

Constructing and Stylizing Corruption in Nigerian Hip-Hop Music: A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Selected Songs of Innocent Idibia (2FACE)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60787/jolan.vol6no1.469>

Abstract

The corruption index of almost all the African countries over the years have continued to soar in a geometric progression while the development of the continent is in arithmetic progression. It stands to wonder if this cankerworm has been institutionalized in the continent. This study therefore explores how Nigerian hip-hop songs construct and stylize corruption using the theoretical approach of critical stylistics. The study also investigates the satirical representation of corruption and decadence in the political terrain among African political leaders. The data for the study were drawn from selected musical lyrics of Innocent Idibia popularly known as 2FACE (*E be like say and for instance*) which were accessed from the internet. The study shows how the artiste represents African political leaders and the decadence in her polity among the rest of the world, using linguistic resources. In constructing the leaders, the hip-hop songs deployed the use of language in packaging up information that links the leaders with activities which evidently portray them as being corrupt. The relational process of identifying the leaders with acts considered to be cruel and evil; and the tool of implying and assuming reveal the implicit linguistic items which politicians use to encode their shady and pretentious activities while raping and maiming the masses who elected them.

Keywords: *Critical stylistics, constructing, Corruption, Hip-Hop, Music*

1. Introduction

Language as an integral part of man has always been manipulated by humans to achieve virtually everything they desire. It has been used to produce some unimaginable strings of notes to form music. Language is a social phenomenon and music plays a special role in enhancing the social life of humans, this is to say that music though having different genres such as Hip-Hop, R &B, Highlife, Reggae, Rock and Roll, Country Music, Rap, Gospel, Juju Music, etc. and language are interconnected. The different genres of music have particular messages they convey which distinguishes them from others. Neo-political songs, religious songs, love and romance songs etc., have their

peculiar styles and subject matters they address. Many hip-hop music by Nigerian contemporary artistes fall within the neo-political songs in the scope of the music genres.

Music can be so trilling that the contemporary listeners groove in it and afterwards react according to the messages in the lyrics or the instruments used in it. It is surprisingly fascinating how these musicians combine their lyrical genres, making people react to it differently. Some musical lyrics carry political undertones and can be evaluated differently. Firstly, by taking cognizance of the environment, situations, themes, and the political journey of the country the music is made, while reflecting and meditating on the socio-political, religious and economic happenings in the country. The other audience more or less care only about the entertainment nature of the music and vibes to it in such manner regardless of the messages therein.

In time past, acts seen as corruption were often frowned at by many as such act is capable of not only denting the image of the perpetrators but also that of his extended family members, and to even his or her unborn children. Today, corruption seems to have been adopted as a normal way of life so much so that anyone who does not indulge in it is seen as a novice while those swimming into it see themselves as movers and shakers of the country. Public office holders and those vying for elective positions were adjudged and voted for based on their level of competence and integrity rather than the size of their pockets. This brings us to the relationship between music and discourse and why it is necessary to study music from the perspective of discourse and subsequently, critical stylistics to appreciate the genres of music well.

2. Statement of the problem

Everything humanly possible within the confines of the law and even in certain occasions outside the confines of the law had been done by the Nigerian people, especially the youths to enthrone good governance, shun corruption and have a better country they will be proud to call their own and in return serve her with all their strength and might. One of the moves still adjudged to be the only way to have turned the country to what everyone would have been enjoying by now was the famous END SARS protest witnessed in 2020. This radical move saw the youths of diverse ethnic groups in the country uniting to fight their common enemy, the result was the sponsoring of many thugs who staged a counter protest, attacked the united youths with weapons, this attack led to the shooting and killing of unconfirmed number of youths by the Nigerian army at the Lekki toll gate. As if that was not enough, the protest got

worsen and saw the penetration of criminal elements who looted every aspect of the country. Surprisingly, many warehouses housed items purportedly contributed by the government and some well-meaning Nigerians to alleviate the sufferings of the poor masses during the famous Covid - 19 scare. Why have all these moves made to enthrone good governance and shun corruption resisted by the political class? Could music be the only avenue to talk to the political elites without getting on their nerves?

