Gospel Àpálà music in African Christian worship: Thematic and stylistic analysis

Esther Titilayo Ojo

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Music is an indispensable tool of cultural transmission. Considering the vast nature of oral traditions, of which indigenous music is encapsulated, many studies on Nigerian indigenous music have concentrated on Jùjù, Ìjála, Dadákuáda, Èsà, and Àpálà. However, much research still needs to be done on Gospel Àpálà, a variant of Traditional Àpálà which was popularised by Hérun Àshá and Ayínà Òmọpówa, noted for its highly proverbial folklore, blended with percussive instruments of which dundun drum and jèjè play leading roles to give aesthetic appeal. In this research, therefore, I investigate and document Gospel Àpálà as it translates from traditional Àpálà into praise and worship of God, in order to identify and describe its unique style and communicative functions, especially in these changing times of modernisation and globalisation. Drawing on systemic functional linguistics and sociology of literature, in this article I provide an analysis and interpretation of six Àpálà Gospel songs from three Àpálà Gospel artists: Sàdè Èúbò, Yómi Òlàbí, and Boiz Òlórùn. I portray the relevance of Àpálà music both in Christian worship and events and gathering. Themes in Àpálà Gospel include praises, thanksgiving and adoration to God, salvation/acknowledging Jesus, God’s greatness and miracles, forgiveness, unity, holiness, heaven, love among brethren, commitment, and dedication to God’s work. My findings reveal, among others, that Gospel Àpálà music encapsulates indigenous knowledge contained in oral literature. I identify stylistic devices such as repetition, rhetorical question, personification, loan words, code-mixing/code-switching, and proverbs which garnish the metamorphosed music and conclude that Àpálà has metamorphosed from traditional Àpálà into Gospel Christian worship.

Keywords: stylistics, deviation, Gospel Àpálà music, Christian worship, oral literature.

Introduction

Music is an essential phenomenon and a vital part of everyday life in African societies. Vidal (28) states that over the ages, music “has proved to be one of the indispensable arts cultivated by [humans] for growth, nurture and transfer of [their] institution and value to future generations”. In the same vein, Isaac illustrates that “the society places a high premium on music and by extension musician[s]”. These claims further foreground music as a tool for cultural preservation. Music is quite important in the lives of Africans who make music at home, at social functions and gatherings, at event centres, and in the marketplaces. Music accompanies and celebrates festivals, social rituals, religious gatherings, and political rallies to mobilise people for solidarity. It also involves ceremonial life such as rites of passage, birth and christening, marriage, initiation into adulthood, housewarming, chieftaincy, death, and mourning. Music has roles in healing; therapy; educative purposes; visits of important dignitaries; announcements of the presence of important dignitaries such as kings, chiefs, and governors; and important personalities in society. To be human is to make music, therefore the music we make says a great deal about who we are, or at least who we think we are. Music projects African values with various traditions accompanied by a melody.

Music is a universal phenomenon among the Yorùbá of South-West Nigeria. Extensive studies have been carried out on indigenous music such as Jùjù, Ìjála, Dadákuáda, Èsà, Sákàrá, Wákà, and Àpálà. Yet not much attention has been paid to Gospel Àpálà in African Christian worship. Furthermore, Àpálà’s metamorphosis from traditional to Gospel Àpálà, which involves the worship and praise of God in churches, is not generally

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captured. This lacuna in knowledge is what I aim to bridge in this article by studying the music of three Gospel Àpálà artistes, namely: Ọsọbá Yòmí, Olábísi, and Boiz Ofòrun, thereby foregrounding their contributions to the development and preservation of Àpálà, an indigenous Yorùbá musical heritage. In this study therefore, from a stylistic point of view, I investigate Gospel Àpálà, a variant of Àpálà which is an Islam-influenced genre, which is indigenous to the Yorùbá people in Nigeria and noted for its highly proverbial folklore, with a view to identifying and describing its unique style and communicative functions. With the aid of transcribed albums of three Àpálà artistes, I also look at stylistic devices which garnish Gospel Àpálà music and anchor my research on the theoretical perspectives of systemic functional linguistics and the sociology of literature.

I document Àpálà, especially in these changing times of modernisation and globalisation. In this article I argue that Gospel Àpálà music in Christian worship has not received the attention it deserves.

Àpálà: Origin, development, and metamorphosis

Scholars like Mustapha, Eùba, Olúsoji, Lásísi, Olúdáre, Ajútunmọbí and Adepoju, Ọmọjọla, Adémowó, and Ajiokóbi have examined the origin and development of Àpálà music. Àpálà is a Yorùbá popular music whose origin could be traced to many sources cutting across such disciplines as music, linguistics, history, religion, and so on. Mustapha and Olúsoji (“Nigerian Dances for piano”) argue that Àpálà evolved from the indigenous music of the Yorùbá and can be regarded as folk songs which later metamorphosed into social music. Àpálà is a socio-religious music with a prominent instrumental part and a vocal accompaniment rooted in social music. Àpálà is of the indigenous musical heritage transmitted from generation to generation, performed, recreated, and promoted by the musicians, thus giving the Yorùbá people a sense of their cultural history and identity. It is worth noting that sakara, Àpálà, Wàkà, dadaáta, and fuji, which are largely influenced by Islamic and more recently Western cultures, are new developments in Yorùbá music.

