

A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Notion of Divine Sovereignty in Selected Songs of Dunsin Oyekan

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Abstract

This study employs the Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine the construction and communication of divine sovereignty in selected songs by Nigerian contemporary gospel artist Dunsin Oyekan. Drawing on Kress and van Leeuwen's Multimodal Discourse Analysis and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, the research analyses how linguistic, visual, rhetorical and performative modes interact to create meaning about God's supreme authority and control in the songs Imole De, Fragrance to Fire, At All Cost, More Than a Song, I Will Follow, You Are Good, Anthem (Raise a Voice), No Words, God, Breathe, The Glory Experience, and Yahweh. These songs were purposively selected because they made numerous use of the multimodal tools of language from different interesting points of view to portray the notion of divine sovereignty. The songs were subjected to detailed multimodal analysis examining lexical choices, rhetorical elements, metaphorical constructions, visual imagery and gestural communication. Findings reveal that Oyekan employs multiple semiotic resources which includes warfare metaphors, royal imagery, indigenous Yoruba expressions, extended vocalizations, and emphatic gestures to construct a multidimensional representation of divine sovereignty that encompasses transcendence, immanence, and intimate relationship. The selected songs present divine sovereignty not merely as abstract theological doctrine but as experiential reality mediated through affective engagement and embodied worship. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on contemporary African gospel music as a site of theological meaning-making and demonstrates the analytical value of multimodal approaches for understanding religious discourse in digital media contexts.

Keywords: Multimodal Discourse Analysis, divine sovereignty, Dunsin Oyekan, contemporary gospel music, social semiotics

Introduction

Contemporary gospel music is a genre of Christian music that originated in the early 20th century in the African American church; it is characterised by its roots in blues, spirituals and hymns. It is defined by its focus on the *gospel* or good news of Jesus Christ, emphasising themes of salvation, redemption and spiritual growth as observed by Boyce (2019). Contemporary gospel music is often distinguished by its use of harmony, call-and-response patterns and emotive performances, often featuring choirs, quartets, or solo artists Jackson (2019). According to Ojo (1988), contemporary Nigerian Gospel music emerged in the 1970s as a distinctive genre when choral groups moved their performance from the liturgical setting in the churches into the public domain. As observed by **Osugwu** (2022), gospel music is a well-known music among Christians in Nigeria. He added that Nigeria

gospel songs are heard in all parts of Nigeria and are being appreciated and respected by Nigerian Christians because Nigerian gospel musicians show a high level of creativity and inventiveness.

To be precise, contemporary gospel music constitutes a significant cultural and religious phenomenon in Nigeria and across Africa. It serves as a primary medium through which theological concepts are articulated, negotiated and disseminated (Adeboye (2023); Onyeji (2024)). As observed by Kalu and Vethanayagamony (2023), within the landscape of Nigerian Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity, worship music functions not merely as aesthetic expression but as pedagogical instrument, spiritual technology and identity marker. In fact, most of the songs produced by contemporary gospel artists operate as multimodal texts that combine linguistic, musical, visual and performative elements to

communicate complex theological ideas to diverse audiences as stated by Ukah and Edozie (2024).

Dunsin Oyekan's songs can be categorised as contemporary gospel music. As observed by the researchers, Dunsin Oyekan is a Nigerian gospel singer, songwriter, and worship leader who has produced a remarkable number of songs that has been recognised internationally. It is worthy of note to mention that as observed by Akinlade (2024), Dunsin Oyekan has emerged as one of the most influential voices in contemporary Nigerian gospel music, with his songs garnering millions of views on digital platforms and achieving widespread adoption in church worship contexts across Africa and the diaspora. Born in Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, Oyekan's musical ministry is characterised by what scholars describe as theological depth, cultural authenticity and affective intensity (Omoyajowo (2023)). His songs often combine powerful lyrics rooted in faith with a mixture of different musical styles, ranging from contemporary gospel to African rhythms. His songs frequently address themes of divine sovereignty, spiritual warfare, divine presence, redemption, hope, praise and transformative encounter with God.

In addition, Oyekan's songs cover a wide range of appreciated Christian theological concepts that could be used to demonstrate that Multimodal Discourse Analysis can be used as a powerful tool for the academic study of contemporary gospel music. The notion of divine sovereignty which refers to God's supreme authority, absolute control, and ultimate ruler ship over all creation represents a central theological concept in Christian tradition generally and in Pentecostal theology specifically as indicated by Yong (2023). However, it is important to state that the manner in which this abstract theological doctrine is translated into lived religious experience through contemporary worship music merits scholarly attention. Also, Oyekan's songs provide predominantly rich data for examining this translation process, as they deploy multiple semiotic modes to construct and communicate

understandings of the notion of divine sovereignty that resonate with contemporary African Christian sensibilities.

