

Conditionality, tagging, and declarative strategies as mechanisms of power: A sociolinguistic study of scriptural discourse

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Abstract

This analysis examines tagging, conditionality, and declaratives in the Adamic accounts in relation to how these are discursive practices through which power and obedience are discursively enacted. By discursive analysis, this analysis demonstrates how biblical texts use conditionals in the formulation of obedience, tagging in the delimitation of meanings, and declaratives in the ideologically naturalized formulation of authority. Moving beyond analysis within biblical studies, this analysis proposes a sociolinguistic argument about linguistically attested patterns that are seen here as the expression of universal mechanisms through which language articulates ideology, through which it performatively instantiates hierarchy, through which language constellations work in conformity with constitutive ideas about language, power, and ideology, as related in contemporary debates in linguistics, semiotics, sociology, and critical theory.

Keywords

conditionality, tagging, declarative strategies, discourse, religious texts, soci

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Introduction

Language is far from a mere transmission mechanism of information. Nor is it simply a domain of power, contest, and identity, but also the site where these three intersect and collide. There is perhaps no better illustration of this phenomenon of discursive power and identity-crafting than the story of the fall of the first Adam in Gen.3:1-7 and the rule of the second Adam in Matt.4:1-11. In these stories of fall and rule, language is far from a descriptive tool, but a constitutive one, shaping perception, truth, and action. The strength of language here does not lie in strength of muscle but in the subtlety of word-crafting and speech-acts.

"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1 KJV), the serpent's rhetorical question, is an paradigmized instance of discursive instability. Tagging, exaggeration, and presupposition are used to misconstrue divine utterance, compelling Eve to negotiate under adversarial conditions. Further discursive instabilities follow, precipitating epistemological doubt, reinterpretation, and finally disobedience. Later, in the narrative, Adam's words-"I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 3:10 KJV)-embody linguistic exemplarity because they signal the sin of fallenness through a declarative statement of displacement from God.

On the other hand, in the temptation in the wilderness, Satan uses the conditional clause as weaponized discoursing: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Matt 4:3, KJV). The "if"-clause here is not used as the neutral hypothesis but as the negative questioning of Christ's divinity. The rhetoric progressively becomes more aggressive, from the selective interpretation of Psalm 91, which is meant to entice Christ into making his divinity authentic by fulfilling the tempter's conditions, like Eve and Adam in the garden of Eden scenario. However, Christ resists dialogic compromise here, as he does not rely on dialogic negations but on self-assertive affirmations, which are declarative: "gegraptai" or "it is written," indicating the performative function of language, which places the strength and power of divinity on the textual authority of what is revealed, leaving no point of negotiation or compromise but instead claiming dominance through textual authenticity.

By juxtaposing Adam and Christ, the importance of the role played by discursive strategies in theologically defining the fall and the triumph becomes evident. Theologically, the fall and the triumph occur not just in deed but in words, in the realm of discourse and linguistic politics. While Adam's surrender theologically symbolizes the entry of sin into the world in the realm of discourse, Christ's obedience symbolizes the regaining of power over the world through the magisterial Word. Socio-politically, the narratives demonstrate that linguistic politics sustains power structures in the world. Doctrinally, the narratives teach that obedience to the declaring power of Scripture prevents theologies from becoming distorted and spirituality from becoming compromised.

Thus, this piece of research focuses on the functions of tag-like rhetorical questions, conditional "if" clauses, and declarative strategies within the texts of Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 and the results they articulate for socio-political and religious communications of our day. There are four specific research questions to be explored:

1. How do tag-like and rhetorical questions serve as destabilizing strategies within the texts of Genesis 3 and Matthew 4?
2. How does the conditional "if" serve specifically as a strategy of manipulation and testing of identity?

3. How do declarative strategies, particularly Christ's *gegraptai*, serve specifically as counter-strategies of power?
4. What socio-political and religious messages do we discern for our day?

Therefore, this paper shifts focus from simply describing discourse in the biblical text and turns to engaging with wider debates in the field of sociolinguistics in relation to language, power, and ideology. Through tag, conditionality, and declarations in the Adamic narratives, I will seek to show that religious texts constitute paradigmatic instances for the analysis of language and practices of power, obedience, and resistance in/to language. Rather than construing the Adamic narratives as discrete objects of theological discourse, they will here be conceived as instances of data relevant to insights regarding societies and their regulation of meaning as control via linguistic form.

The importance of this research consists in crossing various disciplines. The temptation stories are positioned within a set of frameworks of discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2021; Van Dijk, 2006), exegesis, and speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979). It also finds a connection between theological interpretation and present-day political discourse. In this way, this research contributes to a series of discussions within the fields of discourse studies, bible studies, and political communications, demonstrating how, from an ancient conflict, such as serpent–Adam, Satan, and then Christ, there is still a paradigm today regarding manipulation and resistance.

