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## “I am the Christ”: Keyness Analyses of the Sermons of Christ Claimants

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### Abstract

Various religious leaders claim that they are Jesus Christ (the fundamental figure in Christianity), which makes their groups highly distinct from other religious groups. This claim allows society to view generally these leaders as false Christs. To guide individuals in society in identifying their characteristics empirically, in this paper, the language in the discourses of these leaders from the aboutness and communication style perspectives is viewed through the key linguistic features identified. The sermons of Apollo Quiboloy (the leader of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ) and the sermons of AJ Miller (the leader of Divine Truth) who view themselves as Jesus Christ incarnate were used as the target corpora. The sermons of these leaders were compared to different versions of the four canonical gospels (namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as the benchmark corpora found in the Christian Bible using keyness analyses to identify the patterns of key linguistic features in the sermons for language characterization. The findings show that the language in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy displays concepts such as the relationship of *father* and *I (son)* which are likely to be similar when compared to the gospels, whereas the language in the sermons of AJ Miller displays psychological concepts which are likely to be different when compared to the gospels. The findings in the sermons of Christ claimants may allow the characteristics of these religious leaders to be identified.

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The identification of religious leaders as deities or godlike figures is often prevalent in the religious world. For example, Ryuho Okawa, the founder of Happy Science, claimed to be 'El Cantare' or the Highest God on Earth, the Lord of all gods, and a reincarnation of Elohim, Odin, Thoth, Osiris, and Buddha, which allowed his followers to worship him (Kestenbaum, 2020). In Christianity, many religious leaders claimed to be Jesus Christ on earth (e.g., Sun Myung Moon who was the main leader of Unification Church in South Korea and Vissarion who is the leader of Church of the Last Testament in Russia) and promoted extreme beliefs manifested in the practices of their groups enabling individuals particularly in religious society to view them generally as false Christs (Sutton, 2017).

The Christian Bible, specifically in Matthew 24:5, Mark 13:6, Luke 21:8, Matthew 24:23-24, and Mark 13:21-22, has already warned the world about the rising of individuals or religious leaders who will claim to be Jesus Christ and mislead many people (Sproul, 2000). These scriptural texts happened in the cases of Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones (Abbott, 2015) and Heaven's Gate led by Marshall Applewhite (Zeller, 2010; 2014) who viewed themselves as Jesus Christ on earth and led their followers to commit mass suicide in the long run. These leaders who had extreme views of themselves gained power in their discourses and identified their social roles, leading to a damaging effect on their followers.

Through the biblical warnings and destructive effects of those religious groups whose leaders identified themselves as godlike figures, these allow society to discriminate normally the existing religious leaders who view themselves as Jesus Christ incarnate being false Christs even though the social goals of these leaders are likely to be beneficial. In addition, the extreme behaviors of these groups influenced by the distinct beliefs and claims of the leaders are used by other religious groups whose beliefs differ from Christ claimants to attack their groups by calling them cults or dangerous groups (Richardson, 2018).

Given that belief and behavior as indicators to identify the characteristics of religious leaders who view themselves as Jesus Christ may be problematic, we used the discourse (or sermons) of these leaders for it contains language through its linguistic features that are quantifiable and serve as strong indicators to characterize their natures with less subjectivity. In this paper, two existing Christ claimants were chosen to examine the patterns of key linguistic features (at the lexical, semantic, and syntactic levels) characterizing the aboutness and communication style concepts in their sermons using the three types of keyness analysis (namely, keyword analysis, key semantic tag analysis, and key part-of-speech analysis).

The sermons of Apollo Quiboloy (the leader of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ located in Davao City, Philippines) and the sermons of AJ Miller (the leader of Divine Truth located in Queensland, Australia) acting as the target corpora were compared to the four canonical gospels (namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) in the New Testament of the Christian Bible in the American Standard Version (ASV), New International Version (NIV), and King James Version (KJV) acting as the benchmark corpora to find the target features in the sermons. These benchmark corpora, where the language of Jesus Christ is found, may allow us to see whether the language in the sermons of Christ claimants is biblically associated as one way to view the characteristics of these religious leaders.

### **Corpus Approach for Investigating the Language in the Sermons**

Belief and behavior are common indicators used to describe the characteristics of religious groups. However, these may be limited or provide a misleading judgment when applied to other contexts. Therefore, we focused on language that can be found in the discourse of a religious leader. Language shapes the views and practices of religious groups (Omoniyi & Fishman, 2006). It also displays the qualities of beliefs of different religious groups (Palayon et al., 2021). The language in the discourse of each religious leader is

pertinent to examine since it allows us to differentiate the nature of one religious group from other religious groups. In this way, we can describe the characteristics of the target religious leaders in this study based on the language found in their sermons.

To identify the language in the sermons, we applied a corpus approach as an alternative way that can provide linguistic information from a quantitative perspective where the methodological implications and findings are applicable to a broader context. The linguistic data are capable of illustrating the language in the sermons, which describes the characteristics of beliefs promoted by the target religious leaders. According to Biber et al. (1998), a corpus is a body of texts that seeks to represent a language or some parts of a language. This body of texts contains patterns of important linguistic features representing the aspects of language (e.g., aboutness and styles) that illustrate the characteristics of the source of texts (Bondi & Scott, 2010). Corpora have been widely used to investigate the elements of language in different discourse studies (Archer & Rayson, 2016) since this approach provides linguistic evidence quantitatively that can display the concepts in the target corpus (e.g., Palayon et al., 2022a; 2022b) and give support for critical analyses (e.g., Mansouri et al., 2017). Therefore, we found this approach useful to examine the features in the sermons of Christ claimants.

