Journal of Innovative Research in Management and Humanities 7(1), June, 2026.
ISSN: 2141-8217.
https://journals.unizik.edu.ng/joirmah/about

Power, Persuasion and Ideology in Pentecostal Sermons in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis

(pp. 412-431.)

Kelechi Irene Ezeofor
Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze, Anambra State, Nigeria.
Correspondence email: ezeoforkelly8@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines the interplay of power, persuasion, and ideology in Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical and analytical framework. It investigates how linguistic choices in selected sermons construct religious authority, influence congregational interpretation, and reproduce dominant ideological meanings within contemporary Pentecostal Christianity. The study is anchored on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA and supplemented by Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to discourse and ideology. The data consist of six purposively selected Pentecostal sermons delivered in Nigeria between 2024 and 2026, which were analysed qualitatively at the levels of textual features, discursive practice, and social practice. Attention was paid to lexical choices, modality, intertextuality, rhetorical strategies, and directive speech acts as key discursive resources for meaning construction. Findings reveal that Pentecostal sermons consistently employ high-modality assertions, declarative statements, biblical intertextuality, and directive language to establish preacher authority and construct asymmetrical power relations between preacher and congregation. Persuasion is achieved through rhetorical questioning, repetition, contrastive framing, and conditional reward structures that link obedience and faith to divine favour, breakthrough, and success. Ideologically, the sermons reproduce belief systems centred on obedience, divine determinism, prosperity, and spiritual warfare, which are naturalised as unquestionable spiritual truths. The study further establishes that power, persuasion, and ideology operate as interconnected discourse mechanisms within Pentecostal sermon practice, where power legitimises authority, persuasion regulates audience response, and ideology sustains belief systems that shape social reality. The study concludes that Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria function not only as religious instruction but also as ideological instruments that influence cognition, behaviour, and social orientation, thereby reinforcing institutional authority within contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis; Pentecostal sermons; power; persuasion; ideology

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

INTRODUCTION

Language occupies a central position in religious communication because it functions not merely as a medium of transmitting spiritual messages but also as a mechanism for constructing realities, shaping beliefs, influencing social behaviour, and reproducing institutional authority. Within contemporary Christianity, Pentecostalism has emerged as one of the most linguistically dynamic religious movements globally and particularly in Nigeria, where its growth has significantly transformed religious practice, public communication, and sociocultural interaction. Nigerian Pentecostal sermons have increasingly become sites where discourse extends beyond spiritual instruction into ideological construction, persuasion, identity formation, and the negotiation of power relations.

Pentecostal preaching in Nigeria is characterised by high rhetorical intensity, performative language, emotional appeal, audience participation, and strategic deployment of linguistic resources to influence congregants' cognition and behaviour. Unlike traditional homiletic practices that primarily emphasise doctrinal exposition, contemporary Pentecostal sermons often incorporate narrative persuasion, prophetic declarations, metaphorical expressions, repetition, questioning, and interactive discourse patterns that facilitate audience alignment with particular worldviews and belief systems (Akinwotu 6–8). These discursive practices do not simply communicate religious messages; they shape interpretations of social realities, economic aspirations, morality, suffering, success, healing, and divine agency.

The increasing influence of Pentecostal churches within Nigeria's religious and public sphere has generated scholarly interest across linguistics, religious studies, sociology, and discourse analysis. Existing studies reveal that Nigerian Pentecostal discourse frequently reflects broader societal concerns such as poverty, insecurity, health crises, family instability, and aspirations for social mobility. Sermons often reconstruct these experiences through theological narratives that redefine ordinary social conditions as manifestations of spiritual warfare, divine testing, or opportunities for miraculous intervention (Emeka-Nwobia). Through such processes, language becomes a strategic instrument through which religious leaders establish authority and legitimise ideological positions.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides an appropriate framework for interrogating these communicative processes because it examines how discourse reproduces power relations, constructs ideology, and influences social consciousness. CDA moves beyond the surface structure of language to investigate the interconnectedness between textual choices and broader socio-political contexts. Scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk maintain that discourse constitutes an arena where dominance, inequality, and ideological interests are negotiated and sustained through linguistic choices (Fairclough; van Dijk). From this perspective, sermons become discursive events in which religious authority is enacted and institutional power is reproduced.

Power in Pentecostal sermons operates in multiple dimensions. First, there is discursive power, where preachers control interactional patterns and determine acceptable

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

interpretations of scripture and social reality. Second, there is symbolic power, manifested through claims of divine legitimacy and prophetic authority. Third, there is persuasive power, achieved through rhetorical and pragmatic strategies designed to secure congregational consent and participation. Research on Nigerian Pentecostal sermons demonstrates that preachers frequently employ direct commands, rhetorical questions, repetition, metaphorical framing, experiential narratives, and authoritative declarations to strengthen persuasion and encourage ideological alignment among listeners (Akinwotu 10–14).

Ideology within Pentecostal discourse should not be viewed solely in political terms but as systems of belief that organise social understanding and direct behavioural expectations. Through sermons, religious ideologies are naturalised and presented as divine truths rather than socially situated interpretations. Consequently, discourse becomes an influential site where meanings are produced and accepted. Nigerian Pentecostal preaching often positions prosperity, spiritual warfare, obedience, faith, and divine favour as explanatory frameworks for interpreting social experiences and achieving transformation (Emeka-Nwobia).

Despite growing scholarship on religious discourse in Nigeria, existing studies have predominantly focused on rhetorical structures, pragmatic functions, communicative intentions, and discourse organisation of sermons. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how power relations, persuasive mechanisms, and ideological constructions intersect within Pentecostal sermon discourse through a Critical Discourse Analytical lens (Okpeh and Nnamele). This creates a scholarly gap requiring systematic investigation.

