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# Cultural conceptualisations in Elijah Akintunde's Yoruba ballad gospel song *Ijo Odi* 'Dance of the Deaf'

<https://doi.org/10.1515/lass-2023-0010>

Received March 11, 2023; accepted May 14, 2023

**Abstract:** What kind of actions or reactions can sudden good news elicit in the experiencer? How can these actions/reactions be cognitively interpreted by others? Is there a nexus between social realities and the gospel? Using these questions as a spark, this article critically examines the cultural conceptualisations in *Ijo Odi*, a Yoruba gospel ballad by Elijah Akintunde. Drawing insights from Cultural Linguistics, this study argues that cultural symbols and structures (schemas, categories, and metaphors) are deployed in gospel music to capture the message of liberation from socio-economic challenges. Specifically, DANCE and DEAFNESS are mapped to express the kind of PERPLEXITY and ABSURDITY that characterise reaction to SUDDEN PLEASANT NEWS. The song also invokes cognitive schemas and cultural memories of dance, cultural class categories and metaphorization of dance and its internalized network of cognitive associations in the Yoruba world view to project the message of prosperity as a miracle. The study concludes that language is firmly grounded in cultural cognition and the complex socio-economic lives of Nigerians can be captured in the negotiation of spirituality in gospel songs. Future research may explore how the artistic performance of other music genres equally evoke cultural imageries in communicating other diverse issues.

**Keywords:** conceptual categories; conceptualisation; cultural linguistics; dance; deafness; metaphor; schemas

## 1 Introduction

Music is an essential part of human life which expresses collective cultural values and communicates collective memories and the cognitive understanding of human

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experience (Idamoyibo 2016). It can therefore best be expressed as a repository of cultural and ideological significance of a given society as well as a fulcrum for harnessing and transmitting indigenous knowledge and experience towards attaining societal goals. In most societies, music is an indispensable phenomenal tool for cultural preservation; historical documentation; invigoration of sociality; invocation of the deities; promotion of moral rectitude, and representation of socio-cultural realities, such as identities, ideologies, values, beliefs, philosophies and traditions.

In social situations, music can be distinguished in terms of classifications and certain factors such as participants, target audience, age, setting and social goals. Consumers of music select it based on its suitability for their social needs. The functionality of any music is contingent to the context and domain of use. Broadly, music can be secular or religious. It is religious when it incorporates elements of any of the religions – traditional, Islamic, Christianity or any other religion; and it is secular when it reflects on the socio-cultural experiences of the people. However, over the years, in Nigeria the socio-cultural lives of the people have infiltrated their religious songs, and studies such as Taiwo (2008) and Udok and Odunuga (2016) corroborate this. These studies reveal abundant influx of socio-economic and cultural experiences into religious music. So, the various religious songs serve as outlets through which the socio-economic realities of the people in Nigeria are conveyed.

Among all religious songs in Nigeria, Christian gospel music is one of the most popular. The *raison d'être* for its popularity may be due to the growth of Christianity in the country. Owing to distinct contemporary innovations, the gospel music in Nigeria has experienced diverse phenomenal changes. Adedjeji (2005) classifies the gospel styles into three: foreign, indigenous and those derived from popular musical forms. Babalola (2014), with an integrated modification, categorised the music styles into two: those that are derivatives of traditional music and the acculturated styles. Of the authors' identified styles, the song being researched in this paper, *Ijo Odi* 'Dance of the Deaf' by Elijah Akintunde belongs to the acculturated or the indigenous style.

Since language is the vehicular expression of every music, gospel songs patterned after indigenous language contents usually relate with the people's conceptualisations and constructions of physical and abstract realities. With the foregoing, the present study addresses cultural conceptualisations in a gospel song based on schemas, categories and metaphors that are projected in the song with a view to describing the construal of the Yoruba world view and the cognitive classification and mappings of their cultural domains.

## 2 Yoruba worldview in Christian gospel songs

The Yorùbá are found to predominantly occupy the southwestern part of Nigeria and originally, they practise mainly variants of traditional religion. With the infiltration of Western cultures due to trade, Christian mission and colonization, Christianity and Islam gained a rapid ascendancy within the region and consequently, many people converted to the new religions. Christianity is one of the most popular and advertised religions in Nigeria, especially in the Yorùbá land (Odejebi 2014). While Christianity rejects what it considers as the paganist aspects of the Yorùbá culture, it however accepts the perceived positive cultural values of communality, hard work, integrity, respect and many others that reinforce biblical principles. Based on the foregoing, the reception of every song is usually contingent on its alignment with the cultural and ideological perceptions of the people. Thus, many gospel songs in Nigeria promote collective socio-cultural perceptions of the people blended with biblical principles, which *Ijo Odi* typifies.

Odejebi (2014) observes the importance of religion in the African culture and the great influence it exerts on the conduct of the African people, being closely bound up with the traditional ways of the people's life. Within Nigeria, most gospel songs in indigenous languages, especially in Yorùbá, usually eject the indigenous local flavour of the language in order to promote the shared cultural experience, which identifies with the people's socio-economic challenges and remove abstractions about the supernatural. To corroborate this view, Taiwo (2008) submits that:

In order to reflect contemporary values in the Nigerian society, the thematic tentacles of worship songs have extended to embrace issues that would not normally be featured in worship songs, such as success, competition, challenge, etc. The socio-economic climate of Nigeria has led to the incorporation of songs that address the challenges being experienced by Nigerian Christians. (p. 8)

Rendering gospel songs in indigenous languages gives it the necessary appeal to the cognitive understanding of the people. Gospel artistes in the Yorùbá land, such as Tope Alabi, Sola Allyson, Ojo Ade, Niyi Adedokun, Elijah Akintunde and others are known to employ cultural models that encapsulate cultural memories to communicate the Christian values to the listeners.

