



Multilingual Communication Strategies in African Religious Music: A Linguistic Study of Dholuo Ohangla Gospel Expression

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Abstract

This study explores multilingual communication strategies employed in contemporary Dholuo Ohangla gospel music, analysing how artists utilise various linguistic resources to enhance spiritual messages and engage audiences across cultural and linguistic boundaries within Kenya's multilingual religious environment. The research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach based on Relevance Theory to analyse four intentionally selected Dholuo Ohangla gospel songs. Data analysis focuses on identifying metaphorical expressions, patterns of code-switching between Dholuo, English, and Swahili, and stylistic devices that facilitate effective multilingual spiritual communication. It reveals sophisticated multilingual strategies, including the deliberate use of English military and technological terminology, inventive metaphorical structures combining animal, modern, and traditional imagery, and culturally embedded communication tools that preserve Luo cultural authenticity while reaching diverse audiences efficiently. The study concentrates on four songs from a single linguistic community, which limits the generalisability of the findings across African gospel music traditions. Future research should involve broader comparative analyses across multiple African languages and larger sample sizes to validate the results in different contexts. The findings inform multilingual education policies by demonstrating successful indigenous language adaptation strategies, guiding religious organisations in creating artistic expressions that serve as genuine cultural heritage, and thus warrant documentation and promotion.

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Introduction

Contemporary African religious music exemplifies the complex intersection of traditional cultural expressions and modern spiritual communication needs, reflecting global trends in religious music evolution while retaining unique regional characteristics. International research reveals that effective spiritual communication in diverse linguistic contexts requires a nuanced understanding of how different languages serve specific communicative, cultural, and identity functions within religious communities, with religious music providing rich environments for multilingual innovation due to cross-cultural communication requirements while maintaining authenticity (García & Wei, 2022). African gospel music research has uncovered continent-wide patterns of creative linguistic adaptation that maintain traditional spiritual functions while embracing modern possibilities, with West African



studies showing sophisticated code-switching strategies supporting local preservation and international engagement. In contrast, East African research demonstrates similar patterns across Swahili, Amharic, and Luganda contexts (Amusan, 2023). Global religious communities balance preserving traditional practices with adapting to modern demands, as evidenced in Hispanic Pentecostal churches in North America that innovatively incorporate multiple languages into worship (Crystal, 2022) and European immigrant churches developing sophisticated multilingual strategies (Nyandiwa, 2024).

East Africa's multilingual landscape offers unique opportunities for gospel music development. Uganda demonstrates a sophisticated integration of indigenous languages with English and Swahili, while Tanzanian artists create compositions that seamlessly blend multiple languages as unifying cultural forces (Nakamya, 2023). Kenya's status as a multilingual society, with over forty indigenous languages alongside English and Swahili, presents complex communicative challenges that reflect broader African patterns of linguistic diversity and cultural adaptation (Ezeh et al., 2022; Barasa, 2023). The country's colonial history and post-independence language policies have shaped environments where indigenous languages compete with official languages in public discourse. At the same time, the 2010 Constitution theoretically supports multilingual expression but often favours dominant languages in formal settings (Kioko, 2015). Different Kenyan communities have developed distinctive multilingual religious expression approaches, with various ethnic groups demonstrating sophisticated integration strategies that serve both traditional communities and urban populations (Wanjiku, 2020).

The emergence of Dholuo Ohangla gospel music signifies a notable development within Kenya's linguistic landscape because it demonstrates a successful adaptation of traditional musical styles for modern religious expression while retaining cultural authenticity and broadening communication reach. Unlike other Kenyan communities that mainly adopted Western musical styles for gospel, the Luo community's blending of traditional Ohangla rhythms with contemporary gospel messages shows innovative cultural adaptation, safeguarding vital musical heritage while meeting modern spiritual communication demands (Mutiga, 2021). However, limited research has explored Dholuo Ohangla gospel music specifically, despite its rising popularity and unique approach to merging traditional forms with modern multilingual strategies, which creates gaps in understanding how traditional African musical genres adapt to contemporary contexts. Theoretical insights into multilingual religious communication have advanced through developments in pragmatic linguistics, especially Relevance Theory applied to cross-cultural communication, revealing the cognitive processes through which audiences interpret meaning from multilingual religious texts (Sperber & Wilson, 2015). Nonetheless, the limited application of these theories to African religious music contexts hampers understanding of how indigenous communities employ multilingual strategies for effective spiritual communication, highlighting the need for focused studies of cases like Dholuo Ohangla gospel music.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Relevance Theory as developed by Sperber and Wilson (1995, 2002, 2015), which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how multilingual communication achieves effectiveness across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. Relevance Theory posits that human communication succeeds when it generates optimal relevance, attaining maximum cognitive effects with minimal processing effort for the audience. This framework proves particularly valuable for analysing Dholuo Ohangla gospel music because it explains how audiences construct meaning from complex communicative inputs that combine multiple languages, cultural references, and



