

Tithing and Persuasive Discourse in Nigerian Pentecostal Sermons: A Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates how tithing is discursively constructed and legitimised in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons through a socio-cognitive critical discourse analytical framework. While scholarship on Nigerian Pentecostalism has examined prosperity theology, church growth, and religious economy, limited attention has been paid to the specific linguistic strategies through which financial obligation is framed, normalised, and sustained in sermon discourse. This study addresses this gap by analysing persuasive language used in sermons that explicitly focus on tithing. Data consists of purposively selected sermon excerpts publicly available on YouTube and on the official media channels of prominent Nigerian Pentecostal preachers. Only sermons where tithing constitutes a central thematic focus were included, ensuring analytical relevance. The study adopts van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how discourse structures, cognitive framing, and ideological positioning interact in shaping congregational interpretation and response. Analysis reveals recurring persuasive strategies, including scriptural recontextualisation, fear appeals, testimonial legitimation, authority construction, and discursive closure. At the macro level, tithing is framed within a prosperity-centred religious ideology that links financial obedience to divine favour and spiritual legitimacy. At the meso level, rhetorical devices and directive speech acts position preachers as authoritative interpreters of divine instruction. At the micro level, lexical choices, metaphors, modality, and pronoun usage reinforce obligation, urgency, and compliance. The study demonstrates that tithing in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons is not merely a theological practice but a discursively organised system of persuasion through which belief, authority, and financial commitment are constructed and maintained. It contributes to scholarship on religious discourse, pragmatics, and African Pentecostal communication by foregrounding language as a central mechanism in the production and circulation of religious authority.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis; tithing discourse; linguistic persuasion; Pentecostal sermons; socio-cognitive approach*

Introduction

Pentecostalism has emerged as one of the most influential religious movements in contemporary Nigeria, shaping spiritual practices, social relations, and public discourse. Central to its expansion is sermon discourse, which serves as a primary medium for communicating doctrine, reinforcing behavioural expectations, and shaping congregational belief systems. Among the recurring themes in Nigerian Pentecostal preaching, tithing occupies a prominent position, often framed as both a spiritual obligation and a pathway to divine favour and material prosperity. Through sermons, religious leaders construct theological meanings, negotiate authority, and guide congregational responses using persuasive language that reflects broader socio-religious ideologies (Gifford, 2004; Ukah, 2008; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013).

Existing scholarship on Nigerian Pentecostalism has largely focused on prosperity theology, religious economy, and the socio-political influence of Pentecostal leaders. Studies demonstrate that financial giving is frequently embedded within doctrines of faith, obedience, and divine reward, while media technologies have expanded the reach and impact of Pentecostal preaching (Kalu, 2008; Ojo, 2006; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). However, despite these contributions, limited attention has been paid to the linguistic mechanisms through which tithing is discursively constructed and legitimised in sermon discourse. In particular, there remains a lack of micro-level analysis of how persuasive strategies operate within sermons to shape belief, reinforce authority, and guide congregational behaviour.

Sermon discourse functions as more than a vehicle for transmitting doctrine; it is a site where language operates as a strategic resource for constructing social reality. Critical discourse scholars emphasise that language shapes ideology, influences cognition, and sustains power relations within social institutions (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). In religious settings, discourse often legitimises authority, constructs moral obligations, and reinforces communal identities (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Through rhetorical devices, evaluative language, scriptural interpretation, and directive speech acts, preachers frame financial giving as morally necessary and spiritually consequential.

This study examines how tithing is constructed as persuasive discourse in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons using van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis. It focuses on sermon excerpts in which tithing constitutes a central theme, analysing how language legitimises financial obligation, reinforces religious authority, and shapes interpretive frameworks among

listeners. The study aims to identify the discursive strategies through which tithing is framed and sustained, and to explain how these strategies are realised through linguistic choices and rhetorical organisation.

The significance of the study lies in its contribution to discourse-oriented scholarship on religion and language in Africa. By foregrounding linguistic analysis, it demonstrates how persuasive authority is produced through discourse and highlights the role of language in shaping belief, compliance, and contemporary Pentecostal practice.