## 3 Contextualising the song *Ijo Odi* (Dance of the Deaf)

The song *Ijo Odi* is composed by Elijah Akintunde, who began his music career as a church choir master till he became a renowned artiste in the Southwestern region of Nigeria. He affirms that he was ordained by God to minister salvation, deliverance,

reconciliation and restoration to souls. His inspirational songs, such as *Aworan* 'The picture', *Olorun ko so bee* 'God does not say so', *Akuko Gagara* 'Huge cockrel' and *Ijo Odi* 'Dance of the deaf' have become popular and inspired many of his fans, especially in the southwestern Nigeria.

The song *Ijo Odi* 'Dance of the Deaf' projects the imagery of a dance without music or a dance that does not synchronise with drum beats. The cognitive understanding of the song is to envision a deaf man dancing and imagine the absurdity that will characterise such a dance. The song X-rays God's supernatural miracle that beats human imaginations. Based on the lyrics, since God is immortal, he has the power to bring about unimaginable miracles and wonders.

The song narrates a real-life story, which according to Akintunde, occurred at Ijebu-Ode, a major town in Ogun State in the southwestern Nigeria. The moving story revolves around a poor old man trying to make a living by using a tricycle for commercial purposes. One day, during one of his trips, the driver of a luxurious car moving in front of his tricycle suddenly braked hard and by the time the poor old man applied his brakes, it failed and his tricycle hit the luxurious car and broke one of its rear lights. The rich man, in anger, alighted, slapped the old man and tore his clothes and demanded for a replacement of the light, with the market value of one hundred and twenty thousand Naira before he would be released. The incident caused a heavy traffic and in annoyance and curiosity, a stranger alighted from his car to see what was happening. Eventually, the stranger ridiculed the rich man by buying his car for fifteen million naira cash down and handing over the key to the old tricyclist with a cheque of two million naira for the man to start any business of his choice. As a result of this miraculous encounter, the old man in wild amazement and perplexity started rejoicing, dancing and displaying behaviours that could be considered absurd, such as running up and down and leaping like a frog. It was the old man's behaviour that inspired the title of the song. This story connects with the daily realities of Nigerians.

Contextually, the title of the song presents a binary opposition of distinctive concepts: DANCE and DEAFNESS, connoting that the deaf cannot dance meaningfully. This contradiction is what the artiste exploited to teach the theme of supernatural intervention of God in a man's life which can make him display an absurd kind of dance that can only be meaningful in the context of good news. The story is deployed to inspire faith in God's ability to do unimaginable things in the life of those who trust Him. The effect of the miraculous on a person is metaphorically captured as "the dance of the deaf" – an uncoordinated dance, borne out of perplexity and bewilderment which makes the dancer a subject of derision. What kind of miracle will make a person dance like a deaf? This is the question this artiste tries to answer with his amplification of the cognitive association of miraculous acts with the reaction of the person who experiences them. The cultural conceptualisations in the

song are meant to trigger faith in the consumers of the song, who are mostly impoverished people within the lower rung of the socio-economic ladder. The artiste's engagement of a story further brings his message home.

## 4 Cultural conceptualisations in music

Music, just like language use is a complex symbolic system, a socialising agency deployed to express people's socio-cultural practices. It typically conceptualises the cultural world view of the artistes and the social groups they belong in order to express their identities and ideologies. In doing this, musicians employ cultural and conceptual models through the use of linguistic elements. Existing studies have focused on the engagement of metaphors in music, especially in traditional ones among the Igbo and Yoruba, as well as in popular music (Ajayi 2020; Igwebuike 2017; Ogungbemi and Bamgbose 2021).

As observed by Igwebuike (2017), metaphor has been found to be one of the vehicles through which meanings are conveyed in music. In his study Igwebuike identifies five metaphorical source domains of animal, journey, plant/food, war/conflict and family deployed by Egwu Ekpili musicians to represent ideological positioning and inclinations of the Igbo people.

Looking at another music genre among Yoruba, the Fuji music genre, Ogungbemi and Bamgbose (2021) describe the role of imagery as engendering artistic, thematic functions and reflecting ideological stances in the music of Saheed Osupa, one of the popular Fuji artistes in Nigeria. Prominent imageries in the music of Osupa include, food, celestial and animal imageries.

Cultural projection and identity formation is also the subject of a number of scholarly essays on popular music, most especially hip hop in Nigeria. In the context of emerging urban youth lifestyles, Ajayi investigates the music of Abolore Akande (9ice) and his deployment of metaphors to describe sociality in the urban social spaces. Among other issues, many contemporary urban social realities in Nigeria, such as sex, gender, social status and crime can be visualised and understood through the music of 9ice.

Conceptualisation of the other in African music, especially the enemy is the focus of Adeduntan (2016) who sees the idea of the enemy being central to Yoruba musical imagination. Examining this in the music of Sunny Ade, a *Juju* music singer, the author describes the artiste as an exegete whose performance of abuse tempered through referential inexactitude leads the audience to multiple meanings. The consideration here also captures the use of cultural metaphors from wildlife, which is considered antagonistic to man, especially in the context of man's claim to superiority over other creatures.