metaphorical expressions within single musical compositions. The theory's central claim, that every communicative act creates an expectation of relevance, guides understanding of how gospel artists navigate the challenges of reaching diverse audience segments with varying linguistic competencies while maintaining cultural authenticity and ensuring broad accessibility (Wilson & Sperber, 2004). For code-switching analysis, Relevance Theory sheds light on how strategic language alternation serves multiple functions simultaneously, as when artists employ sequences like "Hallelujah Nyasaye, praise the Lord, erokamano Baba," each linguistic choice generating specific cognitive effects that maximise accessibility while preserving authenticity for multilingual audiences (García & Wei, 2022).

The study combines insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff & Turner, 1989) to understand systematic metaphorical patterns, while prioritising Relevance Theory as the main analytical framework. Relevance Theory's view of metaphor as loosely talk involving the creation of ad hoc concepts proves better for analysing how metaphorical expressions succeed in communication within specific contexts. When Dholuo gospel artists refer to Jesus as "sibuor" (lion), audiences form contextually relevant ad hoc concepts that only include spiritually important traits rather than accessing full encyclopaedic knowledge about lions (Sperber & Wilson, 2008). This perspective guides analysis by exploring how various metaphorical expressions, such as lion metaphors signalling authority and kingship versus buffalo metaphors highlighting steadfastness and protection, serve distinct spiritual roles through contextual adaptation (Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008). Incorporating technological metaphors like "teknoloji mamalo" (great technology) for divine qualities illustrates how Relevance Theory explains how audiences build ad hoc concepts, connecting familiar technological experiences with abstract spiritual ideas, creating a new understanding that enhances both cognitive grasp and spiritual significance (Awuor & Anudo, 2016).

Method

This qualitative research employed a descriptive analytical approach based on pragmatic linguistic analysis to investigate multilingual communication patterns in contemporary Dholuo Ohangla gospel music (Bayisa, 2020). The study adopted Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, 2002) as its theoretical framework, recognising its particular usefulness for analysing how spiritual messages are conveyed through musical language and how audiences interpret meaning from complex linguistic and cultural inputs.

The research design used purposive sampling to ensure thorough representation of different artistic styles and variations within the Dholuo Ohangla gospel music genre (Anudo, 2018). This sampling approach allowed for targeted analysis of particularly rich linguistic examples while maintaining enough diversity to support meaningful generalisations about multilingual communication patterns in this musical context. Sample selection criteria included popularity within the Luo community and the wider Kenyan audience, linguistic complexity showing diverse multilingual strategies, thematic variety relevant to contemporary spiritual expression, and availability of complete textual content for detailed linguistic analysis.

Song Selection and Analysis Framework

Four Dholuo Ohangla gospel songs were purposively selected to represent different approaches to multilingual communication within the genre:

NYASAYE MADUONG' (*The Great God*) by *Jemila Atieno* was chosen for its refined integration of traditional Luo spiritual titles with modern gospel messaging, showcasing how indigenous religious vocabulary can be revitalised for contemporary spiritual expression. The song begins with the powerful declaration "*Nyasaye maduong', Nyasaye maber, en ema Ruodh polo gi pinyi*" (*The great God, the*



good God, he is the King of heaven and earth), affirming divine sovereignty through traditional Luo theological ideas. The repetitive praise phrase "*Erokamano Nyasaye, erokamano Baba*" (Thank you God, thank you Father) illustrates how Luo expressions of gratitude preserve their spiritual power in modern contexts. The multilingual bridge "*Hallelujah, praise the Lord, Nyasaye osekonyo*" (Hallelujah, praise the Lord, God has helped) features strategic code-switching that heightens emotional impact while maintaining cultural authenticity.