Given that this study focuses on language, we examined the keyness of sermons. Keyness is a corpus characteristic, which can be viewed from the aboutness and communication style perspectives. Aboutness reveals the content focus of the sermons through aboutness or content keywords and key semantic groups of words illustrating the beliefs of the target religious leaders. Communication style reveals the communication strategies of the sermons through style or function keywords and key part-of-speech tags showing how the belief system is promoted in the discourse (for further details on the concepts of aboutness and communication styles, see Palayon et al., 2020; 2021; 2022a; 2022b). These keyness characteristics serve as our way to inspect if the sermons of the target Christ claimants associate with the discourse of Jesus Christ found in the gospels as the benchmark corpora (see the keyness method section on page 73 of how to identify these characteristics). Therefore, this study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the key linguistic features characterizing the language in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy?; (2) What are the key linguistic features characterizing the language in the sermons of AJ Miller?; (3) From a keyness perspective, does the language in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy associate with the gospels in the Christian Bible?; and, (4) From a keyness perspective, does the language in the sermons of AJ Miller associate with the gospels in the Christian Bible?

## **Materials and Methods**

This paper aims to view the aboutness and communication style as the aspects of language through the patterns of key linguistic features identified in the sermons of Christ claimants, namely, Apollo Quiboloy (see ABC News, 2010, for Apollo Quiboloy's claim) and AJ Miller (see Real Stories, 2018, for AJ Miller's claim). The language concepts found in their sermons allow us to describe the natures of these leaders with less influence from the analysts' intuitions. In this section, the methodological components are presented to achieve the goal of this paper. These components focus on the corpora to find the target linguistic features and keyness methods that identify the important linguistic features.

### **Corpora**

Sermons are the regular talks of religious leaders that illustrate the belief systems and practices of their groups. These texts are suitable to be the target corpus in this study for us to find linguistic evidence for language characterization. The sermons of Apollo Quiboloy and the sermons of AJ Miller (spoken

in English) when they identified themselves as Jesus Christ incarnate, publicly available at <https://www.youtube.com/>, were chosen as the target corpora. The number of the target corpora should be sufficient to see if the characteristics of one Christ claimant differ from another Christ claimant. These texts were transcribed and cleaned for comparisons by deleting the words which are not directly spoken. Words with apostrophes were retained in their original form to maintain the naturalness of sermons, which resulted in unclear items in single letters (such as *t*), pairs of letters (such as *re*), and groups of letters (such as *don*) in the keyword lists as candidates to be meaningful features.

Given that the target subjects in this study are Christ claimants, we expect that the language in the sermons of these leaders is associated with the language of Jesus Christ found in the Christian Bible. The association between the language in the sermons of each Christ claimant and the language of Jesus Christ may serve as one way to view the characteristics of these leaders. The language in the sermons of a Christ claimant that is likely to associate with the gospels may suggest that the target leader may display Christlike characteristics, and the language in the sermons of a Christ claimant that is unlikely to associate with the gospels may suggest that the target leader may display the characteristics of false Christ. Therefore, the Christian Bible, where the language of Jesus Christ is found, is suitable to be the source of benchmark corpora. The gospels of John, Luke, Mark, and Matthew in the American Standard Version (ASV), King James Version (KJV), and New International Version (NIV) were chosen acting as the benchmark corpora in this study. The number of the benchmark corpora in different versions should be sufficient to find the consistent features in the sermons serving as the most meaningful indicators for language characterization and see the patterns of mean log-likelihood (mean LL) values of the data comparisons as supporting findings that confirm the linguistic findings.

To specify the keyness of sermons, the key linguistic features were viewed at the lexical, semantic, and grammatical levels using log-likelihood (LL). These three units of linguistic features show verification of the results, which increases the reliability of the overall findings. However, these features may not be strong enough to see the association of the language in the sermons of each target religious leader when compared to the gospels. Therefore, the mean log-likelihood (mean LL) value of each data comparison was computed to see the similarity or difference of each target corpus when compared to the benchmark corpora from a statistical perspective. Since the log-likelihood values are corpus-size dependent, the sizes of the target corpora should be similar to the sizes of the benchmark corpora. To check their comparability, the procedure of Pojanapunya (2017) cited by Palayon et al. (2021) was applied (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Sizes of the corpora*

| Corpora                   | Word tokens                     | Semantic tag tokens             | Part-of-Speech tokens           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons | 92,572<br>9.2 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 90,697<br>9.0 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 90,987<br>9.0 x 10 <sup>4</sup> |
| AJ Miller's sermons       | 91,164<br>9.1 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 90,460<br>9.0 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 90,750<br>9.0 x 10 <sup>4</sup> |
| ASV gospels               | 93,782<br>9.3 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 88,202<br>8.8 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 87,212<br>8.7 x 10 <sup>4</sup> |
| KJV gospels               | 87,916<br>8.7 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 88,014<br>8.8 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 84,220<br>8.4 x 10 <sup>4</sup> |
| NIV gospels               | 95,827<br>9.5 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 85,138<br>8.5 x 10 <sup>4</sup> | 82,762<br>8.2 x 10 <sup>4</sup> |

## Keyness Analyses

Keyword analysis, key semantic tag analysis, and key part-of-speech analysis are the three types of keyness analysis that are capable of revealing the language concepts in the discourse through key linguistic features. These methods were applied in this study which aim to identify the linguistic features in the target corpora with markedly higher relative frequencies when the target corpora were compared to the benchmark corpora. In these analyses, we employed a probability statistic called log-likelihood (LL) to specify the keyness of each item (Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2018). Though LL was criticized because of the sensitivity of probability values (p-values) to item frequency and corpus sizes (for further criticisms, see Gabrielatos, 2018), the comprehensiveness of its applicability for a register-style characterization in the sermons and for viewing the similarities and differences between the target corpora and benchmark corpora (e.g., Palayon et al., 2021; 2022b; Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2021) makes this statistic appropriate in this study.

