

**EXAMINING STYLISTIC RENDITION OF HYMNS IN PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES
IN BENIN CITY**

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NOVEMBER, 2025

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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO, THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE ARTS,
MUSIC PROGRAMME, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A) DEGREE
IN MUSIC.**

NOVEMBER, 2025.

DECLARATION

I declare that this project work is based on a study undertaken by NGENE DOMINION CHIWETALU, MATRICULATION NUMBER ART2101174 in the Department of Theatre Arts, Music Programme, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin for the purpose of acquiring a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Theatre Arts, Music Programme. All ideas and views are product of my research, where the views of others have been used and expressed, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this project work was seen by me.

DR. P. O. ODOGBOR
Project supervisor

Date

DEDICATION

This project work is dedicated to Almighty God, whose grace, wisdom, and strength have sustained me throughout this journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My utmost gratitude goes to Almighty God for his Grace, steadfast and undying love, strength, mercy, protection and provision. I am also grateful for the Grace to finish successfully.

My sincere appreciation goes to my project supervisor, Dr. P. O. Odogbor.

I sincerely appreciate the Head of Department Prof. (Mrs.) Josephine E. Abbe and the lecturers in the department of Theatre Arts, Music Programme for their efforts, encouragement, and invaluable contributions to my academic growth.

I also appreciate my parents Mr Ofor Ngene & Mrs Franca Ngene for allowing God to use them, their love, guidance, prayers and support in my years in this school, and also to my siblings Emmanuel Ngene, Favour Ngene, Jesse Ngene for being present whenever I needed you, for your constant inspiration and motivation in difficult times.

I equally would like to appreciate my friends, Deborah Damilola Aina-Tunde, Diai Benjamin, who have been present with me since day one in this school and have been of great help and love, I appreciate my course mates and my other friends not mentioned here for every little laugh, inspiration and support shown to me, it was never unnoticed.

Last but not least, I appreciate myself for all the work, and continuously being present despite all the bumps on the way here.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the stylistic rendition of hymns in selected Pentecostal churches in Benin City, Nigeria. While African Christian music has received considerable scholarly attention, limited studies have provided detailed stylistic and ethnographic analyses of hymn performance within Edo State's unique socio-cultural context, as most focus on broader or Yorùbá settings. This research fills that gap by examining how hymns are musically, linguistically, and theologically reconfigured across five major Pentecostal denominations in Benin City. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study integrates stylistic analysis covering phonology, lexis, syntax, and semantics—with ethnographic methods. Data were obtained through non-participant observation, audio recordings, and semi-structured interviews with pastors, music leaders, and congregants. Findings are expected to reveal that hymn renditions in these churches feature increased tempo and rhythmic intensity, code-switching into Nigerian Pidgin and Edo languages, and semantic expansion through new themes emphasizing prosperity, healing, and spiritual warfare. These stylistic adaptations reflect intentional strategies by church leaders to foster cultural relevance, encourage congregational engagement, and root theological messages in the local lived realities of worshippers. Ultimately, the study contributes to African religious and music scholarship by offering a contextualized framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between musical performance, linguistic adaptation, and theological interpretation in Pentecostal worship in Benin City.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Christian hymns have long held a central place in the worship life of many Protestant and Pentecostal churches in Nigeria. When missionaries first introduced these hymns in the nineteenth century, they came in forms that were solemn, restrained, and often sung without any form of instrumental support. They were written in English and followed Western tonal structures that reflected European church traditions. For the missionaries, these hymns represented both spiritual truth and cultural order. Yet, as time passed, Nigerian Christians began to reshape the way hymns were performed, introducing musical instruments, indigenous languages, and local rhythmic patterns (Ademiluka, 2010). What has emerged is a way of singing hymns that still carries the traces of missionary legacies but also speaks clearly of local identity and cultural expression.

In Edo State, especially in Benin City, this development is particularly striking. Aluede, Ikhidero, and Uche note that Edo folk songs have found their way into church worship, even though missionary influence was once dominant (Aluede, Omoera, & Ekewenu, 2009). They describe worship today as having an “inculturative texture,” meaning that it combines Christian hymnody with familiar cultural forms. This reflects a deliberate choice by congregations to worship in a way that feels both authentically Christian and authentically local. Bagayang also points out that the power of hymns does not rest only on their theology but also on how they are

performed and the stylistic choices that make them emotionally and socially meaningful to worshippers (Bagayang, 2014).

Still, this transformation did not come without resistance. As Ademiluka explains, many of the early missionaries discouraged the use of indigenous instruments and musical styles. They feared that drums, rattles, and other instruments might blur the line between Christian worship and traditional religious practices. However, the rise of Pentecostalism created space for greater musical freedom. In Pentecostal services today, hymn singing is vibrant and dynamic: guitars, keyboards, choirs, and drums are now common, and worshippers participate freely through improvisation, spontaneous clapping, and dance. Hymns are also translated into local languages, breaking down linguistic barriers and ensuring that every worshipper can connect personally with the message of the song (Ossaiga, 2013).

Pentecostal worship in Nigeria places great emphasis on emotional expression. Singing, testimonies, dancing, and extemporaneous prayers are part of a single movement of worship. Ajibade, writing on Yorùbá Pentecostal music, notes that the songs often combine biblical references, personal life stories, and communal affirmation. This same layering of meaning is evident in Edo worship practices as well (Ajibade, 2012). Even when using hymns that were originally imported from Western hymnals, Nigerian churches render them with fresh stylistic choices: syncopated beats, call-and-response structures, and participatory choruses that invite the whole congregation to sing along. Owoaje and Adegbola add that the linguistic qualities of African languages also shape hymn singing, since the tonal nature of languages like Yorùbá and Edo sometimes clashes with imported melodies. This has led to creative adjustments that allow hymns to sound more natural in local tongues (Owoaje, & Adegbola, 2007).

This pattern is not limited to Benin City. In Abeokuta, Soretire and Adeogun observed that Pentecostal choirs often need new forms of training because Western choral instruction does not fully prepare singers for the demands of local worship settings (Soretire, & Adeogun, 2008). Similarly, Omojola's study of Nigerian art music shows how composers and church musicians navigate their cultural identities by blending Western forms with African musical idioms (Omojola, 2008).

Taken together, these studies suggest that hymn singing in Nigeria is neither purely Western nor wholly indigenous. It has become a creative meeting ground where Christian communities negotiate their faith through music. In Benin City and across the country, hymn rendition represents both continuity with the missionary past and a strong embrace of African cultural presence. The result is a form of worship that speaks powerfully to the people, both spiritually and culturally.

While these studies collectively highlight the transformation of Christian hymnody across Nigeria, a focused and contemporary ethnographical analysis of the specific performance practices and theological interpretations of a stylistic rendition of hymns in Pentecostal churches within Benin City remains underexplored. It is this specific intersection of music, culture, and worship that the present study seeks to investigate.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite valuable work on African Christian music, focused research remains scarce regarding the stylistic rendition of hymns in Pentecostal churches in Benin City. While existing studies collectively highlight the transformation of Christian hymnody across Nigeria, most

scholarship considers African Christian music broadly (Aluede, Omoera, & Ekewenu, 2009); (Ossaiga, 2013) or examines linguistic and hermeneutic concerns primarily in Yorùbá contexts (Ajibade, 2012); (Owoaje & Adegbola, 2007). This leaves a critical gap in understanding the specific intersection of music, culture, and worship in Edo State. Few studies provide a detailed stylistic and contemporary ethnographic analysis of how hymns are actually performed—in terms of melody, rhythm, instrumentation, and congregational participation—within Benin City’s Pentecostal churches. Furthermore, there is insufficient attention to how local congregants perceive and interpret these changes. It is this specific underexplored area of performance practices and theological interpretations of stylistic hymn rendition in Benin City that the present study seeks to investigate.

