



## Examining Music and Language interface in a comparative study of Old and Contemporary Pop Music and their effects on Nigerian Youths

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### ABSTRACT

The crux of this study is to examine how language is used in the lyrics of some selected old and contemporary pop music and the effects on Nigerian youths. A multi-sampling and comparative methods of analysis were adopted in the analysis of data. The study also adopted sociolinguistics as the theoretical model. Four songs were selected from old and contemporary artistes. The lyrics of their songs were categorized into vulgar, codified or inoffensive expressions and subjected to critical analysis and interpretation. Findings show that the lyrics of songs of old pop musicians were decorous with lucid language, that is language that is embedded with meaningful expressions and conform with societal values and norms. In the contrary, most of the expressions in emergent pop music were mostly erotic, substance abuse, thuggery, cybercrime, nudity, sexual abuse and fantasies amongst other social vices. The paper concludes that the nation is at great risk if contemporary artistes failed to emulate old musicians whose songs are full of wisdom and teach moral values and desist from producing songs that will have negative effects on the society. It is therefore recommended that government and regulatory body in charge of music production and promotion should discourage the production and sale of vulgar music. This is imperative for a sustainable peace, development and moral value in our society.

**Keywords** Language, music, lyrics, vulgar, sustainable peace, moral value

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Different scholars all over the world have proposed multiple definitions of language, an attempt to use words to encapsulate its essence and use. Edward Sapir (1921) defined language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires through a system of voluntarily produced sounds. This definition was based on the observation that language is used by human being as they produce more organized, coherent and meaningful sounds when compared to the sounds of animals. What language means by this definition is that, it is used by human beings to communicate their feelings and that it does not just spring up in the minds of individuals the kind of language he/she speaks. Osoba (2006) agreed with Sapir that language is not instinctive when he opined that, since the human language is not instinctive, the origin of language may be rooted in human community. To Yule (1985) language is a natural sound that emanates from a divine source. Ezeigbo (2008) commenting on the significant of language to human beings stated that the ability to speak and use language is the most important gift God gave human beings over and above all other creatures he created. The use of language in a speech community varies. In a multilingual speech community like Nigeria, a sociolinguistic study will include the number of languages available and the role these languages play in the social, economic, education and media aspects. According to Adegbite (2020), Nigeria is a country with 527 indigenous languages. The languages available are divided into major and minor languages and these are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The major languages function alongside the English language, adopted in the country as language of government, education, economic, a lingua franca, a national and international language. Having highlighted the significant status of language in the society, it is imperative to discuss its role in the music industry. Music is one of the numerous ways through which people express their feelings and emotions. It is one of the ways that the American English is widely known and promoted as a result of the publicity it gains from music and movies. Many scholars have also given their verdict in the roles that music play within a culture. Gregory (1997) in his book *The Social Psychology of Music*, succinctly explained the roles of music in the society from ethnomusicologists' point of view. Cohen (2015) in his journal titled: *Music: Its Language, History, and Culture* examined the history of music in different ages, the instruments of music, elements, the role of the audience, performer and composer. Brandt et al (2022)

also considered music and language as milestones of development. Poormina (2018) on his part examined the importance of music in human life. Music is a unique way of connecting to people by singing songs that reach out to their hearts and soul. There are spiritual songs that people sing or listen to and go into trance; some are filled with the spirit of God, some people sing song and hopes are restored to the listeners. There are songs that discuss issues that affect the society and these issues have been addressed in some countries. Unfortunately, some prominent musicians no longer produce music that have positive impact on the people, especially the youths except glorifying nudity, criminality and dishonesty. Though music can bring great joy to people's lives, but the pop music of today is far from achieving this purpose. It has been observed that recent pop songs contain references to sex, drugs, alcohol or violence, self-destructive behaviour and degradation of women. Such music can negatively influence young impressionable listeners. Nigerians are believed to be highly cultural and religious people, but the western life that the youths are imbibing wholesomely contradicts the culture and moral values of the society. It is on this premise that this study attempts to examine the songs of both old and contemporary pop music and the effects on the society, most especially the youths.

### **Conceptual Framework Language and age in Music**

Age is one of the factors that affect or influences a person's use of language. In sociolinguistics, the branch that discusses the differences that occur in individuals' choice of language is variation. Language variation can be regarded as a speaker's or writer's choice of language for the expression of his or her ideas. It happens because individuals have several ways that an expression can be said in a language and factors, such as age, social class, context, setting, relationship between speakers, gender and education will determine the quality of language and manner of delivery by a speaker. Age-grading in sociolinguistics occurs when individuals change their linguistic behaviour throughout their lifetimes, but the community as a whole, does not change. The phases of aging in a society are: children (1-12years), adolescents (13-17years) and adults (18 and above). How people use languages in these phases differ strongly. Holmes (2001) argued that adolescents usually use non-standard varieties than younger adults. The use of non-standard forms however gradually decreases gradually from adolescent to adulthood in favour of more prestige varieties until a certain stage in adulthood. The frequency of using standard form of speech will decrease within older adults and more non-standard forms will be used. Umukoro and Ovweriavwose (2016) opined that, "the

most influential social group being youths have peculiar language which is in sharp contrast to the language of any social group". The language of the youth has gained the world's attention and have been studied to be distinct, deviant and revolutionary. Looking at language and age in the context of music, the way language is used now among young musicians is clearly distinct. In secular and gospel music, young artistes have come up with jargons and slangs. The use of language in this age in music is loose and is negatively influencing young impressionable listeners. People are naturally moved by what they see and hear. What a person consistently feed his mind shapes and determines his actions and inactions.

Music today is awful unlike in the 60s till about early 2000 when music has depth with a message that is being passed without invectives. The music then was not discursive, it deals with societal vices and real issues of life such as heartbreak, sacrificial love, hope renewal, bad governance etc. These songs fill people with hope; they are songs that can make a person shed tears because they are deep and highly expressive. If a musician is selling fantasy, it has depth; so also, pain. These are days of Sade Adu, Brenda Lee, Elvis Presley, Toni Braxton etc. Unfortunately, the contents of contemporary music now make references to sex, drugs, alcohol, violence, self-destructive behaviours and degradation of women. Akingbe & Onanuga (2018) agreed that "the Nigerian contemporary pop music is ebullient and effusive; the music is spilling out freely without a care in the world of what is being spilled". However, this is not to say that all the songs produced in this age are totally contaminated, the argument is that 80% of these songs are not right for consumption. Liadi and Omobowale (2011) buttressed this assertion when they claimed in the report of their research on 'Music multilingualism and hip-hop consumption among youth in Nigeria' that out of 300 hundred persons involved in the survey they carried out, 74% of them believed that music has impacted youth normative value negatively while only 25.3% believed otherwise. They stressed further that "the seeming attachment of Nigerian youths to multilingual hip-hop, indeed has far reaching implications for the changing character of the youths' normative values as well as the continuing consumption of the music".

The Nigeria music industry has produced both old and modern days pop music artistes. Their songs were greatly influence by American and European musical superstars. In this study, Sonny Okosun and Majekodunmi Fasheke, popularly known as Majek Fashek represent the old artistes while contemporary or modern musicians selected for the study are Tiwatope Savage, popularly known as Tiwa Savage and Azeez Adeshina Fashola whose stage name is Naira Marley. Sonny Okosun was one of the leading Nigerian

musicians from the late 1970s to mid-1980s. His brand of African pop music, Ozzidi, is a combination of Afro-beat, reggae and funk music. Majek Fashek was a Nigerian singer-song writer and guitarist. Tiwa Savage is a Nigerian-born but London raised and educated woman. She is an award-winning Nigerian artiste popularly known as the queen of Afrobeat. Naira Marley, is a British-Nigerian rapper, entertainer, recording artist, stage performer and song writer. He is known for rapping in his native Yoruba dialect, English and Pidgin.