## Keyword Analysis

Keywords are important lexical items that characterize the aboutness and communication styles of texts. These features can be identified through keyword analysis. To conduct this analysis, first, we prepared the keyword lists by comparing the target corpora to the benchmark corpora using AntConc (*see <https://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/> for this tool*). Second, we applied a dispersion filter following the procedure of Pojanapunya (2017) to identify the dispersed words which are potential candidates for finding the final key lexical items. Identifying the dispersed words in the sermons serves as an important step in this analysis to see how words are widely distributed across the texts. Some words with high keyness values may occur in a few texts that are not strong enough to characterize the whole corpus. The items that occur in 50 percent of the text files were selected to establish the dispersed words. And third, after identifying the dispersed words, a z-score cutoff point was applied to determine the final keywords (see the threshold section on page 74). To identify the patterns of keywords, the semantic and syntactic relationships of words were viewed to determine the aboutness and communication style concepts.

## Key semantic tag Analysis and Key part-of-speech Analysis

Key semantic tags are important semantic groups of words that generally characterize the aboutness of texts, and these features can be identified through key semantic tag analysis (*see <https://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/> for the semantic tagging and list of the semantic tags*). Key part-of-speech tags are important grammatical groups of words that characterize the communication styles of texts, and these features can be identified through key part-of-speech analysis. To conduct these analyses, first, the corpora were tagged using the UCREL semantic tagger for key semantic tag analysis and the Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT) for key part-of-speech analysis (Nini, 2015). The tag lists were prepared by comparing the target corpus tags to the benchmark corpus tags using AntConc. Second, sets of lexical items were provided for each range of key linguistic tags to see the textual meaning of each key semantic tag (e.g., S9 Religion and the supernatural: *heaven, God, Christ, spiritual*) and discourse function of each key part-of-speech tag (e.g., SPP2 Second person pronouns: *you, your, yourself*). We also viewed the concordance lines and excerpts of the given sets of words to see how the items were used in the texts. This enabled us to interpret each tag. And third, the final tags were identified using a z-score cutoff point. The association of the tags was viewed to see the semantic relationship for key semantic tags and the syntactic relationship for key part-of-speech tags. The findings in these analyses confirm the keyword findings and highlight other items that give more aboutness and communication style information.

### Thresholds

After generating the key linguistic feature lists, the cutoff point in each list was determined. Given that a cutoff LL value or its associated probability value and Top N, as the threshold methods, were criticized because of their subjectivity, we followed the procedure of Pojanapunya and Watson Todd (2021) and Palayon et al. (2021; 2022a; 2022b) to identify the cutoff points. We applied a proportion of the range of LL values that can be identified using a z-score. Since the total numbers of features in the three analyses are markedly different (see Table 2), we used different z-scores (3 for keywords, 2 for key semantic tags, and 1 for key part-of-speech tags) to identify the final features (see Table 3).

**Table 2**

*Total number of features in each analysis*

| Target corpora            | Word types | Semantic tag types | Part-of-speech tag types |
|---------------------------|------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons | 4,450      | 318                | 63                       |
| AJ Miller's sermons       | 3,669      | 303                | 64                       |

**Table 3**

*Total number of final features in each analysis*

| Data comparisons                          | Keyword lists | Key semantic tag lists | Key part-of-speech tag lists |
|---|---------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. ASV gospels | 18            | 4                      | 3                            |
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. KJV gospels | 18            | 3                      | 3                            |
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. NIV gospels | 53            | 2                      | 4                            |
| AJ Miller's sermons vs. ASV gospels       | 24            | 4                      | 3                            |
| AJ Miller's sermons vs. KJV gospels       | 25            | 4                      | 3                            |
| AJ Miller's sermons vs. NIV gospels       | 23            | 3                      | 4                            |

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the aboutness and communication style concepts through the patterns of key linguistic features identified characterizing the language in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy who claims to be the Appointed Son of God and the sermons of AJ Miller who claims to be Jesus of Nazareth. The patterns of mean log-likelihood (mean LL) values of the data comparisons are also presented, which allow us to see the similarities and differences between the target corpora to the benchmark corpora from a statistical perspective.

