken a purposeful, Christian life to walking a straight path.

This metaphor of a Christian *walk* or *path* also manifests itself in terms other than *wandering*. Extract 10 demonstrates how both the roommates and the lifegroup leaders used the metaphor of traveling to contextualize their personal experiences and quandaries.

44

Extract 10: *Place*

10A. (13Roommates, 29:35)

1	Steve	It really has been like (0.5) the places where I believe that I'm
2		alone and where my actions have affected other people in
3		places where I'm like most prone to (.) like
4	Nick	Wander
5	Steve	Yeah
6		[…]
7	Steve	But no but seriously just like the places where I I like walk in
8		the flesh in the most

10B. (13Roommates, 44:21)

1	Mark	And that's exactly what Satan wants he wants us to get into a
2		place where um we think we're doing something beneficial
3		and we think we're making progress

10C. (16Lifegroup, 3:47)

1	Karla	I think that there's a place for us as leaders to be more
2		responsible for our people
3		[…]
4	Karla	That's good because I think that there's like a place where we
5		need to carry our people a little better

In Extract 10A, Steve voices his frustrations over his thoughts and conduct throughout the past week. In this example, Steve uses the word *places* three times to refer to problematic situations and frustrating tendencies of his. In Extract 10B, Mark elaborates on the conundrum that hindered him from achieving his spiritual goals over the summer. In this example, Mark also uses the word *place* to refer to his predicament. In Extract 10C, Karla encourages the other lifegroup leaders to shepherd their lifegroup better and assume more ownership for the other members. In this example, Karla uses the word *place* twice to refer to a deficiency on the part of the leadership team and an opportunity for them to overcome this deficiency. In these three instances, as the speakers attempt to explain a set of circumstances, they resort to describing the situation as a *place*. Note that this aligns with the *path* metaphor, since those engaged in their *walk* are always at some physical and spatial location on the path. As Christians complete their

45

walk, they may find themselves in a spiritual quagmire that hinders their progress, or they may anticipate an upcoming destination on the journey. It appears that as the speakers wrestle with how to describe and overcome spiritual dilemmas, they rely on the same metaphor given in the Bible for thinking about Christian life.

Within the two data sets analyzed in this paper, numerous additional Christianese metaphors emerged. Both the roommates and lifegroup leaders adopted *hunger* as a metaphor for desire (*13Roommates*, 10:01; *16Lifegroup*, 8:30). Roommates Carl and Matt sprinkle in exclamations of "*favor*" or "*favor* of God" after Carl shares that his fiancée's wedding ring has no deductible and after Matt shares about fortuitously purchasing golf clubs for less than half of the original asking price (*13Roommates*, 2:00, 15:28). Roommate Mark talks about his friends "*walking* out in the Lord," and lifegroup leader Art references a podcast entitled "*Walking* in Friendship with God" (*13Roommates*, 45:08; *16Lifegroup*, 29:27). Both groups use *walking* to help them perform the abstract concepts of faith involved in a distinctively Christian lifestyle or a relationship with God. Several roommates compare Bible verses to plumb lines, suggesting that the way plumb lines keep constructions vertically upright parallels the way Bible verses keep Christians morally upright (*13Roommates*, 37:35). This comparison originates in Amos 7:8, in which God tells the prophet "I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel" (NIV).

Both roommates and lifegroup leaders also mention *testimonies*, a key dialectal term (*13Roommates*, 27:46; *16Lifegroup*, 1:55). Typically, English speakers use the word "testimony" in a court-room setting as a form of evidence or proof. While Christians readily "testify" to what they perceive as God's goodness, they do not view God as sitting

on trial in need of witnesses to testify on His behalf. In Williston and Kinloch's (1979) discussion of recurring non-denominational Christian terms, Christianese speakers employ metonymy in using *testimony* to represent Christianity as a whole (e.g., "he's in the testimony"). But in the roommate dialogue, Steve references a student's *testimony*, which here refers to the student's faith experience before, during, and after conversion to Christianity. This construction of an individual's testimony is more conventional than "being in the testimony" in modern Christianese. Further, Christianese speakers may talk about "a testimony," which is how Matt refers to a story about helping a homeless man. When *testimony* is preceded by an indefinite article, the speaker is probably referring to a spiritually enlightening Christian experience, but not the individual's life story before and after conversion.

Each of these metaphors reveals the way speakers of Christianese conceptualize various facets of Christianity, God, and even themselves. To those well-versed in contemporary Christian culture, these metaphors would translate fairly seamlessly. However, without the context, outsiders would likely find these metaphors incomprehensible.