In the time past, many Nigerian hip-hop songs condemned the Nigerian political actors for their absolute disregard for rule of law, corruption, nepotism and other political vices associated to them. The hip-hop songs of today's artistes tend to only praise the activities of the political class irrespective of whether they are in line with the dictates of the law or not. Regrettably, the courage to use music in condemning the atrocious activities of Nigerian political class now live in the minds of very old and senile members of the music artistes, where sooner than later this all important means of constructing and stylizing corruption in order to enthrone good governance and rule of law may be lost. Moreover, only a few scholarly work exist in this area of linguistic studies, hence the need for this study so as to bridge the widening gap.

3. Related literature

John (2018) avers that the lyrics of music are discourse texts in their own right, and as such can be used to convey the ideologies of imperialism, socio-political activism/Darwinism, feminism and social constructionism in the Nigerian political, religious and social systems. Structures such as indexicals and references are used to signify the identities of politicians and other powerful personalities as well as the masses who live at their mercies. Lyrics in music can thus, be used to reaffirm collective social responsibility of the political class to imbibe good moral, religious, political and social value in leadership and the social responsibility of the masses to rise and fight against injustices prevalent in the country today.

According to Ebebe, Ebim and Uwen (2021), the Nigerian music industry has been enamored by flamboyant, fraud and cyber criminality. Even though music is distinguished by the presence of many relationships that can be treated linguistically, including rhythm and harmony, the lyrics of Nigerian musicians leaves much to be desired; as they often time tend to support cybercrime. For Adedeji (2022) African hip hop music is now undoubtedly the fastest growing form of expressive art in terms of availability, dissemination and acceptability. He posits that the genre in recent Nigerian

hip hop songs has become the mainstream music representing the identity and socio-cultural aspirations of the teeming Nigerian urban youth population.

Osuagwu (2022) posits that the Nigerian gospel songs are heard in all parts of Nigeria and are being appreciated and respected by Nigerian Christians. She argues that in blending Nigerian languages, English and Nigerian Pidgin, Nigerian gospel musicians show a high level of creativity and inventiveness in the way they coin their lyrics in indigenous languages and then blend them with other languages demonstrates that a lot of innovations and skills have been injected into the music. Moreover, Ataisi and Nuwa (2022) posit that the use of language is unavoidable in every activity of man, therefore music become an outlet for the expression of life's activities through the instrumentality of language. They assert that through the use of code switching and mixing, hyponyms, euphemisms, homonymy, slang and words of endearment, Nigerian musicians have successfully and carefully extended the lexicon of the Nigerian English.

Akinrinlola, Ajayi and Lamini (2023) aver that with recourse to context, the Nigerian hip hop artists articulate specific discourse acts such as glamorization of cyber scam, assertion of identity, appeal to scammers' cognitive abilities and justification of cyber scam. These acts according to them, are discursively projected through metaphorical expressions, repetition, pronominal references, lexical choices and rhetorical questions. According to Abiodun (2024), Nigerian music artists who tend to copy from their American counterpart have not treated the female gender properly in their music productions. This is due to their constant use of profane words in their hip hop music, which helps to draw especially the youths to listen and stream such music. For Oseni and Ishola (2024) young generation of Nigerian artists have infused hip hop music with important social themes in order to appeal to the audience's sensibilities and question the Nigerian nation's status quo. This shows that music extends beyond enjoyment and into crucial social participation in Nigeria, thereby raising awareness of the nation's ills through the use of slangy expressions, rhymes, code mixing, repetition and Pidgin English.

The studies reviewed above is an indication that music can be used to communicate different ideas depending on the type of music involved (jazz, rap, gospel, hip-hop, highlife, etc.). A sizeable number literature that centers on music exist, but they all have looked at the music genres from different dimensions, the current work looks at only Innocent Idibia's lyrics that condemns the spate of corruption in the Nigerian political system. Though, related to other works before it, but differ in its

objective, approach and theoretical prop, thus creating a lacuna that necessitated this study. .

4. Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on the critical stylistics framework, an approach to language analysis that is based on the combination of critical discourse analysis and stylistics. Founded by Lesley Jeffries, the framework covers ideologies with texts by setting the appropriate analytical linguistic tools that is lacking in critical discourse analysis. According to Jeffries (2010) critical stylistics sets out to identify the ideologies in any text, whether you agree with it or not. The use of critical stylistics is not limited to a certain kind of text, it is applicable to various types of text including political, literary and social texts. The major aim of the framework is to provide linguistic evidence to support any claim about a certain ideology that existed in a text, analyze how social actors, events and groups are critically portrayed through specific lexical and grammatical choices, use a systematic approach to provide an unbiased and objective interpretation of text and lastly, demonstrate how text producers can subtly exert influence, authority to persuasively convince their audience. Its operational tools include but are not limited to naming, representing, assuming and implying, among others.

5. Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-qualitative research design to carry out a critical stylistics analysis of two (*E be like say* and *for instance*) selected hip hop songs by Innocent Idibia popularly known as *2FACE*. The choice of the two out of so many songs by the artiste stem from the fact that they provide a nuanced exploration of the critical stylistic features needed to explain the rationale of the study.

6. Data presentation and discussion

This section breaks down the hip-hop songs and analyzes them through the lens of the critical stylistics framework employing the tools of naming, identifying, assuming and implying among others.

Naming

Naming is a foundational linguistic too in critical stylistics, used to identify and categorize people, places, concepts or events through noun choices, modifiers and

nominalizations. This tool of the critical stylistics framework helps to shape social realities and embedded ideologies by making specific worldviews appear natural and unquestionable. Example from the extract is provided below:

Them just dey ignore our existence
Them just dey use excuse buy chance
Like them no know say we dey
Them dey use us dey play

When we stand for resistance
All in the act of exploitance
Abi we just be living in a trance
(See appendix lines, 14-20)

E be, like say them want to tell me another story again oh (e be like say)
E be like say them want to act another movie again oh (e be like say)
E be like say them want to do another deceiving again oh
E be like say them want to dance, galala, na the new dance, again o
Them want to sing another song again (they want to sing)
(Lines 123-127)

The use of the pronouns “them”, “our”, “we” and “us” in the extracts above is used by the artiste to name the politicians and the masses. While ‘them’ refers to the political class who are the most powerful in the society, possessing the might to do anything except turning a man into a woman or vice versa, the use of “our”, “we”, and “us” refer to the ordinary Nigerians, (the masses), therefore, creating a sense of “us verses. them” dichotomy. The use of the plural pronouns exception of “them” addresses fellow citizens of Nigeria emphasizing shared humanity among greater percentage of the population who are not in the cadre of the political elites. "God" is also invoked in line 21 as a higher being that is superior to all to judge and punish the politicians for their corrupt tendencies.

Identifying

Identifying as a tool of critical stylistics concerns itself with the exposition of hidden power whereby grammar is treated not as a neutral system, but as a dynamic tool that reinforces social hierarchies and political biases. It also helps in bridging the gap by avoiding the vagueness of general discourse analysis but rather adopts the use of concrete text-based linguistic evidence. Moreover, it shifts the reading process from passive to active ideological understanding while empowering the readers. This can be seen from the data below:

This thing that am feeling
Is a feeling of love
And you know say is so... Ala Oyi e!
This thing is affecting your thing
And is killing your soul... Ala Oyi e!
(Lines 23, 24, 25, 28 and 29)

In the above extracts, the artiste identifies himself as a concerned citizen, critiquing politicians and advocating for the good of the common people. He portrays the politicians as deceitful, power-hungry and exploitative and above all corrupt, while the people whose mandate they represent are depicted as suffering, marginalized and in need of positive change. In this lyrics, the artiste shifts from a personal 'feeling of love' to a societal 'killing your soul' which reveals a socio-political critique disguised as romance. The repetition of Ala Oyi e, functions as a rhythmic anchor and a vocal means of foregrounding and creating emotional intensity. The metaphorical shift of love transition into a destructive force – 'affecting your thing'...'killing your soul', thus mirroring how bad governance and systemic oppression slowly ruin the collective Nigerian psyche. The singer intentionally repurposes the language of a love song to trick the listener into a familiar emotional space before confronting them with the institutionalized political decay facing the country.

Assuming

Assuming is a model of the critical stylistics explored as a textual conceptual tool for the smuggling of unstated beliefs, values and ideologies into a text as 'common sense'. By treating a contestable idea as accepted facts, artistes use presuppositions and triggers like definite articles, factive verbs and iterative to make their worldview feel unquestionable to the reader. This is portrayed in the lyrics below:

Say na me be Baale of Nigerians
Say na me be one wey dey make plan
Say I go create a scenery where better go plenty
Make we dey give chance
Instead to dey pack the money go France
To make suffer to full in abundance
(Lines 38-43)

In the above extract from the hip-hop song, 2Face assumes a moral high ground. Which suggests that if he is given the privilege to sit within the corridors of power, he will turn things around for all to feel the impact of good governance. He therefore, portrays

himself as a leader who will not be corrupt but place the people he leads first, unlike the politicians who are supposed to be accountable to the people but have failed in the mandate of the people which they enjoy. The speaker also assumes that the audience shares his perspectives on the need for change.

Implying

Implying as a tool of critical stylistics relies on the reader's ability to read between the lines using context, shared cultural knowledge and conversational maxims. It allows speakers to communicate controversial ideals while retaining the right to deny they meant it literally. The lyrics below is analyzed in this manner:

On top people wey work the way
Wey give them the key
To chop substance
As them know say we be freelance
Their looting no dey give us assurance
Repentance no dey their plane
E dey create annoyance for my heart
(Line 49-55)

See, all I want to say is that, "They don't really care about us"
'Cause all they want to do is to get in touch with big bucks
'Cause they think the money gives them the power
But the power is nothing if your people cannot get quality education
The power is nothing if your people keep on dying of disease and
Starvation
The power is nothing if your people have no peace (no peace)
The power is nothing if your people cannot live in unity (eh)
See, why do you keep deceiving the people? My brother, my sister
See, why you make all this people to dey fight one another?
(105-144)

The song writer implies that, though the politicians are there not for themselves but for the masses, they only prioritize their wealth and power over the people's welfare. The truth of this implication is seen in the way the political class siphon money meant for public projects into private accounts outside the country. The lyrics thus, suggest that politicians are corrupt, manipulative and deceitful. Line 55 of the extract above implies a sense of frustration among the masses who expect the best from the leaders rather than what they represent currently. The lyrics highlight how greedy, self-centered

leaders neglect the needs of ordinary people to pursue money and power, suggesting that they lack care for the public, leading to widespread suffering and division, while the corrupt elites show no signs of changing their ways.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the major themes of the song are; Corruption and exploitation, accountability and change, power dynamics and social justice, Unity and solidarity among the people. The songs use language to critique the political system and those in power. The speaker's use of naming and identifying strategies creates a sense of “us” verses “them”, emphasizing the struggle between the people and politicians. The assumptions made by the speaker create a sense of shared experience and solidarity with the audience. The implications of corruption and exploitation serve to highlight the need for accountability and change. Additionally, the songs’ use of repetition and exclamations emphasizes the importance of the issue and calls for action. The invocation of God (Chineke me!) adds a sense of moral authority to the critiquing. Using the critical stylistic theory, 2Face Idibia constructs and stylizes corruption as a deeply systemic, moral and socio-economic betrayal. Through code-switching, metaphor and direct address, his lyrics exposes how greed and bad governance oppress the masses, transforming hip-hop music into a channel for social resistance and civic awakening.

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Appendix

For Instance	E Be Like Say
1. Eh!...Chineke me!... Ew!	75. Oh my God, oh, oh, oh
2. Ala Oyi e!.. Ala Oyi e!	76. E be like say dey wan' tell us wetin we never hear before
3. Ala Oyi e!.. Ala Oyi e!	77. Baba dey here plus Soul-E Baba dey here
4. For instance	78. Zapadapadap, dapadap de dapadap
5. Say na me be one wey dey give chance	79. Da dapadap de, da dapadap de
6. Say na me be one wey dey make plans	80. No be small thing oh
7. For all man to benefit	81. No be small thing oh
8. Abi to make we disagree	82. No be small thing oh
9. Abi na to create chance	83. No be small thing oh
10. But now am not of importance	84. I say no be small thing oh
11. Cos now I am looking from a distance	85. No be small thing oh
12. That's why you give them the chance	86. No be small thing oh, eh
13. To turns us ...to turns to victim of circumstance	87. Looking back through all the years
14. Them just dey ignore our existence	88. That you and I have spent together
15. Them just dey use excuse buy chance	89. It seems like you've been playing me all along
16. Like them no know say we dey	90. So many times, you asked me to put the whole of my trust in you
17. Them dey use us dey play	91. So many times, you betrayed and played me for a fool
18. When we stand for resistance	92. Why don't we work together, so the future will be brighter?
19. All in the act of exploitance	93. 'Cause, e be like you and I
20. Abi we just be living in a trance	94. We dey need each other all the time
21. Ayi oh! my God!	95. All the time
22. Ala Oyi e!	96. Another year has come
23. This thing that am feeling	97. And now you want my trust once more
24. Is a feeling of love	98. Oh, no
25. And you know say is so... Ala Oyi e!	99. E be, like say you want me to tell me another story again oh (e be like say)
26. This thing no go go	100. E be like say you want to act another movie again oh (e be like say)
27. Then u know I go slow... Ala Oyi e!	101. E be like say you want to code another coding again oh (e be like say)
28. This thing is affecting your thing	102. E be like say you want to dance, galala na the new dance, again oh
29. And is killing your soul... Ala Oyi e!	103. You want to sing another song again (e be like say)
30. See this type of thing we we dey feel	
31. They make me dey want to dey... Ala Oyi e!	
32. Even if I want to dey cheat	
33. I go still dey want to dey... Ala Oyi e!	
34. Stand look around you	