### **Theoretical Framework Sociolinguistics**

This study adopted Fishman's (1980) bifocal platform model of the nexus between macro-linguistic and micro-linguistic procedures in language use. It also employed William Labov's (1972,1994, 2010) sociolinguistic variability theory and Principles of linguistic change. The term "sociolinguistics" is a branch of linguistics that was propounded by William Labov, an American psychologist. The study is interdisciplinary as it drew from anthropology, linguistics, sociology and psychology. Sociolinguistics as the word itself suggests, is a two-word expression; a combination of sociology and linguistics. It is a scientific study of a society and its language. The study became imperative because the study of language would be incomplete without taking cognizance of people that use it; where and how the language is used. According to Fishman (1972), language use involves "Who speaks, what language, to whom, when and where". Sociolinguistics is a descriptive study of the effect of all aspects of a society on the way language is used, and the effect of society on language. The study of sociolinguistics cannot be separated from the society because language is used by people in the society. Sangia (2014) postulated that sociolinguistics "attempts to explain the human ability to use language rules appropriately in various situations". This means that sociolinguistics account for the way people use language in different contexts to suit their communicative purposes with adherence to the rules that it. Language is also a means of interaction among people as they need to interact with one another since humans cannot live in solitude forever. According to Adegbite (2020), sociolinguistics is concerned with language variation, language use in a society, utilization in terms of language shift, endangerment, extinction e.t.c, and the attitude of a society or speech community to its language or languages.

**Macro and Micro Linguistics** are two types of sociolinguistics propounded by Fishman (1972, 1980). According to him, micro-sociolinguistics is the abstract study of language systems, that is, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics while macro sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society and culture.

**Sociolinguistic Variations** is another major aspect of sociolinguist approach to the study of language of music. The study of variation was born out of the need to account for the different ways that people use language in the society. William Labov (1972) was intrigued by the speech behaviour of black and lower-class people in New York and decided to carry out research on it. The theory, which is called variability theory, is an attempt to explain the differences in languages as a result of social parameters and socio-cultural factors. Variation of a language occurs because language itself is fluid and dynamic - it is susceptible to change. For instance, there is more than one way of saying the same thing. A word also has several ways it can be said in a language e.g. synonym (free-unrestricted). As Shodipe (2014) opined, language variation is indeed a glaring reality as exemplified in its everyday use and individual differences in language performance. Variation can also be considered as a style of speaking; for example, variation according to individual is called “idiolect” and variation according to a group is called “dialect”. Users of a language have choices to make and factors such as age, context, gender, class,

relationship between the speakers and their level of education play significant roles in the way they use a language.

**Methodology**

The data for this study were audio records of selected lyrics of the songs of contemporary and legendary musical icons in Nigeria. A total number of four songs of these artistes considered relevant to this study were collected online and subjected to a detailed examination. These lyrics obtained in audio forms were textualized and adequately translated to the target language for thorough analysis. The lyrics were examined word for word to identify vulgar, codified and inoffensive expressions and their meaning.

**Data Analysis and Discussion**

The analysis is carried out by translating the lyrics of the songs that are code-mixed with the English language. The words of the lyrics are grouped into vulgar, codified and inoffensive expressions and organized into tables.

**Table 1. Loaded by Asake Ft. Tiwa Savage (Translation)**

S / N	Vulgar expressions	Explicit Meaning	Implicit Meaning
1.	E mi dagboru	An unruly person	One who disorganizes a party
2.	Omo kan n lo, omo kan n bo	When a child leaves and another one arrives	A loose lifestyle of having multiple sex partners
3.	Omo yen sare wo’le moti bon’tan	The lady rushes in and I have my way	To quickly have sex with a lady
4.	All the lady for my hood, they wan touch my thing	All the ladies want to touch my luxuries.	All the ladies want to see my expensive jewelry
5.	Olomi je n gbe e de be	Darling, let me take you there	Darling, let me take you to the peak of fun
6.	Ani ma ya werey, ya photo	You are to take photograph not to display madness.	Be proactive and behave like a normal person.
7.	Olofo l’oun binu ologo	When a man without glory is envious of one with glory	A resentful person
	<b>Codified Expressions</b>	<b>Explicit Meaning</b>	<b>Implicit Meaning</b>
8	Agbaje gives me one puff	To exhale forcibly	To share cigarette or pipe with someone.
9	1964 lati n mu coco	Taking hard drugs since 1964	To take hard drugs for a long time.
10	I'm loaded	Very high	Highly desirous to have sex

The lyrics of this song is a blend of vulgar, codified and threatening expressions. The music is mostly rendered in the native language of the artistes and cod-mixed with English language. The song depicts arrogant display of wealth and affluence. The information passed is not in favour of the listeners but to brag about their worldly possessions and make everyone wants to be like them

with the errors they commit. There are also codified words in this song. For instance, the word 'coco' as used by the artiste does not mean 'cocoa', it means hard drug which some refer to as 'coke' an abbreviation for cocaine (substance). When the word 'coke' is used among a particular group of people who are drug addicts, they do not mean 'soda or fizzy drink', they mean cocaine a substance that is snuff to get intoxicated.

**Table 2. *Coming* by Naira Marley**

S / N	Vulgar expressions	Explicit Meaning	Implicit Meaning
1.	Doggy style, cowgirl (oh-yoi)	Special style	A wild sexual style
2.	Je ki n de be (let me ge(t) ge(t) ge(t))	To be allowed to visit someone or a place	To be allowed to have sex with a lady.
3.	Mo ti n wa e tey tey	The desire to see a person.	The urge to have sex with a lady.
4.	Mo fe de be (I want to ge-t, ge-t ge-t)	I want to get there.	The urge to have sex with someone
5.	They go sucking	Drawing something into one's mouth.	To have oral sex
6.	Sloppy top	An untidy or very slippery top	Messy oral sex
7.	Shivering	Moving the body.	Moving the body during sexual intercourse
8.	When I push it in	To force something into a place.	To roughly insert a male erectile organ into a female's private part.

	Codified Expressions	Explicit Meaning	Implicit Meaning
9	I am coming	Arriving or approaching a place	Getting to a height of pleasure when copulating
10	Climb on top, or should I come on top? (oh-yoi)	To be on top	When a male engages a female in sexual act.

The table above shows that the lyrics of the song are vulgar, codified, highly perverse and condescending to any listener who is not in the age bracket of lovers of such music. The song glorifies casual sex between the male and female folks, substance taking and drinking (alcohol). None of the words in this song is encouraging.

Yet, it is played regularly in public places and many youths love the music and have strong feeling for the lyrics of the song as it educates them on some wild sexual styles.

**Table 3 Send Down the Rain by Majek Fashek**

S / N	Inoffensive expressions	Explicit Meaning	Implicit Meaning
1.	'Cause I'm a living man	When a person is alive.	A living soul
2.	Even though I'm young I'm gonna live long	Though a young man but aspire to have long life.	To live a young and impactful life
3.	Jah is my song and that would make me feel so strong	To be hopeful because of the supernatural backing of God	To rely on God for a meaningful life.
4.	Got a lot of works to do, send down the rain	Requesting for rain for human needs.	To request for God's blessings on a project.
5.	Jah is my song that makes me feel so strong no matter what they say even if they say I'm wrong I'm gonna feel strong 'cause I know I'm gonna live long	To have belief in the power of God to pull one out of a difficult or mocking situation in life	To be optimistic about life.

This song paints a picture of a farmer who needs 'rain' to enable him have bumper harvest during the harvest season. The rain that the artiste is referring to is not the downpour from the sky that we know but a cry to God to crown his efforts with success to the scorn of the enemy who are gathered to mock him.

As it is known, when rain falls, there is increase in harvest, ease and refreshment. Farmers and the

communities smile because there will be abundance of edibles to buy and sell and a very large options to choose from. This is the kind of thing the artiste is projecting in his music. He presents his vulnerability to God and his hope in Him.

The writer uses the word 'jah' an acronym for 'Jehovah', one of the attributes of God to refer to Him. He acknowledges the sovereignty of God and His capability.

