

Linguistic Creativity and Innovation in Nigerian Gospel Music

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Outline

- Background
- Previous Research
- Theoretical framework
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Background

- What is Gospel Music?
- Nigeria's multilingual society fosters creativity in music
- Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) as lingua franca enables inclusivity
- Yoruba as the Anchor of Code-Switching in Nigerian Gospel Music
- Gospel music as a cultural archive and site of linguistic innovation



Previous Research

- **Uwen & Ukam (2020)**

- Focus: English as a language of integration in Nigerian Pentecostal Christian songs.
- Method: Data from 20 Pentecostal churches in Calabar (participant observation, recordings, interviews).
- Findings: English performs integrating and accommodating roles via code-mixing, code-switching, interpretation, and Nigerianisms.

- **Taiwo (2008)**

- Focus: Contemporary practice in Christian songs and the influence of socio-cultural experiences in South-western Nigeria.
- Findings:
 - ✓ Songs now include socio-cultural content (economic decline, indigenous worldview, social practices).
 - ✓ Songs serve ideological purposes (manipulation, condemnation)
 - ✓ Increasing use of code-mixing suggests songs have more social than worship value.

Previous Research

- **Nwagbara (2021)**

- Focus: Code-switching and code-mixing as stylistic devices in Mercy Chinwo's gospel songs.
- Method: Mixed-method analysis of six songs.
- Findings: Code-switching/mixing helps establish identity, connect with audiences, gain recognition, express emotion, emphasise themes, and evoke Pentecost.

- **Oluwadoro (2021)**

- Focus: Code alternation (mixing and switching) in Nigerian gospel music using Matrix Language Frame analysis.
- Method: 20 gospel tracks (13 Yoruba-based, 7 English-based).
- Findings: Gospel artistes use code-mixing mainly to connect with youths, among whom it is a common communicative practice.

Previous Research

Identified Research Gap

- Existing studies largely examine **code-switching and code-mixing** in gospel music as tools for integration, identity, audience connection, or social commentary.
- They do not sufficiently explore **linguistic creativity and innovation** (e.g., neologisms, semantic extension, functional conversion, rhetorical strategies) beyond code alternation.
- Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), despite its prominence in popular gospel music, has not received adequate attention as a stylistic and communicative resource in this context.

Resulting Focus of Current Study

- Investigates **bilinguals'/multilinguals' creativity** in Nigerian gospel music, with emphasis on NPE.
- Goes beyond code alternation to examine broader **stylistic innovations** (lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical).
- Analyses how such creativity fosters **meaning-making, inclusivity, solidarity, and identity negotiation** within gospel music.

Theoretical Framework

- **Critical Linguistic Stylistics (CLS)** focuses on how stylistic choices in texts contribute to meaning-making and ideology. It examines linguistic features such as repetition, parallelism, neologisms, and deviations from standard word order, showing how these choices shape interpretation beyond mere ornamentation (Simpson, 2004; Toolan, 2009; Jeffries, 2010; Wales, 2014)
- **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**, by contrast, is primarily concerned with the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; van Dijk, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). It situates stylistic innovations within broader socio-cultural and political contexts, asking how discourse reflects and reshapes beliefs.
- Together, CLS and CDA provide a complementary framework. **CLS sharpens attention to textual and stylistic creativity, while CDA reveals how these practices construct solidarity, spirituality, and cultural continuity in gospel music.**

Methodology

. Research Design

- Qualitative, text-based approach
- Focus on linguistic creativity in Nigerian gospel music
- Emphasis on stylistic and discourse features

. Data Collection

- Ten gospel songs purposively selected
- Criteria: use of Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and indigenous languages
- Lyrics extracted for close textual analysis

Methodology

Analytical Framework

- **Critical Linguistic Stylistics as the primary framework**
- **Supplemented by insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**
- **Examination of how language reflects creativity, identity, and social cohesion**

Data Analysis

- **Identification of stylistic features:**
 - Code-mixing and code-switching**
 - Neologisms and lexical regeneration**
 - Functional conversion and semantic extension**
 - Rhetorical questions, repetition, and word-order deviations**
- **Interpretation of linguistic innovation in relation to cultural and spiritual contexts**

