

Contextual Dynamics and Transitivity Choices in Selected Hymns of Exaltation from Western and Nigerian Christian Traditions

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ABSTRACT

Hymns of exaltation are a vital form of Christian sacred discourse through which worshippers express praise, gratitude, and reverence, reflecting the cultural and situational contexts of their production. While previous studies have examined hymn texts from theological, historical, and musical perspectives, comparatively little attention has been paid to how contextual dynamics shape grammatical meaning-making, particularly in cross-cultural comparisons. This study examines contextual dynamics and transitivity choices in selected Western and Nigerian Christian hymns of exaltation. It aims to identify and analyze the contextual underpinnings of the hymns, discuss prominent transitivity patterns, and compare the hymns to reveal convergence and divergence between traditions. The data comprise four hymns: Carl Boberg's *How Great Thou Art* and Fanny Crosby's *To God Be the Glory* from the Western tradition, and Akanbi Olorunkosebi's *We Praise You, Lord King of Zion* and Bola Illori's *Lord, Thank You for a Peaceful Night* from the Nigerian tradition. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative textual interpretation with quantitative analysis of transitivity processes. The theoretical framework integrates Kecskes' *Situation-Bound Utterances* and Halliday's *Systemic Functional Grammar*, emphasizing transitivity for examining experiential meanings. Western hymns and composers' backgrounds were sourced online, while Nigerian hymns were obtained directly from the hymnists. Findings indicate that Western hymns foreground praise, awe, and gratitude, whereas Nigerian hymns emphasize magnification, appreciation, and thanksgiving. The presence of verbal processes in Nigerian hymns reflects a communal, dialogic orientation, contrasting with the individualistic, introspective approach of Western hymns. The study concludes that contextual dynamics significantly shape transitivity choices and recommends broader cross-cultural studies with expanded datasets.

KEYWORDS: Exaltation; Contextual Dynamics; Transitivity; Sacred Discourse, Western

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
03 February 2026

Available on:
<https://ijiissh.com/>

INTRODUCTION

Christian hymnody represents a longstanding and influential genre of religious literature, functioning not only as musical worship but also as expressive texts that reveal theological beliefs, cultural orientations, and communal values. Hymns of exaltation in particular foreground themes of divine greatness, gratitude, and worship, and they have historically played crucial roles in shaping devotional practices across diverse Christian traditions. For example, "How Great Thou Art," originally composed in Swedish by Carl Boberg in 1885 and later translated into English, gained global popularity through mid-20th-century evangelistic campaigns and remains one of the most recognised hymns of praise worldwide (Wikipedia, 2025). Similarly, Fanny J. Crosby's 19th-century composition *To God Be the Glory* has endured as a hymn of joyful declaration of divine works, especially through its use in Billy Graham crusades and subsequent inclusion in hymnals across denominations (UM Discipleship Ministries, 2025; Hymnary.org, 2025). The Nigerian hymns on the other hand, composed in 1978 and 1982 came as a result of display of talent and scriptural knowledge.

Despite the prominence of these Western hymn texts, there is comparatively limited scholarship on how contextual dynamics of production and reception intersect with linguistic patterns such as transitivity, which construe experiential meanings in text. Linguistic approaches grounded in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) demonstrate that transitivity choices reflect how writers construe experience through processes, participants, and circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Alongside this, Kecskes' perspective on *Situation-Bound Utterances* highlights that meaning is shaped not only by grammatical features but also by situational context (Kecskes, 2003). When applied to sacred texts, these frameworks can illuminate how cultural contexts influence the expression of exaltation in both Western hymns and those from African settings, where hymnody has evolved in dynamic modes of praise and communal interaction. Yet, comparative studies that integrate these linguistic frameworks with cross-cultural hymn texts

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remain sparse. This study therefore investigates selected Western and Nigerian hymns of exaltation to reveal the interplay between contextual dynamics and transitivity choices in presenting devotional meanings across traditions.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to investigate the contextual dynamics and transitivity choices in selected hymns of exaltation from Western and Nigerian Christian tradition. The objectives are to:

1. Identify and examine the contextual dynamics present in the selected Western and Nigerian hymns of exaltation.
2. analyze the prominent transitivity choices in the hymn texts and their contribution to construing experiential meanings.
3. compare and contrast the selected Western and Nigerian hymns in order to reveal patterns of convergence and divergence in linguistic and contextual expression.

Research Questions

1. What contextual dynamics are evident in the selected Western and Nigerian hymns of exaltation?
2. What are the prominent transitivity choices in the selected hymns, and how do they contribute to construing experiential meanings?
3. How do the selected Western and Nigerian hymns compare and contrast in terms of contextual and transitivity patterns, and what patterns of convergence or divergence emerge across the two traditions?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative textual analysis with quantitative examination of transitivity patterns in hymn texts. A mixed-methods design was chosen to capture both the depth of contextual and linguistic nuances (qualitative) and measurable patterns in the use of processes, participants, and circumstances (quantitative).