Research Questions

- 1) What linguistic and discursive strategies are used in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons to construct and legitimise tithing as a religious obligation?
- 2) How are these strategies realised through specific language features such as lexical choice, metaphor, modality, pronoun use, and directive structures in sermon discourse?
- 3) How do these linguistic constructions reinforce religious authority, shape ideological meanings, and influence cognitive models of obligation and compliance in tithing discourse?

Review of Literature

Pentecostal preaching, prosperity, and giving in Nigeria

Studies of Nigerian Pentecostalism consistently show that sermon discourse is central to how Pentecostal movements define spirituality, discipline members, and popularise prosperity-oriented doctrines (Kalu, 2008; Ojo, 2006; Ukah, 2008). Within this landscape, teachings on giving, especially tithing and seed-sowing, are frequently framed as covenantal obligations linked to divine reward, wellbeing, and social mobility (Gifford, 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). The prosperity message, therefore, operates not only as theology but also as a persuasive communicative project that constructs moral obligations around money and faith.

Empirical work on tithing/seed-sowing debates and prosperity claims

Recent scholarship continues to interrogate the place of tithing and seed-sowing in Nigerian Christianity, often highlighting how such practices become focal points of doctrinal dispute and institutional power. For example, Akabike (2021) examines how tithing/seed-sowing narratives are tied to assumptions about prosperity and salvation within contemporary Nigerian Christianity.

Aruku (2024) similarly underscores how interpretations of tithing generate contestation and social pressure within church communities, indicating that giving is sustained not only by doctrine but also by collective expectations and moral surveillance. Although much of this line of work is theological or socio-ethical in orientation, it supports the argument that “giving” discourse remains a contested and socially consequential domain of Pentecostal communication.

Discourse-oriented studies on Nigerian Pentecostal sermons

More directly relevant are linguistic and discourse studies that show how Pentecostal sermons rely on recurring rhetorical and pragmatic resources to persuade audiences. Akinwotu (2021), for instance, demonstrates that Nigerian Pentecostal sermons deploy rhetorical questions, directives, metaphors, repetition, and experiential narratives to achieve conviction and mobilise listeners. In a related discourse tradition, Okpeh (2022) shows how metaphor in Nigerian Pentecostal discourse encodes ideologies (e.g., materialist, retributive, rebirth ideologies) and contributes to meaning-making beyond literal interpretation. Collectively, these studies establish that Pentecostal preaching is a strategic discourse space where language choices matter for belief formation and behavioural compliance.

Critical Discourse Analysis, authority, and persuasion in religious discourse

CDA scholarship treats discourse as a site where ideology and power are reproduced through seemingly “ordinary” language practices (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Within religious contexts, authority is often performed through discursive control: speakers frame interpretations as unquestionable, restrict counter-readings, and present compliance as morally necessary. Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach is particularly relevant because it links discourse structures to cognition, explaining how repeated framing can shape audience mental models about obligation, legitimacy, and consequence (van Dijk, 2008).

Although existing Nigerian Pentecostal scholarship has examined prosperity teaching and debates about giving, and discourse studies have documented rhetorical resources in sermons, limited research has systematically mapped tithing discourse onto clearly specified CDA levels (macro/meso/micro) while also explaining how such discourse shapes cognitive models of obligation and compliance. This study fills that gap by analysing tithing-focused sermons as persuasive discourse, showing how strategies are linguistically realised and how they function ideologically and cognitively within Nigerian Pentecostal preaching.

Theoretical Framework: Socio-Cognitive Critical Discourse Analysis

This study is anchored in van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, which conceptualises discourse as a structured social practice that both reflects and shapes ideology through cognition (van Dijk, 2008). The framework is suitable for sermon discourse because preaching is designed to influence belief, secure commitment, and regulate conduct; these outcomes depend on how listeners interpret messages, internalise evaluations, and accept authority claims.