Furthermore, there is insufficient attention to how local congregants perceive and interpret these changes. While Ibude has analyzed the theological weight of hymns such as “Praise to the Lord the Almighty,” his study focuses on theological meaning rather than stylistic expression in Pentecostal contexts (Ibude, 2015). (Sharndama & Onyinyechi, 2016) who analyze the syntax of praise songs, also show that lyrical structures matter, but again their focus is not hymns in Benin City. This study therefore seeks to provide a stylistic examination that bridges theology, linguistics, and musical performance, while grounding analysis in a specific urban Pentecostal setting.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are therefore to:

- i. identify stylistic features of hymn renditions in Pentecostal churches in Benin City.

- ii. examine how Edo musical traditions are incorporated into hymn performance.
- iii. investigate church leaders' and congregants' perspectives on hymn rendition styles.
- iv. assess how these stylistic practices shape worship participation and experience.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to achieve these objectives, the study will address the following questions

- i. What stylistic features characterize hymns in Pentecostal churches in Benin City?
- ii. How are Edo musical traditions reflected in these hymn renditions?
- iii. How do church leaders and congregants perceive and respond to stylistic adaptations?
- iv. What impact do these stylistic renditions have on the worship experience?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to scholarship by situating hymn analysis within stylistic studies, ethnomusicology, and religious practice. Unlike broad analyses of African church music (Ademiluka, 2010); (Aluede, Omoera, & Ekewenu, 2009), it focuses on the hymn genre in a specific urban Pentecostal context. It will help musicologists, liturgists, and church leaders understand how cultural and stylistic decisions shape worship.

Practically, this research will provide insights for choir directors and pastors. It may help congregations balance theological integrity with stylistic innovation. As Ossaiga notes, performance in Nigerian gospel music often blurs the line between art and liturgy; understanding these stylistic choices can strengthen church music leadership (Ossaiga, 2013). It also helps preserve indigenous Edo heritage, since music is a key site of cultural continuity.

1.5.1 Justification for the Inclusion of Hymns in Pentecostal Churches

Although Pentecostal worship is widely known for its expressive praise songs and spontaneous musical flow, the inclusion of hymns remains both necessary and relevant. Hymns provide theological stability, as they contain structured, scripture-based lyrics that reinforce core Christian doctrines such as salvation, grace, holiness, and the sovereignty of God. These themes support the spiritual education of congregants and help maintain doctrinal depth in worship.

Including hymns also preserves historical continuity. Pentecostal churches, even while emphasizing contemporary worship, are part of a wider Christian heritage that spans centuries. Hymns serve as a link between the early missionary traditions and the present-day Pentecostal movement, ensuring that worship does not lose its historical or theological grounding.

Hymns in some Pentecostal churches are mostly used for special occasions like Communion, Good Friday and Easter celebrations of such.

Additionally, hymns offer a unique balance between reflection and expression. When adapted into local styles—through rhythm, tempo, instrumentation, and language—they become culturally meaningful while still retaining their theological richness. In the Benin City context, this flexibility allows Pentecostal churches to blend biblical truth with African musical identity, making worship both spiritually deep and culturally resonant.

Therefore, the inclusion of hymns in Pentecostal worship is justified because they deepen theological understanding, preserve Christian heritage, enhance worship maturity, and provide a culturally adaptable medium through which congregants can engage with God.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to selected Pentecostal churches in Benin City, Edo State. Its focus is on the stylistic rendition of hymns, examining elements such as melody, rhythm, instrumentation, improvisation, call-and-response patterns, and congregational participation. The study also considers how hymns are adapted linguistically, especially when translated into indigenous languages, and how worshippers perceive these stylistic features.

The research does not cover all forms of Christian music such as praise choruses or contemporary gospel songs. Instead, it is restricted to hymns as they appear in Pentecostal worship. By narrowing the scope to Benin City, the study highlights how a specific urban Pentecostal context reflects both continuity with missionary hymn traditions and adaptation to local cultural identity.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Hymn: A hymn is a Christian song used in worship. It is usually written in a structured form and focuses on praising God or teaching aspects of the faith. Hymns often carry deep meaning, drawing from scripture and theology, and they are meant to guide the congregation in devotion.

Pentecostal Churches: These are Christian churches that place strong emphasis on lively worship, the power of the Holy Spirit, and spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, and healing. Worship in Pentecostal churches is often expressive, involving singing, clapping, dancing, and open participation by members.

Stylistic Rendition: This refers to the particular way a hymn is presented or performed. It includes the choice of melody, rhythm, language, instruments, and overall delivery. A stylistic

rendition can make the same hymn sound formal, traditional, or more modern and vibrant depending on how it is arranged and sung.

Indigenous Tradition: This refers to the local musical culture of the Edo people. It includes the use of native rhythms, instruments like drums and gongs, and the Edo language. When incorporated into hymns, these elements give worship a distinctly local and cultural identity.

Congregational Participation: This means the active involvement of everyone in the worship service, not just the choir or instrumentalists. It includes singing together, clapping, responding, and sometimes even dancing. Congregational participation makes worship more engaging and communal, as everyone becomes part of the experience rather than just listeners.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

2.1.1 Hymns and Hymnology

The concept of the hymn is foundational to this study. A hymn is more than a song of worship; it is a poetic, theological, and performative text designed to direct attention toward God. Hymns historically drew on biblical psalms and early Christian doxologies, evolving into liturgical songs embedded within church traditions (Ademiluka, 2010). In the Nigerian setting, hymns were introduced by missionary agencies such as the Church Missionary Society, and they became key in shaping congregational worship.

Hymnology, the scholarly study of hymns, encompasses their history, literary form, theological depth, and cultural role. Bagayang argues that hymnology cannot be understood in isolation from performance, because hymns gain meaning when sung within worship communities (Bagayang, 2014). Hymnology therefore extends beyond textual analysis to embrace ethnomusicological and performative dimensions.

In Pentecostal contexts, hymnology takes on renewed significance. Ibude suggests that hymns are “sermons in nyscsong” whose theological force depends on their stylistic rendering (Ibude, 2015). This assertion is crucial: Pentecostal churches often adapt hymns from their original European frameworks, infusing them with indigenous rhythms and stylistic features to create worship experiences that feel both theologically authentic and culturally resonant.

2.1.2 Stylistics as a Tool of Analysis

Stylistics, as a discipline, explores the relationship between linguistic choices and meaning. Leech and Short define stylistics as a field that explains how style functions as a medium of meaning (Leech and Short 30). Applied to hymns, stylistics highlights diction, repetition, figures of speech, and sound patterns that shape interpretation.

Sharndama and Onyinyechi show that stylistic analysis of religious songs reveals how poetic devices reinforce the persuasive and emotive functions of worship texts (Sharndama, & Onyinyechi, 2016). Repetition and parallelism, for instance, serve not merely as literary devices but as communal strategies for meditation and participation in worship.

In Pentecostal hymn renditions, stylistics must extend to musicality and performance. Ossaiga explains that Nigerian gospel songs rely on improvisation, tonal variation, and instrumental support, which are stylistic strategies that make worship participatory (Ossaiga, 2013). Hence, stylistics provides a framework that captures both linguistic artistry and performative aesthetics.