Due to its importance in the performance and negotiation of spirituality, gospel music has received a lot of attention in research, however, research on cultural conceptualisations in the gospel music genres in Nigeria are still very limited. Kwiyani and Ola (2021) examine conceptualisation of God in Akan and Yoruba religious songs. They affirm that the songs of Afua Kuma and Tope Alabi, two top gospel artists in Ghana and Nigeria respectively lead Africans into thinking and talking sensibly about God in consistence with Africanness.

In a similar and more recent study, Ayorinde and Ajose (2022) discuss how Tope Alabi's dress, lifestyle, and material life project and shape listeners' understanding of the ideas of spirituality and everyday subjective happiness, and social and economic wellbeing. Similarly, Ajose (2022) discusses the role played by gospel songs in facilitating religious experience and articulating social concerns. Using a popular Yoruba gospel song *Amona tete maa bo* by Joseph Adebayo Adelokun, Ajose explicates the deployment of the artistic tools of eschatological narrative and the metaphorical conceptualisation of *Amona* 'The Guide' to a call for guidance and direction in the social, economic and political life of Nigeria. In *Ijo Odi*, the song being considered in this study, the artiste also deployed storytelling to communicate the subject of God's miraculous intervention in human life.

All these existing studies have a point of convergence, which is that gospel music provides contexts for artistes to conceptualise, internalise and perform spirituality (Ayorinde and Ajose 2022) and through them; we are able to understand the complex interactions between socio-cultural lives of Nigerians and messages being projected. The foundation for this study is laid on these views. However, the present study is a significant departure from the existing ones because it draws insights from Cultural Linguistics which gives consideration to an in-depth understanding of conceptual structures such as schemas, categories and metaphors that are enacted as a result of interactions between members of a cultural group.

## 5 Methods

The data for this study is the Yoruba gospel song *Ijo Odi*, composed and sung by Elijah Akintunde. The song was downloaded from *YouTube* and transcribed with the provision of English glosses. The analysis focused on how the linguistic elements are deployed for cultural conceptualisations within the Yoruba world view. The conceptual framework of Cultural Linguistics guided the interpretation and analysis of the data, Cultural Linguistics is a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary field of Linguistics that investigates the intersection of human language features and cultural conceptualisations, as expressed in cultural models, cultural categories and cultural conceptual metaphors (Sharifian 2015, 2017).

Cultural Linguistics emphasizes the role of culture in conceptualizing human experiences of different kinds. It asserts that cultural knowledge emerges from the interactions of members of a linguistic group as they construct their cognition through the organisation and interpretation of information of cultural meanings (schema). Cultural schemas according to Sharifian (2015) “captures the encyclopaedic meaning that is culturally constructed for lexical items of human language” (p. 518). For instance, the concept of kinship in Yoruba is derived from the knowledge of the culture. This accounts for the understanding of the pragmatic meanings of kinship terms like *uncle, father, brother* and so forth, which differ to a great extent from their original English meanings.

Cultural conceptualisations can be captured in the different usages of the English language that results from its domestication across the outer circles in the world, leading to different varieties of the language we now have. English usage that derives from cultural schemas, which had hitherto not been associated with English is considered as part of the process of the localisation of English (Sharifian 2015: 522).

Conceptual metaphors derive from how language users perceive their world, which according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) has to do with “the way we think, what we experience and what we do everyday” (p. 454). The assertion of conceptual metaphor is that we understand new domain of experience (typically abstract) in terms of another (typically concrete). For instance, we often link certain internal body organs with certain emotions, e.g., HEART with LOVE and SYMPATHY and LIVER with COURAGE. In each case, the concrete domains of the HEART and LIVER are conceptually mapped with the abstract domains of LOVE, SYMPATHY and COURAGE, respectively. The resultant metaphor may be seen in expressions such as *my heart goes out to the families of the victims of the plane crash*, where the emotion SYMPATHY can be identified or *he is lily livered*, which depict the socio-cultural conceptualisation of the liver as the seat of courage.

This study draws insights from Cultural Linguistics with its key analytical notions of cultural cognition, cultural schema, cultural category and cultural metaphor to investigate the cultural conceptualisations in *Ijo Odi*. The gospel prayer song based on a true-life story is meant to inspire faith in the listeners to conceive God’s miraculous intervention in their lives. It is deeply rooted in the Yoruba cultural models and the internalized cognitive schemas of MIRACLE, DANCE, DEAFNESS and ABSURDITY.

## 6 Findings and discussion

The song *Ijo Odi* is a conceptualisation of the miraculous from the perspective of its effect on the receiver. In the Yoruba culture, it is considered absurd for anyone to

dance without drumbeats. This conceptualisation of a dance without beats – *jo lai r'ilu* is deployed by the singer to project and reinforce the message of the kind of behaviour that unexpected pleasant news can elicit in a person – DANCING WITHOUT BEATS. The resultant absurdity informs the title of the song.

The song is set in two parts, the first part is a preamble that prepares the listener for the story on which the song is themed. The preamble focuses on the miraculous (pleasant and unexpected news) and how it triggers an absurd dance that could be compared with that of the deaf. This first part begins with a chorus, that is repeated all through the song – a prayer for the miraculous that will elicit a dance likened to that of the deaf.

- (1) *Iyanu ti yoo şeşę, ta mu mi jo bi odi* ‘miracles that will make me dance like a mute’  
*Ayọ ti yoo şeşę ti n ma fi jo bi aditi* ‘joy that will make me dance like a deaf’  
*K’osu yi to pari o Baba, ję k’o t’ori mi şeşę* ‘before the end of this month, let it happen to me’  
*Ki njo lairi’lu, ki njo bi Aditi* ‘I want to dance without drumbeats, like a deaf’

Literally, this chorus prays for the expectation of a pleasant and miraculous news that will culminate in the celebratory dance that is typically part of a monthly ritual in most Christian congregation in the southwestern part of the country.