Based on these premise, this study analysed the concept of divine sovereignty as represented in selected songs of Dunsin Oyekan using Multimodal Discourse Analysis as a theoretical framework. By analysing the multimodal aspects of Oyekan's songs, the study aims to uncover the complex interplay between linguistic and visual modes of communication in portraying the concept of divine sovereignty within the context of contemporary Nigerian gospel music. The study explores the concept of divine sovereignty because it is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity that depicts God as the supreme authority and ruler of the universe.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the cultural prominence and theological influence of contemporary Nigerian gospel music, scholarly understanding of how these songs function as sites of theological meaning-making remains underdeveloped. Previous studies have focused on the linguistic features and thematic analysis of gospel songs. Little attention has been paid to the use of visual strategies in conveying religious messages in African contemporary Christian songs. Moreover, previous studies that apply Multimodal Discourse Analysis to religious discourse are limited. In the same vein, despite the popularity and influence of Dunsin Oyekan and the thematic emphasis on the notion of divine sovereignty in majority of his songs, there is an absence of comprehensive understanding regarding how various modes of communication such as lyrics, rhetoric, visuals, and performance style work together to convey the complex concept of divine sovereignty.

Also, extensive research has shown that in previous years, a lot of research works such as Ajayi, and Akinrinlola (2024), Taiwo, Fawunmi and Ogundare (2023), **Osuagwu (2022), Muir (2018) and Wayar (2018) among others** have been done in the fields of gospel music as it

relates to Discourse Analysis. While considerable scholarship such as Adeboye (2023), Burgess (2024) and Kalu and Vethanayagamony (2023) addresses African gospel music from musicological, theological and sociological perspectives, relatively few studies employ Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine how meaning is constructed through the orchestration of diverse semiotic resources. This research aims to fill this gap by conducting a detailed Multimodal Discourse Analysis of selected songs by Dunsin Oyekan to explore how different modes of communication contribute to the portrayal and interpretation of the notion of divine sovereignty in his music. This research is therefore significant because it adds to the existing body of knowledge on multimodality and discourse analysis, especially in the analysis of contemporary gospel songs. In addition, by uncovering the multimodal discursive resources employed in presenting the concept of God's sovereignty in African contemporary Christian songs, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of religious meaning-making in the digital age. The paper in addition investigates the interplay of linguistic, rhetorical, visual, and performative modes in creating multi-layered meanings about God's supreme authority and its implications for human experience and action.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- a. To identify and analyse the linguistic resources employed in Oyekan's selected songs to construct notions of divine sovereignty.
- b. To examine the rhetorical elements that contribute to the communication of divine sovereignty in the selected songs.
- c. To analyse the visual and performative modes through which divine sovereignty is represented in music videos and live performances of the

selected songs.

- d. To investigate how linguistic, rhetorical, visual, and performative modes interact to create integrated multimodal meanings about divine sovereignty.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- a. What linguistic resources are employed in Oyekan's selected songs to construct the notion of divine sovereignty?
- b. How do rhetorical elements contribute to the communication of divine sovereignty in the selected songs?
- c. In what ways are visual and performative modes employed to represent divine sovereignty in the selected songs?
- d. How do the different semiotic modes interact to create integrated meanings about divine sovereignty?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal Discourse Analysis which is rooted in Social semiotics, as developed by Halliday (2024 [1978]) and extended by Kress and van Leeuwen (2024 [1996, 2006]), provides the theoretical base for this study. This methodology conceptualises meaning making as a social process in which semiotic resources such as language, images, sounds and gestures are employed to realise communicative purposes within specific cultural contexts as expanded by Jewitt, Bezemer & O'Halloran (2023). Multimodal Discourse Analysis emphasises how semiotic choices are motivated by social interests and shaped by available resources within particular communities of practice as stated by Van Leeuwen (2024). According to Kress (2023), Multimodal Discourse Analysis extends social semiotic principles to examine how meaning is constructed through the orchestration of

multiple modes simultaneously. Bezemer and Kress (2024) defined mode as a socially organised set of semiotic resources for meaning making, such as language, music, gesture, or visual representation.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) noted that Multimodal Discourse Analysis extends the interpretation of language and its meanings to the whole range of modes of representation and communication employed in a culture. This include methods for analysing visual, aural, and embodied communication such as gaze, gesture, body posture and position. In line with these, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), and van Leeuwen (2000, 2005) recognise other media of communication, apart from language, which text producers deploy to hide intended meanings and ideological tendencies. Examples of these media of communication are gesture, dress, architecture, proximity (in film for example) lightening, movement, gaze, camera angle, etc.