Data				
Artist	Track Title	Year of production	General thematic content	Reception on YouTube
Moses Bliss ft. Lyrical Hi	Daddy Wey Dey Pamper	2022	God’s love and faithfulness	13M views 3 years ago
Mercy Chinwo	Na you dey reign	2020	The sovereignty of God	47M views 5 years ago
Timi Dakolo	Everything	2021	Proclamation of God’s promises	27M views 4 years ago
Victoria Orenze	I Get Backing	2023	Divine protection and unwavering faith in God's ability to fight battles and shield believers from harm.	9.8M views 2 years ago
Freke Umoh	Hallelujah no go finish	2019	An expression of faith and thanksgiving	1.5M views 6 years ago
Sammie okposo	Good God	2004	Benefits of God’s goodness	32K views 11 years ago
Frank Edwards	You too dey bless me	2008	God’s love and blessings	768K views 14 years ago
Prinx Emmanuel Ft Lyrical Hi	Kpeme	2020	Acknowledgement of God’s love and protection	777K views 3years ago
Ehen	Victory	2016	A song of praise to God for	64M views 9 years ago

NO TURNING BACK II

GAISE BABA X LAWRENCE OYOR





Oh oh oh oh

Language Use: Slang Expressions

Papa You too much, oh (all for my, all for my sake)

"Father you're awesome o" (You're far too kind!)

I throw away salute, o

"I hail thee, o"

Nobody fit, drag am with You

"No one can compete with you"

You know dey carry last

"You never fail" (or You're always on time) ("Na you dey reign" by Mercy Chinwo)

Language Use: Slang Expressions

(“Daddy wey dey pamper” - Moses Bliss ft. Lyrical Hi)

Even when I **fall your hand**

Even when I disappoint you

You still dey hold my hand

You still hold on to me

Lover of my soul, You no dey break my heart

Lover of my soul, you never break my heart

I'll sing about your mercy

I'll sing about your grace

Na u dey **burst my brain**

You excite/intoxicate me

Every night and day

Language Use: Slang Expressions

If God hand dey on top ur matter

If God is on your matter

Be rest assured say you go occupy space

Be rest assured that you will do exploits

Everyday of my life I dey collect back to back wotowoto (wotowoto means plenty)

Everyday of my life I receive from you abundantly

(“Daddy wey dey pamper” - Moses Bliss ft. Lyrical Hi)

Language Use: Slang Expressions

“Hallelujah no go finish” by Freke Umoh)

My papa no go tire to dey bless me o o

My Father will never be tired of blessing me o o

So me I no go tranga to dey thank am eh eh

So I will not be reluctant in thanking him eh eh"

Language Use: Slang Expressions

(“Kpeme” by Prinx Emmanuel)

If to say man na Chineke

Assuming man is (God) Chineke

Person like me for don kick bucket **tey tey**

I would have been Dead since

I for don ... **Kpeme kpeme**

I would have been Dead

I mean everywhere for **zobo**

everywhere would have been bloody

Maybe because of my **mumu**

Perhaps due to my stupidity

I for don de waka for road de pick **khom khom**

I would have been walking the street picking dirt(I could have gone mad)

Code-switching: Alternate use of English plus one or more Nigerian languages

English – Yoruba and Pidgin Code-switching

(“I Get Backing” by Victoria Orenze)

Eni to ba doju ko mi a ba Baba nile

Whoever rises against me will face my Father in heaven

Eni to ba ro iku kan mi a ba Baba mi lejo

Whoever plots death against me will answer to my Father

I get backing o, I no dey walk alone

I have divine support, I do not walk alone

I walk with God the Father, walk with God the Son

I walk with God the Spirit

Three of them join I get backing o

All three are united with me, I have divine support

Code-switching: Alternate use of English plus one or more Nigerian languages

English – Yoruba and Pidgin Code-switching

(“No turning Back” by Gaise Baba featuring Lawrence Oyor)

Mi o ni choice, I go narrow, them think say I no know road o

I have no choice, I take the narrow path; they think I do not know the way

Emi Mimo, na Him dey move me, dey lead me dey go o

The Holy Spirit is the one who moves me, He leads me forward.

On God, mind is made up o, Of course, no going back o

Truly, my mind is made up certainly, there is no turning back.

Code-switching: Alternate use of English plus one or more Nigerian languages

English – Yoruba

Non-stop, on 240, Esu gan, o damiduro ti (Yeba)

It is non-stop, moving at full speed. Even Satan cannot stop me (Yeba).

Steady revving, mo'n te throttle, got eyes on the price o

I keep pressing on, accelerating, with my eyes fixed on the prize.

Baba nla enikan ko le snatch me from His hand o

No one's grandfather/ancestor can snatch me from His hand.

Ife Jesu lo wa mi ri, to gba'ku mi ku o. That's why I follow o.

