POWER RELATIONS CHURCH DISCOURSE IN NAKURU COUNTY; A CASE OF SACRIFICES, TITHES AND OFFERINGS

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Abstract
This study sought to establish strategies of communication in offering, tithe and sacrifice discourse in Pentecostal churches in Nakuru County using the Discourse-Historical Approach of CDA proposed by Ruth Wodak. The research was carried out in Pentecostal churches in the central sub-county of Nakuru County. The qualitative approach was adopted in this study. The target population was 137 Pentecostal churches. The researcher used purposive sampling to sample four pastors from four different Pentecostal churches (2 male and 2 female) in Nakuru central Sub-County of Nakuru County. Data from church sermons were collected using an audio-recording machine as well as previously recorded sermons (audio). In addition, the researcher observed the congregation during the sermons. The study revealed that sermons delivered demonstrated power and dominance on the part of the pastors while the congregants were powerless and followed the dictates of the preachers’ unquestioningly. The study will help in policy making to streamline church operations and safeguard the congregation. It will also be useful to students interested in communication strategies, language and power.

Key terms: CDA, Pentecostal, religious discourse, power, sermons, ideology

Introduction
In the early years of the 20th Century, Pentecostals in the world amounted to about 980,000, a mere 0.1% of the world population. However, by the end of the century, this number had soared to 425 million, which was about 8% of the world population. By 2007, there were between a quarter to half a billion Pentecostals which is about 10% of the world population. Morris (2007) observes that there are about 125 million believers in the non-Pentecostal churches who consider themselves Pentecostals. Protestant missionaries who were the precursor to Pentecostals arrived at the Kenyan coastal region in 1844 leading to the establishment of Church Missionary Society in Mombasa. Soon after that, in 1846, Rabai Mission Station was built in Mombasa. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, Pentecostal sermons and services are unique, emotionally charged discourses which can be very intimidating and incomprehensible to non-Pentecostals.

Within the religious discourse in Kenya, the manufacture and dissemination of textual personas can be achieved by framing ideological positions through the reconceptualization of social practices and the representation of social actors. Social practices are the socially condoned models of how social activities should be accomplished in order to achieve coordination within society. Social actors are the selected participants within a discourse (Leeuwen, 2008: 6).

The Religious Societies Rules published by the Attorney General’s Office in January 2016 require that all religious organizations submit their constitutions showing their doctrinal statement of their faith. All the religious leaders such as the Muslim imams, pastors, rabbis were required to adhere to these regulations. Lately, Kenyan Christians have lamented about the televangelists who extort money from their congregations in the pretext of exchanging miracles for money. This might be contrary to the Biblical teachings that indicate that tithe
should be ten per cent of someone’s proceeds and that offerings should be given depending on someone’s ability. This Biblical provision has seemingly been misused by pastors and church leaders especially in Pentecostal churches mostly because of lack of accountability. It is therefore important that any religious organization in Kenya should have its constitution detailing their programs, ministries, charitable activities and educational activities they undertake as well as details of persons coordinating these activities. According to the new rules, all religious societies must be registered and open to the registrar's inspection at any time.

The law also requires that all religious leaders should make a declaration of familial relations with other religious leaders and officers including secretaries, treasurers, trustees and committee members. These rules also stipulate that all pastors in Kenya should hold a theological certificate from an accredited theological institution. The new rules were set to be gazetted at the end of January 2016 and operationalised after a year. The rules which were aimed at regulating religious bodies affect all faiths, including mainstream Christian, Hindu and Islamic institutions and their numerous small groupings, some of which have been accused of conning and brainwashing their followers or engaging in radicalization and other dangerous doctrines (The Standard Newspaper, January 2016:4).

The Kenyan Government has on several occasions tried to streamline activities of churches and mosques aiming at weeding out those who wanted to commercialize churches and stop mosques from being used as breeding grounds for terrorists (Kariuki, 2016:16). This is a delicate balancing act because the Constitution provides for the freedom of worship yet the Government has a duty to protect the citizens from manipulation. This essentially means that the Government should not muzzle the church but the church should also be accountable.