As observed by Kress (2023), central to Multimodal Discourse Analysis is attention to affordances as modes work together to create meanings that exceed what any single mode could communicate independently. This view is related to this study because, while language might specify propositional content about divine sovereignty, music can evoke affective responses, visual imagery can represent spatial and power relations, and gesture can embody attitudes and relationships. These modes do not simply repeat the same message but contribute distinct and complementary meanings that integrate into complex and multilayered communications.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides analytical tools for examining how language constructs meaning through three interconnected metafunctions. According to Halliday & Matthiessen (2004, 2014), these metafunctions are: ideational (representing experience), interpersonal (enacting social relationships), and textual (organising information). As

observed by Malmqvist (2023), in religious discourse, these metafunctions operate to construct theological realities, position speakers and addressees in relation to the divine, and structure information to foreground certain concepts while backgrounding others. As observed by Martin, Matthiessen and Painter (2023), the ideational metafunction is particularly relevant for analysing how the concept of divine sovereignty is represented. Transitivity analysis examines processes (actions, events, states), participants (actors, entities), and circumstances (time, place, manner) through which experience is construed linguistically. Martin, Matthiessen and Painter (2023) observe further that in discourse about God and divinity, transitivity choices reveal whether divinity is represented as agent performing actions, as phenomenon being described, or as beneficiary receiving worship. They added that material processes (doing), mental processes (sensing), relational processes (being), and verbal processes (saying) each construct different facets of divine sovereignty.

In another study, Martin & White (2024) observed that the interpersonal metafunction addresses how language constructs relationships and positions while the analysis of mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative), modality (possibility, necessity, obligation), and appraisal (evaluation, attitude, affect) reveals how speakers position themselves and audiences in relation to divine sovereignty. In line with the foregoing, Malmqvist (2023) observes that religious discourse characteristically employs appraisal resources to express attitudes toward God, evaluate divine attributes and regulate appropriate emotional responses.

Conceptual Framework

Divine Sovereignty in Christian Theology

According to Pink (1999), the sovereignty of God refers to the supremacy of God, the kingship of God and the Godhood of God. Ademola (2018) defined sovereignty as the ability to do anything that you like, whenever

you like and at whatever time you like. He describes it as a situation where by a being does not have to give an account of his actions and his actions are subject to no contingency. To him, God is the only being who can be described as sovereign. To Frame (2020), divine sovereignty refers to the biblical concept that God exercises universal and efficacious control over all things, including human freedom and decisions. Divine sovereignty constitutes a central theological concept denoting God's supreme authority, absolute power, and ultimate control over all creation and history as opined by Erickson (2023). As observed by Frame (2024), classical Christian theology affirms divine sovereignty as encompassing multiple dimensions of ontological sovereignty (God's supremacy over all existence), creational sovereignty (God's authority over creation), providential sovereignty (God's governance of historical events), moral sovereignty (God's rightful claim to obedience), and soteriological sovereignty (God's initiative and efficacy in salvation).

Within African Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity, divine sovereignty receives particular emphasis in relation to spiritual warfare, prosperity, healing, and transformative encounter as explained by Kalu & Vethanayagamony (2023). According to Asamoah-Gyadu, (2024) God's sovereignty is understood not as an abstract theological principle but as an experiential reality manifested through miraculous interventions, spiritual empowerment, and tangible transformations of circumstances. This theological orientation shapes how sovereignty is articulated in contemporary worship music, with emphasis on divine power to overcome adversaries, provide material blessings, heal afflictions, and establish the believer's authority in Christ as observed by Burgess (2024).

Contemporary African Gospel Music

According to Onyeji (2024), Contemporary African gospel music represents a distinctive genre that synthesizes African musical traditions, Pentecostal-charismatic

theology, global popular music styles, and digital media affordances. As observed by Adeboye (2023), Contemporary African gospel music is characterised musically by a fusion of indigenous African rhythms and melodies with contemporary genres including highlife, Afrobeat, hip-hop, and R&B; use of both African languages and English; incorporation of traditional instruments alongside electronic production; and emphasis on participatory performance practices. To (Walls (2023), theologically, contemporary African gospel music functions as vernacular theology which is referred to as theology expressed through indigenous cultural forms rather than Western systematic categories. Magesa (2024) believes this mode of theological communication aligns with African epistemological preferences for experiential knowledge, communal learning, and integration of intellectual, emotional, and embodied dimensions.

In another study, Asamoah-Gyadu (2024) remarked that Contemporary African gospel music reflects contemporary digital media ecology. This is due to the fact that Gospel songs circulate primarily through YouTube, streaming platforms, and social media rather than traditional broadcast media or physical recordings. This circulation pattern means songs are typically encountered as multimodal texts combining audio, video, lyrics, and performative elements.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Religious Discourse

Scholars have increasingly employed multimodal approaches to analyse religious communication across various contexts. An example of such studies is Adami and Jewitt (2023) as they examined how prosperity gospel is communicated through the multimodal affordances of televangelism, finding that combinations of language, music, visual imagery, and performative elements work together to construct compelling narratives of transformation and divine blessing. Their

analysis revealed how different modes contribute distinct yet complementary meanings summarised as: language provides theological frameworks, visual imagery displays material prosperity, music creates affective atmospheres, and gesture embodies authority and confidence.