The framework is operationalised across three mutually informing levels:

- 1) **Macro level (social context and ideology):** Analysis identifies the ideological frames that organise tithing discourse, especially prosperity logics that link giving to divine favour, protection, and "open heavens." At this level, the study examines how tithing is framed as covenantal duty, moral legitimacy, and spiritual security, and how dissent is treated as dangerous or rebellious (van Dijk, 2008).
- 2) **Meso level (discursive strategies and interactional control):** This level focuses on the persuasive strategies through which preachers manage agreement and regulate congregational response. Strategies expected in the data include *scriptural recontextualisation*, *fear appeals* (curse/robbery frames), *testimonial legitimation*, *authority construction* (spiritual fatherhood, divine mandate), and *discursive closure* (statements that foreclose debate). These strategies align with sermon persuasion patterns documented in Nigerian Pentecostal discourse research (Akinwotu, 2021).
- 3) **Micro level (linguistic realisation):** Analysis attends to the language forms through which strategies are executed: imperatives and directives, modal verbs (certainty/necessity), evaluative lexis (dishonest/robber/blessed), metaphor (curse, windows of heaven, robbery), pronoun positioning (we/you/they), code choice (e.g., Pidgin for intimacy and alignment), and rhetorical questions that guide interpretation.

By linking discourse to cognition, socio-cognitive CDA enables the study to explain not only *what* is said about tithing but *how* repeated framing shapes mental models of obligation, blessing, and consequence among listeners (van Dijk, 2008). This makes the framework especially appropriate for analysing tithing sermons where persuasion depends on moral evaluation, fear/hope framing, and the legitimisation of authority.

Methodology

Research design

The study adopts a qualitative discourse-analytical design. It analyses tithing-focused sermon discourse as linguistic data, using socio-cognitive CDA to examine how ideology and authority are constructed and how meaning is shaped for audience uptake (van Dijk, 2008).

Data source and selection

Data were drawn from publicly accessible video sermons available on YouTube and official media channels of selected Nigerian Pentecostal ministries. YouTube was chosen because it functions as a major circulation space for Pentecostal preaching and provides access to naturally occurring sermon discourse in extended persuasive form. Sampling was purposive and guided strictly by the research focus. Sermons were included only where tithing constituted the central theme of discourse. The selection was limited to sermons delivered by widely recognised Pentecostal leaders whose messages are routinely disseminated in the public domain. This criterion ensured both data accessibility and relevance, without implying representativeness of all Pentecostal preaching. The study is concerned with linguistic patterns in sermon discourse rather than the personal identities of individual preachers or their ministries.

Sermons were included only when:

- tithing/offerings/financial giving constituted a central theme (not incidental mention);
- the sermon contained extended persuasive moves (argumentation, directives, warnings, testimonies);
- the recording was available in full and sufficiently clear for transcription/analysis;
- The preacher had substantial public visibility, indicating high discursive reach in the public domain.

Preacher inclusion rationale

The study does not claim that the selected preachers represent all Pentecostal traditions. Rather, they function as high-visibility sites of public sermon discourse where persuasive patterns are strongly institutionalised and widely circulated. This aligns with discourse research that treats influential communicators as key producers of widely reproduced discursive norms (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008).

Temporal scope and transparency

The study is not designed as a diachronic analysis. Its primary concern is recurring persuasive patterns in tithing discourse rather than change over time. Nonetheless, the dataset is restricted to publicly accessible sermons within a clearly defined retrieval window to ensure transparency and replicability.

Data handling and ethics

Because the data are publicly available sermons disseminated for open viewing, informed consent is not typically required for textual analysis. However, the study maintains ethical caution by focusing on discourse patterns rather than personal attacks, avoiding defamatory claims, and ensuring accurate contextual representation of excerpted materials.

Analytical procedure

Analysis proceeds in four steps:

- 1) **Transcription and excerpting:** tithing-focused sermon segments were transcribed and segmented into analysable units (key claims, directives, warnings, scriptural interpretations, testimonies).
- 2) **Strategy identification (meso-level):** persuasive strategies were coded (e.g., fear appeal, scriptural recontextualisation, testimonial legitimisation), consistent with sermon strategy patterns noted in Nigerian sermon research (Akinwotu, 2021).
- 3) **Linguistic analysis (micro-level):** each strategy was examined through its linguistic realisation: lexis, modality, metaphor, pronouns, code choice, and rhetorical structure.
- 4) **Ideological and cognitive interpretation (macro + socio-cognitive):** findings were interpreted in relation to broader prosperity ideology and the cognitive models constructed for listeners (van Dijk, 2008).