YAYE MARIA (Oh Mary) by Maureen's was chosen for its innovative approach to biblical narrative adaptation within Luo cultural frameworks, representing sophisticated strategies for making universal Christian stories culturally specific and locally relevant. The narrative opening "*Yaye Maria nyar Daudi, isebed gi ich mar Nyasaye*" (Oh Mary, daughter of David, you have been with child of God) demonstrates how biblical characters are positioned within Luo kinship structures to enhance cultural accessibility. The emotional appeal "*Konywa Maria, konywa mama wa*" (Help us, Mary, help us our mother) shows integration of Catholic devotional practices with traditional Luo ancestral veneration patterns. The contemporary reference "*Technology ok nyal, Nyasaye ema nyalo gik moko duto*" (Technology cannot, God is the one who can do everything) demonstrates creative juxtaposition of modern limitations with divine omnipotence.

BABA WADUOGO (Father You Have Returned) by Princess Jully was chosen for its depiction of resurrection theology using Luo cultural ideas of return and restoration. It illustrates how complex theological doctrines can be expressed through culturally rooted metaphorical frameworks. The celebratory declaration "*Baba waduogo, waduogo gi teko*" (Father, you have returned, you have returned with power) employs Luo notions of a powerful return from journeys to convey resurrection victory. The testimony structure "*Ne anondi gi kuyo, to sani mor omaka*" (I was in sorrow and grief, but now joy has seized me) reflects traditional Luo emotional expression patterns adapted for Christian testimony. The community call "*Bi wagouru malo, Yesu oseduogo*" (Come let us lift up high, Jesus has returned) demonstrates how individual spiritual experience becomes a communal celebration through traditional Luo collective expression patterns.

WANG' NYASAYE (God's Light) by Paul Msafis was chosen for its sophisticated metaphorical development of light imagery within Luo cultural and environmental contexts, illustrating how universal Christian symbols can be adapted to specific cultures through indigenous conceptual frameworks. The metaphorical foundation "*Wang' Nyasaye rieny e chuny joma ohero, tipo gi mudho ok nyal romo*" (God's light shines in the hearts of those who love him, darkness and light cannot meet) employs traditional Luo light-darkness cosmology for Christian spiritual expression. The practical application "*Ka wang'e oserieny kuomi, to ibiro bet gi mor*" (When his light has shone on you, then you will have joy) demonstrates how metaphorical frameworks translate into experiential guidance. The community witness "*Wang'e orieny, wang'e orieny, ji duto nene*" (His light shines, his light shines, all people see) shows how individual spiritual experience becomes public testimony through repetitive communal declaration.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data collection involved several stages of textual analysis, including transcribing complete song texts with attention to pronunciation, rhythm, and linguistic variation, translation methods that use both literal and contextual approaches to capture denotative meaning and cultural significance, and consulting with native Dholuo speakers to ensure accurate interpretation of cultural and linguistic nuances.



Results and Findings

This section presents the findings from analysing multilingual communication strategies in four purposively selected Dholuo Ohangla gospel songs. The results are organised into three main areas aligned with the study's research objectives: linguistic strategies used for cross-cultural spiritual communication, metaphorical and stylistic devices employed to enrich spiritual meaning, and the functions of multilingual strategies in negotiating cultural identity within Kenya's linguistic landscape. The analysis uncovers a sophisticated level of multilingual competence that allows artists to facilitate inclusive spiritual communication while maintaining cultural authenticity and spiritual impact across diverse audience segments. The findings demonstrate how Dholuo gospel artists strategically utilise code-switching patterns, metaphorical frameworks, and stylistic devices to ensure relevance for different linguistic communities, while preserving key cultural and spiritual functions.

