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## A Critical Discourse Analysis of some Fliers of Pentecostal Churches in Bamenda

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines fliers distributed to the population by some Pentecostal churches in the city of Bamenda. The main focus is to determine the ideologies that the churches disseminate through these fliers. Data for the study is collected from some 20 fliers randomly collected from some Pentecostal church members who move around the streets of Bamenda distributing them. Data analysis is done following the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. The findings reveal that the linguistic, discursal and rhetorical devices used by Pentecostal churches in their fliers help in disseminating various ideologies which are aimed at influencing the minds and beliefs of the target population, thereby galvanizing them to join these churches with the hope of finding solutions to various problems.

**Keywords:** *Pentecostal churches, ideologies, damnation, salvation, blessings*

## 1. Introduction

This paper examines fliers distributed to the population by Pentecostal churches in the city of Bamenda, with the main aim of determining the various ideologies these churches intend to disseminate through these fliers. The analysis, therefore, focuses on the linguistic devices, rhetorical and discursal strategies used in the fliers in order to project the various ideologies. Fliers are chosen for the study because they are pieces of papers or leaflets containing advertisement or information, and intended for wide distribution by companies or organizations. The paper adopts the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach because this approach usually focuses on the study of discourse (text or talk) in order to unravel the various ideologies disseminated in it by the users of such text or talk in a particular society.

Pentecostalism is a protestant Christian movement that emphasises direct personal experience of God through baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is characterised by religious excitement: speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, exorcism, intense praise and worship, etc. (Mayrargue, 2008). Over the years, the city of Bamenda has witnessed a proliferation of Pentecostal churches. The churches are found all over the city, with a high concentration in residential areas. Because of the high number, some of the churches end up having only few members. These churches regularly send out their members to homes, streets, major road junctions, travel agencies and markets to preach and distribute fliers to the population. It is on this basis that we have decided to examine the fliers that these churches dish out to the population, in order to determine the various ideologies disseminated in them.

## 2. Theoretical Considerations

This paper uses the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. According to Van Dijk (2015, p.466) "Critical Discourse Analysis is discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced,



legitimated and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately challenge social inequality." Critical discourse analysts therefore have a role of investigating peculiar social ideologies that manifest inequality and abuse of social power to the detriment of the minorities or the underprivileged in society. Their focus is to present the various ways in which these inequalities are enacted by the privileged and resisted by the underprivileged.

Consequently, studies in CDA are not only limited to the description of text and talk but involve relating them to the societies in which they are produced because the main concern is to understand how the discourse is constructed and the reasons for incorporating certain linguistic structures, rather than others, in realizing particular texts or talks (Van Dijk, 1995a).

Studies in CDA can therefore take many dimensions, one of which is focusing on ideologies framed and propagated in various discourse in social contexts. "Ideology, for CDA, is seen as an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations. CDA takes a particular interest in the ways in which language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions." (Wodak 2002, p. 9). Social institutions are noted for using particular patterns of language in their discourse to mediate various ideologies. CDA aims at deciphering these ideologies because "ideologies are typically, though not exclusively, expressed and reproduced in discourse and communication, including non-verbal semiotic messages, such as pictures, photographs and movies" (Van Dijk, 1995b, p.17).

Ideologies framed and sustained in various discourse equally establish and maintain power relations because the linguistic forms that mediate them also express and manipulate power. "Power is signalled not only by grammatical forms within a text, but also by a person's control of a social occasion by means of the genre of a text" (Wodak *ibid*, p.11).

Previous critical discourse studies have revealed how religious authorities/actors have exploited the power and control they have in the use of some religious genres in order to frame and sustain some ideologies; thereby influencing the minds of their audiences in various ways. In a Critical Discourse Analysis of religious sermons in Egypt, Eldin (2014) examines the rhetorical devices in Amr Khalid's sermons in order to show how language, employed in Khalid's sermons, reflects the common conceptual structures and interrelationships between him and his audience. The researcher identifies certain specific ideological modes used by the preacher to deliver his message strongly and influence his audience. The various persuasive strategies employed by the preacher all combine to help him achieve his goals and control the minds of his audience.

In a study on the discourse of divorce in conservative Christian sermons, Hobbs (2019) employs theoretical and methodological principles derived from corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis to examine a corpus of sermons on divorce in order to determine the ways that pastors frame and approach the topic of divorce and what their language reveals about how they want their listeners to perceive divorce. Findings reveal two dominant discourses of divorce in popular conservative Christian sermons. It is first presented as a highly restricted space; with the message being that divorce is rule-driven and formulaic, with restricted access and likely unjustified. Secondly, divorce is presented as male; that is males are presented as the initiators of divorce while women are framed primarily as receivers.

