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**Linguistic Revolution: The New Face of Register**

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**Abstract**

The paper investigated linguistic revolution with regard to the new face of register. It observed that there is a sort of metaphorical and ironical mantra in the speeches of the New Generation Christians in Rivers State, Nigeria. Data collected from the members of some Pentecostal churches were analysed using the Social Identity Theory. The Social Identity Theory defines the individual in an in-group setting and promotes the norms, culture, agreement and boundaries of the members. The norms are identity markers for the members, while the responds of the members are forms of solidarity. We observed that the New Generation Christians are dynamically very slangy. Different words, phrases and diatype sentences evolve from time to time. The speech forms, which to some extent are church-dependent, are patterns of religious identity constructs. We concluded by noting that even though these patterns of language use are

matters of Faith advocacy, care must be taken in order to balance Faith with reason and reality.

**Key words:** Identity, linguistics, Pentecostal, revolution, slangy, social and solidarity

### Introduction

Every speech community is defined by the language they use. Children and the aged alike are identified or can be identified with their language no matter when and where they speak. This role of language is not limited to anybody and any environment. Even in the darkest part of the word, language always stands out as a vehicle and signpost for social identification, group mobilization and solidarity.

Apart from speech communities, social groups, organisations, clubs both secular and religious have common ways and means of identification and solidarity. Nwala (2015) clearly captured this linguistic forms when he noted that as individuals have ways of speaking peculiar to them, so also have groups and organisations. For the individual, it is called idiolect but for the group, it is called sociolect. For the organization and groups – the focus of this paper, such terms or varieties are the reserve of the in-group members. Non-members hardly use or communicatively interpret them.

In the religious setting, especially in the 19th and 20th century, the members (Christians) were commonly referred to as *Brothers* and *Sisters*, while such words as *Amen, praise the lord; Alleluia, peace be with you* were commonplace among worshippers and attendants. Of late, the tune has changed. Different words, phrases and even sentences evolve every other day. As there are upsurge in the evolution of different churches, prayer houses, ministries and healing homes, so also are there an uncontrollable evolution of terminologies of greetings, request; responds to events and situations, identification and solidarity, encouragements, admonition and worship. The fleeting speed with which these terms evolve and the unpredictable manner they drop out allude to the fact that language indeed is dynamic; the property of man, the mirror of the society and the carrier of identity.

### Theoretical Framework

Social identity theory is one that usually hinges on self-categorisation theory (SCT). SCT is a theory that provides a non-reductionist account of the interaction between individual and social levels of influence (Turner & Oates, 1985). Every social group has binding rules – such that each member of the group is expected to queue into these approved norms. These norms define the in-group in contrast to other relevant out-groups. Social identity therefore is one which is firmly anchored in a tradition emphasizing the functional dimension of the group members as a source of social information and justification (Wilder, 1977).

Social identities are at the same time individual perceptions as well as socially constructed conceptions of the defining features, norms, agreements and boundaries of the group identity. They are social identity constructs which provide a common interpretive framework that defines the group, rooted in a common principle. The members of the in-group carry with it the expectations of the in-group, this helps to identify them among other relevant groups.

As defining norms, social identity theory informs the society who the group members are, how they think, how they behave and what they do (Aboh, 2015). It helps one to define and position oneself within a social structure, but it is also about becoming in the sense that social identity can mobilize the group to engage in collective believe in order to change a perceive social reality.

In the Pentecostal churches, especially among the New Generation Christians, one can easily notice a sort of linguistic habit which is a typical example of identity construct. The choice of this theoretical framework is justified because it allows us to appropriately situate the concept of linguistic revolution within the confines of the ever-fleeting terminologies among the New Generation Christians.

### **Review of Literature**

#### ***Register***

This is one of the varieties of a language. It is a social variety which is usually occupationally and professionally defined. It is language according to use. Register unlike slang is a formal and a standard variety even though its form is specialized, restricted and locative.

Hudson (1980) descriptively noted that register is a variation of language according to use which is in contrast with dialect - variety according to users. According to him, “the distinction is needed because the same person may use very different linguistics items to express more or less the same meaning on different occasions and the concept of dialect cannot reasonably be extended to include such variation” (p.46).