### Aboutness and Communication Styles in Apollo Quiboloy's Sermons

For aboutness, Table 4 presents the content keywords and Table 5 presents the key semantic tags which describe the beliefs promoted in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy. These features show that the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy focus on: (1) the existence of Jesus Christ and his role as the Almighty Father from Apollo Quiboloy's group perspective and this can be seen in the keywords *Almighty*, *Father* and *Christ* (e.g., "*in the name of the Almighty Father, our Lord Jesus Christ*"), (2) the role of Apollo Quiboloy as the Appointed Son of God and this can be seen in the key features *appointed* (e.g., "*That's why there is an Appointed Son to show you what will happen after our physical life*"), *Quiboloy* (e.g., "*you have become an overcomer. That's a true Quiboloy*"), and *A3+ Existing* (e.g., *reality*, *am*, *are*), (3) the concept of salvation and this can be seen in the key features such as *spiritual* (e.g., "*he is the one that will give you spiritual life*"), *choice* (e.g., "*your choice will either condemn you or save you*"), *message* (e.g., "*he gave me one message, one word, repent!*"), *words* (e.g., "*Jesus Christ's words were spiritual*"), *salvation* (e.g., "*the true message of salvation*"), *obedience* (e.g., "*The spirit of obedience to his will*"), *loyal* (e.g., "*I will be loyal to those words*"), *verse* (e.g., "*Please read Matthew, Chapter 5 verse 17*"), *S9 Religion and the supernatural* (e.g., *soul*, *spirit*, *heaven*), and *X7+ Wanted* (e.g., *purpose*, *choice*, *plan*), and (4) the nature of Satan and this can be seen in the keywords *Devil*, *Lucifer*, and *serpent* (e.g., "*Lucifer was now called the Devil*", "*that old serpent called the Devil and Satan which deceiveth the whole world*").

For communication styles, Table 4 displays the style or function keywords and Table 6 displays the key part-of-speech tags which describe the communication strategies of how the beliefs in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy are promoted. These features show that the communication styles in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy focus on: (1) personal involvement that tends to include the audience and other personal elements such as Jesus Christ and this can be seen in the key features *you* (e.g., "*You must come to him by faith*"), *your* (e.g., "*they are the words of your Savior*"), *my* (e.g., "*my sheep know my voice*"), *I* (e.g., "*I heard the voice of the Father*"), *we* (e.g., "*we become children, sons and daughters of the Father Almighty*"), *me* (e.g., "*He called me and anointed me*"), *our* (e.g., "*now this is Jesus Christ our Almighty Father in the gentile setting*"), *FPP1* (e.g., *I*, *me*, *my*), and *SPP2* (e.g., *thy*, *your*, *you*), (2) negating style that tends to show restriction for individual's personal growth and this can be seen in the keywords *t*, *don*, and *cannot* (e.g., "*Don't worry if I'm persecuted*", "*If you cannot trust me you know who you are, you cannot trust yourself*"), (3) expression of determination that tends to show the religious purpose of the discourse and this can be seen in the keyword *will* (e.g., "*he's a God of justice, he will save you today*"), (4) expression of being illustrative and this can be seen in the key features *VPRT present tense* (e.g., *accept*, *am*, *ask*) and *DEMP Demonstrative pronouns* (e.g., *that*, *this*, *these*) (e.g., "*This is the fastest-growing movement in the world today*", "*These are the words of God that will judge us*"), and (5) elaborating style that tends to explain the discourse contents and this can be seen in the keywords associated with elaboration such as *because* (e.g., "*because God has a plan for the planet Earth*").

Table 4

*Keywords in Apollo Quiboloy's sermons*

| Rank | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons<br>vs. ASV gospels |           | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons<br>vs. KJV gospels |           | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons<br>vs. NIV gospels |           |
|------|--|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|      | <i>Keywords</i>                              | <i>LL</i> | <i>Keywords</i>                              | <i>LL</i> | <i>Keywords</i>                              | <i>LL</i> |
| 1    | you  | 2339.7    | you  | 2129.0    | that   | 684.5     |
| 2    | will   | 1106.6    | will   | 928.8     | i  | 572.5     |
| 3    | s  | 556.5     | t  | 579.5     | s  | 380.5     |
| 4    | are  | 548.0     | are  | 544.6     | you  | 368.5     |
| 5    | your   | 508.5     | s  | 538.2     | are  | 364.3     |
| 6    | i  | 483.5     | i  | 466.3     | is   | 363.1     |
| 7    | t  | 470.8     | your   | 452.3     | father                                       | 304.7     |
| 8    | don  | 443.6     | don  | 423.3     | christ                                       | 297.3     |
| 9    | father                                       | 351.3     | father                                       | 311.4     | my   | 232.1     |
| 10   | is   | 310.5     | because                                      | 255.8     | spiritual                                    | 212.4     |
| 11   | because                                      | 291.0     | like   | 251.4     | because                                      | 186.0     |
| 12   | like   | 273.4     | is   | 250.8     | we   | 185.5     |
| 13   | has  | 257.5     | has  | 245.7     | t  | 175.8     |
| 14   | my   | 246.2     | who  | 224.2     | don  | 167.3     |
| 15   | can  | 235.4     | here   | 214.0     | devil  | 164.0     |
| 16   | spiritual                                    | 219.7     | spiritual                                    | 209.7     | me   | 162.8     |
| 17   | just   | 218.6     | can  | 207.3     | m  | 161.0     |
| 18   | here   | 213.1     | my   | 194.9     | will   | 159.8     |
| 19   |  |           |  |           | like   | 156.4     |
| 20   |  |           |  |           | years  | 152.1     |
| 21   |  |           |  |           | almighty                                     | 152.1     |
| 22   |  |           |  |           | re   | 149.0     |
| 23   |  |           |  |           | name   | 142.5     |
| 24   |  |           |  |           | your   | 135.5     |
| 25   |  |           |  |           | why  | 131.1     |
| 26   |  |           |  |           | know   | 130.2     |
| 27   |  |           |  |           | choice                                       | 128.0     |
| 28   |  |           |  |           | here   | 126.0     |
| 29   |  |           |  |           | message                                      | 121.2     |
| 30   |  |           |  |           | lucifer                                      | 119.4     |
| 31   |  |           |  |           | appointed                                    | 117.4     |
| 32   |  |           |  |           | words  | 116.4     |
| 33   |  |           |  |           | unto   | 112.3     |
| 34   |  |           |  |           | cannot                                       | 111.5     |
| 35   |  |           |  |           | all  | 108.4     |
| 36   |  |           |  |           | serpent                                      | 108.0     |