The second part of the song is the story that inspires the ballad, which the singer describes as a real-life occurrence. The singer intends this story to inspire faith in listeners for expectation of pleasant and miraculous news that will make them dance like the deaf. This story conceptualises wonderful news and absurdity that it elicits.

## 6.1 Conceptualisation of dance in *Ijo Odi*

Dance is an aesthetic act that involves coordinating movements with music used to express and communicate emotions and sometimes general well-being. It requires body movements to synchronize with the rhythmic stimuli produced by some beats. In the Yoruba culture, dance is typically accompanied with drumbeats and dance is only meaningful when it synchronizes with the drumbeats. According to Soyinka Ajayi (1989), the Yoruba dance expresses body flexibility, balance, rhythm, timing and synchronicity of the music with the dance. Dance could be recreational or social when performed at weddings, naming ceremonies, funeral of aged people and so forth. They could also be symbolic when performed at cultural festivals, and similar ceremonies (Soyinka Ajayi 1989). In whatever context dance is performed, it is typically seen as a cultural cognitive expression of the experience of the community. It is considered absurd in the Yoruba world view to dance without drumbeats. This



idea of a dance without beats – *jo lai r'ilu* is used in the song to reinforce and project the message of the song, which inspires the expectation of good news that can be seen as miraculous acts. The ultimate absurdity in this kind of dance that results from the miracle is seen in the conceptual mapping of MIRACLE EVOKES ABSURD DANCE.

The song is a conceptualisation of the miraculous from the perspective of its effect on the experiencer. In the Yoruba culture, people typically dance at cultural and religious celebrations. However, dance can also be elicited by any kind of good news, which is the case in the story that underlies the song in focus in this research.

For the singer, the concept of dance is that of a spontaneous act triggered by joyous news. It needs no expertise and can be inspired by any act of God to any person. Dance can be done at anytime, anywhere and anyhow in the context of sudden but pleasant news. As we would later see, in the Yoruba cultural memories, it is mapped with certain parts of the body – the hands, the legs, the mouth and other cultural symbols, such as drums, *okoto* (snail shell) and good news.

## 6.2 Mapping dance with deafness and absurdity

Dance for the Yoruba is a significant aspect of life. It is an expression of joy and celebration of good things. In the Yoruba culture, there is an underlying belief that the deaf do not have the essential auditory sense to appreciate musical lyrics and rhythm, so they cannot dance. Therefore, in this culture, with already defined expectations that include perfect body and mind and how this affects the expression and appreciation of symbolic socio-cultural acts, such as dance and music, the dance of a deaf is unimaginable and considered absurd if performed at all because it cannot synchronize with the rhythm of music, therefore it will be uncoordinated.

For the artiste, emotionally-touching news can elicit dance without drumbeats, one likened to what the deaf will do. The song therefore reconceptualises the Yoruba cultural categorisation of DEAFNESS with ENCULTURATION CHALLENGES (Tan 2014). The artiste reconceptualises dance as a spontaneous act, which in its most natural sense does not require any drumbeats to perform, since exciting news can naturally elicit it where other cultural symbols can signify its enactment, as expressed in the lyrics below.

- (2) *To ba se 'ru e fun o* 'If he did such for you'  
*owo gan waa jo wa yo* 'you will dance and rejoice'  
*O o ni duro de'lu* 'you won't wait for the drum beats'  
*ko to gb'wo ijo* 'before you start to dance'  
*O o ni bikita baya ilu ba ijo mu* 'you won't bother if your dance synchronizes with the drumbeat'

From (2), the primacy of spontaneity to dance is more emphasized than any other thing culturally associated with it. This metaphorical mapping of DANCE with SPONTANEITY to accommodate the perception of the DEAF and their cognitive capacity to appreciate music is a significant way of depicting miracle and its effect. Beyond the communal cognitive experience that dance ought to express, miracles can turn the experiencer to a 'deaf' person who dances and cares less about social acceptability of the dance. This conceptualisation is meant to project the understanding that while the dance of the deaf may be absurd to others, it is meaningful within the context of pleasant and joyous news, especially to the receiver of the news. The artiste has therefore divested dance of its typical socio-cultural cognitive associations and orientation in an attempt to reconceptualise or redefine it within the gospel message of miracles and prosperity.

### 6.3 Cognitive schemas and cultural memories of dance in Yoruba

The cultural conceptualisation of dance in Yoruba derives from an internalized network of cognitive associations with parts of the body such as the hands – *gb'owo ijo genge* 'display of hands in readiness for a dance'; the legs – *ijó titun l'átesè* 'a new dance from the steps'. These internalized cognitive schemas influence the cultural memories of the Yoruba conceptualisation and interpretation of dance. Another associative concept with dance in the Yoruba cultural world view is *okoto* 'snail shell'.

- (3) *Wa maa ran bi okoto, fun'royin ayo ti o gbo* 'You will be spinning like a snail shell for the good news you have heard'

The typical cultural association of *okoto* 'snail shell' with spinning is derived from the traditional children's game in which snail shells are made to spin in order to promote rotation and balance. *Okoto* is a typical cultural symbol of dance whose spinning is cognitively compared to dancing. So, a good dancer in the Yoruba world view is metaphorically constructed as *okoto*.