Christian-Specific Jargon: God as Semantic Agent

Speakers of Christianese tend to position God as the semantic agent of action when possible. Because passive voice pervades Christianese, speakers actively avoid depicting human beings as primary agents and seek to introduce God as the moving force behind all good actions. Rather than characterize God as a mysterious, distant, or nebulous entity, the speakers of Christianese analyzed in this study speak as if God's

tendencies can be discussed broadly and as if God maintains intimate involvement in the lives of humans.

Extract 11 is excerpted from the lifegroup leaders' conversation. In their brainstorming, Anna talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in the lifegroup, portraying the Holy Spirit as the agent of action in the room.

Extract 11: *Come in the Room* (16Lifegroup, 6:59)

1	Anna	She said, she's talking about the Bible and how the Spirit of
2		God roams to and fro the earth, looking for a place to land (.)
3		And I think I was, like, reading something from Steffany
4		Frizzell, and she was talking about how God honors (.) um
5		(0.5) their history with him um and their depth with him, and,
6		that he'll come in the room for like one person, where two
7		Or more are gathered the spirit of God is present

According to Gruber (1974), the verbs that Anna uses in discussing God are "agentive verbs" in which the subject functions as the agent of action. In Extract 11, Anna uses the verbs *roam*, *look*, *land*, *honor*, *come*, and *be present* to describe God's actions. In two statements just prior to the discourse in this extract, at 4:33 and 5:47, Anna repeats the phrase "God is doing […]" in discussing and processing church-related events. It is worth noting that Anna has not physically observed anyone *roaming* or *landing* or *being present*, yet she uses metaphoric language that connotes empiricism. As observed in line 7, Anna roots this confidence in the idea that "the spirit of God is present," which as mentioned in Extract 3, alludes to a verse of the Bible: Matthew 18:20. Extracts 1 and 8 contain a similar format: Matt subtly credits God as responsible for the bargain on his golf clubs by acknowledging the "immeasurably more" promised in the Bible, and Carl boasts in lines 4-5 of Extract 8 that "Jesus gives his blessing." In these

three examples, the speakers tended to interpret unexpected favor as a sign of God's involvement in their lives, an idea which their language reflects.

In positioning God as the semantic agent, speakers of Christianese also position themselves as semantic beneficiaries. In line 6 of Extract 11, Anna asserts that "[God]'ll come in the room for like one person." Furthermore, in lines 4-5 of Extract 8, Carl expresses gratitude for the "blessing" given to him. In speaking this way, Anna and Carl posture themselves as entities for whose benefit the given action occurred. This can satisfy several linguistic goals. If Carl communicates that God purportedly has completed actions for his benefit, he may be signaling to the group that he believes God is pleased with him or that he has done something worthy of divine favor. On the one hand, if the other group members view this as a connection between God and Carl, and, by extension, a connection between God and the group at-large, this move may greatly enhance Carl's positive face. On the other hand, if the group members feel isolated for not having experienced similar favor or interpret Carl's favor as a threat or challenge, they will construe Carl's statement as harming their positive face. In the latter scenario, Carl has completed a positive face-threatening act (FTA), damaging the face of the hearer and impairing any sense of group camaraderie.

Christian-Specific Jargon: Additional Features

Two additional characteristic features of Christianese appear in the data. For one, Christianese integrates terms of Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic etymology into an otherwise English dialect, probably to preserve some of the "sacredness" of the original words of the Holy Bible. The English language and even non-English-speaking churchgoers worldwide have adopted some of these words, such as the "amen" lifegroup

49

leader Dean uses to conclude his prayer in Extract 3. Accordingly, Christianese features some distinctively foreign terms not present in the English language. For example, the discussion of Christian culture earlier mentioned Anna's comment "that's kind of like a Sozo point." Based out of Bethel Church in Redding, CA, Sozo Ministry is a healing and counseling program aimed at mending emotional and relational wounds. Sozo is an English translation of the Greek word σώζω, defined as "to save, heal, or deliver." Incorporating a Koine Greek term into an English religiolect demonstrates an understanding of the text's original language, perhaps enhancing a feeling of spiritual authenticity in the ministry.

