

Routes to Persuasion. Negotiating Attitudes in Contemporary Neo-Pentecostal Discourse¹

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Abstract: Since the 1980s, Christianity in Europe has undergone major changes which apply mostly to both the ritual and leadership style. The former stands for religious practices focused on evoking supernatural phenomena whose emergence aims to empower an individual to take a particular action whereas the latter concerns efficient management, based on the *modus operandi* typical of the corporate environment. John Wimber and Charles Peter Wagner are claimed to have been the key figures responsible for the aforementioned shift. Wimber introduced the so-called Signs and Wonders Movement, followed by a world-famous preaching strategy known as power evangelism. He gave rise to the birth of the Third Wave Pentecostalism, also recognized as Neo-Pentecostalism. Wagner on the other hand, initiated the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), that is, a theological belief and movement at the same time whose core themes include transforming societies through strategic-level spiritual warfare (SLSW) and in consequence, advancing the kingdom of God. Interestingly, those two approaches complement each other what can be observed when exploring the discourse. The principal objective of this study is to investigate how the present-day Polish and Italian evangelists following the strategy of power evangelism negotiate attitudes and how it affects recipients' self-image. Data were collected by means of participant observation, computer-mediated interviewing as well as written and spoken text analysis.

Keywords: Power evangelism, Neo-Pentecostalism, Systemic-functional multimodal discourse analysis, Linguistic persuasion, Religious marketplace

ES Caminos hacia la persuasión. La negociación de actitudes en el discurso neopentecostal contemporáneo

Resumen: Desde la década de 1980, el cristianismo evangélico en Europa ha experimentado importantes cambios que atañen sobre todo al rito y al estilo de liderazgo. El primero se refiere a prácticas religiosas centradas en la evocación de fenómenos sobrenaturales, cuya aparición pretende capacitar a un individuo para emprender una determinada acción; mientras que el segundo concierne a la gestión eficaz, basada en el *modus operandi* típico del entorno empresarial. Habitualmente se señala a John Wimber y Charles Peter Wagner como las figuras responsables de estas transformaciones. Wimber introdujo el llamado "Movimiento de Señales y Maravillas", que se convirtió en la base de una estrategia de predicación de escala global conocida como "evangelicalismo de poder" y marcó —a su vez— el nacimiento de la tercera ola del pentecostalismo, también denominada "neopentecostalismo". Wagner, por su parte, inició la Reforma Nueva Apostólica (RNA), es decir, una creencia teológica y un movimiento al mismo tiempo cuyos temas centrales incluyen la transformación de las sociedades mediante la guerra espiritual a nivel estratégico (GES), con la mirada puesta en la consecución del reino de Dios. Curiosamente, estos dos enfoques se complementan entre sí, tal y como puede observarse a través de análisis de discurso. El objetivo principal de este estudio es investigar la negociación de actitudes por parte de los evangélicos polacos e italianos que siguen la estrategia del "evangelismo de poder" y cómo afectan estos mecanismos a la autoimagen de los receptores. Los datos en los que se fundamenta este estudio se recogieron mediante observación participante, entrevistas online y análisis de textos, tanto escritos y orales, como se detalla en la sección metodológica

Palabras clave: Evangelismo de poder; Neopentecostalismo; Análisis multimodal sistémico-funcional del discurso; Persuasión lingüística; Mercado religioso.

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Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Materials and methods. 3. Results. 4. Conclusions. 5. Bibliography.

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1. Introduction

Pentecostalism has gained increasing attention over the last 40 years. Its most dynamic variety, often termed *Neo-Pentecostalism* or the *Third Wave* (McClymond, 2014: 32), has spread worldwide and therefore, has been considered a reference point for the present-day evangelists, leaving behind the so-called classical Pentecostals (*First Wavers*) and charismatics (*Second Wavers*; see below). Its spectacular success results from giving priority to public performances during which individuals claim to experience divine interventions leading to one's spiritual catharsis. John Wimber, who started that movement in the 1980s, emphasized the importance of signs and wonders, mostly by providing a new approach to preaching whose official name came to be known as *power evangelism*. In Wimber's view (Wimber & Springer, 2009: 5), power evangelism combines the proclamation and supernatural demonstration of the kingdom of God and hence, it is the most efficient method of winning the followers of Christ. In other words, participants of a worship service conducted according to Wimber's strategy, may expect to witness what he defines as *power encounters*. These are the visible symptoms of the battle between God and Satan, frequently observed while performing deliverance ministry (Wimber & Springer, 2009: 49). To understand the key idea behind Wimber's *modus operandi*, an *integrated model of healing* he developed should be mentioned first. It should also be remembered that this particular model has been preserved as well as eagerly implemented until today. Although several prominent healing ministers like Oral Roberts or Kathryn Kuhlman had already appeared on stage (Synan, 2001), Wimber's influence reached even the non-believers as a response to his course at Fuller Seminary which provoked controversy (McClymond, 2014: 41). Wimber perceives healing holistically which means that it can affect one's body, soul, and spirit simultaneously (Wimber & Springer, 1987: 171). For this reason, he differentiates between healing of the spirit, inner healing, healing of the demonized and mental illnesses, healing of the body, and healing of the dying and the dead (Wimber & Springer, 1987: 61-62). Wimber's disciples, bearing in mind present-day evangelists who preach internationally in accordance with power evangelism guidelines, stick to the procedure he once coined and described thoroughly. It rests on 5 crucial steps, and these are: (1) the interview, (2) the diagnostic decision, (3) the prayer selection, (4) the prayer engagement, and (5) post prayer directions (Wimber & Springer, 1987: 199). The procedure itself allows for the occurrence of the unpredictable manifestations of the Holy Spirit, including shaking, trembling, falling over, crying, or making animal noises.