|    |                |              |                |              |                |              |
|----|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| 37 |                |              |                |              | only           | 108.0        |
| 38 |                |              |                |              | already        | 105.7        |
| 39 |                |              |                |              | salvation      | 105.0        |
| 40 |                |              |                |              | our            | 103.9        |
| 41 |                |              |                |              | now            | 103.8        |
| 42 |                |              |                |              | am             | 101.8        |
| 43 |                |              |                |              | today          | 100.1        |
| 44 |                |              |                |              | can            | 98.7         |
| 45 |                |              |                |              | in             | 97.7         |
| 46 |                |              |                |              | sisters        | 96.5         |
| 47 |                |              |                |              | become         | 96.3         |
| 48 |                |              |                |              | obedience      | 94.5         |
| 49 |                |              |                |              | loyal          | 92.4         |
| 50 |                |              |                |              | religion       | 92.4         |
| 51 |                |              |                |              | there          | 91.0         |
| 52 |                |              |                |              | quiboloy       | 89.5         |
| 53 |                |              |                |              | verse          | 89.5         |
|    | <b>Mean LL</b> | <b>394.6</b> | <b>Mean LL</b> | <b>367.6</b> | <b>Mean LL</b> | <b>148.6</b> |

**Table 5***Key semantic tags in Apollo Quiboloy's sermons*

| Rank | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. ASV gospels                     |              | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. KJV gospels   |              | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. NIV gospels        |              |
|------|---|--------------|---|--------------|--|--------------|
|      | Key semantic tags   | LL           | Key semantic tags                           | LL           | Key semantic tags                                | LL           |
| 1    | A3+ Existing (e.g., reality, am, are)                         | 608.7        | A3+ Existing (e.g., reality, am, are)       | 523.3        | Z4 Discourse bin (e.g., amen, hallelujah, thank) | 557.7        |
| 2    | X7+ Wanted (e.g., purpose, choice, plan)                      | 432.0        | X7+ Wanted (e.g., purpose, choice, plan)    | 417.4        | A3+ Existing (e.g., reality, am, are)            | 493.9        |
| 3    | A14 Exclusivizers/particularizers (e.g., alone, just, only)   | 336.5        | A2.1+ Change (e.g., happen, became, change) | 395.9        |  |              |
| 4    | S9 Religion and the supernatural (e.g., soul, spirit, heaven) | 330.2        |   |              |  |              |
|      | <b>Mean LL</b>  | <b>413.4</b> | <b>Mean LL</b>                              | <b>442.2</b> | <b>Mean LL</b>                                   | <b>524.8</b> |

Table 6

*Key part-of-speech tags in Apollo Quiboloy's sermons*

| Rank | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. ASV gospels          |        | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. KJV gospels          |        | Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. NIV gospels             |       |
|------|--|--------|--|--------|---|-------|
|      | Key part-of-speech tags                            | LL     | Key part-of-speech tags                            | LL     | Key part-of-speech tags                               | LL    |
| 1    | VPRT present tense (e.g., accept, am, ask)         | 1358.9 | VPRT present tense (e.g., accept, am, ask)         | 1274.2 | FPP1 First person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my)          | 891.5 |
| 2    | FPP1 First person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my)       | 1003.9 | FPP1 First person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my)       | 941.0  | VPRT present tense (e.g., accept, am, ask)            | 555.7 |
| 3    | SPP2 Second person pronouns (e.g., thy, your, you) | 914.7  | SPP2 Second person pronouns (e.g., thy, your, you) | 812.7  | DEMP Demonstrative pronouns (e.g., that, this, these) | 358.8 |
| 4    |  |        |  |        | SPP2 Second person pronouns (e.g., thy, your, you)    | 302.7 |
|      | Mean LL  | 1076.6 | Mean LL  | 991.4  | Mean LL   | 481.6 |

### Aboutness and Communication Styles in AJ Miller's sermons

Table 7 presents the aboutness keywords and Table 8 presents the key semantic tags which describe the beliefs promoted in the sermons of AJ Miller. These features show that the contents of AJ Miller's sermons focus on: (1) the nature of sin and this can be seen in the keywords *sin* (e.g., “*and so to awaken to sin we need to realize these truths but we need to realize them emotionally in our hearts*”) and *right* (e.g., “*God has a definition of what is right and wrong*”) and (2) psychological concepts and these can be seen in the key features *conscience* (e.g., “*there's a lot of ways that the conscience might help us with forgiveness and repentance*”), *feel* (e.g., “*you can't make any change a person who's moral is able to consistently feel and experience and release emotions*”), *know* (e.g., “*we know for most people it's a sensitive issue and they're probably going to go and get angry*”), *want* (e.g., “*...our sins are driven by avoidance types of emotions, we want we want to avoid emotion rather than feeling*”), *X2.1 Thought, belief* (e.g., *feeling, conscience, attitude*), and *X7+ Wanted* (e.g., *will, intention, desire*).

