

‘All things are possible, if only you believe’: Ideology and Discourse Dimensions in Nigerian Neo-Pentecostal Sermons

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Abstract

The paper is a critical discourse analysis of Neo-Pentecostal Church (henceforth NPC) sermon in Nigeria. Three neo-Pentecostal churches were purposively selected and their messages collected over a period of six months through participant observation and from online sources. The titles and themes of the messages as well as the recurring utterances of the speakers were examined in order to find out the ideological imprint imbued in the sermons. Using van Dijk and Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis model, findings reveal that the titles and recurring themes reflect prevailing contemporary challenges experienced in the country which include; poverty, disease, family related problems, and “demonic oppressions” (or witchcraft). The paper concludes that language is an indispensable tool utilized by the NPC pastors (speakers) to negotiate and construct realities in the mind of adherents (hearers).

Keywords: *messages, pastors, neo-Pentecostals, churches, Critical Discourse Analysis*

Introduction

In the past decade, religion and politics have become two flourishing enterprises in Africa. The religious sector, being so prominent, has attracted the attentions of scholars from interdisciplinary perspective. In the 2015 ranking of ten richest pastors in the world, seven are blacks out of which five are Nigerian Pentecostal pastors with a Nigerian topping the list with a net worth of \$150million. (See <http://www.accra24.com/2015/03/2015-top-10-richest-pastors-in-world.html>). The headquarters of these churches are in Nigeria and attract pilgrims from every continent of the world who come for solution to their problems. These churches also have network of branches around the continents of the world. Interestingly, the wealth of these rich pastors (who coincidentally belong to the Pentecostal bloc) has not translated to the viability or wealth of the country and the continent in general.

The term “Pentecostal,” has its origin in the Jewish feast of the weeks of Pentecost. The emphasis of the Pentecostals is on a personal experience of God through the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” with evidence of “speaking in tongues.” They are known for advancing doctrines in prosperity and promotion of spiritual mechanisms of control that offer solutions to all life problems (Zink 2012). Their teachings are creatively patterned to attract greater patronage and participation of worshippers. Pentecostal messages revolve on solution to ALL contemporary challenges which are accessible if only one “believes”; thus, the borrowed title of the paper “*all things are possible, if only you believe*”. Themes on prosperity, healing, fertility, deliverance, etc. pervade the discourses of neo-Pentecostal sermons (here viewed as “messages,” usually transmitted from the speaker (pastor) to the hearers (congregation)). The neo-Pentecostal bloc constitutes one out of Uka’s (2007) three categorization of Pentecostal churches. Others are the African Independent Pentecostals and the Classical Pentecostals. Asamoah-Gyadu (2010) also used the term “charismatic Pentecostals” to refer to the same strand of Pentecostals. For the sake of consistency, we will stick to Uka’s nomenclature of “neo-Pentecostal.”

The messages of the Pentecostal pastors revolve on the theme of health and wealth; and they claim to have power for supernatural healing of every sicknesses and diseases, deliverance from supernatural oppression, poverty and wickedness, through prayer in the name of Jesus Christ (Uka 2007). Their activities have radically transformed the religious landscape in Nigeria. Some scholars have argued that their teachings distract worshippers from facing their contending challenges and taking collective responsibility in solving their problems (Gifford, 2004; Freeman, 2012; Deacon & Lynch, 2013).

Neo-Pentecostal pastors utilize language as an indispensable means for construction of realities, in order to attract new members as well as retain its membership. Pentecostal discourse as a speech genre is characterised by distinct ideological discourse forms which are transmitted during sermons, teachings and interaction among members. It is characterised by specialised language use which is shared by members of the group in the Nigerian and Diaspora congregations. Commenting on the concept of discourse as a reflection of the world, Fairclough notes that discourse is a “general way of representing the world” (Fairclough, 2003: 215) of which one of its domains of use is the religious sphere. Typical discourse

conventions are followed to construct certain discursive realities and to reflect their ideology by the religious group.

Every social institution is built on an ideology which controls their construction and perception of reality. The term 'Ideology' is shrouded by interdisciplinary perspectives and scopes which has made its definition tricky. Fairclough (2003: 218) however has this to say;

Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation. They may be enacted in ways of interaction (and therefore in genres) and inculcated in ways of being identities (and therefore styles). Analysis of texts...is an important aspect of ideological analysis and critique ...