Due to its rapid growth, the Third Wave has won a great number of enthusiasts, particularly amongst prospective leaders interested in running their own ministries who have tried both, to repeat Wimber's success acting in the way he did and to introduce new elements that could enrich the already-existing core (Richter, 1997; Poloma, 2003; Wilkinson & Althouse, 2014; Kobyliński, 2017). Charles Peter Wagner, Wimber's student and later, the father of the *New Apostolic Reformation* (NAR) was one of such figures. The concepts of strategic-level spiritual warfare (SLSW) and social transformation have gained a solid position in the religious marketplace as well as in the Christian discourse. Wagner highlights the role of the so-called apostles (Wagner, 2006), understood as independent, highly-motivated Christian leaders, whose main task is to take control over a given territory and preach the Word of God to non-believers. Since Wagner adopted power evangelism directly from its founder, it goes without saying that preaching should be followed by supernatural manifestations as stated above. Wagner is also known for initiating a shift from a denominational-congregational organization of religious communities to a more autonomous option (Flory & Christerson, 2017: 9). Noteworthy is the fact that the evangelists investigated in this paper represent Wagner's scenario. To be more exact, they travel both countrywide and worldwide. They perform in public and provide the audience with the experiences of the miraculous and the promise to become part of a breakthrough (Flory & Christerson, 2017: 84). The former involves, for instance, prophesying, speaking in tongues, or casting out demons whereas the latter alludes to a spiritual revival, renewal, and awakening. The breakthrough itself can only be achieved upon receiving the so-called divine anointing. What matters most for the advocates of Wimber's legacy, is cognitive restructure that can be achieved gradually when exposed to persuasive messages sent by power evangelism practitioners on a regular basis. Cognitive restructure means complete replacement of a person's maladaptive thoughts (schemas) which make them depressed and anxious with the more adaptive ones focused on further advancement in terms of personal goals (Berdowicz, 2022: 158-161). In effect, one rebuilds their self-image.

To avoid confusion, essential terms that will appear in the following sections should be explained. The one which seems particularly problematic is Neo-Pentecostalism. Some scholars use it when referring to Catholic Charismatic Renewal of the 1960s (Quebedeaux, 1976; Faulkner & Bord, 1983; Csordas, 1994) whereas others, when talking about Wimber and the Third Wave (Yamamori & Miller, 2007; McClymond, 2014; Kobyliński, 2016). For the purposes of this research, only the second interpretation will be taken into account. Therefore, every time concepts such as the *Neo-Pentecostal language* or *religious entrepreneurs* appear in the text, they should immediately be linked to Wimber's Third Wave and his world-famous preaching strategy of power evangelism. Moreover, it should also be made clear that the line between what is Neo-Pentecostal and what is not in contemporary Christianity, is fine. Precisely speaking, the evangelists investigated in this study run their own ministries which may suggest they function based on the apostolic model of leadership.

However, their preaching methods bear striking resemblance to those once established by Wimber. Take for example the healing procedure. Finally, there is also another significant issue which needs specifying for a better understanding of what has been explored. Stark and Finke (Stark & Finke, 1988, 42) introduce the idea of *religious economies*, claiming that «religious economies are like commercial economies. They consist of a market and a set of firms seeking to serve that market». Put differently, religious leaders who root their ministry in Wimber's power evangelism and who are vigorously debated here, perform as religious entrepreneurs, operating in the religious marketplace where competition is nothing unusual (Roof, 1999). Due to the features they share with the corporate environment, they can be considered brands themselves, the brands religious consumers are loyal to and eager to follow. Although the question of faith branding constitutes an essential element of the whole investigation, it will not be addressed separately. The term religious entrepreneurs has been introduced only to show the nature of today's leadership.