Secondly, Christianese notoriously preserves the use of archaisms in the English language. Because much American ecclesiastical language originates from the language of the 1611 King James Bible, many archaisms from the seventeenth-century have survived. Hymns especially, such as *Come Thou Fount* in Extract 4, retain antiquated words such as *thee* and *thou*, which have remained in worship songs for hundreds of years. To many, this timeworn language invokes hallowed tradition. While none of the roommates peppered *thee* or *thou* into their colloquial exchange, Matt encourages Steve in that Steve is "faithful to pursue discipleship with people" (*13Roommates*, 33:06). Leiter (2013) notes that the construction *faithful to* + [verb] was utilized in sixteenth and seventeenth-century English, but according to the OED, using *faithful* adverbially is considered obsolete in present-day English. Because the King James Bible was published in the seventeenth-century, several verses from the KJV include this construction, including the famous verse 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (KJV). The presence of this

archaic construction in the twenty-first century can likely be attributed to the presence of this construction in the 1611 King James Bible.

Backchanneling

The sixth and final strategy speakers of Christianese use to assert in-group membership is backchanneling. When individuals speak in a group setting, they often wield their words to vie for membership in the group, whether consciously or unconsciously. White (1989) notes that when listeners respond supportively, they affirm others' membership bids through these backchannels. Extract 12, which explores much of the same dialogue as Extract 7, delves into the way several roommates encourage Nick and affirm his group membership via backchanneling.

Extract 12: *Praise God* **(13Roommates, 5:20)**

```
1   Nick        …I've been a little tired but (.) time with God has been super
2               consistent and like, refreshing=
3   Matt                              =That's awesome
4   Nick        Lifegroup on Tuesday was really bomb=
5   Matt                              =Whoa
6   Nick        Encouragement, like, all over. (.) Was that last [week?
7   Carl                                        [Praise God.
```

Christianity places a high premium on *growing* in one's faith and encourages this growth through consistently practicing spiritual disciplines. In the opening remark of Extract 12, Nick mentions an obstacle to completing the spiritual discipline of "time with God," but indicates that he carved time out for it anyway. In lines 3 and 5, Matt interrupts Nick with "that's awesome" and "whoa," and in line 7, Carl joins in, uttering "praise God." With these phatic expressions, Matt and Carl use backchannels as stamps of approval for Nick. Matt and Carl's backchanneling also suggests that consistent "time with God," successful lifegroup meetings, and encouragement call for compliments and

51

validation from group members. This demonstrates an alignment of values between the three members, suggesting that Matt, Carl, and Nick all belong to the same community of practice, characterized by the priority of consistent spiritual disciplines. By affirming Nick's ostensible membership bid, Matt and Carl perform expressive speech acts similar to ratifying Nick's membership in the group.

Notably, the pitch and volume of Matt and Carl's backchannels differ from what one would expect. Normally, when a speaker utters phrases such as "that's awesome," "whoa," or "praise God," the words are marked by certain voice inflections. Perhaps the speaker squeals the phrase in a high pitch, reflecting his or her effervescence and excitement. Or perhaps the speaker whispers the words in a low pitch, amazed by the sublimity of an event or an idea. However, in Extract 12, Matt and Carl are not particularly expressive in their vocal inflections. Their backchannels in lines 3, 5, and 7 are monotone, yet emphatic and quick. Matt and Carl aggressively assert themselves into Nick's turn, and their sudden and vigorous statements mirror their abrupt entrance into the conversation. Linguistically, emphatic and declarative sentences often signal turn change in a conversation. However, Nick decidedly continues speaking despite Matt and Carl's interruptions. In other contexts, such forceful intrusion into a conversation would likely be considered awkward or rude. In this example, however, the interruption is considered affirming and encouraging. One possible explanation for this is that the punchy exclamations of the roommates resemble the punchy exclamations of impassioned congregants during a sermon. A group of stirred churchgoers probably would not respond with the monotone pitch of the roommates, but they probably would respond with the same brevity and force. If Matt and Carl respond to Nick the way they

would respond to a dynamic preacher, they communicate their affirmation of Nick with their interruptions. Therefore, through backchannel affirmation, the roommates are able to express their approval in front of one another and to co-negotiate membership in the group.

Summary

In examining the recordings of college-aged evangelical Christians, it has been demonstrated that using Christianese in the company of other Christians validates the speaker's in-group membership. Six strategies used to affirm in-group membership have been highlighted. First, Christianese speakers reference Bible verses to prove their in-group membership. When speakers make these references facetiously, they provoke humor by inviting sacred themes and language into a common frame. However, when speakers make these references seriously, they demonstrate an understanding of what actions are appropriate in the sacred frame. Second, by alluding to aspects of Christian culture such as popular song lyrics, speakers demonstrate their insider knowledge and amplify the contrast between insiders and outsiders. Third, speakers of Christianese introduce religious topics into conversations to announce their membership. Completing category-bound actions such as mentioning recent "time with God" affirms their understanding of group mores and expectations.