Fairclough (2001) had noted that ideologies are institutionalized and portrayed through common sense assumptions, which people accept without questioning because the ideologies were imposed by their society which in this case is the Pentecostal church. Hence, religious sermons are processes of negotiating and constructing ideological conventions or of constructing a belief system, which most often are never contested, questioned or challenged. They are assumed to be laid down instructions from God to man of whom the Pastors are arbiters and conveyors of the messages; so religious ideologies are usually followed dogmatically.

This paper explores the nexus between language, religion and ideology from the Nigerian context with specific focus on the Pentecostal bloc of Christianity. It specifically examines the dominant styles in Pentecostal discourses; and how Pentecostal pastors use sermon as a linguistic genre to construct reality among the community of adherents. The tasks will be undertaken by exploring the prevailing themes, discourses and emotionally imbued ideological utterances that are used in their sacred spaces.

The paper utilizes van Dijk socio-cognitive approach to examine the triad relationship between discourse, cognition, and society and Fairclough (2010) socio-cultural approach which seeks to reveal the role of context in the construction and interpretation of the meaning of the discourses. Sermons, which are religious performance, are perceived here as dynamic constructs which are capable of bringing about new perception of reality and its consequent social change.

Literature Review

The intertwined relationship between language and religion has attracted the attention of researchers. Recently the works of Omoniyi (2006); Crystal (1965); Joseph (2004); Taiwo (2005, 2007, 2008); Chilwa (2010); Davis (2013) etc. have demonstrated that language provides outlet for the expression of religion and religiousness. Mar (1998) conducts a study on the language of prayer, noting that language use unveils the unique coding orientations of a social group. She observes that the various prayers from the diverse Christian groups reveal the disparity in relationship in the means and approach to God by different Christian groups. This view aligns with Crystal's opinion that the forms and functions of language use in religious practices are dependent on the pattern of belief of the adherents. These forms include silence, invocation, mediation; responses etc. (Crystal 1995: 371). The style of usage may vary depending on the preacher's view or mood and the situational context at the time of delivery. It may as well be as a result of the ideological base of the group, and the belief of the members of the group. The use of language in religious context is characterised by fluidity depending on the group, ideological leaning, programme, space, time, and context. The variation could be from "highly structured forms to completely impulsive and almost unpredictable one, also from verbal to non verbal, monologue to dialogue, silent and meditative ones, from tightly structured unison responses to spontaneous loudness" (see Crystal 1995:371).

Commenting on his theoretical study of *Religious language*, Keane (1997) insists that most religious traditions will require its adherents to interact with the invisible world in some respect using specific discursive forms and genres. Such religions also provide linguistic means to achieve such purpose. Du Bois (1986) came up with characteristics prevalent in ritual speeches, of which Keane (1997:52-53) divided into features of performance and of text, and an associated belief that ritual speech replicates how the ancestors spoke. The features of religious performance is made up of "marked voice quality, greater fluency relative to colloquial speech, stylized and restricted intonational contours, gestalt knowledge (speakers often learn texts as a whole and cannot recite them in parts), personal volition disclaimer (crediting a traditional source for one's words), avoidance of first and second person pronouns, and mediation through several speakers." These features most often divert obvious control of speech from the "individual proximate speaker", who is present at the time of speaking, to "some spatially, temporally, or ontologically more distant agent" (see also Urban 1989 in Keane 53).

Van Noppen's (1981) work focuses on critical theolinguistics which is a hybrid discipline interested in the study of the language of theology. His work contributes to the unveiling of how believers and non-believers misuse religious language for ideological purposes. He notes that due to the increasing infiltration of religious language into the public discourse of the contemporary society, it is necessary to scrutinize the "the nature of relationship between the intentional reference and its linguistic articulation and through highlighting the relevance of metaphor theory". (p.7). Wharry (2003: 221) studied 'sermonic expressions' by African American preachers, in an article entitled, "Amen and Hallelujah Preaching: Discourse functions in African American sermons." She argues that a major linguistic feature of African-American preachers is the insertion of 'Amen and Hallelujah' to denote textual changes, mark rhythm, and maintain a spiritual atmosphere.

