

A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of Selected Songs of Wizkid

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Abstract

This work, a lexico-semantic analysis of selected songs of Wizkid, examined the lexical choices and methods of their employment in the data to communicate meaning and accentuate style. Scholars have devoted efforts to the study of words and their deployment in several contexts to achieve certain aims. In continuation with the existing scholarship, this research explored the manner of words deployment as well as the meaning(s) generated from such usage in the data under study. Data for this study comprised four songs of Wizkid: "Ojuelegba", "Show You the Money", "Omalicha" and "Come Closer" purposively selected owing to the subtlety of the lexical items employed in the data. M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, a theory suitable for the exploration of the function of language as used in a certain context, as well as Alan Cruse's (2000) approach to the study of lexical semantics which stipulates that words play a significant role in the interpretation of meaning of utterances and provide credence for the nuances and refinement that accompany language use, served as the theoretical foundation for this study. The paper discovered that through the employment of rhyming lexical items, familiar collocations, code mixing, invented clipped spellings, rhetorical questions, hyperbolic, repetitive and synecdochic words, morphological cataphora, the principle of oppositeness, theme-rheme relationship, pronoun topicalisation and the like, the artist has created a distinct style. The paper concluded that these lexical choices together form a formula which offers him the line of least resistance in communicating with the majority of Nigerians and the world at large.

Key words: Wizkid, Lexical Semantics, Lexical Choices, Meaning and Context.

Introduction

Life is replete with occurrences as one catastrophe leads to another, war follows another war, outrage follows outrage, etcetera. Humans need to narrate to fellow humans their pains, joys, grace, blessing, and exploits all in assembled and coordinated sequences. It is in these explicable moments when an artist relates the experiences of his society by choosing, in songs, lexical items that resonate with the joys and pains of his fellow humans or when an artist acknowledges his God for lifting him to fame and the like that language becomes an asset and proper choice of words becomes paramount. Language is primarily a social phenomenon. In Nigeria, the English language is one of the singular treasures left behind by colonialism. It marks the evolution of Nigeria's sensibility to globalisation and westernisation. Technological exploits are possible with clear mastery of this global language. Nigerian artists have adopted this world language together with the indigenous languages in composing lyrics and through creativity, innovation, code mixing, code switching, pidginisation etcetera, the language has been transformed and transfigured leaving it more varied and complex, more beautiful and pleasurable than the original version. This new version of English which has been acculturated

to reflect the Nigerian experience has been variously termed as Nigerian English or Nigerianism (Teilanyo, 2008).

It is pertinent to discuss Nigerianism, that is the cultural colouration of language/word meaning in this paper, since individual cultures of the world can influence the meaning of words. According to Chase (2000: 91), "languages have words, at least partly, because in the cultures they serve, the meanings such words carry need to be communicated. One must not forget that language is a subset of culture; a window through which opinions, ideas, philosophies, beliefs et cetera of a particular culture can be expressed and appreciated. In other words language represents a cultural group. Through language, the values of a society as well as that society's perception of the world are deciphered." "Nigerianism" is a term which has evolved as a result of linguistic creativity, borrowings and interferences from the indigenous languages (Teilanyo, 2001: 1). This was an observation on the patterns of influences the English language and the forecast on the possibilities of English use and usages in Nigeria in this millennium. The paper posited that there was a likelihood of a Nigerian model of English, an amalgam of the varieties getting increasingly standardized as the Nigerian elites increase in membership and become more "patriotic" in having a kind of "linguistic nationalism" (Teilanyo, 2001: 1). Still on the future of Nigerian English, the above source notes "however its evolution and sustenance as a local and sub regional standard would depend on some extent and among others, how well Nigeria advances in different areas on national and international endeavors" (Teilanyo, 2001: 1). In line with the aforementioned dreams, the Nigerian movie/musical industries have gone haywire in innovations and creativities which have skyrocketed them into great fame.

The paper examines, in Wizkid's songs, the markers of these innovations, creativities and code swap that have added colour and distinctiveness to the English language and the Nigerian English variety. The advent of the internet has transformed the ways of spreading and enjoying music/movies. Viewers/listeners now go online to find lyrics of music displayed for quick mastery, appreciation and identification where necessary. In music, meaning may be conveyed by voice timbre but words choices and rhymes will reveal the depth of the musician's personality (Osakwe, 2011). The musician has the task of establishing and maintaining certain distinctiveness while at the same time sticking to the forms and convention of the language(s) s/he uses to communicate. In the course, s/he becomes creative and innovative.

