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Language and Moral Discourse in Selected Igbo Gospel Songs by Bro Okwey

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Abstract

Language not only facilitates human behavior but also shapes moral life and the social values through which communities understand and regulate conduct. Given the importance of language in moral communication, this study analyzes the linguistic and stylistic features of selected Igbo gospel songs by Bro Okwey and examines how the Igbo language constructs moral discourse and persuades listeners. Guided by Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, the study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyze 62 excerpts from 97 purposively sampled extracts drawn from 28 songs. The findings reveal that Bro Okwey constructs moral evaluations and persuades listeners through modality, direct address, rhetorical questions, metaphor, personification, simile, proverbs, antithesis, irony, hyperbole, allusion, parallelism, paradox, and satire. These features activate the three principal systems of Appraisal Theory—Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation—to present, reinforce, and direct moral positions toward listeners. The study demonstrates that Igbo provides substantial linguistic and stylistic resources for creative moral evaluation, audience engagement, and persuasion. It contributes to scholarship on African language and discourse by showing how Igbo gospel songs function as sites of moral communication and may support Igbo language learning and

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development. The findings underscore the need for greater scholarly attention to indigenous languages as media of moral discourse, while future research could compare Igbo gospel songs with songs in other languages to determine how different linguistic resources facilitate the construction of moral meaning.

Keywords: Appraisal Theory; Bro Okwey; Igbo Gospel Songs; Linguistic and Stylistic Features; Moral Discourse

Introduction

Language is the primary means of human communication, through which individuals perform various social roles. Moreover, "language attitudes shape linguistic behaviours, including patterns of language use" (Bernardo-Hinesley, 2026, p. 75). Through language use, numerous communicative actions which may not be explicitly or directly expressed in words are engaged. Spoken language is the most common mode of language, alongside written and signed forms. Through speaking, individuals do more than communicate, such as constructing social realities, transmitting cultural values, and shaping moral beliefs.

Spoken language occurs in various forms, including conversation, public speeches, sermons, debates, storytelling, and singing. Among these, singing is distinctive: it "integrates musical, linguistic, and creative abilities" (Grob & Christiner, 2026, p. 127) to express ideas, emotions, identity, and moral values. Gospel songs stand out from other song genres, as they function not only as elements of worship but also as forms of persuasive moral discourse. In this capacity, "gospel songs transform personal and collective struggles into aesthetic narratives" (Mahonge & Kisarwa, 2026, p. 457). Through gospel songs, singers promote ethical behaviour and condemn social vices.

In Igboland, a predominantly Christian region of Nigeria, singing is a significant indigenous practice. This significance is reflected in the fact that the musical heritage of the Igbo people is "one of the most sophisticated by means of which their ways of being in the world. . . are articulated" (Okigbo, 2024). Gospel singers blend cultural knowledge and Christian teachings in their lyrics to convey their messages. This is particularly common among pioneer Igbo gospel singers such as Chika Okpala, Obi Igwe, Patty Obassey, and Bro Okwey. While Chika Okpala enriches his lyrics with profound Igbo proverbs, Patty

Obassey mellifluously couches his messages in traditional Igbo-Christian idioms. Similarly, Obi Igwe demonstrates smooth rhetoric in a restrained and elegant style.

Bro Okwey stands out for his lyrical prowess. A distinctive pattern of his songs is the insertion of spoken interludes after the chorus. During the interlude, he reinforces his message before the song returns to another sung section. Bro Okwey interprets scriptures in new Igbo idioms while preserving the original message. This aligns with Dicenso's (2026, p. 437) view that "the final purpose in the interpretation of holy books is the moral improvement of human beings and the actualization of the highest good in the world." Okwey makes profound figurative and rhetorical use of Igbo in a manner that enriches the Igbo language in both structure and content. These qualities make his songs valuable for linguistic study, an area that has received limited attention.

The effectiveness of language in moral discourse does not lie only in what is said but also in how it is said. "Beyond its religious function, gospel song lyrics constitute rich literary texts. . .to construct meaning and represent human experiences" (Mahonge & Kisarwa, 2026, p. 457). This distinctive use of language distinguishes many pioneer Igbo gospel singers from their contemporary counterparts. However, many pioneer Igbo gospel songs and their artists, such as Bro Okwey, have received limited attention because of changing musical trends and their declining availability in the contemporary music market. Thus, scholarly attention has instead shifted to specific contemporary songs.

Given the limited scholarly attention given to the linguistic and stylistic elements employed in pioneer Igbo gospel songs which are yet relevant today, the current study has the following objectives:

i. To analyse the linguistic and stylistic features employed in selected Igbo gospel songs by Bro Okwey.

ii. To examine how the Igbo language is used to construct moral discourse and achieve persuasion in the selected songs.

Language, Moral Discourse, and the Regulation of Behaviour

Language is like a vehicle through which humans convey their messages. According to Onuoha and Obobolo (2026, p. 157), "language is not only a communication tool but also an instrument that shapes beliefs, and perception . . ." There are three main modes through which language is expressed. They include spoken language, written language, and

signed language. While spoken language is commonly associated with speech-capable individuals, and signed language is particularly associated with Deaf communities, written language is learned and used by both sets of people. Thus, through language use, individuals are able to construct identity (Ndububa, 2026b). In this regard, Ugoala (2020, p. 107) notes that "the quest and desire for people to be seen in certain ways play a great role in how they interact with one another." Through language use, individuals also construct and uphold their moral values. People also tell their stories through language. In actual fact, language use can centre on constructing identity, establishing mutual intelligibility, or participating in language games.

Discourse, according to Yule (2023, p. 280), "is usually defined as 'language beyond the sentence.'" It may occur in a piece of writing, speech, song, signed performance, and other forms of communication. As Jones (2024, p. 80) observes, "different settings are seen as suitable for different purposes, or different forms of discourse." Discourses can therefore be classified according to their purposes or modes, such as narration, description, exposition, argumentation, persuasion, instruction, and conversation. Discourse can also be classified according to subject matter or domain as moral, religious, political, academic, media, educational, etc.