Regarding the theoretical background, this research makes reference to: (1) Stark and Lofland's conversion pattern (1965), (2) Petty and Cacioppo's *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), (3) Habrajska's perspective on the persuasion process (Habrajska, 2020), and (4) Berdowicz's view on the qualities of the Neo-Pentecostal language (Berdowicz, 2022). *Systemic Functional-Multimodal Discourse Analysis* (Rose & Martin, 2007: 25-71) (SF-MDA) is the approach employed in this study to explore how appraisal works in the Neo-Pentecostal discourse. Stark and Lofland's conversion pattern places emphasis on seven factors whose combination may account for the successful recruitment. It has been presumed that research subjects fit this narrative, especially when talking about enduring tensions and the problem-solving tools. As for Petty and Cacioppo's findings, special attention has been paid to what they call the *central route to persuasion*. It has been assumed that the participants of the events conducted by power evangelism practitioners are motivated enough to respond to the messages spread during the encounter. Their motivation may arise from both personal relevance and their need for cognition. The former stands for an individual's experiences understood as life hardships they want to overcome and hence they seek guidance whereas the latter applies to the natural human tendency to structure things in a meaningful way so that the recipients become aware of the measures they should take to make progress. When it comes to the leaders and their performance, it has been assumed that the arguments they use when interacting with the audience are strong, bearing in mind Petty and Cacioppo's classification (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986: 133), and that is why they have a high persuasive potential. In other words, they generate favorable thoughts and ultimately cause a permanent attitude change. The arguments in question are considered to be the foundation of what Habrajska describes as *persuasion framework* and *factual persuasion* (Habrajska, 2020: 94). Persuasion framework encompasses a series of actions aimed at attuning the recipient, and these are: enhancing through stressing one's intelligence or right to having one's needs satisfied, creating a bond between the interlocutors, and creating a sender's positive image, mostly by emphasizing their expertise (Habrajska, 2020: 94). The factual persuasion on the other hand, means the speaker's overall effort put into making the recipient accept their point of view. It distinguishes between 3 different paths, including the informative, axiological, and behavioral ones (Habrajska, 2020: 106). The last missing component which seems essential for an interplay to be effective is the right tool. It has been assumed that power evangelism practitioners implement a special variety of a religious language, referred to in this study as the Neo-Pentecostal language, whose qualities let them influence the audience successfully. It is not confined to one chosen nation only (Berdowicz, 2022: 155) and therefore, it should be perceived as something universal, something that unites members of a particular group of people, in this case, Wimber's adherents, regardless of their country of origin.

The main purpose of this research is to investigate how Polish and Italian power evangelism practitioners, who perform the role of independent leaders in charge of their own ministries, use appraisal resources to negotiate attitudes when interacting with the audience and how the content they spread, affects individuals' self-image. The study therefore attempts to explore the persuasive potential of the Neo-Pentecostal language by means of which the leaders, understood as religious entrepreneurs and acting as brands, are capable to make audience members, understood as religious consumers, generate favorable thoughts that eventually lead them to accept the point of view presented by the performer. Based on what has been stated above, the following thesis has been formulated: Polish and Italian power evangelism practitioners employ a two-stage protocol to make their listeners adopt their point of view. The first phase focuses on building a strong brand image, mostly by providing the audience with tailored narrative whose introduction results in establishing a long-lasting bond which consequently enhances source credibility whereas the second phase involves exposing the recipient to messages whose content changes the recipient's state of knowledge, changes their axiological perspective, and induces them to take measures according to the performer's concept. Personal relevance and the need to structure life experiences are major factors responsible for recipients' willingness to elaborate upon the arguments presented during the interplay. Attitudes that are subject to negotiation conducted by power evangelism practitioners have to do with evaluating things, people's character, and their feelings. Power evangelism practitioners tend to invoke two contradictory semiotic realities, namely, the pre-awakening realm in which meaning-making concerns past hurts and the post-awakening realm in which meaning-making concerns an individual's spiritual re-birth. Therefore, attitudes that are subject to negotiation are closely connected with those dimensions in terms of the issues being raised. Evaluation is realized either explicitly or implicitly and employs amplification which serves to demonstrate performer's engagement. Power evangelism practitioners use a special variety of a religious language known for its persuasive impact maximized by the introduction of emotive words, evidence, hyperboles, inclusiveness, imagery, jargon, metaphor, repetition, and rhetorical questions. The practice of negotiating attitudes in the Neo-Pentecostal discourse helps the recipients to resemiotize their self-image which eventually leads to a permanent schematic change and life quality improvement.