This study sought to analyse the texts which constituted sermon discourse from selected churches in Nakuru County. Texts incorporate social practices to utilize social actors and their actions for the purposes of recontextualizing meaning through the use of representations to signify the perceived cognitions of the intended audience. Caldas-Coulthard (1996: 228) notes that all texts code the ideological position(s) of their producers. By framing ideological positions within not only the representations of specifically selected participants and their actions, but also via the appraisal of these social actors and their associated actions, manufacturers of discourse can manipulate the linguistic and socio-semantic elements of a text to produce specific textual personas for their intended audience (Leeuwen, 1996:46). Additionally, Leeuwen (2008:6) reports that not only do texts represent what is going on, but they also evaluate it, ascribe purpose to it, justify it, and so on, and in many texts, these aspects of representation become far more important than the representation of the social practice itself.

As such, Church sermons offer a unique opportunity to implement the tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to decode the representations of meaning constructed within the relationships of the discourse and the audience to provide insight as to how pastors and church leaders manipulate language to develop textual personas within the representations of their sermons that seemingly become bestowed with symbolic leverage.

Ideology
The function of ideology within discourse is utilized as a means of organizing individual thought along specific lines of reason. Such ideological perspectives can be conveyed through the manipulation of language as a means of engendering cognition to follow patterns of common sense that are not likely to lead towards subversive conclusions as using some other discourses may entail (Lemke, 1995: 13). Kress (2008:7) states that the grammar of a language is its theory of reality. While Halliday (1989)’s view of language states that grammar is certainly manipulated to construct ideological arguments and presuppositions for the construction of reality based on experience. It is the individuals therefore who introduce
ideological statements for reproduction that control not only the grammar and the representations within ideology, but also the messages that are contained within the grammar and experiences (Stubbs, 1996: 60).

In characterizing ideologies, (van Dijk, 1995: 248) states that ideologies are basic frameworks of social cognition shared by members of social groups, constituted by relevant selections of socio-cultural values, and organized by an ideological schema that represents the self-definition of a group. Besides their social function of sustaining the interests of groups, ideologies have the cognitive function of organizing the social representations (attitudes and knowledge) of the group, and thus indirectly monitor the group-related social practices, and hence also the text and talk of members.

Hall (1996: 194) describes ideology as not being representative of any intentional biases but is instead a reproduction of dominant discourse, which through repetition comes to be viewed as common sense that is natural and comprehensive rather than partial and selective. This ongoing discourse and the ideological statements made by individuals takes place not outside of ideology, but from within it (Hall, 1999: 397).

However, participants of this discourse may have different roles that affect the production and comprehension of the discourse or ideological statements through the context of the relations between participants (van Dijk, 2008: 22-23). Through the use of mass media, individuals within social roles that have access to power can make ideological statements that are designed to contain messages that evoke meaning within codified language. The term ideology was very important in this study because the study intended to analyze the ideologies propagated by pastors in their sermons that influence their congregants’ beliefs and actions. In the light of Discourse-Historical Approach, DHA, language is not powerful on its own; it is a means to gain and maintain power through the use that powerful people make of it. "Power" is an asymmetric relationship among social actors who assume different social positions or belong to different social groups. This study sought to reveal the power relationships that exist between the actors present in the offering, sacrifice and tithe discourse.

**Power**

CDA shows that there is power vested in discourse. Discourse has been regarded as an important site for both constructing and maintaining social power. CDA views power as already belonging to some participants and not to others, and as a condition which is determined by their institutional role and/or their socioeconomic status, ethnic identity or gender (Juez, 2009: 240-241). Thus power and social power, in particular, the social power of groups and individuals or an institution is a central concern for CDA. Social power is defined in terms of control and therefore the members of a given social group will have power if they are able to control the actions and minds of members of other groups (van- Dijk, 2001: 72). Power is also viewed as an ideological phenomenon that operates through discourse by constructing particular subject positions for people to occupy. These positions are sometimes accepted as natural and unchangeable even though they may not be in the best interest of the powerless (Juez, 2009: 241, Wodak, 2001: 56).

