

## Multilingualism in Contemporary Gospel Music Practice in Nigeria

Emmanuel Imasekhoevbo Aimiuwu, PhD

University of Jos  
emmanuelaimi@yahoo.com

### Abstract

Gospel music has of recent developed a new trend in practice, structures, forms and styles, and one of such fixtures in the use of multilingualism by some Nigerian gospel artists. The acceptance of this trend by some ethnic groups and peoples of this country have become a vogue. The purpose of this paper therefore, is to examine the origin and evolution of this trend, and how this has affected language and communication in Nigeria; with the examples of songs mostly used by all irrespective of tribe or cultural background. Most Nigerian gospel artists or performers use more than four to six or seven languages in a single performance or recording. This study established the positive and dynamic effect of this trend in revitalization of ethnic languages in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Multilingualism; Gospelmusic, Artists, Origin, culture, Tribes, Languages. Commercialism*

### Introduction

Language is the principal thing that distinguishes humans from animals. It is the most powerful and distinct way humans express their thoughts, articulate their rationality, interact and conduct effective communication within a society, community and nation. This is the reason why there is no human society without language. However, it is important to state that there are various spoken languages all over the globe. These languages aggregate words comprising a system of communication between persons in speech or writing in such a manner peculiar to a group, society, nations and race. Language in this aspect is the expression of actions in words or writing that have a particular diction and characteristic which is the focus of this paper.

Music is the combination of sounds to make a logical conclusion. In other words, music is sound. Music as a concept and idea can only be expressed by the production of sound. Spoken language can only be produced through sound. In other words, spoken language and music are synonymous in nature and practice. Multilingualism means speaking in several languages. It is also involved in the use of more than one or two languages in expression of an item, subjects, events, persons or things.

Contemporary Gospel Music is the type of gospel music that emerges as a result of the contemporary influences of technological and social changes that are peculiar to new world of social, spiritual and economic development of our contemporary world today. It developed out of the combination of the earlier hymns and songs used by the early churches in their act of worship and prayers. It also includes the secular or laymen's attempt in performing these hymns and songs in their own styles which merges into ecstatic dancing and singing usually accompanied by piano or organ, handclapping, tambourines, and various types of musical instruments.

Multilingualism as a style, origin and its evolution in Nigeria is the advent of commercial activities between the various communities as they involved in trade, war, and interactions before the emergence of the white man in Nigeria. For example, there are evidence to prove this before the coming of the white man. According to Jacob Egharevba (1954) ascertained that Oba Eweka who reigned around 560BC expanded the kingdom to an area today known as Congo in Central Africa (1954) in his book *The Origin of Benin*, Benin CITY. Ethiopie Publishing Corporation.

The issue of multilingualism became popular when people like Bisi Olatilo and Mr. G. Igbineweka started various programmes in the media to promote multilingualism. Bisi Olatilo was very prominent in various private and official programmes speaking and interpreting same messages or information in the three Nigerian national languages, known as WAZOBIA. Mr. Igbineweka attempted to create a language out of all various ethnic languages in Nigeria against the spirit of "WAZOBIA".

### Origin of Wazobia

In 1950 when the "Rediffusion" or house to house Radio speaker boxes were introduced into Nigeria by the then (NBC) Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, the Federal Government of Nigeria was looking for a way to disseminate the news broadcasting by duly translating information into the various indigenous Nigerian languages so as to get the grassroots.

They then translated the hourly News bulletins into about nine Nigerian languages, when the military came into power 1967 they narrowed the languages down to just three, namely Yoruba, Hausa, and

Igbo, meaning “Wa” – came in Yoruba, “Zo” – meaning come in Hausa languages, and “Bia” meaning come in Igbo language. The word WAZOBIA was coined by late musician Roy Chicago.

This singular action by the Nigeria military government resulted in a state of sending all other Nigerian languages apart from Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba into the cooler and oblivion for them to groan and get lost, as if they were not part of their own country. This action led to the situation in Nigeria that you must come from or belong to any of the three major languages and ethnic groups to be heard, recognized and given reasonable political appointments no matter your talent and accredited competence you may possess. “It was in the light of these and several other reasons that I decided to improve or develop Guosa as a scientific and artistic evolution and integration of all the languages and dialects to be found in Nigeria as a unified *lingua franca*”... Alex Igbineweka Guosa Language Evolutionist. <http://www.edofolks.com>. Retrieved 13/11/2016

Alex Igbineweka and others were mindful of the importance of the mother tongue and the preservation of this heritage which multilingualism as a concept has revived.