Many forms of discourse are engaged in by humans and may involve moral considerations. Moral evaluation entails judging behaviours, beliefs, and situations according to whether they are good or bad, right or wrong, and acceptable or unacceptable. More broadly, Yu and Sultan (2026, p. 3) observe that "moral evaluation is at the heart of moral socialization, which is indispensable to adjusting and regulating moral behavior to maintain social stability and order." Moral judgements are made based on contexts. As Smolentseva (2026, p. 6) further explains, "moral judgement helps to reveal the ideal in relation to which a moral judgement is made." What is considered good in one place and at one time may not be considered good in another, as what is considered right or acceptable. For instance, same-sex marriage is acceptable in some places and not in others. Reciting chaplets and bowing before religious images may be considered acceptable in some religious contexts and unacceptable in others.

Moral evaluation contributes to moral positioning: the act of deciding whether an attitude, belief, or situation is morally good, right, acceptable, or not. In this sense, Astrom (2006, p. 30) observes that moral positioning "gives moral meaning and identity to subjects

and objects." A moral position can be expressed directly or indirectly. In direct moral positioning, the speaker expresses the conclusion of a case, while in indirect positioning, there is a restrained or figurative approach to stating the obvious point. An example of direct moral positioning is "You are honest", while an example of indirect positioning is "You returned the money you found on the road to its owner." Beyond individual judgements, Thormann and Michelini (2026, p. 2) note that "moral evaluations strongly affect the social desirability of interaction partners." Another function of moral evaluation is behavioural regulation. This is achieved through instructions, directives and prohibitions, among others.

Moral instruction fosters behavioural regulation, which also motivates moral persuasion. Moral persuasion involves using moral discourse to convince someone to accept a particular idea, behaviour, or judgement. Emotive and gentle language can be effective in persuading and appealing to people. Persuasion is effective when the addresser creates representations through words, enabling the addressee to visualise and experience them more vividly. McGrath (2011) notes that, in such cases, the addressee "is confronted with an actual instance of the practice whose morality is at issue and invited to draw a general moral conclusion in response." Issuing warnings and emphasising consequences, using inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "us" to create a shared identity, repeating words to make them memorable, and expressing obligation, necessity, certainty, or possibility are several other linguistic strategies for moral persuasion. Persuasive discourse is not only meant to impart information to an individual or audience but also to move them from knowing a moral principle to accepting or acting upon it.

Gospel Songs as Linguistic and Moral Discourse in Igbo Society

A song is a composition of various elements, such as lyrics, message, rhythm, melody, and resonance. Songs are sung to be understood. This implies that a message is coherently or artfully embedded in the lyrics. Although certain songs may contain word plays, fragmented thoughts or vocal acrobatics in lyrics for musicality, songs traditionally convey coherent "ideas, values, and social realities, thereby shaping collective identity and informing public discourse" (Uzoma et al., 2025, p. 212). While musical performance may aim to soothe emotions or complement songs, songs are linguistic expressions meant for careful consumption. Gospel songs are more than just songs. They are moral or religious

discourses at the centre of language, Christian teaching and religious communication. Gospel songs appeal to human emotions with scriptural or morally oriented messages.

Gospel songs adapt to regional and socio-cultural contexts. Artists align their messages to their audience, considering people, place and period of time. Thus, these three factors also influence the musical and lyrical content of gospel songs. In Igboland, the eastern part of Christian-dominant Nigeria, gospel songs are almost a part of the people's way of life. When they are indigenous, songs carry cultural attributes that, as Uzoma et al. (2025, p. 216) observe, "reflect the group's history, beliefs, and practices." Through this song genre, artists address human concerns and promote Christian values, moral conduct and spiritual reflection. There are countless gospel artists of Igbo extraction, some of whom are no longer living or singing. However, songs of inactive artists are still enjoyed in recent times. Gospel song performance and appreciation change with the evolution of things, but profound song lyrics stand the test of time.

Igbo gospel songs have had many artists, ranging from Bro Luke Ezeji, Obi Igwe, Chika Okpala, Voice of the Cross, Helen Nkume, Patty Obassey, Bro Okwey, Rosemary Chukwu, Felix Ndukwe, Israel Anyanele, Ejike Mbaka, Gozie Okeke, Chinyere Udoma, Mercy Chinwo, Judikay, etc. According to Okigbo (2024), "their music is characterized by constant innovation, drawing influences from their immediate neighbors, and even sharing musical traits with other ethnic groups of West and Central Africa." Most of these singers started singing when songs were recorded on cassettes until the days of video compact discs (VCDs). However, some of them are no longer living to distribute their songs through contemporary song-hosting and streaming channels. Among the few notable pioneer Igbo gospel singers still active is Bro Okwey. Okwey's musical career has spanned over four decades, inspiring most contemporary gospel singers and lyricists. He sings with a team of female singers who mostly sing the choruses while he makes spoken interludes at intervals. Bro Okwey's sole use of Igbo reflects the cultural grounding of his Christian musical expression. This practice aligns with Pruitt's (2012) assertion that Christianity, like any other religion, "must be realized within a given culture if it is to be relevant and meaningful in any way." Okwey's songs are based on repentance and reflection on human phenomena. But this alone does not win him the hearts of many gospel-song-loving families; rather, it is his artful command of language.

Linguistic Features of Gospel Song Discourse

Gospel songs are moral discourses; thus the singers place considerable emphasis on their lyrics. According to Uzoma et al. (2025, p. 212), "the language of music—its lyrical content, cadence, and structure—serves as a driving tool for communication and cultural memoria." Singers apply numerous persuasive strategies, including linguistic and stylistic elements, to not only appeal to listeners but also bind their attention. When lyrics are well crafted for rhetorical significance, they sometimes become memorable, resonant, and persuasive beyond the immediate musical experience. This is achieved through linguistic features such as lexical choices, evaluative vocabulary, parallel syntactic structures, modality, imperatives, interrogatives, vocatives/direct address, repetition, personal pronoun use/person reference, and code-switching or borrowing.

Lexical choices are selected words or the use of words in a song. They play overall important roles in heightening the communicative effects of songs. A singer considers their audience and socio-cultural contexts to make lexical choices. Evaluative vocabulary refers to a set of words for judging behaviours and situations. Evaluative vocabulary is used for moral evaluation in gospel songs. As Ma (2025, p. 61) observes, "evaluative language exerts a profound and multi-layered influence." Such vocabulary can be positive or negative, depending on the effect, to show approval or disapproval. Parallel syntactic structures are phrases, clauses, or sentences that follow a uniform pattern to create emphasis or balance. Modality is observed through stating obligations, possibilities, and certainty. This is commonly achieved by modal verbs such as could, should, would, must, ought to, etc. Imperatives are expressions that make requests, give directives, commands, or express prayers. They are used in gospel songs to prompt listeners into actions.