The data comprised four hymns of exaltation: two Western hymns—Carl Boberg's "How Great Thou Art" and Fanny Crosby's "To God Be the Glory: —and two Nigerian hymns—Akanbi Olorunkosebi's "We Praise You, Lord King of Zion" and Bola Ilori's "Lord, Thank You for a Peaceful Night". The Western hymns and background information on their composers were retrieved from reputable online sources, while the Nigerian hymns were obtained directly from the hymnists, ensuring authenticity and contextual relevance.

The study's theoretical framework integrated Keeskes (2010) Situation-Bound Utterances and Halliday and 's Systemic Functional Linguistics. Keeskes' notion was employed to account for the influence of situational and cultural context on meaning-making, while Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly its transitivity system was used to analyse how processes, participants, and circumstances in the hymns encode experiential meanings. The combination of these frameworks allowed for a detailed exploration of the interaction between linguistic choices and contextual factors, highlighting both cultural specificity and cross-cultural patterns in the construction of exaltation.

Data analysis involved identifying and categorizing transitivity processes followed by frequency counts and qualitative interpretation to understand their functional significance. Comparative analysis across the two traditions was conducted to reveal patterns of convergence and divergence in contextual dynamics and transitivity choices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG)**, particularly its transitivity system, developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), and Situation-Bound Utterances (SBUs) theory by Keeskes (2003). The combination of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive examination of both the linguistic structure and the contextual forces shaping hymn texts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly interest in religious language and hymnody has grown across disciplines, but much of the research remains limited in scope or method. Analysing religious discourse broadly, studies have shown that language plays a central role in framing religious experience and belief, providing tools for understanding how texts convey spiritual meaning in context (Wilson et al., 2021). However, such works often take a *descriptive approach to religious discourse without focusing on grammatical systems like transitivity that foreground experiential meaning.

In discourse analysis research, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) and transitivity frameworks have been applied to diverse texts to reveal how meaning and context interplay. For example, transitivity analysis of song lyrics discourse highlights how process types reflect cultural and experiential patterns emphasising the relation between text and cultural context (Siahaan et al., 2025). ([ejournal.unib.ac.id][2]) Similarly, studies of transitivity in political or social texts show how process distributions shape narrative and ideology (Muhammad, 2024; Asante et al., 2025). ([iprjb.org][3]) However, these analyses focus on secular discourse or general cultural texts, not hymnody or religious musical texts.

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Recent work specifically on hymns in African contexts has begun to address linguistic and discursive features. For instance, Ojo Akinleye and Lanre-Atoyebi (2024) investigated ethnosentential strategies in Nigerian hymnody, revealing the use of cultural imagery and collectivization in hymn texts. Their study contributes valuable insights into linguistic and cultural variation, but it relies on Critical Discourse Analysis frameworks rather than systematic grammatical analysis of transitivity. Oduola and Lanre-Atoyebi (2024) also explored text processing and discursive dynamics in Eurocentric and Nigerian hymns, identifying stylistic features and communal rhetorical patterns. While this work illuminates cultural discursive features, it does not specifically quantify or compare transitivity processes limiting depth in grammatical meaning details. ([mediterraneanpublications.com].

Other hymn studies using linguistic or pragmatic approaches include speech act analyses of Christian hymns, which demonstrate how hymns perform communicative functions beyond musical roles. However, such studies focus on speech acts rather than experiential grammar or contextual nuance (Nnamdi-Eruchalu & Nwude, 2022). ([IRE Journals][6]) A pragmatic analysis of Christian hymns likewise examines doctrinal conveyance across denominations but lacks a systematic grammatical framework like transitivity. ([acjoi.org]

In summary, while research has addressed aspects of religious language, cultural discourse in hymns, and broad applications of transitivity in diverse texts, there remains a clear gap few studies apply quantitative and qualitative transitivity analysis to hymnody in a cross-cultural comparative context Most hymn research is descriptive or culturally oriented without deeply interrogating how contextual dynamics shape experiential meanings through specific grammatical choices. The current study fills this gap by combining mixed-methods transitivity analysis with a cross-cultural comparison of selected Western and Nigerian hymns of exaltation—offering both frequency patterns and contextual interpretation that previous research has not systematically achieved.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study delves into the intricate dynamics of context and language in selected hymns of exaltation from Western and Nigerian Christian traditions with a specific focus on the interplay between contextual dynamics and transitivity choices. The four hymns selected (two for each tradition) have the same discourse issue of praise and worship, which is situated within specific context of exaltation. While the primary context could be situational, historical, social, and cultural, a more granular examination of the hymn texts reveals subtler contexts that emerge within these broader ones.

For example, within the context of exaltation, further sub-contexts such as praise and magnification, gratitude and praise, appreciation and thanksgiving are identified. This multilayered contextualization underscores both points of convergence and divergence in the expression of Christian faith across both traditions as would be observed in the analysis below.

This study also draws on Halliday's Transitivity System of Ideational Metafunction. This framework enabled a detailed analysis of the textual elements that constituted both hymn traditions, including the processes, participants, and circumstances that are encoded in the language. This helps to shed light on the distinct characteristics of each tradition.

Context of Exaltation

Exaltation, in the context of hymn analysis, refers to the act of elevating or extolling God's majesty, power and greatness. It involves the expression of reverence, awe and admiration for God's character, attributes and works. Exaltation is a fundamental aspect of hymnody as it enables worshippers to acknowledge and honour God's supremacy and sovereignty.

In hymns, exaltation entails several key components which include gratitude, thanksgiving, awe, praise and adoration. Gratitude and thanksgiving involve expressing thanks and appreciation for God's blessings, provisions and mercies. Awe inspires a sense of reverence, wonder and fear in response to God's majesty, power and holiness. Praise declares God's excellence, greatness and worthiness of worship, while adoration honours and worships God. These components of exaltation are often intertwined and expressed through various discourse devices as would be observed in this analysis.

Context of Praise and Awe in Carl Boberg's "How Great Thou Art"

The interpretation of hymnal lyrics is deeply influenced by the situation in which the hymn was written, as well as the historical, cultural and religious context. This is particularly evident in Carl Boberg's hymn "How Great Thou Art" where the meaning and significance of the lexical items are intricately linked to the author's context—his personal experience, cultural background and religious beliefs.

Boberg's hymn was written in the 20th century, inspired by the natural beauty of Sweden, particularly after a summer thunderstorm. According to his own account, he was caught in a severe thunderstorm while walking home from church. The storm was so intense that it forced him to seek shelter in a nearby farmhouse. After the storm, he was inspired to write the hymn. The calm and peaceful atmosphere after the storm, combined with the vivid memories of the powerful storm, seemed to have sparked Boberg's creativity and led to the composition of this hymn. The imagery of stars, thunder, birds and mountains in the hymn reflect Boberg's awe of God's creation, inspired by his surroundings.

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The beauty and power of nature led him to compose a hymn of praise to God, focusing on the theme of divine greatness and majesty. The contextual situation, that is the natural environment and Boberg's emotional response to it, shaped the creation of the hymn and its message.

The lyrics of "How Great Thou Art" provide a clear example of Kecskes' Contextual Dependence (CD), which is one of Kecskes' tenets. The hymn's meaning is directly influenced by the specific context in which it was written. For example, when Boberg sings about "the stars" and "rolling thunder", these images are not just metaphors for God's greatness; they are grounded in his personal live experience of a Swedish thunderstorm. The context—his immediate environment (outside) and emotional reaction to it (in)—were crucial in shaping the meanings of this expression. This is a clear example of Kecskes' context as influenced from outside-in and inside-out.

The situational context, as described by Kecskes (2010), refers to the external environmental context in which the communication takes place. In this case, the situational context is likely a worship setting, where singers are addressing God in a prayer-like manner. The refrain—"Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee"—suggests that the singers are in a context of worship, where they are expressing praise and adoration to God.

The prior context of the hymn as envisioned by Kecskes (2010) refers to the speaker's (hymnist or singers) internal, cognitive context. In this case, the speaker's prior knowledge and experiences of God's majesty and power shape his (their) internal context. Lines 1-3 of stanza 1 and 2 "Oh Lord My God" "When I in awesome wonder consider all the works Thy hands have made", and "and when I think that God His son not sparing" suggest that the singers' internal context is characterized by a sense of awe and reverence.

The verb 'consider' illustrates the hymnist's or singers' internal cognitive process. The verb 'consider' implies a deliberate and thoughtful examination of God's creation. In this context, "consider" implies that the speaker is engaging in a mental act of reflection, weighing the magnitude of God's creative power. The verb "Think" on the other hand, implies a deeper level of cognitive processing, where the speaker is not just recalling information but also emotionally and spiritually grappling with the significance of God's love and sacrifice. This internal context (inside), which resulted in the hymn composition (out), reveals Kecskes' notion of context influence from inside-out.

Apart from the verbs "consider" and "think", the subordinate clause "When I think..." serves as a trigger, introducing a moment of introspective reflection. This reflection is not just a mental exercise, but also an emotional and spiritual response to the depth of God's love.

Another discourse expression that instantiates the context of praise and awe is the adverb "awesome". In line 2 of stanza 1 — "When I in awesome wonder" — the word "awesome" connotes a sense of reverence and fear, which depicts the hymnist's awe-inspired response to God's majesty and "consider" in the line "consider all the works Thy hands have made" as earlier mentioned, pragmatically implies a sense of contemplative wonder, thereby reinforcing the context of awe.

The hymn refrain "Then sings my soul my Savior God to Thee, How great Thou art, how great Thou art" exemplifies a paradigm of praise. The performative verb "sings" reveals an act of amplifying the praise. The repetition of "how great Thou art" serves to emphasise God's greatness, thereby further reinforces the context of praise and awe. The employment of the noun phrase "Thy power throughout the universe" connotes a sense of divine omnipotence, while the prepositional phrase "throughout the universe" pragmatically implies a sense of cosmic scope, revealing God's majesty.

Using Kecskes' notion of SBUs and Halliday's transitivity system in hymn analysis complement each other. While Situational Bound Utterances (SBUs) examine the different contextual dynamics of the selected Western and Nigerian hymns, the transitivity system helps in gaining insight into how language is used to represent spiritual experiences, relationships with the divine and theological concepts. Hence, the need for using Halliday's transitivity system for analysis in this study.

These transitivity choices are significant because they reveal different processes, participants and circumstances employed by the hymnists representing the two traditions. The processes include Material process (physical actions or events), Mental process (thoughts, feelings or perception), Relational process (state of being or relationship), Verbal process (act of speaking or communication), Existential process (existence or presence) Behavioural process (process of typically human physiological and psychological behaviour).

The processes identified in the selected lines of the hymns under this category (praise/worship) are represented in the tables below:

Processes and Participants in Selected Western and Nigerian Hymn(s) of Exaltation

Table 1

Oh Lord My God	When	I	In awesome wonder
Vocatives	Circumstance	Actor	Circumstance

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Table 2

Consider	All the works Thy hands have made
Mental	Phenomenon

Table 3

I	See	The star
Senser	Mental process	Phenomenon

Table 4

I	Hear	The rolling thunder
Senser	Mental process	Phenomenon

Table 5

Thy power	Throughout	Displayed
Actor	Circumstance	Material process

“How Great Thou Art” is a hymn composed by Carl Boberg to express awe and praise to God because of His majesty, creative power and redemptive love through a meticulous selection of lexical items and ideational structures. In table 1 above, Carl Boberg starts with a vocative which is a type of nominal group that functions to address or invoke someone (God). Although in Halliday’s functional grammar, vocatives are not considered as part of the transitivity structure but this was used by the hymnist to establish a direct and personal address to God, create a sense of intimacy, drawing the hymnist or singers into a personal conversation with God and express reverence, awe and worship, setting the tone for the rest of the hymn.

The circumstance “in awesome wonder” conveys a sense of being overwhelmed by the beauty and power of creation. This is to intensify the hymnist’s emotional state, highlighting the depth of his awe and reverence for God’s creation. The mental process “consider” represents the hymnist’s or singers’ internal reflection and contemplation. The participant (senser) “I” performs this mental process, emphasizing the personal and emotional response to the natural works. The phenomenon “all the works Thy hands have made” is the entity being considered. In tables 3 and 4, the verbs “see” and “hear” are mental processes of perception, representing the singers’ internal experience of observing the natural work. They could also be interpreted as physical sight or audible sound and could also mean a deeper spiritual perception.

Through the use of Mental and Material processes, the hymnist creates a powerful expression of praise and awe that continues to inspire people to this day.

Context of Gratitude and Praise in Fanny Crosby's "To God be the Glory"

In the context of this research work, gratitude and praise are related yet without concepts. Gratitude in the selected hymns expresses thanks for specific actions, blessings or interventions, acknowledging the source of those blessings. Praise on the other hand, tends to focus on admiration or extolling the attributes, character or needs of a higher power, often without a specific focus on thanking for something. While gratitude implies a sense of indebtedness or appreciation for something received, praise emphasises reverence, adoration and worship. In hymns, these concepts often overlap, but gratitude tends to be more specific, whereas praise is often more general and celebratory.

Fanny Crosby’s “To God be the Glory” is a classic expression of appreciation, reflecting a deep sense of gratitude and praise for God’s goodness and love, and for His sacrifice for humanity. The lines of the hymn and lexical choices reveal the fact that it is a hymn of thanksgiving. For example, line 1 and 2 of the hymn and line 1-3 of the repeated refrain “To God be the glory, great things He hath done”, “so loved He the world that He gave us His son”, “praise the Lord, praise the Lord”, “let the earth hear His voice”. Also, lexical items like glory, great, love, sacrifice and atonement express the theme of praise. The hymn’s emphasis on gratitude makes it suitable for both private (personal) and public worship, especially when the motive is to show appreciation to God.

The hymn “To God be the glory” was written amidst the socio-cultural and religious upheavals of post-civil war in America. As the country grappled with rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, evangelical revival swept across the nation, emphasising personal conversion, evangelism and social reforms. Within this context, Crosby, a blind, yet prolific hymn writer collaborated with composer William H. Doan to create a hymn that would become an enduring classic, proclaiming the glory of God and the transformative power of faith. This hymn was popularized through revivals, evangelistic campaigns and church service.

The hymn remains a powerful expression of gratitude and praise, resonating with contemporary contexts where people seek to acknowledge and celebrate God’s presence and blessings in their lives. This hymn can be sung in various contexts that emphasise gratitude and praise such as thanksgiving services, worship services and prayer gatherings and personal devotions.