In music, people are attracted to the drums/beats as well as the lyrics. A good music is the type that lexical items are carefully chosen to suit purpose and trap audience. Wizkid's choices of words and his particular brand of aesthetics are visible in all his songs. Each song points at Wizkid's bilingual sensibility. This is made possible through his skilful manipulations of lexico-semantic possibilities of the Nigerian language settings. His major interest is in communicating with the populace. Communication through an effective use of language is a tool that a good human beings are considered higher animals due to their ability to communicate effectively through the use of language (Adedimeji, 2005). Good choices of words as well as the meanings the lexical items connote are ingredients to great musical exploits and fame. That is the reason some literary artist find it convenient to engage in incongruous but purposive blending for stylistic effects and to expose the ills in their environment (Osakwe, 2005).

About Wizkid

A lot has been written about Wizkid by several reviewers (Akam 2015; Durosomo 2017; Platon 2017) and lovers of music. Nigerian finders.com documents this:

Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun or better known by his stage name "Wizkid" is the chairman and CEO of the star boy music record label. From his ride to fame in 2010 after the release of the airwaves smashing single "Holla At You Body" under Banky W's (E.M.E) record label, he has continuously released new music to keep him relevant and a hot cake (sic) in the Nigerian music industry.

Wizkid is a famous artiste, a multiple award winner and a father. He started singing at the age of 11 (eleven) and his first studio album was with four of his church friends who chose to be identified as the "Glorious five" (www.bionetworth.com.ng wizkid-biography.com). Since 2010, Wizkid has gone on to release over 40 tracks and two studio albums. Wizkid does more of releasing singles and collaborations than releasing albums. The genres of his music are afrobeat, reggae, dancehall, hip hop, and etcetera.

The Lexico-Semantic Approach to the Study

Lexico-semantics is another term for lexical semantics. According to Cruse (2000: 90), "lexical semantics is by and large the study of the meanings of content words, and is oriented principally to the contribution that open-set items make to these". The units of analysis in lexical semantics are words but also sub-words or subunits such as affixes and even compound words and phrases. Lexical units make up the catalogue of words in a language, the lexicon (Ajulo, 1994). Lexical semantics examines how the meaning of the lexical units create an acceptable relationship with the structure of the language or syntax, a process known as syntax-semantic interface. Lexico-semantic level is the level at which a stylistician appraises the authors deployment of words and their meaning (Ogunsiji, 2013). Many linguists have started to develop interest in lexical studies in English perhaps as a result of the realisation that there is a need for a separate level of linguistic analysis to cater for certain linguistic patterns and regularities which the grammatical level alone can not take care of (Ajulo 1994). Malmkjaer (2002:339) sees the study of lexis as the study of vocabulary of a language in all its aspects. This paper is a deviation from the common core of lexical semantics but in line with the observation below:

The nature of lexico-semantics has changed markedly in the twenty to thirty years since classic texts like Lyons (1977) and Cruse (1986) were published. Such texts were written at the same time when structuralist lexical semantics essentially carried on separately from major (Generative) theories of Grammar. During and since the 1980's however theories of Grammar have become much more lexically driven necessitating much deeper attention to issues of lexical meanings (Malmkjaer, 2002:339)

This source laments that unfortunately there is a tendency in lexical semantics textbooks to present lexical semantics essentially as it was 30 years ago, with the focus limited to polysemy, homonymy, and the 'nym' relations (synonyms, antonyms etcetera). This work adopts a broader definition of the field. In Toolan's (1998) views, language could easily lend

itself to being a manipulative tool that could be used to condition peoples' thought. Language use include creating new words to express our values, control others, decry the imperfection in our society and praise our loved ones as in Wizkid's "Omalicha". This work is in line with the current trend of approaching lexical semantics from other angles (musical field). At this level of analysis, the stylistic significance of choice of words and meanings intended, connotative and denotative meanings are explored. The supportive roles of positive lexical items in creating happiness in a Nigerian society, like today's Nigeria, are also visible. The nature or types of words are also reviewed. There are different types and forms of words: simple, difficult, concrete, abstract, archaic, modern, specific or general. The manners of word formation (morphology): compound words, blends, acronyms, coinages, clippings etcetera all communicate meaning. In all, it is established in this paper that words form the basis of lexico. semantic analyses.

Songs are like poems in the sense that they are viewed as products of a collective experience; "a semiotic encounter through which the meanings that constitute the social system are exchanged collectively or singly, the concepts expressed and communicated by the poems are aspects of the semantic process of social dynamics which create new ideational lexical and structural possibilities in the communication process" Osakwe (1995:1). In this vein, this paper examines the data as that which communicate meaning using a compressed language containing various linguistic mechanisms.

Lexico-Semantic Analyses of Selected Songs of Wizkid

Wizkid is a singer and also a song writer. He is known for peculiar lyrics which stick to one's head long after the song is over. Though criticized for being repetitive and uncreative, Wizkid serves special mention for his imaginative prowess. One does not need to hack his way through high sounding lexemes to understand and identify with his songs. Wizkid chooses his lexical items decoratively in line with his aim at ornamentation and entertainment. He knows that entertainment is often enhanced by sound effects. These sound effects are often created by overt verbal dexterity displayed in his lyrics.

