

METAPHORICAL CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF MATERNAL HEALTH IN SELECTED YORUBA ANTEPARTUM SONGS

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Abstract

Metaphors play a crucial role in shaping human understanding of abstract concepts by mapping them onto familiar, concrete experiences. In the context of health communication, particularly maternal care, metaphors become a powerful tool for conveying complex information in ways that are culturally significant and relatable. This study aims to examine the metaphorical conceptualizations embedded in selected Yoruba antepartum lyrics and explore how these metaphorical expressions reflect socio-cultural values concerning maternal health. Guided by Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the study analyses ten (10) purposively *selected songs sung during antepartum sessions at the Gynecology and Midwifery Department of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Abeokuta. The study reveals that Yoruba antepartum songs use metaphorical language to effectively communicate maternal health messages, thereby making complex health concepts more accessible and relatable to expectant mothers. The metaphors employed in the songs underscore important health practices like hygiene, nutrition, family planning, and immunization, and also reinforce deeply rooted cultural values and beliefs. Metaphors such as CLEANLINESS IS A WEAPON, PROTEINOUS FOOD IS CARE and HUSBAND AS SEED-BEARER/WIFE AS THE SOIL emphasise the importance of hygiene, nutrition and collaborative roles of spouses in reproduction. The study, therefore, concludes that Yoruba antepartum songs are effective, innovative and culturally sensitive means of promoting maternal health awareness and behaviour, as they blend traditional values and modern health practices.

Keywords: Antepartum songs; cognitive linguistics; conceptual metaphor; health communication; Yoruba music

Introduction

Metaphors play a crucial role in shaping human understanding of abstract concepts by mapping them onto familiar, concrete experiences (Odikpo-Okafor & Ezeifeke, 2024; Dahiru, 2018). This process allows individuals to make sense of complex ideas by relating them to tangible, easily comprehensible experiences, thus simplifying communication and influencing perceptions, behaviours, and decision-making (Wachowiak et al., 2022). In the context of health communication, particularly maternal care, metaphors become a powerful tool for conveying complex information in ways that are culturally significant and relatable. Music, as a universal form of communication, further enhances this process. It transcends mere entertainment, serving as a medium through which metaphors are embedded and expressed, reflecting cultural values, emotions, and ideologies (Izen et al., 2023). Oyewole (2024, p. 251) asserts that “music, as a form of communication, holds profound significance in human interaction, serving as a powerful conduit for expression and the exchange of ideas”. In this way, music not only deepens the impact of metaphors but also makes health messages more memorable and meaningful, thereby reinforcing cultural understandings of maternal health.

Songs are not only aesthetic compositions but also serve rhetorical and communicative functions. Through carefully crafted lyrics, musicians convey personal and collective opinions, drawing on metaphorical language and symbolic imagery (Izen et al., 2023). This aligns with Attabor’s (2018, p. 50) observation that “music has an extraordinary power not only to evoke emotion but also to bind people into a social group”. In the context of the Yoruba cultural landscape, songs, especially those embedded in traditional rituals and communal experiences, function as repositories of indigenous knowledge and social values. Yoruba music is a vivid reflection of the people’s cultural identity. According to Olaleye (2015), music among the Yoruba is a highly creative enterprise, used to express a broad range of human experiences including emotions, moods, attitudes, frustrations, events, and expectations. Thus, Yoruba songs serve as more than mere artistic expressions; they also function as cultural texts that reinforce collective identity and preserve indigenous knowledge systems.

This study focuses on antepartum song lyrics performed during maternal healthcare sessions at the Federal Medical Centre, Abeokuta. These songs are typically sung by midwives and pregnant women as part of the cultural and psychosocial experience of prenatal care. The aim of this study is to examine the metaphorical conceptualisations embedded in selected Yoruba antepartum lyrics and explore how these metaphorical expressions reflect socio-cultural values concerning maternal health. While adopting Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the study seeks to analyse how figurative language within these songs shapes perceptions, conveys collective wisdom, and reinforces the cultural framework of pregnancy and healthcare among Yoruba women.