For the communication styles identified by function keywords (see Table 7) and key part-of-speech tags (see Table 9), these features show that the sermons of AJ Miller apply: (1) personal involvement and this can be seen in the key features *we* (e.g., “*we have certain emotional responses to certain events*”), *you* (e.g., “*you'll have the ability to read thoughts and feelings of other people*”), *(I)m* (e.g., “*I'm suppressing my own emotions by deciding to not feel about it*”), and *FPP1 First person pronouns* (e.g., *I, me, my*), (2) negating style and this can be seen in the keywords *t* and *don* (e.g., “*so all of the senses aren't going to list are all available in a physical but the majority of people don't develop them*”), (3) intensifying style that tends to magnify the content elements in the discourse and this can be seen in the key features *really* (e.g., “*so without without faith you're really probably not going to engage the process of conscience at all*”) and *EMPH Emphatics* (e.g., *really, so, most*), and (4) elaborating style that tends to expound the content elements and this can be seen in the key features associated with elaboration such as *what* (e.g., “*what matters is what I'm addicted to what my emotional beliefs are*”), *to* (e.g., “*you will either react everything*”).

single time to an emotion”), that (e.g., “we are trying to get other people to agree with our fears and to agree that we should not ever have to deal with these fears”) and NOMZ Nominalizations (e.g., reinforcement).

**Table 7**

*Keywords in AJ Miller’s sermons*

| Rank | AJ Miller’s sermons vs. ASV gospels |           | AJ Miller’s sermons vs. KJV gospels |           | AJ Miller’s sermons vs. NIV gospels |           |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
|      | <i>Keywords</i>                     | <i>LL</i> | <i>Keywords</i>                     | <i>LL</i> | <i>Keywords</i>                     | <i>LL</i> |
| 1    | s                                   | 2132.7    | s                                   | 2049.2    | we                                  | 2114.2    |
| 2    | we                                  | 2031.7    | we                                  | 1905.4    | s                                   | 1831.9    |
| 3    | you                                 | 1502.9    | you                                 | 1348.0    | that                                | 1172.3    |
| 4    | t                                   | 1062.6    | t                                   | 1170.7    | re                                  | 995.7     |
| 5    | re                                  | 1041.3    | re                                  | 993.9     | sin                                 | 968.2     |
| 6    | sin                                 | 939.6     | sin                                 | 919.8     | it                                  | 699.0     |
| 7    | so                                  | 930.9     | so                                  | 862.7     | t                                   | 634.1     |
| 8    | to                                  | 666.1     | to                                  | 591.0     | ve                                  | 534.8     |
| 9    | it                                  | 639.3     | it                                  | 573.9     | so                                  | 530.9     |
| 10   | right                               | 595.3     | right                               | 560.7     | right                               | 509.7     |
| 11   | ve                                  | 557.4     | going                               | 552.8     | yeah                                | 462.7     |
| 12   | can                                 | 548.0     | ve                                  | 532.0     | our                                 | 407.2     |
| 13   | just                                | 523.4     | can                                 | 499.0     | conscience                          | 403.7     |
| 14   | about                               | 501.0     | about                               | 467.5     | can                                 | 340.5     |
| 15   | don                                 | 483.9     | don                                 | 461.8     | really                              | 331.2     |
| 16   | going                               | 477.9     | yeah                                | 434.8     | m                                   | 317.8     |
| 17   | yeah                                | 455.6     | just                                | 432.8     | know                                | 306.2     |
| 18   | what                                | 439.1     | what                                | 394.0     | about                               | 284.2     |
| 19   | like                                | 411.3     | our                                 | 386.8     | just                                | 284.1     |
| 20   | our                                 | 407.6     | like                                | 381.6     | like                                | 270.5     |
| 21   | conscience                          | 397.6     | conscience                          | 367.6     | feel                                | 267.2     |
| 22   | really                              | 374.9     | really                              | 357.8     | going                               | 267.0     |
| 23   | want                                | 340.5     | m                                   | 332.2     | what                                | 249.0     |
| 24   | know                                | 311.4     | want                                | 331.8     |                                     |           |
| 25   |                                     |           | know                                | 307.4     |                                     |           |
|      | Mean LL                             | 630.7     | Mean LL                             | 583.7     | Mean LL                             | 494.2     |

Table 8

*Key semantic tags in AJ Miller's sermons*

| Rank | AJ Miller's sermons vs. ASV gospels                        |           | AJ Miller's sermons vs. KJV gospels                        |           | AJ Miller's sermons vs. NIV gospels                        |           |
|------|--|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|      | <i>Key semantic tags</i>                                   | <i>LL</i> | <i>Key semantic tags</i>                                   | <i>LL</i> | <i>Key semantic tags</i>                                   | <i>LL</i> |
| 1    | Z4 Discourse bin (e.g., honestly, right, yes)              | 1282.8    | Z4 Discourse bin (e.g., honestly, right, yes)              | 1246.7    | Z4 Discourse bin (e.g., honestly, right, yes)              | 1856.0    |
| 2    | A3+ Existing (e.g., is, being, situations)                 | 810.7     | A3+ Existing (e.g., is, being, situations)                 | 712.0     | X2.1 Thought, belief (e.g., feeling, conscience, attitude) | 694.9     |
| 3    | X2.1 Thought, belief (e.g., feeling, conscience, attitude) | 754.8     | X7+ Wanted (e.g., will, intention, desire)                 | 698.9     | A3+ Existing (e.g., is, being, situations)                 | 675.8     |
| 4    | X7+ Wanted (e.g., will, intention, desire)                 | 717.1     | X2.1 Thought, belief (e.g., feeling, conscience, attitude) | 685.8     |  |           |
|      | Mean LL  | 866.2     | Mean LL  | 807.6     | Mean LL  | 955.2     |