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Fanny Crossby's composition of the hymn "To God be the glory" was not merely a product of her singing talent (though blind), but rather, a reflection of a deep-seated scriptural knowledge and beliefs in the Christian faith and her inspiration for this hymn composition was traced to the effect the sermon by Pastor Robbert Lowry had on her. She was deeply moved and felt compelled to express her feelings in the hymn. As Kecskes (2013:12) notes "Language use is always embedded in a cultural and historical contexts and it is shaped by the speaker's intention, beliefs and values". Also, the meaning of the lyrics of the hymn is often implicit and relies on shared knowledge, context and cultural background of the singers. Specifically, Kecskes' notion focuses on the interplay between the communicative context and pragmatics of text. Therefore, both the context of the hymnist (historical, biographical and social context) and the implicit meaning of the lyrics based on shared knowledge and cultural references are crucial aspects to consider. Implicit meaning refers to the underlying, indirect or inferred meaning that goes beyond the literal interpretation of the lyrics or words. Understanding the implicit meaning uncovers underlying themes, motifs and symbolism and also helps to understand the hymn's message and emotional resonance within its original context and beyond. For example, acknowledging God's mighty act of love in the line "so loved He the world that He gave us His son", emphasises God's sacrificial love, highlighting Jesus atonement.

Also, the prior knowledge and Christian upbringing and faith of Fanny Crossby influenced her composition of the hymn "To God be the Glory". This is an example of context influence by inside out, where the hymnist's internal knowledge and beliefs shape the external expression of the hymn lyrics. The incident of Christ's death and the concept of His atoning blood for salvation as mentioned in the hymn ("Who yielded His life an atonement for sin", And open the life gate that all may go in"), can be seen as a context influence from outside-in. Also, the historical event and theological concept, external to Crossby's personal experience, shaped the content and message of the hymn.

Halliday's transitivity system, particularly the ideational metafunction would be used to further analyse the hymn, because it provides a more detailed and systematic approach for examining the representation of experiences, events and relationships in the hymns. Some lines of the hymns would be analysed and discussed below:

Table 6

To God	Be	the glory	great things	He	hath done
Attribute	Process: Material	Carrier	Goal	Actor	Process: material

Table 7

So	Loved	He	the world,	That	He	gave	Us	His son
Circumstance	Process: Mental	Senser	Phenomenon	Conjunction	Actor	Process: Material	Recipient	Goal

Table 8

Who	Yielded	His life	An atonement	For sin
Actor	Process: Material	Goal	Range	Circumstance

Table 9

Oh perfect	The purchase of God
Vocative	Vocative

Table 10

That moment	From Jesus	A pardon	Receives
Goal	Circumstance	Goal	Process: Material

In the analysis of hymns, whose structures generally do not follow the SPCA format, the arrangement or pattern is generally distorted because they are poetic in nature and follow the non-basic structure. Therefore, for convenience of analysis in terms of transitivity, there is need to first revert the lines of the hymns into the basic structure, so as to be able to assign the appropriate participants and processes to the words of the hymns.

Table 6 above comprises two independent clauses separated by a comma, and has the relational process "be" which attributes the quality of "glory" which is the "carrier", emphasising God's worthiness of praise. This process functions to elevate God's status and highlights His majesty. The material processes "hath done" (table 6), "gave" (table 7), "yielded" (table 8) and "receives" emphasise God's actions, including His provision of salvation and redemption. Specifically, table 7 — "So loved He the world that He gave us

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His son” reflects the scriptural knowledge of John 3:16, which states, “for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life”.

The participant involved in the process also contribute to the context of exaltation. “God”, “He”, “Jesus” is portrayed as the actor, sener and attribute, highlighting His central role as the one who is exalted in the hymn. The world and humanity (implied) are portrayed as the beneficiary (table 7) and recipient of God’s actions. The use of the vocatives (noun phrase) “Oh perfect redemption and the purchased of God” functions to express the ransom of the atoning blood of Jesus through which those who believe are purchased and turns out to be perfect redemption. This creates a sense of intimacy and connection with God.

The processes and participants work together to create a context of exaltation, emphasising God’s majesty, power, wisdom and love. The implication of this analysis is that effective worship lyrics can be crafted by using discourse processes to emphasise God’s character, love and actions, thereby invoking a sense of gratitude, praise and reverence in the worshipper.

Context of Magnification in Akanbi Olorunkosebi’s We praise you the Lord’

Magnification in this context refers to the act of emphasising or highlighting the greatness, power or attributes of God’s power by lyrical contents that amplifies or enlarges their significance. This creates a sense of reverence, awe and devotion, drawing the worshippers into a deeper experience of connection with the divine.