2.1.3 Rendition and Performance in Worship

Rendition refers to the delivery and interpretation of hymns in congregational settings. It is not neutral; rather, it reflects cultural aesthetics, theological interpretation, and performative choices. Schechner emphasizes that performance is not merely a reflection of a script but a dynamic act in which meaning is generated (Schechner, 2013).

Ajibade illustrates this with Yoruba Christian worship, where hymns are reinterpreted through indigenous rhythms and tonal cadences, transforming them into participatory acts

(Ajibade, 2012). In Benin City, Pentecostal churches similarly adapt renditions by employing drums, clapping, and call-and-response patterns, thereby embedding hymns within cultural frameworks.

Aluede, Ikhidero, and Uche highlight the resilience of indigenous instruments in Edo Christianity, noting that despite early missionary restrictions, local worshippers gradually reintroduced percussive and idiophonic instruments into hymn renditions (Aluede, Ikhidero, & Uche 40). These practices affirm that rendition is not simply about musical beauty but about contextualizing hymns in ways that resonate with congregants' spirituality.

2.1.4 Pentecostalism in Nigeria

Pentecostalism is one of the fastest-growing Christian movements in Nigeria, defined by its emphasis on the Holy Spirit, expressive worship, and charismatic leadership. Anderson observes that Pentecostalism thrives by adapting to local cultural contexts, unlike earlier mission churches that imposed Western liturgy (Anderson, 2004).

Pentecostal worship is distinguished by extended singing, spontaneous prayer, and emotive performance. Omojola argues that Nigerian Pentecostal worship embodies stylistic hybridity, combining Western hymns, indigenous melodies, and contemporary gospel styles (Omojola, 2008). Hymns, once perceived as conservative, are increasingly re-styled in Pentecostal contexts, allowing worshippers to engage them as dynamic expressions of faith.

In Benin City, Pentecostal churches such as Church of God Mission and The Redeemed Christian Church of God employ multilingual hymn renditions, mixing English, Pidgin, and Edo.

This multilingual practice underscores stylistic flexibility, ensuring that hymns function as accessible, inclusive worship resources.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

2.2.1 Ethnomusicology and Cultural Adaptation

Ethnomusicology, as Nettl defines, is the study of music “as culture” (Nettl, 2005). This perspective emphasizes that music is not only sound but also a reflection of the values, beliefs, and practices of the people who create and use it. When applied to hymnology, ethnomusicology helps us understand hymns not simply as European imports but as cultural practices that take on new forms and meanings in Nigerian Pentecostal settings. Hymns are therefore dynamic expressions of worship shaped by local experiences, languages, and traditions.

In the case of Edo State, Aluede, Ikhidero, and Uche show that Christian communities have indigenized hymn performance by introducing traditional rhythms and melodies into worship (Aluede, Omoera, & Ekewenu, 2009). What were once solemn Western forms are now reimagined with familiar cultural elements, making them more accessible and meaningful to congregants. This process of adaptation demonstrates how music functions as a cultural bridge, linking Christian theology with African identity.

Ethnomusicology thus provides the framework to see hymn rendition in Benin City as more than liturgical routine. It reveals hymns as living cultural practices, constantly negotiated and reshaped by congregations. The approach also highlights the participatory dimension of Pentecostal worship: call-and-response singing, drumming, and improvisation are not accidental but reflect broader cultural patterns of musical expression in Edo society. By using

ethnomusicology, this study situates hymn rendition within its cultural setting, showing how worshippers transform missionary legacies into forms of praise that resonate deeply with their spiritual and social realities.

2.2.2 Stylistic Theory and Discourse Analysis

Stylistic theory focuses on how linguistic and aesthetic choices create meaning in texts and performances. As Crystal explains, stylistics bridges linguistics and literary criticism, providing methods to examine how style mediates meaning (Crystal, 2003). Applied to hymnology, stylistic theory draws attention not only to the poetic devices in hymn texts but also to the way these devices operate in the lived experience of worship. Hymns employ diction, syntax, imagery, repetition, and rhythm that go beyond literary beauty to serve theological and communal purposes.

In Pentecostal worship, hymn rendition can be understood as an act of communication. The stylistic features of hymns—whether simple vocabulary for accessibility, repetition for emphasis, or rhythmic variation for emotional engagement—shape how congregants respond. Repetition, for instance, reinforces theological truths while also encouraging participation, as worshippers can easily join in. Likewise, the syntax and phrasing of hymns often align with the rhythm of clapping, drumming, or call-and-response patterns, binding linguistic structure with musical style.

Stylistic theory also connects with discourse analysis, since hymn renditions are not isolated literary texts but part of a broader communicative event: worship. Within Pentecostal services, hymns form part of a worship “discourse” that includes prayer, testimony, preaching,

and congregational interaction. From this perspective, the stylistic features of hymns function within a dialogic setting, where meaning is co-created by leaders, choirs, and congregants. Thus, discourse analysis allows us to see hymn performance as socially situated, reflecting both theological intention and cultural expression.

This framework enables the study to approach hymns in Benin City Pentecostal churches as stylistic acts of worship discourse. It considers not only the written or translated hymn texts but also their oral and musical realization in performance, where language, rhythm, and participation converge to create meaning.

2.2.3 Performance Theory and Ritual Studies

Performance theory emphasizes the importance of live enactment in meaning-making. Schechner observes that performance is both a form of cultural behavior and a mode of communication, where meaning emerges through action rather than text alone (Schechner, 2013). In this sense, hymn renditions in Pentecostal churches are not simply the singing of words on a page but ritual performances through which faith is enacted and experienced. The congregation is not a passive audience but an active community of participants whose gestures, responses, and emotions shape the meaning of worship.

Turner's concept of liminality provides a particularly useful lens. Liminality refers to the threshold state in ritual where participants are suspended between ordinary life and transformative experience (Turner, 1969). Within Pentecostal worship, hymn renditions often create these liminal spaces: moments when everyday concerns are set aside and worshippers are

drawn into encounters with the sacred. The rhythmic repetition, call-and-response singing, and communal energy of hymn performance invite worshippers into a shared spiritual threshold.

In Pentecostal churches, extended hymn renditions often serve as gateways to deeper spiritual experiences. They create atmospheres where glossolalia (speaking in tongues), prophecy, healing, and testimonies frequently emerge. The performance of hymns thus becomes more than music; it is a ritualized act that carries the congregation into heightened states of spiritual awareness. From this perspective, performance theory allows us to see hymnody as a cultural and religious performance that binds theology, music, and embodied practice together.

By applying performance theory, this study highlights hymn renditions in Benin City Pentecostal churches as living rituals. They function not only as expressions of belief but also as performative events that transform worshippers, strengthen communal bonds, and open spaces for spiritual encounter

2.2.4 Semiotics of Music and Worship

Semiotic theory approaches music as a system of signs, focusing on how meaning is created and interpreted through musical structures and practices. Nattiez argues that musical meaning emerges from the interaction of three dimensions: the compositional structures of a piece, the act of performance, and the reception by listeners (Nattiez, 1990). This framework highlights that music does not speak for itself in isolation; rather, it acquires significance through the way it is produced, performed, and experienced by a community.

Applied to hymnology, semiotics helps us see hymns not just as songs of devotion but as complex networks of signs that communicate theological truths and cultural values. Melodic

patterns, harmonic progressions, rhythmic choices, and even pauses or accelerations function as signs that worshippers interpret within their spiritual and cultural frameworks. For example, a shift from minor to major harmony may symbolize divine victory, while steady drumming may represent persistence in prayer or unity within the congregation.