2. Materials and methods

This research was conducted both in Poland and Italy. It focused on two essential ingredients of the religious marketplace, namely, religious entrepreneurs and religious consumers. As for religious entrepreneurs, the study focused on power evangelism practitioners who present themselves as brands and feature a strong brand image. Regarding religious consumers, the investigation in question centered around individuals who claimed to have had a divine encounter after being exposed to the content disseminated by the above-mentioned preachers and as a result, their self-image has been deeply affected. Major inclusion criteria in the case of religious leaders were: (1) adoption of Wimber's preaching style, (2) considerable emphasis on signs and wonders, (3) corporate approach to ministry, (4) use of the Neo-Pentecostal language, and (5) countrywide or international recognition. As far as religious shoppers are concerned, they encompassed: (1) regular participation in the Neo-Pentecostal ritual, (2) conviction of having experienced supernatural intervention, (3) radical change of life priorities, (4) active engagement in community outreach projects, and (5) advocacy for revival, renewal, and awakening ideas. Although this research involves individuals who describe themselves as members of particular religious groups in which the Neo-Pentecostal practices prevail, those groups as a whole will not be discussed. What is significant here is the interaction between a religious entrepreneur whose *modus operandi* rests on power evangelism strategy and the religious consumer who seeks spiritual catharsis and healing, regardless of its type.

The following power evangelism practitioners were selected: (1) Arkadiusz Krzywodajć, pastor and founder of Filadelfia Church, Wodzisław Śląski, Poland (Kościół Filadelfia; original Polish name), (2) Wojciech Walaszczyk, pastor and founder of the Vineyard Christian Center from Rybnik, Poland (Centrum Chrześcijańskie Winnica; original Polish name), (3) Tomasz Dorożala, pastor and founder of the Blazing Fire Ministries from Gdańsk, Poland (Służba Apostolska Ogień Przebudzenia; original Polish name), (4) Tony Bellavia, pastor and founder of the Parola della Grazia Church from Rome, Italy, (5) Roselen Boerner Faccio, pastor and founder of the Sabaoth Missionary Movement; initiator of the Sabaoth Church Milano whose subsidiaries can be found in major Italian cities, and (6) Angelo D'Aloisi, pastor of the Hillsong Milan. It should be mentioned that due to limited time and financial resources, only some of them were investigated on-site whereas others, mainly off-site. Because of the fact that all the enumerated leaders pose as brands, they spread content and operate via social media, bearing in mind official Facebook and Instagram profiles. As suggested by Klaver (2021: 212), mediatization enables religious place-making in global cities which in practical terms means that attenders can join the service in whatever form, regardless of whether they inhabit the city or just pass through. That is why, videos showing sermons can be reached online easily. The on-site exploration involved Arkadiusz Krzywodajć, Wojciech Walaszczyk, and Angelo D'Aloisi whose performance was transmitted live every Sunday during a community gathering taking place in Rome whereas the off-site study involved Tomasz Dorożala, Tony Bellavia, and Roselen Boerner Faccio whose guidelines on Church growth were put into practice by the pastors of the Roman subsidiary, called Sabaoth Church Roma.

The implemented data collection methods included participant observation, asynchronous computer-mediated interviewing and text analysis. In respect of participant observation, it was carried out in Wodzisław Śląski (Poland), Rybnik (Poland), and Rome (Italy) and comprised the communities supervised by the leaders in questions. It should be made clear that religious entrepreneurs chosen for the purposes of this study, not only act as itinerant preachers and brands at the same time but are also in charge of groups that meet weekly. Worship services hosted by those preachers were attended periodically to investigate how attitudes are negotiated while interacting face-to-face and how the audience responds to verbal stimulation. Moreover, frequent visits to the events they organized allowed for a better understanding of the Neo-Pentecostal ritual, helped to determine the qualities of the Neo-Pentecostal language that serve religious persuasion, and made it possible to identify the two-stage protocol power evangelism practitioners tend to employ. As for computer-mediated asynchronous interviews, they were anonymous, conducted online and consisting of open-ended questions that allowed for detailed responses. An emphasis was placed on how the argumentation put forward by the preachers affected recipients' self-image and what the conversion process looked like. What seems significant, the subjects were recruited from the Roman groups under consideration. Twenty respondents (5 men and 15 women) answered the questions from the list, either in English or Italian, depending on their choice. The age range was between 18 and 65. As regards text analysis, it was done by means of the approach mentioned above and termed SF-MDA. Importantly, it applied to both written and spoken texts published on the Internet by the entrepreneurs referred to in this study. Based on what has already been stated, it can be concluded that the research consisted of the comprehensive overview part and the validation part. The former stands for recognizing how Neo-Pentecostal persuasion works while the latter for how it influences the addressees.