#### 4. Mother and Child by Sunny Okosun

S / N	Inoffensive expressions	Explicit Meaning	Implicit Meaning
1.	Mother, mother show me the way	To be shown a path	To be led to a right path.
2.	Mother teach me how to see because I'm still a child	To be thought how to be wise.	To seek guidance on how to vividly see things for what they truly are
3.	Mother teach me how to smile because I'm still a child	To be taught how to express happiness.	To be expressive.
4.	Mother teach me how to live because I'm still a child	To be taught how to be a man.	To be taught how to live an impactful life.
5.	I'm afraid to walk in darkness because I'm still a child	To be afraid of darkness.	To be wary of bad behaviour that may have dire consequences.
6.	Mother, you are my sight	A vision	A mentor, a guide

The artiste in the above lyrics, has carefully selected his words to have meaning and depth. The words have been artistically crafted to suit the aim of the artiste, which is reaching out to an older adult, a female person to teach him the wisdom of living a meaningful significant and error-free life. The lyrics are full of metaphor. The persona in the music is vulnerable and is calling on 'mother' to help him find the right path. The persona, called on his 'mother' to teach him how to smile, see, live, not walk in darkness and be shown the way. Mothers are known to be frontiers in children's lives as they teach them basic and important lessons of life. Mothers teach their children to walk, sit, crawl, bath, respect others, etc. The two Holy books (The Quran and the Bible) attest to the fact that the paradise of a child lies in the foot of his or mother. This shows that the role of a mother in the life of a child is very significant. This is the main message of the artiste.

### **Comparative Summary of Findings of the lyrics Songs**

The tables and the analysis above show clearly the discrepancy in the ideologies and mindsets of the voices behind the lyrics of the songs. Findings show that the old pop musicians, use more decorous or inoffensive language and are in fact, religious even in their secular song renditions. On the contrary, contemporary or emergent musicians have no voice for moral values. Their use of language depicts low moral values, and inappropriate ways of amassing wealth than upholding discipline and good behaviours. These songs they render unapologetically for public consumptions have serious negative impacts on the society. In one of the lyrics of a selected contemporary song, only 8% is inoffensive or normal. A whopping 78% of this song has an unhealthy use of language. Needless to say, that the song in question has nothing that glorifies sanity or discipline. Rather, it eulogises substance consumption, fornication, prostitution, casual sex or intimacy, women degradation, wild sexual fantasies amongst other unholy and humanly defected behaviours. The effects of such immoral conduct are dire and disastrous. A person who is overtly sexual will become a nymphomania (excess sexual behaviour in women), a paedophile (sexual attraction to children), pansexual, bisexual and also indulge in incest. These behaviours sooner or later will become an epidemic. In fact, a major concern in Nigeria today, is the reports of rape of minors, gay parties, organ harvesting for ritual purposes, strange sexual diseases that is, herpes, hepatitis, gonorrhoea, HIV/AIDS, etc.

Additionally, findings have shown that all the contemporary songs that have been purposely selected for this study are the same in language and style. They all glorify fraud, substance consumption, casual sex /

fornication and adultery, little work / big enjoyment, prostitution, and reckless living. Furthermore, all the contemporary or modern pop songs investigated code-mixed their language of rendition. The use of English in rendering the songs are mixed with mother tongues or foreign languages. For instance, in *Loaded* by Asake Ft. Tiwa Savage, there was a mix of the English and Yoruba languages (Yoruba being an indigenous language of the artiste). In *Coming* by Naira Marley, the languages used are English, Yoruba and a South African language. However, looking at the language of rendition of old pop songs, they were rendered purely in English. One of the two selected songs was rendered in British English (Sunny Okosun) while the other (Mjak Fashek) was rendered in two variants of the English language. The first variant was American English and such words include: gonna (going to), got (instead of have to), 'cause (instead of because), wanna (I want to). The other variant is what is referred to as Nigerianism or Nigerian English. This is not peculiar to Majek Fashek, a dated pop musician only, 9ice, a contemporary pop musician also used American English in his song *Living Things*.