Whatever position is true, what is certain is that Àpálà has no particular date of origin, and that it has been in existence since 1930 and was called ọrọ ẹwọ bẹ́tì (cover your ear). According to Ajútunmọbí, Osiyale, and Sogbesan, Àpálà has been in existence since before the likes of Múráí́nà, Ákó, and even Ligálí Múkááhú, but it was popularised by Harùnà Ishólá and Ayinlá Òmòwùrà. Therefore, the origin and development of traditional Àpálà music cannot be complete without reference to Harúnà Ishólá and Ayíná Òmòwùrá.

In interviews I conducted with Mr Babáwále Gáníyí on 16 April and 25 September 2020, he mentioned that Ẹ́dè is the birthplace of Àpálà and that a man called Balogun and his son Tijani were renowned Àpálà singers as early as 1938. Olúsoji (“Comparative Analysis of the Islam influenced Àpálà, Wàkà and Sakara Popular Music of the Yorùbá”), on the other hand, suggests that Àpálà music started long before 1938. Ajúdá Èlórín, for instance, was remembered to have played Àpálà music as early as 1930 (Ajútunmọbí, Babatunde and Sogbesan 38). Whatever position is true, what is certain is that Àpálà evolved among different Yorùbá sub-groups that drew their inspirations from popular Yorùbá musical forms at different times. This explains why there are more than three different styles or forms of Àpálà music, as dictated by the frequency of sound production and combination of instruments used at different times. Each individual developed his own Àpálà version among the people of his community, getting inspiration from other Yorùbá music, local experiences, and creative ingenuity. According to Ajútunmọbí, Osiyale, and Sogbesan, among such styles of Àpálà are: Àpálà Ọjọ́nà (línìyí), Àpálà Ọjọ́nà (hot beat)—Ayíná Òmòwùrà; Àpálà Ọjọ́nà (hot beat)—Ayíná Òmòwùrà; Àpálà Ọjọ́nà (hot beat)—Ayíná Òmòwùrà; Àpálà Ọjọ́nà (hot beat)—Ayíná Òmòwùrà; Àpálà Ọjọ́nà (hot beat)—Ayíná Òmòwùrà. (39)

Whichever form it takes, Àpálà music is noted for its highly proverbial folklore blended with percussive instruments of which drums play a leading role. An Àpálà ensemble consists of Agídígho (a thumb piano having four or five keys and a rectangular box resonator), ekere (a gourd rattle), agogo (metal gong), Akúbá (membrane drum), as well as two or three king drums. The Yorùbá people referred to Àpálà as “Páàpáà lù àpálà” (Àpálà drum; of different sounds to form a whole). This implies that Àpálà music is a conglomeration of various types of songs and drums to produce a unique whole. What this signifies is that Àpálà music does not have a clear-cut identity or origin per se but is a representation of other musical variations. In these present times, Àpálà traditional music now has a variant which is Gospel Àpálà. This is performed in church services and various entertainments. The
instrument of Ápalá is still the same with Gospel Ápalá. Gospel Ápalá is a variant of Ápalá music used in churches for the elevation of God's name. Generally, the stylistic features that are used in Gospel Ápalá music include repetition, rhetorical question, personification, loan words, code-mixing/code-switching, and proverbs, among others. Instruments of Gospel Ápalá include a rattle (gèrè), thumb piano (àdígbó), and a bell (ágógo), as well as two or three king drums. In the present times, traditional Ápalá has effectively moved to Gospel Ápalá.

Systemic functional linguistics and sociology of literature
Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) was propounded by M. A. K. Halliday. SFL is an interpretive framework that views language as a strategic meaning making resource. This means that it is an important instrument for interpreting texts (Halliday; Matthiessen). The term “functional” symbolises that language performs many functions, hence it is functional. This model (SFL) accounts for how the language is used, whether spoken or written. SFL is functional and semantic rather than formal in orientation. It is bordered on how language is used in spoken or written form and this takes place in contexts of use. Language is viewed as a social activity that has evolved in the functions it serves and also in the structures which showcase these functions. In other words, the model operates in the context of use, which is the environment, situation, or circumstance of use, and not in isolated sentences or words. SFL is based on the context of situation and the context of culture and, in this article, my focus is on context of culture. Ápalá music as performed in the culture of Yorùbá society—which includes views, beliefs, emotions, psychology, and philosophy. Since culture is the way of life of a people, their language therefore reflects and transmits the cultural norms and values of the group. Context of culture is an eye-opener to the socio-cultural rules or codes of behaviour which one must understand in order to communicate appropriately in the society. SFL is a sociological theory which focuses on the sociological aspects of language description, and it is also an interpretive and contextual model.

Sociology of literature, on the other hand, is a scientific theory propounded by Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893). Sociology of literature as a whole deals with how society is represented in the literary work and the interaction of literature with other social institutions. The theory’s focus is to show the symbiosis, interconnectivity, and interaction between literature and all the sociological activities occurring in society. Ògunsìna reveals that literary works do not exist in isolation from the society that produces them, and that literature burdens itself with human expression, human experience, and human behaviour since man is a product of his society. Aside from this, literature employs language to represent the happenings of a particular society. As the name suggests, sociology of literature is a fusion of two separate disciplines—sociology and literature. As literature uses language as tools to reproduce human experience the society, the literary Ápalá artistes produce songs by using materials from the society which are the property of the society. Sociology comprises of the study of social relationships and the outcome of such relationships for on-going systems, and the process of social change. Sociology burdens itself with all that happens to human beings as a result of their relationship with one another in the society (Barber 43). It is an art of words which entertains, enlightens, educates, and instructs—thereby projecting the experience and behaviour of man in the society. While sociology examines social institutions of family, marriage, economic, religious, and political structures (which form the social structures), literature involves the social world of man and his desire to change the same. Therefore, the field of sociology of literature concerns the study of society, and the social life of people cannot be discussed in isolation, since the culture of a people is reflected in their social life. In this study, Gospel Ápalá music is a product—inclusive of content and language—of the society, and it is sung by, and for, the people of the society.