There have equally been extensive researches on the language use in Christian religion services from the Nigerian perspective. Among these are; Taiwo's (2008) study of the "Discursive Practices in Nigerian Pentecostal Christian Songs," which utilizes Critical Discourse analytical framework. He noted that the recurring preaching of prosperity message of the charismatic churches and the socio-cultural practices of Nigerians had overwhelming influence in contemporary Christian songs. He observed that the socio-cultural experiences of the singers greatly influence the songs they sing. There is the expression of indigenous cultural practices in an erstwhile purely foreign religious practice. This results in the mixing of the contact languages of the worshippers

Awonuga and Chimunya (2016) looked at the syntactic devices in two Nigerian pastors, Paul Enenche and Chris Oyakhilome's sermons entitle 'The Mystery of the Blessing' and 'Spiritual Blessing' respectively. Their findings reveal that repetition, syntactic parallelism, rhetorical questions, imperative sentences and dependent clauses followed by independent sentences are the distinguishing linguistic characteristics of sermons in the Pentecostal context. Their work however, focused on the syntactic level of language use. Chilwa (2013) looked at how African Christianity is negotiated and practiced in the internet with emphasis on online worshippers in Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon. He noted that the worshippers view the forums as a sacred space solely for spiritual matters and not for sharing social or individual feelings and problems, and there is restricted interaction with one another as they would have been in offline worship.

From Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, Chilwa (2010) conducted a study on the "Discourse of Naming among Christian Charismatic Movements in Nigeria." He sees ideology as the "belief, socio-political and cultural conventions upon which people's actions and discursive practices are based." He observes that names are reflections of givers experiences and perception of the real world; and they also function as medium of "self-expression, cognitive consciousness and an ideological tool to sustain spiritual tradition" among the group. Hence the study examines how Pentecostal pastors represent and construct a belief system using discursive practices.

Of relevance to this work is Taiwo's (2007) study of language and ideology in newspaper headlines using Critical Discourse Analysis model. He noted that headlines that headlines are emotion-inducing strategy utilized by news editors to initiate, sustain and shape discourse views of the readers on national issues. He states that the term ideology "simply refers to attitudes, set of beliefs, values and doctrines with reference to religious, political, social and economic life, which shape the individual's and group's perception and through which reality is constructed and interpreted"(221). The present work draws heavily from Taiwo's approach but varies in research subjects and scope. While Taiwo concentrated on newspaper headlines, this work is on the themes and/titles of Pentecostal messages and their prevailing emotional induced utterances used to negotiate reality as well as imbue ideological conventions in the minds of the adherents. Every Pentecostal sermon discourse is imbued with certain ideologies which are constructed and transmitted to the hearers. The paper explores the nexus between languages and religion (Pentecostalism) from the CDA perspective. It specifically explores the recurring themes in Nigerian Pentecostal discourses; and probes into how language is used to mirror the socio-cultural experiences of Nigerians and as well as evoking listener's emotion in Nigerian Pentecostal discourses.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) provides a model for investigating the workings of language in social life. It seeks to address social problems and effect social changes. CDA is a theoretical framework for analysing empirical social data using linguistic models. It involves the analysis of oral, written and visual and multimodal texts (Wodak 2001, 2006). Various scholars have approached it from interdisciplinary perspective. While Wodak and Reisigl adopts a "discourse-historical approach"; Van Leeuwen looks at the

“social actors approach,” van Dijk (1995) on the other hand centres on text linguistics and “social-cognitive approach” while Fairclough, greatly influenced by M.K. Halliday’s functional linguistics focuses on Dialectal-Relation approach (socio-cultural analysis of discourses). These variations in approach notwithstanding, the core of CDA is on the study of discursive social problems. As the data for this study is on the investigation of how sermons are constructed to create reality and ideology, it will be useful to draw from van Dijk’s cognitive model and Fairclough’s socio-cultural approaches. Van Dijk’s model will help in the understanding of not only how dominance is expressed and legitimised but also how the powerful members of the society (in this case Pentecostal pastors) control and manipulate discourse (sermon) to bring about mind change (social change) to the listeners (van Dijk, 1995:2). Fairclough’s approach reveals the role of context in the construction and interpretation of the meaning of the discourses. He insists that the aim of CDA is “to produce interpretations and explanations of areas of social life which both identify the causes of social wrongs and produce knowledge which could (in the right condition) contribute to righting or mitigating them” (Fairclough 2010:8). It probes into what is wrong with a society (an institution, an organisation, etc) and how ‘wrongs’ might be ‘righted’ or mitigated from a particular normative standpoint (p.7). Fairclough (2010:94) provides a three dimensional analytical framework for exploring linkages in discourse event; Firstly, it is a spoken or written language. Secondly, it is an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of texts; and thirdly, it is a piece of social practice. Fairclough (2010) identifies three central tenets of CDA namely: social structure (class, status, age, ethnic identity and gender); culture (the generally accepted norms of behaviour in the society); and discourse (the words we use). The goal of CDA is to determine the relationship between these three central tenets (Taiwo 2007).