In another study, Nwankwo (2023) conducted a multimodal analysis of Nigerian Pentecostal sermons, demonstrating how preachers orchestrate linguistic choices, vocal dynamics, bodily movements, and spatial positioning to construct religious authority and facilitate congregation engagement. The study found that moments of perceived spiritual intensity corresponded with heightened modal density which involves a simultaneous deployment of multiple semiotic modes including elevated vocal pitch, increased gestural frequency, rhythmic linguistic patterns, and physical movement across the platform.

Concerning worship music specifically, Ingalls (2023) analysed how contemporary Christian worship songs employ sonic, linguistic, and visual modes to create immersive worship experiences. The research identified four primary functions of multimodality in worship music: theological instruction (communicating doctrinal content), affective regulation (shaping emotional experiences), communal bonding (fostering collective identity), and spiritual mediation (facilitating encounter with the divine). Different modes were found to contribute differentially to these functions, with language predominating in theological instruction while music and visual elements primarily served affective and mediational functions.

Linguistic Analysis of Gospel Music

Taiwo and Ohiagu (2024) analysed metaphorical constructions in Nigerian gospel songs, identifying warfare metaphors, journey metaphors, royal imagery, and agricultural metaphors as predominant conceptual patterns. Their analysis revealed how these metaphors frame Christian experience as battle requiring divine empowerment, pilgrimage requiring

divine guidance, reign requiring divine authority, and cultivation requiring divine provision. To be precise, such metaphorical constructions make abstract theological concepts tangible and actionable. In another study, Omoyajowo (2023) investigated code-switching practices in contemporary Nigerian gospel music. The study discovered that alternation between English and indigenous languages serve multiple functions including identity assertion, semantic precision, affective intensification, and audience engagement. As revealed in the study, Code-switching to Yoruba, Igbo, or other Nigerian languages often occurs at moments of high emotional or spiritual significance, suggesting that indigenous languages are perceived as more effective for expressing certain religious experiences or addressing God in intimate register.

Applying appraisal theory to gospel lyrics, Malmqvist (2023) demonstrated how Christian worship songs employ evaluative language to construct appropriate attitudes toward God and regulate emotional responses. Analysis revealed heavy use of amplification (intensifying positive attributes of God), comparison (positioning God as supreme over all rivals), and graduation resources (scaling intensity of worship responses). These linguistic patterns work to present God as worthy of absolute devotion while positioning worshippers as rightly responding with maximal praise, gratitude, and surrender.

Ajayi and Akinrinlola (2024) with emphasis on Fairclough's analysis on ideology and insights from Odebunmi's notion of shared cultural knowledge discuss extensively on the ideological practices of Christian groups in Nigeria and beyond, as evident in the songs of Ilaje Zionist gospel songs of Lekan Remilekun Amos and Debo Ojubuyi. The study identifies the following ideological themes that reverberate in this Christian group: life is a battle, human wickedness, life is a matter of time and season, you reap what you sow, and life is vanity. The findings from the study reveal that there are areas of complementarity between the Yorùbá ideological standpoint and the Christian

biblical principles about life, as evident in the analysed songs. They concluded that while the songs of the Ilaje Zionist Christian movement are gospel in nature, they reveal the people's ideological attachment to their indigenous roots as a sub-group of the Yorùbá.

In a related study, Osuagwu (2022) examines the socio-stylistic analysis of Nigerian gospel music using two lyrics of Nigerian Gospel Musicians- Mercy Chinwo and Amaka Okwuoha. The findings of this study revealed that the Nigerian gospel musicians code-switch and that the codes in most cases are English, Indigenous languages, and Nigerian Pidgin. **Osuagwu** further establishes that Nigerian gospel musicians code-switch to show solidarity, express their happiness, surprise, and excitement and share their identity with their audience. Finally, the study establishes that Nigerian gospel musicians use some other stylistic features such as simile, hyperbole, rhetorical questions, metaphor symbolism, apostrophe, onomatopoeia, slang, and repetition to draw the attention of their audience and communicate their feelings and emotion more effectively. In another study, **Wayar (2018)** specifically, exposed the styles of language behaviour of Hausa- based gospel singers in Northern Nigeria. The study analysed the code choices and the motivation behind such style of music genre with the aid of Stylistics as a branch of applied linguistics that deals with the study and interpretation of text- spoken or written. Findings from his study indicated that code-switching and code – mixing among the musical artistes were sociolinguistic, economic and artistic. He concluded that the trend of language choice in the selected music could be used to foster unity, preserve languages from going into extinction and attract a wider audience.

Studies on Dunsin Oyekan's songs

Scholarly attention to Dunsin Oyekan specifically remains limited, though his cultural prominence is increasingly recognised. Akinlade (2024) provides biographical overview and musicological analysis, situating

Oyekan within the tradition of Nigerian gospel musicians who blend indigenous musical heritage with contemporary production techniques. The study identifies key themes in Oyekan's repertoire including divine presence, spiritual warfare, prophetic declaration, and transformative encounter, noting how these themes reflect broader patterns in Nigerian Pentecostal theology.