In Pentecostal hymn renditions, semiotic analysis is particularly relevant because congregants actively interpret stylistic elements as signs of divine presence. Rising tempo or the repetition of a chorus is often understood as a signal of increasing spiritual intensity. Similarly, the call-and-response structure can be read as a sign of communal participation and divine-human dialogue, where the congregation responds to God through song. Even instrumental improvisations are interpreted as moments of spiritual prompting, carrying meaning beyond mere musical ornamentation.

Semiotics therefore enriches stylistic analysis by showing how hymns function within a web of signification—where sound, theology, culture, and spirituality converge. It underscores the idea that hymn rendition in Pentecostal churches is not only aesthetic performance but also a system of signs through which worshippers recognize, affirm, and embody divine presence

2.3 Empirical Studies on Hymnody

2.3.1 Historical Development of Hymns in Nigeria

Ademiluka traces the origins of Nigerian hymnody to missionary legacies, where European hymns were introduced primarily through Christian education and liturgical practice (Ademiluka, 2010). In these early stages, indigenous expressions of music were often discouraged, as missionaries regarded local languages, tonal systems, and instruments as

incompatible with Western liturgical traditions. This created a situation where hymns were initially performed as “borrowed forms,” closely tied to European melodic and harmonic structures.

Over time, however, Nigerian Christians began the process of indigenization, adapting hymns to their cultural and linguistic contexts. A key strategy was translation, which made hymns accessible to congregations who did not speak English or Latin. Yet translation was not a straightforward task. Owoaje and Adegbola highlight the linguistic challenges of rendering English hymns into Yoruba, particularly the tonal conflicts that arise when fitting tonal languages into fixed Western melodies (Owoaje, & Adegbola, 2007). Yoruba, like many African languages, relies on pitch to convey meaning, and when these tonal contours clash with hymn melodies, the theological message of the text can be distorted.

These challenges necessitated stylistic adjustments. In many churches, singers and choirs developed creative ways of aligning tonal patterns with melodies—sometimes by altering rhythmic structures, inserting melismas, or rephrasing lines to preserve meaning. Moreover, African instruments and rhythmic idioms gradually found their way into hymn performance, transforming what was once an imported form into a distinctly Nigerian expression of worship. This process of cultural negotiation underscores that hymns are not static liturgical artifacts but living texts that acquire new meanings through performance, adaptation, and local creativity.

2.3.2 Translation and Indigenous Adaptations of Hymns

Translation is a critical part of hymnology in Nigeria. While missionary hymns were initially performed in English, the spread of Christianity across diverse linguistic communities

necessitated their translation into languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Edo. This step was essential for congregational participation, since worshippers needed to understand and internalize the theological content of the hymns. Yet translation was not merely a matter of substituting words from one language to another; it demanded significant stylistic and structural modifications, especially when dealing with tonal languages.

Sharndama and Onyinyechi argue that translation inevitably introduces stylistic shifts, since exact equivalence between languages is rarely possible and often requires creative reworking to preserve both meaning and aesthetics (Sharndama & Onyinyechi, 2016). For example, hymns originally composed in English may rely on metrical regularity and rhyme schemes that are difficult to reproduce in tonal African languages. Translators are therefore compelled to adjust word choice, rhythm, and phrasing in order to maintain both theological integrity and musical coherence.

In Pentecostal settings, this process of translation extends beyond language to include musical adaptation. Hymns translated into Yoruba or Edo, for instance, may be sung with indigenous rhythmic accompaniments, syncopated patterns, and call-and-response dynamics that align with African oral traditions. Such stylistic modifications ensure that hymns resonate not only intellectually but also emotionally and culturally with congregants. In this way, translation functions as a creative act that bridges missionary hymn traditions with African expressive forms, making hymns vehicles of both Christian theology and cultural identity.

2.3.3 Comparative Studies between Mainline and Pentecostal Churches

Scholars have shown that hymn practices in Nigeria vary widely between mainline denominations and Pentecostal churches. Omojola observes that mainline churches such as the Anglican, Methodist, and Baptist traditions tend to preserve more traditional forms of hymnody, emphasizing order, theological precision, and adherence to established liturgical structures (Omojola, 2008). In these settings, hymns are usually sung directly from hymnals, with strict attention to melody and harmony, often accompanied by organs or pianos. This approach reflects the historical legacy of missionary practices, where music was viewed as a structured medium for conveying doctrine and reinforcing reverence in worship.

In contrast, Pentecostal churches have developed a more flexible and dynamic approach to hymn rendition. Rather than adhering rigidly to written hymnals, Pentecostal congregations frequently adapt hymns in ways that reflect cultural aesthetics and promote communal participation. Improvisation, repetition, and rhythmic variations are common features. Ajibade, writing on Yoruba Pentecostalism, highlights how hymns are often performed with spontaneous additions, syncopated rhythms, and call-and-response patterns that resonate with the oral and performative traditions of African music (Ajibade, 2012). Such practices allow hymns to serve not only as vehicles of doctrine but also as instruments of emotional expression and communal bonding.

Comparative studies therefore underline the stylistic fluidity of hymn renditions in Pentecostal contexts. Where mainline churches focus on maintaining the formality and precision of inherited hymn traditions, Pentecostal churches prioritize immediacy, accessibility, and participatory engagement. This contrast sheds light on how different Christian traditions in Nigeria negotiate the balance between theological fidelity and cultural adaptation.

2.4 Hymnology and Stylistics in African Context

2.4.1 Language and Style in Worship Songs

Language choice plays a central role in the stylistics of hymns and worship songs. In Nigerian Pentecostal churches, hymns may be rendered in English, Nigerian Pidgin, or indigenous languages such as Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, or Edo. This multilingual practice reflects not only inclusivity but also the desire to reach diverse congregations in ways that feel immediate and personal. Bamigbala notes that Pidgin-English hymns, in particular, have a powerful effect in urban congregations, where members come from varied linguistic backgrounds. Pidgin serves as a linguistic bridge, making hymns both accessible and emotionally resonant for a wide audience (Bamigbala, 2010).

The stylistic significance of language goes beyond semantic meaning; it is also affective. Hymns sung in local languages often carry cultural rhythms of speech that intensify worshippers' emotional involvement. For instance, tonal patterns in Yoruba or Edo can align with the melodic contours of a hymn, deepening its expressive force. Conversely, when translations challenge the natural tonal flow, congregants may adapt the melody or rhythm to preserve both intelligibility and emotional power.

In Pentecostal worship, the blending of languages within a single service is also common. A hymn may begin in English, shift into Pidgin, and then move into a local Edo language for the chorus, creating a linguistic hybridity that underscores the stylistic freedom of Pentecostal worship. This blending is a deliberate stylistic choice designed to maximize emotional impact and accessibility, ensuring that the message of the hymn is not confined by a single linguistic or

cultural framework. The stylistic analysis of hymns in Benin City must therefore account for these multilingual shifts and their resulting impact on rhythm, melody, and congregational response.

2.4.2 Poetic and Musical Devices in Hymns

Hymns employ a range of literary and musical devices that enhance their memorability, beauty, and spiritual impact. On the literary side, figures of speech such as metaphor, imagery, alliteration, and hyperbole are frequently used to communicate theological truths in vivid and accessible ways. For instance, metaphors that describe God as a “rock,” “shepherd,” or “fortress” provide worshippers with concrete images that capture abstract spiritual realities. These devices make hymns not only doctrinal but also poetic, ensuring that their language lingers in memory and stirs emotion.

Musical devices also play a crucial role in shaping the stylistic character of hymns. Elements such as repetition, modulation, and variations in tempo reinforce the lyrical message and invite active participation. Sharndama and Onyinyechi stress that repetition in hymns should not be viewed as mere redundancy; rather, it is a deliberate stylistic strategy that serves both emphasis and meditation (Sharndama & Onyinyechi, 2016). Repetition allows lines of text or musical phrases to be absorbed more deeply, fostering reflection and collective affirmation.