Methodology

The discussions of this paper is based on thirty two sermons collected from three Pentecostal churches in Nigeria over a period of six months to ensure consistency and adequacy of information. Most of the sermons were collected by participant observation by the researcher and the research assistants. Live streaming, YouTube and podcast versions of the messages were also collected to ensure accuracy and validity of data. These collected data are organised as follows; recurring theme of Pentecostal sermons; these are followed by the discussion on the identified categories of ideological construction in Nigerian Pentecostal discourses. Discussion of findings follows before the conclusion.

Analysis

Ideological discursive formation in the Neo-Pentecostal sermons

The Pentecostal church can be viewed here as an institution with identifiable discursive norms and being made up of different “ideological discursive formations” (IDFs) which is linked with the individual groups that make up the institution (Fairclough (2003:30). The members of the group (IDF which can be equated with a ‘speech community’), share common discursive norms which are usually entrenched in their ‘ideological norm’. Fairclough notes that sometimes the “institutional subjects are constructed in accordance with the norms of the IDF” which they may not know about its ideological foundation. Pentecostal sermons provide channels for transmission and transference of certain ideological discursive formations to members of the groups.

Pentecostal sermons are replete with ideology of divine health and prosperity. Fredrick (2005) in Uka (2007) referred to Pentecostal churches as ‘Wealth and Health Preachers’. Their messages are meant to build the hearers’ faith which is assumed to be a requirement to getting the needed solution to the person’s problems. For Pentecostals, once you have faith in God, your problems will be solved. The broad themes in Pentecostal sermons are summed up into these: Faith, Prosperity, Signs and Wonders. These include; healing, prosperity/breakthrough, fruitfulness, marital breakthrough, deliverance, among others. Thirty eight themes are available in this data which were obtained from selected Pentecostal church sermons. The themes will be categorized according to their discursive peculiarities and relevance (Chiluwa 2010). This is to elicit formal and implied meaning from the suppositions. The discursive value of the text will be explored to see how the text producers (pastors)’s social world is negotiated and transmitted to the listeners.

The themes are categorised as follows;

- Faith and positive confessional ideology
- Fruitfulness
- Deliverance and militarism discourse

- Divine health and healing
- Giving and volunteering services

a. 'Faithing it' and Ideological Confession

One of the cardinal features of the Pentecostal churches is faith and positive confession. They have been referred to by different scholars using nomenclatures like; i.) Prosperity Christianity; ii.) Health and Wealth Gospel; iii.) The Faith Movement; iv.) Name-it- and Claim-it etc. (Fredrick 2005 in Uka 2007). These references speak volume of their ideological imprint which is enshrined in their ideological positive confession and saying what you want to see. The concept of faith is embedded in positive confessional ideology where faith is the requirement for accessing one's wishes and desires. Members believe that "A close mouth is a close destiny", which means that you can have whatever you say or confess having. Pentecostals believe that they can command anything to happen and it will happen, once one has faith. Sicknesses can be cured by instructing them to go, poverty can be reversed by declaring "I can never be poor". One can score 'A' grade in examinations by saying "I cannot fail". This ideology is transmitted to the members who create imaginary world of possibilities. The neo-Pentecostal sermons are flavoured with faith provoking discourses aimed at building the listeners' faith. The utterances below are extracts from the preaching on the theme of faith and positive confession.

- i. *Whatever cannot be found in Jesus cannot be found in you*
- ii. *Your father cannot be a Most High, and you will be a most low.*
- iii. *As you speak from your spirit, the power starts oozing out of your body*
- iv. *Limitations are unreal, there have no foundation*
- v. *Keep saying it, don't stop talking it*
- vi. *If it is too big for you to say, then it will be too big for you to handle*
- vii. *Anything you say 'go', will go, anything you say come will come, you have the power in your tongue*

First statement above is an indication that once you are an adherent, you are already aligned to the family of Jesus Christ, who is the model of Christian faith. A believer is expected to have and display all that Jesus represents, like, living a sickness-free, debt-free, poverty-free, pressure-free etc lifestyle, in order to reflect the Jesus-like identity and supernatural lifestyle. This world view is conveyed to the listeners who are expected to display same.

In the second utterance, the speaker's and listeners' knowledge of the socio-cultural context of the utterance is imperative to the interpretation of the message. The listener needs to know the cultural significance, representations and connections between most high and most low places. One's knowledge of the preposition, their cultural relevance and connection are paramount to the interpretation of the message. The utterance reflects societal hierarchy with God being in the highest position of authority and power (most high) and the others (non believers) being in the lowest places that are associated with negative vices. Faith and positive confession are portrayed as requirement to move from the low places to high places. In African tradition, and Nigerian in particular, people in position of power and authority are celebrated, respected and revered. So people strive to be like them, and are desirous to leave their low places and attain the high places of life. Such statement is to meant to persuade the listener that he/she can actually change his/her social status, if only he/she believes, and by mere confessing it. The parallel juxtaposition of 'most high' and "most low" naturally appeals to the listeners' ideological sense. The discourse however downplays the essence of diligence as a requirement for greatness and wealth.