Interrogatives are usually adopted for rhetorical effects. They may not be immediately supported with answers but are meant to provoke the listeners' thoughts. Vocatives or direct addresses are expressions used to address the audience. They make the listeners feel engaged and personally involved in the song. Repetitions are recurring words or expressions meant for emphasis. They may occur in choruses or spoken interludes but generally reflect a considerable part of a song. Ogunlade (2026) identifies code-switching in Nigerian gospel music. Code-switching is going from one language to another, while borrowing similarly means using words from another language that have become part of

the receiving language. Both features are employed to enhance communication, intelligibility, and expressiveness.

Stylistic Features of Gospel Song Discourse

The effectiveness of gospel songs can also be improved by stylistic features. These features are achieved by using linguistic features in new or creative ways to make rhetorical or aesthetic impressions. As Mahonge and Kisarwa (2026, p. 466) observe, "the interaction of language, literary form, and spirituality facilitates meaning-making." Such lyrical devices include: metaphor, allegory, biblical allusion and intertextuality, personification, simile, antithesis, irony, anaphora, apostrophe, satire, and rhetorical questions.

Metaphor is a figurative expression of description, which compares one thing to another to emphasize a perceived shared quality or relationship, in a manner that differs from everyday language use. Peña-Cervel et al. (2022, p. 46) describe metaphor as a "figure of conceptual conflict," highlighting the conceptual contrast involved in metaphorical meaning. Examples of metaphor include, "My study is a graveyard". This expression does not imply that the speaker's study is situated in a graveyard, or that the study has graves in it. It rather means that the study is as silent as a graveyard. Another example is saying "He is a lion" to imply that he is brave or courageous. Allegory is a discourse in which characters or events symbolise ideas or qualities. In a narrative, a character may symbolise salvation, wickedness, etc. An event or situation may also symbolise hardship, salvation, etc. An allegory presents a narrative or description which has a deeper meaning than the words may portray on the surface.

Biblical allusion is making references to characters or events in the Bible to support an idea. Such allusions can function as a "cognitive-discursive mechanism" for organising understanding (Rubtsova, 2026). Biblical allusions back moral instruction and evaluation, and require listeners to recognise and relate them to the moral message being conveyed. Biblical intertextuality is a broader form of biblical allusion. While allusion is making an indirect reference, intertextuality entails quoting, retelling, or adapting another text. Personification is attributing human qualities to non-human entities. For instance, in the statements, "Justice is blind" or "Death came knocking on his door", neither justice nor death is human to possess the human abilities assigned to them. Justice has no eye to be blind, nor does death have legs to walk nor hands to knock on doors. According to Peña-

Cervel et al. (2022, p. 152), "A simile is seen as a figure of thought based on comparing two objects, A and B, in such a way that the comparison departs from our common expectations." Similes functions with words such as like, as, as though, etc. For example, "He is as brave as a lion". Similes and metaphors are figures of comparison but while metaphor says that one thing is another, simile says that one thing is like another.

Anaphora is the repetition of successive phrases, sentences or lines. The repetition could be words or a group of words. In gospel songs, anaphora is used to lay emphasis or make expressions more memorable. For instance, in "I came; I saw; I conquered," "I" is anaphora. Apostrophe is making a direct address to an abstract or faraway person. In gospel songs, an artist may introduce apostrophe when talking to God, or addressing situations such as death, life, etc. as though they were seen or reachable. Peña-Cervel et al. (2022, p. 151) note that Satire is "a literary technique used to expose, criticize, and even ridicule individual, institutional, and social frailties" to encourage change. Satire in gospel songs makes a jest of human faults or moral problems to offer correction. A rhetorical question does not require an answer. It is asked to prompt reflection or provoke thought. In gospel songs, singers ask certain questions to call the listeners' attention to moral issues and encourage listeners to re-evaluate their beliefs and behaviour. These features and numerous more are used to elevate the use of language in gospel songs for more effective persuasion and communication of moral messages. As Ugoala (2022, p. 177) observes, "how language is used determines the outcomes of its usage in intergroup and interpersonal relations."

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory (AT): a framework for analysing "how writers/speakers approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise" (p. 1) people, things, behaviours, and situations. AT also examines how speakers position their audience towards those evaluations. Martin and White noted that some influential branches of 20th-century language studies could not address speakers' linguistic strategies for constructing stance, audience, and evaluation. This observation resulted in Martin and White's (2005) proposal of a new approach, Appraisal Theory, which had been developed over the previous years within M.A.K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Appraisal Theory comprises three major systems that facilitate the analysis of evaluation and interpersonal positioning. They are Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Attitude is simply how the speaker expresses evaluation. It has three subsystems: Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. Affect is a manner of evaluation that expresses feelings and emotions. Judgement involves evaluating people and their behaviour as right or wrong, good or bad, etc. Appreciation is a subsystem of Attitude concerned with the value, beauty, or importance of things, events, and situations.

Engagement, the second system, is about the stance taken by a speaker and how it relates to others' views or opinions. Engagement has two subsystems, namely Monogloss and Heterogloss. Monogloss is the speaker's act of presenting a proposition without referring to others' views, while Heterogloss involves the speaker's reference to or acknowledgement of other views. The third system, Graduation, is about scaling evaluation. That is, it shows the strength of an evaluation, whether it is stronger, weaker, higher, or lower. Graduation has two subsystems, namely Force and Focus. Force involves increasing or decreasing the strength of something, while Focus makes the meaning more or less precise.

This theory is appropriate for this study as it analyses Bro Okwey's evaluation of people, ideas, and situations. This addresses the first objective of the study. Attitude as a system of AT is most relevant for achieving the second objective, as it reveals how moral values are expressed through evaluation, while Engagement and Graduation also contribute to explaining how these evaluations are presented and strengthened for persuasive purposes.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design and a discourse and stylistic analysis method. Ninety-seven extracts of a total duration of 65:23 minutes, culled from spoken interludes in twenty-eight songs by Bro Okwey, are purposively sampled. The extracts are his own contributions, rather than those of his singers, occurring between sung sections, while the 28 songs are those with his spoken interludes. A few interludes and songs are excluded because of their irrelevance to the study objectives. The twenty-eight songs are drawn from 8 song albums and are available on the singer's online song-hosting websites. Sampled extracts were written out exactly as sung to ensure fairness and avoid

bias. Given the total number of extracts (97) and the large size of each extract, only linguistic or stylistic features in each extract are presented in the paper for analysis. These shorter extracts, sixty-two of which are presented in the paper, are labelled excerpts. The English translations are literal and faithful to preserve the traditional idioms in the excerpts.