Method and literature review
This is a qualitative research study which adopts a historical and descriptive analysis for its research design. This historical method traces the origin of Gospel Ápalá, which is a variant of Ápalá music performed only by the Yorùbá people of South-West Nigeria, its development, and the exponents. Moreover, it focuses on the contribution of three Gospel Ápalá artistes, namely: Òsóhá, Òlabísí, and Ojórun. The descriptive method engages a content analysis of the musical structure of Ápalá music and particularly that of the three artistes, highlighting how their creative processes and performances of the genre in its authentic form has aided in promoting and conserving this indigenous musical and cultural heritage in order to safeguard its loss to modernity. My field work consisted of identifying selected Gospel Ápalá artistes, attending their performances and recording them on audio devices, and thereafter the rigorous activity of transcribing, and analysing the performances. I also conducted
unstructured oral interviews with five respondents between the ages of 59 and 82 to get their views on the two different kinds of Ápálá music.

In the study I adopt the views of Beier in his understanding of the term ‘music’ when he explains how the Yorùbá people engage music in all their endeavours:

There is no occasion in Yorùbá life that is not accompanied by songs. Births, marriage, house warming and funeral are all occasions for lyrical songs of great beauty. Everyday life is also accompanied by a great deal of impromptu singing, a kind of musical thinking, in which the singer puts everything to tune which happens to pass through his head. (23)

Beier's argument regarding the Yorùbá engagement of musical composition in all spheres of life is germane as nothing happens whatsoever that doesn't prompt the Yorùbá people to sing. Mention one area of human participation in life, and the Yorùbá people always have a ready-made song that can neatly fit into that domain. It is pertinent to also consider the contribution of Ñketía's (African Music in Ghana) belief of Africans and music, of which the Yorùbá society is an integral part. He explains thus:

The African life and music are inseparable. Music accompanies him in the worship of his gods. The African gods (divinities), some of whom are deified heroes, and each with his own praise chants, chanted in his praise by his own established cult and devotees at worships and special rituals, serve intermediary purposes. The African believes in the existence of a Supreme God, who is the “Prime mover” and maker of all that exists. The African approach Him in worship, praising Him and making their request known through the gods. And in doing this, song is mostly adopted. (4)

The above statement explains that music is one of those tools Africans makes use of during the worship of their gods or deities. It is used to invoke the spirit of the gods, to make supplications, and to pray in terms of people's need. The power of music is brought to the lime-light here. This implies that there is a strong spiritual bond in music generally. In another vein, Ñketía (Music of Africa) tries to categorise the African songs. He ponders the category of songs that he terms the 'songs of the elders'. He stresses that these types of songs remind one of the past, and it requires some kind of knowledge to understand them: “One of the most important categories of songs found in African societies, may be described as 'songs of the elders'. They remind people of the past and values of a society and require some knowledge of oral tradition before one can understand them” (196).

Ñketía's position here is very straightforward and can be likened to the Yorùbá songs meant for the elderly people, Orin àgbá (songs of the elders). This type of song, unlike contemporary music, takes more experience of life to digest and understand, hence they are mainly understood by the elders. Apart from this, there are songs referred to as Orin awo (songs of the initiates). Omibiyi gives a detailed explanation of the effect of music on the Yorùbá life and the categories of songs:

Among the Yorùbá of Nigeria, as well as other ethnic groups in Africa, music is an integral and functional part of daily activities. It permeates every level of traditional life be it social, religious or ceremonial. Consequently, there exist a large repertory of both vocal and instrumental music such as various songs for entertainment, songs for individual and group labour, praise songs for kings, deities and other important people to mention a few. (492)

Wachsmann gives an insightful explanation as to how the African child imbibed the spirit of musicality from the mother at cradle. He asserts:

He starts off on his mother’s back and for a long time he never leaves it [...] When she speaks he must feel the vibrations of her body, when she pounds a mortar he must be aware of the muscular effort of lifting the pestle; he probably is aware of the actual thud of the pestle reaching the bottom of the mortar. Here an experience of rhythm is introduced. (499)

Ídòwù supports Omibiyi’s views about the African take on music, providing further evidence that Africans always accompany everything in life with music:

We have the songs. These constitute a rich heritage of all Africa. Africans are always singing; and in their singing and poetry, they express themselves: All the joys and sorrows of their hearts, and their hopes and fears about the future, find outlet. Singing is always a vehicle conveying certain sentiments or truth [...] in each people’s songs, there is a wealth of material for the scholars who will patiently sift and collate. (85)

Awoyá and Ñpámpú (qtd in Ajiłókibi) compliment the above statements on music thus: “In all, songs tell the stories of the people’s past [...] they also express the joy and sorrows of the people, their assurances, hopes and fears of the future and life after death” (1).
One important point he tries to lay emphasis on with the above statement is the fact that a good relationship exists between dance, drum, and music.