The extracts above were recurring utterance in the sermon titles listed below;

- i. *On my way to my high places*
- ii. *How to take possession of what belongs to you*
- iii. *Unveiling the mystery of four dimensional faith*
- iv. *The power of violent faith*
- v. *You can talk to everything*
- vi. *See things that don't exist*
- vii. *Educate your spirit man*
- viii. *When you believe*
- ix. *Step up your tongue*
- x. *Put the devil where he belongs*

- xi. Walking in the supernatural*
- xii. Renew your mind and get new way of thinking*
- xiii. Talk yourself to the top*
- xiv. Divine health banquet service*
- xv. Is there no balm in Gilead*
- xvi. Arise and be healed*

These sermons revolve on having an ‘above all’ mentality which is accessible by faith. The communicative intent of the addresser/ speaker is brought to bear with a deep reflection and preaching and build up of possibilities that can be surmounted by words spoken in faith. Words are ascribed with potency to perform action given the appropriate context of the situation (see Austin, 1962).

Omoniyi (2006) has noted that the present age is characterised by ‘multifaithism’ and freedom of faith whereby individuals have freedom to believe in anything they choose. The use of this faith imbued discourse has engendered an unusual craving for wealth ‘by all means’ since they believe they can make it, if only they have faith and declare it (Taiwo 2008) without recourse to hard work. This ideological shift largely contributes to the high rate of crime and other social vices in the society.

Fruitfulness Discourses

Most Pentecostal messages draw on the experiential knowledge of the socio-cultural context and experiences of the speaker and the listeners. Africans just like people from most societies value fruitfulness (procreation/child bearing), and childless marriages are regarded as failed and unsuccessful marriages. Children are regarded as heirs and successors to a man’s household. Childless men/women are scorned or pitied by members of the society. Men are scorned for having no successor to inherit their wealth; while women are always blamed for being responsible for the misfortune. A childless woman is ridiculed and may be pitied by others as there will be no one to take care of her in old age; she may be blamed for having been promiscuous and reckless while growing up, which has brought the evil on her. Childlessness in marriages is often blamed on women and that is why Pentecostalism is greatly patronized by them, as they either go to seek spiritual solution to their childless state or pray for their daughters, friends, sisters, or relations, from their religious/spiritual leaders.

Themes of fruitfulness pervade the discourse of Nigerian Pentecostals. For instance;

- i. Your father cannot be a baby maker and you will be a baby beggar*
- ii. You don’t need sperm count, all you need is God count*
- iii. Your spiritual parents are not barren so every root of barrenness in your life is destroyed now...*

In the first utterance, God is constructed as a ‘baby maker’ while those in need of babies are portrayed as ‘baby beggars’. The second utterance downplays the place of science in issues of fertility. It trivialises medical science and the functionality of viable spermatozoa in conception – thus ‘you don’t need sperm count’. There is promise of solution to women looking for the fruit of the womb. The term “fruit of the womb” is a metaphor mostly used in religious circles to denote fruitfulness or being blessed with the ability to have many children, “.all you need is God count”. The discourses do not suggest recourse to medical check up or intervention but is laden with the possibilities of faith. This idea, generally derived from overriding religious ideology and its consequence has exposed many women to diverse forms of violence. For instance, there are reported incidence of some women, who were violated and exploited by their so-called pastors with promise of giving them babies or solving their problems (<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2979585/Nigerian-pastor-arrested-impregnating-20-women-church-claims-God-commanded-sex-daughters.html>. 4 March 2015).

Childlessness in marriage is viewed seriously in African cultural context. It may lead to a man taking another wife (or wives) who are expected to bear children for him. It may also lead to illicit sexual relationship and its concomitant effects.

The following are titles of the sermons from where the utterances were drawn from;

- i. Fruitfulness banquet service*
- ii. Ye shall not be barren in the land*
- iii. Showers of blessings*
- iv. Never too late with God*

v. *Solution to all problems*

vi. *Mother of nation service*

The last title in this section “Mother of Nations service” captures the societal stereotyped blame of infertility on women. One may ask why there is no “father of nation’s service”? Societal expectations and impositions are also reflected even in the religious space.