The purpose and interest of these individuals was to create unity and coexistence in peace of the various ethnic groups that make up the nation Nigeria after the civil war ended in the 70s. However, the purpose of this paper is focus on the use of multilingualism by Nigerians in contemporary Gospel music. Therefore, multilingualism as a concept is a fact that has existed from the beginning of communication between persons and persons from various cultures

The main reasons for the development of multilingualism can be summarized thus:

(1) Language has a very unique way of creating unity that cannot be easily broken. Genesis Chapter 11 Verse 1 “And the whole earth was of one language and of one speech.”

Verses 5, 6, and 7 of Genesis Chapter 11 says;

“And the Lord came down to see the city and tower, which the children of men builded.” Verse 6 says: “And the Lord said, Behold the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do, and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do”.

Verse 7:

“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understanding one another’s speech.” Holy Bible KJV

God in his might acknowledged the power of language in fostering unity.

(2) It is a means of identification of a mutual relationship that have ancestral foundational linguistic background

that can be trusted without doubt.

(3) To eliminate suspicions and misconceptions, misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

(4) Language encourages love, satisfaction, joy, peace and intents or purposes.

(5) To bring about development, profitability and accountability of actions.

These and more are some of the reasons I believe are factors responsible today for the use of multilingualism in contemporary Gospel Music in Nigeria by artist for easy identification, mutual relationship, eliminate suspicious, misconception and encourage love, satisfaction and intents of purpose.

Apart from the reasons stated above, another aspect or reasons and purposes of using multilingualism in contemporary Gospel Music is to encourage a sort of documentation of some languages that are going extinct or are on the verge of complete extinction. The third reason is the vocal tonal qualities of some languages that are traditionally musical and acceptable in contemporary music to all irrespective of tribes or cultures. Finally, multilingualism also helps in the struggle of indigenization of Christianity in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

### **Multilingualism in Contemporary Gospel Music in Practice: The use of Major and Minority Languages**

In practice, the use of multilingualism in contemporary Gospel Music can be attested to by visiting any Christian church, worship centres or any Christian crusade programme or gathering in any part of Nigeria, be it the South-South, South East or South West, North Central, North East or North West. In such occasion, we find the use of multilingualism in action: a reality that cannot be denied. A collection of CDs and VCDs of most contemporary Gospel Music will reveal the fact that most of them are done in multilingualism using some major and minor languages in Nigeria.

In reality, there are very few hymns and worship songs that have not been translated into various Nigerian languages. Another factor in multilingualism usage is the role of pidgin which is responsible for the

quick burial of most minority languages that are dying or already dead. Be that as it may, the translation and acceptance of the use of multilingualism in contemporary Gospel Music is also helping to document and revitalize the use of some dying minority languages in Nigeria.  
Commonly Used Songs Involving Multilingualism In Nigerian Churches’.

#### OGA JESUS

Oga Jesus you de sweet mebelle  
You do good for me, you de make me wonder  
Oga Jesus you de bless me yafun yafun  
All for you O Jesus na waya O!

Ch:- Every day you give me chop  
Every day you give me cloth  
You no dey play me wayo o  
Oga Jesus nay u be better o  
Na you I go follow forever titilailai

#### SATAN COMOT FOR ROAD

Satan comot for road  
I’m of holy ghost  
I no get break O  
Im of holy ghost

#### HOLY GHOST FIRE PURSUE THEM

Holy Ghost fire pursue them (4ce)  
Any where Satan is hiding  
Holy Ghost fire pursue them (2ce)

#### BYE BYE TO JATIJATI

Bye bye to jatijati (Respond) 2ce  
In the name of Jesus  
Bye bye to Jatijati  
Bye bye to poverty o (Respond) 2ce  
In the name of Jesus  
Bye bye to poverty o!

#### YORUBA SONGS

##### IBARE JESU

Ibare Jesu  
Ibare o – baba/2ce  
A wa juba re  
O mo Olorun  
Ibare o baba  
Awa juba re o  
Kabiyesi o  
Ibare o baba.