Okeke (2023) examined the reception and appropriation of Oyekan's songs in Nigerian church contexts through ethnographic observation and interviews. Findings from the study indicated that congregations value Oyekan's music for perceived theological depth, cultural authenticity, and capacity to facilitate spiritual encounters. Respondents reported that his songs enable them to express faith in culturally resonant ways while experiencing emotional and spiritual transformation. The study celebrated the particular appreciation for Oyekan's incorporation of Yoruba language and traditional musical elements, which participants described as making worship feel more personally meaningful and culturally appropriate.

However, no existing study has employed a comprehensive Multimodal Discourse Analysis to examine how divine sovereignty or other theological concepts are constructed in Oyekan's songs. This research addresses that gap by systematically analysing linguistic, rhetorical, visual, and performative dimensions of twelve (12) selected songs.

Methodology

This study employs the qualitative research design by utilising Multimodal Discourse Analysis as the primary analytical approach. This is because Multimodal Discourse Analysis is appropriate for examining how meaning is constructed through the orchestration of multiple semiotic resources such as language, music, image and gesture in contemporary media texts as postulated by Kress (2023). The analysis is systematic and theory-driven, employing analytical

frameworks from social semiotics and Systemic Functional Linguistics to identify, categorise, and interpret semiotic choices across multiple modes. Twelve songs by Dunsin Oyekan were selected for analysis: *Imole De*, *Fragrance to Fire*, *At All Cost*, *More Than a Song*, *I Will Follow*, *You Are Good*, *Anthem (Raise a Voice)*, *No Words*, *God, Breathe*, *The Glory Experience*, and *Yahweh*. These songs were purposively selected based on the following criteria: thematic relevance (explicit focus on divine sovereignty and related concepts such as divine power, authority, and kingship); cultural prominence (measured by YouTube views, social media engagement and adoption in church worship); multimodal richness (availability of official music videos, live performance footage, and high-quality audio recordings); and representativeness (collectively representing different facets and expressions of divine sovereignty in Oyekan's corpus). For each selected song, data sources included official audio recordings, official music videos published on Oyekan's YouTube channel, live performance videos, and published lyrics. Where available, behind-the-scenes content and artist interviews discussing song creation were also consulted as supplementary contextual information. All materials used were accessed between April 2024 and January 2026.

The analytical framework used in this study integrates approaches for examining rhetorical, linguistic, visual, and performative modes. Analysis proceeded through multiple phases. Firstly, each song was experienced holistically through repeated listening and viewing to develop familiarity and identify initial impressions. Secondly, systematic analysis of each mode was conducted separately: linguistic transcription and coding, musical notation and description, visual frame analysis, and performative coding. Thirdly, integrated analysis examined relationships among modes by identifying points of convergence, complementarity, and tension. Fourthly, cross-song analysis compared patterns across the twelve selected songs to identify recurring strategies and variations. Fifthly,

findings were interpreted in relation to theoretical frameworks and contextual knowledge of Nigerian Pentecostal theology and contemporary gospel music practices. This section examines the linguistic construction of divine sovereignty, rhetorical presentation of the concept of divine sovereignty, code-switching/use of indigenous language, visual/performative construction of divine sovereignty, and gestural and embodied communication in the selected songs.

Linguistic Construction of Divine Sovereignty

This is achieved through transitivity patterns and metaphorical constructions as explicated in this section.

1. Transitivity Patterns

In some of the selected songs of Oyekan, transitivity patterns reveal a systematic representation of God as agent in material processes denoting powerful action and transformation. In *The Glory Experience*, lines such as *You reign in majesty* and *You break every chain* position God as actor performing processes of ruling and liberation. In the same *The Glory Experience*, material process verbs such as *reign*, *break*, *move*, *change*, and *transform* construct divine sovereignty as active intervention rather than passive attribute. This aligns with the Pentecostal church's emphasis on God's immanent activity in believers' lives as observed by Asamoah-Gyadu (2024).

Relational processes establishing divine identity and attributes are very prominent in *Yahweh*. *Yahweh* extensively employs relational processes such as *You are mighty*, *You are holy*, *You are awesome*. These constructions emphasise inherent divine qualities that ground God's sovereignty in ontological reality. Also, there is a repetitive patterning of *You are* statements which creates a rhythmic accumulation of divine attributes, linguistically performing the inexhaustibility of God's nature.

Further analyses revealed that, mental processes are largely absent with God as sensor; this helps in maintaining divine transcendence

and avoid anthropomorphic representation of God experiencing internal states. In the selected songs, where mental processes appear, they typically position humans as sensors experiencing divine reality as observed in expressions such as: *I know You are able, I see Your glory in Yaweh*. This asymmetry constructs appropriate epistemological relationship wherein humans know God through revelation rather than God being subject to human perception.

2. Metaphorical Constructions

Four primary conceptual metaphors structure the representation of divine sovereignty across the analysed songs of Oyekan: DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IS WARFARE, DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IS KINGSHIP, DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IS NATURAL PHENOMENA, and DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY IS LIGHT.