Against this background, this study investigates power, persuasion, and ideology in Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria using Critical Discourse Analysis. The study seeks to uncover the linguistic and discursive strategies through which Pentecostal preachers establish authority, shape audience perceptions, and reproduce particular ideological positions. By examining selected Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, the study contributes to expanding scholarship on religious discourse and offers insight into the broader relationship between language, religion, and social influence in contemporary Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Pentecostal Christianity has emerged as one of the most influential religious movements in contemporary Nigeria, with sermons occupying a central position in shaping religious consciousness, social attitudes, and behavioral orientation among adherents. Beyond their spiritual function, Pentecostal sermons increasingly serve as sites for constructing realities, legitimizing authority, negotiating identities, and transmitting systems of belief. Through carefully selected linguistic choices, preachers are able to influence audience perception, secure ideological alignment, and reinforce institutional authority. Consequently, Pentecostal sermons present an important domain for investigating the relationship among language, power, persuasion, and ideology.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

Scholarly attention has been devoted to Nigerian Pentecostal discourse from different linguistic and discourse-analytical perspectives. Existing studies have explored ideological representation in Pentecostal sermons Emeka-Nwobia (2017), rhetorical and pragmatic strategies in sermon discourse Akinwotu (2021), discourse organization and interactional structures in religious communication Adedun and Mekiliuwa (2010), metaphorical and ideological constructions in Pentecostal language use Okpeh and Ibileye (2023), as well as broader discourse practices in Nigerian sermon communication Mekiliuwa (2021). These studies have made significant contributions to understanding religious language and communicative behavior within Pentecostal settings in Nigeria.

However, despite these scholarly contributions, existing studies appear to have treated the linguistic dimensions of Pentecostal sermons largely from isolated perspectives. Much attention has been given to rhetorical effectiveness, discourse patterns, pragmatic intentions, metaphorical expressions, and ideological manifestations, while relatively limited attention has been paid to examining the intersection of power, persuasion, and ideology as interconnected discursive mechanisms within Pentecostal sermon discourse. Consequently, there remains insufficient understanding of how authority is linguistically enacted, how persuasive strategies function to secure audience compliance, and how ideological positions are normalised and reproduced through sermon practices.

Furthermore, available studies have not sufficiently demonstrated how these three variables, power, persuasion, and ideology, operate simultaneously within the Nigerian Pentecostal context using Critical Discourse Analysis as an integrated analytical framework. This creates a conceptual and methodological gap in scholarship on religious discourse in Nigeria.

It is this identified gap that motivates the present study. Therefore, this study investigates Power, Persuasion and Ideology in Pentecostal Sermons in Nigeria: A Critical Discourse Analysis with the aim of uncovering the discursive strategies through which Pentecostal preachers establish authority, persuade audiences, and reproduce ideological meanings within contemporary Nigerian religious communication.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is built around three major concepts that constitute the focus of the study: power, persuasion, and ideology. These concepts are examined within the context of Pentecostal sermon discourse in Nigeria to explain how language functions as a medium through which authority is exercised, meanings are negotiated, and religious worldviews are reproduced. The discussion below presents each concept independently before demonstrating its interrelationship within the study.

Power

Power is a multidimensional concept that has attracted scholarly attention across linguistics, sociology, discourse studies, and communication studies. Within discourse studies, power is generally understood as the capacity of individuals or institutions to influence, control, regulate, or shape the behaviour, beliefs, and actions of others through language and social interaction.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

According to Fairclough (2010), discourse constitutes a social practice through which relations of power are produced and maintained. This perspective suggests that language does not merely reflect social realities but actively contributes to constructing and sustaining social structures. Similarly, van Dijk (2008) explains that discursive power operates through access to communication, control of knowledge, and regulation of meaning.

Within religious discourse, power manifests through institutional legitimacy and symbolic authority. Preachers often occupy privileged communicative positions that allow them to interpret scripture, define acceptable beliefs, establish behavioural expectations, and guide audience understanding of reality. This form of authority extends beyond formal institutional control into symbolic influence, where congregants accept particular meanings as legitimate because they are presented within recognised religious structures.

In Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria, power is commonly exercised through scriptural interpretation, prophetic declarations, directives, testimonial narratives, repetition, and interactional control. The preacher determines discourse direction while the audience largely assumes a responsive position. Such communicative arrangements position sermon discourse as an important site for examining how authority is constructed and maintained through language.

For the purpose of this study, power refers to the linguistic and discursive capacity of Pentecostal preachers to establish authority, shape interpretations, and influence audience responses during sermon delivery.

Persuasion

Persuasion refers to the strategic use of language to influence attitudes, beliefs, values, and actions. Unlike coercion, persuasion relies primarily on communication and symbolic influence to secure acceptance and compliance.

Persuasion occupies a central position in religious communication because sermons are intended not merely to inform but also to transform listeners. Aristotle's rhetorical tradition identifies persuasion as a process involving logical appeal, emotional appeal, and speaker credibility. Contemporary discourse scholars similarly view persuasion as a communicative practice achieved through deliberate linguistic choices.

In sermon discourse, persuasive communication is realised through various rhetorical and discourse strategies such as repetition, metaphor, rhetorical questions, direct address, narratives, emotional appeal, inclusive pronouns, scriptural citation, promises, warnings, and performative declarations. These strategies encourage audience participation and facilitate alignment with the preacher's intended message.

Nigerian Pentecostal sermons particularly demonstrate strong persuasive orientation because preaching frequently targets behavioural change, spiritual commitment, economic aspiration, moral reform, healing expectations, and faith reinforcement. Through persuasive language, preachers attempt to secure audience belief and encourage acceptance of specific interpretations of religious and social realities.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

Within this study, persuasion refers to the deliberate linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms employed by Pentecostal preachers to influence audience perception, encourage compliance, and promote acceptance of intended meanings.

Ideology

Ideology is generally understood as a structured system of beliefs, values, assumptions, and worldviews that shape how individuals interpret and respond to social realities. Within Critical Discourse Analysis, ideology is viewed as socially constructed and reproduced through discourse practices.

Van Dijk (1998) conceptualises ideology as a cognitive framework that organises group beliefs and influences social behaviour. Fairclough (2003) further argues that discourse contributes significantly to the production and naturalisation of ideological meanings within society. Ideology therefore becomes visible through recurring patterns of language use that legitimise particular social positions and ways of understanding reality.

In religious discourse, ideology manifests through doctrinal assumptions, belief systems, value orientations, and institutional narratives. Pentecostal sermons often transmit ideological meanings concerning prosperity, divine favour, obedience, faith, spiritual warfare, healing, morality, and human destiny. Through repeated exposure to these discourse patterns, audiences gradually internalise such perspectives as acceptable frameworks for interpreting life experiences.

Within Nigerian Pentecostal contexts, ideological meanings are frequently embedded in scriptural interpretation, prophetic speech, testimonial constructions, and theological explanations of social conditions. Consequently, sermons become sites where religious ideologies are continuously negotiated and reproduced.

For this study, ideology refers to the underlying systems of belief and meaning constructed and sustained through Pentecostal sermon discourse.

Relationship among Power, Persuasion, and Ideology

Although discussed separately for conceptual clarity, power, persuasion, and ideology operate as interconnected discourse processes within Pentecostal sermons. Power establishes authority and legitimacy, persuasion provides communicative strategies for influencing audiences, while ideology represents the belief systems that emerge and become sustained through discourse.

This study, therefore, conceptualises Pentecostal sermon discourse as a dynamic process in which language serves as a resource for exercising authority, persuading congregants, and reproducing ideological meanings. Critical Discourse Analysis provides the analytical framework through which these relationships are examined.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the discourse analytical perspectives advanced by Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk. Critical Discourse Analysis provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for this study because it examines the relationship between language, power, ideology, and social

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

practice. Since the present study investigates how Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria enact power, achieve persuasion, and reproduce ideological meanings through discourse, CDA offers a suitable analytical framework for explaining these relationships.

Critical Discourse Analysis emerged as an interdisciplinary approach to discourse study in the late twentieth century through the contributions of scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, Ruth Wodak, and other critical linguists. Unlike traditional discourse approaches that focus primarily on linguistic structure, CDA investigates how language functions within broader social, political, cultural, and institutional contexts. The central assumption of CDA is that discourse is not neutral but is shaped by relations of power and systems of ideology operating within society.

According to Fairclough (1995), discourse should be understood as a form of social practice through which social identities, relationships, and systems of knowledge are constructed and maintained. Fairclough argues that language both reflects and shapes social realities, making discourse an important site for examining unequal power relations and ideological formations. His model of Critical Discourse Analysis consists of three interrelated dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual dimension focuses on linguistic features within discourse including vocabulary, grammatical structures, cohesion, rhetorical choices, and interactional patterns. This level examines how specific linguistic choices contribute to the construction of meaning. The dimension of discursive practice concerns the processes involved in producing, distributing, and interpreting discourse. It examines how texts are created, consumed, and negotiated within particular institutional and communicative contexts. The social practice dimension situates discourse within wider social and ideological structures. At this level, attention is directed toward how discourse reproduces or challenges systems of authority, belief, and social organisation.

While Fairclough emphasises discourse as social practice, van Dijk (1998; 2008) extends Critical Discourse Analysis by focusing on the relationship among discourse, cognition, and society. Van Dijk argues that ideology operates through shared social beliefs that influence interpretation and communication. According to his socio-cognitive approach, discourse functions as a medium through which dominant groups shape public knowledge, construct social meanings, and maintain influence over audiences.

Within religious communication, Critical Discourse Analysis assumes that sermons are not merely spiritual texts but discursive events embedded within institutional structures and systems of meaning. Religious leaders possess symbolic authority, which allows them to define realities, influence interpretations, and shape behavioural expectations through language. Through repeated discourse practices, ideological meanings become naturalised and accepted by audiences. The relevance of Critical Discourse Analysis to this study lies in its capacity to explain how Pentecostal sermon discourse operates as a site where authority is exercised, persuasion is achieved, and ideology is reproduced. Nigerian Pentecostal sermons frequently employ rhetorical devices, scriptural legitimisation, prophetic declarations, interactional strategies, and persuasive language that extend beyond religious instruction into broader social meaning-making.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

This study, therefore, adopts Critical Discourse Analysis as its theoretical framework because it provides analytical tools for examining how linguistic choices in selected Pentecostal sermons construct power relations, influence congregational responses, and sustain ideological positions within contemporary Nigerian religious discourse.

Empirical Studies

Empirical studies on Pentecostal sermon discourse in Nigeria have attracted scholarly attention across discourse analysis, pragmatics, rhetoric, and religious communication. Existing studies demonstrate growing interest in understanding how language functions within religious contexts; however, the analytical concerns and methodological orientations vary considerably.

Emeka-Nwobia (2017) examined ideology and discourse dimensions in Nigerian neo-Pentecostal sermons using Critical Discourse Analysis. The study selected sermons from three neo-Pentecostal churches and analysed sermon themes, recurring utterances, and ideological constructions embedded in religious communication. Findings revealed that sermon discourse reflected prevailing social concerns such as poverty, disease, family instability, and spiritual oppression while simultaneously constructing realities that shaped congregants' interpretation of social experiences. The study concluded that language functions as a powerful instrument through which religious meanings are negotiated and maintained. Although the study provided valuable insight into ideological representation within Pentecostal discourse, its emphasis remained largely on ideology and did not sufficiently account for how persuasion and power operate simultaneously within sermon practices.