It is the love of Jesus that found me, that saved me through His death. That's why I follow Him. ("No turning Back" by Gaise Baba featuring Lawrence Oyor)

Code-switching: Alternate use of English plus one or more Nigerian languages

English – Pidgin

Na the love wey you give that I'm using to love you o

It's the love you bestow on me, that I'm reciprocating o

It's the joy that I have I'm using to praise your name

For your goodness (e no dey finish)

For your goodness (it never ends)

And your mercies (e no go finish)

And your mercies (it never ends)

(“Hallelujah no go finish” by Freke Umoh)

Code-switching: Alternate use of English plus one or more Nigerian languages

English – Yoruba and Pidgin Code-switching

All the days of my life I'll praise you

Everything that I have now you gave to me **Baba**

Lord I say for your love I'm grateful

Jesu you love me plenty you came to die for me

Jesus you love me so much you came to die for me

Code-switching: Alternate use of English plus one or more Nigerian languages

English – Igbo

Come and see what the Lord has done for me
He has taken away my sorrows and now I'm free

Agam e buru hallelujah eh buru yeah

I will carry hallelujah, I will lift it high (*I will lift up my praise*)

Agam a para hallelujah para o

I will shout hallelujah aloud

(“Victory” by Eben)

Repetition: The deliberate repeating of words, phrases, or structures.

God is more **real**, more real than **Madrid**

I say God is more **real**, more **real** than **Madrid** (“Daddy wey dey pamper” by Moses Bliss ft Lyrical Hi)

My God he goodi ye o ye o he good o **welu welu**

My God is good ye o ye o, he's good o **well well**"

(“Good God” by Sammie okposo)

I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus

I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back (okay)

No, no

No, no

No, no

No, no turning back

No, no

No, no

No, no

No, no turning back (“No turning Back” by Gaise Baba featuring Lawrence Ovor)

Repetition: The deliberate repeating of words, phrases, or structures

Hallelujah no go finish

"Hallelujah will never cease "

Hallelujah no go

"Hallelujah will never "

Hallelujah no go finish

"Hallelujah will never cease "

Hallelujah no go finish

"Hallelujah will never cease " ("Hallelujah no go finish" by Freke Umoh)

Authentic God oh (oh na-na-na)

Authen-authentic God oh (oh na-na-na)

Na you de reign o

"you're reigning o" ("Na you dey reign" by Mercy Chinwo)

Double double heavenly blessings na him I dey receive

"Double double heavenly blessings is what I always receive" ("Victory" by Eben)

Semantic Extension: A word is used in a broader or new sense beyond its original meaning.

“No Turning Back” (Gaise Baba)

- **On 240** – a car-speed metaphor semantically extended to represent unstoppable spiritual momentum and total commitment to faith.
- **Eyes on the prize** – borrowed from sports/racing language, extended to signify ultimate salvation and eternal reward.
- **Steady revving, mo’n te throttle** – mechanical imagery semantically extended to spiritual persistence and energy in Christian devotion.

“I Get Backing” (Victoria Orenze)

- **I get backing** – literally means “support,” extended here to divine protection and assurance of God’s presence.
- **I no dey walk alone** – beyond the literal physical sense, it symbolically extends to spiritual companionship with the Trinity and angelic hosts.

Semantic Extension: A word is used in a broader or new sense beyond its original meaning

- **Daddy wey dey pamper** – the everyday act of pampering a child is extended to express God’s gentle care and mercy.
- **Na you dey burst my brain** – from slang meaning amazement/shock, extended metaphorically to express overwhelming gratitude and awe at God’s goodness.
- **Fall your hand** – a Nigerian Pidgin idiom for disappointment, extended into the spiritual domain to show human failure against divine expectation.
- **Na you dey set compass without maths set** – the literal use of a drawing tool is extended metaphorically to God’s flawless guidance. “Daddy Wey Dey Pamper” (Moses Bliss)
- **Na you dey reign** – literal political or royal rule is extended metaphorically to divine sovereignty over all creation.
- **I throw away salute** – taken from military/politeness contexts, semantically extended to an act of worshipful reverence.
- **Authentic God** – the adjective “authentic,” usually used for originality or genuineness in human artefacts, extended to emphasise God’s unmatched, undiluted nature. “Na You Dey Reign” (Mercy Chinwo)

Summary

Worship + cultural archive

English, Pidgin & indigenous blends

NPE = inclusive lingua franca

Yoruba anchors code-switching

Everyday speech → spiritual metaphors

Repetition = rhythm, devotion, participation

Language as identity, inclusivity, continuity

Conclusion: Language, Faith & Culture

- More than worship → cultural voice
- Blends English, Pidgin & indigenous tongues
- Everyday words gain new spiritual meanings
- Creativity = access, memory & participation
- Affirms heritage, projects global voice
- Language = unity, continuity, belonging

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION