

Olusegun Fariudeen Liadi*

Meaning construction in Nigerian multilingual hip hop: a study in sociology of music

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Abstract: The wide acceptability of Nigerian hip hop music, home and abroad, indicates increasing value of the inclusion of local popular languages in the composition and performance of the music. In the text of many of the award winning singles and albums are mixtures of different languages ranging from English, Pidgin English, Yoruba, Igbo and other local dialects. Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of structuralism, this study examines meaning construction in hip hop music in Nigeria. By focusing on the Nigerian hip hop artists, who adopt different slangs embedded with codes considered absurd within the mainstream cultural milieu, the study closely investigates constructed meanings in the lyrics of four Nigerian award winning hip hop artists. All the artists adopted multilingual codes-switching from one language to another in presentation of their messages. The codes in the songs generally symbolise and present messages or meaning that appears out of the mainstream cultural meanings. Listeners and artistes meet at the level of interpretations. The article argues that Nigerian artists creatively present a sub-culture where they and their fans can relate through codes and words embedded with symbolic meanings shared by both artists and fans.

Keywords: Saussure; meaning construction; multilingual hip hop; Nigerian music; semiotics

1 Introduction

The wide acceptability of Nigerian version of hip hop music, home and abroad, indicates increasing value of the inclusion of local popular languages in the composition and performance of the music. In the text of many of the award winning singles and albums are mixtures of different languages ranging from English, Pidgin English, Yoruba, Igbo and other local dialects. The ethnic affinity of the singers

***Corresponding author: Olusegun Fariudeen Liadi**, Sociology, Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria, E-mail: liadiolusegun@gmail.com. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9239-4996>

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notwithstanding, singers, composers and performers of contemporary Nigerian hip hop music adopt multilingualism for both market and aesthetic purposes (Liadi 2012; Liadi and Omobowale 2011). What inclusion of various languages shows is that it allows artists to engage in social dialogue with their audience, conveying their inner thoughts and philosophy, in such a way that it is easy to understand and acknowledge by fans. The choice of language mixing or switching within the text of a Nigerian hip hop artist is an important factor in terms of the interpretation of messages in the songs.

Hence, the focal point of this article is to examine the multilingual structure of and the meaning embedded in some selected Nigerian hip hop music. The analysis here involves the examination of lyrics and/or video clips of some selected artists in relation to and with the intention of exposing the underlying structure of meaning embedded in the songs. However, the article does not aim to delve extensively into the linguistic terminologies or structure in terms of how such will be done by a linguist. What the study is preoccupied with is language(s) preference of the artists (Agbo 2009) in the composition of their music in terms of exposing the mixing and fusion of various languages to present a musical story to their audiences. Also, the article demonstrates how the messages through the multi-language become meaningful in the construction of everyday social realities by the fans.

2 Multilingualism (code-switching) and hip hop music

Code-switching, according to Babalola and Taiwo (2009) is a sociolinguistic term and a product of multilingualism. The concept has been studied in considerable detail since about 1970, particularly from sociolinguistic point of view (Appel and Muysken 1987). Nelip (2006) noted that authors with focus on the studies of language acquisition, second language acquisition, and language learning use the term code switching to describe either multiple language speakers, or language learner practices involving the use of more than one language. However, different perspectives have been developed in the study of this concept, reflecting a variety of scholarly orientations (Sarkar et al. 2005). Generally, code-switching can be intentional and unintentional (Okolo 2002). It can also be inter-sentential that is “switches between sentences” or intra-sentential which describes “switches within sentence” (Babalola and Taiwo 2009: 3).

Whether intentional or intra-sentential the pertinent question, to follow Appel and Muysken (1987) is, why do people code switch in the course of a single conversation? Many studies, including those of Nigerian scholars such as Okolo (2002),

Appel and Muysken (1987) among many others have attempted to provide answer to this question. To start with Appel and Muysken (1987), switching codes in conversation serves four functions: referential function, directive function, expressive function, phatic function and metalinguistic function. Okolo (2002) provided a broader classification under which the four functions identified by Appel and Muysken can be pigeon holed. Using tape recorded data collected from a longitudinal study that lasted three years, Okolo (2002) examined and identified the conversational roles and social functions of code switching among multiple language speakers. In Okolo's (2002) view the reasons why people observe code switching in conversational situations include both social and psychological reasons. For him, "social and psychological factors ...underlie code switching" (p. 240) and form the major reasons why people code switch in conversation.

In music, attempt has been made by various scholars to examine the uses of code switching in Hip hop music since the 1990s (Androutsopoulos 2006: 1). From German hip hop to Australian hip hop to Pinoy rap (Philippines) to Azeri rap (Azerbaijan) (Price 2007) to J hip hop (Japan) and to Nigerian hip hop, what is common to these variety of country-led hip hop is the mixing and switching of local languages in musical texts. Although it has come under different banners, code switching in hip music has been variously studied by Agbo (2009) 'language alternations in Nigerian hip hop music'; Babalola and Taiwo (2009) 'code switching in contemporary Nigerian music'; (Sarkar et al. 2005) 'multilingual code switching in Montreal hip hop'; Bentahila and Davies (2002) 'language mixing in rai music'; and Fenn and Prullo (2000) 'language choice in hip hop in Tanzania and Malawi' to mentioned a few. Common in the works of the authors mentioned above is a study of mixed codes in the lyrics of (hip hop) music.

Fenn and Prullo (2000) look at choices of language in hip-hop music in Tanzania and Malawi, two neighboring East African nations. They noted that rap music is carried out in the two major languages in Tanzania, Swahili and English. Fenn and Prullo (2000) observed in this study that while English rap borrows heavily from American hip-hop discourse, with such themes as parties and friends, Swahili rap focuses on issues pertinent to Tanzanians, like AIDS, drug use, corruption, unemployment and immigration from the country. The authors in the conclusion showed that Tanzanian hip-hop musicians mediate between English and Swahili, relying on both languages to construct a unique landscape for their music.

In Nigeria, Agbo (2009) examined the language choices of Nigerian musical artistes to understand how the musicians cleverly mixed languages as strategies to enhance the aesthetic and rhetorical qualities of their works. It was revealed, in the study, that the language alternation (code switching) patterns involve major Nigerian languages and English. The author (Agbo 2009) observed that language switching by the Nigerian artists has other connotations because they are viewed to also bear

the qualities of identifying the artists' linguistic identity and preferences. The author concludes that the employment of the multilingualism by the Nigerian musicians through code switching helps hip hop artists to achieve greater fan base. In addition, the creative use of multi-lingualism can achieve a greater understanding of the messages that the Nigerian artists try to pass across to their fan base.

3 Semiotics, structuralism and the Nigerian multilingual hip hop

To examine meaning construction in the musical lyrics of the Nigerian hip hop artists, the author draws on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of structuralism. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) has often been canonized as the founding father of modern linguistics (Aranovich and Wong 2022; Bishop and Phillips 2006) and by extension structuralism (Sørensen and Thellefsen 2022; Ritzer 2008). Saussure's theory stresses the importance of internal structure dedicated to cognitive thought process or action of human minds in structuring the physical (material) or intangible (abstract) signs of their surroundings, and among them is the structure of linguistic signs in the language system that allows them to function as human beings and communicate with each other (Yakin and Totu 2014).

Saussure also introduced the concept of code to clarify how we assemble meaning from such relations – defined simply as the assignment of meaning to sign structures (Danesi 2022). For Saussure, language is wholly mental entity covering two elements, the signifier and the signified, which co-function to form the sign (Joseph 2022; Stoltz 2021). The fundamental distinction Saussure made between the concept of *la langue* (language) and *la parole* (speech) is of utmost importance because of its relevance in the explanations of the issues that surround this article. However, it is important to point out that there are more to the theory of sign by Saussure than just *la parole* and *la langue*. Beyond these two components of linguistic signs, Saussure developed what is called semiotic (the study of meanings of language in social life), distinguished between *signifier* (word) and *signified* (social meaning of the word). His binary way of thinking led Saussure to present several concepts in a form of dichotomy, for example, linguistic and nonlinguistic signs, arbitrary versus motivated, and others (Joseph 2022). According to Lemert (1979: 931) “semiotic is the study of signs and their meaning (in relations) to linguistic; but language is only one of many sign systems”. Whether semiotic or linguistics, these two must be viewed together to have a meaningful insight to a group's language (sign) (Yakin and Totu 2014).

Structuralism which is described as a theoretical commitment to reveal the basic structural patterns in social and cultural phenomena (Joseph 2022) has often been said to derive many of its theoretical elements from the Saussure's expositions in structural linguistics. In fact, as the Encyclopedia Americana 2003 puts it, structuralism and its followers take "structural linguistics as their methodological mode" (p. 568). However, the concern of structuralism as developed by Saussure differs from the major focus of structural functionalism (Ritzer 2008). Saussure's theory concerns the study of the underlying structure of a social phenomenon to discover its elements of relations within the whole system (Rudloff and Kjærboe 2022). This theory is based on three assumptions: the systemic nature of significations, the relational and functional distinctions of the elements of significations and the arbitrary nature of significations (Bishop and Phillips 2006).

As Saussure posits, the study of language as a cultural signs/codes should focus on the system rather than the history of linguistic phenomena. This is because rather than history, language and the linguistic system is indeed a system of signs, and signs derive their meaning through their relations with other signs in the total structure of signs (Schinkel and Tacq 2004) in a speech community. In other words, signs/languages/codes only acquire meaning and value when they are interpreted in relations to each other. This claim is supported by arguing that social and cultural phenomena do not have essence on their own but are defined by their internal structure and the relations among their parts, and also by their relations with other phenomena in the relevant social and cultural systems (Encyclopedia Americana 2003). To this study, it is believed that this part of Saussure's theory is aligned with the interpretive sociology's view of social phenomenon. According to Adorjen and Kelly (2007) interpretive sociology embraces the principle that social life is subjective and that those who systematically study social life attend to how people make sense and interpret their social world, actions, and identities. The relationship between the signifier and the signified requires interpretation of signs in relation with other signs which also needs a familiarity with the sets of conventions or codes currently in use to communicate meaning in a cultural setting.

It is this last point that led Saussure to his famous distinction between different poles of language analysis, which relate to the difference between what he calls *parole* (the utterance or proposition) and *langue* (the language system) (Bishop & Philips, 2006). This distinction relates to differences between communal and individuation of language relations in a society such that the "collective (social) and the individual part of language" (Schinkel and Tacq 2004: 62–63) become explicit. Saussure's distinction of *la langue* (language) and *parole* (speaking) provides this study with an adequate theoretical analytical tool to explain not only the structure of the multilingualism employed in the texts (*parole*) of the lyrics from the songs of selected hip hop artists but also the social signification of such multilingual texts in

relations to its location within the larger context of the Nigerian cultural milieu. In this regards, the social objectification of the multilingual signs in multilingualism songs through the generations of group shared meanings and social identification of fans works in tandem with the speech like multilingual lyrics within the Nigerian hip hop.

As a group, the Nigerian hip hop artists, whether deliberately or not, give prominence to usage of multiple languages and coded words in their lyrics (Ajayi 2023; Ogah-Adejoh 2021; Akande 2020; Liadi 2012; Adedeji 2011). The seeming influence multi-ligualism has on the popularity of the Nigerian version of hip hop has also been well documented (Liadi and Omobowale 2011; Liadi 2012). Given the far-reaching effects hip hop messages have on young people's behaviours, a semiotic analysis of meanings and interpretations of codes/slangs produced by prominent artists may represent an important milestone in scholarly attempt to further understand the social usage of languages among young people. The purpose of this article therefore is to explore social construction of meanings from selected songs of award-winning popular hip hop artists in Nigeria through the aid of semiotic analysis.

4 Materials and methods

The data used for this study was from the lyrics and videos of selected Nigerian hip hop artists. The author used purpose sampling technique to obtain sample of songs of the selected artists and the nightclubs visited for the purpose of observations. The lyrics of the songs used in the study were obtained from music from the back of the albums of the artists selected for the study. Those that were not available were sourced from copy of songs' lyrics compiled in a pamphlet format that is hawked around and from the internet. The lyrics are particularly important source of material for the study.

Six songs from the music of four artists were selected for use in the study. In the case of Dbanj and 9ice two tracks from their songs were selected, (1) because the songs are sequel to each other. In other words, the message/story in the songs can better be understood in details when examined together. And (2), because the two selected songs, in the case of these two artists, were extremely popular among youths. The criteria for choosing the songs were the same used for selecting the artists who sang the songs. This selection was through scrutinization of awards lists of some of the major local and international music awarding organizations such as the Nigerian Music Award (NMA), Music TV (MTV) Europe/Africa, Music of Black Origin (MOBO), World Music Awards (WMA) and the Hip Hop World Awards (HHPA). To be included, an Artists/music must have won either an international or local awards (as a measure of his/its popularity) in the last five years. Also, the video clips

of these selected songs were watched to detail some important verbal and nonverbal behaviours that helped to explain the social relations embedded in the music.

To help further our analysis, participant observations were conducted at three night clubs within Ibadan city between December 25th to January 1st, 2020. The observations offered opportunities for the author and the research. Apart from the obvious and the usual justifications articulated for using participant observation, that is, the immersion of a researcher in the natural setting where the phenomenon under study is taken place (Babbie 2005), participation offered further opportunity to observe the consumers of hip hop music in action and study the social vibes created periodically as some of the Afro hip hop were played by the DJ. Thus, the author was opportune to observe many social behaviours of clubbers in terms of the intensity and the immersion as the songs were played. Aside this, the Participant Observation conducted at the different nightclubs affirmed the choices of artists selected for this study. The author's observed that the songs of these four artists selected for the study were repeatedly played throughout most part of the nights with only few interjections of songs of other musicians. This confirms the popularity and the currency of these artists both within the music industry and among the audiences.

Apart from the nightclub managers and DJs who had previous knowledge and idea about the presence of the author when the observations were being conducted, the observation was largely covert in nature. This of course is to avoid any form of interference with the nature of events and also to allow the author to intermittently hop out to record some of the important observations. In other words, the author presented himself as a clubber, danced and sometimes engaged in the usual ecstatic shout of fun along with other clubbers.

5 Results

This section presents the results from the analysis of findings from the lyrics of the selected artists. The results show how each selected artist create multiple slangs (as codes) within the community of fans who listens to their music and the meanings generated from the codes.

5.1 Oyeibanji, Daniel Dapo (aka Dbanj) – *Tongolo* (2005) and *Why Me* (2008)

Tongolo and *Why Me* are two songs that have successfully promoted and enhanced the music status of Daniel Oyeibanji popularly known as Dbanj in the music industry. Both songs, released in different years (2005 and 2008 respectively), topped the

musical charts in the country for several weeks. When put together, what is discernable is that the two songs are two parts of a story. Though, *Tongolo* is the source of the nomenclature of *kokomaster* (with different meanings) which Dbanj carries around up till today, *Why Me* is a work which somehow stamped the name into the consciousness of his teeming fans. Between *Tongolo* and *Why Me* nevertheless, are several awards won by the artist locally and internationally for his prowess and creativity in the industry. They are so popular that up till today the songs are more or less like anthem on the lips of hip hop lovers in the country. The author's observation is that, in all the clubs visited, these two songs were always played and the reception of the clubbers to them when DJs played the songs was overwhelming. Indeed, *Tongolo* is a typical multilingual hip hop song in Nigeria as it is composed of three languages (Standard English, Pidgin English and Yoruba) that have wider usage in communication parlance. *Why Me* on the other hand is primarily dominated by the use of Pidgin English with the other two languages featuring once or twice in the whole music.

The data (the lyrics of the two songs) showed that the musician (Dbanj) adopted multi-lingualism in presentation of his messages. The lexical items in this particular music are composed with English, Pidgin English and the Yoruba languages. However, the Pidgin English clearly dominated most of the text. While Yoruba language also features prominently (particularly in *Tongolo*), English was used sparingly. This may not be surprising as Dbanj is widely known for his use of Pidgin English in most of his songs. In fact, the Dbanj's musical fame is believed to rest on his use of Pidgin English and his capacity to entertain his fans. The domination of Pidgin English in the *Tongolo* and *Why Me* appears to be intentional as it frees the musician from some of the difficulties (i.e. inability to freestyle with other languages) he may run into expressing his messages in strictly Yoruba or English. This assertion is based on the fact that many of the lexis that the musician chose to convey in Pidgin English have their standard equivalent in English language. For example, in (*Tongolo*) Verse two, lines 2, 7, 8, 9 are phrases that can easily be expressed with the English language: *As I dey waka up the road* (as I walked up the road), *I see one baby, I nail her no be small* (I saw one lady, I liked her a lot), *I yannam the truth, I yannam the fact and I yannam no be small* (I told her the truth, I told her the fact and I told her everything), *she no wan gree my own o* (she declined my entreaties), *until I yannam the koko* (until I told her the real thing).

Apparently, conveying this message in proper English may make the music lose some of the rhythm and free flow styling which afforded it the aesthetic and commercial success. Thus, the use of Pidgin English liberated the musician from the challenges and struggling of lack of free flow rhythm which may result from the use of English to communicate this simple message. Also, in *Why Me*, almost all the lexical items in the lyrics of the song have standard equivalent in English language,

but the artist opted for Pidgin English again perhaps for the same reason as *tongolo*. Since musical text must flow freely from the thought of the composer, Dbanj's choice of Pidgin English appears to be with the intention to connect aesthetically with his audiences. Therefore, choosing to use Pidgin English extensively with the mixture of standard English is to present a simple but very clear message to his audiences, that of his reputation as the *kokomaster*:

Me I be Dbanj	I am Dbanj
My jamo friends dey call me ski banj	My Jamaican friends call me skibanj
I don get degree for <i>womanology</i>	I earned a degree in <i>womanology</i>
I don study the woman <i>phisonomy</i>	I have studied women <i>phisonomy</i>
Wey dey make dem dey follow me	which attract them to me
For the clubs girls dey take dem top off for me	girls pulls off their top for me at the club
Even if guys dey ask for me,	guys ask about me
make I tell them the secret of my melody	to reveal the secret of my melody

The above text extracted from the lyrics of *tongolo* illustrates a simple message the artist's charm with the opposite gender. As he said, he has degree in *womanology* through the study of women *phisonomy*. Of course these two terms here are construction of the artist which gives him the leverage to express his idea in a simple manner. The 'degree', as it were, qualifies him to lecture his fans about the secret of what attract women to him which he called the *koko*. Thus:

Dbanj tell dem the koko	Dbanj tell them the real thing,
I say make you yan dem the koko (2ce)	I say tell them the real thing
When you see the woman wey you like	when you see a woman that you like
you go just use your magic word	just use the magic word
(You go just say no long thing, <i>tongolo</i>)	you should merely say, no long thing, <i>tongolo</i>
Sungbalaja, <i>tongolo</i> ,	lie down flat, <i>tongolo</i>
Omoge wa ja, <i>tongolo</i>	omoge wa ja, <i>tongolo</i>
Sungbalaja, shay wo le <i>tongolo</i> ,	lie down flat, can you <i>tongolo</i>
Omoge wa ja, <i>tongolo</i>	omoge waja, <i>tongolo</i>

Sugbalaja, *tongolo*, *omoge waja*, all these are slangs with meanings of their own. To comprehend what the terms mean requires deep understanding and immersion into street sub-culture of the Nigerian youth listeners. Nevertheless, *koko* is a Yoruba word which could mean the essence of a thing (for example, *koko oro ti a nso ni wipe...* literally meaning, the essence of our discussion is ...). But *koko* in *tongolo* was appropriated to communicate an idea that is related to male-female sexual organs and by extension sexual intercourse (Omobowale and Omobowale 2007).

Within the sub culture of hip hop this message resonates well with the youth's sensibilities. Youth are captivated by stories of love, emotions and in particular, sex. *Tongolo* seems to offer this in abundance to its audiences. If the lyrics of *Tongolo* conceal this fact, the music video (the three versions; original, remix and the un-cut) put no one in doubt as to the meaning or message of *Tongolo*. In the remix and the un-cut version of the video of the song (*Tongolo*), Dbanj and his former music collaborator (Don Jazzy) were present in a bedroom scene touching, caressing and smooching different ladies (with only lingerie and bikini) on a bed. The display is just a little short of actual sexual act. And in the course of this simulated sexual role play, the video vixens (as they are called) repeatedly echo the chorus "I like the *koko*", "*it is the biggest koko*", "*it is the sweetest koko*" in response to Dbanj's questions "do you like the *koko*?" "How big is the *koko*?", and "how sweet is the *koko*?"

Dbanj used his lyrics to convey the message of eroticism to his multitude fans. *No long thing*. For Dbanj, the magic words (*koko*): *tongolo*, *sungbalaja*, are the street codes for sensual attraction to the ladies. These terms are the principal codes that the artist used to present the message in his music. Though, Dbanji has not revealed what he meant by the terms *tongolo* (the word has been used interchangeably as sex or sexual act), *koko* (high male-sexuality) some writers have concluded that the two codes combined mean the "ultimate aphrodisiac" (Abimbolu 2017). The word could also mean a man with satisfying sexual organ. In a more explicit detail, Anumoka (2016) writes that

Dbanji came into the industry with all the sexual prowess and aptitude when music fans were in need of a new theme for their artists to sing. The lyrics from his song *tongolo* and the demonstration he (Dbanji) does with his hands made him the sexual lord that even guys were scared of leaving their women close to him because he made everyone believe his *koko* can do magic without touching the lady (Anumoka 2016: 1).

Having possessed the magic words (i.e. *tongolo*) which attract the women to him, in the sequel *Why Me*, the artist completed the second part of his story:

I don't know how to say this
 But this girl drives me crazy
 Cause I cruise in tow with a Mercedes
 So she said she wanna have my baby
 First when I met her
 She said *koko* master come test her
 Twice maybe *metta*
 Wanna test my skills
 So I let her, yes so I let her

I am not sure how to express my mind on this
 this girl drives me crazy
 because I drive around in a Mercedes
 she said told me she wishes to have my baby
 when we first met
 she invited *koko* master to test her
 we could do it twice or thrice
 she was trying to test my skill
 hence, I agreed.

In *Why Me* the ladies now flock around Danj but once his *koko* was accustomed to by them, it became difficult to shake the ladies off. The artist related his experiences now not in terms of showcasing his prowess at wooing ladies but with some sense of disgust that they would not let go after having had a feel of his *koko*. At first when she wanted to *test his skill* he *let her*. But to his astonishment she now wanted to have his *baby* though this was not the agreement between them. Hence, rather than being proud and happy as the man with the magic word (*kokomaster*) he was miffed:

She said she wanted to be mine	she said she wanted to be mine
That my koko tracks are wild	that my koko tracks are wild
So tell me why me o	I would like to understand why me
But it was a one nightstand	it is just a one nightstand
Baby don't you understand	baby don't you understand
So tell me why me o (2x)	I would like ot understand why me
You dey try me o	you are frustrating me

However, the content of the music has a wider interpretation that goes beyond the everyday understanding. Whichever way it is looked at meanings generated from these music and such slangs as *tongolo* and *koko* are not meant for the mainstream society-wide interpretations or understanding. It is a constricted code as hip hop sub-culture and it is not only understood by this group but forms part of their identity. Consequently, the meaning generated from Dbanj's music are sub-culture bound and can only be understood when referred to the speech community in the sub-culture. Generally, it will be difficult to find adequate meaning for either *koko* or *tongolo* within the larger Nigerian speech communities. The relevance of the words and the meaning generated from them are subject to sub-culture of hip hop listeners. They have been interpreted severally and the meaning given to these terms depends on whether one is within the culture or outside of it.

5.2 Gongo Aso (2008) and Wedding Day (2008)–Abolore Akande (aka 9ice)

One multilingual hip hop star that has a contrasting usage of languages in his music is Mr. Abolore Akande known widely as 9ice. *Gongo Aso* and *Wedding Day* are two songs which showcase the musical talent of 9ice in the industry. These songs released in the same album titled *Gongo Aso*, won 9ice many awards and they are darlings of DJs at nightclubs. The unique feature of 9ice is his creative usage of Yoruba adages and poetic thoughts in the compositions and performance of his music. This differentiates him not only in style but also aesthetically. While many other multilingual

artists in the industry let Pidgin English dominate their songs (with Yoruba or other dialect sparingly used) for 9ice, Yoruba language is the main language in his hip hop while he mixes it with Pidgin English and English. Interestingly, rather than being a minus for the musician, the observation of this author is that Yoruba language usage has become a strength for him. This ingenuity has led to the present accolades enjoyed by the musician among the Nigerian youth. However, *Gongo Aso* and *Wedding Day* have different themes/messages but they are both very popular given the numbers of awards won by the two songs.

Gongo Aso is a song that is based on the experience of the artists which bothers on partying, celebration, drinking, brotherliness and sharing. The song was performed in three languages. The musician switches from Yoruba, to English, and then to Pidgin English, though Yoruba language features more prominently in the music. He introduced *gongo aso* with the following chorus:

Gongo aso, akutupu ahu,	the drums will be played and the wonders shall happen
anywhere I dey now(2ce)	anywhere I am now
Ajisebi oyo laari,	Oyo imitators abound
oyo o'sebi baba eni Kankan	but Oyo don't imitate anyone
I be double now,	I am a success now
Aye nlo, e o ri nkan,	the beat is on, can't you see it
gongo aso	the drums will be played

The song is a celebratory song of success. It preaches the virtue of partying and celebration with friends in line with the idea that *Gongo Aso* represents. *Gongo* is a specially carved stick for beating a drum in Yoruba land. What *gongo aso* therefore connotes is rolling out the drums in celebration in times of success. In Yoruba society where 9ice comes from and its people are known for the culture of partying and celebration of success and accomplishment. This reflected a lot in this particular song as he says in verse one:

Everywhere I dey na party	everywhere I find myself we party
Hennssy nlo, Moet nlo, Bacardi nlooo	Hennesy flows, Meot flows, and Bacardi nloo
We no go stop till the break of dawn	we are not stopping until daybreaks
Bebe nloooo	the party is on
Forget sey you gey money	don't be too conscious of wealth
Call your pad idem make una follow judi	invite your friends and merry/dance together
Party jolly, jolly party	party and jolly, jolly and party
Fidi gbodi, make una shack scordi	dance and drink squardron
Make your eye dirty	drink till your tipsy
From now till eternity	from now till eternity

As it appears the song is not only on partying, it is also on drinking as well. Drinking, nevertheless, is an element of partying. In the song, four hard drinks were mentioned with the word *nlo* (meaning flowing); Hennessy, Moet, Bacardi, Scordi (Squadron). The first three drinks are very expensive Champagne and hard liquors. Indeed, these drinks are now part of the emerging alcoholic (drinking) culture among the Nigerian youth. Hip hop music lovers showcases these drinks at every opportunity and it has come to be a status symbols for those who are within the culture such that if you can “pump Champagne” or seen drinking Hennessy and any of the other hard liquors, the individuals are regarded to be in the league of the ‘big boys’ (Bailey 2023). In any case, *Gongo Aso* celebrates virtues of friendliness and sharing among friends as typified in the above song. The song suggests that friends jettison class divides to come together to celebrate one of their own in time of success, as he forgets that he is now richer or more successful – he invites them to *fidi gbodi* (jolly and party).

Unlike *Gongo Aso*, *Wedding Day* is a song that celebrates love and the value of marriage. Inter switching between four languages (Hausa, Yoruba, Pidgin English and English) 9ice projected the message of love, emotion and warnings to potential rivals warning “*aya wa nii nobi story iyawo wan nii*” (it is not a tell tales she is our wife). In his characteristic manner he pointed out that on that day he is going to celebrate in a big way *maa gbe’su lena, maa tun fona roka* (I prepare a large feat or banquet):

On our wedding day,	on our wedding day
Maa gbe’su lena, maa tun fona roka	I will prepare a large feast
Gbogbo awon its still dey le	all the single girls lurking around
This time around,	this time around
Omo sai gobe	ladies bye bye
Sweet girl	sweet girl
Na you a go marry	it is you I will marry
Aya wa ni nobi story	it is not a tell tales she is our wife
Iyawo wa nii	she is our bride

This is a very popular song among the youths in Nigeria particularly among the girls. Ladies celebrate this song and you usually hear them humming it while playing around or working. The affection shown to the song by fans cannot be surprising as this is the one of the very thing that occupies the minds of the youths while growing up. Love is one of the fantasies of both young and old ladies. Any object that expresses the messages of love and rendering of affection is accorded a special space in the heart of the womenfolk. The message of the music is message of affection, marriage and declaration of love. The message here shows that the man is willing to be faithful to his “sweet girl” now that he has found her. So, all other girls are warned to stop lurking around and “sai gobe”. Again, one found 9ice reverting back into Yoruba

culture for inspirations here. The text *aya wa ni no be story iyawo wa ni* (it is no telltale story she is our wife) can be contrasted with *aya mi ni* (she is my wife). Marriage is a union that goes beyond the principal actors (bride and bridegroom) in Yoruba culture, as it is in many other Nigerian cultures. Marriage still takes place between two extended families despite modernization. Thus, if the artist had used the later text (*aya mi ni*) he would have conveyed the value of nuclear family to his fans. But, he chooses to use the former, perhaps, not to disengage with the philosophy of marriage (of the people whose language he has adopted mainly for his music) from the language itself.

Anyway, the other language that features in this song (*sai gobe*) is a Hausa word that means till tomorrow. It is usually used in greeting when the speaker wishes to say goodbye for the last time for the day. This word therefore expresses the termination of contact or interactions at least for the time being with the other person. Its use here, by 9ice, is to illustrate the fact that there was no space in his heart (at least for now) for other girls. Thus, it is meant to say goodbye to his ex-lovers. In the circle of every day communication, *sai gobe* has a different meaning. *Omo gobe lo wa o*, means you are in serious trouble. The singer's versatility and ingenuity allowed him the creative use of the language to project his thoughts in an acceptable manner. Through the music *sai gobe* has found its way into everyday lexis of the average youth in conversations. However, unlike the original meaning for which it is used among the Hausas, the word has become in-group slang with slightly different meaning from its original usage.

5.3 Peter and Paul Okoye (aka Psquare) – Do Me (2008)

In terms of musical popularity, Psquare is a household name in the Nigerian hip hop industry. They are one of the most successful multilingual hip hop groups in the country, past and present. The ascendance of the duo is based on their intelligent reconstruction of some of the American stars songs in local form (Wikipedia 2010). These recreations were so popular with the Nigerian fans that many of the corporate concerts organized in the country from the year 2000s must include Psquare. In fact, the duo (twin brothers) released their first major album titled *Last Nite* through the sponsorship of Benson and Hedges of London in the year 2001 (Wikipedia 2010). Though they have released a couple of more albums and singles since then, their popularity has been average, until the release of the third album *Games Over* released in 2008.

Do Me (see complete lyrics in appendix 6), the leading track in the duo's third album sold more than eight million copies and won several awards in Nigeria and Africa. The song, which is dominated by the mixture of the Pidgin English and

Standard English with a fast beating performance, is a delight at dance halls and clubhouses across the country. Apart from *wahala* which can be a Hausa or Yoruba word) for trouble and *omo* (Yoruba word which is now used in youth language as a girl in girlfriend) the verses and chorus of the song was dominated by these two languages. The examination of the chorus of the song provides insight into both the multilingualism in and the message of the music:

If you do me, I do you, (man no go vex)
 Step on the dance floor (man no go vex)
 Touch me, I touch you (man no go vex)
 You say, I say (man no go vex)
 If you do me, I do you, (man no go vex)
 Step on the dance floor (man no go vex)
 So won't you give it to me (I will give it to you)
 So make you give if it to me some more (some more)
 E get as e dey do me, so make you give it to me, give it to me

The words *do me, I do you* occur throughout most part of this song. This is an expression which may suggest different meaning to listeners of the music depending on the understanding of the sub culture of hip hop. As with the other terms used by various other multilingual hip hop artists, it may be a bit difficult to say with a degree of absoluteness that this is exactly what the musicians mean by the usage of these words (since the lyrics is merely individual speeches of the duo). Nevertheless, taking together with other words (*touch me, I touch; make u give it to me some more*) in the chorus which also appears frequently in the song and watching of the video clips of *do me*, it becomes easy to infer as to what the message the duo was communicating to their fans. *Do me, I do you; touch me, I touch you (man no go vex); give it to me some more*, though amenable to different interpretations, connotes codes for sex roles and actions. The words illustrate subtle bedroom languages which typify flirtatious or sexual innuendoes. To understand what sexual nuances built in the song one must first understand that the song was sung in collaborations with South African ladies. Who in the music video swings their waists and buttocks in a flirtatious manner chorusing repeatedly:

Boy, you know say talk is cheap	boy you are aware that talk is cheap
and you are tempted to roll with me	and you are tempted to roll with me
Me, I no be the bizzy body wey you see	I am not the bizzy body that you see
what a man can do, a woman can do so	what a man can do a woman can do so
if you do I do you	if you do me I will do you
man no go vex	no quarrel

Psquare and these singers appear to be in dialogue with one another. The skimpy dresses, the body languages convey the messages of sex and sexual relations. The sexual subtleties in the message are further projected in the second part of the song:

Omo, check out the way she twist and wind it	girl check out the way she is twisting and winding it
Make me feel like am grinding it, grinding it	she makes me feel like I am grinding it
I know say you dey eye me, eye me	I am aware of your interest
After the show na the party for my room	after the show I will take you to a party in my room
Strictly for me and you, you	strictly for you and me
We get plenty things to do, do	we have a lot to do
So pull off the bump... and move, make we groove	so, pull off the bump and move, let us groove

The words *na the party for my room* are considerably illustrative of these sexual subtleties. The party, which is meant strictly for *me and you* (the lady and the duo) will afford them to engage in the *plenty things* awaiting them *after the show* in his *room*. With this choice of words, Psquare was able to build a sexual (flirtatious) move in the song. In any case, the use of these words, its social/cultural context and the meanings derived from them appears to be quite clear to the fans. The implication of this is that hip hop fans across the country use this in relational forms especially in communication with the opposite sex. These words are often on the lips of many youths particularly the boys with meanings and body languages that are suggestive. For many fans, therefore, sex and sexual relations, a common theme in all the Nigeria hip hop music, finds its ways into the interpretations of these lyrical items.

5.4 My African Queen (2004) – Innocent Idibia (aka 2face)

Innocent Idibia is a well-known face in the Nigerian hip hop circles. Since his debut as a solo artist after the breakup of the Plantation Boys, the musical group to which he formerly belonged, 2face's music career has been on the rise. Considering the numbers of local and international awards he has won and the concerts he has the grace to perform, his is nothing, but a success story. In fact, 2face is today regarded in many quarters as the doyen of the Nigerian hip hop music.

With the release of his most smashing hit track so far (the *African Queen*) 2face, as he is popularly known, became an international figure. *Face2face* the album in which *African Queen* was released reportedly sold over two million copies as at 2004 (Wikipedia 2010) bringing fortune to the artist. But beyond this market success, the achievement of *African Queen*, arguably, has not been surpassed by any songs produced by Nigerian hip hop artists in the country. In terms of fame and international

recognitions, *Africa Queen* is second to none. In fact, aside Dbanj (who won the MTV Europe award in 2007), the song stands as the only hip hop song of the Nigerian stock that won this prestigious award, in 2005. MTV Europe is a highly coveted musical award for many musicians as this shows that the musicians are not only listen to in Nigeria and Africa, but elsewhere in the world. The best any other Nigerian artists could so far achieve is winning the African version of the award (MTV Africa). Furthermore, the song (*African Queen*) was also used for the soundtrack of a Hollywood comedy film *Phat Girl* (Ihejirika, 2023) a feat in its own right. What seems to capture the attention of the world about *African Queen* (lyrics in appendix 7) is the almost unreal description of love through the eye of an African hip hop artist. Painting the picture of an African queen; the girl of his dreams, 2face says:

just like the sun, lights up the earth, you light up my life
 the only one, I've ever seen with a smile so bright
 and just yesterday, you came around my way
 and changed my whole scenery with your astonishing beauty
 oh, you coulda make a brother sing,
 you ordinary thing, a supernatural being,
 I know you are just brighter than the moon
 Brighter than the star, I love you just the way you are.

In the music video, the artist presented the prototype of this *African Queen*. Using ladies of dark glowing skins with different hairdos (from low cut to huge African hair weavings) 2face romantically show how the African queen makes his heart go *tinga linga lin*. Indeed, the artist used the song, *African Queen* to celebrate his love for the African *nubia*— the African beauty. Though, this song was produced with over 90 % English, 2face is a known multilingual hip hop artist who has done many works using pidgin, English and local languages. For example, in some of his other popular songs, *ifana ibaga*, *street credibility* (in collaborations with 9ice), *keep on rocking*, etc., the artist's dominant language of performance was Pidgin English with some Standard English text. Using mainly English languages and some Pidgin English, the artists was able to express his inner most thoughts about what he conceived as African beauty.

In any case, the lyrics of the *African Queen*, taking out of the beating and sounds, can pass for a romantic poem written by an overwhelmed lover. It is on this poetic dimension that the popularity of the song lies and not the rhythms nor the beating nor the techno effect. Unlike all the other songs that have been examined above, *African Queen* is a slow moving music which can be liken to the American version of blues. In other words, it is not really for the dancehall. To enjoy the song it appears

that one must listen carefully to the lyrics. Indeed, it is a reflexive music that attempt to paint a picture: that of an African beauty.

and you are my African Queen, the girl of my dreams.
 you take me where I've never been
 you make my heart go ting-a-ling-a-ling, oh ahh
 you are my African Queen, the girl of my dreams
 and you remind me of a thing
 and that is the African beauty yahhh

Nevertheless, the author observed that many of the nightclubs visited played this song despite its slow beat nature. The word “love” appeared repetitively in the song thereby projecting the message of love. Though, the tempo and the social vibes around the clubs were mellowed as this song rented the air, clubbers cuddled and entangled each other romantically moving in a slow, but completely involved ways.

6 Discussions and conclusion

Using Saussure's notion of signified and signifier, the article has argued that the codes used by popular hip hop artists in Nigeria are geared towards sub-cultural communication between the artists and their fans. Slangs, word representations are major elements in the Nigerian multilingual hip hop that endears music to many youth in the country. All the artists generally focused on presentation of themes that capture the sensibility of their fans. The musical themes veered from messages of love and marriages to sex to partying and drinking. There is a similar use of language in the songs of the artists. All the artists adopted multilingual codes-switching from one language to another in presentation of their messages. The codes in the songs generally symbolise and present messages or meaning that appears out of the mainstream cultural meanings. Listeners and artistes meet at the level of interpretations. In Saussure's semiology, meanings are generated through an understanding of the binarity of *la langue* and *la parole*.

The multilingual hip-hop text/lyrics can be described as the parole as it is the apparent speech act of individual artists. *La parole* is the actual multilingual lyrics prepared by the artists, the structure of which is a fusion or unification of different signs/codes/languages. The lyrics being an individual artist's conception and inner thoughts which, perhaps, may have gone through a series of processes of changes and modifications is, a priori design strategically focused to suit the purpose and fancy of a targeted body of fans. For example, when a lyric such as “*am the Banj, my Jamaican friends dey call me skibanji. Listen, when koko master falls in love, make you*

know say water done pass garri” is composed and produced by the popular hip hop artist (Dbanj) to present himself as *kokomaster*, anyone uninitiated within the circle of the listeners of his music (particularly if such person is perhaps a stranger in Nigeria), may wonder and pose such questions as what sort of speech/utterances is the above? What does koko master mean? Yet, in linguistic terms this text/lyrics has all the nitty gritty of a speech, though, an individual isolated utterance. Hence, the speech will not make any relevant meanings to someone who perhaps is from Japan or even Britain and do not listen to Dbanji’s music. The speech/lyrics may still, in Saussuran conceptions, not make any sense/meaning to someone who is a Nigerian but do not share in the meaning of the several codes within the text. In other words, such text as the above cannot operate alone expect it is referred back to its speech community and locate the content and context of the texts within the social (structure) of the language(s) used – that is back to the *langue*.

La langue (language) in Saussure’s argument is a well-defined object in the heterogeneous mass of speech facts (Lemert 1979). It is the social side of speech, outside the individual who can never create or modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by members of the community (Lemert 1979). In essence, unlike parole which is an individual speech act, langue is more of group/collective’s products. Different cultural settings are endowed with codes of communication and interaction for which language is the most common. To understand the meaning of a code or language one must, in Saussure’s view relate or refer the code back to the speech community where it comes from. And it is within such referral that parole (the individual speech) comes to make sense. To quote Lemert (1982) “Saussure viewed la langue as the social system of conventions from which la parole draws its elements. And Schinckel and Tacq (2004) supports it by stating that *la langue*: “never exists completely within an individual, it is the *social* part of language, it is the whole stock of linguistic signs together, a reservoir, a sum total of all *individual* manifestations of language, *parole*” (p. 63).

The importance of this to the above discussion is that the Nigerian Hip Hop lyrics can have meaning if amenable to proper interpretations only within the context of the whole gamut of language systems in the social environment. The lyrical structure in *naija* hip hop is normatively in accordance with the grammatical structures of the various languages in use. When some of the codes such as “*koko*”, “*ori e o fokasibe*”, “*swagger-swagger*”, “*Yahoozee*”, “*Maga don pay*”, “*control number*”, “*orobo to bad o*”, “*make you follow me bumper to bumper*”, to mention just few street codes that appear in the musical text, it is only appropriate to locate the meaning and thus interpret them within the social context of their usage. It is only in this way, that the *signifier* (the codes/utterance/parole) of the music adequately provides the *signified* (meaning of the codes/words/langue).

The multilingual music is a tool for the expression of the experiences and internal philosophy of the musicians, which appears to find acceptance with the youths perhaps because both the artists and the listeners share same socio-environmental context. From all indications the hip hop musical lyrics has its niche (comprising of the language modes, listeners, performers etc.); it is only within this niche that the multilingual hip hop lyrical has become meaningful. Though, many of the slangs/languages that are used in the Nigerian hip hop have generated concerns among some older generation of Nigerians, one must be careful not to fall into ethnocentric potholes as the multilingual text of the Nigerian hip hop lyrics are an on-going dialogue between the audiences and the artists themselves. This is because some of the codes that find their ways into music multilingual hip-hop are sometimes derived from the street codes and slangs picked up among the youths.

Finally, the *langue* of the multilingual hip-hop provides an avenue for the emergence of certain subcultures and normative expectations when listeners are in groups. Here Saussure's view is clearly important again. Saussure must have seen the structure of language as determinate of people's lives and behavior since he believed that "meanings, the mind, and ultimately the social world are shaped by the structure of language (Ritzer 2008: 594). The world as it is observed, including the people and every other element in the environment, are by-products of the structure of language. For many of the Nigerian youths this is fast becoming a truism. Innumerate numbers of the contemporary youth not only speak but live by the codes and language structure of the multilingual hip hop lyrics. For example, in everyday conversations, for those who listen and abide by the rules of the Multilanguage structure, their conversations among colleagues, friends and even parents reflects these codes. The structure of multilingualism is easily decipherable in their terms. The world of the Nigerian hip hop listeners and the events that surrounds it are been shaped and reproduced by this phenomenon and anyone who do not share in it are viewed as unfashionable.

Furthermore, to operate or belong in this world it becomes essential to be conversant with the knowledge of and the right context for which multilingual musical terms derivable from hip hop are put to use. For example, code such as "*orobo to bad*" (by Wande Coal, a former member of the Mo Hit Group) generates important self and group consciousness. *Orobo to bad* is originally meant to describe Wande's body mass (he is towards the plump side) in the music video. However, this multilingual lyrical code has been reinterpreted to mean and used for a beautiful girl who is fat. The knowledge of this latest musical slangs/codes and thus its inclusions in conversation among friends not only present the person

as someone in ‘town’ or in vogue, the knowledge forecloses any doubt of the person’s lack of sense of belonging. For those who cannot show the knowledge of some of the slangs that are important to the group they are believed to be out of date and therefore requested to “move up” or they are ostracized from group membership. This may be because the *langue*, as the social structure among certain subgroup, generates certain values and thus codes of conduct which members follows.

As an indication of the level of popularity of the music and the overwhelming effect it has on the general populace, the multilingual slangs generated from the lyrics are gradually creeping into the speech act of many people in the country, including those who will swear against ever listening to hip hop. Some of the slangs, which sometimes may be the coinage of the musician (i.e. *koko*, *tongolo*, etc.) were found to encourage some form of unique communication pattern among the audience of the music which forms the sub-culture of listeners. Besides, the multilingual slangs in the music are mutually intelligible to the musicians and the listeners. Although, various interpretations emerge from the consumption and the use of the slangs in the music, artists that come out with current slangs in his/her music usually have more followership than those who do not.

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Bionote

Olusegun Fariudeen Liadi

Sociology, Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria

liadiolusegun@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9239-4996>

Olusegun Fariudeen Liadi is currently a faculty member in the Department of Sociology, Fountain University, Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. He received his PhD in Sociology from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. His research interests include youth studies, popular culture and Development issues in Sub-Saharan Africa. His latest co-edited book, *Big Data: A Reader in Social and Management Research Methods*, is a foray into big data studies in social sciences.