Furthermore, from the tables and the analysis carried out, it is clear that rather than use codified expressions that are also vulgar, the old artistes use slangs that cannot be categorized as vulgar. These words are used for the sake of rhythm. Also, the two old pop songs, conveyed different good messages and the lyrics can be resonated by any listener of the songs. They give hope and hard work its due diligence. One speaks about its total vulnerability to the supreme being (God) and the other one, speaks about the vulnerability of a child to his or her mother who is perceived to be an epitome of proper guidance. The tone of the songs is hopeful, respectful, diligent and persevering. Lastly, another major difference between the lyrics of the songs of old and contemporary artistes is that the meaning of one can be understood explicitly and the other, implicitly. As one can observe from the songs analysed, the meaning of the lyrics of contemporary songs cannot be easily understood; the songs can only be understood when an explicit analysis is done on the language of rendition. For instance, if you are not familiar with words like hustle, puff, mo fe de be (I want to get there or I want to have sex with you) you may not be able to read any meaning to the words. On the contrary, songs of old pop - artistes can be easily understood. Unlike the contemporary musicians, their songs have depth and lots of moral and intellectual messages. Ultimately, while the lyrics of the songs of old artistes pose no threat to the society, the lyrics of the songs of contemporary artistes are hazardous to the society, most especially the youths.

### **Conclusion**

This study has critically examined the use of language in the lyrics of the songs of old and contemporary artistes and the implications of the lyrics of these songs on impressionable Nigerian youths. The submission is that old music has positive impact on the society while contemporary pop songs are bad for the consumption of not only youths but also gullible and impressionable adults in Nigeria. The songs are excessively codified to seem unharmed on the outside but when critically examined for the purpose of meaning, they are rotten and pose serious threat to the society and the future generations. Little wonder why there are so many vulgar and codified languages amongst youths today to cover their raw and bad conducts. Words that seem innocuous on the outside but with very controversial and intellectually barren meanings. Additionally, one of the contemporary songs examined in this study (*Coming*) has been banned from public consumption. Unfortunately, this song can still be easily accessed on social media. The song with the video production is on You Tube and can easily be downloaded on google. Findings also reveal that Nigerian youths love these songs for flimsy reasons such as the video quality, the dressing of the artistes, women/ladies in the music videos, houses, cars and money displayed and the beats. No attention whatsoever was paid to the lyrics except for a man in the comment section of one of the lyrics that talked about the international misrepresentation of the nation by the artistes. If the future generations who are looked upon for hope renewal are this easily swayed and corrupt, the future is bleak. The Holy bible corroborated this when it says 'if the foundation is destroyed, what can the righteous do?'.

The challenges we face as a country presently include bad global representation of the country by some youths, especially the Yahoo boys. Others include kidnapping, organ harvesting for ritual purposes and illegitimate sales, prostitution, homicide and suicide killings, incest, rape of minors, ritual killings, amongst others. All these can be stopped by providing a system that works and a pronouncement on the type of songs that should be aired and released to the public. The conclusion of this study is that contemporary artistes should emulate old artistes whose songs are full of wisdom and teach moral values. If contemporary musicians do not see themselves as agents of change and be aware of the influence they have on the younger ones, the nation is at great risk. There should be a sense of responsibility on the musicians to desist from producing songs that will have negative effects on the society. The producers, marketers, promoters of these songs, parents, government, youths

and the whole nation must also rise up to discourage and stop the production of bad music that pose threat to corporate existence of our country, Nigeria.

### **Recommendations**

This study recommends that contemporary artistes should go back and listen to the songs of old artistes and see what they are doing differently. Lyrics of old songs fill people with hope; they are deep and highly expressive. Music ought to have meaning, not just be sung for the sole aim of profit making without paying attention to thousands of lives that are at risk to such open glorification of evil. In addition, government and the regulatory bodies of the music industry should pay adequate attention to the kind of songs that are allowed to get to the public. The songs with the videos are rated eighteen (18) but when they are thrown open to the public, anybody can pick them. In a country where father and mother are working their hearts out to provide for the family, where will they have the time to sit with their adolescents and youths to guide them? Meanwhile, an eighteen-year-old is pretty much a child. Finally, youths should be careful of the contents they consume on social media and other platforms. They are advised to be very selective and try to see and know that patience, hard work, diligence, total submission to God and respect to our parents, honesty, perseverance, kindness, meekness, sincerity (As advocated in the old songs examined in this study) is not jettison for worldly affairs. There is so much gain in having good moral values and being prudent.



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