Fourth, Christianese speakers may frame long statements as sermons, salting their speeches with "Amen" or "praise God" and concluding with practical moral counsel. Fifth, because Christianese contains characteristic peculiarities, using language with these traits signals in-group membership. Jargon infused with biblical metaphors, passive phrasing that sketches God as the semantic agent, and preservation of archaic terms and

constructions all typify Christianese. Sixth, the presence of backchanneling in

Christianese-speaking circles allows members to negotiate group membership mutually.

With these six strategies, speakers use Christianese to accomplish the main goal of

proving their membership to one another in a group of fellow Christians.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

This thesis has examined Christianese as present in a group of evangelical college students. First, the relevant literature was reviewed. Foundational pragmatic theories that applied to the data analysis were discussed, and the history and development of Christianese as a religiolect was examined. Then, the history and methodology of Conversation Analysis were investigated, and the case was made that CA is a valid method of conducting the present study. Finally, two conversations of college students who attend the same church were analyzed for Christianese. The primary conclusion from the data was that speakers use Christianese in group settings to demonstrate their membership in a group of Christians and their connectedness to the larger Christian culture.

It is important to note that the analysis and conclusions of this investigation apply only to the present data set. Several parameters of this investigation necessarily limit the scope and applicability of its results. For one, this investigation featured little diversity in terms of the Christianese spoken. On the one hand, speakers brought into the conversation a variety of experiences in different churches and geographical regions that inevitably contributes to how they view and talk about their faith. On the other hand, every speaker also participated only with other students who attend the same church and the same school. Therefore, it would be unwise to extrapolate beyond the present data. Leiter (2013) notes that Christianese varies across geographical and denominational lines. Unsurprisingly, the Christianese present in a charismatic church in the "Bible Belt" has

very different features from the Christianese in a small Anglican assembly in New England or a non-denominational megachurch on America's west coast, even though all three sociolects qualify as Christianese. This paper examines only one variety of Christianese, even though the term is often used to refer to an array of different religiolects. Additional research could be conducted on these varieties of Christianese, including comparisons to the evangelical Christianese of the Bible belt. As another limitation, this paper concentrates on only two conversations, and it would be unwise to make sweeping generalizations about such a small data sample. More research is needed to corroborate, refine, or falsify this study's conclusions. An increase in formal research on Christianese would also contribute to a greater understanding of diversity within the dialect.

It is outside the scope of this study to analyze Christianese as it pertains to Christian ministry, but one practical application of this study's findings merits special consideration. Like many contemporary Christians, Waggoner (2009) notes that Christianese is commonly associated with superficiality rather than piety. Consequently, many pastors and ministry leaders encourage their congregants to be cognizant of their Christianese and to drop enigmatic or recondite phrases. In doing so, Christians might make their beliefs more accessible to non-Christians and clarify what they are communicating. While linguists are dubiously qualified to make recommendations to ministry leaders on how best to "shepherd their flocks," the current analysis does provide insight into potential complexities of dissociating from one's Christianese. For example, as highlighted in the data analysis, Christianese is replete with metaphors that are not easily untangled. Because people have learned and understood certain concepts via

metaphors, they are likely to discuss the concepts via the metaphors. Removing the metaphor from their vernacular would not simply require dropping some phrases from their vocabulary—it would require restructuring their conceptual framework. While some phrases or constructions in Christianese would not be particularly difficult to eliminate, this study suggests that removing some metaphorical constructions would be rather complicated. Additionally, Christianese is somewhat inevitable, since all people speak in their own unique dialect, known as an idiolect. Even if someone actively policed his or her language for Christianese, some words or constructions would certainly escape through the filter. Christianese is simply a natural consequence of the way some Christians think and speak.

So, what should one think about Christianese? This study suggests that Christianese is a religiolect, a language variety used by members of a religious community. Christianese is characterized by a host of idiosyncratic features, including allusions to the Bible and contemporary Christian culture, tendency to frame God as the semantic agent of an occurrence, lexical borrowings from biblical languages, and backchanneling to validate others' membership bids. This study also suggests that a main social function of Christianese is to demonstrate connectedness and membership in a larger group of fellow Christians. While it is difficult to speculate about the future of Christianese, as long as Christians continue to talk about their faith, there will be plenty of Christianese to decode and analyze.