Literature Review

Recent decades have seen the scholarly study of linguistic aspects of Scripture expand considerably, covering the realms of biblical exegesis, discourse linguistics, and political theology. There had been growing recognition of the fact that biblical texts share meaning in terms of theology, simultaneously constructing frameworks of interpretation, communal identity, and power through their own text (Fairclough, 1995; Runge, 2010; Wodak, 2021). Such insights have given rise to the possibilities of studying the function of temptation narratives within paradigms of discursive conflict.

As is characteristic within other works on the relationship between religion and sociolinguistics, this project also initially concentrates on religious discourse, though it considers scripture not merely as an aspect of religion, but rather as an example of an archival object that carries deeper meanings than initially would seem possible within the context of scripture itself. As such, the use of conditionality and tagging here not only provides insight into conditionality and power from the perspective of discourse pragmatics, but also also illustrates an intersection between sociopolitical constructs and belief itself, and provides insight into how narratives encode universal constructs of obedience and legitimation.

Discourse Markers and Rhetorical Questions

Runge (2010) and others have also drawn focussed attention to the way in which Biblical Hebrew and Koine Greek use discourse markers to create meaning in excess of what is propositionally conveyed. In Genesis 3:1 itself, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" has been analyzed for frame-shifting. Here, the snake's words are less questions than 'door-opening' gambits which make scarcity claims and trigger God's hyperbole and initiate adverse negotiating with Eve (Han, 2002; Ilie, 1994). These questions are less information-seeking than presupposition-providing and disrupter-of-hearer's epistemic state.

"This strategy is consistent with the findings of discourse analytic research." Ilie, Ioritz (1994) supports that rhetorical questions contain a double voice, stating that they "claim something whilst disguising the claim as a question, compelling the listener to reply to the speaker's frame." Han (2002) adds that this displacement of proof is "commonly found among rhetorical interrogations since they frequently precipitate the respondent's defense." In the book of Genesis, the response of Eve after being asked the rhetorical question found in Genesis 3 exemplifies this displacement of proof, offering again God's command but this time with the addition "neither shall ye touch it" (Genesis 3:3) to indicate that the serpent's frame had previously altered her response to God's speech (Wenham, 1987).

Conditionality and Identity Testing

The conditional clause has the same strategic function in Matthew 4. Indeed, as Declerck & Reed (2001) argue, "in many cases, it will not be possible to construct valid implications involving the if-clause" such that it serves as its logical antecedent. "Instead,," they write, "it may index challenging-of-identity and agonist agendas." The devil's formulation-"If thou be the Son of God"-is one such identity-challenge clause. The purpose of the formulation is to force Jesus to demonstrate his status as Son of God on the devil's terms, thus undermining the divine pre-frame of baptismal declaration ("This is my beloved Son," Matt 3:17).

By connecting action and conditional proof, Satan proposes to reverse the dynamic of identity and obedience. Rather than resting on God's declaration, Jesus is challenged to show and prove his identity in a display of dramatic flair. This reversal reflects a common political and social *modus operandi* in which enemies of a cause or movement apply a conditional proof of merit in order for a leader or group to prove their value by aligning with the negative framework constructed by their enemies.

Declaratives and Canonical Authority

As counterexamples to such destabilizing strategies, the examples from Christ show the effectiveness of declarative speech acts. As informed by the theory of speech acts, incorporated from the works of Austin (1962), Searle (1979), and explored among other scholars such as Thiselton (1992), the declarative speech act is much more than stating a proposition—it is an act of authority. The *gegraptai* formula from Christ's examples is such an act—a formula that states 'It is written,' not only communicating its message but also referring to the authoritative position which Scripture takes on as it stands written (Runge, 2010).

"The importance of this is in the performative finality." Rather than engaging in negotiations with Satan's terms, Jesus shuts down discussion by grounding it in divine revelation. Hays (2016), and Carson (2016), "this is not simply an index of Christ's personal compliance, but is itself a hermeneutic principle—that Scripture is to be interpreted canonically, contextually, and in accordance with divine purpose, and not arbitrarily or deceitfully, as in the case of Satan, citing only part of Psalm 91." Also, different from Satan's reduction of Psalm 91, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy with contextual acuity.

Theological and Doctrinal Critical Discourse Context

Pauline theology establishes Adam and Christ as representative individuals whose speech acts are laden with theological meanings (Romans 5:12-21, 1 Cor. 15:45). Adam's declaration, "I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Genesis 3:10), is more declarative than descriptive and functions as a linguistic enactment of alienation (Calvin, 1559/2011; Carson, 2016). Christ's repeated declarations, on the other hand, function to assert dominion through obedience and

textural fidelity. For instance, how Vanhoozer (2016) observes the discursiveness of the speech acts between Adam's declaration and Christ's declaration, aligning dislocation and dominion.

It fits well within the larger body of theological hermeneutics. Ricoeur (1970) highlighted the mediating function of texts in constituting worlds and subjectivities, of which the words of Adam and the words of Christ are exemplars. In the contrasting traditions of Genesis 3 and Matthew 4, therefore, the conflict between the philosophy of compromise through dialogue and the philosophy of commitment through declaration is presented.