Data Analysis

This section presents a critical discourse analysis of purposively selected Nigerian Pentecostal sermon excerpts in which tithing constitutes the central theme. The analysis applies van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to examine how language operates as a persuasive resource in shaping belief, reinforcing authority, and guiding congregational behaviour. Attention is given to the interaction between macro-level ideological framing, meso-level discursive strategies, and micro-

level linguistic features such as metaphor, evaluative lexis, pronoun positioning, modality, and directive structures. By foregrounding how meaning is constructed within sermon discourse, the section demonstrates how tithing is framed as a spiritual obligation, moral duty, and pathway to divine favour. The focus is therefore not on theological correctness but on the linguistic organisation of persuasion within contemporary Pentecostal communication.

Fear Appeal and Moral Threat in Tithing Discourse

A recurring persuasive strategy in the sermons analysed is fear appeal, where non-payment of tithes is framed as spiritually dangerous and morally condemnable. Through lexical choice, metaphor, and declarative constructions, sermon discourse constructs a moral universe in which financial giving becomes a protective act against divine punishment.

Consider the excerpt:

“It is a dangerous thing to have a curse on your head... Every robber who robs God of his tithe and offering is under a curse.”

Here, the lexical item *dangerous* establishes a climate of threat, while the metaphor “*curse on your head*” transforms spiritual consequence into a personal burden. The criminalising expression “*robber who robs God*” redefines non-payment as theft rather than omission. Repetition of the lexical root *rob* intensifies culpability and positions congregants as offenders violating divine ownership. The possessive construction “*God of his tithe*” presupposes that tithe inherently belongs to God, thereby presenting giving as an obligation rather than a voluntary offering.

The utterance is expressed in unmodalised declarative form, which gives it epistemic authority and frames it as unquestionable truth. The clause “*is under a curse*” operates as a categorical judgement, leaving little room for negotiation. Discursively, the warning links non-compliance with punishment and constructs obedience as a strategy for spiritual safety.

A related framing appears in another excerpt:

“If God curses you, to whom will you run? It is a dangerous thing to rob God.”

The rhetorical question anticipates and suppresses dissent by implying that divine punishment is unavoidable. Repetition of *danger* reinforces urgency, while *robbing God* again criminalises non-

payment. The interrogative structure creates psychological engagement but directs the listener toward a predetermined conclusion: compliance.

Ideologically, these constructions sustain a prosperity-punishment binary in which financial obedience guarantees protection while resistance invites affliction. Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse may shape mental models in which tithe payment is perceived as necessary for spiritual security. Fear therefore operates not merely as emotional rhetoric but as a discursive mechanism for legitimising authority, guiding behaviour, and aligning economic practice with religious obligation.

Scriptural Recontextualisation in Tithing Discourse

A dominant persuasive strategy in the sermons analysed is the recontextualisation of scripture, whereby biblical narratives and verses are reframed to present tithing as a timeless, divinely mandated practice. Rather than treating scripture as open to multiple interpretations, sermon discourse selectively reinterprets biblical events to construct tithing as a fixed moral and spiritual requirement for contemporary believers.

Consider the excerpt:

“Adam touched the tithe... God said This one is yours, but this is mine.”

This utterance reinterprets the Genesis narrative by equating Adam’s disobedience with the withholding of tithe. The verb *touched* functions metaphorically, implying transgression and relocating a primordial act of disobedience into the domain of financial obligation. The possessive contrast *“this one is yours, but this is mine”* foregrounds divine ownership and frames tithe as sacred property. Through this grammatical pattern, financial giving is constructed not as optional generosity but as restitution of what already belongs to God.

Discursively, scripture is not quoted for reflection but recontextualised as instruction. Elements of biblical narrative are reconstructed to support contemporary doctrinal emphasis, collapsing historical distance and positioning present-day congregants within the same moral framework as biblical figures. Ideologically, this framing constructs continuity between ancient divine command and modern financial practice, thereby legitimising tithing as part of an unbroken spiritual order.