In a study of the naming of independent churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Majola (2022) adopts a CDA approach in order to examine the case of charismatic churches in South Africa. He focuses his study on the naming patterns and practices of three church categories as representative examples: the early church (in the Bible), mainline churches, and charismatic churches in South Africa, and comes out with findings showing that there has been a major shift in the naming practices of churches in the three categories based on different

experiences. The findings reveal that the naming of present day churches is dynamic in that names originate from expectations, biblical passages, visions, names of people, intentions, worship and praise names, personal experiences and prophetic names; depending on the leaders of such churches, and in most cases, the general membership of the church has no or little contribution to the name of the church to which they belong.

### 3. Data

Data for this study comprise of twenty fliers randomly collected from members of Pentecostal churches in the city of Bamenda. Data analysis is done at three different levels. At the first level, the analysis focuses on identifying the population targeted in the fliers distributed by these churches. Analysis at the second level focuses on the noun phrases that depict the various ideologies disseminated in the fliers. At the third stage, the analysis focuses on the various discourse and rhetorical strategies employed in these documents. At the various levels, we first of all count and record the target items on frequency tables before proceeding to advance interpretations and explanations to account for the use of the various linguistic, discursual and rhetorical devices identified in the fliers.

### 4. Findings and Discussions

The findings presented and discussed in this section focus on three main issues: the population targeted in the fliers, the ideologies expressed, and the rhetorical strategies employed in these fliers. Frequency tables are used to display statistics on these aspects, and discussions follow thereafter.

#### 4.1. Population targeted in the fliers

The analysis of the fliers collected reveals the various groups of persons targeted in the fliers distributed by Pentecostal churches. The table below presents statistics on the target population.

**Table 1: Targeted population in Pentecostal church fliers**

Targeted Population	Frequency on the 20 fliers
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You	323
We/Us	47
Sinner(s)	16
The Reader	6
The Faithless	7
The Lost	4

As can be seen on the table above, the messages in the fliers distributed by Pentecostal churches are directed to *You*, *We/Us*, *Sinners*, *The Reader*, *The Faithless* and *The Lost*.

The use of the personal pronoun *You* had the highest frequency (323 occurrences) in the 20 fliers analysed. *You*, here, is interpreted as anyone who reads the messages in the fliers. The excessive repetition of the pronoun in the fliers is seen as a strategy employed to capture the attention of the reader. Anyone who reads the fliers will certainly have the feeling that the messages in them are designed personally for him/her. Targeting *You* in the fliers therefore makes the messages in them relevant to anyone who happens to read the fliers. The use of *You* is complemented in the fliers by a few instances of the use of the noun phrase *The Reader* (six occurrences).

In some instances there is the use of the plural first person personal pronouns *We* and *Us*, which equally have a high frequency (47 occurrences) in the 20 fliers analysed. The use of the inclusive *We/Us* in the fliers is also considered as an effective strategy, which makes the reader feel that the messages in the fliers are not directed just to him/her, but equally to every other person, including those who conceive and distribute the fliers.

In other instances in the fliers, the messages are directed to *Sinners*, *The Faithless* and *The Lost*. Although one would understand that these are the real people who need the messages disseminated in the fliers, the frequency of the use of these nouns remains very low in the fliers analysed; 16, 7 and 4 occurrences respectively. It is understood here that, instead of singling out more of these groups of people in their

fliers, Pentecostal church evangelists rather prefer using more of generalized pronouns such as *You, We* and *Us*, which do not identify any person or groups of persons in particular. Their messages therefore end up not indexing anyone in particular, but involve everyone who happens to read the fliers.

#### 4.2. Ideologies expressed in the fliers

The analysis reveals that a variety of noun phrases are used in the texts to foreground various concepts and ideas. These can be classified in to two groups: the negative margin and the positive margin. The table below presents these phrases and their frequencies in the fliers analysed.

**Table 2: Ideologies expressed in Pentecostal church fliers**

Positive Margin		Negative Margin	
Heaven	29	Hell	23
Eternal life	20	Death	44
Love	11	Sin	62
Salvation	19	Lake of fire	22
Righteousness	7	Unrighteousness	7
Faith	26	Evil	8
Holy Ghost/Spirit	28	Devil	18
Deliverance	10	Sickness	9
Healing	15		
Holiness	16		
Repentance	5		
Peace	3		

As can be seen from the table above, both nouns and noun phrases are used in the fliers analysed to foreground various ideas and concepts in the readers' minds.

In the positive margin, there is the excessive use of the noun phrases *Heaven, Eternal life* and *Salvation* which are presented in the fliers as the final destinations everyone should strive to attain, with the help of the *Holy Ghost/Spirit*. In order to get to this destination, one



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needs to have *Faith*, and live a life of *Love, Righteousness, Holiness, Peace* and *Repentance*. Besides, such a life will bring about *Healing* and *Deliverance*. The use of these phrases foregrounds in the reader's mind the beauty of a life with God.

On the other hand, *Death, Hell* and the *Lake of fire* are presented in the fliers as the final destination of those who live a life of *Sin, Evil* and *Unrighteousness*, with the help of the *Devil*. Their lives are equally characterised by *Sickness*. All these paint a gloomy picture in the minds of the readers helping them to perceive the consequences of living a life without God.