Song Selection and Analysis Framework

Four Dholuo Ohangla gospel songs were purposively selected to represent different approaches to multilingual communication within the genre:

NYASAYE MADUONG' (The Great God) by Jemila Atieno revitalises traditional spiritual vocabulary with modern expression. The opening "Nyasaye maduong', Nyasaye maber, en ema Ruodh polo gi piny" (The great God, the good God, he is the King of heaven and earth) establishes divine sovereignty using traditional Luo theological concepts. The song demonstrates strategic code-switching through "Hallelujah, praise the Lord, Nyasaye osekenyo" (Hallelujah, praise the Lord, God has helped), which enhances emotional impact while maintaining cultural authenticity.

YAYE MARIA (Oh Mary) by Maureen adapts biblical narratives within Luo cultural frameworks. The phrase "Yaye Maria nyar Daudi, isebed gi ich mar Nyasaye" (Oh Mary, daughter of David, you have been with child of God) positions biblical characters within Luo kinship structures, making universal Christian stories locally relevant. The song creates a deliberate contrast between modern limitations and divine power through "Technology ok nyal, Nyasaye ema nyalo gik moko duto" (Technology cannot, God is the one who can do everything).

BABA WADUOGO (Father, You Have Returned) by Princess Jully conveys resurrection theology through Luo ideas of return and renewal. The jubilant phrase "Baba waduogo, waduogo gi teko" (Father, you have returned, you have returned with power) uses traditional themes of a powerful return from journeys to express the triumph of resurrection. The testimony "Ne anondi gi kuyo, to sani mor omaka" (I was in sorrow and grief, but now joy has seized me) adapts traditional emotional expression patterns for Christian testimony.

WANG' NYASAYE (God's Light) by Paul Msafi enhances light imagery within Luo environmental contexts. The phrase "Wang' Nyasaye rieny e chuny joma ohero, tipo gi mudho ok nyal romo" (God's light shines in the hearts of those who love him, darkness and light cannot meet) employs traditional Luo light-darkness cosmology for Christian expression. The repeated line "Wang'e orieny, wang'e orieny, ji duto nene" (His light shines, his light shines, all people see) transforms individual spiritual experience into a collective public testimony.

Linguistic Strategies for Cross-Cultural Spiritual Communication

The analysis revealed sophisticated multilingual integration strategies that serve multiple communicative functions while maintaining cultural authenticity and spiritual effectiveness (Shitandi & Wanyama, 2014). Artists demonstrated remarkable competence in utilising linguistic resources from Dholuo, English, and Swahili to create inclusive yet culturally grounded spiritual expression.



The findings indicate three primary linguistic strategy categories: strategic code-switching for audience inclusion, lexical borrowing for conceptual expansion, and syntactic integration for cultural authenticity maintenance.

Strategic code-switching patterns display a sophisticated understanding of audience diversity and communicative effectiveness across linguistic boundaries. Jemila Atieno "NYASAYE MADUONG" exemplifies intra-sentential code-switching through the phrase "*Hallelujah Nyasaye, praise the Lord, erokamano Baba*" (Hallelujah God, praise the Lord, thank you Father), where English religious terminology enhances emotional intensity while Dholuo maintains cultural specificity (Crystal, 2022). This pattern serves multiple functions: creating an inclusive spiritual community across linguistic boundaries, boosting emotional impact through linguistic variety, and preserving Luo cultural identity through syntactic structures and core vocabulary retention.

Inter-sentential code-switching happens when artists alternate between languages across sentence boundaries to reach different audience groups while keeping the overall unity of the message. Paul Msafi's "WANG' NYASAYE" shows this approach through the sequence "*Computer ok nyal ngolo chuny dhano*" (Computer cannot change a person's heart) followed by "*But God's light can transform everything*", creating a deliberate contrast between technological limits and divine power while effectively engaging both Dholuo and English-speaking audiences.

Lexical borrowing strategies enable conceptual expansion by linking traditional spiritual vocabulary with modern experiential areas. The use of technological terminology demonstrates creative adaptation of current conceptual frameworks for spiritual expression, with Lady Maureen's "YAYE MARIA" employing "*Technology ok nyal kony dhano, to Nyasaye ema konyo*" (Technology cannot help a person, but God is the one who helps) to assert spiritual dominance over technological solutions, while recognising the modern presence of technology in audience experience (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020).