APPENDIX

Jefferson Transcript Notation

Symbol	Example	Use
[text]	S1: Are you [nervous? S2:　　　　[No no no	Indicates the starting/ending points of overlapping speech
=	S1: Are you nervous?= S2: =No no no	Latching; one word or turn occurs directly after another (no overlap)
(# of seconds)	Are you (1.0) nervous?	Number in parentheses indicates the number seconds of pause in speech
(.)	Are you (.) nervous?	A brief pause in speech, less than .5 seconds
-	Are you nerv-	Word is cut off (possibly due to interruption)
:	Are you: nervous?	Elongated sound
<u>Word</u>	Are you <u>nervous</u>?	Speaker emphasizes underlined portion
ALL CAPS	ARE YOU NERVOUS?	Loud/yelling/raised voice
(words)	Are you (nervous)	Transcriber's doubt; a guess at what may have been said
((*words*))	Are you nervous? ((laughter))	Represents something difficult to write phonemically (laughter, movement, etc.)

WORKS CITED

Adams, M. (2009). *Slang: the people's poetry*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Alexander, P. S. (2008). Insider/outsider labelling and the struggle for power in early Judaism. In *Religion, Language, and Power*. 83-100. New York: Routledge.

Borker, R. (1986). 'Moved by the Spirit': Constructing meaning in a Brethren breaking of bread service. *Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse* 6(3), 317-338.

Brooks, J. L., Groening, M., Jean, A., Scully, M., Sakai, R., Maxtone-Graham, I., Meyer, G., Copyright Collection (Library of Congress). (2007). *The Simpsons Movie*. Beverly Hills, Calif: 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bucholtz, M. (1999). "Why be normal?": Language and identity practices in a community of nerd girls. *Language in Society,* 28(2), 203-223.

Chambers, J. K., & Trudgill, P. (1998). *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, Y.-H. (1997). *Effects of group membership and audience's attitude on communication* (Dissertation). Columbia University, Ann Arbor, MI.

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of syntax Cambridg*e. Multilingual Matters: MIT Press. Cambridge.

Coates, J. (2007). Talk in a play frame: More on laughter and intimacy. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 39(1), 29-49.

Coleman, L. (1980). The Language of "Born-Again" Christianity. *Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 6, 133-142.

Corwin, A. (2014). Lord hear our prayer: Prayer, social support, and well-being in a Catholic convent. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 24(2), 175-195.

Crosby, T. & Stanton T. (2013, May 30). *Shoot Christians Say* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Dxo0Yjno3I.

Dzameshie, A. (1995). Social motivations for politeness behavior in Christian sermonic discourse. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 37(2), 192-215.

Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (1992). Communities of practice: Where language, gender and power all live. In K. Hall, M. Buchholtz and B. Moonwomon (Eds.) *Locating power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Berkeley: Berkeley Women and Language Group, University of California: 89-99.

Eelen, G. (2001). *A critique of politeness theory*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Eskridge, L. (2014). *Defining the term in contemporary times*. Retrieved March 25, 2017, from http://www.wheaton.edu/ISAE/Defining-Evangelicalism/Defining-the Term.

Fairhurst, G. T. & Sarr, R. A. (1996). *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Frye, N. (1991). *The double vision: Language and meaning in religion*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Goffman, E. (1955). On Face-Work: An analysis of ritual elements in social interaction, *Psychiatry: Journal of Interpersonal Relations* 18(3), 213–231.

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

Gruber, J. (1965). *Studies in lexical relations* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). MIT, Cambridge, MA.

Gumperz, J. J. (1982). *Discourse strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hary, B. H. (2009). *Translating religion: linguistic analysis of Judeo-Arabic sacred texts from Egypt*. Leiden: Brill.

Heather, N. (2000). *Religious language and critical discourse analysis: ideology and identity in Christian discourse today*. Oxford: P. Lang.

Howell, B. & Dorr, R. (2007). Evangelical pilgrimage: The language of short-term missions. *Journal of Communication and Religion*, 30, 236-265.

Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation analysis: Principles, practices, and applications*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jargon. (2015). In *Dictionary of media and communication studies*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury.

JJMVids. (2012, January 30). *Sh*tuff Christian Girls Say* [video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=My92oE9RwRE.

Kasper, G. (1990). Linguistic politeness: Current research issues. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 14 (2), 193-218.