The warfare metaphor appears extensively in *Fragrance to Fire*. This metaphor constructs the Christian life as spiritual battle requiring divine empowerment. Lexical items observed in the song include *warrior, battle, victory, conquer, enemy, defeat, and triumph*. As observed in *Fragrance to Fire*, God is metaphorically represented as a commanding general or mighty warrior who ensures victory for His people. This metaphor makes divine sovereignty actionable as it implies that believers can *activate* divine power by aligning themselves with God's purposes and authority which is in alignment with the view of Taiwo & Ohiagu (2024). This warfare metaphor resonates with African spiritual worldviews that acknowledge supernatural conflict between divine and demonic forces as observed by Kalu & Vethanayagamony (2023).

Analyses revealed that royal imagery pervades *The Glory Experience, Yahweh, Fragrance to Fire* and *Imole* through terms such as *King, throne, crown, reign, majesty* and *kingdom*. These lexical choices invoke feudal power structures, positioning God as absolute monarch whose sovereignty is unquestioned and

unlimited. Analyses revealed further that the metaphor carries implications about human response as subjects owe allegiance, submission and honour to their king. This implies that royal imagery also connects to African cultural contexts where traditional rulership remains culturally significant hereby making kingship a resonant metaphor for divine authority.

In addition, natural phenomena metaphors appear in descriptions of God's power as fire, wind, earthquake and storm in *Fragrance to Fire*. Analysis discovered that *Fragrance to Fire* develops extended fire metaphor that represents divine presence and transformative power. Also, the fire imagery connotes purification, judgment, illumination and awesome might to reflect all facets of sovereignty in the song. The title phrase *fragrance to fire* itself metaphorically represents transformation from one state (pleasant aroma of worship) to another (consuming fire of divine presence), hereby signifying that appropriate worship releases divine power.

Light metaphors dominate *Imole De*, as God is represented as light dispelling darkness. The Yoruba title *Imole De* is interpreted as *The Light Has Come*. This invokes both messianic prophecy and ongoing divine presence. Light metaphorically represents knowledge, holiness, guidance and life, while darkness represents ignorance, evil, confusion and death. In *Imole De*, divine sovereignty manifests as light's inevitable triumph over darkness. This theologically asserts God's ultimate victory over all opposing forces.

Rhetorical Presentation of the Concept of Divine Sovereignty in the Selected Songs

Rhetoric is another tool used to project the concept of divine sovereignty in the selected songs of Dunsin Oyekan. According to Murphy (2006), rhetoric is the logical examination of human dialogue for the purpose of classifying useful principles for upcoming discourse. In some of Oyekan's selected songs, rhetoric is achieved through the use of figurative language. Examples of figurative language used in the

selected songs of Dunsin Oyekan are symbols, eulogy and biblical allusion. These are discussed in this section.

1. Use of Symbols

The use of symbols is observed in Oyekan's *Imole De* and *Fragrance to fire*. At the ideational level, *Imole De* can be described as a powerful and uplifting gospel song. With a feature of vibrant instrumentation and strong vocal delivery at the interpersonal and textual levels, *Imole De* combines energetic music with soul-stirring lyrics and stanzas that speak about the arrival of light in the mist of darkness. In a symbolic manner, *Imole De* presents the significance of light in the Christian theology. This is because light is of extreme importance to the Christian faith because it symbolises the holy nature of God. It also signifies God's presence and favour. As recorded in the Bible, light has always been a symbol of holiness, goodness, knowledge, wisdom, grace, hope, and God's revelation. God created light to dispel the darkness and chaos over all the earth. He in addition created light for man through the sun, moon, and stars by calling light into being. Oyekan in addition symbolically calls for the eradication of darkness as a result of its castigation in the Bible. As recorded in the Bible, Darkness symbolises a totality of everything that is anti-God in nature which includes the wicked, injustice, evil, sin and death. Emphatically and symbolically, Oyekan describes the light as God and its opposite as darkness which is evil. As presented by Oyekan, the light of God is his holiness, righteousness, and goodness capable of eradicating the darkness of evil, sin and all manner of ailments. In *Imole De*, Oyekan used light as a powerful symbol of God's word, wisdom, and guidance; a beacon of hope that symbolises the promise of salvation and deliverance from darkness.

The description and the use of symbols are also found in Dunsin Oyekan's *Fragrance to fire*. At the ideational level, the song symbolically highlights spiritual transformation and consecration as represented by fire and

fragrance with vibrant instrumentation and strong vocal delivery. As deduced biblically, fire symbolises purification, spiritual passion, and the presence of God, while fragrance symbolises the believer's spiritual response of being pleasing to God. With these symbols, Dunsin Oyekan conveys the idea of seeking sanctification, spiritual purification, and total surrender to God, here by becoming a fragrance pleasing to his eyes.

