

## Conceptual Metaphors in Some Christian Praise/Worship Songs in Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*This is a pragmatic study of the naturally occurring speech situations from Praise/Worship songs in the church context. The study involves a detailed consideration of the various contextual features needed and necessary for the understanding of discourse by identifying and systematically interpreting the various conceptual forces behind the utterances of the people in the songs selected. The author integrates the Mey's pragmeme and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual Metaphor. Conceptual Metaphor according to Lakoff is a powerful instrument to facilitate communication. It is a conceptual precepts shared by members of the same culture. The findings shows that contextual features are most attached to the production and interpretation of speech. And that language is understood as a product of general cognitive abilities (Timothy & Aremu, 2016). It establishes the fact that there are other aspects of meaning which the congregation derived that are not taken solely from the meaning of words in the praise/worship songs. And as a result of this, the composers and the singers should be mindful of what they compose and of cause what they lead people to sing or what people sing.*

**Keywords:** Language, Christian, Praise/Worship and Conceptual Metaphor.

### **Introduction**

A Praise/Worship is a song composed with the aim of making people to admit the existence of God, to minister comfort for the troubled, to reveal the way of salvation etc to the congregation (audience). It is a bye product of Christian religion. Language on one hand, is the speech or the way people in a particular society communicate or relate. It is also essentially a social phenomenon. Praise/Worship songs which is the focus of this paper has been using language also for the purpose of winning souls. This is so because language is an act of human communication that includes, abilities, skills and strategies which may require speech, symbols, gesture, to communicate one's message to listener in the conversation, most especially spoken. Abioye (2009, p. 13) says it is obvious that words are not just uttered by one but meant to carry out specific action as intended by the singer. Metaphors are not only figure of speech as portrayed by the literary scholars but linguistic tool used in everyday communication. Despite the use of metaphor in the religious issue, the linguistic study of metaphor used in praise/worship songs are somehow enormous. So many scholars had worked on religious based issues. Odebunmi (2007), worked on studies of stylistics of religious electronic media in Nigeria, Babajide (2007) on styles in Solomon's Songs of Solomon and Okot P'Bitek's Song of Lawino, Olagunju (2007) did research on the thematic progressions in the Christian discourse, Babatunde & Aremu (2016) worked on a pragmatic study of Conceptual Metaphors in Nigerian Christian Tracts. It seems scholars have not done much work on conceptual metaphor.

## **Language Functions**

Halliday (1985) describes:

Language as a system for making meaning: a semantic system with other systems for encoding the meanings it produces. The term “semantics” does not simply refer to the meaning of words; it is the entire system of meanings of a language, expressed by grammar as well as vocabulary.

Louis (1961) as cited in Odeneye (2007) sees language as an instrument with which man forms thought, feelings, mood, aspiration, will and act; the instrument by whose means he influences. This definition buttresses the major function of language as a key to the prehistoric relation among people and nations. Osisanwo (2003) says that language is the human vocal noise or arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for communication. This definition sheds more light on the sound system of human language.

Jakobson (1960), Hymes (1962), Halliday (1970), Stubbs (1995), Odeneye (2007), and Omotayo (2012 & 2014) emphasise this function of language. Halliday (1970) proposes three levels of language functions; namely the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual. The Ideational function of language is the use of language to express one’s experience of the real world and the inner world of one’s consciousness. It represents the speaker’s meaning potential as an observer. It expresses the process, the world of thought and feelings; objects, actions, events, quality, state and the relation of the metaphysical. Language is seen as the means through which a speaker encodes his own individual experience in addition to his cultural experience. The interpersonal function is the use of language to establish and maintain social relations. These relations include conversational interactions. This function is also a tool for socialization. The speaker expresses his own attitudes and the behaviour of others in his environment. He greets, condemns, sympathizes and felicitates with members of his community through language. The Textual Function is used to provide speaker’s / writer’s experience, mood, feelings in a text that is situationally and culturally relevant to the environment. It is this function that provides the quality of coherence and cohesion (relating text to the context of situation and the preceding, and the succeeding text) in what we say. “Textual” differentiates a functional language (natural) from a non-functional (unnatural) language.