Socio-Political and Critical Discourse

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has long proven that questions, conditionals, and declarations are non-neutral tools with potential for the imposition of meanings (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2021). Political speeches often rely on rhetorical questions to discredit opponents, conditional discourse to impose adversarial conditions, and selective citations to selectively reframe authoritative discourses like the constitution, laws, and holy scripts. The temptation narratives, therefore, cannot be viewed in vacuo as religious stories but models for how words can be a terrain of struggle.

Many examples from contemporary times are readily apparent. Nigerian election rallies in 2015 and 2019 often utilized conditional discourse to contest legitimacy ("If they are true democrats, why fear the ballot?"), and examples of selective framing of police force discourses to delegitimize popular movements have been evident in #EndSARS videotapes (Iredule (2022)). The usage of "fake news" by Trump and "Take back control" in Brexit examples of simplifications of discourses and tagging of adversaries reveal how such manipulation of public discourse continues to be pertinent to narratives of Temptation narratives.

African Linguistic Perspectives

The recent African engagement has been part of this conversation and has helped to highlight the performative element of biblical language. For instance, Iredele (2022) used systemic functional linguistics and CDA on Genesis 1 and revealed how the words of God were performative of power and how they construct existence. The African engagement adds to this study by underlining that biblical language is not only descriptive but actually performative, and this is directly relevant to the topic of temptation narratives.

Theoretical Framework: Discourse, Power, and Speech Acts

A critical analysis of discourse treats language as a social practice occurring within relations of power, ideology, and identity (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2021). Thus, language forms like questions, conditionals, and declaratives are considered not as simple constructions but as language strategies structured in relation to communication, perception, and power (Fairclough, 1979). These tendencies can well be demonstrated in the temptation narratives found in the books of Genesis 3, which is very pronounced in the account in the Gospel of Matthew 4.

There are three aspects of discourse which are of particular importance within this analysis: rhetorical questioning, conditionality, and declarative speech. Questions can be a genuine attempt to search for information, but very often they are a device into which presupposition is encoded, forcing a hearer to respond to a speaker's design (Han, 2002). Rhetorical questions, in particular, are very adept at this, serving far less to inquire than to state (Ilie, 1994). The serpent's first salvo, in Genesis 3:1-"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"-is exemplary, to say the least.

Conditional clauses, in like manner, carry both pragmatic and logical meanings. Declerck and Reed (2001) show how if-clauses may contain tests of identity or provocations of adversity, which oblige speakers to prove themselves through conformity with negative agendas. Illustrative of this kind of conditional is Satan's "If thou be the Son of God" in both Matthew 4:3 and 6. Here, there is no neutral hypothesis but presupposition for purposes of destabilizing proof.

Declarative speech acts offer an alternative approach. Following the constative-performative typology of speech acts first outlined by Austin (1962) and the categories of illocutionary force set out by Searle (1979), declaratives can be understood to be speech acts that exercise force through the utterance of norms, definitions, or reality, and that frequently involve the enactment of some kind of assertoric or constative force. Jesus' "gegraptai" ("It is written"), for example, is clearly this kind of performative utterance of declarative force. "The perfect passive form of the Greek word 'graphō' expresses the fact that the action is complete, having immediate and abiding significance, 'it stands written'" (Runge, 2010). Thus, this formula upholds the continuing validity of Scripture, leaves no room for negotiation, and substitutes God's norms in place of 'antagonistic' ones.

Therefore, appraising these narratives from a discourse analysis perspective, it is clear that there is a struggle between speech genres, as though in dialogic form: where the serpent and Satan use questions and conditionals to destabilize identity, but Eve and Adam struggle as they open up negotiations, and Christ resists as he uses statements that stabilize identity in terms of divine authority.

Methodology: Discourse Analysis, Intertextuality, and Aspect

This paper will apply a qualitative discourse-analytical method based on biblical linguistics studies, intertextual hermeneutics, and the theory of speech acts. Three points of methodological clarification will be important in establishing the framework for this textual analysis.

Firstly, it is essential to acknowledge that the rhetorical question in biblical narrative is something more than the question mark. In Gen 3:1, for example, the *aph-ki* in the Hebrew language indicates notification rather than seeking information (Wenham, 1987). Rhetorical questions are often used as 'assertion-disguised-as-query,' where the onus of proof is placed on the listener, as illustrated by Han (2002). The reaction of the woman illustrates how she has entered the semantic field of the serpent by adding 'neither shall ye touch it' (Gen 3:3).