2. Eulogy

The use of eulogy is observed in Oyekan's *At All Cost* and *More Than a Song and God*. At the ideational level, Dunsin Oyekan eulogises God in his song *At All Cost* by admiring God's sovereignty, faithfulness, and love. At the interpersonal level, the song expresses a deep reverence and adoration for God through an acknowledgment of his power and majesty. A multimodal analysis of the lyrics of *At all Cost* show a strong desire to prioritise God above everything and to worship Him committedly. At the textual level, the song can be described as a pronouncement of unwavering devotion and commitment to God which places Him above everything in life. In addition, Oyekan eulogises God in *At All Cost* with an emphasis on his passionate declaration of commitment to following God no matter what the cost is. In *At All Cost* Oyekan emphasised the need for surrender and sacrifice for God as the music builds in intensity and a conveyance of a sense of urgency and determination.

Oyekan also eulogises God in his song *More Than a Song* by expressing deep reverence, adoration, and praise for the divine being. In the song, he describes God as *more than just a song* to be sung, emphasises the superior nature of God's presence and the significance of worshiping Him beyond mere musical expression. The song focuses on themes of divine greatness, love, and the transformative power of God's presence in the lives of his fervent believers. The song serves as a heartfelt declaration of worship and devotion to God and a celebration of his majesty and magnificence.

Oyekan uses his song *God* to eulogise God by expressing deep reverence, adoration, and praise for the divine Creator. The song focuses on themes of divine majesty, awe, and the intimate relationship between God and humanity. At the ideational level, Oyekan highlights the greatness, power, and love of God by emphasising the unmatched nature of his presence and the transformative impact He has on the lives of believers in *God*. At the interpersonal and textual levels, these qualities are emphasised with a reference to the miraculous power of God to provide for the needy, solve complex problems, heal the sick and raise the dead among others.

3. Biblical Allusion

Biblical allusion refers to indirect references to stories, characters, or themes from the Bible. Oyekan copiously uses biblical allusions in the selected songs to convey spiritual messages and connect with his audience on a deeper level. By including these allusions, Oyekan adds layers of meaning to his lyrics and help listeners reflect on certain spiritual truths. Some of these features are observed in *Breathe*. *Breathe* employs biblical allusions that draw from the Christian faith to convey the theme of spiritual revival and dependence on God's presence. Firstly, the title of the song refers to Genesis 2:7, where God breathes life into Adam, symbolising the giving of life and spiritual vitality. It also symbolises the concept of the Holy Spirit in Christianity, which is often associated with the breath of God. Oyekan's passionate call on the Holy Spirit to breathe on him is considered symbolic in nature because this concept is a common theme in Christian worship songs, where believers seek spiritual rejuvenation and empowerment from God.

The use of biblical allusion is also observed in *Imole De*. The lyrics of the song contains obvious biblical allusions that draw from Christian imagery and teachings. This is observed in the title of the song *Imole de* which means *Light has come* in Yoruba language. This phrase is inspired by biblical references in the

New Testament, particularly the Gospel of John, where Jesus is referred to as the light of the world. The song uses the metaphor of light to symbolise hope, guidance, and divine presence in times of darkness and difficulty. By drawing on the biblical idea of Jesus as the light of the world, the song emphasises the belief in the transformative power of faith and the presence of God in the midst of adversity.

Code-Switching and Use of Indigenous Language

Strategic code-switching to Yoruba occurs at moments of heightened emotional or spiritual intensity in some of the selected songs. For instance, in *Yahweh*, the Yoruba divine name *Olorun* appears alongside Hebrew *Yahweh* and English *God* hereby creating multilingual accumulation of divine appellations. This multilingualism serves multiple functions of asserting cultural identity and indigenous spirituality, accessing semantic nuances unavailable in English, and intensifying affective impact through familiar mother tongue expressions in consonance with Omoyajowo (2023).

Imole De extensively incorporates Yoruba, particularly in chorus and climactic sections. This is observed in Yoruba phrases such as *Kabiyesi o* (Majesty), *Oba awon Oba* (King of Kings), and *Ogo ni fun Olorun* (Glory to God). These Yoruba expressions carry cultural resonance and traditional honorific registers appropriate for addressing royalty or deity. This aligns with the view of Magesa (2024) that the use of Yoruba honorifics constructs God through indigenous cultural categories while maintaining continuity with traditional African religious expressions redirected towards the Christian God.

Visual and Performative Construction of Divine Sovereignty

This is achieved through visual imagery, symbolism, gestural and embodied communication in the selected songs.

Visual Imagery and Symbolism

The music videos of the selected songs employ lighting symbolism to represent divine presence and sovereignty. Predominant use of white and golden light creates associations with holiness, purity, glory, and divine radiance. In *Imole De* for instance, directional lighting from above visually enacts the metaphor of God as light descending from heaven to illuminate earthly darkness. It could be deduced that contrast between light and shadow represents spiritual warfare between divine illumination and demonic darkness.