The song, rather than building on the person schema of the deaf and its mapping with cultural negative traits of IMPASSIVITY and ABSURDITY, it projects a positive mapping of the UNCOORDINATED DANCE OF THE DEAF with PLEASANT NEWS emanating from the divine acts of God. The song deploys Yoruba person schema of the DEAF to delegitimise shared negative cultural cognition of what deafness entails in order to project the message of prayer for a miraculous act. The pragmatic meaning construction is based on the story with its focus on DANCE and its associative concepts.

The song also divests dance of its cultural conceptualisation as a communally sanctioned behaviour, which comes with drum beats and synchronisation. This new reconceptualisation of dance makes it a natural and spontaneous act which can be spurred by any kind of good news and performed by anyone, including the deaf.

## 6.4 Class categories in the Yoruba socio-cultural world view

The story portrays the cultural class categories in Yoruba, in which the RICH are conceptualised as POWERFUL, ARROGANT, OPPRESSIVE as well as VENGEFUL and the POOR as VULNERABLE people with LOW SELF-ESTEEM. Possession of riches and wealth symbolizes power, which is often expressed in arrogance and oppression.

- (4) *Igbaju lẹ̀kinni, igbaju lẹ̀kẹkẹji, ka to wi ka fo, o ti faso ya moo l'ara* 'two slaps his face, before long, he tore his clothes'

The image of the rich in (4) is that of unempathetic, arrogant and vengeful people, who physically assault the poor as seen in the act of the luxurious car owner. The poor man's response of profuse weeping depicts the susceptibility of the poor. These are also seen in the self-schemas (knowledge of the social self in relation to the other) constructed by the characters in the story which are predicated on shared cultural schemas. For instance, the tricycle rider's self-commodification (Davis 2003) is borne out of hopelessness.

- (5) *... o ni bi won ba ta oun, at'aya, at'omo, awon o le ri'ru owo yen* 'if they sold him his wife and children, they cannot get such huge amount'

This self-commodification and denigration imply a surrender of power by the weak, vulnerable and hopeless indigent man to the wealthy oppressive luxurious care owner. While self-commodification is an expression of hopelessness and surrender by the poor, another extreme of the construction of power is shown in the wealthy believing they have absolute power over the lives of others they consider below them in social status (6).

- (6) *Mo fẹ fi ye were yi pe, mo le raa ki n paa jẹ* 'I want to make this lunatic know that I can buy, kill and eat him'

The conceptualisations of the rich and the poor shown in (5) and (6) are deeply rooted in Yoruba sayings like "*eni ju ni lo, le ju ni nu*" (anyone greater than you can destroy you). This saying invests enormous power in the rich and affluent. The saying constitutes part of the building blocks for culturally interpreting class categories in the Yoruba world view. The story apparently demonstrates these class categories as seen in the key characters – the poor man, the owner of the luxurious

car and the stranger. However, the song shows that the kind of power demonstrated by the stranger can only be motivated by God and this is the basis for interpreting this act as a ‘miracle’, the kind that people who listen to the song should be inspired to desire and pray for.

## 6.5 Dance and the miraculous

The song conceptualises the idea that DANCE IS SPONTANEOUS and MIRACLES ELICIT UNUSUAL DANCE, the kind which does not necessarily fit into the Yoruba cultural conceptualisation of dance, but which is meaningful in the context of unexpected pleasant news rated as miraculous. The song deemphasizes all the cultural associative aesthetic elements of music and dancing, such as mastery of dance steps, synchronicity of the music with dance and the art of composing music.

- (7) *Gbọ na ta lo sọ fún ọ pe ‘wọ náà ko mòó jó* ‘Listen, who says you also don’t know how to dance?’  
*Iṣẹlẹ ti mo wí á kó ẹ níjó titun, lai ré’lẹ ẹkọ ijó* ‘Situation that will trigger a new dance step without being taught’  
*A kó ẹ l’órìn titun, bẹẹ oó kii ẹ Tópé Àlàbí* ‘you will be taught a new song, although you are not Tope Alabi’  
*‘A kó ẹ l’órìn titun, oó kii ẹ’ Òjò Ade* ‘you will be taught a new song, although you are not Ojo Ade’  
*Orin titun ta t’enu jade, ijo titun t’atẹsẹ rẹ* ‘New song from your mouth; new dance steps’

This conceptualisation of dance strips it of any form of mastery and accompaniment culturally associated with it, making dance a natural reaction to any unexpected but pleasant news. The song suggests that in the Yoruba world view, dance and music are latent arts in every human and they can be triggered by sudden, but pleasant news. To support this, there is a proverb in Yoruba that suggests that a mere jump may be interpreted as a dance – *eni to fo s’oke o be ijo l’ori* ‘he who jumps up, has opened the rhythm of dance’. Dance and songs are co-constructed and conceptualised as spontaneous reactions that do not require pre-existing gifts, training or mastery to perform within the experiential reality of the miraculous. Good news can inspire these acts to bring about new forms of them in the experiencer (*orin titun* – ‘new song’) and dance (*ijo titun* – ‘new dance’), which according to the singer could only be taught by experience. The song also notes that celebration of the miraculous takes no cognizance of approved social behaviour and reputation of a person, as seen in extract (4) below.

- (8) *To ba jẹ laarin igboro, ni'şẹlẹ yen ti ba o, nibẹ naa l'oti maa jo, lai wo tani nwo o*  
 'If the news came to you in the public, you will start dancing 'without caring about who is watching you'

Dancing in Yoruba, like other cultural expression is regulated by certain social conventions, which include being performed for specific purposes, such as cultural and religious celebrations, where awareness of the audience is significant. In the Yoruba culture, there is typically a bi-directional relationship between dancers and others – the dancer performs with the consciousness of the audience. The kind of inadvertent dance described in (7) can only be imagined within the context of unexpected cheering news.