The use in the fliers of noun phrases from the two margins therefore presents the reader with two choices: a life with God and a life without God. The intention of the use of these phrases is to help those who identify themselves with the ideologies in the positive margin to consolidate their position; that is, continue living a living in *Righteousness, Love, Holiness, Peace, Faith* and *Repentance* in order to attain *Heaven, Salvation* and *Eternal life*. However, those who identify with the ideologies in the negative margin (sin, unrighteousness, evil and devil) are pushed to engage in an ideological migration from the negative margin to the positive margin, so as to escape from the impending doom (death, hell, lake of fire) that will befall them if they persist in their position.

We therefore see here how Pentecostals use to power and control they have over this genre (church fliers) to realise their evangelical mission. Readers, who might have been hitherto having a peace of mind, may start imagining how their lives will end; either in hell or a lake of fire or in heaven enjoying eternal life. This is achieved in the fliers thanks to the choice of the noun phrases that portray the various ideologies.



### 4.3. Rhetorical devices used in the fliers

The analyses equally revealed a number of rhetorical and discourse strategies used in the fliers in order to influence the ideologies of the target population.

**Table 3: Rhetorical strategies**

Rhetorical Strategy	Frequency
Condemning everyone	18
Calling for self-examination and confession	11
Calling for repentance	19
Inviting to pray	11
Declaring the reader free/saved/delivered	10
Inviting to join church	9

#### 4.3.1. Condemning everyone

In the fliers distributed to the population by members of Pentecostal churches, there are expressions and utterances which out-rightly condemn everyone. Everyone is considered as a sinner and unrighteous. For example:

1. No one can call himself holy and sinless in the presence of God.
2. The Bible states that you are a sinner. "There is none righteous, no, not one (Romans 3: 10).

As can be seen from the examples above, everyone, with no exceptions, is condemned as a sinner. The Bible is even quoted in example 2 to better foreground this position.

#### 4.3.2. Calling for self-examination and confession

After condemning the reader, another strategy used in the fliers is calling on the readers to examine themselves and confess.

For example:

3. Dear reader, would you also look at yourself in the mirror of God?

4. Accept yourself as you are and confess to God clearly and sincerely your sins.
5. Admit to God that you are a guilty sinner.

The reader is forced here to accept and accommodate the ideology that he/she is a sinner, thus found in a situation that requires him/her to move/migrate. As can be seen from the examples, the linguistic patterns used help to realise this strategy effectively. In example 3, the reader is called out, and is asked a rhetorical question. Examples 4 and 5 are imperative sentences which are used to compel the readers accept their status as sinners.

#### **4.3.3. Calling for Repentance**

The next strategy involves calling the reader to repent.

For example:

6. Repent and put all your trust in Jesus Christ.
7. Turn away from Satan and evil, and turn back to God.

The reader is invited here to migrate from his/her previous state of sin to a state of righteousness through repentance. As can be seen from the examples, imperative sentences are equally used in order to push the reader to action. Repentance is not presented here as a choice; rather it is presented as an obligation.

#### **4.3.4. Invitation to Pray**

Another strategy that is used to influence the ideology of the reader is the invitation to pray.

For example:

8. Please pray this prayer...
9. Seek the lord in prayer.
10. You can receive him by praying as follows...
11. You ought to pray with the psalmist saying...

As can be seen from the examples above, the reader is equally persuaded to pray in order to be safe. While in examples 8 and 9 this is realized by the use of imperative sentences, in examples 10 and 11 the pronoun *You* is used to call out the reader, and modal auxiliaries are used as persuasive devices requesting the reader to pray. Prayer is

presented here as a channel that can be used to migrate from damnation to salvation.

#### **4.3.5. Declaring the Reader Free/Safe**

Another way of influencing the reader in the fliers is by declaring them free.

For example:

12. You have become a child of God and thus a new creature.
13. You will be saved for all eternity.

These declarations foreground in the readers' mind the idea that they are free because they have acknowledged their sins, confessed them, and prayed for their salvation. Therefore, the readers end up believing that they have migrated from condemnation to salvation.

#### **4.3.6. Invitation to Join a Church**

In some of the fliers, there is an invitation to join a church.

For example:

14. Please visit us on our service days at ...
15. Go to a place of worship regularly.

Joining a church here is presented as a means of re-enforcing ones faith and concretizing salvation.

We see here how Pentecostals use the power and control they have over their church fliers to influence the minds of the readers of such fliers. Readers are pushed to engage in an ideological migration in the fliers, which begins with condemning everyone as a sinner, calling on them to examine themselves and confess their sins, urging them to repent from the sins, inviting them to pray, declaring them safe, and ends with inviting them to join a church in order to consolidate their new status.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study concludes that although religion is a free choice, Pentecostal churches use fliers to influence the ideologies of the target population. This is realized in the fliers through the use of linguistic and rhetorical strategies that play on the readers' mind; inciting them to migrate from

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one ideological mind-set to another. The churches, therefore, use the power and control they have over their church fliers to shape the ideologies of their target population, persuading them to believe their doctrine, and thereby achieving their evangelical mission.

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