Akinwotu (2021) investigated selected Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria from a pragma-rhetorical perspective. Drawing on rhetoric and pragmatic act theory, the study analysed twelve sermons with the objective of identifying persuasive strategies and communicative intentions employed by Pentecostal preachers. Findings indicated extensive use of rhetorical questions, direct commands, repetition, structural parallelism, metaphor, experiential narratives, and logical argumentation as persuasive resources. The study also revealed that preachers construct authority by adopting performative and directive communicative roles. While this study advanced understanding of persuasion in Pentecostal sermons, its analytical concern was predominantly rhetorical and pragmatic, leaving relatively unexplored the ideological implications and broader power structures embedded in sermon discourse.

Adedun and Mekiliuwa (2010) explored discourse features and patterns in a Nigerian Pentecostal Christian sermon. The study focused on linguistic organisation and communicative structures evident in sermon performance. Through discourse analysis, the researchers identified interactional patterns, textual organisation, and communicative conventions that characterise Pentecostal preaching. Their findings established that sermon discourse demonstrates systematic linguistic organisation influenced by contextual and institutional factors. Nevertheless, the study concentrated more on structural discourse

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

patterns and offered a limited explanation of how linguistic choices function to reproduce ideological meanings and establish authority relations.

Okpeh and Amadi (2020) conducted a discursive analysis of selected prayers of a Nigerian Pentecostal cleric. Although centred on prayer discourse rather than sermon discourse, the study investigated rhetorical devices and pragmatic functions embedded in Pentecostal religious communication. Using Gricean pragmatic principles, the researchers identified numerous rhetorical patterns that contributed to persuasive religious communication and audience engagement. Their findings demonstrated that religious discourse frequently relies on strategic language use to influence interpretation and response. However, the study focused primarily on prayer performance and did not provide an integrated analysis of power, persuasion, and ideology within sermon discourse.

Agho (2024) examined conversational discourse strategies in selected Nigerian Pentecostal church sermons using conversational analysis. The study analysed how Pentecostal preachers utilise conversational techniques to engage audiences and facilitate participation during sermon delivery. Findings showed that sermon discourse contains features such as turn-taking, elicitation, storytelling, declarations, and interactional sequencing, challenging the assumption that sermons function exclusively as monologic communication. While the study broadened understanding of interactional dimensions of Pentecostal sermons, it paid limited attention to the ideological and power-related implications of these discourse strategies.

The foregoing studies collectively demonstrate that Nigerian scholarship has substantially contributed to understanding Pentecostal religious discourse from ideological, rhetorical, pragmatic, structural, and conversational perspectives. However, available studies largely examine these dimensions independently. There remains insufficient empirical attention to the integrated operation of power, persuasion, and ideology within Pentecostal sermon discourse using Critical Discourse Analysis as a unified analytical framework.

The present study therefore differs from previous studies by examining how linguistic choices in selected Pentecostal sermons simultaneously enact authority, persuade audiences, and reproduce ideological meanings within contemporary Nigerian religious communication.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design because the objective of the study is not to measure variables statistically but to investigate how linguistic choices in Pentecostal sermons construct power relations, achieve persuasion, and reproduce ideological meanings. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows for detailed textual interpretation and contextual examination of discourse within naturally occurring communicative settings.

The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as both the theoretical and analytical approach. Critical Discourse Analysis is suitable for this study because it facilitates the examination of the relationship between language use and broader social

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

practices, particularly how discourse reflects and sustains systems of authority, influence, and ideology.

The population of the study consists of Pentecostal sermon discourse in Nigeria. Since it is impractical to examine all Pentecostal sermons, the study purposively selects sermons from recognised Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. Purposive sampling is adopted because it enables the researcher to select sermon texts that contain rich linguistic and ideological features relevant to the objectives of the study.

The sample for the study comprises six purposively selected sermons drawn from three Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, with two sermons selected from each church. Selection is guided by criteria such as accessibility of sermon recordings or transcripts, popularity of the preacher, relevance of sermon themes to social and religious issues, and evidence of persuasive and ideological discourse features. The selected sermons are limited to sermons delivered from 2024 to 2026 to capture contemporary Pentecostal discourse practices.

Data for the study are obtained from publicly accessible sermon recordings and, where available, official sermon transcripts. Sermons delivered in English constitute the primary data source to ensure consistency in linguistic analysis. Audio materials are transcribed where necessary, and only the sermon content delivered by the preacher is subjected to detailed analysis.

The method of data analysis is qualitative textual analysis using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Analysis is conducted at three interconnected levels. The first level focuses on textual analysis, examining lexical choices, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices, modality, repetition, pronoun use, metaphor, and other discourse features. The second level examines discursive practice by analysing patterns of sermon production and interpretation as communicative events. The third level investigates social practice by interpreting how sermon discourse reflects and reproduces broader systems of power, persuasion, and ideology within Nigerian Pentecostal contexts.

To strengthen analytical validity, extracts selected for analysis are chosen based on their relevance to the study objectives and are interpreted within their immediate communicative and sociocultural contexts. Findings are presented through textual excerpts followed by discourse interpretation and critical explanation.