Second, the conditionals of Matthew 4 are interpreted pragmatically and not logically. The "if thou be the Son of God" of Satan is not a statement of hypothesis but of provocation, and it is just the kind of "identity test" which forces speakers on both sides of the conversation "to prove themselves" in 'adversary' 'frames' of reference, according to Declerck and Reed's work of 2001. This, of course, is what is summed up by 'critical discourse analysis's' point, set forth by Fairclough in his work of 1995, and by Wodak, (Wodak, 2021), namely, "adversarial 'if-tests' are very common in political rhetoric," and what "leaders are asked to 'perform' legitimacy on the 'enemy's' terms."

Third, the intertextual and aspectual qualities of Christ's answers must also feature prominently in an interpretation. The formula *gegraptai* is a perfect passive construction in Koine Greek that implies not only past inscription but also current validity: "it stands written" (Runge, 2010; BibleHub, 2025). Each occurrence of *gegraptai* grounds Christ's acts of resisting in the continuing authoritative significance of Scripture—together performative and interpretive act

and principle. Jesus responds to Satan's partial application of Psalm 91 with canonical interpretation by alluding Deuteronomy 6:16, illustrating that the promises given must also include consideration of covenanting obedience (Hays, 2016; Sloan, 2015).

Methodologically, therefore, this research will move forward through a textual analysis of Genesis 3:1-7 and Matthew 4:1-11 (KJV), focusing on the pragmatic role of interrogatives, conditionals, and declaratives. The pragmatic role will then be discussed in light of broader discourses of pragmatics and speech act theories, and will be further interpreted within canonical and theological frameworks of hermeneutics. Through this cross-disciplinary analysis of language and application, this research will illustrate the ways in which ancient stories disseminated archetypal patterns of manipulation and resistance.

Analysis and Discussion

The temptation stories in Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 function as model case analyses for the study of adversarial discourse. In each story, the struggle over truth, power, and identity takes place within the site of language itself. By investigating the specific examples of the serpents' questioning of Eve and the temptations of Christ by Satan insofar as they may be considered instances of the tactics of tagging, conditionality, and the declarative mood, it becomes possible to find general principles for dealing with manipulative language in general, both in the world of the Bible and in the world today.

Tagging and the Rhetoric of Presupposition

Genesis 3 begins with a rhetorical question, not so much as a question, but as a challenge, "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Genesis 3:1). In the above question, the use of the Hebrew particle "aph ki," indeed or really, implies doubt in the words of God, presuming an underlying assumption that God's words were too dogmatic (Wenham, 1987). According to Han (2002), the use of rhetorical questions is often "assertion disguised as query," where the challenge of proof shifts to the respondent. An assertion in the form of a rhetorical question, Ilie (1994) suggests, presumes something that cannot be countered without justifying it.

Eve's response shows how dangerous it is to enter such a discursive frame. Eve repeats God's command in a formulaic way and appends to it "neither shall ye touch it" (Gen 3:3): "You shall not eat of it nor touch it" (Gen 3:3). According to cognitive linguistics theory, memory is better described as a reconstructive process than a storage process and is susceptible to framing effects (Lakoff, 2004; Kahneman, 2011). The insertion of "neither shall ye touch it" represents how 'adversarial discourse' introduces 'memory intrusions,' causing misremembering. The act of testing the limits of something has now been reframed from God's beneficence to a warning.

The serpent's follow-up phrase-"Ye shall not surely die" (Gen 3:4)-closes the reshaping with the use of declaration and contradiction. The rhetorical tag sets up the destabilization of the epistemic foundation for the occurrence of overt contradiction. The serpent foils what is described by modern scholars of critical discourse analysis as 'agenda-setting,' which refers to the subtle movement of the horizon of meaning to the point that follow-up statements take on different meaning (Fairclough, 1995).

By contrast, in Matthew four, Christ is seen as refusing to be tagged with adversary frames. Here, when Satan starts with "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread" (Matt 4:3), the framing of the initial utterance follows the serpent's questioning: by placing a query on God's identity inside a conditional statement. Again, Christ does not repeat and revise

God's sayings while being pressed by adversaries as in the case of Eve. Rather, Christ gives a statement rooted in Scripture: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). While Eve is undermined by a question, Christ resists being undermined by refusing to confirm his identity according to adversary framing. By thus refusing to respond to a question framed by Satan itself, Christ follows the resistance of adversary framing taught in discourse ethics (Vanhoozer, 2016).

What is important about this contrast is the way in which two epistemic stances are revealed. On one side, there is susceptibility to suggestion and reinterpretation. Eve represents the danger of dialogical openness in the interpretation of divine utterances. On the other side is a pretension to stable reference to authoritative discourse. Christ represents adherence to original meaning through authoritative statement.

However, the application of the concept of tagging in this particular case has a function that goes beyond mere clarification, as it delimits the field of possible interpretations and subsumes the topic under a hegemonic ideological orientation. Such practices are also seen in the institution of talk, whether it be a court of law or a parliament session, and result in regulation of the speakers on the basis of compliance. Therefore, the practice of tagging the bible can be seen as a part of a sociolinguistic practice called discursive control.