Despite that this song is a prayer song composed by a Pentecostal Christian gospel singer, it is backed up by a story that inspires inclinations for the miraculous, deeply rooted in the Yoruba world view. This world view is corroborated by the Yoruba saying “*kira kita o d'ola, k'a sise bi eru o da nkan, Olorun l'o ngbe ni ga*” ‘hard work does not translate into wealth, working like a slave amounts to nothing, it is only God that makes one prosper’. This clearly plays out in the life of the poor tricyclist who left his home in penury on that particular day and encountered an incident which made him return home as a car owner and millionaire. This kind of message resonates well with typical Pentecostal Christian view of miracle as divine intervention in human affairs.

## 6.6 Metaphorising distress and perplexity

The story portrays different human emotions, moods and attitudes, especially in the protagonist. The story starts with picture of a poor old tricyclist struggling to live and whose struggles were compounded by his unfortunate encounter with the luxurious car owner. The two encounters the man had, first with the luxurious car owner and the stranger elicit completely opposite emotions – distress and perplexity, respectively.

To paint the picture of the distress level of the poor tricyclist and the profuseness of his tears, the man was said to be “drinking his tears” – *onikeke n wa ekun mu* ‘the tricyclist is weeping profusely’. This is a hyperbolic way of describing profuse weeping in Yoruba. In other descriptions, the tricyclist was said to be ‘crying like a newly born baby’ – *o nke bi omo titun* and making hiccups – *n'ibi to ti n sesuke* – ‘where he was making hiccups’. Drawing cognitive associative meanings between TEARS, NEW BABY CRY and HICCUPS and DISTRESS are vivid metaphorical means of constructing the poor cyclist's emotional state at that time.

In contrast, his encounter with the stranger elicits joy and perplexity that produces an absurd behaviour of running up and down like an insane person and leaping like a frog.

- (9) *Baba si sa're lo soke bi eni ti nkan njaje* 'The man ran up like someone who has been bitten by something'
- (10) *Nigba t'o nsa're pada, bo, se l'o n to bi opolo* 'by the time he was running back, he started leaping like a frog'

In (9) and (10), the narrator projects the image of an elated man trying to deal with the perplexity that was brought about by the sudden good news he has just heard. He is compared with someone who has been bitten by something. Mapping the man's manner of running with a person who has been bitten by something is the typical way of conceptualising demented people in the Yoruba world view.

The climax of the story is the intervention by the stranger which released the UNBELIEVABLY GOOD NEWS and the EXTREME JOY that follows, culminating in PERPLEXITY and ABSURDITY in the protagonist's behaviour. The conceptual blending of the cyclist's behaviour with the leaping of a frog is a visual metaphor that implies that ELATION can lead to PERPLEXITY which can in turn generate ANIMALISTIC BEHAVIOURS, such as LEAPING LIKE A FROG.

## 7 Conclusions

This paper addresses cultural conceptualisations in a ballad gospel song *Ijo Odi*. The song is a narrative of the experience of an indigent tricyclist's experience of a grass to grace story. The gospel song, *Ijo Odi* is characterised by a surfeit of Yoruba cultural symbols, which are deployed to amplify the cognitive understanding of the message of faith and hope in God, as well as prosperity, especially in conditions of extreme despondency. Interpretation of the conceptual structures (schemas, categories and metaphors) in the song reveals that DANCE and DEAFNESS are mapped to uncover the kind of PERPLEXITY and ABSURDITY that characterise reaction to SUDDEN PLEASANT NEWS. The artiste invokes cognitive schemas and cultural memories of dance in Yoruba, cultural class categories and metaphorization of dance and its internalized network of cognitive associations to project the message. This resonates with the view that language is firmly grounded in cultural cognition and the complex socio-economic lives of humans can be captured in the negotiation of every aspect of their lives, including spirituality in gospel songs as seen in this study. The significance of this study lies in its ability to stimulate a lucid understanding of the cognitive associations of cultural memories and categories in the communication of common

human experiences. Future research may explore how the artistic performance of other music genres equally evoke cultural imageries in communicating other diverse social issues.

## Appendix

**Ijo Odi** – Composer/Singer – Evangelist Elijah Akintunde

*Iyanu ti yoo sele ta mu mi jo bi odi* (**Miracles that will make me dance like a deaf**)

*Ayo ti yio sele ti nma fi jo bi aditi* (**Joy that will make me dance like a deaf**)

*K'osu yo to pari Baba, je ko t'ori mi sele* (**before the end of this month, let me witness it**)

*Ki njo lairilu, ki njo bi aditi* (**Let me dance like a deaf person**)

*Call: To ba se 'ru e fun o, iwo gan wa jo wa yo* (**If He did such for you, you will dance and rejoice**)

*Response: En*

*O o ni duro de'lu* (**you won't wait for the drums**)

*K'o to gbowo ijo* (**before you start dancing**)

*O ni bikita boya ilu ba ijo mu* (**You won't bother if your dance syncs with the drum beat**)

*Wa maa ran bi okoto, fun'royin ayo ti o gbo* (**you will be spinning like a snail's shell, for the good news you will hear**)

*Wa gb'ow ijo gen ge, fun 'sele ayo ti o ri* (**you will start dancing for the joy you will experience**)

*A! k'osu yi to pari, Baba je o tori mi sele* (**Ah! Before the end of this month, Father let it begin with me**)