3. Results

The investigation reveals that power evangelism practitioners build rapport with their followers in stages. The first stage consists in cultivating what is known as customer loyalty. They win audience members' trust by providing them with the kind of product or service whose features are universal. Interestingly, product/service exposure occurs periodically which in practical terms means that the issues raised during a sermon tend to be put on the agenda again after a while. Wimber's disciples frequently allude to life stories which have a strong emotional load and which ultimately bring catharsis understood as inner healing. In many cases, power evangelism practitioners talk about their own hardships to show the contrast between now and then which goes in line with Spilka et al's views on conversion (2009: 211). The scholars claim that conversion

centers on the new self, and the new self tends to be described and recognized by other individuals. Take for example Tomasz Dorożala's confession which he published online in the form of a song titled *The Awakened* (Apostoł Tomasz Dorożala, 2021). Dorożala juxtaposes the past with the present. He explains that in 2010 his life was a misery because his marriage did not work. Besides, he openly states that although he had been attending Masses, praying, and going on pilgrimages, he was not a decent man:

I thought I had everything: a wife, business and money. However, all that was ephemeral. One day in 2010 I realized I was fed up with everything and I was immersed into darkness. Theoretically, I had known God since I was a little kid but in fact, I would get really scared in a difficult moment. I grabbed a knife with my right hand and then I thought to myself: is this the end? I got rid of my beloved one. I wanted to be seen as a good man, but I was called evil. Mess in my head, depression, and condemnation. I acted as if everything had been all right but that was a lie. I lied to myself. Lord Jesus, You saved me [...]. You forgave me [...]. I begged on my knees, You raised me up [...]. You made me Your son. I am no longer a bastard. Now I have different aspirations. The old ones are gone. You have to understand that religion itself does not save. I was convinced it does, but it turned out to be a bullshit. I had been a religious person all my life. I had been going on pilgrimages since I was 6 years old. Believe me, I received all the sacraments and I had been attending Masses every Sunday. Nevertheless, as soon as I left the church, I would transform into the devil [...]. I could not understand why I had been struggling so much. I did not know whether or not the spiritual world existed. I had been following the material, supposedly believing in God. I had my own faith, that was my path. I had been manipulated like a puppet all my life, purged into the nose by Satan. Such was the game. I started seeking. Seek and you will find. Have you started your search yet or maybe you are about to prepare your coffin? (Apostoł Tomasz Dorożala, 2021).

The passage mentioned above shows that Dorożala negotiates attitudes by evaluating feelings, character, and things. He is doing this explicitly as well as implicitly. He compares two contradictory realities including the pre- and post-awakening realms. As for evaluating feelings that allude to the pre-awakening period, Dorożala focuses on his poor emotional condition by admitting to having been fed up with his life and having been immersed into the darkness. He also admits that he was not able to cope with difficult moments since he was too scared to take measures. Moreover, he feels disappointed by those who told him that he would find salvation in religion. The situation he describes led him to grab a knife what may suggest he was thinking of committing suicide. Apropos judging the character, Dorożala speaks of himself in a negative way. He introduces the word *bastard* and *devil* to clarify how he used to treat other people. In addition, he acknowledges that he was chaotic in terms of his faith. He was a successful man but at the same time, spiritually empty. As far as evaluating things is concerned, Dorożala criticizes the Catholic Church for misguiding the worshippers. In his opinion, the mere fact of participating in religious practices imposed by the Church, does not guarantee holiness. Regarding the post-awakening period, Dorożala's summary abounds with favorable connotations. He alludes to his current state of mind which is the complete opposite of his previous condition. It should be remembered that in the Neo-Pentecostal discourse, the motive of inner restructure plays an essential part. Dorożala's transformation concerns the shift from a bastard living a miserable life to the son of God with new perspectives. What is also worth noting here is how meaning changes depending on the context, bearing in mind Iedema's (Iedema, 2021) theory of resemiotization. Dorożala's narrative focuses on his conversion as mentioned earlier and therefore it should be discussed in a broader sense. In the pre-awakening period Dorożala saw himself as a loser, deprived of hope and happiness whereas in the post-awakening period, Dorożala approaches his past hurts in a more optimistic manner, giving them a different value. They no longer cause discomfort. Conversely, they serve as reference points for further advancement and for motivating those who search for effective solutions to their problems. Records of similar transition can also be traced in testimonies provided by Bellavia (Missione Paradiso, 2017), Walaszczyk (O Bogu – Spotkania Dla Przedsiębiorców, 2023), and Krzywodajć (Kościół DOM Wrocław, 2022).