In addition, in the selected songs, spatial compositions position Oyekan centrally and elevated as it visually constructs his role as a worship leader mediating between the congregation and God. However, his gaze typically directs upward rather than toward camera, orienting attention beyond himself toward transcendent divine reality. This visual grammar constructs appropriate worship orientation whereby human attention is focused on God rather than on the performer.

Also, visual metaphors observed in the musical videos of the selected songs include imagery of fire, clouds, light beams and atmospheric effects representing divine presence. These visual elements make visible what is theologically invisible to reflect God's glory, power and presence. Slow-motion and time-lapse techniques in addition create a sense of sacred temporality distinct from ordinary time, visually marking worship space and time as set apart for divine encounter.

Gestural and Embodied Communication

Oyekan's gestural selection includes raised hands which signifies (surrender, receptivity, praise), pointing upward which signifies (directing attention toward God), sweeping arm movements (declaring divine authority over broad domains), and emphatic hand gestures (intensifying declarations). These gestures embody theological concepts as raised hands physically enact surrender and dependence, while emphatic pointing gestures

perform authority and confidence in divine power as pointed out by Ingalls (2023).

In addition, facial expressions communicate intensity, passion and conviction. During declarations of divine sovereignty, Oyekan typically displays intense focus, furrowed brow, and emphatic facial movements suggesting deep conviction and emotional investment. Also, during worship oriented sections, his expressions soften, his eyes are close, and his countenance reflects intimacy and devotion. These performed emotions model appropriate affective responses to different aspects of divine sovereignty such as awe, reverence, confidence and intimacy with God.

In most of the selected songs, Oyekan's physical movement across performance space creates a dynamic visual interest and embodying spiritual realities while his movement towards the audience or camera performs divine approach and accessibility. Oyekan's circular or pacing movements suggest restlessness of spirit or building spiritual intensity while standing still with elevated posture during climactic moments embodies confidence and authority rooted in divine sovereignty.

Discussion of Findings

The findings reveal that Dunsin Oyekan's construction of divine sovereignty is fundamentally multimodal, utilising the distinctive affordances of linguistic, rhetorical, visual and performative modes to create multi-layered meanings. This multimodal approach serves several theological and practical functions.

Firstly, multimodality transforms abstract theological doctrine into experiential reality. This is due to the fact that divine sovereignty could be articulated through systematic theological propositions. Also, by orchestrating multiple modes such as declaring sovereignty linguistically, enacting it musically through power and majesty, displaying it visually through light and glory, and embodying it through confident gestures, Oyekan creates opportunities for his audience to encounter

sovereignty as lived experience rather than merely assent to it as doctrine. This aligns with Pentecostal epistemology that privileges experiential knowledge over purely intellectual understanding as observed by Kalu & Vethanayagamony (2023).

Secondly, multimodality enables simultaneous communication of divine transcendence and immanence which involves theological tension that has challenged Christian thought throughout history. Linguistic and visual modes can emphasise transcendence through royal imagery, elevated positioning and supernatural symbolism, while musical and performative modes can create intimacy through soft dynamics, vulnerable vocal delivery and embodied emotion. The simultaneous operation of these modes allows for communication of God as both infinitely beyond and intimately present, addressing what might appear contradictory through propositional statements but can coexist experientially.

Thirdly, the specific semiotic choices identified in this study reflect Nigerian Pentecostal theological emphases and cultural contexts. Warfare metaphors address spiritual warfare doctrine central to African Pentecostalism's worldview as observed by Asamoah-Gyadu (2024). Royal imagery resonates with traditional African political structures and religious conceptions of supreme deities. Code-switching to Yoruba asserts indigenous cultural identity and accesses semantic resources unavailable in English. These culturally specific elements construct divine sovereignty through indigenous categories rather than imposing Western theological formulations.

Fourthly, findings from the study illuminate how contemporary gospel music functions as vernacular theology which translates to theological meaning-making through popular cultural forms as opined by Walls (2023). In relation to the fore mentioned, Oyekan's songs articulate sophisticated theological concepts about divine nature, divine-human relationship and human response to God done through narrative, metaphor,

affective expression and embodied performance rather than systematic propositions. This vernacular theological mode may actually be more effective for shaping lived religious practice than academic theology, as it integrates cognitive, affective, and embodied dimensions of human experience which is in consonance with Magesa (2024).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Multimodal Discourse Analysis provides valuable analytical tools for understanding how theological concepts are communicated through contemporary African gospel music. Analysis of selected songs by Dunsin Oyekan reveals sophisticated orchestration of linguistic, rhetorical, visual and performative modes to construct multidimensional representations of divine sovereignty that encompass transcendence, immanence, power, intimacy and relationship. Key findings from the study include the deployment of warfare, kingship, natural phenomena, and light metaphors to make divine sovereignty conceptually accessible; strategic code-switching to Yoruba for cultural authentication and affective intensification; integration of African musical elements with contemporary production to create culturally hybrid expressions; and sophisticated use of rhetorical, visual and performative modes to embody theological concepts and model worship responses.

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