##### IWO NI OLORUN

Iwo ni – o Olorun o  
Eledumare oga ogo  
Iwo ni o Olorun o  
A wi ma ye hun  
Alagbara  
Ka to da aiye  
Leyin ti wa  
Ka to da aiye  
Le yin tin joba  
Olorun Baba Olorun Omo Olorun Emi mimo

##### BABA BABA BABA

Ba-ba-ba-ba-ba, Baba

O se O baba  
O se O ba ba  
A dupe baba

OYIGIYIGI  
Oyigiyigi o-o-o  
A la gba wi e -da-a-a  
A lakoso Orun-u-u  
Eyin lolo go ju lo

GBA GBOGBO OGO  
Gba gbo gbo ogo 3ce  
Olorun mi ti mo gbo jule  
PRAISE  
KABIESI-O-HOSANNA O  
Ka bi esi -O- Hosanna -O-  
Eyin Jesu Kristi  
Oba a yi ku  
Egbe – ga, Egbe – ga  
Eyin Jesu -o-  
Eyin Jesu Kristi  
Oba aiku

IGBO SONGS  
WORSHIP  
JEHOVAH IDI EBUBE  
Jehovah idi ebube Nebem nno  
Jehovah idi ebube  
N’eligwe ibu Eze  
N’elu uwa inachi achi  
Na ala nmuo, ibu dike Nagha  
Jehovah id ebube

CHINEKE NKE IGWE  
Chineke nke igwe  
Onye dika gi  
Mmalite na ogwugwu  
Onye dika gi

AKA JEHOVAH  
Aka Jehovah, Aka Jehovah neme nma (2ce)  
Olu ebube ya nke n’erughari n’ebe m noo  
Isi iyi nke ndu, nke nadighi ata ata  
Aka Jehovah, aka Jehovah neme nma

OMERE IHE M JI AKPO YA DIKE NA-AGHA  
Omere ihe m ji akpo ya dike na-agma  
Omere ihe m ji akpo ya (2ce)  
Omere ihe m ji akpo ya dike na-agma (2ce)

PRAISE  
KPOO YA CHUKWU  
Kpoo ya chukwu n’ogaza  
Kpoo ya chukwu n’ogaza gi o (ekpere)  
Meziah onye obi oma  
Kpoo ya chukwu n’ogaza

KPO YA OME MMA  
Kpo ya ome mma (3ce) Omen ma (response)  
Kpo ya ome nma ome nma  
Kpo ya omen ma omen ma

TOYA TOYA

Toya toya toya (3ce)

Onye nwanyi luru olu oma n'uwa toya

MMADU NILE NA SI EBUBE

Mmadu nile na si ebube

Ebube Jehovah mara nma

Mmadu nile nasi ebube

Ebube Jehovah mara nma

HAUSA SONGS

KAUNA YA HADA MU

Aye ye ye kauna

Kauna itache Baba

Kauna Yesu

Kauna ya hada mu

YABE YESU

Yabe Yesu Jushiana

Yabe Yesu Yana

Da kyau.

YA MUTU DOMINA

Yesu ya je gishiaye

Domina Domina

Yesu ya je gishieye

Domina

Ya mutu Domina

INA DA UBA

Ina da uba

Uba uba

Ina da uba

Uba uba.

EFIK SONGS

Jesus e daman mio

Ami mama di sanga ye enye

Aka nanam enye ibianake mi'o

Ami mama ndisaga ye enye.

Idara Idra

Nito Abasi Idara (2ce)

Anie etie nte Jehovah

Ami moyon ami nkwe (2ce)

Amanan Eyen Abasi Amanamm Aye

Amanam Eyen Abasi Amanam

Song Song

Abasi Aya ya O

A ya ya O

A ba si A ya ya O

A ya ya nanan di

EDO/DELTA SONGS

Osemudiamen

Oye lose lofen ye mu men

Jesu loje mu dia ni men fo

O a mudia noria Odere

Ohide Ohide  
Onose mudia na ohide (2ce)  
Amen a roho  
Men a re han Jesu  
Ofon re a se,  
Men a re han Jesu  
A men a ro ho  
Jesu men a re ha  
Ni se gede wen de

O sa no bua Obulu (2ce)  
Emi e sire wen ru men  
O sano bua obulu

Dore dore  
Ebo o se wui ni men  
Dore Ebo ose wu ni men  
Iye yi si obo  
Iye yi si o yen

Respond: Oghene ru kem bve me sine jiro  
Oghene ru kem bve me sine jiro  
Sien jiro siro oghene  
Oghene ru kembve me sine jiro

Do, do Oghene do  
Do do Oghene do  
Oghene hime re we  
Do Do Oghen Do

UWE SE BABA  
Uwe se Baba  
Uwe sa Obuhima  
Uwe se Uwe se  
Uwe se Baba O

WAKO JIRE OGHENE  
Wako Jire Wako Jire  
Wako Jire Ogbene  
Ye Ye Ye Ye  
Wako Jire woko Jire  
Oghene

BEROM:  
Ada gwi Ni balafuen  
Npalan fuen  
Ada gwi Ni palan fuen  
Idoma, Tiv, Igede, Itsekiri, etc.