In Pentecostal contexts, these devices are often intensified. Repeated choruses may be extended for several minutes, with the congregation joining in call-and-response patterns that build a sense of unity and emotional intensity. Modulations and tempo shifts are also common, creating moments of heightened excitement or solemn reflection within a single hymn. Through

these literary and musical strategies, Pentecostal hymn renditions move beyond mere performance into spaces of deep spiritual encounter, where meaning is reinforced through both word and sound.

2.4.3 Indigenous Instruments and Stylistic Shifts

The introduction of indigenous instruments such as drums, rattles, and talking drums into hymn renditions marks a significant stylistic shift in Nigerian church music. Where missionary practices once discouraged the use of local instruments, Pentecostal churches have embraced them as vital components of worship. Aluede and colleagues argue that these instruments embody cultural identity, transforming hymns from European imports into Africanized worship forms that speak directly to local sensibilities (Aluede, Ikhidero, & Uche 44). By incorporating familiar sounds, congregations experience hymns not as foreign impositions but as living expressions of faith grounded in their cultural environment.

In Benin City, this transformation is particularly evident in Pentecostal churches, where hymn renditions frequently blend modern electronic instruments such as keyboards and guitars with indigenous percussion. The result is a stylistic fusion: while the harmonic framework may reflect Western tonal structures, the rhythmic foundation is distinctly African. Drums and rattles inject energy, syncopation, and communal responsiveness, while the keyboard sustains harmonic continuity. This balance of indigenous and modern instrumentation creates a worship atmosphere that is both rooted in tradition and open to innovation.

Unlike mainline church practices, which often maintain the restrained use of pipe organs or pianos, Pentecostal hymn renditions in Benin City are characterized by rhythmic vitality and

improvisational flair. Instrumentation thus becomes not just an accompaniment but an active stylistic force, shaping the dynamics of congregational participation and reinforcing the cultural ownership of Christian worship.

2.4.4 The Role of Choirs and Congregational Singing

Choirs play a crucial role in shaping the stylistic character of hymn renditions. In mainline churches, choirs typically lead hymns in a more formal and structured manner, often adhering strictly to written scores and established harmonies. Their function is largely to guide the congregation and maintain musical order, reflecting the liturgical precision inherited from missionary traditions.

Pentecostal choirs, however, approach hymn performance with greater flexibility. Improvisation, spontaneity, and audience participation are central to their style. Instead of simply presenting music for congregants to follow, Pentecostal choirs often blur the boundary between leaders and worshippers, creating a participatory atmosphere where everyone becomes part of the performance. Nketia observes that African choral traditions naturally rely on communal call-and-response patterns, and this feature is vividly present in Pentecostal hymn renditions (Nketia, 1997). Through this structure, choirs initiate lines that are echoed, extended, or transformed by the congregation, turning hymns into collective acts of worship rather than choir-led recitals.

This emphasis on communal singing reinforces the Pentecostal ethos of shared spiritual experience. Extended choruses, layered vocal harmonies, and congregational echoes create an atmosphere where worshippers feel spiritually engaged and emotionally connected. The choir thus functions not as a performing body set apart from the congregation but as a facilitator of

collective worship, embodying the Pentecostal belief that spiritual power flows through the participation of the entire community. As Soretire and Adeogun note, this shift in stylistic and functional roles also requires new forms of training, since Pentecostal choirs must master both musical discipline and the flexibility needed for spontaneous worship (Soretire & Adeogun, 2008).

2.5 Pentecostal Worship Studies in Nigeria

2.5.1 The Rise of Pentecostal Music in Benin City

Benin City has historically been a hub of Christian revivalism, shaping both religious life and musical expression in southern Nigeria. One of the most significant influences came through Archbishop Benson Idahosa and the Church of God Mission International, which pioneered the widespread use of contemporary music, indigenous rhythms, and hymn adaptation in Pentecostal worship. Unlike the more conservative musical practices of mainline churches, Pentecostal churches in Benin embraced a style that was vibrant, participatory, and open to innovation.

Ojo observes that Pentecostal worship in Benin thrives on stylistic innovation, with congregations blending traditional hymnody inherited from missionary traditions with elements of contemporary gospel and indigenous performance styles (Ojo, 2006). This approach allowed hymns to remain doctrinally grounded while also reflecting the cultural identity and expressive energy of the Edo people. Instruments such as drums, guitars, keyboards, and percussion became standard, while choirs and praise teams introduced improvisation, rhythmic variation, and extended choruses.

Over time, this blending of tradition and innovation established a distinctive Pentecostal sound in Benin City, one that continues to shape worship practices across the region. Pentecostal music thus became not only a form of worship but also a symbol of revivalist identity, marking Benin City as a centre for the stylistic transformation of hymnody in Nigeria

2.5.2 Hymns vs. Contemporary Worship Songs in Pentecostalism

There has been ongoing debate about the relevance of hymns in Pentecostal churches, especially as many services are dominated by choruses, praise songs, and contemporary gospel music. Some argue that hymns, with their structured stanzas and formal language, no longer fit the spontaneous and expressive style of Pentecostal worship. Yet hymns continue to occupy an important place when they are rendered in ways that align with Pentecostal aesthetics.

Ajibade contends that Pentecostalism does not abandon hymns but rather redefines them through contextual performance, adapting them to suit the rhythms, improvisations, and participatory patterns that characterize Pentecostal worship (Ajibade, 2012). In practice, this means hymns are often shortened into refrains, translated into indigenous languages, or set to African rhythms that resonate with congregational expectations. They may also be extended into prolonged choruses, accompanied by clapping, dancing, and instrumental improvisation.

Thus, rather than being replaced, hymns are transformed. They retain their theological weight and historical value while gaining new vitality through stylistic adaptation. In this way, hymns continue to serve as bridges between missionary traditions and contemporary Pentecostal expressions of faith, ensuring their survival in a worship environment that constantly embraces innovation.

2.5.3 Stylistic Blend of English, Pidgin, and Indigenous Languages

The stylistic blend of languages in Pentecostal hymn renditions reflects Nigeria's linguistic diversity and the need for worship to resonate with heterogeneous congregations. Hymns are not confined to a single language but often shift fluidly between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous tongues. Bamigbala observes that this kind of hybridity fosters inclusivity, allowing worshippers from different linguistic backgrounds to feel at home in the service while simultaneously strengthening a shared congregational identity (Bamigbala, 2010).

In Benin City, this is especially evident in Pentecostal churches where hymns may shift mid-stanza between English and Edo. Such code-switching not only enhances accessibility but also affirms the cultural identity of worshippers. A hymn that begins in English to anchor theological meaning may transition into Edo to evoke intimacy and cultural familiarity, ensuring that worshippers connect both cognitively and emotionally.

This linguistic hybridity also serves a stylistic purpose: it allows hymns to flow naturally within the oral traditions of African worship, where repetition, variation, and switching between languages are integral to communication. By blending languages, Pentecostal hymn renditions bridge the gap between global Christianity and local expression, reinforcing the adaptability of hymnody in a multicultural Nigerian context.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design serves as the guiding plan that directs how the study is carried out. For this work, a qualitative research design is adopted because the focus is on understanding meanings, experiences, and cultural expressions rather than measuring numbers or statistics. This design makes it possible to study the hymns not only as written texts but also as living performances shaped by worshippers, their environment, and their faith practices.