Olukọjú (118) explains the various ways and manners by which one can make use of songs or music. He outlines those ways based on life phenomenon and human endeavour, and views music as a vehicle that transports our thoughts for people to hear in terms of joy, sadness, or during praise and thanksgiving. He attests to the fact that music serves as a therapeutic tool to heal and ease the mind of the bereaved and goes further to explain that music serves as a motivational tool that boosts and encourages the mind of the African towards any physical engagements such as war or during stressful work.

**Themes of Gospel Àpálá**

**Praises, thanksgiving, and adoration of God**

This theme is common to Gospel Àpálá artistes as it is their usual practice to make it a priority. Before they commence their performance, they give praises to God for the gift of life, their audience, and their hosts’ invitation to minister. The praises they offer include the gift of salvation which speaks volumes of deep knowledge of Jesus. It is obvious that praises permeate their performances.

**Salvation/acknowledging Jesus**

In the excerpt below, Òṣòbá, a female Gospel Àpálá artist, sings about salvation thus: “Ọrẹ ẹ kálo, wá ọ lọ ti Jéṣù wọ” (Friends follow me, come and taste Jesus):

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<th>Lílé:</th>
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<td>Èjè:</td>
<td>O ti dájú, o ọ n fún ẹ rẹc</td>
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<td>Èjè:</td>
<td>Dájúaì, ólùwà rẹ à fún dàmìn</td>
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<td>Lílé:</td>
<td>A gbó pẹ̀ hélùtí yato sì bánté o c</td>
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<td>Èjè:</td>
<td>Èyìn ènjègbé mo ní</td>
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Anyonsì, a female Gospel artist, sings about salvation thus: “Ọrẹ ẹ kálo, wá ọ lọ ti Jéṣù wọ” (Friends follow me, come and taste Jesus):

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Lead: Friends follow me, come and taste Jesus)
Chorus: Let us together lift Jesus up
Lead: Friend of sinners that the world loves
Chorus: Friends follow me, come and taste Jesus)
Lead: Anyone who does not have Jesus)
   Certainly, he is playing with fire
Chorus: Certainly, he will suffer seriously
   He will know for sure, that belt is different from charmed belt.
Lead: My esteemed comrades
   At least you are hearing my voice
   We implore you to accept Jesus,
   You are proving stubborn.
Chorus: You are proving arrogant
Lead: I am only pitying you, I don’t want you to burn inside fire
   Anyone who does not have Jesus
   Anyone who does not have Jesus
Since I've known Jesus, I have liberty.

From the excerpt above, the artist projects Jesus as a friend of sinners whom the world loves (Ọrẹ ẹlẹyẹ tārāyẹ n'ọ). She also spells out the spiritual implication of not accepting Jesus such as playing with fire and encounters with poverty/suffering (Ọ tì dàjú, o n'ìnà serẹ). She counsels people not to be stubborn and arrogant. The next example is titled, “Since I've known Jesus, I have liberty.”

Lead: I look at the seas and rivers
Chorus: Our Jesus is the master any time
Chorus: Everybody come quickly
Chorus: Seeing is believing, news cannot be compared to eyewitness
Chorus: There is no trouble for me at all
Chorus: God is big

From the excerpt above, the artist projects Jesus as a friend of sinners whom the world loves (Ọrẹ ẹlẹyẹ tārāyẹ n'ọ). She also spells out the spiritual implication of not accepting Jesus such as playing with fire and encounters with poverty/suffering (Ọ tì dàjú, o n'ìnà serẹ). She counsels people not to be stubborn and arrogant. The next example is titled, “Since I've known Jesus, I have liberty.”
Lead: He created the firmament
Chorus: He also created fish in the depths of the sea
Lead: Surely, there is no king like Lord
Chorus: Surely, there is no king like Lord
Lead: The provider is Jesus
Chorus: He died that we may have salvation
Lead: My Jesus
Chorus: Since I’ve known Jesus
Lead: I have liberty
Chorus: There is no trouble for me at all
Lead: If an egg collides with a stone)
Chorus: It is certain, it will break, certainly there is no king like God)
Lead: I pity you, that is why I’m counselling you
Chorus: You see, anyone who does not have Jesus, has no God
Lead: You see, anyone who has Jesus in his life
Chorus: Certainly,
Chorus: But anyone who doesn’t have Jesus in his life
Lead: Becomes a play person for Satan
Since I’ve known Jesus, I have liberty
Chorus: There is no trouble for me at all.

In the above example, she emphasises confidently that she has not encountered trouble since she encountered Jesus, thereby sending out such invitation to accept Jesus into their lives. She expresses that, since she received Jesus, she has never been disappointed.