Yoruba Antepartum Songs: A Form of Health Communication

The Yoruba ethnic group is one of Nigeria’s most culturally vibrant communities, with a rich heritage rooted in oral traditions and expressive performances. As Oladipo (2020, p. 94) observes, “geographically, the Yorubas are one of the popular ethnic groups in Nigeria who occupy the southwestern region of Nigeria”. Central to Yoruba identity is the use of music, not just as a form of entertainment, but as a communicative tool deeply interwoven with language, rituals, and daily practices. Songs among the Yoruba are a cultural staple and are integral to the transmission of knowledge, moral values, health practices, and spiritual beliefs. Aladesanmi (2020, p. 284) describes songs as “a short metrical

composition intended or adapted for singing, especially in rhymed stanzas... The usage of songs cannot be overemphasized among the people of Yoruba society”.

Indeed, Yoruba songs are deployed to achieve various purposes, including satire, advice, caution, praise, and even health enlightenment, which make them a potent cultural medium (Adelabu & Ayo-Obiremi, 2024). During antepartum care sessions, these songs are not merely aesthetic expressions but functional tools for communicating critical health information. They educate expectant mothers on prenatal hygiene, nutritional habits, emotional well-being, and safe birthing practices, often using metaphors and culturally resonant imagery to enhance retention and understanding (Abawi, 2013). Through these songs, midwives and older women in the community pass down generational wisdom and health-related warnings, thereby complementing formal medical advice with culturally grounded knowledge.

Particularly relevant to this study is the use of Yoruba songs in maternal healthcare contexts, especially during antepartum sessions. These songs, sung by midwives and pregnant women alike, offer more than rhythmic encouragement; they function as oral repositories of indigenous health knowledge and communal wisdom, often communicated through symbolic and metaphorical language. As noted by Kolawole and Ibekwe (2021, p. 107), “the Yoruba cultural values...guide the conduct of those who live in the society in which such cultural values are held in high esteem”. These values are codified and reinforced in songs, which serve not only aesthetic but also pedagogical and persuasive functions. The conceptual metaphors embedded in antepartum songs reflect these cultural values. Understanding these metaphorical expressions provides insight into how Yoruba women conceptualise pregnancy and maternal health within their cultural worldview. In line with this, Akinmusuyi (2022) emphasises that language use in culturally rooted communication is not merely for information transfer but for performing pragmatic acts that build social connection and influence behaviour, especially in health-related discourse. Hence, this study explores how metaphorical conceptualisations in Yoruba antepartum songs convey traditional knowledge, reinforce communal values, and contribute to maternal well-being.

Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This study is anchored on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 2003). CMT offers a cognitive approach to understanding how people make sense of abstract experiences by mapping them onto more familiar, concrete domains. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003, p. 5), “metaphors are defined as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. This means that metaphors are not merely decorative language tools; rather, they are essential mechanisms through which individuals structure thoughts, interpret experiences, and communicate meaning.

Oluremi (2021, p. 91) states that “CMT takes metaphor as a cognitive tool which is an integral part of human existence that helps in defining reality”. Thus, metaphor is seen as a fundamental structure of human cognition. It shapes not only language but also perception, behaviour, and social practices. Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 5) emphasise the pervasive nature of metaphor, arguing that “the concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and consequently, the language is metaphorically structured”. This assertion suggests that metaphors are not isolated linguistic phenomena but are deeply embedded in thought and action.

Furthermore, Kamalu et al. (2024, p. 69) affirm that “metaphors are highly essential elements in the configuration and expression of social, cultural, and psychological experiences”. In this regard, metaphors serve as cultural and cognitive instruments, enabling speakers within a community to express complex ideas, emotions, and shared values. Particularly in oral

traditions such as Yoruba antepartum songs, metaphors are used to encode experiences surrounding motherhood, childbirth, health, and spirituality in accessible and culturally resonant ways.