*Ki njo lairi 'lu, ki njo bi aditi* (**I will dance without drum beats; I will dance like a deaf**)

*Chorus: Iyanu ti o sele...* (**Miracle that will occur**)

*Gbo na ta lo so fun o pe 'wo naa ko moo jo* (**Listen, who says you also don't know how to dance?**)

*Response: En* (**Ehn!**)

*Isele to mo wi a ko e nijo titun, lai re'le eko ijo* (**Situation that will trigger a new dance step without being taught**)

*A ko e l'orin titun, be o kii se Tope Alabi* (**you will be taught a new song, although you are not Tope Alabi**)

*A ko e l'orin titun, oo kii s'Ojo Ade* (**you will be taught a new song, although you are not Ojo Ade**)

*Orin titun ta t'enu jade, ijo titun t'atase re* (New song from your mouth; new dance steps in your legs)

*To ba je laarin igboro, ni'sele yen ti ba o* (If the situation occurs to you in the public)

*Nibe naa l'oti maajo, lai wo tani nwo o* (Right there, you will commence the dancing without noticing who is watching you)

*Ah k'osu yi to pari Baba, je ko t'ori mi sele,* (Ah! Before the end of this month, Father let it begin with me)

*Ki n jo lairi 'lu, ki n jo bi aditi* (I will dance without drum beats; I will dance like a deaf)

*Chorus: Iyani to o sele...* (Miracle that will occur...)

### The Story

*Mo ri'ru re ri o, ni's'aju mi lo'se* (I have seen it before, I witness it)

*Mo ti ri ru re ri, ni s'aju mi l'ose* (I have seen it before, I witness it)

*Baba agba kan ni, o ni keke NAPEP* (One old man who has a Tricycle)

*O nlo laarin igboro, ilu Ijebu* (He was going on the street of Ijebu)

*Ijebu Ode, Baba to nwa keke yi, ko n kobo l'apo* (Ijebu Ode, the tricycle rider did not have any money)

*Ko tie tul'aso l'orun, sugbon n'itori atije, lo fin ngba keke wa* (He did not even have good cloth on him; but in order to eat, he was hiring a tricycle)

*Bo ti nlo l'opopo yen, moto ka nlo n'iwaju* (As he was riding on the road, a car was moving at the front)

*A, oko baba olowo, Baba Olowo n'iwaju, onokeke leyin* (Ah! The rich man's car, the rich man at the front and the tricycle man behind)

*B'o ti nlo l'o ntele, sa dede l'ojiji, a o m'oun t'olowo ri, to mu ko te bireki* (As the rich man's car was moving, the tricycle man was coming behind too. Suddenly, we didn't know what the rich man had seen that made him press the brake of the car)

*Moto se sii o duro, s'e o gbagbe eyin l'owa, iyen naa te bireki* (The car stopped. The tricycle man, don't forget he was at the back. He also pressed the break.)

*Iyen ba di pafe, bireki ko mu mo, lo ba di labalaba, afi kosa l'agbo* (Entirely, the break is no longer sharp again! Everything turned to confusion, the next we heard was a sound of commotion)

*O ko fun Baba Olowo, a! o ti fona moto; Baba Olowo solake, o wo jade ninu keke* (The tricycle man hit the rich man and broke the backlight. The rich man alighted and pulled out the man from his tricycle)

*Igbaju eleekinni, igbaju eleekeji, ka to wi ka to fo, o ti faso ya moo l'ara* (First slap ... Second slap, before we speak and before we talk, the rich man had torn his clothes to pieces.)



*O ni “o fone moto mi, oko olowo iyebiye, o ti je gbes s’ogbo” (the rich man said, “You broke my backlight, the car of huge amount; you are in great debt, hear now.”)*

*Ina moto ti o for one twenty thousand l’oje, egberun l’ona ogofa (the backlight you broke is sold for one twenty thousand naira)*

*A! Baba ba bu s’ekun, o ni bi won ta oun, a’taya a t’omo, awon o le ri’ru owo yen (Ah! The tricycle man cried, he said even if they sold him, his wife and children, they couldn’t get such a huge amount of money.)*

*Olowo f’ariga, onikeke n’w’ekun mu, moto wa to lo rere, ko tie s’ona l’ati koja (The rich man declined, the tricycle man wept furiously, many cars were behind and the road was blocked for them to pass)*

*Olow ti gbe moto di’na, a! s’dede lojiji, alejo kan nfese rin lat’owo eyin wa (The rich man had blocked the road with his car. Suddenly, a stranger was walking from behind)*

*Tori pe ko r’ona koja, n’igba to de bi t’oro ti se, o ni “e joo ki lo de? Ki lo fa road block, ta lo gbe moto s’ona?” Olow l’o fun l’esi, o ni (because he could not pass. When he got to the scene, he asked what had happened that had made the road blocked. Who blocked the road with this car? The rich man answered and said...)*

*Baba ode yi ni, o ti fo’na moto mi, bi o ba de san’wo yen, emi o ni gbe moto kuro. (this foolish man, he broke the backlight of my car. And if he didn’t pay for it, I wouldn’t take my car from the road.)*

*Alejo yen w’aju baba, t’onke bi omo titun, pelu akisa l’orun, t’oun t’ewu l’ori. (The stranger looked at the man’s face crying like a baby with tattered cloth and his grey head)*

*O ba k’aju si olowo “uncle e ma se binu, elo l’owo ina ti won fo?, (he faced the rich man, Uncle, please don’t be offended, how much did the backlight cost?)*