The following example is titled “Orúkọ Jésù Làwá Nlọ” (It is the name of Jesus that we use):

Lilé: Orúkọ Jésù làwá n’ọ
Egbé: Iwọ ìrò mo Jésù
Lilé: Ààfọ̀sẹ wóní
Egbé: Ààfọ̀sẹ wóní
Lilé: Ohúà ni transformer tó n’ọnù
        Kẹmí mà ní rọ pọ̀gún ní, ori ní.
Egbé: Kẹmí mà ní rọ pọ̀gún ní:
Lilé: You na de du mi well well
Egbé: Jesus you too much
Lilé: You na de du m’ì well well
Egbé: You carry my matter
Lilé: You carry my matter for your head
Egbé: You na d’é d’ì m’ì well well

Lead: It is the name of Jesus, we use
Chorus: You uphold Jesus
Lead: He will turn you to wonder
Chorus: He will turn you to wonder
Lead: God is the transformer that is bringing light
A selfish person thinks it is medicine, it is destiny
Chorus: A selfish person thinks it is medicine
Lead: You are doing me well
Chorus: Jesus, you are too much
Lead: You are doing me well
Chorus: You shoulder my matter
Lead: You shoulder my matter as a priority
Chorus: You are doing me well
From Òṣòba’s examples above, she mostly sings about her salvation and the liberty she has in Christ Jesus. She narrates her encounters since she came in contact with Jesus and says there is no trouble for her (There is no tôrōba fun mi rara). She mentions the differences between her former life and her present experiences.

Olabisi, a male Gospel Àpálá artist, also makes the theme of appreciation to God his major pre-occupation as he sings: “Ladies & Gentlemen, Ë sòpà ijo” (Let us dance):

Lead: Ladies and gentlemen let us dance
Chorus: Oh my Jesus I love you very much
Lead: Walk gently, child of Jesus
Chorus: Walk softly, softly
Lead: Walk gently
Chorus: Walk gently
Lead: My level has changed I am elevated
Chorus: I am elevated
Lead: I will soon collect my Visa to overseas.
Chorus: Join me to thank God
Lead: My life has changed
Chorus: I am elevated
Lead: Important dignitaries, stand up, let us dance, please, rejoice
Chorus: Lift up your leg, let us praise God
Lead: Lift up your legs gently let us praise father
Chorus: Lift up your body, let us praise father

Olabisi makes appreciation to God his major priority as seen above. He employs loan words from English and Pidgin English. He expresses faith in Christ by using faith language such as “Lêfù mì ti change (my level has changed), mo ti elevate (I am elevated), Mí o ni pè gbà visa lọ si ilú ọba (I shall soon obtain visa abroad), Ayè mì ti change (my life has changed), Rọrọ (lift your leg gently), gbèsi (lift your leg), ọja kà yin Bàbá (let’s praise Father), Gbèbòdè rè (lift up your body), je kà yin bàbà o let’s praise Father).” This use of language portrays him as an international man in this age of civilisation and globalisation.

Another male Gospel Àpálá artist, Òlórùn, focuses on appreciation and gratitude to God. The name “Boiz Òlórùn” means “God’s Boys”. This implies that “God’s boys” is a special name chosen by the leader of the group. Just like other Gospel Àpálá artists, Òlórùn’s preoccupation is praises and adoration to the Lord. He mentions many negative experiences that God shields one from as in the examples below: “Òlórùn tì o je o ya wèrè” (God that does not allow you to run mad), “Òlórùn tì o je kí sójá nà ò” (God that does not allow soldier to beat you), “Òlórùn tì o je kí orin lò” (God that does not allow you to get lost) in the song “Òlórùn tì o je o ya wèrè” (God that does not allow you to run mad):
Lîc. Olôrun ti o jè o ya wèrè
Olôrun ti o jè ki sôjì nà ó
Olôrun ti o jè ki o rîn-ô
Jèsù lò dàmilọhù, mo sè wá ì ṣòpè
Egbé: Jèsù lò dàmilọhù, mo sè wá n ṣòpè
Lîc. Ò tì n kí n mà mú jîòvè
Ò tì n kí n mà mà jóbì
Chorus: Jèsù lò dàmilọhù, mo sè wá ì ṣòpè

Lead: God that does not allow you to turn mad
God that does not allow soldier to beat you
God that does not allow you to get lost
Jesus has made me wealthy, that is why I’m giving thanks
Chorus: Jesus has made me wealthy, that is why I’m giving thanks
Lead: He has said I should not go eat leaves
He has said I should not eat Kolanut
Chorus: Jesus has made me wealthy that is why I am thanking Him

Olôrun also sings “Sòpè tiè” (Give thanks for your own):
Lîc. Sòpè tiè
Egbé: Mo sòpè tèmi
Lîc. Ènì bà mòorc Olúwa
Egbé: È m’á mà sòpè
Lîc. Dákun wá sòpè
Egbé: È sèun tí È kù jùn wù
Lîc. Immortal Invisible God
Tí tí ayé ló o má yín Ò o
Egbé: À ìpè
Lîc. Somebody shout Halleluyah
Immortal Invisible God
Egbé: Ò yá há praise the Lord
Lîc. Lòkònrin – Lòbínrìn praise the Lord
Egbé: À ìpè
Lîc. È má mà praise the Lord
Egbé: Mo ní kí ló o bá sè fún Baba
Lîc. À ŋa mà mà ìpè.
Bí báa bá ni kí mà ìpẹ̀yì wá
Egbé: Ìpẹ̀yì one million o lè tó lẹ̀yì
Lîc. Wó ní báa n jè rúsì
Egbé: Rárá
Lîc. Àbí n jé Bògà?
Egbé: Rárá
Lîc. Àbí n jé Sèmo?
Egbé: Rárá
Lîc. N mú kóòhì?
Egbé: Rárá
Lîc. N mú ìjù
Egbé: Rárá
Lîc. Kí lounjé báá mi?
Egbé: Òpè lounjé báá mi
Lîc. Kí lounjé báá mi?
Egbé: Òpè lounjé báá mi
Lead: Thank God for your life
Chorus: I thank God for my life
Lead: Anyone who knows the goodness of God
Chorus: You better give thanks
Lead: Please come and give thanks
Chorus: Thank You for dying for us
Lead: Immortal invisible God
   Forever we shall praise you
Chorus: We give thanks
Lead: Somebody shout Halleluiah,
   Immortal, invisible God.
Chorus: Its time, let us praise the Lord
Lead: Men, women, praise the Lord
Chorus: We give thanks
Lead: Somebody shout Halleluiah,
   Immortal, invisible God.
Chorus: Its time, let us praise the Lord
Lead: Men, women, praise the Lord
Chorus: We give thanks
Lead: We should please praise the Lord
Chorus: I say what can we do for the father
Lead: We should give thanks God
   If father say we should bring duck.
Chorus: One million ducks can never be enough
Lead: They say father eats rice?
Chorus: No
Lead: They say father eats Burger?
Chorus: No
Lead: He drinks coke?
Chorus: No
Lead: He drinks a type of Hausa drink called Kunu?
Chorus: No
Lead: What is the food of my father?
Chorus: Appreciation is the food of my father
Lead: What is the food of my father
Chorus: Praise is the food of my father.