35. I bet you go dey want to dey... Ala Oyi e!	104. E be like say you want to code, you want to code oh
36. Ala Oyi e! for the thing wey u see wey make you Ala Oyi e!	105. See, all I want to say is that, "They don't really care about us"
37. For instance	106. 'Cause all they want to do is to get in touch with big bucks
38. Say na me be Baale of Nigerians	107. 'Cause they think the money gives them the power
39. Say na me be one wey dey make plan	108. But the power is nothing if your people cannot get quality education
40. Say I go create a scenery where better go plenty	109. The power is nothing if your people keep on dying of disease and
41. Make we dey give chance	110. Starvation
42. Instead to dey pack the money go France	111. The power is nothing if your people have no peace (no peace)
43. To make suffer to full in abundance	112. The power is nothing if your people cannot live in unity (eh)
44. To make me run run away	113. See, why do you keep deceiving the people? My brother, my sister
45. To a place where ebi say	114. See, why you make all this people to dey fight one another?
46. I go feel like Europeans	115. Oh, no
47. Where them go respect my skills for instance	116. Only God can judge you now
48. Where them no go dey play pranks	117. Only God can judge you now
49. Ontop people wey work the way	118. Only God can judge you now
50. Wey give them the key	119. Only God can judge you now
51. To chop substance	120. Another year has come
52. As them know say we be freelance	121. And now you want my vote once more
53. Their looting no dey give us assurance	122. Oh, no
54. Repentance no dey their plane	123. E be, like say them want to tell me another story again oh (e be like say)
55. E dey create annoyance for my heart	124. E be like say them want to act another movie again oh (e be like say)
56. So Ala Oyi e!	125. E be like say them want to do another deceiving again oh
57. This thing that am feeling	126. E be like say them want to dance, galala, na the new dance, again o
58. Is a feeling of love	127. Them want to sing another song again (they want to sing)
59. And you know say is so... Ala Oyi e!	128. E be like say them want to dance (code), they want to dance
60. This thing no go go	129. I dedicate this one to all of the shady politicians
61. Then u know I go slow... Ala Oyi e!	
62. This thing is affecting your thing	
63. And is killing your soul... Ala Oyi e!	
64. See this type of thing we we dey feel	
65. They make me dey want to dey... Ala Oyi e!	
66. Even if I want to dey cheat	
67. I go still dey want to dey... Ala Oyi e!	
68. Stand look around you	
69. I bet you go dey want to dey... Ala Oyi e!	

70. Ala Oyi e! for the thing wey u see wey make you Ala Oyi e!	130. Wey go promise and fail and make the people live in harsh conditions
71. Make we dey give chance... Ala Oyi e!	131. Dedicate this one to all of the shady politicians
72. Instead to dey pack the money go France... Ala Oyi e!	132. Why don't you change your ways?
73. To make suffer to full in abundance... Ala Oyi e!	133. Change your ways now
74. Ala Oyi e!... Ala Oyi e!... Ala Oyi e!	134. Make the people live the way they are supposed to live
	135. Eh, eh
	136. No be small thing oh
	137. As you see me so (no be small thing oh)
	138. I no send, I no send you oh (no be small thing oh)
	139. All of the shady politicians (no be small thing oh)
	140. As you see me so (no be small thing oh)
	141. I no send, I no send you oh (no be small thing oh)
	142. All of the shady politicians (I say no be small thing oh)"

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