Deliverance and discourse of militarism

Deliverance is one of the fundamental features of Pentecostalism. There is the metaphorical representation of life as warfare where one needs to fight and conquer in battles before one can attain greatness. Metaphors are rhetorical devices used to spice up speeches. Pentecostal discourses are flavoured with warfare / military discourses, and adherents are portrayed as being in constant wars with the kingdom of darkness (metaphysical world), grandfather’s house (ancestral ties), witches, old man/woman, etc. This is reflected in some of the themes below:

- a. *Crushing the siege*
- b. *Deep pit of bewitchment*
- c. *Breaking the siege*
- d. *Slumbering in the tent of your father*
- e. *Skeleton in Grandfather’s cupboard*
- f. *Dismantling prayer against your enemy*
- g. *No negotiation with the enemy*
- h. *Crumbling the yoke of idolatry*
- i. *Breaking the yoke of stagnation*
- j. *Mysterious battle of the dust*
- k. *Raw materials for fire*
- l. *The power of fearless life*
- m. *Lifting the embargo*
- n. *Deliverance of the feet*
- o. *Deliverance of the hand*
- p. *Your marriage and your ancestry*
- q. *War against delay*

The sermons above are pervaded with terms like ‘*siege*’, ‘*war*’, ‘*battle*’, ‘*yoke*’, ‘*embargo*’, ‘*power*’, ‘*embargo*’, ‘*negotiation with the enemy*’, ‘*Operation Massacre*’, ‘*Dismantling*’, etc. These sermons utilise metaphor to construct life as battle front, warzone where spiritual powers are needed to overcome the enemies assault. The speakers portray themselves as the spiritual messiahs to help the listeners achieve their desired goal which is deliverance from the oppression of their enemies. In the sermon entitled ‘Crushing the Siege’, the following were prevailing lines:

- i. *Any siege against any man shall scatter*
- ii. *Powers behind my siege, hear the word of the Lord, destroy yourself..*
- iii. *Every siege waged against your career and destiny shall scatter today*
- iv. *Some of you were followed here by your spiritual enemy, the angel of the lord will arrest those ‘follow follow’ powers*

The utterances above presuppose that there is a battle between the listeners and the enemy. The background knowledge of the context of situation is very important in the interpretation or meaning of the content of the sermons. The speaker paints a picture of a hearer in need of help or deliverance from spirits that are fighting against his/her destiny. There is use of Nigerian Pidgin reduplicated phrase ‘follow follow’ to bring the message home to the hearers on the activities of the evil spirits against their lives which can affect their career, family life and destiny.

Most titles in this category are messages tailored towards dealing with one’s ancestry which is believed to be a major setback to attaining his desired progress. Africans were portrayed by the colonial powers as pagans; as such there are the battles to free one from ancestral ties if he must access his blessings. There are believed to be witches who contend with people’s progress. That is why there are no natural deaths in Africa. Women are usually the victims and ‘*scapegoat-ed*’; they are blamed for being responsible for the death of their husbands or even children. They are called witches and one wonders where the wizards are in those

societies. Members build deep-rooted belief that all they need to get emancipated from life struggles are those prayers.

Discourse of Prosperity

The following are examples of prosperity imbued utterances captured in their sermons:

- i. *If you didn't go to school and you love God you will make it*
- ii. *Every limitation is broken today*

The first utterance in this section defies the slogan that education is the bedrock of any society. There is ranking of wealth (material possession) over educational attainment. This reflects the socio-cultural value that extols wealth over educational attainment. The rich and affluent members of the society are regarded as illustrious sons/daughter but those in the academia do not attract such admiration because they are not as wealthy and are not likely to spend their money on frivolities valued by the larger society. The text below reflects the ideological construct of the neo-Pentecostal churches which also reflect the socio-cultural value of the Nigerian people.

Our church is for all the people who believe that Jesus already paid for them to be rich and those who don't believe start believing when they see it happen in a lot of people's lives. We are not ashamed to be called the church of the rich because if they call your family poor, will you be excited? Even when a family is poor, they hate to be called poor. No man in his right mind enjoys being called poor and nobody truly wants to be poor, although people may pretend. (<http://www.nigerianwatch.com/news/4467-millionaire-pastorpruener-oyedepo-hits-back-at-critics-saying-god-made-him-rich>)

- iii. *I cannot be poor, poverty is of the devil*
- iv. *I will make it in Jesus name*
- v. *God is changing my level by all means*

These prevailing expressions bring about ideological shift in the mind of the listeners and members who consistently proclaim the expressions. They are made to keep saying and claiming the expressions/confessions in order to have solution to all their needs like their financial, health, employment, business breakthroughs, etc. New members are persuaded to keep attending the services in order to have their share of the prosperity. The excerpt below is a regular welcome charge to new members in most Pentecostal churches;

Keep coming, three months is too much for you to experience your desired change of level. He that walks with the wise shall be wise".