Following Weber (1980), researchers in the DHA tradition view “power” as the possibility of establishing one’s own will within a social relationship and against the will of others. Some of the ways in which power is implemented are physical force and violence, control of people through threats or promises (disciplining regimes), attachment to authority (exertion of authority and submission to authority), and technical control with the help of objects such as means of production, means of transportation, weapons, and so on.

Power relations are legitimized or delegitimized in discourses. Texts are often sites of social struggle in that they manifest traces of differing ideological fights for dominance and hegemony. Thus, in the in-depth analysis of texts, the DHA focuses on the ways in which
linguistic forms are used in various expressions and manipulations of power. Power is discursively exerted not only by grammatical forms, but also by a person’s control of the social occasion by means of the genre of a text, or by the regulation.

**Methodology**
A qualitative approach was adopted to investigate strategies of communication in church giving discourse in Pentecostal churches in Nakuru County. This approach is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003: 34). The research was carried out in Pentecostal churches in Nakuru central sub-county in Nakuru County. The target population was pastors of the selected Pentecostal churches. Pastors were chosen because they often preach to their congregation about giving.

The research sampled four pastors (2 male and 2 female) from the one hundred and sixty-seven Pentecostal churches existing in Nakuru central Sub-County of Nakuru County. Two female pastors from the four were chosen to bring about gender balance. Sermons from four Pentecostal churches were used in the analysis because it was assumed that since they have a similar doctrinal approach, they are likely to preach in a similar manner concerning giving as portrayed in the Bible. The only expected difference is the individual strategies of communication.

Sermons on offerings, tithe and sacrificed discourse were recorded using an electronic audio recording machine. The machine was taken to church and placed at a strategic point where it recorded the pastors’ sermons. An audio recording machine was chosen because it preserves the information for repetitive listening by the researcher to aid in the data analysis process. The researcher also took notes during the sermon. In addition, the researcher observed how the congregation was responding to the pastors preaching from the start to the end of the sermon especially with changing discourse topics. After data was transcribed and translated, it was organized and coded to ease identification and interpretation; a series of indices were developed to categorize the audio recordings in terms of types of information sought. The data was analyzed qualitatively guided by study objectives in the light of Discourse-Historical Approach.

**Theoretical Framework**
This study utilized Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), by KhosraviNki (2010). Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) belongs in the broadly defined field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak, 2001). DHA has four characteristics: interdisciplinary and particularly problem-oriented interests; teamwork; triangulation as a fundamental and constitutive methodological principle; and orientation toward application (Wodak, 2009: 12). The DHA attempts to integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive “events” are embedded. Further, it analyzes the historical dimension of discursive actions by exploring the ways in which particular genres of discourse are subject to diachronic change (Wodak, 2011: 65).

From the point of view of the DHA, ideology is defined as an (often) one-sided perspective or worldview composed of related mental representations, convictions, opinions, attitudes, and evaluations (Wodak, 2001: 65). Ideologies are shared by members of specific social groups. Ideologies serve as an important means of establishing and maintaining unequal power relations through discourse. This assertion was relevant to this study because the kind of power relations manifested in the tithe, offering and sacrifice discourse that was examined.

**Findings**
CDA views power as already belonging to some participants and not to others, and as a condition determined to them by their institutional role (Juez, 2009: 240). It was realized in
this study that the pastors seemed to portray themselves as being powerful in the delivery of sermon on offerings, sacrifice and tithes as compared to their congregants. This is because of the responsibility bestowed to them (pastors) by the church by virtue of the position they occupy in the church. Their source of power was believed to be from God. They portrayed their powers through their preaching by claiming that God speaks to them always hence they were authorized agents of God. This is in line with Weber’s (1980) assertion that some of the ways in which power is implemented are attachment to authority. The pastors seemed to attach their power to God and the Bible as an existing authority. To show respect to authority, congregants listened passively to the sermon.