These songs are usually performed in the church, and the audience are usually the worshipers, the artists can be a group of singers eg choir, church band or choral group, whose membership may be multilingual or members of the local community.

### **The Effects of Multilingualism in Gospel Music and Creativity**

It is a common saying that in the next century many of the languages in the world will go into extinction. In Nigeria the multilingualism in Gospel Music is one natural way by which some of these already dying languages are being revitalized. This may not have been as a result of conscious efforts of the practitioners but a byproduct of other factors Evangelism, Commercialization, Indigenization and Education.

### **Evangelism**

Evangelism is the act of persuading people or someone to become a Christian. Evangelists are missionaries or people or persons that traveled from place to place trying to persuade people to become Christians. Music

is one of the most effective means of getting people's attention to the gospel of Christ. Hence, these evangelist preachers and their music ministers, go through a rigorous studies of the languages of their targeted audience or host that would be converted. In so doing, they translate the gospels into the various languages in simple melodic tunes that excite the local audience who begin to fall in love with the messages. Indirectly, these languages were directly documented and developed. In other words, the music created, is not only pleasant to the people but also acceptable to the cultures that own the language.

### **Commercialization**

Ray Classic, a popular Gospel Musician in Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria said his main interest in singing in more than two or three languages in his performance, is to open up the marketing of his music to more Nigerians. That leads to the increase of the numbers of his fans, and acceptability. Though, he says that God understands all languages and as an ambassador of Christ, therefore he sees speaking or singing in multiple languages as natural and scripturally profitable.

Basically speaking, it has been proven beyond reasonable doubts that commercial activities are the only most significant driving force towards higher standard of living and economic stability of any nation. Commercial activities are functions performed or services rendered in exchange for money or its worth in kinds or services. Therefore commercialism formed part of reasons for the use of multilingualism in Gospel music in Nigeria.

### **Indigenization**

The effort to indigenize Christianity in Africa is also a factor that led to the use of multilingualism in Gospel Music. This does not only play a key role in educational developments of the people. It is a known fact that the use of multilingualism in music has greatly helped in the development of issues relating to education, science and technology, religion, cultural and mutual understanding that provided the needed platform for unity and development of Christianity. In Nigeria today, people listen and dance to Gospel music done in multiple languages irrespective of their tribe, religion, cultures or church denomination.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

Plato once said that music gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and charm and gaiety to life and everything. Multilingualism usage in contemporary music can be said to have aided creativity and provided a better and acceptable medium through the obvious power of music. With the technology of recording and playing CDs and VCD available now in iPads and smart phones, we carry music with us everywhere we go. Because we have music for all occasion to make life easy and help us to focus in a language that is universal, the impact of multilingualism in music should be further examined by experts and scholars for a better productivity and usage of our languages. There should be language revitalization and salvaging of the endangered languages in Nigeria through the use multilingualism as it is been practiced now in contemporary Gospel Music.

There should be legislation and sensitization from national to state, local and community on the use of multilingualism. People should be encouraged to first study and use their mother tongue and other Nigerian languages in their day to day activities. There should be no limitation or exclusion of any language no matter how minor or major a language may be.

### **References**

- Abah Adah and Paul Chinama (2014). Music and dance are integral part of Nigeria rich cultural heritage, *Leadership Newspaper*, February 14, 2014.
- Alex, Igbonewaka (2009). Otedo News Update. From <http://www.edofolks.com>. Retrieved 13/11/2016.
- Aimiwu, E. I. (2014). Axiology of religious music and peace in contemporary Nigeria. *Journal of University Scholars in Nigeria (JUSREL)*, Issue, No. 4, September.
- Aimiwu, E. I. (2015). Traditional music in North Central Nigeria: Trend of development. *Journal of University Scholars in Religious*, Issue No. 5, September.
- Elena (2013). The influence of music on your creativity based on "The Mozart Effect" Book. Retrieved November 12, 2016 from [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/NCBI/Literature](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/NCBI/Literature).
- Ladi, Olusegun Fariudeen (2012). Multilingualism and hip-hop consumption in Nigeria. [www.africa.spectrum.org](http://www.africa.spectrum.org)
- Lutz, J. (2012). The relationship between music and language. Retrieved November 12, 2016 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmc33381201>.
- Okonkwo, Ngozi Vera (2006). Christian religious music in contemporary Nigeria and its relevance to social reconstruction. *A Journal of the Association of Nigerian Musicologists (JANIM)*, Volume 2.