Conditionality as Adversarial Test

If-clauses have pragmatic functions as more than just logical propositions: they may have performative functions as identity tests (Declerck and Reed, 2001). In political discourse, opponents use conditionals such as: 'If you are seriously committed to democracy, then you better do X', which force leaders to perform legitimacy under hostile conditions (Fairclough, 1995). Instead of making a proposition, the conditionality sets up an implied evaluation with which the interlocutor might not agree.

Matthew 4 illustrates this process powerfully. The repeated formula of "If thou be the Son of God" (Matthew 4:3, 6) is neither objective nor conditional, but rather forcing, requiring a display of Sonship as a function of performance. The condition of the if-test requires Sonship to be proved, rather than accepted on God's word. What this indicates is what Austin (1962) terms a "felicity condition failure," where Satan is requiring a fulfillment of conditions of identity, which are logically at odds with God's speech act.

The example in Christ's resistance is one that contrasts through not giving Satan the recognition for the test per se but through the use of declaratives that qualify through divine fiat. Thus, through Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13, Satan is turned from the challenge through covenantal response rather than miraculous display. This is one form of what has been termed in contemporary analysis in discourse studies as the practice of 'reframing,' wherein the agenda is passed through new frameworks for appraisal (Lewandowsky et al., 2020). It is this second move in discursive practice in the serpent in Genesis 3:4, which is defiance through negation of divine judgment couched through a conditional promise of enlightenment—"you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). So, through this move, Adam and Eve choose through the alternate conditionality placed before them. Alternate conditionality demonstrates how conditionality can reshape reality through an alternate version (Declerck & Reed, 2001). It is this alternate conditionality posited by the serpent that is communicative in leading to lack of obedience.

In contrast, in Genesis 3, with Eve and Adam, this is precisely where they go wrong. In response to numerous suggestions made by the serpent, Adam and Eve begin to reason in conditional form themselves: "If the fruit is desirable for wisdom, then it is good to eat." In terms of philosophical

reasoning here, this is clearly an example of a deontological (code-based) versus consequential (outcome-based) reasoning mode, where Adam and Eve put stock in outcomes (wisdom and desirability) rather than commandments (Moral Law). In this case, while Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 may share identical forms in this conversation (questions and conditional statements), it is clearly the subject of this conversation choosing to accept or resist conditional forms.

This kind of “if-then” conditionality goes to show the naturalization of authority in a linguistic form. This kind of structure can be found, for instance, in legal modalities, in educational policies, and government regulation, as a form of obeying or disobeying, conditional for the latter, and following or foregoing, conditional for the first. The story of Adami, therefore, illustrates a wider mechanism of sociolinguistic conditionality.

Declaratives as Performative

Climactic contrast in Adam and Christ is based on the contrary function of declarative speech. Declaratives, according to Austin (1962), are speech acts that create rather than state facts. Another key aspect given by Searle (1979) is that sometimes these speech acts are found in institutional settings where authority is present. The ultimate contradiction by the serpent is, therefore, in its perverse declarative form, ‘Ye shall not surely die,’ where it not only contradicts but also creates false facts about reality. This false declaration is enforced by the act of Adam and Eve when they ate.

Christ, on the other hand, uses the declarative sentences that put the divine force behind the words by using the gegraptai construct, “It stands written.” The use of the perfect passive tense in Greek, explained by Runge (2010), “indicates the state of inscription that continues to exist” to give Christ’s replies the force of the speech act. The act defies the immediate challenge and the challenge to the divine identity definition offered by the adversary.

“Christ’s use of Deuteronomy illustrates a canonical hermeneutic,” states Hays, “in which promises (e.g., Psalm 91, protection by angels) are to be interpreted in the light of command (e.g., Deut. 6.16, no testing of God).” Here, “clarification” in rhetoric finds balance in the canonical.

Theologically, this reveals the contrast between Adam, who is subject to refreezing, and Christ, who exemplifies the “last Adam” through his refusal, which consists in stable and declarative truth (cf. 1 Cor 15:45). Discursively, this reveals how declaratives serve as anchors of authority within adversarial situations, minimizing the risk of refreezing by refusing to engage in endless refreezing negotiation. The well-grounded declarative therefore becomes a tool for epistemic stability within a situation of discursivity.

Comparative Discursive Outcomes

Discursive Strategy	First Adam (Gen 3)	Second Adam (Matt 4)	Outcome
Tagging / Question	Eve responds to “Hath God said?” Adam silent until after fall	Jesus resists “If thou be the Son...” with “It is written”	Eve destabilized; Christ unmoved
Conditionality	Serpent denies (“Ye shall not surely die”) → Adam/Eve comply	Satan provokes (“If... command... cast down”) → Jesus refuses	Adam/Eve persuaded; Christ resists
Declarative Speech	Adam: “I was afraid... I hid myself” (fear/shame frame)	Jesus: “It is written...” (textual authority frame)	Adam declares alienation; Christ declares dominion

Temptation narratives in Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 demonstrate that significant contrasts between Adam and Christ extend not only to morality but also to discourse. How each character responds to questions, conditionals, and declaratives shapes their process of response altogether. Through juxtaposition of discourse strategies in both the First Adam and the Second Adam, it is observable that language can both destabilize and fortify identity, truth, and authority.