The hymn “We praise You Lord” is characterised by declarative sentences that affirm and proclaim God’s majesty. For example, line 3 of stanza 1 – “Sun and Moon declare your glory” (asserts the existence of God’s glory), line 9 – “You are our solid foundation” (attributes the qualities of reliability and strength to God), line 7 “At Your word, they were created” (establish a causal relationship between God’s word and the creation of the world). The strategic use of these declarative sentences creates contexts of praise and elevation, drawing the singers into a deeper experience of reverence and awe.

The hymn is an expression of praise and adoration to God, acknowledging His sovereignty, faithfulness and presence in all creation, while also affirming trust and reliance on Him as a solid foundation (line 1 of stanza 2 “You are our solid foundation). The focus of the hymn is on communal participation in worship and the inclusion of cosmic elements (nature, the heavens, animals, stormy wind, creeping things and flying birds) as participants in praising God. The hymnist integrates the totality of God’s creation – “seas and all that they contain”, “stormy winds that do you pleasure”, “Hills and mountains praise their maker”, reflecting an Nigerian worldview that sees all aspects of life and nature as intertwined in divine worship.

The context that warranted the composition of this hymn, according to the information gathered during the interview is that the hymnist drew inspiration from a sense of awe and wonder at God’s majesty and creative power. He was moved by the greatness of God’s creation and the testimony of the natural world. The hymnist utilises his talent, creative intuition and knowledge of the Bible (inside-out). His early exposure to music and proficiency as an organist along with his experience as a hymnographer (outside-in) allowed him to craft a hymn that blends both external influences and personal creativity. These showcase the “inside-out” creative element, which refers to the internal, personal experiences and creative intuitions of the composer and the outside-in which refers to the external influences such as cultural, historical and theological concept.

The Nigerian hymn, characterised by its emphasis on collective praise and worship, and the majesty of God’s creation is situated within the context of communal worship (“We praise You Lord, King of Zion”), spiritual reflection (“All day long, in You we trust”) and cultural expression (“Hills and mountains praise their master”) reflecting African diasporic tradition and imagery. As van Dijk’s (1998) concept of contextualisation suggests, the hymn’s lyrics and structure are adapted to the socio-context of collective worship, where the discourse and non-discourse cues converge to create a shared understanding of the context. The hymn’s performance in Christian’s worship services, prayer meetings, thanksgiving services and outdoor worship services serves to foster spiritual reflection and cultural expression.

Having established the sociocultural context, there is need for a closer examination of the processes and participants involved in the hymn’s ideational structure, using Halliday’s transitivity system, to reveal how God, humanity and nature are represented using processes and participants. Below are tables showing some lines of the hymn using the ideational metafunction of Halliday’s transitivity system to project the context of praise and elevation in Akanbi Olorunkosebi’s hymn of “We praise You Lord, King of Zion”:

Process and Participants in selected Nigerian Hymn(s) of Exaltation

Table 11

We	Praise	You Lord King of zion	With your host and angels bright
Actor	Material Process	Goal	Circumstance

Table 12

You	Are	Our solid foundation
Carrier	Relational process	Attribute

Table 13

All day long	In you	We	Trust
Circumstance	Phenomenon	Senser	Mental process

Table 14

On earth	Praise	All things	Are	praising	You
Circumstance	Actor	Material process	Circumstance		Goal

Table 15

Sun moon	Declare	Your glory	And	All shinning stars of light
Sayer	Verbal process	Phenomenon	Conjunction	sayer

The hymn begins with the material process "praises" in the first line "We praise You Lord King of Zion", "With Your hosts and angels bright". This process is an action of worship with the hymnist or singers actively engaged in praising God. The actor "We" is the doer of the action, while the goal "You, Lord King of Zion" is the recipient of the praise. The circumstance "With Your hosts and angels bright" provides additional information about the manner of the praise and those involved, emphasising the celestial accompaniment.

The relational process "are" (relational of being) in table 12 — "You are our solid foundation" describes God's character as a source of stability. The carrier "You" possesses the attribute "our solid foundation" highlighting God's reliability and trust worthiness. This process reinforces the context of exaltation and affirming who God is.

The mental process "trust" in table 13 — "All day long, in You we trust" indicates the singers' reliance on God mentally. The senser "we" experiences the mental state of trust with the phenomenon "You" as the object of trust. This process reveals the singers' confidence and faith in God.

The Material process "are praising" in the line "on earth all things are praising You" is an action of worship and exaltation to God, with all creation actively engaged in praising God. The actor "all things" is the performer of the action, while the goal "You" (God) is the recipient of the praise. The circumstance "on earth" provides additional information about the location of the worship, emphasising the universal scope of the worship.

The verbal process "declare" in line 15 — "sun, moon declare Your glory and all shining stars of light" is a verbalization with the celestial bodies, proclaiming God's glory. The sayer — sun, moon... are the sources of the declaration, while the verbiage "Your glory" is the context of the declaration.

The hymn's ideational structure presents a worldview that emphasises God's sovereignty (King of Zion), human dependence (worshippers' expression of trust in God and acknowledgement of dependence on Him) and natural world witness (depiction of the natural world as declaring God's glory and praising Him).