Discussion

The dataset for the study is presented as follows. Discussions are grouped thematically according to the study objectives. Excerpts refer only to portions of the 96 song extracts presented for discussion. The codes S and E represent song and extract, respectively. Thus, S1 E1 means Song 1, Extract 1, as shown in the table below. Italics are used in a few words to highlight areas of focus.

Table 1. Corpus of Selected Bro Okwey Gospel Songs

Song ID	Song	Theme/Subject Matter	Extracts	Duration
S1	Anya Mmiri Juru M N'Anya	Religious and Moral Decline	9	0:35
S2	Anyi Agaghi Agba Oso	Oppression and Resistance	4	2:00
S3	Bia Bulie M Elu	Human Suffering	4	1:03
S4	Chukwu Abughi Onye Ajo Omume	Giving and Generosity	2	0:36
S5	Ego Obara	Money and Morality	5	6:07
S6	Emehiewo M	Fornication	1	2:51
S7	Ezigbo Enyi M Oma	Alcohol Abuse	2	3:32
S8	Gbaghara M Mmehie M	Hypocrisy	1	1:49
S9	Ihe Emebiwo	Moral Decay	2	1:11
S10	Ihunanya	Love and Forgiveness	4	1:31
S11	Mmadu Ekweghi Ochichi	Resistance to Authority	2	0:52
S12	Ndi Mmuo-Ozi N'Erughari	Christ's Rejection and Salvation	5	1:59
S13	Nna Ghara	Sin and its Consequences	5	4:05
S14	Nulu Olu Anyi	Envy and Gossip	4	3:12
S15	Nwa Ogwugwu Oge	Youth Moral Decadence	3	2:06
S16	O Bu Ya Bu Nna M	Trust in God	3	0:35
S17	Ochichi	Political Corruption	6	4:07
S18	Ogu Di N'iru	Loss of the Fear of God	2	2:57
S19	Okwu Onye Nwe Anyi	Moral Deterioration	1	1:24
S20	Onu Ikputu	Human Mortality	4	4:13
S21	Onye Ajuju	Enmity and Jealousy	4	2:40
S22	Onye M So Adighi Mfe	Christ's Power	6	3:27
S23	O Si N'elu Igwe Bia	Christ's Salvation	6	2:50

Song ID	Song	Theme/Subject Matter	Extracts	Duration
S24	Roputa Onye I Ga Efe	Smoking and Vanity	1	1:28
S25	Umu Mmadu Akpafusiwo	Christian Corruption	3	2:15
S26	Uwa Akala Nka	Social Corruption	1	2:08
S27	Uwa Joro Njo	Evil and Suffering	4	1:42
S28	Uwe Jesus	Materialism and Christian Values	3	2:08
			97	65:23

Table 1 presents all the songs that formed the dataset for the study. The Song ID column presents the codes assigned to the songs based on alphabetical order. The codes are used further in the data analysis to reference the songs. The Extracts column shows the number of extracts from each song, while the Duration column shows the total duration of all the extracts from each song.

Linguistic Features in Bro Okwey's Moral Discourse

Code-mixing/ Code switching

Excerpt 1: S5 E3

"Ị chiela ọtụtụ ụmụ mmadụ *chief*; ọ bụkwa maka gị ka ụfọdụ bụzị *thief*"

[You have crowned many people 'chief'; and it is because of you that some have become 'thief']

Excerpt 2: S13 E5

"ndị bụ *fireground* wee bụrụzịa *waterground*."

[Those who are fireground thus become waterground]

Excerpt 3: S22 E5

"Onye ji oke osimiri mere *bank*, were azụ mere *cashier*, were nkọ azụ mere *cheque leaf*"

[The one who turned the great sea into a bank, used a fish as a cashier, used a fishhook as a cheque leaf]

The above excerpts show instances of Bro Okwey's code-mixing in his messages. In Excerpt 1, 'chief' and 'thief' are used especially to create rhetorical emphasis through phonological wordplay and moral contrast. In Excerpt 2, the code-mixing entails creative

English formations, 'fireground' and 'waterground', which provide a contrast between fire and water. Excerpt 3 contains another creative example of code-mixing, which creates an analogy between financial transactions and the miraculous act.

Excerpt 4: S9 E2

"Onye nwe ụlọ tie, '*Who is that*?' onye ohi agbagfue, ma taa, onye ohi tie, *'Who is there?'* onye nwe ụlọ aba nshi baa mamịrị"

[if the owner of the house shouted, 'Who is that?' the thief would flee; but today, if the thief shouts, 'Who is there?' the owner of the house will urinate and defecate]

Excerpt 5: S22 E4

"...wee *command-ịa* ya, sị, *'Attention. Peace. Be still!*' Ikuku wee kwụrụ rụọ mgbe onye m so gwara ya, *'At ease*!'"

[...and commanded it, saying, 'Attention. Peace. Be still!' The wind came to a standstill until the one I follow told it, 'At ease!']

Bro Okwey also extends his inter-language expressions to code-switching, as in Excerpt 4. The message switches from Igbo to English to capture a familiar expression used by robbers and a house owner's question when suspecting a robber's presence. Code-switching here facilitates characterisation and social reversal. In Excerpt 5, the code-switching plays a dramatic function. There is also an important military register, which reinforces Christ's authority over the situation.

Modality

Excerpt 6: S2 E3

"Chineke ga-azụpụta anyị"

[God will deliver us.]