Metaphorical and Stylistic Enhancement of Spiritual Meaning

Animal metaphors form the most prominent framework in the analysed songs, showing creative ways of using familiar experiential domains for spiritual expression (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Traditional Luo animal symbolism provides mental links to understanding divine traits, with lion images representing authority and fearlessness, buffalo metaphors highlighting steadfastness and protection, and light imagery connecting environmental experience with spiritual illumination through systematic metaphor development that creates rich ideas about divine qualities. Modern metaphorical adaptations show how artists creatively blend current experiences with traditional spiritual ideas, especially through technological metaphors in Pastor Willy Paul Msafi's "WANG' NYASAYE" that make deliberate contrasts between human technological achievements and divine powers (García & Wei, 2022). The phrase "*Computer ok nyal ngolo chuny dhano, to wang' Nyasaye ema nyalo*" (Computer cannot change a person's heart, but God's light can) demonstrates sophisticated metaphorical reasoning, grounding abstract spiritual concepts in concrete modern experience while positioning spiritual solutions as better than technological fixes.

Stylistic devices, including repetition, rhetorical questions, and personification, serve various communicative functions, enhancing both aesthetic appeal and spiritual impact by creating rhythmic patterns that aid memorisation and build cumulative spiritual influence. Desmuzik "BABA WADUOGO" employs repetitive celebration "*Baba waduogo, waduogo gi teko*" (Father, you have returned, you have returned with power) to generate an emotional crescendo while reinforcing resurrection theology through rhythmic emphasis (Muller, 2019). Rhetorical questions involve audiences in active meaning construction while asserting spiritual truths through implied answers,



fostering cognitive engagement that goes beyond passive listening by encouraging audiences to access stored spiritual knowledge and develop personal spiritual application. Personification devices make abstract spiritual concepts tangible and experientially approachable, attributing human characteristics to divine qualities that foster emotional connection and practical understanding while maintaining theological integrity and cultural authenticity.

Cultural and Identity Negotiation Through Multilingual Strategies

The analysis uncovered sophisticated identity negotiation strategies that allow artists and audiences to maintain Luo cultural distinctiveness while engaging effectively in broader Kenyan national and East African regional cultural dialogues through multilingual choices that serve multiple identity functions at the same time (Githiora, 2018). These strategies safeguard Luo cultural heritage with traditional vocabulary and syntactic structures, assert Kenyan national citizenship through Swahili inclusion, and connect with the global Christian community via English religious terminology, as shown in Swahili incorporation patterns that position artists within East African rather than solely Luo or Western Christian traditions. The phrase "Mama Maria, omba kwa ajili yetu" (Mother Mary, pray for us) in Lady Maureen's "YAYE MARIA" promotes pan-East African Catholic identity, transcending ethnic boundaries while maintaining Luo cultural particularities in other compositional elements, fostering an inclusive spiritual community while upholding cultural uniqueness (Mazrui & Mazrui, 2021).

English integration serves both functional and symbolic purposes expanding communicative reach while asserting participation in global Christian discourse, exemplified in the celebratory sequence "Praise God, Baba waduogo gi teko" (Praise God, Father you have returned with power) in Desmuzik "BABA WADUOGO" that demonstrates how English enhances emotional intensity while maintaining Luo theological specificity, suggesting sophisticated understanding of how linguistic choices serve both local cultural preservation and global spiritual connectivity functions. Traditional cultural elements including kinship terminology, ancestral veneration patterns, and community celebration structures provide frameworks for adapting universal Christian concepts to Luo cultural contexts, as seen in the phrase "Yaye Maria nyar Daudi" (Oh Mary daughter of David) that positions biblical characters within Luo kinship structures, making universal Christian narratives culturally specific and locally relevant while maintaining theological integrity, demonstrating that successful cross-cultural religious communication requires cultural translation rather than simple linguistic translation (Adeoye, 2021).