Paradigm Shift: From Alienation to Dominion

The contrast between Adam and Christ represents a paradigm shift in the ways of engagement. The strategy of Eve is to operate within the parameters set by the adversary, but Christ supplants the parameters altogether and asserts the authority of Scripture through declaratives. The text of Genesis 3 represents the destabilizing impact of interrogatives and conditionals, while the text of Matthew 4 unravels the impact of declaratives in establishing identity without compromising to the presuppositions of the adversary. The discursive strategy of Adam's speech represents alienation, but the discursive strategy of Christ's speech represents dominion. The consequences of these discursive strategies are far-reaching: The fall and triumph can be achieved through both action and word.

Contemporary Implications: Frames, Questions, and Declarative

The juxtaposition of Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 involves more than simply demonstrating points of contrast between their theological tenets. It finds significance as a heuristic device within contemporary social, political, and theological discussion. Within both stories, language emerges as a means of communications, but significantly, it is a tool of contestation regarding truth and identity. In this, it speaks profoundly to contemporary issues of political communications, framing, and theological discussion.

Political and Media Rhetoric

In contemporary political discourse, it is common to find repetition of the tactics of the serpent and Satan. They are represented in "Are we really safe?" or "Can this government be trusted?" These are rhetorical questions that act as framing practices and assume insecurity or ineffectiveness, which require defenders to react in order to deflect those charges (Wodak, 2021). These questions are also akin to those of the serpent in Genesis 3. They are questions that undermine pre-existing beliefs and provide Suspicion as a starting point. Conditionals in political arguments: "If your policies are effective, why are prices still rising?" -are not hypotheses but provocation tests (Declerck & Reed, 2001).

In the light of the communicative-action approach to communication, put forward by Habermas in his 1984 monograph "The Theory of Communicative Action", the above-discussed strategies appear to be kinds of distortion of rational communication, wherein speech is made use of for strategic manipulation instead of for reaching a mutual understanding. The speech act performed by the serpent in the Eden story is strategic, wherein the goal is to persuade rather than to inform. Satan's performance of the speech act in the fourth chapter of Matthew 4 also has the same import, wherein the speech act itself is used for the purpose of forcing the identification of the interlocutor rather than aiming at rational interaction.

The Nigerian press environment provides an excellent case study. Campaign debates during elections are characterized by rhetorical questioning: "Has this government performed?" and negative if-questioning: "If the opposition is really set on governing, where are their policies?" These strategies influence the audience's impression less by the answers than by the context which answers are forced into (Fairclough, 1995; Chilton, 2004). Once the opposition and

government agree on the context, they become vulnerable to accepting the presuppositions conveyed by the context, much as Eve did in Genesis 3.

Foucault's theory of power/knowledge (1972) is very informative at this point: those who dominate the framing of discourse always have more power than others to determine truth. The serpent's power was neither physical nor necessarily violent but rested within his ability to redefine the epistemic landscape. The same is true of media influencers today.

The Problem of Misquotation and Selective Citation

Just as Satan had picked and chosen from Psalm 91 to justify the provocation (Matt 4:6), today politicians often use the select quote style to control conversation. According to Hays (2016), "teachings about doctrine are frequently taken from their canonical contexts to create proof texts, while the practice of political mis-quoting flourishes in the sound-bite age." A provision within the country's constitution, to cite an example, can be taken out of its context to support an action that is not aligned to the provision's intent. Within this context, meaning emerges through the 'fusion of horizons' of the text and context. It is incorrect to refer to Scripture or a constitution without relating it to its horizon. This is a hermeneutic mistake, which Satan makes in his use of Psalm 91, corrected by Jesus' citation of Deuteronomy 6:16.

Research verifies the efficacy of repetition and strategic framing in generating public belief. Indeed, the illusory truth effect illustrates how "familiarity, rather than truth, is the determining factor in perceptions of truthfulness" (Fazio et al., 2015). Importantly, even knowledgeable subjects will confirm false assertions given sufficient repetition, as shown in the work of Pennycook et al. (2018). Thus, the use of scriptural references by Satan can be seen as a case of discursive trickery from antiquity, validated by the premises of modern cognitive psychology.

In Nigerian politics, selective quotation is common where politicians often cite either symbols of the state or religious texts as evidence of state-legitimacy by divine authority while often suppressing the contextual construction that calls them to answer. Here, there is what Van Dijk (2006) defines as 'ideological square discourse', where one focuses on 'in-group' legitimacies while downplaying 'counter-texts'.