and “Children of God are you here?”:

Lilè: Children of God are you there?
Ègbè: Yes, we are here?
Lilè: Some have food, and cannot eat
Ègbè: Some have food, and cannot eat
Lilè: Ki la a ba fi san an?
Ègbè: Ki la a ba fi san ore Babá mi?
Lilè: Ti won ba ni n kọwọ wa?
Ègbè: Sẹkere n be nibi
Lilè: Omele n be nibi
Ègbè: Omìgàn n be nibi
Lilè: Ope lounje baba mi
Ègbè: Ope lounje baba mi

Lead: Children of God are you there?
Chorus: Yes, we are here?
Lead: Some have food, and cannot eat
Chorus: Some people can eat a whole building but don’t have food to eat
Lead: What shall we use to appreciate?
Chorus: What shall we use to appreciate my Father?
Lead: If they say I should bring money?
Chorus: There is rattle
God's greatness/miracles

Another song by Olọrun is “Iṣẹ Olúwa Ò Ta Lénu” (God's work is pepperish in the mouth):

Lead: There is a type of talking-drum
Chorus: There is gangan drummer here
Lead: Appreciation is the food of my father
Chorus: Appreciation is the food of my father

Olọrun showcases ṣẹlẹẹ, ọmelẹ, and ẹgbe as the major instruments of Gospel Ápalá music. He mostly asks his audience to praise and appreciate God for all His goodness. An example of such appreciation is “Olọrun ti o jẹ o yọ wọrè” (God that does not allow you to run mad), “Olọrun ti o jẹ ki ọjọ ná o” (God that does not allow soldier to beat you), “Olọrun ti o jẹ ki o 'rin lo” (God that does not allow you to get lost), “Eni bá moore Olúwa” (whosoever appreciate the goodness of God), and “Aji ka maa dapọ” (We should just thank Him). He frequently asks pertinent questions about the nature of the appreciation, for example “Bí bábá bá ni bá mi pépéyè wá, Pépéyè One Million o le to láára” (perishable things or natural things are not enough to appreciate God). He asks if God eats rice, burgers, or drinks coke: “Abí n je Bọ gbọ” (Does he eat burger), “ṣẹ kẹ kẹ n he nibi” (There is rattle here), “Omele n he nibi” (There is
given below are sentential repetition: elements of the sentence being repeated are reduplicated to vividly express what they have in mind. The examples for effect, usually to create a concrete and stronger impact in a poem or song. Full or sentential repetition is the intentional repetition of a sentence structure in several lines in a literary work. Full/sentential repetition

lexical, semantic, phonetic, and thematic repetition. Traditional

Yoruba poetic genres, such as orin (songs), oriki (praise-poetry), oríkì (incantation), esẹ-ifa (ifá divination poetry), ekúm iyúmo (bridal cry), and ọrọ (proverbs). There are six types of repetition: full, partial, lexical, semantic, phonetic, and thematic repetition. Traditional Ápalá also use repetition, which explains the occurrence of repetition in Gospel Ápalá.

Full/sentential repetition

Full or sentential repetition is the intentional repetition of a sentence structure in several lines in a literary work for effect, usually to create a concrete and stronger impact in a poem or song. Òṣòbá, Ọlàbísi, and Ọlórún repeated the full sentences to provide clarity and emphasis, highlighting deeper meanings of their songs. Also, the whole elements of the sentence being repeated are reduplicated to vividly express what they have in mind. The examples given below are sentential repetition:

Stylistic devices

The use of stylistic devices and oral traditional materials such as repetition, rhetorical question, personification, loan words, code-mixing/switching, and proverbs explicitly beautify, embellish, and magnifying the dominant intents of the singers. It thereby positions the two genres—traditional Ápalá and Gospel Ápalá—as pieces that breathe into one another in terms of form, voices, and popularity. The excitement most Christians get from it affirms people’s nostalgic feeling for their heritage embedded in Ápalá music. Scholars such as Òṣòbá, Bámgbóye, Òlabí, Òlátúnjí, Adebowale, Òlátéjú, and Òjọ have emphasised the importance of stylistic devices in works of art. Stylistic devices are linguistic resources employed deliberately to fulfil a stylistic task or expressive means of the language. Their primary goal is to achieve aesthetic ornaments, that is, to beautify literary works. In order to make their Gospel Ápalá music enticing and classical, the artistes employ different stylistic devices to enrich their performances. They dexterously exploit the resources of the Yoruba language in a special and heightened manner with the intention of transforming their experiences into works of art. Òlátéjú asserts that the ambition of any literary writer/artist is to achieve two things, and these are ‘message’ and ‘entertainment’ (277). Òlátéjú’s point is further buttressed with the fact that in order to achieve his purpose of writing, the “writer/artist employs consciously his literary and linguistic skills by packing into the work all ingredients that would generate aesthetic pleasure” (277). As a work of art, literature involves a skilful exploitation and manipulation of language and, through this, an artist may be described as brilliant and ingenious. In the following section, I examine a few stylistic devices employed by the multi-talented artistes who skilfully mint and mend words in both Yoruba and English languages. This act of skilfully smiting words could be seen in all their songs. They achieve this through the use of stylistic devices such as repetition, rhetorical questions, personification, loan words, code-mixing/code-switching, and proverbs, among others.

Repetition

This is a stylistic device that involves intentional usage of a word, phrase, or full sentence two or more times in a speech or written work to create effect. As an aesthetic device and chief among all stylistic devices, repetition creates beauty and good taste in a work of art (Babalá). It projects creativity of the writer’s sense of value, thereby aiding and sustaining memorability. It helps in shaping and sharpening one’s memory and is used as a foregrounding tool in highlighting and reiterating an important message. For repetition to be noticeable, the words, phrases, or sentences should be repeated within close proximity of each other for the purpose of emphasis and memorability. The lexico-structural pattern can be either full or partial (Ólátúnjí). Repetition is common in almost all the Yoruba poetic genres, such as orin (songs), oriki (praise-poetry), oríkì (incantation), esẹ-ifa (ifá divination poetry), ekúm iyúmo (bridal cry), and ọrọ (proverbs). There are six types of repetition: full, partial, lexical, semantic, phonetic, and thematic repetition. Traditional Ápalá also use repetition, which explains the occurrence of repetition in Gospel Ápalá.
Friends follow me, come and taste Jesus
Friends follow me, come and taste Jesus

Anyone who does not have Jesus
Anyone who does not have Jesus

God’s work is pepperish in the mouth
God’s work is pepperish in the mouth

The layman’s judgement of the above repetitions may be light and inconsequential, but a close look at them will make one see the basic rudiment and stylistic purpose of full/sentential repetition

**Lexical repetition**

Lexical repetition foregrounds or focuses on some items which may occur at the beginning, middle, or end of the sentence. The effect of this kind of repetition is intensification and topicalisation. The writer beams his searchlight on a particular word repeatedly for emphasis, bringing out a central message. Whenever there is a preponderance of a particular word, lexical repetition is found. To avoid ambiguity, lexical repetition is necessary. Lexical repetition is shown in the example below:

*Loju mi ti change*
*Mo ti elevate*
*Mo ti elevate*
*Aye mi ti change*
*Mo ti elevate (Olabisi)*

My level has changed
I am elevated
My life has changed
I am elevated

*Sope tiye*
*Mo sope temi*
*Eni ba moore Olura*
*E ma ma sope*
*Dakun (Olorun, “Sope tiye”)*

Thank God for your life
I thank God for my life
You better give thanks
Please come and give thanks
In partial repetition, the sentence structure is repeated, but not all the lexical items are repeated. Below are few examples of partial repetition:

- O ti daju, o n'fa seré
  Dajudaju, o n'fa seré (Ọṣọba, “Ọrẹ e kálo, wá lọ tó Jésù wò”)
  
  Certainly he is playing with fire
  Certainly he is playing with fire

- Olorun ti o je o yá wèrè
  Olorun ti o je kí sójá ná ó
  Olorun ti o je kí o rín lọ (Olorun, “Olorun ti o je o yá wèrè”)
  
  God that does not allow you to turn mad
  God that does not allow soldier to beat you
  God that does not allow you to get lost

In partial repetition, half of the sentence, that is, a phrase, is repeated for effect. The phrase may occur at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence. In the above example, the bold phrases such as: “O lọ ní, Olorun ti o je, o n'fa seré” are examples of partial repetition.

**Semantic repetition**

Semantic repetition is the re-occurrence of words that are synonymous which are placed at close range in a given literary text. For example:

- Àní o gba Jésù,
  O lọ ti gbémi
  O lọ ní sapá kóndú (Ọṣọba, “Ọrẹ e kálo, wá lọ tó Jésù wò”)
  
  We implore you to accept Jesus,
  You are proving stubborn.
  You are proving arrogant

In the above examples, the words gbémi and sapá kóndú are semantic repetition for they are synonymous and mean “proving stubborn”. Jāvè and jobi are examples of semantic repetition, meaning consultation with other gods. Also, yá wèrè and sójá ná ó, rín lọ are examples of semantic repetition representing something evil.