English Integration Patterns and Metaphorical Analysis

English Integration Through Metaphorical Loan Word Borrowing

English integration in Dholuo Ohangla gospel music mainly occurs through metaphorical loan words that serve specific communicative functions beyond simple vocabulary addition (Onyango, 2014). These borrowed terms act as complete metaphorical frameworks organising spiritual understanding via familiar conceptual domains rather than just lexical replacements. Religious terminology integration shows this pattern through phrases like "Hallelujah, praise the Lord, Nyasaye osekonyo" (Hallelujah, praise the Lord, God has helped) in Jemila Atieno's "NYASAYE MADUONG," where borrowed English expressions carry embedded metaphors of universal worship that go beyond linguistic boundaries while keeping Dholuo grammatical structures (Crystal, 2022). The term "Hallelujah" illustrates metaphorical embedding by activating ideas of divine transcendence, spiritual community, and universal praise that extend beyond its literal Hebrew origin. This allows the



borrowed term to connect cultural boundaries while keeping spiritual authenticity and fostering meaningful dialogue between modern experiences and traditional wisdom.

Technological and Military Metaphor Systems

Contemporary vocabulary integration reveals sophisticated metaphorical frameworks where technological and military terms create deliberate contrasts between human achievements and divine capabilities through figurative language that transforms literal meanings into spiritual discourse. Maureen's "YAYE MARIA" demonstrates this through "Technology ok nyal konyo dhano, to Nyasaye ema konyo" (Technology cannot help a person, but God is the one who helps), where "technology" functions metaphorically to represent the entire conceptual domain of human advancement rather than specific devices, activating embedded associations of human limitation versus divine omnipotence, temporal solutions versus eternal salvation, and material progress versus spiritual transformation (Pennycook & Makoni, 2020). Msafi's "WANG' NYASAYE" advances this pattern through "Computer ok nyal ngolo chuny dhano, to wang' Nyasaye ema nyalo" (Computer cannot change a person's heart, but God's light can), where "computer" metaphorically embodies computational logic, artificial intelligence, and technological efficiency, deliberately contrasted with divine attributes to assert spiritual superiority while acknowledging contemporary technological relevance. Military terminology borrowing follows similar patterns, with terms like "Major," "Commander," and "King" functioning as metaphorical frameworks organising spiritual understanding through hierarchical structures that map military authority onto divine sovereignty, creating accessible conceptual bridges between familiar institutional power structures and abstract theological concepts.

Animal Metaphor Systems and Figurative Expression

Animal metaphors form the most sophisticated framework in Dholuo gospel music, showcasing remarkable creativity in adapting familiar experiential realms for spiritual expression through systematic figurative language that turns concrete animal traits into abstract divine qualities (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The lion metaphor in "YESU MEJA" works via complex cognitive mapping where JESUS IS A LION creates contextually fitting spiritual meanings by selectively highlighting specific leonine traits: apex predator status symbolises spiritual dominance over evil, fearless hunting embodies divine courage in facing spiritual opposition, protective pride leadership stands for divine care for believers, and territorial dominance relates to divine kingship and ultimate authority (Wilson & Sperber, 2004). Buffalo metaphors in "POD IPEK" highlight different divine qualities through distinctive behavioural traits that function figuratively: steadfast persistence in challenging terrain symbolises divine faithfulness during trials, unwavering protective instincts embody divine protection of believers, smart environmental adaptation demonstrates divine wisdom in changing circumstances, and robust physical resilience conveys divine strength to overcome obstacles. Modern metaphor adaptations incorporate new conceptual domains with figurative language, such as "teknoloji mamalo" (great technology) which metaphorically locates divine power within efficiency and reliability frameworks, bulldozer imagery that emphasises divine capacity to remove obstacles and change circumstances, and "supa pawa" (super power) metaphors inspired by global political discourse that symbolise divine authority beyond human institutions (Tendahl & Gibbs, 2008).

Swahili Integration and Stylistic Devices

Swahili incorporation occurs selectively through strategic linguistic choices that embed spiritual messages within broader Kenyan cultural contexts while preserving Luo specificity, mainly through religious terminology like "Amina" (Amen) that carries pan-African significance beyond ethnic boundaries and reflects Kenya's multilingual landscape where Swahili acts as a bridge among



communities (García & Wei, 2022). Stylistic devices enhance both aesthetic appeal and spiritual effectiveness via sophisticated linguistic mechanisms, including repetitive structures like "Sibuor Yesu Meja" that create musical patterns for easier memorisation while fostering cumulative spiritual impact through sustained metaphorical development. Strategic code-switching patterns demonstrate advanced audience awareness through intra-sentential switching within Dholuo grammatical structures and inter-sentential alternation across sentence boundaries. These stylistic elements produce hybrid expressions that expand semantic possibilities while maintaining overall coherence, accommodating diverse audience segments through multilingual choices that uphold cultural authenticity and spiritual integrity, reflecting broader trends where indigenous languages sustain cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, English facilitates international connectivity, and Swahili supports national integration within East African multilingual communication.