A related example extends scriptural authority through direct citation:

“Jesus said, this ought you to have done and not to leave the other undone.”

Here, quotation functions as legitimising discourse. The modal construction *ought* signals obligation, while attribution to Jesus transforms the statement from pastoral interpretation to divine mandate. The declarative form restricts alternative readings and positions compliance as alignment with sacred instruction. Scripture is thus reinserted into contemporary economic discourse as prescriptive authority.

Another instance counters dissent through historical framing:

“It is not part of the law Christ redeemed us from... Abraham paid tithe before the law.”

This construction invokes a pre-law origin for tithing, presenting it as transcending theological debates about Mosaic law. The contrastive structure *“not part of the law... before the law”* operates argumentatively, anticipating objections and neutralising them through declarative certainty. Tithing is thereby positioned as universal and doctrinally uncontested.

Analytically, scriptural recontextualisation functions as a key persuasive mechanism in tithing discourse. Linguistic features such as possessive pronouns, modal verbs, and declarative structures establish authority and minimise interpretive flexibility. At a broader level, scripture is reframed as directive discourse that guides congregational behaviour and reinforces an ideology of divine ownership and prosperity-oriented obedience. Repeated exposure to such framing may encourage listeners to internalise tithing as historically grounded, spiritually mandated, and morally necessary, thereby sustaining institutional authority and financial practice.

Testimonial Legitimation in Tithing Discourse

Another recurring persuasive strategy in the sermons is testimonial legitimation, where personal success stories and experiential narratives are used to validate tithing. Rather than relying solely on doctrinal claims, the discourse mobilises lived experiences of the preacher or other believers to demonstrate the perceived efficacy of financial obedience. Testimony thus functions as a discursive resource that transforms belief into “evidence.”

Consider the excerpt:

“Many have tithed their way into greatness in life... John D. Rockefeller began tithing from a small salary and became a billionaire.”

This utterance frames tithing as causally linked to material success. The expression “*tithed their way into greatness*” employs a journey metaphor that presents giving as a pathway to achievement. Evaluative lexis such as *greatness* and *billionaire* foregrounds material prosperity, while the declarative structure presents the claim as factual rather than interpretive. The reference to Rockefeller functions as an appeal to authority, creating an analogy between religious giving and capitalist success and implying that disciplined tithing produces economic transformation.

A second example illustrates how local testimonies strengthen persuasion:

“I know someone who started tithing here with a small income and now earns millions.”

Here, proximity enhances credibility. The phrase “*I know someone*” personalises the narrative, while “*started here*” situates the testimony within the same religious community. The lexical contrast between *small income* and *millions* constructs a transformation narrative that emphasises upward mobility. The simple declarative form presents the outcome as established truth, encouraging listeners to interpret their own circumstances as potentially reversible through obedience.

A further testimonial draws on collective experience:

“There are amazing testimonies in this place... strange breakthroughs and divine ideas come through tithing.”

The plural *testimonies* suggest widespread validation, while the adjective *amazing* heightens emotional engagement. The phrase “*in this place*” reinforces communal legitimacy, implying that evidence is observable within the congregation. Metaphorical expressions such as *divine ideas* blend spiritual and material aspirations, presenting prosperity as both sacred and attainable.

Analytically, testimonial legitimation operates as a bridge between doctrine and lived experience. Linguistically, it relies on evaluative lexis, declarative certainty, and narrative sequencing to construct credibility. Discursively, testimonies function as social proof, shifting persuasion from command to demonstration by showing what happens to those who tithe. Ideologically, these narratives reinforce a prosperity orientation in which financial obedience is linked to material reward and spiritual favour.

Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to testimonial narratives may shape mental models that associate tithing with success, upward mobility, and divine approval. Financial

giving is therefore framed not only as a religious duty but also as a practical pathway to personal transformation and collective aspiration.

Authority Construction in Tithing Discourse

A further persuasive strategy evident in the sermons is authority construction, where preachers position themselves as divinely sanctioned interpreters of scripture and custodians of spiritual truth. Through relational metaphors, directive speech, and epistemic certainty, sermon discourse establishes hierarchical authority and frames compliance as necessary for spiritual legitimacy.