Declaratives as Stabilizers of Discourse

Against antagonistic interrogatives and forceful conditionals, declaratives are stabilizers. Christ's use of "It is written" literalizes the dialogue in a normative order that cannot be antagonistically renegotiated. Austin (1962) wrote that declaratives are speech acts that "make things so" because they occur in recognized structures of authority. In the realm of dogma, declaratives referring to texts in a holy book can clarify matters when nothing can be agreed on as a result of endless rounds of negotiation (Carson, 2016).

This function of stabilization is applicable to politics as well. References to constitutions, charters, or binding treaties could function as performative anchors against manipulation, given the correct interpretation of these in context and not used selectively as instruments of manipulation. The risk is where Laclau and Mouffe refer to "floating signifiers"—terms such as justice, liberty, or democracy, emptied out of supportive context and reappropriated by those who have power over the discursive sphere.

The way Jesus employs Scripture illustrates how declaratives derived from authoritative tradition can counter this kind of drift. The employment of *gegraptai* prevents endlessly renegotiating a meaning, as is expected in adversarial discourse.

Towards a Heuristic of Discursive Resistance

Temptation narratives in both Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 offer far more than theological tales anchored to ancient contexts but, instead, serve as exemplary models of adversarial discourse that provide heuristic resistance strategies in their own right. Both tales offer exemplars of adversarial linguistic practice in which questions, conditionals, and declarations are employed in contexts. Through heuristic analysis of Eve's or Christ's resistance strategies in these contexts, five central tenets emerges in resistance to manipulative discourse as anchored in both theological and modern discourse analysis models.

First is to diagnose the intent of questions: although it is generally assumed that questions result from seeking minds, yet questions could sometimes be used as a rhetorical tool of interlocutor's subversion with a negative intent against the respondents' position and resolve. According to Han (2002), rhetorical questions are "assertions in disguise," while Ilie (1994) points out that they are devices that smuggle presuppositions into a discourse. This is exactly what a typical serpent question would accomplish in the account of creation in the Garden of Eden: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" This type of question does not intend to ask anything and instead holds a manipulation of God's bountifulness in a negative light as a restrictive clause. This method of discourse can be defeated if discourse practitioners can ensure that they can diagnose the truth-seeking question and the manipulative questioning method of adversaries. This can be accomplished by making sure that discourse practitioners can ensure a level of discourse vigilance in developing critical skills in discerning the intentions of discourse. This can be seen in current examples of discourse in the mass media industry of a country when they involve rhetorical questions like "Can this government ever deliver?"

Second, disavow a hostilities frame: "The refusal of Christ to submit to Satan's conditional 'if-test's (Matt. 4:3, 6) illustrates the need to disavow hostilities frames in any communication relationship." To respond to Satan's requests for a stone-based food source or a temple pinnacle jump would be to concede there is, in fact, a proof of proof required for a divinely established Christ-hood. Christ resists the challenge to frame a negotiation for Christ-hood on a hostilities frame, however, by citing declarative Scripture, "It is written" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). Vanhoozer (2016) explains, "The refusal of Christ to engage in a hostilities frame, therefore, is the refusal to let the scripts of the world frame the story of redemption. Today, a refusal of a hostilities frame might look like a refusal to submit to legitimacy testing mandated in adversarial communication, such as to be asked to prove one's patriotism or orthodoxy of politics, for example, to prove one's faithfulness in the domain of churches in terms of growth and material benefits."

Third, the process of contextualization in citation is critical here, which is most obvious in Satan's partial quotations in Psalm 91:11-12 in Matthew 4:6, typically constituting the ever-green problem of decontextualized proof texting in theology. As Hays (2016) supports, there is the need for canonical biblical hermeneutics, wherein promise is interpreted in terms of command, and privilege in terms of duty, which is demonstrated in Christ's counter-texting in Deuteronomy 6:16, wherein the promise of protection is placed in the operability of the covenantal demand for obedience, which is also applicable in political and legal communication, wherein provisions in constitutions or statutes are selectively decontextualized in order to further biased objectives, which is corrected in Gadamer's (1975) hermeneutics, wherein through the process of fusion of horizons, meanings are generated. Decontextualization cancels out the manipulative power in selective citations in these respects.

Fourth, anchor in declaratives: In the role of declarative statements used in adversarial discussions, stabilizing asserts the authority and forecloses the possibilities for renegotiation. The uses in adversarial argumentation of declarative statements to exercise recognized authority, which refuses to open to renegotiation, have been explored by Austin in 1962 and

Searle in 1979 to construct realities that authorize the legitimacy of assertions for the speaker and others to endorse. "It stands written" in Christ's repeated *gegraptai* illustrates this role clearly. "The Greek perfect passive tense carries the implication that the inscription is final, that the word is irrevocable" (Runge, 2010). By laying the foundation for his act of resistance in the debatability and infallibility of Scripture using declarative assertions, Jesus asserts that both identity and authority cannot very well remain in the process of endless constructions and deconstructions but stand firmly derailed in fixed irrevocable constructs.