Excerpt 7: S16 E1

"Ụzọ gị ga-eghere oghe; mgbidi a niile ga-adakwa"

[Your path will be open; all these walls will also fall]

Excerpt 8: S20 E2

"Mmadụ apụghị ịgbanari aja"

[Man cannot escape the dust]

Excerpt 9: S20 E4

"Ụfọdụ ga-abụ ata…ụfọdụ ga-abụkwanu ezi nri"

[Some will be chaff…others, however, will be good food]

Modality is a significant feature in Bro Okwey's construction of moral discourse. In Excerpt 6, it supports a predictive evaluation and a reassurance to the listener about divine intervention. In Excerpt 7, Bro Okwey continues the reassurance of hope and divine intervention as in Excerpt 6. Modality in Excerpt 8 conveys impossibility, while in Excerpt 9 it constructs a moral discourse of differentiation and possible outcomes.

Direct Address

Excerpt 10: S7 E2

"Oga, ajụkwala, ọ bụ mmanya na-eme gị ihe ahụ. I rapụ iji ya wee hụrụ isi, ọ gaghị emekwa gị ya ọzọ."

[Sir, ask not; it is alcohol that does that to you. If you stop using it to support your head, it will not do it to you again.]

Excerpt 11: S17 E6

"Chineke anyi, kọwaara ha okwu a"

[Our Creator, explain these words to them]

Excerpt 12: S18 E1

"Ndi nke Christ, kulienu, jikerenu, umu nna m"

[People of Christ, arise; get ready, my brethren]

Excerpt 13: S21 E4

"Gẹẹ ntị, onye iro: ọ bụrụ na ị chọrọ ka ọkụ Chineke nwụwe n'ịme gị, rapụ iro, ekworo, asịrị, ufụ obi.."

[Listen, enemy: if you want God's fire to light inside you, leave behind enmity, jealousy, gossip, heart pain…]

Bro Okwey creatively constructs interlocutors in his ode-styled songs. Direct addresses are a common feature of this pattern, occurring in virtually all of his songs. They are appeals to God, as in Excerpt 11, or made to listeners. They are also directed to distant or abstract entities, which is Bro Okwey's common linguistic pattern, as predominantly evident in his addresses to money, fornication, alcohol, love, sin, leadership, and the world in S5, S6, S7, S10, S13, S17, and S27, respectively. When directed to listeners, these address forms occur as imperatives, as in Excerpts 10 to 13, interrogatives, as in Excerpts 14 to 17 below, to provoke thought, or as plain statements.

Rhetorical Questions

Excerpt 14: S1 E7

"Ị hụla na mmadụ ahapụla ụzọ baa ọhịa?"

[Have you seen that humankind has left the road and entered the bush?]

Excerpt 15: S8 E1

"Ị mara na mmadụ enweghị amamikpe n'ime obi ya bụ mmadụ nke anụ ahụ onwe ya na-achị?"

[Do you know that a person who has no self-condemnation inside his heart is a person whose own flesh rules?]

Excerpt 16: S16 E3

"Onye ka anyị ga ekele? Ọ bụ otu nzuzo ka ọ bụ ndị mgbaasi?"

[Whom shall we thank? Is it one secret power, or malevolent sorcerers?]

Excerpt 17: S18 E2

"O ga abụdi na Agbala egbuola egwu Chineke n'ime mmadụ?"

[Could it actually be that Agbala has killed the fear of God in people?]

Interrogative constructions in Bro Okwey's moral discourse deserve specialised attention, given their widespread use across the songs. These question forms show Bro Okwey's penchant for involving the listener in his moral evaluation, as in Excerpt 17,

challenging moral assumptions, as in Excerpt 15, and persuading the listener to accept the moral answer supplied after the questions, as in Excerpt 16. In S23, especially, a series of 30 questions are used to expose contradictions and provoke reflection.

Stylistic Features in Bro Okwey's Moral Discourse

Personification

Excerpt 18: S3 E3

"Nsogbu ụwa ajụghịkwanụ gị ma ị bụ ọgaranya ma Ị bụ ogbenye."

[The troubles of the world do not ask you whether you are rich or whether you are poor.]

Excerpt 19: S24 E1

"Cigar a bụrụ onye anaghị egbu mmadụ"

[Cigar then becomes who does not kill people]

Excerpt 20: S26 E1

"Mmehie atụwara ụwa ime. Mmehie tụrụ ime, ọ mụọ ọnwụ."

[Sin has impregnated the world. When sin becomes pregnant, it gives birth to death.]

Excerpt 21: S28 E2

"Ihe anya n'ahụ were mmadụ mere ọdịbo"

[What the eye sees uses man as a servant,]

In Excerpts 18 to 21, Bro Okwey does not only discuss non-human entities but also attributes human qualities to them. In Excerpts 18, troubles are depicted as capable of speech. In Excerpt 19, cigar is treated as a human and a killer, while its harmful effects are ironically reversed and smokers' self-deception exposed. Excerpt 20 constructs social decay through a series of personified entities: sin as capable of impregnating, the world as a woman, and death as a baby resulting from the pregnancy. In Excerpt 21, fashion is personified as an active force influencing younger generations.

Clusters of personifications manifest most strongly in S5, S6, S7, S10, S13, and S17, in which Bro Okwey addresses money, fornication, alcohol, love, sin, and leadership, respectively. Thus, Bro Okwey represents these abstract entities in concrete, human-like terms, thereby encouraging listeners to approach them as concrete forces too.

Metaphor

Excerpt 22: S4 E2

"obi abụrụ ha ose…ha were obi na ire tinyere onye ahụ nsị"

[their hearts become pepper…they use their hearts and tongues to poison that person]

Excerpt 23: S10 E4

"Ihunanya bụ ala ihe ọma si na ya apụta, ma ihe gbara ya gburugburu bụ mgbaghara."

[Love is a land from which good things come out, but what surrounds it is forgiveness]

Excerpt 24: S13 E5

"...ndị bụ nnu jiri tufuo uto ha, ndị bụ ìhè wee ghọọ ọchịchịrị, ndị bụ elu ugwu wee ghọọ ndagburugbuị"

[...those who are salt lose their taste; those who are light then become darkness; those who are mountaintops become valleys]

Excerpt 25: S26 E1

"Ụwa bụ akpụkpọ-ụkwụ Chineke"

[The earth is God's footwear]

Excerpt 26; S27 E4

"...obi ndị bi n'ime ya bụ akpà, bụrụkwa ngwụgwụ a na-atọghị-atọ"

[...the heart of those living in it is a closed bag, and an unopened bundle]

Bro Okwey's mastery of figurative discourse is strongest in his deployment of metaphors. In Excerpt 22, pepper connotes pain as the emotional effect of greed. Excerpt 23 depicts an abstract moral value (love) as concrete. Excerpt 24 captures the loss of positive qualities, implying moral corruption. Excerpt 25 presents the subordinate status of the world, while Excerpt 26 represents the human mind as a closed container, thus constructing lack of trust.