The study is limited to selected Pentecostal sermons in Nigeria and does not attempt to generalise findings to all Christian denominations or all forms of religious communication. Rather, it seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of how discourse operates within the selected religious context.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data 1

Title: "The Power of Faithful Stewardship"
Church: Inspiration Chapel International, Lagos
Preacher: Rev. Daniel Akinola

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

Date: 16th June, 2026

Excerpt:

Beloved in Christ, today we are called to reflect on the divine principle of stewardship, a truth that persuasion does not force but gently appeals to the heart. God does not coerce obedience; rather, He invites us into a covenant of trust and faithfulness. One of the clearest expressions of this trust is the practice of tithing. When we return to God a portion of what He has blessed us with, we acknowledge Him as the true source of our provision. Tithing is not merely a financial duty; it is an act of worship, gratitude, and spiritual alignment. I therefore persuade you, as a shepherd of God's flock, to see beyond obligation and embrace revelation. The windows of blessing are often tied to the obedience of faith. When believers honor God with their substance, they position themselves for divine supply and stability. Do not allow fear or doubt to hinder your obedience. Let love for God and His kingdom guide your giving. As we respond faithfully, we participate in the advancement of His work on earth. May your heart be persuaded by grace, and may your hands be open in worship. Amen.

Data Analysis

The discourse situates tithing within a Pentecostal prosperity theology that redefines economic practice as spiritual obedience and covenantal engagement with divine blessing.

CDA Analysis (Fairclough and van Dijk)

The sermon employs a strategic combination of modality and lexical elevation to naturalise financial giving as a spiritual obligation. Expressions such as "divine principle of stewardship" and "windows of blessing" reflect nominalisation, transforming material economic actions into abstract theological constructs that resist contestation. The contrastive framing between "coercion" and "invitation" constructs ideological consent by presenting obedience as voluntary, thereby masking institutional influence within affective persuasion.

High-modality directives such as "do not allow fear" and "let love guide" function as indirect regulatory mechanisms that shape audience behaviour while maintaining a pastoral tone. The preacher's self-positioning through "I therefore persuade you" reveals controlled authority disguised as spiritual guidance, reinforcing asymmetrical power relations in sermon interaction.

Discursively, persuasion is embedded within theological reasoning, where financial contribution is reinterpreted as spiritual participation. This reduces potential resistance by reframing economic obligation as moral and spiritual alignment.

From a social practice perspective, the sermon reproduces Nigerian Pentecostal prosperity ideology, which links financial obedience to divine reward systems and positions the church as the intermediary of blessing. This reinforces institutional authority and legitimises existing religious-economic structures.

In van Dijk's socio-cognitive terms, the sermon constructs shared mental models in which giving is normalised as spiritual investment rather than economic loss. Repeated

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

associations between obedience, blessing, and divine supply shape collective belief systems that naturalise tithing as both a moral duty and a pathway to prosperity.

Interpretation of Power, Persuasion, and Ideology

Power is exercised through moral authority and institutional legitimation. Persuasion operates through affective modulation and theological reframing of economic practice. Ideology is reproduced through prosperity-based belief systems that equate financial obedience with divine reward and stability.

Data 2

Title: "Breaking Generational Bondage and Enforcing Victory in Christ"
Church: Inspiration Chapel International, Lagos
Preacher: Pastor Dede Okula
Date: 15th February, 2024

Excerpt:

Beloved in Christ, I welcome you into a season of revelation and victory. You must understand that your Christian journey is not a passive experience but a spiritual battle. The Bible makes it clear that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, and spiritual forces of darkness. There are forces that resist destinies. There are patterns that follow families from generation to generation. But in the name of Jesus Christ, every generational bondage is broken today. You are not a victim of your background. You are not limited by your family history. Through the blood of Jesus, you have been redeemed from every curse. Therefore, I declare over your life: every demonic limitation is destroyed. But you must rise in faith. You must engage spiritual authority. You must enforce what Christ has already accomplished. Victory is not automatic; it is enforced through prayer, through the Word, and through bold faith declarations. Do not tolerate what Christ has already defeated. Sickness is not your portion. Delay is not your identity. Failure is not your destiny. You must reject every voice that contradicts your victory in Christ. As a believer, you are seated with Christ in heavenly places, far above principalities and powers. This means you operate from a position of authority, not defeat. Speak it. Declare it. Enforce it. I therefore decree that every chain is broken. Every inherited limitation is destroyed. Every spiritual opposition is scattered in the name of Jesus. Walk in victory. Walk in dominion. Walk in the fullness of your inheritance in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Data Analysis

The discourse reflects Pentecostal spiritual warfare ideology, where lived experiences are interpreted through a binary opposition between divine authority and demonic forces.

CDA Analysis (Fairclough and van Dijk)

The excerpt constructs a conflict-driven worldview through adversarial lexical choices such as "bondage," "curses," and "victory," which ideologically frame social and personal challenges as spiritual conditions. High-modality directives ("must," "are

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

instructed") reduce interpretive flexibility and position the preacher as an authoritative mediator of spiritual knowledge.

Material action verbs such as "break," "reject," and "enforce" create a sense of urgency and agency, constructing believers as active participants in spiritual confrontation. At the same time, nominalisation of structural issues into terms like "generational curses" shifts causality from socio-economic conditions to supernatural explanations, reinforcing ideological abstraction.

Discursively, the sermon blends theological and militaristic registers, producing an interdiscursive "warfare" frame that enhances persuasion through emotional intensity and moral urgency. Socially, it reproduces Pentecostal ideology that privileges spiritual causation as the primary explanatory model for life events while reinforcing institutional reliance on religious authority.

From a socio-cognitive perspective, the discourse constructs shared mental models in which adversity is normalised as spiritual attack, shaping collective belief systems and reinforcing in-group identity. Power is exercised through control of interpretive frameworks, persuasion through directive modality and fear-based contrast, and ideology through the naturalisation of spiritual warfare as lived reality.