Language cannot be divorced from the religious experiences of a people as it is an active and reliable tool of religious expression. According to Rahimi and Hematiyan (1994), “the interface between language and religion is so palpable throughout the world that we cannot ignore it” (Rahimi & Hematiyan, 1994:1). Acknowledging the intertwined relationship between language and different areas of human endeavour such as religion, Gregorutti (2008) and Omotayo (2014) assert that “because language is so intimately connected to human experience, linguistics is a point of centralized traffic, intersecting with fields such as sociology, psychology ... history and theology”.

Language also performs the function of an instrument of emotional expression as demonstrated by human beings when they are frustrated or angry, happy or sad. Lots of studies have been done on linguistics analysis of Religious Discourse by so many scholars based on the pragmatic, sociolinguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis etc. Crystal (1965, Oladosu (1997), Oha

(1997), Babatunde (2007), Odebunmi (2007), Ogundeji (2012), Aremu (2013), etc. In view of all these, religious language affect people's lives especially their feelings and emotions. And that is the reason why praise/worship reflects one's emotion. The type of song you sing reveals your mood at a particular time. For instance when you sing 'Eyin le seyi, eyin le seyi o, ayeraye Olorun iyanu, eyin le se yi o Baba

Int: You were the one that has done this, you were the one that has done this o, everlasting God of miracle, you were the one that has done this, father.

When one sings this, it shows that the person is happy and that is why the person thank his maker. The paper therefore fill the existing vacuum in research on religious language, but equally expose other area of study to contextual meaning issue.

### **Language and Religion**

The relationship between language and religion are inseparable. Any attempt to separate one from the other will automatically result in the end of both. This is simply because one cannot exist without the other.

Religion consists of the entirety of life of those people that submitted to its influence. It is a most important part of the life of a human being. In very many communities, people have thought religion to be very essential, and some thought it more essential than any other part of life. Religion is one of the activities of life where people resist and as well embrace change. Brown (1999, p.9) posits that religion involves both an individual and a social event that has to do with experiences. In a similar way, every communities builds up its own religion. Most religions include the following elements:

- The beliefs of the community about God
- The beliefs of the community about God's relationship with the world.
- The ways in which the people of the community worship God and pray to Him.
- The rules which the community follows because of their beliefs about God.
- The places and people which the community believes to be holy and to belong to God in a special way. (Brown 1999 & Omotayo, 2014).

Language plays important roles in religion especially in Christianity. It was discovered that there are several ways in which language can be useful in churches such as time of sermon, prayer, music etc. Therefore, delivering praise/worship just like sermon will yield good interest .This will make the songs sink deeply into the hearts of its listeners. For instance:

He is Lord/2ce  
He is Lord amen  
He has risen from the dead, He is Lord  
Every kneel shall bow  
Every tongue confess  
That Jesus Christ is Lord.

This song acknowledges God, affirming He is God and not man. Though is in English, people still understand the content of the song clearly.

### **Research Questions**

This study was used to give solutions to the following research questions:

1. What contextual belief are often shared by participants in the meaning of metaphors found in PRWS?
  1. To identify the utterances that are metaphorical in nature.
  2. What illocutionary acts are placed by the participants in the utterances/texts of PRWS?

### **Contextual Beliefs**

The beliefs, ideas or assumptions shared by the participants about the topic of discourse, choice of referent and the cultural background of the participants, which facilitate effective communication, is known as contextual beliefs or mutual contextual beliefs or shared contextual beliefs. Odebunmi (2006: 24) says that “contextual beliefs are the beliefs or assumptions held prior to or during occasions of participation (which) come into and facilitate the communicative process.” According to Odebunmi (2006: 24) beliefs are in two levels namely, language level and situation level.