Simile

Excerpt 27: S2 E2

"...were ụtali chịrị anyị dika atụrụ, nama, na ewu"

[...use whips to drive us along like sheep, cattle, and goats]

Excerpt 28: S12 E3

"Unu wee gbaa ya ụkwụ ka ball"

[You then kicked Him like a ball]

Excerpt 29: S13 E5

"Ọ bụkwa gị ji ọrịa n'afụ ka ose"

[It was also you who used an infection that hurts like pepper]

Excerpt 30: S20 E1

"...jide ya n'aka dika okpu-ite. Ma kama Ọ ga-akpụ mmadụ dika ite, Ọ wue ya dika ụlọ."

[...held it in His hand like a potter. But instead of moulding man like a pot, He built him like a house]

The pattern of Okwey's songs commonly entails discussing or addressing entities which he endeavours to make more familiar or vivid to listeners. He achieves this through a sophisticated use of language that not only strengthens his messages but also makes them more memorable. Similes support this strategy by emphasising loss of human freedom and dignity in Excerpt 27, a humiliating rejection of Christ in Excerpt 28, and a painful punishment for sin in Excerpt 29, the crafted nature of human existence in Excerpt 30. Similes occur most frequently in S20, where Bro Okwey makes numerous comparisons of man with God and their creations.

Proverbs

Excerpt 31: S2 E3

"Onye adịghị nke oriri, adịghị nke ọ ga-agbọ."

[Whoever has eaten nothing has nothing to vomit.]

Excerpt 32: S20 E3

"Mmadụ apụghị ịgbanari aja."

[Man cannot escape the dust.]

Excerpt 33: S21 E4

"Anaghị akpụ ụkwara n'ọnụ afụnwụ ọkụ."

[One does not hold a cough in the mouth while blowing out fire.]

Excerpt 34: S25 E3

"Mgbe ị hụrụ ala nyọwe mmadụ na ike gị ghẹre ọghẹ"

[When you bend to the ground to spy on a person, your own rear is wide open]

Okwey embeds his messages in traditional proverbs, some of which he creates. This stylistic feature conveys his ideas of reciprocity, the inevitability of human mortality, caution against hypocrisy and incompatible behaviours, and self-examination before condemning others, in Excerpts 31, 32, 33 and 34, respectively. In S25, Okwey uses the most proverbs, presenting virtually every line in the form of a proverb.

Antithesis

Excerpt 35: S7 E2

"Na Cana nke Galilee ka I meghere anya ụmụ mmadụ, wee gaa na ndụ Samson wee mechie ha anya"

[At Cana of Galilee you opened people's eyes, then went into Samson's life and closed their eyes.]

Excerpt 36: S12 E5

"Ị jụ ịnabata ya n'ime ndụ gị, ọ ghọọrọ gị nkume nke ọnwụnwa…Ma Ị nabata ya n'ime ndụ gị, ọ ghọọ nkume nke nzọpụta"

[If you refuse to receive Him into your life, He will become the stone of temptation for you…but if you accept Him into your life, He becomes the stone of salvation]

Excerpt 37: S13 E2

"Mmadụ ghọọ ohu nye ụwa, ebe Chineke mere ụwa ka ọ bụrụ ohu nye mmadụ"

[man become a slave to the world, whereas God made the world to be a slave to man]

Excerpt 38: S19 E1

"Onye ji ego ... bụ naanị onye azọpụtara, ma onye ji Christ ... ma o nweghị ego, bụ onye iberibe"

[The one who has money… is the only one who is saved; but the one who has Christ… yet has no money, is a worthless person]

Bro Okwey enriches his moral discourse with stylistic expressions that contrast results and consequences. In Excerpt 35, he shows contradictory effects of alcohol. In Excerpt 36, there are spiritual consequences of accepting or rejecting Christ. In Excerpt 37, human dominion and enslavement are contrasted. In Excerpt 38, Bro Okwey exposes the corruption of religious values and the eclipse of spiritual worth by material wealth.

Irony

Excerpt 39: S5 E1

"Ego ka Simon onye mgbasi jiri bịa ịzụta Mmụọ Nsọ wee zụta nkọcha."

[It was money that Simon the sorcerer brought to buy the Holy Spirit, and instead bought a curse]

Excerpt 40: S8 E1

"...nụ na a na-achụ onye ohi, ọ sị, "Tigbuenu ya." Mana ya bụ onye na-ezu ọbara di onye ọzọ, bụrụ onye na-eme business"

[...hears that a thief is being pursued, she says, "Kill him." But she who steals another woman's husband's blood, is someone who is doing business]

Excerpt 41: S9 E2

"Na mbụ, onye nwe ụlọ tie, "Who is that?" onye ohi agbagfue, ma taa, onye ohi tie, "Who is there?" onye nwe ụlọ aba nshi baa mamịrị"

[At first, if the owner of the house shouted, "Who is that?" the thief would flee; but today, if the thief shouts, "Who is there?" the owner of the house will urinate and defecate]

Excerpt 42: S18 E2

"Egwu anaghi ekwe onye ji ewu maobu okuko chuoro Agbala aja ka o were oke ya n'aka onye nchu aja Agbala, ma leenu na ndi nyere Chineke onyinye n'ulo uka na akpoku onye isi uka n'ulo ikpe ka ha na ya kezie oke ha. O."

[Fear does not allow the person who used a goat or a chicken as a sacrifice to Agbala to take his own share from the hand of Agbala's priest, but look at those who gave

an offering to God in church dragging the head of the church to court so that they may obtain their share.]

Bro Okwey continues his penchant for enriching moral discourse with stylistic features. In his descriptions of human situations, he emphasises how expectations are reversed. This is evident in Excerpts 39 to 42. In Excerpt 46, Bro Okwey creates a moral irony about treating spiritual matters as commodities. In Excerpt 40, the irony exposes hypocrisy and double standards. In Excerpt 41, Bro Okwey represents the decline of social security. In Excerpt 42, he captures religious hypocrisy and moral inconsistency among Christians.