Data 3

Title: "Walking in Covenant Obedience and Kingdom Authority"
Church: Church of Believers International
Preacher: Rev. Charity Zungo
Date: 10th March, 2025

Excerpt:

Beloved, God has called you into a covenant of obedience and authority in Christ. You are not ordinary; you are a representative of heaven on earth. Therefore, refuse disobedience, for it disconnects you from divine alignment. Walk in submission to God's word, and you will experience consistent breakthroughs. I decree over your life that every resistance is broken. As you obey, doors will open, and favour will locate you. The kingdom responds to obedience, not excuses. Stand firm in faith, declare God's promises, and enforce your victory. You are empowered to reign in life through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Data Analysis

The discourse reflects Pentecostal covenant theology in which spiritual authority, obedience, and divine reward are tightly interwoven within a kingdom-oriented worldview.

CDA Analysis (Fairclough and van Dijk)

The excerpt constructs authority through high-modality declaratives such as "you are," "refuse," and "I decree," which eliminate ambiguity and position the preacher as a legitimising voice of divine intention. The lexical field of authority ("covenant," "kingdom," "representative," "empowered") reinforces institutionalised spiritual hierarchy and identity construction.

Material and directive verbs such as "walk," "refuse," "stand," and "enforce" foreground action, constructing believers as disciplined agents required to perform

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

obedience. Conditional structures linking obedience to outcomes ("as you obey, doors will open") encode ideological causality, where spiritual compliance is directly tied to material and experiential reward.

Discursively, the sermon operates as a hybrid of prophetic declaration and didactic instruction, reducing dialogic space and strengthening preacher authority. The repetitive use of second-person address ("you") intensifies interpellation, directly positioning the audience within the discourse of obligation and promise.

Socially, the sermon reproduces Pentecostal ideology of covenant reciprocity, where divine favour is constructed as contingent upon human obedience. This reinforces institutional authority and legitimises religious leadership as mediator of access to divine blessings.

From a socio-cognitive perspective, the discourse constructs shared mental models in which obedience is equated with prosperity and divine access, while disobedience signals exclusion. Power is exercised through authoritative decrees, persuasion through conditional reward structures, and ideology through the normalization of covenant-based causality in spiritual life.

Data 4

Title: "The Price of Divine Alignment"
Preacher: Pastor Daniel Chukwuebuka Nwafor
Church: Streams of Dominion Pentecostal Assembly
Date: 14 July 2024

Excerpt

Church, hear this truth today: God is not moved by noise; He is moved by alignment. Many believers want results without surrender, breakthrough without discipline, and divine lifting without divine order. The Bible says, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." Notice that Scripture does not say if you are emotional, talented, or connected. It says willing and obedient. There is a generation that wants crowns but rejects process. They want testimony without sacrifice. But God does not promote rebellion. Ask yourself today: who is directing your decisions—God or your desires? When heaven gives instruction, delay becomes resistance. Partial obedience is hidden disobedience. Some people are praying for open doors while living with closed ears. You cannot reject divine order and expect divine favour. From today, align your words, your associations, your giving, your conduct, and your thinking with God's purpose. The world will tell you to follow your heart, but I tell you to follow truth. The enemy wins when believers become comfortable with compromise. Stand up and declare: "Lord, align my life with Your will." As you align, confusion will leave, opportunities will come, and your next season shall open. Your obedience will speak louder than your prayers. In Jesus' name.

Data Analysis

This sermon excerpt reveals the interconnection of power, persuasion, and ideology in Pentecostal discourse. Through authoritative and directive language, the

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

preacher constructs spiritual authority and positions himself as a legitimate interpreter of divine expectations.

Power is enacted through declarative expressions such as "God is not moved by noise; He is moved by alignment" and "God does not promote rebellion." These statements present religious claims as unquestionable truths and establish asymmetrical relations between preacher and congregation. The preacher assumes the role of defining acceptable Christian conduct and the conditions for divine approval.

Persuasion is achieved through rhetorical contrast, imperatives, and conditional promises. Expressions such as "Ask yourself today: who is directing your decisions, God or your desires?" and "Stand up and declare" directly involve the audience and encourage self-evaluation and behavioural commitment. The sermon further persuades through reward-based language by linking obedience to positive outcomes: "confusion will leave, opportunities will come, and your next season shall open." This constructs compliance as desirable and spiritually beneficial.

Ideologically, the sermon promotes an ideology of divine alignment and obedience, where spiritual success is represented as dependent on submission to God's order. Binary oppositions such as alignment/disobedience, truth/world, and obedience/rebellion simplify moral choices and position obedience as the only legitimate pathway to transformation. The biblical citation "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land" functions as intertextual legitimation, reinforcing the message with scriptural authority.

Data 5

Preacher: Pastor Miriam Ezinne Okorie
Church: Streams of Dominion Pentecostal Assembly
Title of Sermon: Who Controls Your Tomorrow?
Date: 22nd February, 2026

Excerpt:

People of God, there is a battle taking place every day—not merely for your money or your time, but for your thinking. The person who controls your thoughts eventually influences your future. Many believers say they trust God, yet they depend more on fear than on faith. God did not create you to be directed by trends, opinions, or public pressure. Listen carefully: your tomorrow is not decided by circumstances; it is shaped by the authority you submit to. Submission is not weakness—it is direction. There are voices competing for your attention: culture, social media, friends, fear, and faith. Every voice carries an agenda. The question is not whether you are being influenced. The question is: who is influencing you? If God speaks and you negotiate, confusion begins. When God leads, trust becomes your responsibility.Stop feeding anxiety and start feeding conviction. Do not build your future on emotion. Today I challenge you: surrender your plans, your fears, and your expectations to God. Some doors close because they are distractions. Some delays are divine instructions. Declare with me: "My future belongs to God." You will not

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

walk in confusion. You will not submit to fear. You will walk in purpose. In Jesus' mighty name.