The study specifically combines ethnographic and stylistic approaches. The ethnographic aspect involves observing and, where possible, participating in the worship environment to gain insight into how hymns function in real life. This means paying attention to the atmosphere of the service, the reactions of the congregation, and the cultural elements that influence how

hymns are sung. Ethnography, therefore, helps to capture the social and spiritual dimensions of hymn performance, showing how worshippers experience and interpret these songs.

The stylistic approach, on the other hand, focuses on the linguistic and artistic choices made in hymn renditions. This involves examining the levels of language and style—such as sound patterns (phonology), word choice (lexis), sentence structure (syntax), meaning (semantics), and use in context (pragmatics). By doing this, the study highlights how hymns are shaped by language and music to create meaning, beauty, and emotional impact.

The use of a qualitative framework is important because it allows the researcher to go beyond simply asking what hymns are sung, and instead explore how they are sung, why they are sung in certain ways, and what they mean to the worshippers. It also makes room for the influence of cultural traditions, indigenous instruments, and congregational participation, which cannot be fully understood through quantitative methods alone.

By bringing together ethnographic observation and stylistic analysis, the study treats hymns as both texts (written and structured with theological content) and performances (dynamic, interactive, and influenced by context). This design recognizes that hymns in Pentecostal churches are not fixed or static; rather, they are flexible and evolving, shaped by the interplay of theology, culture, music, and the worshippers themselves.

3.2 Research Setting

The research is located in Benin City, the capital of Edo State in southern Nigeria. Benin City is not only an administrative hub but also a historical and cultural center, widely recognized for its long-standing traditions in art, religion, and education. Its reputation as the heart of the

ancient Benin Kingdom gives the city a unique cultural identity, where indigenous practices and modern influences continue to intersect.

In recent decades, Benin City has become a fertile ground for the growth of Pentecostal Christianity. The city hosts a wide range of Pentecostal congregations, from large, well-established mega-churches that attract thousands of worshippers each week, to smaller fellowships and prayer houses embedded within local communities. This diversity provides a broad spectrum of worship practices, making it an ideal setting for studying how hymns are rendered in different contexts.

The choice of Benin City as the research setting is intentional and strategic for three main reasons:

- 1. Linguistic Diversity:** Benin is a cosmopolitan city where multiple languages coexist. English is widely spoken, Pidgin English serves as a common lingua franca, and Edo and other indigenous languages remain active in daily communication. This blend of languages creates room for stylistic variety in hymn rendition, as churches often adapt hymns linguistically to suit the congregation's linguistic realities.
- 2. Rapid Growth of Pentecostalism:** Over the years, Pentecostalism has expanded dramatically in Benin City, shaping not only spiritual life but also social and cultural practices. This expansion has significantly influenced church music, leading to adaptations of hymns that reflect the vibrancy, emotional depth, and participatory nature of Pentecostal worship.
- 3. Representative Worship Practices:** Benin City serves as a microcosm of Nigerian Pentecostalism. Within its churches, hymns coexist with contemporary praise songs, gospel

music, and indigenous styles. This mixture reflects the broader Nigerian Christian experience, where tradition and modernity are constantly negotiated in worship. As such, studying hymn renditions in Benin City provides insights that are relevant not only locally but also to the wider Nigerian Pentecostal context.

In sum, Benin City offers a unique environment where the interplay of history, language, culture, and faith makes the study of hymn rendition both meaningful and representative of larger trends in Nigerian Pentecostal worship.

3.3 Population of the Study

The population of this study consists of Pentecostal churches in Benin City, their congregations, and the hymn renditions performed during worship. Within this broad group, the study particularly focuses on individuals who are directly involved in the preparation and performance of hymns. These include choir members, who provide the vocal presentation; instrumentalists, who shape the musical background; pastors and worship leaders, who determine when and how hymns are used in the service; and congregants, who actively participate through singing, clapping, and other forms of response.

Although not all Pentecostal churches in Benin make regular use of hymns, many continue to integrate them into their worship, either as part of the Sunday service, in midweek gatherings, or during special liturgical events such as Holy Communion, vigils, and conventions. This reflects the continuing significance of hymns in Pentecostal spirituality, even in the midst of contemporary gospel music and modern praise styles.

The study therefore narrows its focus to those Pentecostal churches that intentionally include hymn sessions in their liturgy. This makes it possible to capture the stylistic choices, linguistic variations, and cultural adaptations that come into play during hymn rendition. By engaging with both the performers (choirs, instrumentalists, leaders) and the receivers (the congregation), the study is able to present a holistic picture of how hymns function as both musical and communal acts of worship.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Given the large number of Pentecostal churches in Benin City, it would be impractical to include all of them in the scope of this study. For this reason, the researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique. This approach allows for the deliberate selection of churches that are known to use hymns as part of their worship practice. The choice of purposive sampling is rooted in the aim of obtaining rich, relevant, and detailed data, rather than aiming for numerical representation.

The sample size for the study consists of five Pentecostal churches drawn from different denominational backgrounds. This ensures variety in worship styles, theological emphases, and musical expressions. The selected churches represent a balance between large congregations with formal choir structures and smaller fellowships where hymn usage is more communal and less formally organized.

Within these churches, a total of fifteen hymns were identified and analyzed. The hymns were chosen based on three main criteria:

1. Frequency of Use – hymns that are regularly sung during services.
2. Thematic Richness – hymns that convey significant theological or spiritual themes.

3. Stylistic Variety – hymns that demonstrate different forms of adaptation in terms of rhythm, language, and performance style.

In addition to hymn analysis, twenty respondents were purposively selected for interviews. These respondents included choir leaders, instrumentalists, pastors, and long-standing congregational members, all of whom have direct experience with hymn performance and its role in Pentecostal worship. Their insights provided both technical and experiential perspectives, enriching the study with multiple layers of understanding.

This approach prioritizes depth over breadth, ensuring that the data collected is meaningful and contextually grounded. As Patton (230) notes, purposive sampling enables the researcher to focus on information-rich cases, producing insights that illuminate the subject of study more effectively than broad generalizations could.

3.5 Research Instruments

The instruments used in collecting data for this study include:

1. Observation: The researcher attended services in selected churches, taking detailed notes on the manner of hymn rendition, including variations in rhythm, melody, and congregational response.
2. Audio Recordings: Hymns were recorded to allow for repeated listening and phonological analysis.
3. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with choir leaders, pastors, and congregants to gain insight into their perceptions of hymn rendition.

4. Field Notes: In addition to audio recordings, descriptive notes were taken on gestures, instrumental accompaniments, and audience reactions.

The combination of these instruments enhances the credibility and richness of the data collected.

3.6 Method of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over a period of three months, covering both Sunday services and mid-week gatherings. The procedure involved the following steps:

Stage One: Gaining entry and permission from church leaders to observe and record services.

Stage Two: Participatory observation of hymn sessions, with the researcher sitting among the congregation.

Stage Three: Recording hymn renditions and taking notes on contextual features such as tempo, rhythm, and spontaneous improvisations.

Stage Four: Conducting interviews with respondents to capture their perspectives on why hymns are rendered the way they are.

Stage Five: Transcribing selected hymns for stylistic analysis at phonological, lexical, syntactic, and semantic levels.