Table 9

*Key part-of-speech tags in AJ Miller's sermons*

| Rank | AJ Miller's sermons vs. ASV gospels          |           | AJ Miller's sermons vs. KJV gospels          |           | AJ Miller's sermons vs. NIV gospels          |           |
|------|--|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
|      | <i>Key part-of-speech tags</i>               | <i>LL</i> | <i>Key part-of-speech tags</i>               | <i>LL</i> | <i>Key part-of-speech tags</i>               | <i>LL</i> |
| 1    | VPRT Present tense (e.g., begin, act, are)   | 2800.9    | VPRT Present tense (e.g., begin, act, are)   | 2661.9    | VPRT Present tense (e.g., begin, act, are)   | 1565.2    |
| 2    | FPP1 First person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my) | 1041.8    | FPP1 First person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my) | 977.4     | FPP1 First-person pronouns (e.g., I, me, my) | 926.8     |
| 3    | EMPH Emphatics (e.g., really, so, most)      | 1037.9    | EMPH Emphatics (e.g., really, so, most)      | 900.0     | EMPH Emphatics (e.g., really, so, most)      | 813.8     |
| 4    |  |           |  |           | NOMZ Nominalizations (e.g., reinforcement)   | 669.7     |
|      | Mean LL                                      | 1446.8    | Mean LL                                      | 1327.9    | Mean LL                                      | 943.0     |

### Mean LL of the data comparisons

Table 10 displays the mean LL values of the data comparisons in each analysis which support the linguistic findings. The patterns of mean LL values show similarities and differences between the target corpora and benchmark corpora from a statistical perspective. Lower mean LL value suggests similarity, while higher mean LL value suggests difference (Pojanapunya, 2017; Pojanapunya & Watson Todd, 2021). The results show that the mean LL values of Apollo Quiboloy's sermons are lower than the mean LL values of AJ Miller's sermons. This suggests that the discourse of Apollo Quiboloy is likely to be similar when compared to the gospels. The mean LL values of AJ Miller's sermons are higher than the mean LL values of Apollo Quiboloy's sermons. This suggests that the discourse of AJ Miller is likely to be different when compared to the gospels.

**Table 10**

*Mean LL values in each analysis*

| Data comparisons                          | Keyword mean LL values | Key semantic tag mean LL values | Key part-of-speech tag mean LL values |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. ASV gospels | 394.6                  | 413.4                           | 1076.6                                |
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. KJV gospels | 367.6                  | 442.2                           | 991.4                                 |
| Apollo Quiboloy's sermons vs. NIV gospels | 148.6                  | 524.8                           | 481.6                                 |
| AJ Miller's sermons vs. ASV gospels       | 630.7                  | 866.2                           | 1446.8                                |
| AJ Miller's sermons vs. KJV gospels       | 583.7                  | 807.6                           | 1327.9                                |
| AJ Miller's sermons vs. NIV gospels       | 494.2                  | 955.2                           | 943.0                                 |

From the linguistic and mean LL findings of Apollo Quiboloy's sermons, the patterns characterizing the aboutness concepts imply their association with the philosophy of Jesus Christ found in the gospels. The association of the target sermons with the gospels can be seen as well through the frequent use of scriptural texts (*verse, message, words*) in the discourse (e.g., "*Verse 9 Jesus said, — he that had seen me had seen the Father*").

The concept of salvation through obedience and loyalty to the philosophy of Jesus Christ is explicated (e.g., "*the standard of salvation is obedience*") as the gospels promote salvation through allegiance (Bates, 2017). The keyword pattern on *Devil, Lucifer, and serpent* displays the nature of Satan (e.g., "*he is now called the old serpent, the Devil, Satan which deceiveth the whole world*") and this topic is also highlighted in the gospels (Boice, 2015).

The concept of the father-and-son relationship is emphasized in the discourse where Jesus Christ is viewed as the Almighty Father (e.g., "*I'm willing to lay down my life for the Lord our Almighty Father the Lord Jesus Christ*") and Apollo Quiboloy is viewed as the Appointed Son of God (e.g., "*I am the only one who's boldly preaching this, that's why I am the Appointed Son of God!*"). This concept is displayed in the gospels (see Garland, 2015; Thompson, 2000) where Jesus was generally identified as the Son of God and called God as the Father (in heaven). This implies a development of the belief in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as one topic in the Bible (Toney, 2015). These findings suggest that the discourse of Apollo Quiboloy as he views himself as the Appointed Son of God is likely to be similar when compared to the gospels.

From the key linguistic and mean LL patterns of AJ Miller's sermons, the findings suggest that most of the aboutness concepts may not be present in the gospels. The absence of scriptural texts in the discourse also reveals the distance between the target sermons and the gospels. This suggests that the beliefs promoted in the discourse are personalized and these may not be biblically founded.