**Sermon 2**

*Pastor: Greet the person seated next to you and tell them welcome to the house of God.*

**Line 7**

*Congregants: (shaking hands) Welcome to the house of God. Line 8*

Sermon 2 above shows how the pastors portrayed power in relation to their congregants. He made the congregants follow exactly what he ordered them to do. By telling the congregants to greet each other, he wanted to achieve what DHA theory called commonality (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001: 76). He wanted to establish a common ground in preparation to deliver his sermon. He then led and dominated the discourse in the sermon. The congregants were passive and responsive listeners. The pastor asks the congregants to greet their neighbours and welcome them to the house of God and the congregants did exactly just like the pastor had asked them to do. This action by the congregants passively responding as ordered by their pastor was a clear indication of how the pastor portrayed more and extensive religious powers compared to the congregants. This is in line with van Dijk’s (1993: 271) view that the most effective power is mostly cognitive and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation and manipulation.

**Sermon 2**

*Pastor: The Bible in the book of Malachi 3:8 tells us about the consequences of not tithing faithfully. Line 11*

*Somebody read for us (a lady stands up and reads) Malachi 3:8-9 “I ask you, is it right for a person to rob God? Of course not, how? You ask in the Matter of tithes and offerings.*

**Line 12**

*A curse is on all of you. Bring the full amount of your tithes to the temple so that there is plenty of food there”. (The lady sits). Line 13*

Borrowing from the assertion of Weber (1980:45) that power is attached to an authority, the pastor attached his power to the Bible. Everything the pastor said about giving of offerings and tithes was supported by the Bible quotations. He made reference to the Bible verses in order to legitimize his powers as sourced from God’s Holy Book. In such a case, no congregant made an attempt to question him. It seemed that this was because the congregants believed that God’s voice is in the Bible.

**Sermon 2**

*Pastor: God is speaking to us through His word. He is teaching us about how we should give our tithes and offerings. Line 14*
God is lamenting that we have cheated and robbed him. Praise God. Line 15

Congregants: Amen (in a low tone). Line 16

Kress (1998:4) explains that social power of a text in society depends on its interpretation. Each producer of a message relies on its recipient for it to function as intended. The congregants respond to the pastor scantily in low tones. This implies that they may have developed fear because they have heard God’s scary message through the pastor who has more power in relation to them. This made the pastor to be respected and cannot be questioned by the congregants.

Sermon 1

Pastor: Melchizedek a king of Salem and also a priest of the most high, brought bread and wine to Abram blessed him and said. Line 4

“May the Most High God who made heavens bless Abram. May the Most High God who gave you victory over your enemies be praised. Line 5

And God gave Melchizedek a tenth of the best he had recovered. Line 6

The Bible tells us that Melchizedek blessed Abram using bread and wine. Abram gave God ten per cent of what he had. Line 7

Brethren, when the servant of God is given the power to bless by God, he will bless you and when he is given the power to curse, you will be cursed. Praise God. Line 8

Congregants: Amen (Few respond in low tones). Line 9

Sermon 2

Pastor: Let us stand on our feet and we sing as we prepare to bring our offerings to the lord. Hold your offerings in your hands and bring in front here so that the man of God can bless (people look at their purse some in their pockets trying to find money. Some start walking slowly to the front. Some sit bending their heads. After some time almost everyone has gone to the altar to give their offerings). Line 30

In the above transcript, the pastor told the congregants that God had given him powers to bless and to curse. In such a case, he dominated the discourse while the congregants acted passive listeners. Positions of power are sometimes accepted as natural and unchangeable even though they may not be in the best interest of the powerless (Juez 2009:241, Wodak 2001: 56). This can be seen in the behaviour of the congregants; they just respond by saying ‘Amen’ to the pastor to show that they agree with what he is saying. Because the congregants respected all that came from God, the pastor seemed to use that fact to dominate the discourse in the sermon. The fact that he claimed that he was endowed with the powers to bless and curse made the congregants respect him to an extent of fearing him. This fear made the congregants be passive and obedient during the sermon. The congregants at the end walked to the altar and gave their offerings.

Similarly, the fact that worshippers took their purses slowly and reluctantly may have been an indication that the congregants were feeling rather uncomfortable with the issue of holding their offerings by their hands and taking them to the altar to be prayed for. This was a directive from the pastor. This is what Cordon (2014) terms as abusive power. Billing (2008:12) asserts that power abuse by one group over others may make another group discursively resist such powers. Some congregants bending their heads and others walking
slowly to the altar may be an indication that they are resisting the pastor's directive. In this case, the pastor is seemingly abusing his powers and the congregants are resisting his power albeit temporarily.

The congregants’ behaviour in response to the pastor’s directions shows that given a chance, the congregants would have given a different opinion on the pastors preaching about tithe and offering in the church and the manner of giving these offerings. Because the powerful actors in a social set up prevail over a lesser powerful social group (Luke, 2005:27), the congregants finally walk to the altar and do as the pastor instructed without any objection. In this case, the pastor dominated the discourse in the church at the expense of his congregants. 

**Sermon 2**

*Pastor: Praise God. Line 1*

*Congregants: Amen. Line 2*

*Pastor: Praise God good people of God. Line 3*

*Congregants: Amen. Line 4*

*Pastor: We thank God for bringing us together today again. Somebody say thank you, Jesus. Line 5*

*Congregants: Thank you Jesus (loudly). Line 6*

*Pastor: Greet the person seated next to you and tell them welcome to the house of God. Line 7*

*Congregants: (shaking hands) Welcome to the house of God. Line 8*

*Pastor: Today I want us to teach ourselves about giving ten per cent and other offerings. Tell your neighbour giving ten per cent faithfully. Line 9*

*Congregants: Gi-vi-ng ten per cent faith-fully. Line 10*

The discourse in the above transcript was one-sided. It was the pastor who was talking while the congregants just responded. Whatever he told the congregants to say, they said obediently without questioning. The implication was that the pastor had some kind of special powers that he portrayed in the church that made the congregants obey him religiously. The congregants were just but passive listeners in the church. They can't challenge or take the role of the pastor. One characteristic of power according to Luke (2008:28) is that it is supreme and prevents people from having grievances by shaping their perceptions. The pastor’s religious power over the congregants makes them agree to everything that the pastor say and do as he instructs. He told them to say *Amen*, they said *Amen*. The congregants, with no choice, have accepted that the pastor is powerful and must be respected always.

**Sermon 2**

*Pastor: Good amount of offering that pleases God. Line 23*

*Congregants: (few say it in a low tone) Good amount of offering that pleases God. Line 23*

*Pastor: (raising his voice) in abundance. Line 24*

*Congregants: (In low tones) in abundance. Line 25*
Few congregants again replied in low tones as indicated in the sermon above. This implied that they were not impressed by the pastor's insistence of abundant offerings, sacrifices and tithes though they have no choice since the pastor's word seemed to be final. When he asked them to tell their friends: ‘*a good amount of offerings that please God*’, they just said it though reluctantly. An indication that, were it not for the powers the pastor portrayed and the powerful position he held in the church, they would not have replied to him. According to van Dijk (2001:72) members of a given social group will have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of members of other groups. Since the pastor was able to make the congregants do as he says, he becomes powerful than them. The pastor entirely controlled the discourse in the church. The congregants were passive listeners of the pastor’s preaching.

**Conclusions**

The data above revealed that in church, a social setup, members occupy different social groups. The pastor seems more powerful than the congregants because the congregants follow the instruction of the pastor to the letter. The pastor dominates the church giving discourse because the congregants are not seen to be making any contributions during the sermon. Their participation is only seen when they briefly respond to the pastor. It has been established that the power relation between the pastor and the congregants is absolutely zero. The congregants believe that the pastor is the agent of God in the church; he represents God in all aspects and whatever he says must be respected and he must be obeyed too. However much the subject of giving offerings and sacrifices generously in church does not please every congregant, he or she has no option but do as the man of God says. The pastor convinced the congregants that the message he was relaying to them was God’s through the reading of the Bible. This authenticated the pastor’s sermon on church giving.

**Recommendations**

More language research should be done to establish more about church discourse, power and ideology. The society especially congregants should be sensitized on their role in the church and how contemporary preachers purport to be very powerful at the expense of the congregants.

**References**