This method ensured that the study did not only rely on texts of hymns but also incorporated their lived performance in Pentecostal worship.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using stylistic frameworks combined with ethnographic interpretation. The procedure is as follows:

- 1. Phonological Level:** Examining sound patterns such as rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, and tonal adaptation when hymns are sung in English, Pidgin, or Edo language.
- 2. Lexical Level:** Studying choice of words, archaism, biblical diction, repetition, and modification of original hymn texts.
- 3. Syntactic Level:** Analyzing sentence structures, parallelism, inversion, and rhetorical features present in hymns.
- 4. Semantic Level:** Exploring meanings conveyed by hymns, including theological concepts, metaphorical imagery, and symbolic language.
- 5. Performance Analysis:** Evaluating how improvisation, call-and-response, clapping, and instrumental accompaniment affect hymn rendition.

This multi-level analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the stylistic features of hymn performance in Pentecostal contexts.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Presentation of Data

4.1.1 Corpus of Hymns Analyzed

The study examined a corpus of ten hymns that were rendered across five selected Pentecostal churches in Benin City. These hymns were chosen on the basis of frequency of use, thematic depth, and stylistic richness. They represent a blend of classic Protestant hymns, translated versions, and adapted forms that continue to shape Pentecostal worship.

Among the traditional hymns frequently encountered were Amazing Grace, In Christ Alone, All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name, and Great Is Thy Faithfulness. These hymns are deeply embedded in Christian worship traditions and are valued for their strong theological content, lyrical beauty, and emotional resonance.

In addition, the study identified localized or translated versions of hymns such as Onward, Christian Soldiers and Blessed Assurance. These translations were often rendered in Edo or Pidgin English, reflecting the linguistic adaptability of congregations and the effort to make hymns accessible to a wider worship community.

The hymns in the corpus therefore cut across themes of grace, faith, assurance, divine sovereignty, perseverance, and hope. Their consistent use in Pentecostal services highlights both continuity with older Christian traditions and the creative adaptations that emerge when these hymns are reinterpreted in contemporary worship contexts.

This corpus provides the textual and musical material for subsequent stylistic and ethnographic analysis, allowing the study to explore not only the theological depth of the hymns but also their performance features and the congregational responses they evoke.

4.1.2 Observed Modifications and Analysis

During the course of observation, a number of stylistic modifications were noted in the rendition of hymns across the sampled Pentecostal churches. These modifications reveal how traditional hymns are reinterpreted in ways that suit the expressive nature of Pentecostal worship and the cultural realities of congregants.

Rhythm and Tempo

One of the most noticeable phonological modifications in Pentecostal hymn rendition is the alteration of rhythm and tempo. Hymns that are originally composed in slow and reflective styles, such as *Amazing Grace* and *It Is Well with My Soul*, but were often rendered at a faster pace with vibrant percussive accompaniment. The inclusion of drums, handclaps, and guitars introduces a steady backbeat that energizes the hymn and changes its emotional tone from solemn reflection to a more joyful testimony.

Tempo adjustments often occur at both micro and macro levels. Within verses, singers in most cases push or pull the tempo slightly, while choruses are usually performed at a more rapid pace, creating a climax of energy and intensity. Syncopation and rhythmic breaks further restructure the hymns, shifting emphasis from strict metrical regularity to participatory exuberance. In practice, these rhythmic innovations transform hymns from meditative pieces into collective celebrations, reinforcing the Pentecostal emphasis on praise, joy, and expressive worship.

Thus, rhythm and tempo in Pentecostal hymnody are not merely musical choices but theological statements. A hymn rendered slowly encourages reflection and penitence, whereas the same hymn sung with heightened tempo functions as testimony, drawing the worshippers into a shared atmosphere of victory and joy.

Instrumentation

A major stylistic feature observed was the instrumentation. Unlike mainline Protestant denominations such as Anglican or Methodist churches, which typically rely on the organ or piano to accompany hymns, Pentecostal churches employed a wide range of instruments. These included drums (both trap sets and local varieties), electric and bass guitars, tambourines,

keyboards, and handclaps. In some cases, indigenous percussion instruments such as the ogene (metal gong) or talking drum were incorporated.

This instrumentation often transformed hymns from solemn, reflective pieces into lively, dynamic songs. While the theological depth of the hymns was retained, their stylistic delivery carried a more celebratory tone, aligning with the expressive spirituality characteristic of Pentecostal worship. In some churches, hymns were rendered in a call-and-response pattern, with the choir or leader singing a line and the congregation echoing it, further reinforcing communal participation. Thus, the mode of rendition highlighted a balance between the traditional structure of hymns and the Pentecostal emphasis on vibrancy, spontaneity, and active congregational involvement.

These instruments did more than accompany the hymns; they transformed the atmosphere of worship. For example, in renditions of Amazing Grace, the gentle rhythm of the original hymn was replaced with upbeat drumming and syncopated keyboard accompaniment, creating a celebratory tone. Similarly, in Onward, Christian Soldiers, the inclusion of trumpets and percussive beats gave the hymn a militaristic energy, aligning the music with its lyrical theme of Christian perseverance. The Pentecostal style of instrumentation highlighted the adaptability of hymns, demonstrating that they could be contextualized into an African musical framework without losing their theological content.

Techniques of Performance.

From observations Pentecostal Churches adopt a different approach to rendering of hymns unlike the Traditional methods, they adopt styles like:

Improvisation and Addition: Choir leaders often introduced spontaneous improvisations, inserting new phrases, scriptural allusions, or even entire short verses not found in the original hymn. These additions, delivered with passion and creativity, reflected both personal spirituality and the Pentecostal emphasis on spontaneity in worship. Improvised phrases such as “Hallelujah, we give You praise” or “Jesus You reign forever” extended the hymns beyond their written form, blurring the line between structured hymnody and free praise.

Repetition of Chorus Lines: Repetition emerged as a central feature, particularly in the choruses or refrain sections. Lines were often sung multiple times beyond what is prescribed in the hymnals. This not only reinforced the message of the hymn but also created space for deeper congregational participation, as worshippers were able to internalize and echo the lines with increasing enthusiasm.

Call and Response: Another noticeable technique in Pentecostal hymn renditions is the adoption of call-and-response structures. Unlike parallelism and inversion, which are already present in many hymn texts, call-and-response is not typically part of the written hymn tradition. Rather, it emerges from the African oral performance context, where interactive dialogue between leader and audience is a central stylistic device.

During hymn renditions, a choir leader or pastor may sing or recite a line from the hymn, to which the congregation provides a response. For example:

Leader: “Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?”

Congregation: “No one, no one!”

This structure transforms the hymn from a monologic recitation into a dialogic and participatory performance. Call-and-response syntax also allows for theological reinforcement, as key affirmations (such as the uniqueness of God, the power of Christ, or the assurance of salvation) are echoed and confirmed by the worshipping community.

Overall, these techniques show that hymns in Pentecostal churches are not treated as rigid, fixed texts but as living expressions of worship. They are reshaped through rhythm, language, and improvisation to reflect both the theology and the cultural identity of the congregation.

Melody

The melody of Pentecostal hymns in Benin City is lively and full of feeling. It mixes Western hymns with local Edo music in a way that makes worship exciting and easy for everyone to join.

The songs use a back-and-forth style: one person sings a short line, and the whole church answers. This feels like a conversation and keeps everyone involved. The singer often goes up in pitch to build excitement, and the group replies with a strong, united sound.

Instead of using all the notes in a normal scale, these melodies use just five main notes, like in Edo folk songs. Singers slide between notes, bend them, or add little shakes to show joy, crying, or prayer. It sounds warm and familiar to local ears.

Each line is short and repeated many times. The same phrase can be sung over and over, getting louder or faster, with extra notes added each time. This helps people stay in worship for a long time and feel the Spirit moving.

The rhythm is bouncy and dance-like. People clap, stamp their feet, or move to the beat, even if the song is written simply. Drums and other local instruments join in, making the melody feel alive and full of energy.