Though the nature of sin is highlighted in AJ Miller's sermons which is one topic in the Bible, this concept is viewed from a psychological perspective (e.g., "*these two types of sins basically and both of them involve our condition which is our current state and our desires which is our aspired to future state so that's what sin involves*") associated with emotions (e.g., "*I realize that I sin I feel it emotionally and because of that because it's an emotional feeling I now have an imperative that develops within me*") and conscience (e.g., "*we need the conscience so that we can learn to love truth in all circumstances and to do it in all circumstances*"). These concepts are non-religious characterizing the ideology promoted which means that the discourse of AJ Miller as he views himself as Jesus of Nazareth is likely to be different when compared to the gospels.

From the communication style findings, both sets of sermons applied negating style and elaborating style. This suggests that the discourses tend to be restrictive (e.g., From Apollo Quiboloy's sermons, "*Don't hate back, pray to the Father Almighty that your enemy will be enlightened*"; from AJ Miller's sermons, "*you can't force them, you can't change their mind*") and elaborative (e.g., From Apollo Quiboloy's sermons, "*He sent me into all the world, because of this I am his voice today*"; from AJ Miller's sermons, "*they are the senses of the spirit body so our emotions are one of the senses that we also use to experience the world*") which allow individuals to see the goal and purpose of sermons.

Both sets of sermons also applied a personal involvement style through the frequent use of first-person pronouns and second-person pronouns. Taken from one of the benchmark corpora in the book of John (NIV), Jesus used *I* that refers to himself and *you* that refers to the message recipients (e.g., "*Jesus, therefore, said unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep*"). This means that the use of personal involvement is present in the gospels (see also Bloch & Barrett, 2016, for further details).

The frequent use of first-person pronouns (*I*, *me*, *my*) also entails the high involvement of the two Christ claimants in the sermons. This occurs in the discourse given that these leaders view themselves as Jesus Christ incarnate and they tend to emphasize the purpose of their existence as Christ claimants. This communication style, which is associated with the other styles, may serve as one way to view the characteristics of these leaders.

For Apollo Quiboloy's sermons, the high frequency of present tense (which associates with the tag related to *Existing*) and the frequent use of demonstrative pronouns are noticeable which display the illustrative characteristic of discourse. The use of *will* is also highly frequent (which appears in the three comparisons of keyword analysis) illustrating that the discourse tends to be determined (e.g., "*He's a God of justice, he will save you today*"). The association of these styles suggests that while Apollo Quiboloy views himself as the Appointed Son of God, his discourse tends to demonstrate the beliefs promoted such as his social role. It also tends to be determined in elaborating these concepts associated with biblical texts justifying the claim as the Appointed Son of God and its purpose (e.g., "*That's why there is an Appointed Son to show you what will happen after our physical life*").

For AJ Miller's sermons, emphatics such as *really* are highly frequent and the use of nominalizations is frequent. This pattern suggests that the discourse, especially the non-religious concepts, is highly

intensified. Having high intensification of the content elements in the discourse may result in being highly persuasive and elaborative (see Palayon, 2022a) allowing individuals to believe and interpret non-traditional or non-religious beliefs as true beliefs.

Overall, from the linguistic and statistical findings, most features in the sermons of Apollo Quiboloy are likely to be similar when compared to the gospels. This suggests that this Christ claimant may display Christlike characteristics. Most features in the sermons of AJ Miller are likely to be different when compared to the gospels. This suggests that this Christ claimant may display the characteristics of false Christ.

The methodology applied in this study provides us with a systematic procedure for viewing the characteristics of Christ claimants from a linguistic perspective. The approach of data comparison allows us to find consistent patterns of key features which can be used as strong indicators to characterize the language in the sermons. The three types of keyness analysis enable us to find the key features from different levels in large data sets which can be used for characterization and verification. The method for cutoff applied in this study allows us to select sufficient key items without the influence of the analyst's intuition. The comparison of mean LL values enables us to view the similarities and differences between the target corpora and benchmark corpora, which increase the reliability of the main findings. The key linguistic features specified by log-likelihood serve as significant indicators that we can use to describe the natures of Christ claimants with less subjectivity. This corpus-based methodology offers a new perspective on identifying the characteristics of Christ claimants, which is relatively underexplored in applied linguistics and religious studies. However, this study only focused on language which serves as one indicator to identify the characteristics of Christ claimants. Therefore, future studies may consider a critical type of analysis to find more information that can be used to illustrate the characteristics of Christ claimants.

## **Conclusion**

This paper viewed the language from the aboutness and communication style perspectives through the key linguistic features identified in the sermons of the existing Christ claimants, namely, Apollo Quiboloy (the leader of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ who views himself as the Appointed Son of God) and AJ Miller (the leader of Divine Truth who views himself as Jesus of Nazareth). Comparing their sermons to the gospels in the Christian Bible using keyness analyses allowed us to see whether the language in the sermons of these Christ claimants associate with the language of Jesus Christ found in the gospels. Viewing the language in the discourse of each Christ claimant may allow us to describe their characteristics. The language likely to associate with the gospels may suggest that a Christ claimant may display Christlike characteristics, and the language unlikely to associate with the gospels may indicate that a Christ claimant may display the characteristics of false Christ. The methodology and findings in this study offered insights into identifying the characteristics of Christ claimants based on the characteristics of language found in their discourses.

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