**Rhetorical questions**

The rhetorical question is derived from classical rhetoric. It is the art of public speaking in which a speaker asks some questions in order to buttress a point. A rhetorical question is stylistic use of interrogative language, in such a way that the response to the said interrogation is already suggested as provided by the speaker him/herself. In literature, a rhetorical question is a question posed to the audience in which an answer is not expected since the answer is already suggested in the question. This is known as apparent interrogation and when rhetorical
questions are uttered, they are not expected to be responded to by the referents/addresssee. This stylistic technique is very conspicuous in the songs of all the artistes. Examples abound in the provided texts.

**Personification**

Personification is a stylistic device which gives animate qualities and strength to inanimate things (Ojó, “Predominant Stylistic Devices of Proverbs in Selected Yoruba Literary Texts” 282). Personification is a reference to inanimate objects as if they were animate. It is an extension of a metaphor, especially as it invests non-human things with human attributes with the intention of making them vivid (Ołatünji). Examples of personification employed by the artistes are “Ṣèkèèrè n’è bẹ̀ níbi” (There is rattle here) and “Omele n’è bẹ̀ níbi” (There is talking drum here) (Ojlọrun, “Ṣọpẹ̀ ńjẹ”)—the gourd or rattle, and talking drum are personified, as if they can attend events.

**Loan words**

These are words taken from one language and incorporated into another language’s vocabulary. The selected artistes loan words from English, Pidgin, Hausa, etc. Examples are: “A ẹ ń ṣè wọndà” (He will make you a wonder) (Ọsọba, “Orúkọ Jésù Láwá Nłọ”); “bělịtị” (belt); (Ọsọba, “Orúkọ Jésù Láwá Nłọ”); “There is no trouble for me at all,” “The difference is clear and I tell you” (Ọsọba, “Since I’ve known Jesus”); “You na de du me well well” (You are doing me well) and “Gbe bọ̀dị rẹ̀, ẹ̀ kà yìn baba o” (Lift up your body let’s praise the father) (Ọsọba, “Orúkọ Jésù Láwá Nłọ”); and “Gàn án ní à fì jì” (Ọsọba, “Since I’ve known Jesus”). In these examples, the following words are loaned from English: wonder, belt, trouble, tell, rice, burger, coke, body, and level, while Gàn án ní à fì jì is from the Hausa language.

**Code mixing/code switching**

Code mixing is a means of linguistic socialisation and a sign of modernisation. It signifies an interaction of two languages within a sentence as a result of bilingualism. In the following examples the inclusion of words like transformer, love, ATM, and Visa makes for a code-mixing expression: “Ọluwa ni transformer to ń tọnà” (God is the transformer that brings light), “You carry my matter” (You shoulder my matter) and “You carry my matter for your head” (You should my matter on your head) (Ọsọba, “Orúkọ Jésù Láwá Nłọ”); “Ladies & Gentlemen, È sópà ọjọ” (Ladies and Gentlemen, let us dance), “O my Jesus mo love rẹ gan-ẹ” (Oh my Jesus, I love you seriously), “Lẹfù mi ti change mo ti elevate” (My level has changed, I am elevated), “Mi ọ ni pé gbà ọsí àlu ìgbà” (would soon get VISA abroad), “Gbe bọ̀dị rẹ̀, ẹ̀ kà yìn baba o” (Lift your body let’s praise the father) and “Wàhu jẹ́ ẹ̀ jẹ̀, jẹ́ Jésù” (Tread softly, child of Jesus) (Ogbọisi); “Ọọpẹ̀ ẹnì ẹ̀ jẹ́ ọmọ Jésù” (He turns the mouth of fish to ATM) and “Ọ ni enter your pin, Lọ́bá mí ’JESUS’” (He said enter your pin, He then said JESUS) (Ojlọrun, “Isẹ̀ Ọluwa O Ta Lẹ́nú”).

The examples contain many instances of alternation between Yoruba and English.

**Proverbs**

Proverbs are reflections and expressions of wisdom, ethics, philosophy, and beliefs of a given society (Ojó, “A Stylistic Analysis of Proverbs in Selected Yoruba Written Literature” 2). Proverbs employ figurative language to make a statement of fact as shown below:

*Bèyìn bá fòrì sò ọpàtà*

*Ọtị da ju, ịgbo lo mì a fo* (Ọsọba, “Since I’ve known Jesus”)

If an egg collides with a stone
It is certain, it will break certainly there is no king like God

The above proverb expresses the truth that if an egg collides with the rock, it will break. It shows how fragile an egg is. This proverb means “to attempt the impossible”.

**Conclusion**

In this article I explored the description, thematic, and stylistic traits of Gospel Àpálà music which is a variant of Àpálà music. I argued that Gospel Ápálà artistes Ọşọba, Ogbọisi, and Ojlọrun improved on traditional Ápálà’s original form in terms of the music, lyrics, language, and instrumentation by resuscitating the dying traditional Ápálà into global limelight. I present the description and relevance of Gospel Ápálà in line with the principles
of systemic functional linguistics and sociolinguistics of literature. Themes of Gospel Àpàlà focus mainly on praise and worship of God, thereby projecting God's greatness, and entertaining, educative, informative, and therapeutic functions of literature. The styles, beats, and instruments of traditional Àpàlà have been retained but modernised to project the continuity of the genre. Stylistic devices which garnish their music include repetition, rhetorical questions, personification, loan words, code-mixing/code-switching, and proverbs. From the discussion, it is clear that traditional Àpàlà has become a variant of Àpàlà music. It is therefore safe to conclude that Gospel Àpàlà has become a new register of African music.

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