Lakoff and Johnson’s (2003, p. 3) assertion that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action” is especially pertinent to this study, which views antepartum song lyrics as metaphor-laden texts shaped by Yoruba cultural logic and communal health discourse. In such contexts, metaphors enable both the performers and their audience to comprehend abstract medical, emotional, or spiritual experiences, such as pregnancy, pain, and childbirth, through more tangible or culturally meaningful concepts. Therefore, this study adopts Conceptual Metaphor Theory to examine and interpret the metaphorical expressions embedded in selected Yoruba antepartum songs performed in a hospital setting. It investigates the patterns of metaphorical conceptualisation, the thematic concerns of the lyrics, and how these metaphors reflect and shape Yoruba cultural perceptions of maternal health and pregnancy.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative research design to uncover the underlying metaphorical and cultural messages embedded in selected Yoruba antepartum song lyrics. The choice of this method complements the positions of Creswell (2014) and Moleong (2017), who both emphasise the suitability of descriptive qualitative approaches for interpreting meanings, patterns, and contextual nuances in textual and oral data. The primary data for this study were collected from live performances of songs rendered during antepartum sessions at the Gynecology and Midwifery Department of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Abeokuta. These sessions, held routinely on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, serve as a culturally significant forum for the expression of Yoruba antenatal songs. During these sessions, both midwives and pregnant women participate in communal singing that encapsulates moral, emotional, and health-related messages.

To document these performances, the researcher used a smartphone recording to capture all the songs sung across ten sessions, during which a total of 25 songs were performed. The recorded data were then retrieved, transcribed in Yoruba, and translated into English. In the process of translation, both literal and free translation techniques were utilised to preserve the semantic content, stylistic form, and cultural connotations of the original Yoruba lyrics. From this collection, a purposive random sampling technique was employed to select ten (10) song texts for in-depth analysis. The songs were labelled Song 1 to Song 10 for clarity and ease of reference. The choice to analyse ten songs was guided by the need for a focused yet comprehensive exploration of metaphorical conceptualisations within the scope of this research.

Data Analysis

SONG 1

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
E ma gba’le, k’e si ma fo gota (×2) Ta lo le mo igba, tabi akoko T’omo tuntun le de, e ma gba’le	<i>Always Sweep the floor and wash the drainage Nobody knows the time of delivery Of the newborn, always sweep the floor</i>

The dominant theme of the song above is personal hygiene. The song deploys metaphorical language to communicate vital health information, particularly hygiene, to expectant mothers. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003) holds that our understanding of abstract concepts is structured through more concrete, bodily experiences; hence, the

phrase “fo gota” (wash the drainage) functions as a metaphorical expression mapping from the concrete domain of environmental sanitation to the abstract domain of maternal health care. The conceptual metaphor at play here can be rendered as: CLEAN SURROUNDINGS ARE HEALTHY PREGNANCY CONDITIONS. Within this framework, the “gota” (drainage) is not only a literal structure but also a symbolic representation of the woman’s immediate environment. By instructing women to “wash the drainage,” the song equates keeping the environment clean with protecting the pregnant body from harm. The metaphorical mapping relies on culturally shared knowledge that dirty drainage harbours mosquitoes, germs, and other pathogens, which threaten the health of both mother and fetus.

Also, the line “Ta lo le mo igba, tabi akoko t’omo tuntun le de” (“Nobody knows the time of delivery of the newborn”) introduces a temporal metaphor: BIRTH IS AN UNPREDICTABLE EVENT. This metaphor complements the cultural awareness that delivery can occur suddenly, thus reinforcing the urgency and regularity of maintaining cleanliness. Through metaphor, the song acts as a culturally resonant form of health communication by encouraging proactive environmental hygiene to ensure maternal well-being.

SONG 2

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
Call- F’eto s’ebi re o	<i>Call-Embrace family planning</i>
Resp-F’eto s’ebi re o	<i>Resp- Embrace family planning</i>
Call- To ba fe k’omo re re’le-iwe	<i>Call-If you want education for your child</i>
Resp- F’eto s’ebi re o	<i>Resp-Embrace family planning</i>
Call-T’o ba fe k’omo re di lawyer	<i>Call-If you want your child to be a lawyer</i>
Resp- F’eto s’ebi re o	<i>Resp-Embrace family planning</i>
Call-T’o ba fe k’omo re di doctor	<i>Call-If you want your child to be a doctor</i>
Resp-F’eto s’ebi re o	<i>Resp- Embrace family planning</i>