Hudson further noted that register shows or locates people, a sort of identity construct or style. Register, he observes, takes a multi-dimensional matrix, just like the map of our society which we each build in our mind. This simply means that register covers a wide range of spectrum defining occupations, people, groups, societies among others. To show the diversities in register, Hudson noted:

In writing one letter a person might start ‘I am writing to inform you that...’, but in another, the same person might write ‘I just wanted to let you know that...’. Such examples could be multiplied endlessly and suggest that the amount of variation due to register differences (if ‘it

could somehow be quantified) may be quite comparable with that due to differences in dialect (1980, p.46).

Yule (1985) in a related opinion, looked at register as a special type of jargon, “which is used to define technical vocabularies associated with a special activity or group” (p. 245). He acknowledges that register (jargon) helps to connect people who see themselves as one or ‘insiders’ in some way and to exclude ‘outsiders’. To prove his assertion, Yule noted that there is religious as well as legal registers in which one expects to find expressions not used among outsiders. To drive home his thought, Yule gave two examples: ‘ye shall be blessed by Him in times of tribulation’ and ‘the plaintiff is ready to take the witness stand’.

Yule’s acknowledgement is a clear testimony that register indeed is a variety of language according to use; that, it locates the insider or in-group members, their language use and style. This is a clear indication of the fact that register is a typical form of identity construct and sociolinguistic solidarity.

Wardough (1986) observed that register is a complicating item in the study of language varieties. He notes that dialect which is language according to users or a regional variety, the description and situation is straightforward, but for register, the description is not. This is perhaps because of its description as a variety according to use, which means since the use of language is notoriously complex; register itself is also notoriously complex.

The complexity of the term notwithstanding, Wardough simply defined it as “set of language items associated with discrete occupational or social groups”. The equation of register to social groups is within the confines of this paper. This is because churches belong to social groups whose language use is dependent on a number of factors, such as belief, interest and the general context. Ferguson gives vent to Wardough’s opinion that the language use of any social group is dependent on her belief when he says, “people participating in recurrent communication situation tend to develop similar vocabularies, similar feature of intonation characteristic bits of syntax and phonology that they use in these situations” (p.20).

Olaoye (1998) in a rather expository posture noted that all human activities require the use of language in some sort. The different activities of man occasion the uses of language to specifically spotlight such activities. Olaoye like Anaghogu, mbah and Eme (2000) noted that register takes different forms, such as the mode of discourse; the flied of discourse and the tenor of discourse.

Anaghogu, Mbah and Eme (2000) in noting the different varieties of language also acknowledged register as a variety of language according to use. Anaghogu, Mbah and Eme as we hinted above, distinguished register into three dimensions:

- i. The field of discourse

ii. The mode of discourse

iii. The style of discourse

The field of discourse according to them is the variation according to the subject matter. Here, they observe that different disciplines and fields of human endeavours have terms solely used in such fields. Hence, in mathematics, cookery, law etc. you have words and terms peculiar to them. In the mode of discourse, they note two varieties, the spoken and the written mode. According to them “if something is spoken, the language differs as in the written form, hesitations, pauses and repetitions are phenomena that tend to have longer sentences, sometimes with parenthesis” (p.17).

In the style of discourse, Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2000) noted that the situation or context decides the nature of language used. If the context is a formal one, the style will certainly be different from when it is an informal one. According to them, the closeness of people does not influence language use in formal situations; hence, the wife of a chairman of an occasion must address him at the occasion as the “Chairman”. The distribution of parameters of register into three like other scholars also did is quite commendable, as it helps to bring to clarity the language use in any field of human endeavour.

Nwobia (2007) like the scholars already noted, described register as the totality of what people do with language, a definition which is in contrast with the user of language (dialect). According to Nwobia (p.28), “an individual may use different linguistic terms to refer to or express same meaning in different context and occasion”. She stressed further that language must also be appropriately used in different context and situation. This means that the language used in a market place will not be appropriate for class room usage; in the same vein, the language used in court room maybe entirely different from that used by a preacher in the church (p.29).

Salami (2014) like Nwobia (2007) noted that people can use different forms and lexis of a language in different context. He notes that the Computer scientists, Medical doctors, Bankers, Engineers etc. use different vocabulary items. A Computer scientist according to him will talk about ‘template’ a Civil engineer or Design engineer may refer to the same concept as ‘frame’ (p. 43).

Nwala and Obisike (2014) also noted that register is a variety of language according to use, saying that no variety of language is used the same way regardless of where, who, when and the purpose of usage. Going by their opinion, it simply means that register is that variety of language that helps people to be specific in context and occupational terminologies.