Context of Appreciation and Thanksgiving in Bola Ilori's "We Thank You Lord for a Peaceful Night"

Appreciation involves recognising and valuing the quality, significance or importance of something or someone. It is a positive emotional response to something that brings joy, admiration and gratitude. Thanksgiving on the other hand specifically involves expressing gratitude for something, often in a formal or ritualistic manner. It is a more explicit acknowledgement of indebtedness or appreciation for a particular benefit, blessing or action. The key difference lies in their focus; appreciation emphasises recognition and valuation, while thanksgiving expresses thanks for something received.

This hymn is a beautiful expression of appreciation and thanksgiving, with Bola Ilori offering thanks to God for various blessings and seeking guidance and strength for the day ahead. The hymn begins with an expression of gratitude for a peaceful night and the morning's new beginning — "Lord thank You for a peaceful night and the morning new". This expression of gratitude is observed in his enumeration of God's goodness — for strength to rise and move, talk and work for us to do", acknowledging God's provision for the daily needs. The hymnist expresses gratitude for "grace with You to live and work", recognizing God for enabling him to do all these.

The lines of the hymn reveal a context of exaltation through various expressions that acknowledge God's sovereignty, majesty and power. For example, Bola Ilori addresses God as "Father" in line 4 of stanza 1, "We say Father, thank You", showing personal relationship with Him and recognising His paternal care. This expression of familiarity and reverence create a sense of exaltation as he acknowledges God's authority and loving nature. The word "Father" as a form of address to God is a deliberate discourse choice that instantiates paradigm of exaltation. Semantically, "Father", is a kingship term that implies hierarchical relationship, with God

Contextual Dynamics and Transitivity Choices in Selected Hymns of Exaltation from Western and Nigerian Christian Traditions

occupying the superior position. This hierarchical structure reinforces the notion of God's exalted status, revealing the power dynamics inherent in the father-child relationship.

Pragmatically, "Father" implies reverence, respect and obedience. It evokes feelings of love, trust and dependence which are quintessential to the exaltation of God.

As observed and gathered from the interview conducted with Bola Illori, the hymnist, this composition is based on internal thoughts and feelings of the hymnist about God's goodness, protection and care. He expresses his gratitude and dependence on God out of a humble recognition of his limitations and a willingness to surrender to God's will. This reveals Kecskes' inside-out approach. That is, the motivation for this hymn composition was as a result of internal thought and feelings about God's goodness (inside), leading to its expression in the hymn (out).

From an outside-in perspective, which considers the external context and social norms, we can observe a context of worship and communal devotion. The hymn's language and structure suggests a communal setting, where believers gather to express their gratitude and praise to God. The speaker's use of inclusive language such as "we" (first person plural pronoun in the subjective form) and "us" (first person plural pronoun in the objective form), reinforces this context, emphasising the shared experience of worship and devotion.

Another expression that reveals a context of appreciation is the hymnist's declaration of dependence on God, as seen in the line "Whatever comes my way this day, up to You will I look". This statement acknowledges God's sovereignty over all aspects of life, emphasising the singers' trust and reliance on Him. By looking to God for guidance and strength, the singers exalt God as the ultimate source of wisdom and power to face daily challenges.

The hymn's discourse features such as the use of temporal expression ("Morning near", "breaking dawn") verb of gratitude ("thinking") and noun phrases ("strength to rise", "grace to live"), suggest that it is particularly suited for morning prayers. The hymn's illocutionary force, which is to express gratitude and praise, aligns with the typical speech acts performed during morning prayers, such as thanking God for a new day and seeking guidance and strength.

The analysis of the Western and Nigerian hymns of exaltation above also reflect their respective cultural and theological contexts. Nigerian hymnody as exemplified in Akanbi Olorunkosebi's "We praise You Lord, King of Zion" places significant emphasis on communal, cosmic worship, where all creation from the natural world to humanity is seen as participating in God's glory. This creates a sense of unity and harmony and reflects the spiritual interconnectedness of African traditions. The hymn's language fosters a sense of collective and cosmic celebration, inviting all listeners to partake in this divine praise.

In contrast, Western hymnody tends to focus more on the individual's spiritual journey, highlighting personal salvation and the relationship between humanity and God. The language ...structure of Western hymns of often lean towards formality, intellectualism and emphasis on doctrinal truths.

The main differences between Western and Nigerian hymnody are communal versus individual worship, the role of nature in worship and the inclusiveness of praise. These shapen the discourse dynamics of each tradition. Nigerian hymns like Olorunkosebi embody a holistic worldview that brings together creation and the divine in a dynamic participatory worship experience, while Western hymns often reflect a more doctrinal, personal focus on salvation and God's sovereignty. These differences highlight the distinct theological and cultural expressions within each tradition, shaping how worship is experienced and understood in these contexts. Furthermore, the hymn's discourse structure, which includes a series of relational and material processes, creates a sense of temporal and spatial orientation, which is consistent with the morning prayer context.