Discussion

Global Patterns, Theoretical Contributions, and Regional African Implications

The linguistic strategies in Dholuo Ohangla gospel music showcase sophisticated multilingual skills that align with global patterns of successful multilingual religious expression while displaying unique African innovations through traditional musical structures and indigenous metaphors (Ndege et al., 2019; Crystal, 2022). The application of Relevance Theory reveals how artists use diverse linguistic resources to achieve maximum relevance for different audiences, providing empirical evidence for theoretical predictions about multilingual communication while illustrating that metaphorical strategies serve to build bridges across cultural boundaries through shared cognitive foundations (Sperber & Wilson, 2015; Amusan, 2023). The integration of traditional Luo animal metaphors with modern technological imagery creates a meaningful synthesis that addresses contemporary spiritual needs while honouring cultural heritage. This challenges the prediction of indigenous language decline in globalised settings by highlighting creative innovation that broadens communicative possibilities while safeguarding essential cultural functions (García & Wei, 2022; Nakamya, 2023). These effective multilingual strategies serve as valuable models for understanding broader African cultural adaptation patterns, demonstrating that successful cultural preservation requires dynamic adaptation rather than static maintenance, and that African communities possess sophisticated resources for navigating global contexts while maintaining their distinctiveness (Muller, 2019; Mutiga, 2021). The documented approach provides insights into how indigenous language cultural production can generate significant economic value while preserving heritage, supporting arguments for greater investment in indigenous language development, and showing that cultural preservation and economic growth can be mutually reinforcing goals, with implications for language vitality theory and continental cultural policy development.

Kenyan National Development and Cross-Cultural Identity Construction

The multilingual strategies documented in Dholuo Ohangla gospel music have essential implications for Kenya's language policy development, especially concerning constitutional provisions supporting indigenous language development and cultural heritage preservation (Kioko, 2015). The successful adaptation of Dholuo offers empirical evidence that indigenous languages can thrive through innovative adaptation strategies while revealing complex identity construction mechanisms that facilitate navigation of Kenya's intricate multilingual landscape (Githiora, 2018). Strategic use of Swahili elements fosters an inclusive spiritual community while maintaining Luo cultural distinctiveness, demonstrating how linguistic choices serve multiple identity functions with implications for national integration. These findings support the implementation of constitutional language provisions by indicating that effective indigenous language development relies on



promoting creative innovation rather than enforcing traditional patterns (Wanjiku, 2020). The deliberate integration of traditional and contemporary expressions shows that successful indigenous language adaptation depends on inventive integration strategies, contributing to language vitality theory by illustrating that effective innovation preserves cultural knowledge systems while broadening application domains and supporting both cultural preservation and national unity objectives (Mbesa, 2019).

Conclusion

Contemporary Dholuo Ohangla gospel music demonstrates advanced multilingual communication strategies that effectively blend traditional cultural expression with modern spiritual needs through innovative integration of Dholuo, English, and Swahili sources. The analysis shows that artists utilise strategic code-switching, metaphorical frameworks, and mechanisms for cultural adaptation to create inclusive spiritual expressions that uphold Luo authenticity while engaging diverse audiences. These findings reveal that successful African religious communication requires linguistic creativity that respects heritage while embracing modern relevance. Educational language policies should therefore recognise and embed these multilingual strategies into formal curricula, celebrating creative multilingual expression as a sign of advanced linguistic competence rather than deficiency, while promoting indigenous language development through modern artistic innovation. The sophisticated linguistic and cultural innovations observed mark significant achievements that contribute to ongoing cultural vitality and provide valuable models for understanding how African communities adapt to contemporary contexts while safeguarding essential cultural functions, warranting further research across different gospel traditions and linguistic groups.

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