Consider the excerpt:

“Your pastor has superior authority... he is your spiritual father.”

This utterance constructs authority through relational and hierarchical framing. The possessive structure “*your pastor*” personalises leadership while asserting control, positioning the preacher as guide and overseer. The comparative adjective *superior* establishes a hierarchy of spiritual knowledge, implying privileged access to divine instruction. The metaphor “*spiritual father*” is particularly significant; kinship metaphors naturalise authority by embedding it within familial relations where obedience is culturally expected. Through this framing, congregants are positioned as dependents whose spiritual well-being is mediated through pastoral guidance.

At the linguistic level, the declarative form presents authority as an established reality rather than a negotiable claim. The absence of modality reinforces epistemic certainty, while the metaphorical framing evokes emotional attachment and trust. Discursively, interpretation of scripture shifts from individual understanding to institutional mediation, centralising authority and framing obedience as moral obligation.

Authority is further reinforced through directive speech:

“Look at the person telling you not to pay tithe... look at his results.”

The imperative *look* functions as a directive that controls audience interpretation. Rather than encouraging independent evaluation, the discourse guides listeners toward a predetermined conclusion that critics of tithing lack credibility. The phrase “*his results*” invokes material success as a marker of spiritual authenticity, reinforcing the prosperity logic that links wealth with divine approval. Repetition of the imperative intensifies interpretive control, while evaluative framing

delegitimises dissent. Authority is thus constructed through contrast, positioning preachers as credible and critics as ineffective.

Another instance frames authority as spiritual mediation:

“If your parents curse you, your pastor can cancel it... But if God curses you, to whom will you run?”

Here, the pastor is positioned as an intermediary between divine power and human vulnerability. The modal verb *can* attribute supernatural capability to pastoral authority, while the rhetorical question eliminates alternative sources of protection and reinforces dependency on institutional leadership. Declarative and interrogative forms combine to produce urgency and reliance, encouraging trust in pastoral guidance.

Analytically, authority construction operates as a central mechanism in tithing discourse. Linguistic resources such as possessive pronouns, kinship metaphors, imperatives, and declarative certainty establish credibility and regulate interpretation. Discursively, authority is enacted through directive speech and credibility contrasts that position preachers as reliable guides and dissenters as untrustworthy. Ideologically, the discourse sustains a hierarchy in which spiritual leadership is presented as necessary for moral order and financial obedience. Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such constructions may shape mental models in which pastoral authority is perceived as legitimate, protective, and divinely endorsed, thereby embedding tithing within a relational structure of obedience and trust.

Discursive Closure in Tithing Discourse

A major persuasive strategy observed in the sermons is discursive closure, whereby sermon discourse forecloses debate, suppresses alternative interpretations, and presents tithing as a non-negotiable spiritual requirement. Through absolutist statements, directive formulations, and unmodalised claims, compliance is constructed as the only legitimate response.

Consider the excerpt:

“Anyone who is not paying tithe is not going to heaven. Full stop.”

This utterance exemplifies discursive closure through categorical assertion. The pronoun *anyone* universalises the claim, eliminating exceptions, while the negative construction *“is not going”*

links non-payment directly to eternal consequence. The unmodalised declarative structure presents the statement as absolute truth rather than doctrinal interpretation. The phrase “*full stop*” functions as a discursive terminator, signalling finality and discouraging further reflection or challenge. Through this framing, theological complexity is reduced to a single behavioural requirement.

Closure also operates through dismissal of dissent:

“Some say tithing is old... don’t listen to them.”

Here, alternative interpretations are introduced only to be rejected. The phrase “*some say*” minimises opposing views, while the imperative “*don’t listen*” instructs congregants to disengage from alternative perspectives. The directive structure regulates interpretation and reinforces pastoral authority by limiting cognitive autonomy.

Another instance illustrates closure through moral framing:

“Every time you touch your tithe, you are living in dishonesty.”