The tables below show how Halliday's transitivity system projects the context of gratitude, thanksgiving and exaltation in Bola Illori's "Lord, thank You for a peaceful night".

Table 16

Lord	That you	For a peaceful day and for this morning new	For breaking dawn so calm and bright
Vocative	Verbal	Circumstance	circumstance

Table 17

For strength to rise and move and talk
Circumstance

Table 18

Whenever comes my this day	Up to you	Will	I	Look
Circumstance	Circumstance	Material	Actor	Process: Mental

Table 19

Help	Me to show your love	Always
Process: Mental	Goal	circumstance

The hymn lyrics project a context of gratitude and exaltation through the use of various processes and participants. The material processes such as "rise", "move", "talk", emphasise the singers' action of gratitude and devotion. For example, in table 16 above, "Lord, thank You for a peaceful night and for this morning new" features the verbal process "thank you" which highlights the hymnist or singers' action of expressing gratitude. Similarly, the line "For strength to rise and move and talk features the material process "rise", "move" and "talk", which emphasise the singers' physical actions that are enabled by God's strength.

The relational process "be" which is implied in table one above describes the state of being new, which serves as the basis for the hymnist or singer's gratitude, as a result of their recognition of the morning newness and freshness, which is a gift from God. The verbal process of "thank" also shows the singers' expression of gratitude. Throughout the hymn, Bola Ilori repeatedly expresses thanks to God. This verbal process creates a sense of intimacy and closeness between him and God.

The mental process of "look" in table 18 — "Whatever comes my way this day, up to You will I look" is not just a physical act of looking but rather, a metaphorical or figurative act of looking, which involves the singers' mental and emotional focus on God. It implies a sense of dependence, trust and surrender to God's guidance and providence. In systemic Functional Discourses (SFL), this mental process "look" can be classified as a type of "cognitive" or perspective process, which involves the speakers' mental perception, attention and understanding of their environment and circumstances. Therefore, "look" in this context emphasises the singers' decision to focus on God amidst life's challenges. This process reinforces the speaker's trust and reliance on God.

The hymn lyrics project a context of gratitude and exaltation by emphasising the singers' actions, thoughts and feelings of devotion and thanksgiving towards God. The various processes work together to create a rich expression of gratitude and exaltation.

This study would do a quantitative analysis of the processes employed in the above Western and Nigerian hymns with the objectives of determining the predominant process types in each tradition. By examining the frequency of distribution of material, relational, mental, verbal, behavioural and existential processes, this research aims to provide an accurate and comprehensive understanding of the discourse features, that characterise these two hymnody traditions. This would contribute to a comparative analysis of Western and Nigerian hymns, shedding light on the similarities and differences between these two traditions and enhancing our understanding of the role of language in shaping religious expression and identity. This is in line with van Dijk (2015)'s opinion that qualitative methods are necessary for a systemic and objective analysis of discourse.

Findings

The quantitative analysis in the above table showed that material process are the predominant process type in Western hymns, accounting for 50% of the total process. This suggests that Western hymns tend to focus more on actions which are central to the context of exaltation. In contrast, Nigerian hymn exhibit a distribution of process type, with the material processes accounting for 44.4% of the total.

A comparative analysis of the two traditions revealed that Western hymns of exaltation tend to be more action-oriented and individualistic, whereas Nigerian hymns are more verbally expressive and communal. The presence of verbal process in Nigerian hymns (22.2%) highlights the importance of communal expression and dialogue in this tradition. In contrast, Western hymns do not exhibit any verbal process, suggesting a more individualistic and introspective approach to exaltation.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that mental processes are more frequent in Western hymns (40%) than Nigerian hymns (22.2%). This suggests that Western hymns tend to focus more on internal thoughts and emotions, such as gratitude and praise, whereas Nigerian hymns emphasise external actions and communal expressions.

Comparative analysis indicated both convergence and divergence. While both traditions employ relational and material processes to construct praise and devotion, Nigerian hymns demonstrated greater participatory and interactive linguistic strategies, reflecting cultural and contextual specificity.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that contextual dynamics significantly shape transitivity choices in hymns of exaltation. Western and Nigerian hymns differ not only in thematic focus but also in the linguistic realization of worship: Western hymns favor introspective and declarative structures, whereas Nigerian hymns foreground communal dialogue and participatory processes. These patterns suggest that **culture and situational context** are key determinants in how experiential meaning is encoded in hymn texts, confirming the relevance of the integrated **SFG** and **SBU**s frameworks for cross-cultural analysis

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, it is recommended that *hymnologists and educators should incorporate cross-cultural analyses in training and curriculum development to enhance understanding of communal and individualistic worship styles. Additionally, further studies could expand the dataset to include more hymns from diverse cultural contexts, using **mixed-methods transitivity analysis to deepen insights into how contextual and linguistic factors co-construct devotional meaning across Christian traditions.

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