
A STYLO-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ENGLISH GOSPEL SONGS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This paper explores the stylo-pragmatic properties of English gospel songs in Nigeria. This is an area where researchers have not really beamed their searchlights on despite wide-spread and general acceptability of Christian gospel songs in Nigeria. The aim of this study is, however, to utilise parodic strategies, as promoted by Morson (1989) and Bakhtin (1981), to explore some Christian lyrics in Nigeria. Three songs are purposively selected to reflect the linguistic multiplicity of Nigeria. They are: Pernam Percy Paul's Bring Down Your Glory, Osinachi Joseph's You Are Able and Dunsin Oyekan's Open Up. The paper is able to show that Christian songs in Nigeria portray deeper meanings than what the lyrics present at the points of rendition. There are underlining parodies in which the alternate interpretation of a lyrics opens up deeper meaning that may probably suggest the intention of the song writer.*

KEYWORDS: Stylo-pragmatics, gospel songs, parodic strategies, linguistic multiplicity, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The paradigm exploration and application of linguistic apparatus to the study of literature has unveiled uncharted horizons in the field of literary criticism in the recent times. This is achievable under the domain of stylistics. However, the major contribution of stylistics, apart from linguistic insights and linguistic tools of modern criticism, is its objective way of analysing literary text. Kumar (1987:40) affirms that language oriented theories try to develop an objective methodology of analysis and interpretation by focusing on the literature entity independent of the author's intentions. With its objectivity, insights from linguistics and useful terminology, stylistics makes our interpretation literary texts valid and enhances our world views. However, this is not totally independent of the various contexts of the discourse or textual world. Therefore, stylo-pragmatics is a blend of stylistic and pragmatic elements that can enhance the meaning of a text.

Carter and Stockwell (2008: 44) believe that there are many different styles according to the style of the author e.g. racy, formal and colloquial one. They see style as a choice of certain structures over others available in the language. To claim that style is a choice is not, of course, to claim that it is

always a conscious choice. Indeed, if one had to make all phonological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic choices consciously, it would take a very long time to say anything at all. In literature, as in all discourse, a sense of the best way of putting something can be intuitive or conscious; the result as far as the reader is concerned will be much the same" (ibid).

Linguistics, as a broader discipline, helps readers to discover the hidden clues about the language. It acts aptly as the screw that dismantles the pieces of the whole text into smaller understandable parts. It can be a great help to interpret the meaning of a certain literary work. Carter and Stockwell (2008: 39) point out that linguistics can give readers a point of view, a way of looking at a text that helps readers to develop a consistent analysis, and urges them to ask questions about the language of the text that they come through.

The focus of this research is to investigate the use of stylistic devices in lyrics of Christian music in Nigeria. This is significant because Christian music enjoys the widest listenership among the religious groups in Nigeria. They are also of different language varieties but the scope of this study will be limited to the music rendered in English language. Although, many genres of songs have been used to study language, Christian music lyrics seem to have seldom been analyzed by the linguists, and they have been seldom used in English education. The aim was to explore the varieties of stylistic devices used in the verses to convey the exact meaning of the lyrics at different levels of language, such as figurative language (metaphor, metonymy, personification, idiom, etc.), and phonetic devices (rhyme scheme and repetition), in addition, to reveal how these stylistic devices work in the lyrics. Interestingly, most of the Christian songs usually tell about common topics in the Bible and Christian life generally. They are composed with creative language use to draw sympathy to Christian faith.

The gospel music scene in Nigeria is an offshoot of that of the western world, where most of these new spiritual churches originated. They parade pastors and choirs that have been fully westernised in their mode of dressing and speech. The modern day gospel singer foresees the apocalyptic future of men, calling on all and sundry to repent now, because tomorrow of course might be too late. The lyrics of these gospel songs focus on these spiritual, emotional, political, economics and societal issues that plague the teeming members of the congregation and the general populace. Some of the Nigerian gospel singers are Jide Obi, Chris Okotie, Nathaniel Bassey, Frank Edward, Joe Praise, Israel Strong, Buchi, Eben, Jadhiel, Sinach, Chris Oyakhilome, Rap Nation, T.B.1 to mention but a few. On the other hand the traditional African churches still maintain those vital African elements that make them tick. They parade an array of fully African musical instruments. They dance African steps and aim towards a perfect blend of local traditional music with Christian messages. This study is stylo-pragmatic in nature as it looks into the various styles of the writers and the textual context of each song considered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars in stylistics have explored the various areas of language use in literary texts. It is important to define text here as either spoken or written language for the purpose of communication. Trichomwaree Pookun (2015) explores the stylistic devices in the OASIS songs and submitted that songs move us beyond the appreciation of lyrics into understanding the accurate meaning of the

message through the use of effective stylistic devices such as figurative language and phonetic devices in the aspects of rhyme and repetition. According to him, by investigating the language style of selected song lyrics of OASIS, it demonstrates some distinctive stylistic aspects that exist in their popular singles. Pookum (2015) established that stylistic analysis of a song can provide English language learners understanding of: (a) language use of English native speakers in song lyrics; (b) language strategies of persuasive style used in song lyrics, (c) the songwriting style in terms of language skill and (d) the creative way that messages communicate meaning in the lyrics.

Also, Ekpe M. B. et al (2018) worked on the Phonological lyrics of English Gospel Songs in Nigeria and came up with the observation that the phonological features and processes of Nigerians differs from that of the Standard British English and the reason could be traced to lack of consistencies and complexities in the spellings, tenses and plural formations of English words and mother tongue interference from the singers L1. The improper pronunciation and production of sounds leads to ineffective communication. This lack of international intelligibility invariably leads to a breakdown in communication between the Nigerian gospel singers and the English native speakers. There is also a great impact of the L1 on the L2 in the utterances of most Nigerian gospel singers. The Nigerian English gospel singers produce English words differently from the standard RP. The major cause of this is as a result of the discrepancies between the RP and the Nigerian English pronunciation of the vowel and consonant sounds and these affect communication negatively.

Framework

Models of stylo-pragmatics are derived from stylistic (intra-speaker) language variation from early models that paid differential attention to speech (Labov 1966) focusing on the various interactional influences, including the speaker's audience (Bell 1984) and the speaker's own agentive construction of identity in interaction (Coupland 1980). In addition to utilizing casual speech from sociolinguistic interviews and other 'natural' speech data, sociolinguists have investigated stylistic language use in overtly performative and self-conscious contexts (e.g., Schilling-Estes 1998). Aside from considering what influences intra-speaker variation, another question that has received much attention lately in style research is how to attribute meaning to the use of specific linguistic features of style. The present study locates itself within this body of research as it attempts to investigate the symbolic meaning of linguistic style through the lens of parody, a particular type of linguistic performance in which speakers attempt to 'reveal the covert semiotic value of apparently unmotivated actions' (Morson 1989) through what Bakhtin (1981) has called 'varidirectional double-voicing'. As such, parody can be a useful tool in uncovering agentive and perceived symbolic meaning of linguistic features of style. This study illustrates that parodic strategy is a means through which language users purposefully couple linguistic and extra-linguistic devices which stand in ideological opposition to each other. In the case of Martha Stewart, stylistic elements associated with her 'Good Woman' image are exploited in order to expose the underlying 'Bad Woman' that Stewart actually is (especially in light of her 2003 insider trading conviction and imprisonment). Finally, the analysis presented confirms that linguistic features which linguists find salient and choose to analyze as stylistic devices are also salient to those who use, perceive, and manipulate them for authentic communicative purposes. It is suggested that the genre of parody can be of use to linguists who wish to uncover the complex associations between style, performance, and gendered language use.

METHODOLOGY

The varieties of Christian music in Nigeria can be traced in correspondence to the various indigenous languages in Nigeria. Bamgbose (1981) puts the indigenous language in Nigeria at 450. It is however wise to select our data following the three major languages in Nigeria namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba though songs rendered in English language. The three songs are:

Pernam Percy Paul's Bring Down Your Glory, Osinachi Joseph's You Are Able and Dunsin Oyekan's Open Up. These artistes are geographically selected with English as their second language and they enjoy wide listenership throughout the country.

Backgrounds of the Selected Christian Singers

Bakulipanam Percy Paul Mokungah, widely known by his stage name Panam Percy Paul, is a Nigerian gospel singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist whose musical career spans 40 years. He was born to major Paul Harley, an officer in the Nigerian Army, and composer Paulina Paul Mokungah in 1957. Paul's kind of music is praise and worship styled in the feel of country music and African high life. His worship songs include: Oh Ye Gates (1978), Don't You Cry (1980), Bring Down the Glory 1 (1984), Panam Percy Paul and Friends (1987), Bring Down the Glory 2: God of War (1989), At This Christmas with Panam Percy Paul (1991), Bring Down The Glory 3: Higher Than High (1993), Master of the Universe (1995), Bring Down the Glory 4: Deep Intimacy (2003), Cheer up (2007), Destiny (2009), Return Bring Down Your Glory 5: Throne Of Grace (2013).

Osinachi Joseph, known professionally as Sinach, is a Nigerian singer, songwriter and senior worship leader at Believers' Loveworld. She has released several gospel hit songs, including "Way Maker", "I Know Who I Am", "Great Are You Lord", "Rejoice", "He Did It Again", "Precious Jesus", "The Name of Jesus", "This Is My Season", "Awesome God", "For This", "I Stand Amazed", "Simply Devoted" and "Jesus is Alive". She has received a Bethlehem Hall of Faith certificate of commemoration during her visit to Israel in December 2017 and in March 2019, the visuals for Sinach's "Way Maker" became the third Nigerian video to garnered 100 millions views worldwide.

Dunsin Oyekan, born on November 5, 1985, is a Nigerian contemporary Christian singer, songwriter, producer, instrumentalist and recording artist popularly referred to as The Eagle. He is the convener of the Code Red Worship Experience. His songs include: Code Red (2016), You Are Good (2016), Na You (2016), Amazing (2016), We Worship You (2018), If All I Say Is Jesus (2018), Hallelujah (Live at Code Red) (2018), Song of Angels (Live) (2018), Imole De (2018), God (2018), I Proclaim (2019), Open Up (2019), Kingdom Now (2019).

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**Parodic Elements and Interpretations of Lines in Pernam Percy Paul's 'Bring Down Your Glory (Analysis of Data 1)**

Text	Parodic Inference
Lord we are sorry,	We are not unapologetic
We have turn around and gone astray,	we could have stayed with You
Your trust for us we have betrayed,	not holding on to Your trust
Your power we don't recognised,	we could have recognised your power
Your Lordship we have all despised,	we should not despise your Lordship
We cannot pretend,	there is tendency to pretend but you see everything
We all now repent,	No one is resisting penitence
Forgive us Lord we pray...	we are guilty without your forgiveness
Bring down your glory	Your glory is not here
Bring down your glory.	Your glory is not here
Where is all the power, we have heard about,	the power is not here
Your glory and protection,	absence of glory and protection
For the ones you died for,	not for the ones You hated
Something must be truly wrong,	things are not right
Please Jesus... what can it be?...	
I hear your voice speaking to my conscience...	You are not quiet in my conscience
The church has turned from you.	the church is not with You
And trusting in their doctrines,	and not holding Your doctrines
Giving praise to people,	not praising You
And never talking of your power.	they talk of others power
Lord we are sorry,(we've turned around)	We are not unapologetic
We have turn around and gone astray,	we could have stayed with You
Your trust for us we have betrayed,	not holding on to Your trust
Your power we don't recognised,	we could have recognised your voice
Your Lordship we have all despised,	we should not despise your Lordship
We cannot pretend,	there is tendency to pretend
We all now repent,	No one is resisting penitence
Forgive us Lord we pray...	we are guilty without your forgiveness
Bring down your glory	Your glory is not here
Bring down your glory.	Your glory is not here
The church is now depending on her power...	Church is not trusting Your power
Trusting in her wisdom, thinking she can change the world,	not trusting Your wisdom, she cannot change the world
We need to reach the people,	we have not reached the people

but the power must come from you...

we lack the power to do it alone

Parodic Elements and Interpretations of Lines in Sinach's 'You Are Able' (Analysis of Data 2)