The tune goes up and down to match the mood: it rises when calling on God, falls when giving praise or saying sorry, and holds long high notes when something powerful happens in prayer.

Overall, the melody is simple but powerful. It's made for everyone to sing, feel, and move together, turning a hymn into a shared moment with God that feels close to home.

Harmony

The original Traditional hymns as written contain four parts harmonies on the original hymns but are often accompanied by just mainly three parts and sometimes all render the verses in melody then switch to parts during the choruses.

Textural Density

Traditional Western hymns: Rich, four-part harmonies (soprano, alto, tenor, bass) with full chordal progressions, often supported by organs.

Benin City renditions: Predominantly monophonic or heterophonic—unison singing with subtle vocal overlaps—resulting in a sparser, more horizontal texture (e.g., Eki with gentle dissonances for emphasis).

Resolution and Dissonance

Traditional Western hymns: Focus on clear resolutions and consonance to convey theological certainty.

Benin City renditions: Introduce indigenous dissonances through vocal heterophony and minimal chord changes, adding emotional tension and release (e.g., Agbo mercy appeals with unresolved modal phrases).

Accompaniment Integration

Traditional Western hymns: Use fixed harmonic support from instruments like keyboards for stability.

Benin City renditions: Integrate traditional Edo percussion (e.g., talking drums, bells) to underpin sparse harmonies, creating polyrhythmic backdrops that prioritize vocal purity and cultural resonance.

4.1.3 Mode of Rendition in Churches

The mode of hymn rendition in the sampled Pentecostal churches reflected both continuity with Christian liturgical traditions and innovation shaped by Pentecostal worship culture. In most cases, hymns were introduced by a pastor, worship leader, or choir director, who either announced the hymn number from a hymnal or called it spontaneously, often linking it thematically to the flow of the service (e.g., during prayer, Holy Communion, or moments of reflection).

Once introduced, the hymns were sung congregationally, with the choir providing leadership in melody, harmony, and tempo. Congregational participation was strong, with

members singing, clapping, and sometimes swaying or dancing to the rhythm. This collective involvement distinguished Pentecostal hymn rendition from more formalized liturgies, underscoring the participatory ethos of Pentecostal worship.

4.2 Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of Pentecostal hymn renditions reveals distinct differences not only between Pentecostal and mainline church traditions. This analysis highlights the stylistic, cultural, and theological negotiations that occur in the process of hymn adaptation and performance in Pentecostal worship spaces in Benin City.

4.2.1 Pentecostal vs. Mainline Renditions

One of the clearest contrasts lies in the approach to hymn performance between Pentecostal and mainline churches such as Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist congregations. Mainline churches typically adhere strictly to the versions contained in official hymnals, following both the textual structure and musical notation with minimal deviation. Hymns are rendered solemnly, often accompanied only by the organ or piano, with the primary focus being liturgical order, reverence, and theological consistency. For example, Holy, Holy, Holy in an Anglican church is often sung in a slow, stately tempo, with strict adherence to the written score and without exclamatory interjections or improvisation.

In contrast, Pentecostal churches approach hymn rendition as a flexible, dynamic, and participatory practice. Rather than limiting themselves to the written text, Pentecostal choirs and worship leaders frequently modify rhythm, tempo, and textual arrangement to reflect the mood

of the service and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Improvisations such as the insertion of phrases (“Somebody give Him praise!”), call-and-response structures, and spontaneous repetitions were common features. Instrumentation was also notably broader, with the use of drums, guitars, keyboards, and other contemporary instruments that infused hymns with vibrancy and celebratory energy.

This divergence reflects deeper theological and philosophical orientations: while mainline traditions emphasize liturgical order, textual fidelity, and reverence, Pentecostal traditions emphasize Spirit-led spontaneity, inclusivity, and the active engagement of the congregation. Hymns in Pentecostal worship are therefore transformed from fixed texts into living, evolving acts of communal expression.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This research set out to investigate the stylistic features of hymn rendition in Pentecostal churches in Benin City. The study was guided by specific objectives: to identify the phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and stylistic features of Pentecostal hymn renditions; to analyze the role of performance and musical accompaniment in hymn delivery; and to examine the cultural and theological significance of these stylistic practices.

Chapter One introduced the study, providing the background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, and significance. It highlighted the importance of hymns as both religious and cultural artifacts that embody theological truths while reflecting socio-cultural

realities. The chapter also outlined the scope of the research, focusing on selected Pentecostal churches in Benin City.

Chapter Two reviewed related literature and theoretical perspectives. It clarified concepts such as hymnology, stylistics, Pentecostalism, and performance theory. The review examined works on hymn usage in African Christianity, stylistic approaches to religious texts, and ethnomusicological studies of Pentecostal worship. The theoretical framework combined stylistic theory, performance theory, and ethnomusicology, offering a multidimensional lens for analyzing hymn renditions.

Chapter Three discussed the research methodology. The study adopted a qualitative design, employing purposive sampling of five Pentecostal churches in Benin City: Church of God Mission International, Christ Embassy, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries, Winners Chapel, and Assemblies of God. Data collection methods included participant observation, audio recordings, and interviews with pastors, choir members, and congregants. Stylistic analysis was applied to transcribed hymn excerpts, supported by discourse and performance analysis. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and respect for worship practices were observed.

Chapter Four presented and analyzed the data. Hymns like Holy, Holy, Holy, Rock of Ages, and Onward Christian Soldiers were examined across phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and stylistic levels. Findings revealed that Pentecostal renditions feature repetition, code-switching between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages, rhythmic adaptation to African instruments, and performance techniques such as call-and-response and improvisation. The chapter also compared Pentecostal hymnody with mainline traditions, noting the greater flexibility and cultural integration in Pentecostal contexts.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that hymn rendition in Pentecostal churches in Benin City is both a linguistic and cultural phenomenon. Stylistically, it demonstrates a unique blend of global Christian hymn traditions and local Nigerian expressions. Linguistic analysis reveals creative manipulation of phonology, lexis, syntax, and semantics to fit the Pentecostal worship context. Performance analysis shows that hymns function as dynamic acts of faith, involving not only the voice but also the body, instruments, and communal participation.

Pentecostal hymnody in Benin City reflects the adaptability of Christianity in Africa. Rather than abandoning traditional hymnody, Pentecostal churches have re-styled it to align with African rhythms, languages, and spiritual concerns. This stylistic reconfiguration enhances accessibility, emotional engagement, and theological relevance. Ultimately, the study affirms that hymns remain central to Pentecostal identity, theology, and worship practice.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. For Pentecostal Churches

- Churches should document and preserve localized versions of hymns to safeguard cultural and linguistic adaptations.
- Worship leaders should balance creativity with theological accuracy, ensuring that adaptations do not distort hymn meaning.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on training choirs in stylistic diversity to enrich worship experiences.

2. For Hymnology and Music Scholars

- Scholars should expand research on African adaptations of Western hymn traditions to highlight the global-local dynamics of Christianity.
- Stylistic analysis should be applied more broadly to religious texts, bridging the gap between linguistics, literature, and theology.

3. For Theological Education

- Seminaries and Bible colleges should integrate hymnology and stylistic studies into their curriculum to prepare ministers for culturally relevant worship leadership.
- Students of theology should be exposed to both Western hymn traditions and African adaptations.

4. For Future Research

- Future studies should examine hymn rendition in other Nigerian cities for comparative insights.
- Quantitative research could measure congregational responses to different stylistic features of hymn rendition.
- Further research should explore the role of digital media in shaping Pentecostal hymnody in Nigeria.

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