*O ni “se o fe ba san’wo ni? One twenty thousand l’oje”. Alejo ye ba p’ohun da, “tori one twenty, just one twenty, of da gbogbo ori duro, tori one twenty, o fas ya mo baba lara, oo ti e wo t’ewu ori”. (the rich man asked whether the stranger wanted to pay for him. Instantaneously, the stranger changed his tone and said because of one twenty, just one twenty, you delayed many heads, because of one twenty, you tore a man’s cloth without even respecting the grey head)*

*O ni “elo l’o ra moto yen gan?” Mo fe wo’ye t’oje”. Gbogbo ero ba pa lolo. Olowo meji wa n’soro. Oyinbo nre bo l’ako. Awe ni “what do you mean, don’t be silly, mor fifteen million ti mor l’ose to koja.” (the stranger asked, “How much did you buy your car. I wanted to know the amount”. The crowd was silent. Two rich men are now exchanging words. Vocabulary was fuming out of their mouth. The rich man asked, “What do you mean? Don’t be silly, more than fifteen million I bought it last week”)*

*Alejo yen wa r'erin, o ni "maa jo e l'aju. Mo de maa wo e nile, igberaga e ti po ju, elo lo ni to kun o l'aju? Loni ni n'o fi ye o, pe 'bi ti e pari si, ibe ni temi ti bere. Lo ba se wo e seyin," "omo gbe baagi mi wa. Mo fe fi ye were yi, pe mo le raa ki n pa je. Mi o ni sa'wo ina ye".* (The stranger now laughed, he said I will surprise you. I will disgrace you. Your pride is too much, how much did you have that had entangled your face. Today, I will prove to you that where your own ends is where that of another person begins. He beckoned to the back, Boy, bring my bag, I want to prove to this mad fellow that I can buy and kill him. I won't pay for that backlight.)

*O ba si briefcase, kikida dollar ni. O ba k'owo dollar aggregate to fifteen million, ie l'owo naira, o gbe le olowo l'owo, o ni "gb'owo moto e, oya ba mi mu kokoro and then ba n ko'we oko yen. Iyen ba fitiju pare, o ba k'ju si Baba, Baba Onikeke, n'ibi t'o ti nse'suke,* (He opened the briefcase full of dollars. He counted dollars equivalent to fifteen million naira and gave the rich man. He said, "Take the money for your car; now, give me the car key and as well give me the particulars for the car. The rich man lingered in shame. The stranger turned to the old man where he was gasping due to emotional stress.")

*O ni "Daddy, e yee ke, oni l'ekun yin pari, oni l'osi yin tan, oni ni'ya yin tan". O ni Baba, se e mo moto wa?" Baba ni "mo ngbiyanju".* (He ordered, "Daddy, stop crying, your sorrow ends today; today, your poverty ends; today, your afflictions end." He asked, "Baba, can you drive?" Baba replied, "I am trying.")

*O ni "number one, moto ti ko di tiyin na, e maa gbe moto yen lo". Baba si nsare lo s'oke bi eni ti nkan jaje.* (The stranger said to the old man, "One, the car has become yours, take the car away." The old man ran helter-skelter like a mad fellow.)

*Nigba t'o n'sare pada bo, se lo n to bi opolo, o n'jo lalairi 'lu. A! o nj'ijo odi.* (As the old man was running thither, he was leaping like a frog, dancing without the drum. Ah! He was dancing like a deaf.)

*Nibi t'o ti n'jo l'owo, l'alejo yen fa check yo, chek N2 million, o fi le Baba l'owo.* (As he was still dancing, the stranger brought out a check of two million naira and gave the old man.)

*O ni "Daddy, e t'eti e gbo, e o gbudo ta moto yi, e maa fi j'aye kiri.* (he said "Daddy, listen to me, you must not sell this car, be enjoying with it everywhere.)

*Se e wa r'owo eleyi, owo to ba wu yin t'e le se, e koko fi bere se e gbo.* (With this money, any business you can do, start with it. Is that taken?)

*To ba ti wa je ki e pe mi, o ni number mi l'eyi. E wa w'ajo l'ese arugbo. A! k'osu yi to pari Baba je ko t'ori mi sele, ki njo lair'ilu, ki njo bi aditi* (the stranger said, "Later on, call me Sir. This is my number." Come and see dancing in the legs of an old man. Ah! Before this month ends, Father, let it start from me, let me dance without drum beats, let me dance like a deaf)

*Chorus: Iyanu ti yio sele ... (Miracle that will happen...)*

*Emi le jo la ri'ilu, mo fe jo bi aditi; ki njo lair'ilu, ki n jo bi aditi (I can dance without drum beats, I want to dance like a deaf)*

*Isele ayo l'aye mi t'a mu mi jo bi odi; ki njo lair'ilu, ki n'jo bi aditi (Situations of joy in my life that will make me dance like a deaf; let me dance without drum beats, let me dance like a deaf)*

*Baba je n'gab leta ayo t'a mu mi jo bi aditi; ki njo lair'ilu, ki n jo bi aditi (Father, let me receive a letter of joy that will make me dance like a deaf; let me dance without drum beats, let me dance like a deaf)*

*K'oloriire kan pe mi o, ki n'gbape ayo l'odun yi; ki njo lair'ilu, ki n jo bi aditi (Let a benefactor call me, let me receive a call of joy this year; let me dance without drum beats, let me dance like a deaf)*

*Je n'jo lair'lu Baba mi je n'jo bi aditi; ki njo lair'ilu, ki n jo bi aditi (Let me dance without drum beats, my Father, let me dance like a deaf; let me dance without drum beats, let me dance like a deaf)*

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