Text	Parodic Inference
You are able	You are not weak
You are able	You are not weak
By your word	Not by any other word
I stand, I testify	I'm not ignorant, not keeping quiet
You are able	You are not weak
God is able	other gods are weak
Our God is able	our God is not weak
By your word Lord I stand and I testify	Not by any other word I'm not ignorant, not keeping quiet
That you are able	that You are not weak
Exceeding, abundantly	not few, not small
Much more than I can ever think	my thoughts are limited
Exceeding, abundantly	not few, not small
You are able to do	You are not limited
All sufficient God	no limit to God
(Yeah eh eh)	
You are able	You are not weak
By your word I stand, and I testify	Not by any other word I'm not ignorant, not keeping quiet
You are able	You are not weak
You are able	You are not weak
By your word I stand, and I testify	Not by any other word I'm not ignorant, not keeping quiet
You are able	You are not weak
Exceeding, abundantly	not few, not small
Much more than I could ever think	my thoughts are limited
Exceeding, abundantly	not few, not small
You are able to do	You are not limited
All sufficient God	no limit to God
(He's all sufficient, yeah eh, alleluia)	no limit to God
You see, Nothing is impossible	I cannot imagine anything impossible with you
With you, Nothing is impossible with you	I cannot imagine anything impossible with you
Nothing is impossible	everything is possible
For All things are possible with you	Nothing is impossible with you
(Lift up your hands) Lord, Nothing is impossible With you	when you hang down, he will not make things possible
Nothing is impossible with you	everything is possible with you

Parodic Elements and Interpretations of Lines in Dunsin Oyekan's 'Open Up' (Analysis of Data 3)

Text	Parodic Inference
Open up	Do not cover
Let it flow now, Open up! Out of the mundane	hold not back, giving the most important
To where I'm ordained	not to where I am not meant to be
For things that were made	things that were not made
Were made from things unseen	were not made for people to see
There are realms of glory	not where there is no glory
That my world should see	that my world should not see
Dimensions found only in Jesus Christ the Son	no despondency in Jesus Christ
Channels of my spirit Open up!	my spirit should not be quiet
Because I am with the Father, Open up!	because I'm not with ordinary man
No boundaries No limits, Open up!	I'm giving to limitations and boundaries

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

In the above Tables 1, 2, 3, we have seen how lyricists attempt to reveal the covert semiotic value of apparently unmotivated actions through what Bakhtin (1981) calls varidirectional double-voicing. The three songs that we have considered have shown instances where agentive and perceived symbolic meaning of linguistic features of style are opaque and the Parodic inferences have thrown light on the original intended meanings of the lines. For example in data 1, line 2-7:

We have turn around and gone astray, (a)

Your trust for us we have betrayed, (a)

Your power we don't recognised, (b)

Your Lordship we have all despised, (b)

We cannot pretend (c)

We all now repent. (c)

Apart from the phonological rhyme pattern, lines 2 and 3 show that God desires that His followers walk close to Him in which the song writer parodically presents in the form of personal confession. While lines 2 and 3 show the position of the persona from God, lines 4 and 5 reveals the extent of how the actions of the persona have constituted great offence to God and lines 6 and 7 show the resolution of the persona. These findings are in consonance with the phonological partitioning of the rhyme scheme of the lines. These are also evident in the other two data that we considered in data 2, line 8-14:

By your word Lord I stand and I testify

That you are able

Exceeding, abundantly

Much more than I can ever think

Exceeding, abundantly

You are able to do

All sufficient God

and data 3, line 4-8:

For things that were made
Were made from things unseen
There are realms of glory
That my world should see
Dimensions found only in Jesus Christ the Son

In another finding, the arrangement of lines of the songs usually comes into resolution on the strength of showing the magnanimity, greatness and strength of God as well as what He can do. Whenever the lyricist praises or extols God, he parodically debases and humbles His creature. For example, line 4-7 of data 1:

Your power we don't recognised,
Your Lordship we have all despised,
We cannot pretend,
We all now repent,

show that God has 'power' that has not been recognised; 'Lordship' that has been despised; and the ability of God to see beyond 'pretence' of man.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to show that Christian songs in Nigeria portray deeper meanings than what the lyrics present at the points of rendition. There are underlining parodies in which the alternate interpretation of a lyrics opens up deeper meaning that may probably suggest the intention of the song writer. The paper also affirms the efficiency of Parodic strategies to unravel the meaning of literary text while paying attention to the style employed by the writer.

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