The second stage of the protocol relies heavily on what has already been achieved in respect of enhancing source credibility. Precisely speaking, the more religious customers trust the brand the more likely they are to adopt the point of view its representatives hold. Therefore, performers' attempts to disseminate ideas that change recipients' state of knowledge as well as their axiological perspective, and ultimately make them behave according to the performer's plan, can move unnoticed. Interestingly, a behavioral shift goes hand in hand with prior evolution of one's value system. Tony Bellavia promotes, what is known among power evangelism practitioners, as *Prosperity Gospel* (Wiegele, 2005: 40; Bowler, 2013: 3; Kobyliński, 2021: 7). It has provoked severe criticism across Christians due to its increased focus on worldly concerns, as noted by Wiegele (2005) in her study on Catholic prosperity movement *El Shaddai*. Bellavia turns to the concept of *seed faith* (Roberts, 1999: 17) which highlights the business-oriented face of the relationship between God and human. During his sermons, he seeks to convince audience members that whether or not God will bless them depends on how much they invest in His kingdom, understood here as the Church Bellavia is in charge of. Put it differently, Bellavia urges his followers to give him money but before they act the way he wishes, Bellavia needs to win their appreciation and make them think God's mercy is conditional. To illustrate:

Open your hearts and dare to have expectations because today the Holy Spirit will speak to you [...]. Thanks to all of you for your contribution, for your donations, and for the generosity you are showing [...] You are the blessing channel. You need to know that God will continue to bless you. Amen. Say to a person who is behind you, not to the one who is next to you: you are a great blessing [...]. Today will talk about the air. We will start with how important the financial air is [...]. God's wish is to bless you with joy,

the kind of joy that is as big as the one He has [...]. You know, financial air is crucial in every person's life. I read the statistics, and they say that 70% of people is stressed about money and that 66% of people live paycheck to paycheck [...]. Research findings reveal that financial stress has a considerable impact on our health: cardiac problems, insomnia, mental problems, panic attacks [...]. Yesterday when I was reading those statistics, I recalled the events that took place when I was 30, just before my conversion. I experienced that kind of stress [...]. I was thinking of committing suicide but thanks to God's mercy, I got to know Lord Jesus who liberated me [...]. I remember my past but I also remember the miracles God performed [...]. God wants your children to have an abundant life but first and foremost, He wants your children to be in perfect health and relaxed [...]. God will give you more provided you administer your finances in an appropriate way. But what will happen if you invest your resources inappropriately [...]? The first thing we do together with my wife is to give a tithe every month. Then we think of saving money up for something else. This is effective, healthy, and faithful administration [...]. I am sure that God wants to bless you so that you can also bless your Church because [...] this is the Church of Jesus Christ (Parola della Grazia – Roma, 2024).

Bellavia, similarly to Dorożala, focuses on juxtaposing the pre-awakening and post-awakening realities. His evaluation resembles that of Dorożala's, bearing in mind the three common aspects of appraisal. Bellavia begins with judging people's character, and he is doing this explicitly. In this particular case, he refers to audience members. Bellavia expresses his admiration for the gathered who regularly support Bellavia's ministry financially. He calls them a *blessing channel*. The expression he uses, evokes positive associations and hence, attunes the participants to respond as intended by the performer. Bellavia tries to enforce discipline by alluding to the reward system: donating will result in receiving God's favor. However, the enthusiastic mood is further replaced with a pessimistic view of everyday life struggles. Bellavia describes people as stressed and unhealthy due to the lack of financial stability. Then, he goes on to talk about his personal experience of being poor. He even admits to having had suicidal thoughts, like in Dorożala's story. He criticizes himself for the approach he had developed before his conversion, that is, awakening. Nevertheless, he quickly contrasts the old with the new. He praises himself for having administered his finances effectively what stands for having planted a seed of faith that has consequently given rise to abundant harvest. The passage finishes with an implicit evaluation of participants' conduct. Bellavia suggests that those who invest their resources inappropriately and therefore, do not bless Bellavia's ministry, will not be taken into consideration by God since the ministry itself is Jesus's work. When it comes to negotiating attitudes with regard to things, the emphasis has been put on a constructive tone whose main objective is to encourage rather than discourage. Bellavia speaks, for instance, of financial air that is crucial for individuals. In addition, he speaks of perfect health which is the result of faithful administration. The extract in question addresses resemiotization as it occurred with the one of Dorożala's. However, the starting point differs. Dorożala's struggles were more of inner nature whereas those of Bellavia were tangible and easily noticeable. The pre-awakened Bellavia was perceived as a man with debts, incapable of managing money successfully while the post-awakened Bellavia is thought of as an influential pastor, having a great potential to multiply his assets.