Giving as Condition for Prosperity, Blessings and Breakthroughs

People are encouraged to give their money, time, skill and expertise as channels for God to bless them. Offering time is always re-echoed with 'blessing time' in Nigerian Pentecostal churches. Adogame (2010) noted that people are more likely to part with their money and time if they are members of a religious group. Members are convinced that their "*escape from the current economic holocaust is by giving. Your giving will provoke a hundred fold blessing as well as exception platform for every covenant practitioner (giver)*" (excerpt from Sermon 2016).

The following are other extracts from sermons that bother on giving to the church;

- i. *God is not a robber. If he says it he will do it.*
- ii. *God is not a thank you God, he is a 'rewarder'.*
- iii. *God is not looking for who to use but who to bless*
- iv. *Financial prosperity does not answer to prayers , it answers to giving*

Members are also persuaded to give to the propagation of the work of the kingdom in the form of charity, tithes, project offering, prophet offering, partnership and other kingdom investments. Adherents willingly part with their money and other material offerings with expectation that it will come back to them in "*good measure, shaken together and running over*". They are excited to willingly part with their possessions because "*God loves a cheerful giver*". The metaphor of seed time and harvest time is always played back to them. Their money is the seed which they have to sow on the fertile ground (the church) to attract their bountiful harvest in due time. Without overt coercion, members are conditioned to keep giving even to the last drop in their hands.

- i. *If what you have in your hand is not enough, it is a seed sow it, and it will bring a bountiful harvest.*
- ii. *If it does not hurt you it is not sacrifice, and if it is not sacrificial, it is not acceptable.*
- iii. *For it to be acceptable, it must cost you something*
- iv. *You should never get tired of giving because it is the only channel for you to access your desired turnaround.*

Pentecostal sermons stress that the measure of one's giving determines the level/extent of one's harvest / blessing. So if one needs bountiful harvest, he is expected to give bountifully by sowing more seeds.

"Cast your bread upon water, and you will find it after so many days,.. did it say that you will find it after today or the next day?"

Audience responds ... No

"If you won't find it immediately what do you do?...."

Water it with your mouth and keep sowing, for the word of God says that you will definitely reap it. Keep sowing, keep waiting, God doesn't eat seeds, it must surely speak"

Volunteering is another form of giving prevalent in the Nigerian Pentecostal churches. Sermons are replete with expressions meant to persuade members into giving their time, skills and expertise to the propagation of the gospel. This is popularly known among Pentecostals as 'kingdom service'. This has contributed to their great success in the provision of health facilities, building of schools and universities, employment of young graduates to work as full pastors and office staff. Members are indoctrinated to render acceptable services to God a means of buying into God's heart to provide their blessings. Pentecostal churches in Nigeria cut across membership of different classes, ranging from professionals, captains of industries, academics and the artisans. In Living Faith Church (Winners Chapel), their pastors have at least a university degree in various academic disciplines. Most founders and presidents of the neo-Pentecostal pastors also have university degrees, For instance, Bishop David Oyedepo of the Living Faith Church (LFC) and Pastor Chris Oyakhilome of the Believers Love Word studied Architecture. The General overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Pastor Enoch A. Adeboye not only has a Bachelors (BSc.) degree in Mathematics from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria in 1967, but also MSc. Degree in Hydrodynamics and a Doctorate Degree (PhD) in Applied Mathematics, both from the University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria in 1969 and 1975 respectively. Pastor Kumuyi of Deeper Life Bible Church has a first class honours degree in Mathematics while Dr Daniel K. Olukoya, the General Overseer of the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries holds a first class Honours degree in Microbiology from the University of Lagos, Nigeria and a PhD in Molecular Genetics from the University of Reading, United Kingdom. As a researcher, he has over seventy scientific publications to his credit. (<http://www.mountainoffire.org.uk/index.php/about-mfm/dr-d-k-olukoya>).

Due to these conglomerate of men and women of diverse class and expertise, volunteer service thrives in the church and this has contributed to its widespread and overwhelming success. Sermons provide avenues for persuading members to sacrifice their time, money, skills, expertise and labour to serve in the house of God. Professionals like engineers, doctors, academics, lawyers, architects, teachers, etc offer their professional services at no charge since they are key into the prevailing ideology of the group. Even those that are not gainfully employed are enmeshed with the ideology to go out and keep bringing members (evangelism and soul winning) so that the God of prosperity can bless them. Below is another extract of a sermon:

If you love Jesus you have answers to all your needs

Let Jesus employ you and no employer will reject you

Loving God will take you from the back to the front.