Data Analysis

This excerpt reflects how Pentecostal discourse constructs power, persuasion, and ideology through strategic language choices that shape belief, identity, and action. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, the sermon reveals how religious authority is enacted and how congregants are positioned within a framework of spiritual control and moral obligation.

At the level of power, the preacher establishes epistemic authority by defining reality in absolute terms. Statements such as "there is a battle taking place every day… for your thinking" and "the person who controls your thoughts eventually influences your future" construct thought control as a spiritual battlefield, positioning the preacher as an interpreter of hidden truths. Modal expressions like "your tomorrow is not decided by circumstances" further suppress alternative viewpoints and present divine authority as the ultimate determinant of human destiny.

Persuasion is achieved through direct address, rhetorical questioning, and imperative structures. The repeated use of "you" creates immediacy and personal involvement, while questions such as "who is influencing you?" force introspection and ideological alignment. Imperatives like "Listen carefully," "Stop feeding anxiety," and "surrender your plans" function as directive speech acts that guide behavioural response. The sermon also uses contrastive framing (faith vs fear, submission vs weakness, purpose vs confusion) to steer interpretation toward preferred meanings.

At the level of ideology, the sermon promotes a worldview in which human agency is subordinated to divine authority. Ideological constructs such as submission as direction and divine control of destiny normalize obedience as both rational and necessary. The statement "Some delays are divine instructions" reframes hardship as purposeful, thereby legitimizing endurance and reinforcing acceptance of suffering. Additionally, the declaration "My future belongs to God" exemplifies ideological interpellation, where the audience is invited to internalize religious identity through collective affirmation.

Data 6

Title: "The Power of Obedience"
Church: Church of Believers International
Preacher: Pastor Daniel Aliokno
Date: 18th May, 2024

Excerpt:

People of God, hear the word of the Lord today. Life is not a coincidence; it is a journey governed by divine authority. Many people are struggling not because God is absent, but because they are disconnected from instruction. The Bible says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." This means your reasoning is not the final authority over your life. I want you to understand that obedience is the bridge between promise and fulfilment. You cannot walk in disobedience and expect divine results. Some of you are praying for elevation, but you are resisting direction. Today,

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

God is calling you back to alignment. Do not allow fear to lead you. Fear will always distort your vision and delay your destiny. Faith, on the other hand, produces clarity and direction. Even when the instruction is difficult, it is still the safest path. I decree over your life: every confusion is lifted, every delay is broken, and every closed door is opened by divine authority. But you must respond in obedience. From today, choose trust over doubt, submission over resistance, and faith over fear. Your breakthrough is connected to your obedience. In Jesus' name, receive grace to follow divine instruction and walk in victory.

Data Analysis

This sermon excerpt reflects a systematic construction of power, persuasion, ideology, modality, and intertextual authority through Pentecostal discourse.

At the level of power, the preacher establishes epistemic and spiritual authority by presenting claims as universal and unquestionable truths. Expressions such as "Life is not a coincidence; it is a journey governed by divine authority" and "your reasoning is not the final authority over your life" position divine authority above human rationality. This creates an asymmetrical relationship in which the preacher functions as the mediator of divine will, while the audience is positioned as subordinate recipients of instruction.

Persuasion is achieved through multiple discursive strategies, including imperatives, rhetorical appeals, and conditional reasoning. Commands such as "hear the word of the Lord today," "do not allow fear to lead you," and "choose trust over doubt" function as directive speech acts that regulate behaviour. Rhetorical contrasts (fear vs faith, obedience vs disobedience, submission vs resistance) simplify moral decision-making and guide interpretation toward preferred meanings. The sermon further strengthens persuasion through conditional reward framing, as seen in "your breakthrough is connected to your obedience," which links compliance to positive spiritual outcomes.

At the level of ideology, the sermon constructs an ideology of divine determinism and obedience-centered spirituality, where human destiny is shaped by submission to divine instruction. The statement "obedience is the bridge between promise and fulfilment" naturalizes obedience as the only legitimate pathway to success. Difficult experiences are reinterpreted as part of divine guidance, reinforcing acceptance and endurance as spiritual virtues. The declaration "your breakthrough is connected to your obedience" functions as ideological interpellation, positioning the audience to internalize responsibility for their spiritual outcomes.

In addition, the sermon demonstrates modality of certainty through categorical expressions such as is, is not, and will, which reduce interpretive ambiguity and reinforce ideological closure. Although there is no direct biblical quotation in this excerpt, the discourse still carries implicit intertextuality, reflecting familiar Pentecostal scriptural logic of obedience and reward.