The theme of this song is birth control and family planning as a pathway to socioeconomic empowerment and quality child-rearing. The song deploys metaphorical reasoning as a persuasive rhetorical strategy to promote family planning among Yoruba women. According to CMT, abstract concepts (such as family planning, future aspirations) are understood and communicated through more concrete or familiar domains (such as professions, school). The primary conceptual metaphor can be said to be: PLANNED PARENTHOOD IS A PATHWAY TO SUCCESS. This metaphor frames family planning as a means to a desirable end, such as being social mobility, access to education, and professional excellence for one’s children. The repeated call-and-response structure reinforces this metaphor through oral repetition, which is a typical feature of Yoruba didactic songs and chants. The line “To ba fe k’omo re re’le-iwe” (If you want your child to go to school) implies that education is both desirable and costly. It is metaphorically positioned as a resource-intensive endeavour that requires prior planning and financial control. In traditional Yoruba communities, songs serve not only as entertainment but as powerful instruments of orature, pedagogy, and communal sensitization (Adelabu & Ayo-Obiremi, 2024). This antepartum song, situated within a clinical but culturally relevant setting, harnesses the persuasive power of metaphor to translate medical advice (birth control) into culturally embedded aspirations (education, prestige).

SONG 3

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
Imototo lo le segun arun gbogbo	<i>Only cleanliness can vanquish diseases</i>
Imototo ile,	<i>Cleanliness of the house</i>
Imototo ara,	<i>Cleanliness of the body</i>
Imototo aso,	<i>Cleanliness of the clothes</i>
imototo ounje,	<i>Cleanliness of the food</i>
Imototo l’o le segun arun gbogbo	<i>Only cleanliness can vanquish diseases</i>

The central theme of the song is personal hygiene as a strategy for disease prevention and holistic health, especially during pregnancy. This song employs a series of metaphorical mappings to communicate the relationship between cleanliness and health. The song metaphorically frames “cleanliness” as a defensive weapon and “disease” as an enemy to be conquered (CLEANLINESS IS A WEAPON; DISEASE IS AN ENEMY). This framing not only simplifies the health message but also complements culturally resonant notions of battle and protection. The recurrent phrase “Imototo lo le segun arun gbogbo” (Only cleanliness can vanquish diseases) metaphorically equates cleanliness to a form of power, tool, or strategy capable of “defeating” illness. In Yoruba cosmology, illness is often perceived as a force or external attack; therefore, presenting hygiene as a “vanquisher” evokes an image of empowerment and proactive defense.

Other metaphors in the song portray cleanliness as essential to health by framing everyday domains as symbolic extensions of the self. The house is metaphorically viewed as a body container, where a clean environment reflects internal and external harmony. The body itself is likened to a sacred temple or battleground requiring protection through hygiene. Clothes are seen as boundaries of self, with cleanliness signifying dignity and moral standing, especially in Yoruba culture where appearance conveys identity. Food is metaphorically presented as life-giving fuel, emphasising its role in sustaining both mother and fetus. Together, these metaphors construct a culturally resonant framework that stresses personal hygiene as foundational to maternal health. Thus, the song transforms abstract health advice into cognitively and emotionally resonant knowledge by leveraging everyday items (home, body, food, clothing) as metaphoric vehicles of meaning. It encourages pregnant women to understand that the war against disease begins with their personal commitment to holistic cleanliness—physically, materially, and environmentally.

SONG 4

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
E ma j'ewa, E ma j'efo, e j'eyin	<i>Always eat beans, always eat vegetables, always eat eggs</i>
Alaboyun e ma j'ewa	<i>Expectant mothers, always eat beans</i>

The theme of Song 4 is healthy diet for expectant mothers. In this song, conceptual metaphors are used to promote maternal nutritional practices among pregnant women. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors allow us to understand abstract or complex ideas (like fetal development and maternal care) through more concrete, everyday experiences (like food consumption). The primary conceptual metaphor in the song: FOOD IS HEALTH. In the Yoruba cultural and communicative context, the act of consuming specific foods such as 'ewa' (beans), 'efo' (vegetables), and 'eyin' (eggs) is not merely dietary; it is a metaphor for health maintenance and maternal responsibility. This metaphor frames these foods as embodied tools for promoting both maternal and fetal well-being, thus shifting dietary advice into a more vivid, culturally resonant conceptual space. The refrain "Aláboyún, e má j'ewa" (Expectant mothers, always eat beans) uses imperative mood and repetition to emphasise maternal responsibility, metaphorically equating eating well with loving and caring for the unborn child. Thus, good dietary habits become an act of maternal protection. Thus, the song serves as a non-threatening, familiar, and emotionally resonant vehicle for health communication. The audience, primarily pregnant women in antepartum clinics, are more likely to internalise health information when it is tied to their culinary practices and social identity.

SONG 5

Antenatal Song	Translation
Omo mi ni gilasi mi o (×2)	<i>My child is my mirror oh (×2)</i>
Omo mi ni gilasi ti mo fi n woju	<i>My child is the mirror with which I</i>
Omo mi ni gilasi ti mo fi n ri'ran o	<i>see</i>
K'a ye ma fo gilasi mi	<i>My child is the lens with which I view May the evil ones not break my glass</i>

The central theme of this song is childcare and the cultural value of children in Yoruba society. It metaphorically frames the child as both a reflection of the parent and a vital lens through which meaning and identity are experienced. This song is deeply metaphorical and communicates core Yoruba ideologies surrounding children, parenthood, and generational legacy. The lyrics present a metaphorical structure that shapes how motherhood and childcare are understood within Yoruba cultural cognition. In the song's conceptual metaphor: A CHILD IS A MIRROR, the child is likened to a mirror ("gilasi"), which is a reflective surface through which the parent sees themselves. This is an example of ontological metaphor, where an abstract concept (parental identity or legacy) is understood via a concrete physical object (a mirror). The metaphor suggests that a child reflects the physical, genetic, and moral attributes of the parent, reinforcing the Yoruba cultural belief that children are both extensions and embodiments of their parents.

The plea "K'a ye ma fo gilasi mi" (May the evil ones not break my glass) introduces a metaphor of fragility and protection. The mirror here represents not only the child but also the emotional and social investment a parent places in the child. To "break the mirror" metaphorically equates to losing the child or having the child harmed: BREAKING THE MIRROR IS LOSING THE CHILD. Childbirth, in the Yoruba society, is a central marker

of womanhood and continuity. This song reinforces the socio-cultural value placed on procreation by presenting the child as a delicate yet powerful symbol of identity, visibility, and future. The use of metaphorical language here also serves as a subtle reminder of the need for proper antenatal care and maternal responsibility. Since the “mirror” (child) must not be broken, it implies that pregnant women must be cautious, follow medical guidance, and maintain emotional and physical well-being to protect the unborn child.

SONG 6

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
Ma f’oyun mi l’ewa je akara	<i>I’ll feed my foetus beans through beanballs</i>
Ma f’oyun mi l’ewa je olele	<i>I’ll feed my foetus beans through beancake</i>
Ma f’oyun mi l’ewa je gbegiri	<i>I’ll feed my foetus beans through beansoup</i>
Emi f’alafia f’omo mi	<i>I want nourishment for my child</i>
Ma f’oyun mi l’ewa je	<i>I’ll nourish my foetus with beans</i>

The theme of this song centres on prenatal nutrition. It focuses on maternal responsibility and the cultural importance of feeding the unborn child with healthy, protein-rich meals. This song is rich in cultural and metaphorical meaning, using food as a central metaphor for nurturing and protection. The song constructs a set of mappings that link food, particularly traditional protein-rich meals, with care, health, and maternal love. The primary conceptual metaphor in the song is PROTEINOUS FOOD IS CARE. The repeated use of various bean-based dishes, such as “akara” (beanballs), “olele” (bean pudding), and “gbegiri” (bean soup), suggests not just the nutritional content, but symbolically frames maternal feeding as a gesture of emotional, physical, and spiritual care. The unborn child is viewed as already participating in the mother's culinary decisions, thereby reinforcing the idea that prenatal nutrition is the foundation of future wellbeing. These metaphors are ontological, treating abstract states (health, care, love) as concrete, edible things. By stating “Ma f’oyun mi l’ewa je” (I’ll nourish my foetus with beans), the mother materialises care through culturally significant food, presenting her womb as a nurturing environment.

Another metaphor evident in the song is BEANS ARE LIFE-SUSTAINING MEDICINE. Beans are not just food in this context; they are agents of vitality and growth. The metaphor assumes that food, especially beans, has a preventive and curative power. Beyond its poetic beauty, this song serves as an indigenous health communication tool, promoting the importance of maternal nutrition using familiar and emotionally resonant metaphors. It validates local dietary practices and elevates traditional foods as nutritional and beneficial to the unborn child.

SONG 7

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
Oni ma bi were o (x2)	<i>He said I’ll deliver safely (x2)</i>
Oga ogo k’o leta si mi,	<i>The Almighty sent me a letter</i>
Oni ma bi were	<i>That I’ll have a safe delivery</i>

The theme of the song centres around divine assurance of safe delivery. This song is a celebration of faith, hope, and maternal confidence, built around deeply embedded cultural metaphors. It communicates spiritual assurance of safe delivery through metaphorical imagery that

reflects Yoruba cosmology and reverence for divine intervention. The conceptual metaphorical framework used in the song implies A DIVINE PROMISE IS A WRITTEN LETTER. In this context, the ‘letter’ is not used in the literal sense but as a metaphor for divine assurance, spiritual documentation, and unchangeable destiny. This metaphor operates on the cultural understanding that a letter carries official weight, permanence, and authority. In the Yoruba worldview, something “written” (especially when divinely issued) is considered final, trustworthy, and sealed. The song also uses the metaphor: SAFE DELIVERY IS A DIVINE DECREE. The use of “Oga ogo” (The Almighty) elevates the assurance of childbirth safety to the realm of supernatural control. The divine being is conceptualised not just as a god, but as a high-ranking administrator or king who communicates via written edicts (letters). Thus, saying “The Almighty sent me a letter” metaphorically constructs the message of safe delivery as a divine decree that is tangible and irreversible.

SONG 8

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
E ba mi gbe gbosa f’oko mi Oko olorire t’o fun mi loyun Emi na gbe gbosa fun’ra mi Aya olorire t’o m’ara duro	<i>Help me give kudos to my husband A fortuitous husband who impregnated me Even I applaud myself too A fortuitous wife cooperating maximumly</i>

The central theme of the song is reproduction within marital union, with emphasis on cooperation, fertility, and shared responsibility in conception. This song is rich in metaphorical language, particularly in its portrayal of conception and reproductive success as acts worthy of celebration and mutual acknowledgment. It maps abstract biological and reproductive processes onto concrete social roles and culturally valued identities. One metaphor employed in the song is HUSBAND AS SEED-BEARER. The metaphorical praise of the husband (“oko olorire”) symbolically represents him as the source of fertility, which aligns with the biological role of the sperm. The metaphor invokes the conceptual schema of “THE MAN IS THE SEED”, where seed (sperm) is the initiating agent in reproduction. This reflects both biological realism and Yoruba symbolic association of masculinity with provision and productivity.

Also, the metaphor: WIFE AS THE SOIL further reinforces the message of the song. The wife refers to herself as “aya olorire t’o m’ara duro” (the “fortunate wife who kept herself together”). Here, the woman metaphorically embodies the soil or vessel, drawing from the conceptual metaphor THE BODY IS A CONTAINER. In Yoruba cosmology and agricultural symbolism, the seed (male) must find fertile soil (female) to produce fruit (child). Her role is presented not as passive but active and cooperative, showing bodily readiness and emotional stability (“m’ara duro”) for conception. Ultimately, the song considers reproduction as an achievement: REPRODUCTION IS AN ACHIEVEMENT. This metaphor frames successful conception not merely as a biological outcome but as a socially significant accomplishment, deserving praise and symbolic “applause.” By referring to both partners as “olorire” (fortunate/successful), the song elevates reproduction into the realm of social prestige and shared marital triumph

SONG 9

Antenatal Lyrics	Translation
Call- E ma pe omo dara, o dara	<i>Call-Always say children are good</i>
Resp-Omo dara o dara	<i>Resp- Children are good</i>
Call-Emi a toju omo mi	<i>Call-I will take care of my child</i>
Resp- Omo dara o dara	<i>Resp- Children are good</i>
Call- Emi a we f'omo mi	<i>Call- I will bathe my child</i>
Resp- Omo dara o dara	<i>Resp- Children are good</i>
Call- Emi a f'omo mi l'oyon	<i>Call- I will breastfeed my child</i>
Resp- Omo dara o dara	<i>Resp- Children are good</i>
Call- Ma lo'gun fun l'asiko	<i>Call- I will administer drugs on time</i>
Resp- Omo dara o dara	<i>Resp- Children are good</i>

The central theme of the song is maternal responsibility and child care. In the song, abstract domains like nurture, bonding, and preventive health are structured and expressed through concrete bodily experiences like breastfeeding, bathing, and administering drugs. The song employs various metaphorical elements to convey its message. One of such metaphors is BREASTFEEDING IS NURTURE. The line “Emi a f’omo mi l’oyon” (I will breastfeed my child) metaphorises motherly love, nourishment, and bonding. In this context, the breast is not only a biological organ but a symbol of life-sustaining care, warmth, and emotional connection. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2003), the BODY IS A SOURCE DOMAIN, and here, the BREAST as a source of nourishment helps conceptualise the abstract target domain of maternal care and emotional security. Thus, breastfeeding metaphorically stands for the emotional, psychological, and physical sustenance a mother provides.

Another metaphor in the song is DRUGS ARE SHIELDS. The reference “Ma lo’gun fun l’asiko” (I will administer drugs on time) uses medicine as a metaphor for vigilance, foresight, and preventive care. Here, drugs stand in for maternal responsibility, particularly in protecting the child from disease and infections. Moreover, the repetitive chant “Omo dara o dara” (Children are good) reflects the conceptual metaphor: CHILDREN ARE TREASURES, a prevailing belief in Yoruba cosmology. This reinforces a positive attitude toward motherhood and inspires proactive, preventive, and affectionate childcare practices. Songs such as this one are part of Yoruba antepartum oral tradition, used to ritualise health education and socialise maternal roles in community settings.

SONG 10

Antepartum Lyrics	Translation
Ee marun l’abere o (x2)	<i>Injection are administered five times (x2)</i>
Alaboyun e teti e gbo	<i>Pregnant women listen attentively</i>
Ee marun l’abere o	<i>Injection are administered five times</i>

The primary theme of this song is maternal health, with a specific emphasis on preventive immunization during and after pregnancy. Abstract and technical medical concepts like immunization, infection prevention, and health compliance can be understood through concrete, familiar physical experiences; in this case, the experience of receiving an

injection. The key conceptual metaphor in the song is INJECTION IS A SHIELD AGAINST HARM. This metaphor positions the injection as more than a medical procedure. It is conceptualised as a protective barrier, a symbol of immunity, and a responsible act of self-care and child protection. The abstract domain of immunological protection is made accessible by grounding it in the sensorimotor experience of receiving an injection. The phrase “Ee marun l’abere o” (Injection is administered five times) metaphorically frames the tetanus toxoid (TT) vaccination schedule as a ritual of safety. In medical terms, pregnant women are advised to receive at least two doses during pregnancy, while the full course comprises five doses for lifelong protection. Thus, the number “five” becomes a metaphor for completeness, continuity, and sustained protection. This song functions as health communication through oral performance, where repetition and rhythm aid memorability and internalisation of health guidelines among expectant mothers. The direct address (“Alaboyun e teti e gbo” – Pregnant women, listen attentively) marks an intentional didactic tone, urging pregnant women to pay attention to antenatal protocols. It positions the speaker as a caregiver or health educator, and the listeners as agents of their own health.

Discussion of Findings

Through the lens of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980, 2003) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this study has analysed ten Yoruba antepartum songs sung at the Gynecology and Midwifery Department of the Federal Medical Centre (FMC), Abeokuta. The analysis reveals how metaphorical language is carefully crafted into health communication, thereby providing a culturally resonant means of conveying complex health messages to expectant mothers. These songs transform abstract health concepts into tangible, familiar experiences, making maternal health information both accessible and relatable. Using metaphors, these songs engage the audience’s everyday life by connecting health practices to culturally significant values and reinforcing communal norms around maternal care.

One of the primary ways these songs communicate health messages is through metaphors that frame health practices in familiar, culturally meaningful terms. Cleanliness, for instance, is a recurring theme throughout many of the songs, often depicted as a proactive tool for safeguarding both maternal and child health. Metaphors like CLEANLINESS IS A WEAPON (Song 3) and CLEAN SURROUNDINGS ARE HEALTHY PREGNANCY CONDITIONS (Song 1) emphasise the role of hygiene not merely as a preventive measure but as an active form of protection against disease. These metaphors tap into deeply held cultural beliefs within the Yoruba community, where cleanliness is seen as foundational to good health, particularly during pregnancy. The metaphorical mapping of cleanliness as both a physical and symbolic shield encourages expectant mothers to internalise hygiene practices as a form of maternal responsibility, directly linking the well-being of both mother and child to the state of their environment. The songs also emphasise the importance of health compliance through metaphors such as INJECTION IS A SHIELD AGAINST HARM (Song 10) in the context of immunization. This metaphor likens immunization to a shield, protecting both mother and child from the risks of disease.

Similarly, the use of food-related metaphors plays a significant role in how the songs address maternal nutrition. In the Yoruba cultural context, food is not just sustenance but also a symbol of care, affection and protection. Metaphors like FOOD IS HEALTH (Song 4) and PROTEINOUS FOOD IS CARE (Song 6) conceptualise maternal nutrition as an act of nurturing by emphasising specific foods, such as beans, as not just physical nourishment but also as carriers of maternal love and care. The symbolic value of food in these songs reinforces the cultural importance of nutrition, making the act of feeding both

a biological necessity and an emotional gesture. Another central theme in these songs is family planning, framed through the metaphor PLANNED PARENTHOOD IS A PATHWAY TO SUCCESS (Song 2). This metaphor positions family planning as a strategic tool for achieving long-term socioeconomic success. The songs convey that responsible family planning is not merely about preventing unwanted pregnancies, but about positioning children for a brighter future, one that is shaped by planned, deliberate decisions.

The role of spirituality in maternal health is also reinforced through metaphors that connect divine intervention with safe childbirth. The metaphor A DIVINE PROMISE IS A WRITTEN LETTER (Song 7) frames the belief in divine protection during pregnancy and childbirth as a formal, irrevocable decree. This metaphysical metaphor reflects the deep-rooted trust in divine will and intervention that is central to Yoruba culture. For expectant mothers, the promise of a safe delivery becomes more than a medical expectation; it is a spiritual assurance. Also, the metaphors HUSBAND AS SEED-BEARER (Song 8) and WIFE AS THE SOIL (Song 8) are reflective of the agricultural symbolism pervasive in Yoruba culture, which frames reproduction within a marital context. These metaphors emphasise the collaborative roles of both partners in conception, with the husband symbolised as the seed-bearer and the wife as the soil that nurtures and sustains the seed. This metaphor not only implies the biological roles of both parents but also reinforces social and cultural norms about marriage, fertility, and the joint responsibility of spouses in the reproductive process.

Conclusion

This study has revealed how Yoruba antepartum songs serve as powerful tools for health communication, using metaphorical language to convey essential maternal health messages in a culturally relevant and accessible manner. The metaphors employed in the songs not only emphasise important health practices like cleanliness, nutrition, family planning, and immunization but also reinforce deeply rooted cultural values and beliefs, which make them potent tools for health education in the community. The study, therefore, concludes that Yoruba antepartum songs are effective, innovative and culturally sensitive means of promoting maternal health awareness and behaviour, as they blend traditional values and modern health practices. Further studies could undertake a comparative analysis of the linguistic strategies used in antepartum songs across different regions and languages in Nigeria. This could provide insights into the role of language in health communication in diverse cultural contexts.

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