Storytelling in the Neo-Pentecostal ritual plays a vital role. It aims to attract religious shoppers, trigger out an emotional response, and eventually make them more vulnerable to persuasive messages. Besides, the narrative goes in line with Stark and Lofland's claims regarding the factors contributing to subject's conversion (Stark & Lofland, 1965). It should also be remembered that the Neo-Pentecostal discourse features frequent references to the so-called *divine anointing* which stands for special empowerment granted by God to His worshippers in order for them to move forward and progress. The data show that Neo-Pentecostal teaching builds upon the idea of seed faith which, as stated above, imposes certain conditions. For this reason, verbal stimulation delivered by Neo-Pentecostal leaders should rest on strong arguments whose implementation will cause attitudinal transformation. The findings appear to confirm that participants' self-image changes over the course of time and that the inner restructure they undergo has a considerable effect on how they are currently coping with life difficulties. Referring back to Petty and Cacioppo's theory, the results demonstrate that those who attend worship services run by power evangelism practitioners, feel motivated enough to interact with the performers and that their motivation arises from personal relevance as well as from the need to organize past hurts in a meaningful way. The interviews carried out among members of Roman religious groups whose leaders operate based on Wimber's strategy, relied on three categories. The term *divine encounter*, conceptualized by the respondents as the supernatural intervention of paramount significance for their existence, was employed as a common denominator. The categories under consideration included: (1) life before the encounter, (2) divine encounter, and (3) personal revival. The first category focused on interviewees' life quality before joining a given group and therefore, before being exposed to verbal stimulation provided by power evangelism practitioners. The second category dealt with the actual experience of the divine anointing and its subsequent consequences in terms of mental and physical condition whereas the third category concerned the shift in respondents' self-perception as well as their current approach to the ongoing life struggles.

Regarding the answers received in relation to the first category, the most frequently mentioned factors that had a considerable impact on the subjects' life quality, leading to its deterioration, were: difficult family relationships, broken romantic relationships, psychological abuse, peer pressure, promiscuity, excessive consumerism, poverty, addictions, crisis of values, identity crisis, and school failure. Respondents claimed to have developed low self-esteem as a result and that produced a wide range of side-effects including spiritual emptiness, unhappiness, feeling of hopelessness, feeling of loneliness, feeling of insecurity, indecisiveness, depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, fear and anxiety. It is worth noting that the common denominator

here is what Stark and Lofland define as enduring tensions (Stark & Lofland, 1965: 864). Apropos the second category, the subjects indicated that the divine encounter helped them to regain mental as well as physical strength and to start over. When it comes to their wellbeing, they highlighted the absence of somatic symptoms, reduction of stress, positive thinking, inner courage, inner peace, satisfaction, sense of support, sense of liberation, sense of maturity, and sense of self-fulfillment. As for the practical aspect of their recovery, the subjects spoke of the ability to take control over their lives, ability to make reasonable decisions, restoring broken friendships, goal-orientation, and good academic and work performance. Put another way, they reorganized themselves (Spilka et al., 2009: 211). The answers provided to the questions posed in the third category show that respondents' self-perception changed to a great extent. They no longer see themselves as defeated. Conversely, they claim they are heroes who managed to overcome challenges. Moreover, they eagerly point to the circumstances, habits or events that were destructive and they do so to emphasize the contrast between the pre-awakening reality and the post-awakening reality. The findings demonstrate that subjects' current approach to life struggles significantly differs from the one they would express previously. The major shift involves reattribution. Interestingly, reattribution is one of the well-known verbal strategies used in cognitive behavioral therapy (Clark, 2014: 6). All respondents agreed that God prepared a particular plan for them and hence they should trust Him. They are not worried about the future anymore. In essence, they accepted the rhetoric they had been exposed to which can be understood as their full consent to a problem resolution program put forward by Wimber's enthusiasts (Stark & Lofland, 1965: 867). When talking about respondents' agency in the whole conversion process, what emerges from the study is their position of an active seeker (Gooren, 2010). Sociologists, anthropologists, and psychologists debating upon conversion careers often start their analysis with converts' pre-affiliation background to account for the choice they made. The results obtained from the research in question demonstrate that age, ethnicity, and gender did not matter. What truly mattered was a huge discrepancy between the current state of affairs and the desired one.