If you work in Jesus' vineyard by bringing soul to His kingdom, you will command the same order of result that Jesus commanded, even greater works

Going out (on evangelism), will bring your desired miracle job, marriage, children, career breakthroughs, healing etc. It is opportunity for your desired change of story. As you harvest souls, God will give you harvest of testimonies, harvest of career breakthrough, etc. You will command the blessing of what eyes have not seen, ears heard (1Corinthian 2:9).

Contextualised biblical quotations are utilized as backings to justify and validate every instruction and ideological statement. This strategy appeals to the ideology of the listeners who readily buy into their rhetoric as divine instructions from God to man without challenging the rationale. This is because religion is dogmatic

and it is a misnomer to question the basis of 'divine' instructions from the leadership. Other instances of such discourses are below:

Love God in your corner and he will bring you to the open.

If you love God, you may not do any other thing on earth but you will make it.

We never heard of Solomon's academic laurel, but suddenly he became king. Solomon loved God and God took him to the front. 1 Kings 4: 29-34.

You are born into the kingdom to exhibit the kingdom. You are born by God to behave like God. Jesus lived victorious as a man of exploits. He was never perturbed. If you believe in me the works that I do you will do. And greater works shall you do. So as a believer you are to operate in a stress free zone of exploit. Jesus is the light so you are also light. Jesus said 'I am the light of the world.

"You are the light of the world" that means you are the pacesetter, trail blazer, pathfinder and reference point for others to follow.

The neo-Pentecostals utilize biblical quotations as backup to legitimise and justify their view and ideologies as well as ascribe power to their rhetoric.

Discourse of Parallelism/Allegorical Language Use

The pastors always appear and speak enthusiastically during sermon speech performances and there is liberty in the use of language in Pentecostal worship unlike in Catholic liturgy (see Crystal, 1965). Pentecostal preachers deploy various forms of figurative expressions to flavour their speeches as a means of appealing to the ideological common sense of the audience. Examples are expressions like:

- i. *There is no entitlement in title*
- ii. *Who you follow determines what follows you*
- iii. *If you go through the week without midweek service, you will end up weak*
- iv. *It is your mental picture that determines your actual picture*
- v. *To be thankful is to be 'tank-ful'*
- vi. *Even if you are a woman, you can be a woman but don't be womanish*

The ideological posture in the titles of the messages portrays the people (congregation/ listeners) as people in need, who have come to their ideological messiah (dominant power) to seek for help and solution to their problems. The messages of the NPC sermonic discourses are imbued with socio-cultural information which is meant to help the receivers develop or build their faith to getting their desired provisions as stated in the teaching. Generally, they offer promises of healing as against seeking medical attention; giving as requirement for financial emancipation instead of hard work, and that accounts for the high poverty rate in the continent even in the face of these high profiled millionaire pastors.

Conclusion

In the analysis of Pentecostal sermons, the issue of ideology and power relation is crucial in determining how the participants construct or perceive realities. In Critical Discourse study language is not just examined as a sign, means or channel of transfer or transmission of culture but it is perceived as a crucial force for shaping or reshaping a social institution or social practice. Findings reveal the ideological imprint of most Pentecostal sermons and the way the socio-cultural knowledge is construed in the themes and utterances of NPC. Prevailing and recurring themes addressed contemporary challenges like fertility, poverty, healing and health, and over all spiritual interventions and all-round breakthrough. Faith is constructed as the fundamental requirement for accessing breakthroughs if only one can believe and keep saying it. The titles of the messages reflect the socio-cultural value of the people which someone who is not conversant with the values may not appreciate the interpretative values enshrined in the messages, the purposes/intent and the expected outcome. The cultural belief of most of the ethnic groups which entails or stigmatizes women who have reached marriageable age without being married; and also views that childless marriages are unsuccessful and failed marriages, presupposes the overt need for the titles and purposes of the messages. There is appropriation of scriptures to appeal to contemporary situations and context. Their constructions are dynamic and opposite the liturgical, dogmatic and monotonous order of the historic churches thus the attraction and patronage they enjoy in Nigeria. This ideological reorientation and construction of reality in line with Foucault's (1988) subjectivization, leads to social transformation, which most often starts from the religious groups and gradually permeates into the bigger culture.

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