The lexical item *dishonesty* reframes non-payment as ethical failure rather than theological disagreement. The habitual construction “*every time*” intensifies culpability, presenting non-compliance as repeated moral violation. Evaluative lexis positions dissenters as ethically compromised, while the declarative form removes interpretive ambiguity. By shifting the issue from theology to morality, the discourse renders opposition difficult to defend.

Analytically, discursive closure functions as a regulatory mechanism that stabilises tithing discourse and restricts theological negotiation. Linguistic resources such as universal pronouns, declarative certainty, evaluative lexis, and directive structures construct finality and authority. Discursively, dissent is suppressed, and alternative interpretations are delegitimised, reinforcing a binary between authorised teaching and unacceptable deviation. Ideologically, obedience is framed as a condition for salvation, while resistance is associated with moral and spiritual failure. Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse may shape mental models in which questioning is discouraged, and compliance becomes normative. Tithing is thus internalised not merely as doctrinal instruction but as an unquestionable component of faith practice, embedded within a structure of authority, morality, and belief.

Analytical Synthesis: Interplay of Strategies in Tithing Discourse

The analysis shows that tithing discourse in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons operates through an interrelated system of persuasive strategies rather than isolated rhetorical moves. Scriptural recontextualisation provides doctrinal legitimacy; fear appeals regulate behaviour; testimonial narratives offer experiential validation; authority construction stabilises interpretation; and discursive closure suppresses dissent. Together, these strategies create a cohesive discursive environment in which financial giving is framed as spiritually necessary, morally justified, and socially endorsed.

At the macro level, the sermons construct a prosperity-oriented ideology linking obedience to tithing with divine favour, protection, and material success. Financial giving is embedded within a moral framework that defines compliance as faithfulness and resistance as spiritual risk, thereby aligning economic behaviour with religious identity.

At the meso level, the strategies operate interactively. Scriptural references ground theological claims, fear appeals intensify urgency, and testimonial narratives reinforce credibility. Authority construction centralises interpretation within pastoral leadership, while discursive closure limits alternative readings. These strategies reinforce one another to sustain a coherent, persuasive structure.

At the micro level, linguistic features such as imperatives, evaluative lexis, metaphors, pronoun positioning, and unmodalised declaratives guide interpretation and regulate emotional response. Repetition and consistency enable these patterns to shape cognitive alignment between preacher and audience.

From a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse contributes to mental models through which congregants interpret obligation, prosperity, and spiritual legitimacy. Tithing becomes framed not merely as a financial practice but as a necessary component of faith tied to protection, blessing, and belonging. This synthesis highlights how ideology, authority, and language converge to sustain persuasive religious communication.

Conclusion

This study examined how tithing is discursively constructed and legitimised in Nigerian Pentecostal sermons using a socio-cognitive critical discourse analytical lens. Through analysis of purposively selected sermon excerpts, it showed that financial giving is sustained not only through

theological instruction but through structured persuasive discourse in which language shapes belief, reinforces authority, and guides congregational behaviour.

The findings indicate that tithing discourse operates through recurring strategies, including scriptural recontextualisation, fear appeal, testimonial legitimation, authority construction, and discursive closure. At the macro level, these strategies collectively reinforce a prosperity-oriented ideology linking financial obedience with divine favour, protection, and spiritual legitimacy. At the meso level, discourse regulates interpretation through rhetorical control, directive speech, and credibility framing. At the micro level, linguistic features such as metaphor, modality, evaluative lexis, and pronoun positioning generate persuasive force and limit interpretive flexibility.

Within a socio-cognitive perspective, repeated exposure to such discourse contributes to mental models that associate giving with blessing, protection, and moral alignment. Tithing is thus framed not merely as a financial practice but as a necessary component of faith and belonging.

The study contributes to research on religious discourse, pragmatics, and African Pentecostal communication by foregrounding language as central to the production of religious authority. By situating tithing within the interaction between discourse, cognition, and social context, it demonstrates how sermon language shapes moral expectation and behaviour.

Although limited to publicly accessible sermons and selected high-visibility preachers, the study underscores the importance of examining religious communication as a discursive system through which obligation, authority, and belief are constructed and sustained.

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