Overall, the sermon exemplifies how Pentecostal discourse operationalizes authority, persuasion, and ideology through directive language, binary oppositions, modality, and reward-based spiritual reasoning, thereby shaping both belief and behavioural orientation.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Pentecostal sermon discourse in Nigeria is a highly structured site of ideological reproduction in which language is systematically used to enact power, achieve persuasion, and construct religious ideology. Across the six selected sermons, it is evident that preachers consistently employ authoritative declaratives, high-modality expressions, biblical intertextuality, and directive speech acts to establish spiritual authority and position themselves as legitimate interpreters of divine will. This discursive positioning creates an asymmetrical relationship between preacher and congregation, where the preacher occupies a dominant epistemic role while the audience is constructed as receptive and obedient participants. The study further finds that persuasion in Pentecostal sermons is achieved through a combination of rhetorical strategies, including imperatives, rhetorical questioning, repetition, contrastive framing, and conditional reward structures. These strategies function to regulate audience interpretation and behaviour by simplifying moral choices into binary oppositions such as obedience/disobedience, faith/fear, and alignment/compromise. Additionally, persuasive discourse frequently links compliance with positive spiritual outcomes such as breakthrough, divine favour, and victory, while disobedience is associated with delay, confusion, and loss, thereby reinforcing a reward–punishment structure that strengthens audience alignment with preached messages. The findings also indicate that Pentecostal sermons strongly reproduce an ideology of divine determinism, obedience, prosperity, and spiritual warfare. Ideological meanings are naturalised through repeated lexical patterns, metaphorical constructions, and scriptural legitimation, making them appear as unquestionable spiritual truths rather than socially constructed interpretations. Concepts such as alignment, covenant, obedience, spiritual warfare, and divine instruction are consistently used to frame lived experiences and social realities within a religious worldview. Furthermore, the study establishes that power, persuasion, and ideology operate not as separate elements but as interconnected discourse mechanisms, where power is enacted through authoritative speech and control of interpretation, persuasion is achieved through emotional, rhetorical, and conditional linguistic strategies, and ideology is sustained through the repeated naturalisation of belief systems that link human behaviour to divine outcomes, thereby showing that Pentecostal sermons function as powerful discursive tools that shape cognition, regulate behaviour, and reinforce institutional religious authority within Nigerian society.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Pentecostal sermon discourse in Nigeria functions as a powerful socio-religious mechanism through which power, persuasion, and ideology are simultaneously constructed and sustained through language. Guided by Critical Discourse Analysis, the study demonstrates that sermons are not merely spiritual communications but structured discursive events that actively shape belief systems, regulate behaviour, and reproduce institutional authority within Pentecostal Christianity. Findings from the analysis show that Pentecostal preachers consistently deploy linguistic strategies that reinforce their spiritual authority and position themselves as legitimate mediators of divine truth. Through

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

the use of declarative assertions, high-modality expressions, biblical intertextual references, and directive speech acts, preachers establish asymmetrical power relations that place congregants in subordinate but responsive positions, confirming that power in Pentecostal sermons is largely discursively constructed and maintained through authoritative language use. The study further concludes that persuasion is a central communicative function of Pentecostal sermons, achieved through rhetorical devices such as imperatives, repetition, rhetorical questioning, contrastive structures, and conditional reward framing. These strategies effectively shape audience perception by presenting obedience, faith, and alignment as pathways to spiritual and material benefits, while disobedience is framed as leading to failure, delay, or confusion, thereby ensuring that persuasion operates not only at the cognitive level but also at the emotional and behavioural levels of congregational response. In addition, the study concludes that Pentecostal sermon discourse is deeply ideological, promoting belief systems centred on obedience, divine determinism, prosperity, and spiritual warfare. These ideologies are naturalised through repeated linguistic patterns and scriptural legitimation, making them appear as divinely ordained truths rather than socially constructed meanings, as a result of which congregants are interpellated into accepting specific interpretations of reality, identity, and destiny. Overall, the study establishes that power, persuasion, and ideology are mutually reinforcing discourse processes in Pentecostal sermons, and their interaction demonstrates how language operates as a tool for religious authority, social influence, and ideological reproduction within contemporary Nigerian Pentecostalism, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how discourse functions within religious settings and highlighting the critical role of language in shaping spiritual and social realities.

References

Adedun, Emmanuel A., and Oluwatoyin Jumoke Mekiliuwa. (2010). "Discourse Features and Patterns in a Nigerian Pentecostal Christian Sermon." *ARC: The Journal of the School of Religious Studies*, vol. 38, pp. 63–94.

Agho, Jennifer. (2024). "Conversational Discourse Strategies of Selected Nigerian Pentecostal Church Sermons." *CLAREP Journal of English and Linguistics*, vol. 6, pp. 169–192.

Akinola, Daniel. (2026).*The Power of Faithful Stewardship*. Inspiration Chapel International.

Akinwotu, Samuel Alaba. (2021). "A Pragma-Rhetorical Study of Selected Pentecostal Sermons in Nigeria." *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*, no. 33, pp. 4–19.

Emeka-Nwobia, Ngozi U. (2017). "All Things Are Possible, If Only You Believe': Ideology and Discourse Dimensions in Nigerian Neo-Pentecostal Sermons." *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2017, pp. 59–72.

Fairclough, Norman. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. Routledge.

Fairclough, Norman. (2010). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. 2nd ed., Pearson.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)

Mekiliuwa, Oluwatoyin Jumoke. (2021). *A Discourse Analysis of Selected Pentecostal Sermons in Lagos, Nigeria*. Unpublished M.A. dissertation.

Nwafor, Daniel Chukwuebuka. (2024). *The Price of Divine Alignment*. Streams of Dominion Pentecostal Assembly.

Okaria, Miriam Ezinne. (2026). *Who Controls Your Tomorrow?* Streams of Dominion Pentecostal Assembly.

Okpeh, Peter O., and Adamma Maryann Amadi. (2020). "A Discursive Analysis of Selected Prayers of a Nigerian Pentecostal Cleric." *Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 157–167.

Okula, Dede. (2024). *Breaking Generational Bondage and Enforcing Victory in Christ.* Inspiration Chapel International.

Okpeh, Peter O., and Gbenga Ibileye. (2023). "Metaphor and Ideology in Nigerian Pentecostal Discourse." Unpublished manuscript.

van Dijk, Teun A.(1998). *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach.* Sage.

van Dijk, Teun A. (2008). *Discourse and Power.* Palgrave Macmillan.

van Dijk, Teun A. (2009). *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk.* Cambridge UP.

Zungo, Charity. (2025). *Walking in Covenant Obedience and Kingdom Authority.* Church of Believers International.

©Copyright 2026 by the author(s)