The fore going has explicitly brought to fore the facts about language and its dynamism. Explaining register –the variety of language according to use, the scholars acknowledged the fact that it makes for the appropriate use of language, to define

context, occupation, and that register serves as a social means of solidarity and identity construct. Register helps people shift ground in their use of language, choosing the appropriate linguistic items as the occasion warrants.

In agreement with the literature, Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2001) observed the flexibility of language noting that “no human language is fixed, uniform, or unvarying; all languages show internal variation” (p.259). Once we realize that variations in language is pervasive, it becomes apparent that there is no such thing as a single language used at all time by speakers or social groups. So, register which is a diatype due to occupation is also not fixed. The churches respond to the environment, the context and the fleeting belief of her members and evolve speech forms and jargons to stick the in-group members together in a common show of identity and solidarity.

### **Methodology**

To source data for this paper, we simply interacted with the faithful of six Pentecostal denominations: The Redeemed Christian church, the Winners Chapel; the Salvation Ministries, the Logos Ministries; the Omega Prayer Ministries and the Dominion City, all in Port Harcourt city, Rivers State, Nigeria. The data were descriptively analysed showing how they convey local and in-group meanings.

### **Analysis**

In this analysis, we segment the data into three broad discourse strategies, portraying how registers are social identity constructs which provide a common interpretive framework that defines the group, rooted in a common principle and belief. The strategies are:

- i. Consolation and hope strategy,
- ii. Ironic strategy, and
- iii. Worship, praise and salutation strategy.

#### ***Consolation and Hope Strategy***

Consolation is simply an act of encouragement. It is to give solace and comfort while expecting that the condition will turn out positive or better. It is an outright believe and hope in what one does not know or control, it is so because one believes something far greater and profound will certainly cause the situation to change. Consolation has ever been the solace of Christians especially the assurance that Jesus Christ will come one day to rapture His people.

However, a new dimension or twist to consolation has emerged among the New Generation Christians (especially, the Pentecostal churches). The innovation, we hold in this paper, makes mess of man and his ability to reason and take charge of his responsibilities and conditions. It is now a sort of apology for laziness, mistakes and

in-action, describing man as, inferior, empty and motionless in the face of reality. It is a commonplace to hear Christian make such consolatory remarks as:

- i. I cannot be sick
- ii. I am too loaded to fail
- iii. I cannot be poor
- iv. Lay it at the Apostle's feet
- v. I am a covenant child
- vi. It is well.

These declarative statements and their likes not mentioned in this paper are quite popular among the Pentecostals. It is a common scenario to visit a Brother or a Sister who is sick, or who is poor; or who has failed in an examination, but who will turn around to speak from his or her resolve that he/she cannot be sick, be poor or fail. The reality of the situation makes one to wonder the rationale behind such declarative statements and perhaps, the reasonability of such a person. This is simply part of identity construct, where one is in prison and lacks the boldness and freedom to face the glaring fact; it is a situation where one is incapacitated and chained, thus, he is unable to think otherwise. Social identity and solidarity control the behaviour of the in-group members, set them apart from outsiders and chart a road-map for them. It makes the members have the indefinable sense of betrayal and guilt even in a solitary place. For us, one should acknowledge the reality, face the challenges while relying on hope which gives one the courage that better times awaits one. If not, how can one explain the reason behind the proclamation that 'it is well' when there are undeniable and incontrovertible evidence of sorrow and regret?

### ***Ironic Strategy***

Irony is simply, the opposite of a fact. It is a concept in logic or truth-conditional semantics used to say the reverse of an intended proposition. According to Barnet, S. Berman, M. & Burto, W. (1978, p.80) irony is a "stimulated ignorance". It is a pretentious linguistic device used to say the opposite of what one literally means, either to emphasis the message or to be sarcastic. Generally, ironic statements are not overtly deceitful because the audience knows the fact given the conspicuous nature of the evidence. So, one therefore wonders why the Faithful of a living and true God will resort to deliberate lies, while believing that the listener knows the true situation. The question then becomes, who is deceiving who? Why will the followers of an impeccable and truthful God live in practical falsehood and pretence? Why must people claim what they are not or what is not? In most speeches of the Pentecostals, one readily hears such statements as:

- i. I am healed
- ii. I am very rich
- iii. I am very strong, and

- iv. It is well with my pocket

The positive psychological declarations above are the opposite and truthful state of the claimant. The speaker indeed is