Kiparsky, P. (2002, January). *On the architecture of Panini's grammar*. Lecture presented at Hyderabad Conference on the Architecture of Grammar in India, Hyderabad. Retrieved January 29, 2017, from http://www.ling.gu.se/kurser/linghist/indians/Karakas.pdf.

Koester, A. (2006). *Investigating workplace discourse*. London: Routledge.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Le Page, R. B. & Tabouret-Keller, A. (1985). *Acts of identity: Creole-based approaches to language and ethnicity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lehtinen, E. (2009). Sequential and inferential order in religious action: A conversation analytic perspective. *Langage et Société*, 130, 15-36.

Leiter, S. I. (2013). *Christianese: A sociolinguistic analysis of the evangelical Christian dialect of American English* (unpublished honors BA thesis). Emory University, Atlanta.

Lewis, T.V. (2002). Religious rhetoric and the comic frame in The Simpsons. *Journal of Media and Religion*, 1(3), 153-165.

Liddicoat, A. (2007). *An introduction to conversation analysis*. London: Continuum.

Malinowski, B. (1936). The problem of meaning in primitive languages. In CK. Ogden & I.A. Richards, *The meaning of meaning*, [1923], Supplement I: 296-336. Kegan Paul.

McQuerry, M. (1979). Some Terms of Evangelical Christianity. *American Speech,* 54(2), 148-151.

Mills, S. (2003). *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ochs, E. (1988). *Culture and language development: Language acquisition and language socialization in a Samoan village*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ochs, E. (1993). Constructing social identity: A language socialization perspective. *Intercultural Discourse and Communication*, 26(3), 78-91.

Psathas, G. (1999). Studying the organization in action: Membership categorization and interaction analysis. *Human Studies*, *22*(2/4), 139–162.

Rackley, E. D. (2014). Scripture-based discourses of Latter-Day Saint and Methodist youths. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 49(4), 417.

Robinson, R. (1757). [Recorded by J. W. Nettleton]. *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* [MP3].

Sacks, H., Jefferson, G., & Schegloff, E. A. (2005). *Lectures on conversation: Volumes I & II*. Oxford (UK): Blackwell.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation. *Language,* 50(4), 696.

Schegloff, E. A. (1968). Sequencing in Conversational Openings. *American Anthropologist,* 70(6), 1075-1095.

Shellnutt, K., Press, T. S., & Zylstra, S. E. (2016). Trump Elected President, Thanks to 4 in 5 White Evangelicals. Retrieved April 16, 2017, from http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/november/trump-elected-president-thanks-to-4-in-5-white-evangelicals.html.

Shoaps, R. (2002). 'Pray earnestly': The textual construction of personal involvement in Pentecostal prayer and song. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 12(1), 34-71.

Silverman, D. (Director). (2007). *The Simpsons movie* [Video file]. United States: 20th Century Fox Film Corp.

Smith, W. B., & Bekerman, Z. (2011). Constructing social identity: Silence and argument in an Arab-Jewish Israeli group encounter. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 43(6), 1675–1688.

Smitherman, G. (2000). *Black talk: words and phrases from the hood to the amen corner*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Sterling, P. (2000). Identity in language: An exploration into the social implications of linguistic variation. Unpublished manuscript: http://www.tamu.edu/chr/agora/winter2000/sterling.pdf.

Stetzer, E. (2015). *The rise of the evangelical 'nones.'* Retrieved March 25, 2017, from http://www.cnn.com/2015/06/12/living/stetzer-christian-nones/.

Sturgill, A. (2004). Scope and Purposes of Church Web Sites. *Journal of Media & Religion*, 3(3), 165-176.

ten Have, P. (1999). Doing conversation analysis. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
    Publications.

Upton, J. (2007). [Recorded by J. Upton]. *The Spirit of Adoption* [MP3].

Waggoner, B. (2009). *The Velveteen Woman: Becoming Real through God's
    Transforming Love*. Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Pub.

Ward, N., & Tsukahara, W. (2000). Prosodic features which cue back-channel responses
    in English and Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics, 32*(8), 1177-1207.

White, S. (1989). Backchannels across Cultures: A Study of Americans and Japanese.
    Language in Society, 18(1), 59-76.

Williston, R. C., & Kinloch, A. M. (1979). Some nondenominational-Christian words.
    American Speech, 54(1), 68.

Yngve, V. H. (1970). *On getting a word in edgewise*. Chicago: CLS.

Yutang, L. (1935). *My country and my people*. New York: Reynal & Hitchcock.