Hyperbole

Excerpt 43: S6 E1

"Iko, ihe I mere enweghị ngụcha"

[Fornication, your deeds are countless]

Excerpt 44: S7 E1

"Agha i dọtara na ụwa taa enwebeghị nlụcha ruo echi."

[The war you have dragged into the world today has not seen an end till tomorrow.]

Excerpt 45: S9 E1

"Taa, motor arịala elu pole, rịa elu osisi ebe ọ na-ezere mmadụ ka ọ gafee."

[Today, the motor has climbed poles and climbed trees while it avoids human beings so that they may pass.]

Excerpt 46: S22 E3

"...ẹrimẹri ghọrọ atụrụ taa wa, mmadụ taa wa, elu rie, ala rie."

[...food became a sheep-eat-on, human-eat-on, heaven eat, earth eat]

Okwey strengthens his moral evaluations by exaggerating the degrees and outcomes of situations, which makes his warnings and condemnation more forceful. The exaggerations manifest in the extent of the consequences of sexual immorality in Excerpt 43, the destructive social consequences of drunkenness in Excerpt 44, the abnormal

consequences of social disorder in Excerpt 45, and Christ's miraculous provision in Excerpt 46. In all, Bro Okwey portrays the need for repentance and divine intervention.

Allusion

Excerpt 47: S13 E3

"...o dịghịkwa onye chọrọ ka a kpọọ nwa ya Cain, Jezebel, Delilah, ma ọ bụ Judas."

[...no one wants their child to be called Cain, Jezebel, Delilah, or Judas.]

Excerpt 48: S17 E2

"Ọchichi, gi gburu Adolf Hitler nke obodo German, gbuo George Washington na John Kennedy nke America. Ọ bụ gi gburu Kwame Nkrumah nke obodo Ghana."

[Leadership, you killed Adolf Hitler of Germany, and killed George Washington and John Kennedy of America. It was you who killed Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana.]

Among the stylistic features employed by Okwey is adapting his messages through allusions to famous characters and events. These references are biblical, as in Excerpt 47, political, as in Excerpt 48, or socio-cultural, as in S18 E2. As such, Okwey makes his messages more familiar and accessible to listeners, which consequently strengthens the force of his moral standing and evaluation. Additional biblical allusions also manifest in Excerpts 3, 5, 9, 35, 39, and 46, while the largest cluster (Miriam, Aaron, Moses, David, the Prodigal Son, Cain, Jezebel, Delilah and Judas) occurs in S13 E3. There are also noteworthy allusions to the Nigerian historical political crisis in S2 E1, the Nigerian-Biafra Civil War in S5 E3, Idi Amin in S17 E3, and traditional Igbo royal titles/names in S26 E1.

Repetition

Excerpt 49: S4 E1

"Ma inyeghị akụ ma ọ bụ ego, inye oge gị. Ma inyeghị oge gị, inye okwu ọnụ gị. Ma inyeghị okwu ọnụ gị, inye ije ụkwụ gị."

[If you do not give wealth or money, you give your time. If you do not give your time, you give the words of your mouth. If you do not give the words of your mouth, you give the movement of your feet.]

Excerpt 50: S18 E2

"Agbala egbuola egwu Chineke n'ime mmadụ"

[Agbala has killed the fear of God in mankind.]

Excerpt 51: S26 E1

"Ụwa akala nka"

[The world has grown old]

Bro Okwey repeats expressions for emphasis. This creates melody and makes his messages more memorable for listeners. In Excerpt 49, this "Ma inyeghị … inye …; ma inyeghị … inye …; ma inyeghị … inye …" creates a sequence of forms of giving, emphasising that moral or religious contribution is not only made through material wealth. Excerpt 50 is repeated four times in S18 E2 within 2:30 minutes, each time complementing Okwey's evaluation of moral and religious decline. Similarly, Excerpt 51 is repeated five times in 2 minutes as a refrain-like judgement on the deteriorated state of society. Numerous instances of repetition also occur across Okwey's songs through his recurring mentions of subjects while discussing money, fornication and love in S5, S6 and S10, respectively. Notable repetitions also occur in S9, S12, S18, S19, S22, S25, among others.

Parallelism

Excerpt 52: S17 E4

"Gi chibalu anyi ọhịa, gi chiputara anyi ụzọ, ọ bụkwa gi chibatalu anyi ụlọ."

[You led us into the bush; you led us onto the road; and it was also you who led us into the house.]

Excerpt 53: S26 E1

"Enyi Mbụ… Enyi Abụọ… Ọdụm Nke Mbụ… Ọdụm Nke Abụọ… Nze Nke Mbụ… Nze Nke Abụọ…"

[Elephant the First… Elephant the Second… Lion the First… Lion the Second… Nze the First… Nze the Second…]

In Excerpt 52, the parallel "gi + verb + object" structures show how leadership takes people through difficult days of war. Excerpt 53 presents structural parallelism in

naming patterns, which shows the changing nature of traditional titles and supports Bro Okwey's criticism of contemporary leadership. Numerous parallel structures pervade Bro Okwey's moral discourse, as also manifest in Excerpts 3 and 5, and mostly in S17. This stylistic feature enables him to establish a balance in structure and meaning while reinforcing his stance and evaluative strategies.

Paradox

Excerpt 54: S17 E5

"Ọtọ m, Egbu m"

[My sweetener me, my killer]

Excerpt 55: S18 E2

"Agbala egbuola egwu Chineke n'ime mmadụ"

[Agbala has killed the fear of God in mankind]

Paradox is a contradictory statement. It is similar to antithesis which is a contrast of parallel structures, and broader than oxymoron which places two opposite words together. While paradox focuses on meaning, antithesis focuses on structure. Bro Okwey engages both features in his moral discourse. In Excerpt 54, the contradictory consequences of leadership are conveyed. Bro Okwey in this excerpt presents leadership as both beneficial and destructive. In Excerpt 55, he creates a striking paradox by presenting a lesser god, Agbala, as having killed the fear of the Almighty God in humans. This paradox criticises contemporary religious hypocrisy and moral decline. Numerous other paradoxical expressions can be found in S7 E1, S13 E1, and S13 E5.

Satire

Excerpt 56: S1 E9

"Akwụkwọ nsọ Chineke abanyewo na ebe rụrụ unyi. Ndị e chere na ha bụ ndị nsọ Chineke webara ya ebe ahụ."