Negotiating attitudes in the Neo-Pentecostal discourse requires the application of an efficient tool. The investigation proves that power evangelism practitioners employ a specific variety of a religious language that has already been defined as the Neo-Pentecostal language (Berdowicz, 2022: 155) and whose persuasive force stems from a regular use of emotive words, evidence, hyperboles, inclusiveness, imagery, jargon, metaphor, repetition, and rhetorical questions. However, what makes it truly powerful is the introduction of performatives (Austin, 1962: 32) by means of which saying is doing. As a case in point, consider Roselen Boerner Faccio's healing prayer: «The answer to the illness is that Jesus can heal you today [...]. Are you ready? Close your eyes and lay your hand on the part of your body that hurts [...]. We are praying in tongues now [...]. I am calling the healing right now. I am calling the healing right now, the healing of my grandchild. If you know what hurts your grandfather, touch this part of your body as if it were his part [...]. May the power of the Holy Spirit fall upon me right now» (SabaothTV, 2020). Boerner Faccio initiates contact with the supernatural according to the guidelines once set by Wimber (Wimber & Springer, 2009: 49). She gives value to the act of healing by assigning this particular attribute to the divine. Persuasive potential of the Neo-Pentecostal language can also be noted in a passage delivered by D'Aloisi: «Don't think about the waves, don't think about the storm, don't think about your boat possibly capsizing, don't think about being in danger because Jesus is with you on the boat [...]. Today I would like to encourage you because I know that you are the prettiest expression of God. You are the most wonderful gift of God on the face of the earth! Today we can see incredible things and we can do it together [...]. Maybe what you are going through, I've also gone through myself. And just as I overcame it, you can do it with me today!» (Hillsong Italy, 2020). D'Aloisi speaks directly to his listeners and his performance clearly features motivational implications. First of all, D'Aloisi concentrates on the concept of agency which goes in line with the one of empowerment. He employs the metaphor of a boat that comes from the Bible (Matthew 14: 22-33). The metaphor under consideration gives a clue about D'Aloisi's attitude towards the quality of life the pre-awakened have. It should be made clear that he evaluates an abstract sort of a thing, that is, one's existence, not their character. The strategy of recalling trusted sources serves to make the audience adopt performer's point of view straight away instead of providing additional arguments. Then, D'Aloisi goes on to evaluate his followers. He implements superlatives which aim to ennoble the recipients. As occurred with the previously-studied cases, also here resemiotization concerns the pre-awakening and post-awakening periods.

4. Conclusions

This research has attempted to investigate how Polish and Italian power evangelism practitioners who act as brands and who run their own ministries, use appraisal resources to negotiate attitudes and how the content they deliver affects recipients' self-image. Moreover, the study has also sought to explore the persuasive potential of the Neo-Pentecostal language whose implementation aims to make audience members, understood as religious consumers, adopt the point of view presented by the performer which consequently leads to one's inner restructure.

Firstly, it has been confirmed that personal relevance and motivation to structure life events in a meaningful way are crucial for how those who attend the events hosted by power evangelism practitioners, respond to persuasive messages when being exposed to them on a regular basis. All the respondents admitted to having faced life struggles in the past. They also admitted to having had a divine encounter which eventually turned out to be a focal point for starting over. It is worth mentioning that the divine anointing the interviewees claimed to have received, did not happen immediately. Conversely, it occurred after a while and had been preceded by continuous verbal stimulation on the part of the leaders in question.

Secondly, it has been proved that in the Neo-Pentecostal discourse attitudes under evaluation relate to things, people's character, and feelings. In addition, they are closely linked to the semiotic realities power evangelism practitioners tend to invoke when interacting with audience members and these include the pre-awakening period, characterized by painful memories as well as the post-awakening period, known for instances of spiritual re-birth and transformation. What is significant, evaluation can be either explicit or implicit. It is also gradable. The former stands for direct references whereas the latter is realized, for example, by means of metaphors. Power evangelism practitioners employ the practice of juxtaposing the past with the present to emphasize the benefits their followers are likely to obtain provided they act according to the guidelines.

Thirdly, the research has offered important insights into how power evangelism practitioners build rapport with their adherents and how resemiotization works in the Neo-Pentecostal environment. The study has also found that Neo-Pentecostal leaders heavily rely on the persuasive power of the Neo-Pentecostal language which manifests itself in the use of emotive words, evidence, hyperboles, inclusiveness, imagery, jargon, metaphor, repetition, and rhetorical questions. Besides, their utterances feature frequent implementation of performatives whose introduction to the discourse makes it more dynamic. Power evangelism practitioners stick to ritual rules once established by Wimber and that is why, they need an efficient tool that will enable them to come into contact with the supernatural.

The current findings add to a growing body of literature on Neo-Pentecostalism in Poland and Italy as well as on Neo-Pentecostalism in general. Furthermore, they also serve as a base for future studies on faith branding in relation to different faces of present-day Christianity. The work contributes to existing knowledge on cognitive behavioral therapy; however, it concentrates on its practical application outside a psychotherapist's office. Precisely speaking, research findings demonstrate that verbal strategies that are typical of CBT, can be easily incorporated into a religious setting depending on the circumstances. Taken together, this investigation brings new opportunities for scholars interested in the phenomenon of power evangelism.

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