At language level, meaning occurs when participants understand the same language of communication used in the discourse: when a speaker uses a language which he/ she believes his/her hearer/audience understands. The speaker will want reactions from the hearer because he/she knows that the hearer understands the language of communication. In other words, if the hearer does not understand the language of communication, the vacuum of meaning will be left out unachieved. At the level of the situation, meaning depends on participants shared knowledge of linguistics/non-linguistic cues, cultural beliefs and experiences. At this level, the experience of the world (individual level) in addition to the group experiences (group level) of the interactants aid meaning in the human communicative process. Odebunmi (2006) identifies three levels of situational beliefs, namely:

**Share Experience of Subject/Topic:** for participants to really discuss effectively in a conversational interaction, they should share the knowledge of the topic or subject matter. This makes the participants to comprehend and react to every linguistic item employed in the discourse. This explains why words/statements picked in transit may not make sense or have full meaning to a person who does not know or share the knowledge of the topic of the discourse.

**Shared Experience of Word Choices, Referents and References:-** This has to do with the knowledge of individual words used in the interaction by the participants. It is important here for participants to have mutual contextual knowledge of words, referents and references used in discourse in order to attained meaningful interaction. The lexical items employed in discourse will depend largely on the participants’ personal experience and their group experience of the world. It is germane for participants to share knowledge or symbols of the lexical items to be employed in the interaction because there are culturally shared lexical items included. For example, the word ‘sister’ in the Nigerian setting does not have the same meaning

as in the British interpretation of the word. Every female relative, acquaintance, friend and neighbour are referred to as brother in Nigeria.

**Shared Socio-Cultural and Situational Experiences, Previous or Immediate:** Participants must share the same socio- cultural and situational experiences because some words or expressions are culturally determined and these vary from culture to culture; for example, the Hausa do not employ euphemisms in their expression: a blind man is called 'meekafo' meaning blind man to his face without an offence being caused. Odeneye (2007). This is not allowed in the Yoruba culture because it is uncultured to mention one's deformity in one's presence. If the needs for him to be described arise, the speaker has to use a euphemism like "the man that has an eye problem" to describe him. In order to achieve smooth communication in human interactions, interpretations of expressions should not be limited to context, culture and situation alone; the linguistic entities "are also very vital to the process" (Odebunmi 2006:33).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical base of this study as earlier stated hinges on Mey's pragmeme and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) cognitive metaphor. Cognitive metaphor is the same thing as conceptual metaphor. It means ability to comprehend an idea in terms of another. It involves every part of human experience. Conceptual Metaphor shapes thought and action in which our study is adequately represented. It (CM) uses one idea and link or relate it to another to better understanding of something. Babatunde and Aremu (2016) said that the source of domain consists of ' a set of literal entities ,attributes , processes, and relationships linked semantically in terms of sparial, causal and temporal relationships, derived from basic human experience and stored in the mind. They added that all these are called 'metaphorical expressions or 'linguistic metaphor'. It is not that all expression in religious language are metaphorical. The metaphorical use of the language in religious issue cannot be compared with analogical use of metaphor. The conceptual metaphor 'God is good' according to some scholars is a metaphor that cannot be explained literarily but only with the mapping and the target domain.

Different studies have been done by different scholars on metaphorical nature of religious discourse. E.g Erussard (1997) etc. Because of the supposed weakness of speech act even as condemned by Mey, the concept of pragmatic acts came in to substitute for Austin's speech acts. Mey says speech act lacks the theory of action. Pragmatic acts entails putting our speech acts in context that is adapting oneself to context and vice versa. According to Mey (2001, p.217), no conversation or utterance can be properly understood, unless it is within the vicinity in which it is meant to be understood.

Pragmatic act is divided into Activity and Textual part. Textual part has to do with the context while Activity part is an interactants segment. Therefore modified model of Mey's (2001) pragmatic act has been adopted in analysing metaphors in Christian praise/worship songs because it shapes human action.