[The Holy Book of God has entered an unclean place. Those who were thought to be God's holy people took it there]

Excerpt 57: S5 E2

"Ma e jighị gị, ndị na-efe arụsị agaghị ata ọkụkọ."

[Without you, those who worship idols would not eat chicken]

Excerpt 58: S7 E1

"Mmanya... i meela nna m ukwu ahụ ezi n'ime gutter, mee nne m ukwu ahụ nkịta…"

[Alcohol, you have made that great elder a pig inside a gutter, and made that great elderly woman a dog…]

Excerpt 59: S19 E1

"Okoro ụwa aṅụọla cigar n'erijughi afọ... Agbọghọ ụwa akpuọla ara na-erughi eru... Ndị nzukọ Christ ezukọtala I gozi onye emere eze amụsụ"

[The young man of the world has smoked a cigar without having eaten to his fill… The congregation of Christ has gathered to bless one who was made a king of witchcraft.]

Satire is a prominent feature in Bro Okwey's moral discourse, as he numerously criticises social vices to encourage positive change and repentance. In Excerpt 56, he exposes the hypocrisy of religious elites who claim sanctity while misrepresenting sacred traditions. In Excerpt 57, Okwey exposes how money supports both pagan rituals. In Excerpt 58, he mocks alcoholics who lose their dignity and are blamed for their self-inflicted embarrassment. Excerpt 59 captures socio-religious satire, whereby he emphasises premarital immaturity and the commercialisation of faith.

Pun

Excerpt 60: S5 E3

"Ọtụtụ abụrụwo ndị oriri n'ihi gị, ebe ọtụtụ ghọrọ ndị ori"

[Many have become people of feasting because of you, while many have become people of theft.]

Excerpt 61: S10 E2

ịhụnanya. Létụdịna onye ahụ nọ gị n'akụkụ *anya* na mkpụrụ *anya* ya, ka ọ letụkwa nke gị. Ka *anya* ụnụ abụọ hụrịta *anya* ụnụ"

[Love. Look a little at the person who is beside you in the eye and in their seed of the eye, so that they too may look a little at yours. Let the eyes of both of you see each other's eyes]

Excerpt 62: S13 E3

"Ụfọdụ ndị isi wee bụrụzịa ndị ịsị."

[Some leaders now become the blind]

Pun is a wordplay which exploits similarities in structure, meaning and sound to create meanings. Excerpts 60 and 62 present puns which are better realised in Igbo than in the English translation. Okwey plays on the structures of 'ndị oriri' and 'ndị ori' and 'isi' and 'ịsị' to reinforce his message. In Excerpt 61, the pun is on 'ịhụnanya' which in Igbo is literally 'love' but literarily 'look in the eyes'. In Igbo worldview, the idea of love is tied to eye contact, vision, and direct presence. Thus, to love is literarily "to look into the eyes" or "to see another person." Okwey applies this pun in his evaluation of love. Other instances of pun occur in Excerpts 1, 2, and 3.

Findings

From the lens of Appraisal Theory, data analysis shows that Bro Okwey employs numerous linguistic and stylistic features in his moral discourse. The major linguistic features include code mixing/switching, modality, direct addresses, and rhetorical questions, while the major stylistic features are personification, metaphor, simile, proverbs, antithesis, irony, hyperbole, allusion, repetition, parallelism, paradox, satire, and pun. These features appear frequently in Bro Okwey's songs, suggesting a penchant for infusing uncommon discourse features into his moral discourse. This penchant is also evinced in the multiple features carried by many of Okwey's expressions. Findings reveal that these features serve three major discourse functions, namely constructing moral evaluations, making moral issues more familiar and accessible, and persuading listeners.

Some features, such as anaphora, euphemism, and climax, among others, found in the dataset are not presented for analysis to conserve space and avoid an unnecessarily extensive analysis. Anaphora occurs frequently in Okwey's direct addresses and repeated subjects, as in S1 E3, S2 E2, S3 E2, S4 E1, S5 E1 & 2, and S6 E1, among others. Euphemism and climax occur less frequently in the dataset, with euphemism appearing in S3 E4, S6 E1, and S10 E1, and climax in S3 E2, S4 E1, S12 E1, E2 & E4, and S17 E5.

Igbo, in Bro Okwey's moral discourse, functions as more than a medium of singing; it proves linguistically effective in constructing evaluation, engagement and varying degrees of graduation. In his evaluation, Okwey assigns positive and negative value to entities through metaphors, personifications, ironies, antitheses, paradoxes, allusions, similes, and satires. In terms of engagement, he positions his listeners towards his evaluations through rhetorical questions, direct addresses, modality, and imperatives. In graduation, he intensifies his evaluation through repetition, hyperbole, parallel structures, metaphors, similes, modality and pun/wordplay. Given Bro Okwey's consistent use of Igbo and only occasional mixing with English for rhetorical purposes, the findings suggest that Bro Okwey does not merely use Igbo to connect his messages to Igbo socio-cultural realities, but also to portray the richness of the language.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Bro Okwey deploys numerous linguistic and stylistic features in constructing moral evaluation. He draws on the three systems of Appraisal Theory in constructing his moral discourse. The Igbo language supports his distinctive style through the use of various linguistic and stylistic features. This study reveals the possibility of enriching moral discourse through singing and highlights how this approach facilitates effective communication and audience persuasion. The findings also show the importance of skilled language use, particularly the significance of the Igbo language.

The study contributes to knowledge by providing a linguistic account of how Igbo is used to construct moral discourse in gospel music. It shows how linguistic and stylistic features facilitate moral evaluation, engagement and intensification, and how moral positions are presented, reinforced and directed towards listeners. The study also contributes to the understanding of Igbo as a resource for creative and persuasive discourse. Given the role of songs in language development, Okwey's rich use of Igbo in his songs could contribute to Igbo language learning and development. By applying Appraisal Theory to analysing selected Igbo gospel songs, the study further shows how linguistic choices and stylistic features combine to construct moral meanings.

More attention should be given to Igbo as a medium of moral or religious discourse, as findings reveal that Igbo language contains sufficient resources for moral evaluation and audience persuasion. Future studies may compare Igbo gospel songs and

songs in any other language to determine how language use facilitates the construction and persuasion of moral discourse.

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