Fifth, prebunking as inoculation: Beyond the notion of resistance as reaction, there is value in proactive preparation as well. For example, Lewandowsky et al. (2020) show that "prebunking"—that is, pre-exposure to possible misinformation or misleading frames of reference—can increase resilience against deception. Indeed, this fits well with the biblical model, since the temptation stories themselves function as prebunking narratives that provide believers with a model for recognizing how the devil operates ahead of time. For society as a whole, prebunking could be realized as media literacy, fact-checking, and health publicity programs that instruct people on how to identify selective quotation, traps of rhetoric, and quotation out of context. Conferences on catechesis that focus on the devil's tropes will provide believers with the rhetoric necessary for resistance.

These five heuristics combined provide a rich framework for discursive resistance. First of all, they prove conclusively that the temptation narratives of Genesis 3 and Matthew 4 are more than just a distant theological past but instead function instead as a paradigmatic response to challenging circumstances. On a theological level, these heuristics function to show how Adam represents a failure of theological reinterpretation and how Christ represents a success of theological statement and biblical fidelity. On a discursive level, these heuristics show how language-as a function of questioning, conditionality, and statement-can either undermine or establish identity, truth, and authorial power in a world filled with spin and theological misinformation.

These heuristics together offer a set of best practices for dealing with the complexity of contemporary discourses. In diagnosing questions, resisting hostile framing, citing contrary to canon, speaking with declarative authority, and using pre-bunking and debunking, help to resist the linguistic trickery that undid the first Adam, and to align with the discursive power of the second Adam. In Nigerian culture, this is especially important in maintaining democratic discourse and building resilient communities in a media space where hostile speech is all-pervasive.

Lastly, the implications of this study reveal that biblical discourse contains a kind of miniature of more expansive sociolinguistics. The use of conditional clauses establishes a pattern of obedience; tagging strategies configure compliance for ideologies of domination; and declaration establishes authority through naturalization and facticity. These operations do not remain fixed to religious ideology but also operate within more profane institutions like jurisprudence, politics, and education. Through the placement of the Adamic stories within this wider spectrum, this study reveals how linguistic structures themselves serve to encode regulatory modes of sociospatial governance. On this level, then, the study contributes to theory through the development of the notion of conditionality and tagging itself as sociospatial linguistic strategy that is genre-, culture-, and time-independent.

Conclusion

The comparative discourse analysis of Genesis 3:1-7 and Matthew 4:1-11 reveals that while the fall of the first Adam and the victory of the second Adam depend on different attitudes towards

linguistic manipulation, both the serpent in paradise and Satan in the wilderness rely on linguistic strategies which take advantage of the weaknesses of dialogue, such as rhetorical questions which question initial commitment, conditionality which takes the form of identity queries, and selective context, the latter used as a weapon of temptation.

"neither shall ye touch it") shows how the slightest displacement in a speech pattern, the insertion of a mere three words, can be the signal for the onset of epistemological drift and the eventual entrance of disobedience. Adam's subsequent claim of shame and distance, "I was afraid ... and I hid myself" (Gen 3:10), represents the speech-act realization of fallenness. In diametric opposition, Christ's use of the declarative only "It is written," the *gegraptai*- form of the passive voice, indicates a dispensation from entering the adversary's logic and a repositioning of rhetoric upon God's truth. While Adam's speech acts the part of dislocation, Christ's speech acts the part of domination.

This contrast provides both theological and socio-political insights. On the theological level, the stories enact Paul's contrast between 'Adam' and 'Christ' (Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45), showing how the very act of discourse provides the medium for fall and redemption itself. On the doctrinal level, the texts illustrate the importance of adherence to canonical truth as a bulwark against theological error. On the socio-political level, they illustrate the dynamics of discursive power—the use of Rhetorical Questions, Tests by Condition, and Citation—all of which are equally important today in issues of propaganda and ideological manipulation.

What this means for today's society is simply that manipulation via argument will be insufficient to protect one's community. A fact that Christ's interpretation highlights is simply that discourse can be countered with fidelity, with the ability to ground discourse in non-negotiable truths. Such an application of interpretation is simply the key to understanding how to properly navigate today's battles in politics, theology, and culture, in which truths are commonly placed in question via linguistic means.

The contribution this research makes to the field of sociolinguistics is that it clearly shows that conditionality, tagging, and declarative strategies are not only tools of the text but also tools of discourse that create authority. Although the findings of this research rely on the Adamic narratives, the overall findings go beyond the study of the Bible since they demonstrate the use of language to create obedience, establish the legitimacy of hierarchy, and control the limits of resistance through the use of linguistic strategies that occur beyond religious texts, and this makes them exemplary. Religious texts, therefore, are not exceptional but exemplary because they exemplify linguistic strategies that cut across other fields of society.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies within the manuscript preparation process

During the course of preparing this work, the author employed the use of the ChatGPT tool in the quest to reorder certain sentences, edit out similar thoughts, and make the entire text flow well. After the use of the above tool/service, the author went through the text and is solely liable for the content of the final/actual work presented in this document.

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