### **Methodology**

Five praise/worship songs were selected. They comprise of common and popular songs rendered in any denomination in Nigeria. They are the ones to be analysed .These songs were carefully scrutinized and selected, and the conceptual metaphors in them were randomly

selected as our data for the analysis. Lakoff-Johnson (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor and modified model of Mey's (2001) theory of pragmatic acts were adopted as theoretical framework for analyzing the data in this research work.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

A lot of conceptual metaphor were found in the selected praise/worship songs. These are the metaphors to analyse. a) God is good. b) He (Jesus) is Lord. c) He's a miracle working God. d) You are the Pillar that holds our life. e) Jehovah is your name. These are analyzed below:

Excerpt 1. God is good.

CM-i) "God is a good supreme being"

The word "good" can be used as a noun, adverb and adjective. It means something/someone is pleasant, of high quality, sensible, strong etc. The metaphorical mapping "God is good" reveals God as a supreme being that is pleasant, someone perfect in all ramifications, someone reliable-worthy to be depended on. That God is perfect in everything.

- (i) God is good  
He has done me well  
Oh my soul, rise up and praise the Lord.

Excerpt. 2. He (Jesus) is Lord

CM. ii) He is the head/leader

In example 2, the conceptual mapping of the word "Lord" presupposes an honorable person, a person of high rank in nobility, a powerful man, a title of respect. But in this worship song it is a title used to refer to God or Christ. Jesus is conceptualized to be a supreme being having sovereignty over all creatures according to Christians. He rules with humility and because of this God the father gave Him a name above all other name. (Philippians 2: 9-11).

He is Lord/2ce  
He is Lord amen  
He has risen from the dead, He is LORD  
Every kneel shall bow  
Every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord

Excerpt. 3. He's a miracle-working God

CM. iii) He is a miracle

He, a pronoun is conceptualizing to be God since the singer/composer depends on the shared religious belief. Miracle-working in the sense that God works in a mysterious ways. He does what ordinary person can't do.

He's a miracle-working God/2ce  
He's an Alpha and Omega.  
He's a miracle-working God.

Excerpt 4. You are the pillar that holds our life  
Master Jesus you are the pillar that holds our life.

- CM- iv) God is a pillar  
v) God is a pole

The word “pillar” refers to a large round stone, metal or wooden used to support or hold a building or roof of a building. The statement is an example of personification in the literary sense of it. In Personification, an object is used to depict human being. The metaphorical mapping “God is a pillar”, God is a pole shows God as human life supporter, defender. This is then deduced through inference and implicature from a statement from our data.

You are the pillar that holds our life/2ce  
Master Jesus, you are the pillar that holds our life.

Excerpt. 5 Jehovah is your name/2ce  
Mighty in battle, great in warrior  
Jehovah is your name.

- CM. vi). Jehovah is your appellation  
vii) Jehovah is your title

In example 5, Jehovah is a name/appellation given to God in the Old Testament of the Bible meaning, ‘God’ There is Jehovah Nissi, Jireh, Rapha etc. God is conceptualized to be an overall supreme being. The use of cognitive/conceptual metaphor in Christian praise/worship songs reveals that language of this kind of genre of religious discourse are categorized by using literal or non-literal language. Our findings showed that the praise/worship songs is a dialogic and monologic discourse. Mey’s (2001), pragmeme and Lakoff and Johnson (1980) conceptual metaphor were used in this study to explain the ‘everyday metaphors’ used in PRWS, which are often used as practs like acknowledging, requesting, exhorting etc.

### **Conclusion**

The study revealed that praise/worship songs as a religious discourse is categorized by the following type of conceptual metaphors, namely ,i) God is a good supreme being .ii) He(Jesus) is the head , iii) He is a miracle iv).Jesus is a pillar , v) Jesus is a pole vi) Jehovah is your appellation, vii) Jehovah is your title. Analysis of the PRWS has revealed a set of heterogeneous illocutionary force too like acknowledging, exhorting etc. There are seven (7) conceptual metaphors discovered in our data in the cause of analysis. Presupposition, participants, implicature, direct speech acts were found to be useful tools. Further pragmatic study of religious discourse can also be done in the genres of religious hymns, and psalms.

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