- i. Sick  
 ii. Broke  
 iii. Very sick, and  
 iv. Very broke

In most case, the members of the Pentecostals use these types of expressions to appeal to the conscience of their addressees, a sort of mind game and face strategy used to ask for economic and social aids. Ordinarily, one would expect followers of a true God to be frank and real in their speeches, instead, what one finds out is their brazen use of deceitful and pretentious speeches because of their influenced believes that one must not speak negatively. And that there is power in spoken words, for what one says with one's mouth, must certainly come to pass. This is another display of identity strategy, which does not permit a devotee or an adherent of a social group to exercise freedom of personality and right to expression. People who are frank in their speeches, who present their real situations to God and man are seen to be unbelievers, faithless and outsiders.

For us, our argument is that the use of ironic, deceitful and at times silent-coated request for economic and social aids is an extreme display of fanaticism and pretence. It is a psychological dummy sold to the teeming members of the Pentecostals usually used to stick them together, while presenting the world as a bed of roses. This is very typical of the antics of the social group whose aim is to present her believe and ideology as a temple of justice and template of opportunities. God is real, and His followers, we think, should be real.

#### ***Worship, Praise and Salutation Strategy***

To worship is to respect and to give absolute reverence. To praise is to extol, glorify and to commend. Greeting or salutation is a show of solidarity, goodwill, friendliness and exchange of pleasantry; it is also a form of praise. Worship, praise and greeting are discourse acts the Christian churches are known for. Worship and praise are acts used to reverence and extol God. Greeting is used by members to show comradeship, affection and oneness. In the traditional parlance, Christians use simple affectionate and in-group terms such as, *peace be unto this house, Brother and Sister* to show oneness of faith and such terms as *praise the lord, Alleluia, Amen* to show reverence to God

But of late, especially among the New Generation Christians, the scope of this discourse act has widened. Many terms which ranges from reverence to God, praise to

God and to the members, show of faith, group identification to mention just a few evolve every other day. We now hear such expressions as:

- i. Bless you
- ii. God is good, all the time
- iii. God bless you
- iv. Sow a seed
- v. Sow a seed of faith
- vi. On the mountain
- vii. Sacrificial offering
- viii. Waiting on the lord
- ix. Give God a wiper
- x. Hee too powerful Praise God
- xi. Man of God
- xii. Woman of God

These discourse acts unlike the traditional discourse acts of *Amen, praise the lord, Brother, Sister, peace be unto this house and Alleluia* are to some extent used to depict such behavioural degrees of holiness, faith, 'Born againism' and denominational solidarity. Again, we argue that the fleeting evolution of registers of the New Generation Christians is more of denominational identity and not necessarily, any *manifestation of adherence to the principles and ordinances of God*. The use of these registers is so open and locative that one can readily identify the particular denomination of a speaker. For example, the Omega Prayer Ministries (OPM) to show in-group and discourse particularism during their testimony times say:

Speaker: OPM

Congregational response: Doctor Jesus in action

Speaker: Doctor Jesus in action

Congregational response: God is here.

It is also quite common to hear this somewhat cliché among the Redeemed Christian church:

Speaker: Who did this?

Congregational response: Jesus, oh my God, wow oooo!

Just like any other social group, the New Generation Christians, especially the Pentecostal churches use such registers which map them out among others. Even though these registers are in most cases expressions within the confines of the Standard wordings of the English language, their meanings and usages are in most cases, not conventional. If not, how can one reconcile the fact that, *bless you and praise God* are

forms of greetings and not wishes or exultation? Or *how can a bed-ridden man who is hospitalized claim that all is well and that he is strong when there are all indications that he is not?* The members of the denominations where these registers are used know and understand their senses of usages, hence they respond accordingly.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we have appraised the fleeting evolution and new face of register among the New Generation Christians of the Pentecostal churches. We argued that this new form of speeches and discourse acts of the Pentecostal are some form of identity construct and solidarity. They help to define and locate the denominations and serve as a type of in-house language. The expressions we observed are mostly of the Standard English but their semantic senses are often specialized. This is why declarative expressions such as, *it is well, I am rich and I am strong*, which on the surface denote or portray positive socio-economic well-being are ironic and indirect expressions of, regret, poverty and ailment. In as much as register is like an ailment or character that is self-inflicted and imbibed, care must be taken to balance faith, religiosity, and fanaticism with reality.

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