Rhyming lexemes and familiar collocations are employed for recreational and entertaining effects. This skillful lexical interplay enhanced his reputation culminating in his recent awards as Best male artiste in Africa and many others. Wizkid switches and mixes codes in addition to his invented clipped spellings. He roams from English to Nigerian English to pidgin English slangs, as well as to Igbo and Yoruba words etcetera. Quite remarkably, he arouses and sustains interest by using rhetorical questions and excessive hyperboles. Four of his songs will be analyzed in this paper. They are: "Ojuelegba", "Show you the money", "Omalicha" and the 2017 award winning song, "Come closer".

Analyses of "Ojuelegba"

Wizkid was born on the 16th of July, 1990. His song "Ojuelegba" was produced by Legendury Beatz as one of his singles in September 2014. Ojuelegba is a popular city in Lagos State, Nigeria. His use of the city name as a song title highlights his early years as a budding artist where he roamed the streets of the city praying for a breakthrough. Fela Anikulapo Kuti who seems to be a major influence on Wizkid's music had used the chaotic lifestyle of the city to depict the theme of poor governance in Nigeria. Wizkid in his song, "Ojuelegba", reveals his humble and tough beginning. He prides in the popular culture of the city which has given rise

to numerous talents in all walks of life. He is proud to say that his people live there, this he expresses in pidgin, a language most familiar to his people,

"my people dey there,
my people suffer,
demdey pray for blessing.
ehhnicjuelegba, o".

As a city hosting thousands of low income carers, the vicissitudes of life become the raw materials for Wizkid who equally displays dexterity at fabricating and compounding innovative lexical items. He mentions Ojuelegba with "O" at the end. This, apart from depicting the shouting pattern of bus conductors at the famous park in the city, is a discourse tick added to words or phrases for emphasis.

To encourage the people of this city, especially those who are faced with challenges, he advises that since life has no duplicate, the people should seize this only opportunity to make a difference in life. The positive lexical items employed stipulate that life is not that difficult and that with hardwork and a sincere prayer to God there is bound to be a change for the better:

Aiye o le to yen o
Aiye o ni double
Adura lo le se o
Call on daddy, baba God.

These are predominantly Yoruba words mixed with English lexical items which are in consonance with common parlance to create identity and in-group membership. To lead the way. Wizkid praises God for lifting him to fame in the chorus. Words like "feeling good". "thanking God for life" etcetera are chosen to reiterate the message he passes across.

Repetition

In the lyrics of the song, there are copious repetitions of lines to foreground the subject matter. For instance, "I can't explain" is repeated four times in the chorus to show how excited Wizkid is that God has lifted him from penury to affluence. Repetitions of exclamatory words like eh, eh, yeah, o I say, etcetera are all pointers to his gratefulness to God for His grace upon his life.

Code-Mixing and Code-Switching

Wizkid switches and mixes codes in this song. In various instances, he mixes Yoruba, and English words or switches completely to Yoruba in order to identify with his people since the music is basically about his adopted home. The excerpt below from the song portrays this:

Ni ojuelegba
Me and CD
From Mo' Dogg studio
"We been hustling to work" (Pidgin)
Ojojumo lo n s' adura
Mon jaije mi won mi won soroju

As shown above, code switching is the most prominent feature in "Ojuelegba". Also, familiar lexemes like "my people...my story", "hustle" and others are used in place of jaw breaking vocabulariesto complement the exercise.

Morphological Cataphora

Cataphora exists when there is a connection between a pronoun and its referring nounphrase where the two are interpreted as making reference to the same thing (Cutting, 2002). In line two of the first verse of the song, the pronoun, "they" is the mechanism employed to signal this phenomenon. Here, the pronoun refers forward to the people living in the city of Ojuelegba whom the singer calls "my people". This meaning is reinforced by the expression in line one of the first verse: "Ni Ojuelegba" (in Ojuelegba) where "Ojuelegba functions synecdochically as an umbrella term referring to the people of the city. In this case, even when the head of the prepositional phrase is "Ni" (in), this head word indicating place points towards its complement, "Ojuelegba" for its full realisation of meaning. This is verifiable as open-set items typically carry the burden of the semantic content of utterances. Because of the richness of their meanings and their unrestricted numbers, they participate in complex paradigmatic and syntagmatic structures" (Cruse 2000: 90). It is this linguistic system of cataphora that provides contextual cues about the referent in this song.

The Principle of Oppositeness

Quite remarkably, the singer reiterates his concern for the people of Ojuelegba when he highlights their plight: "my people suffer"; and using lexical items that align with the principle of oppositeness he explains in the next two lines what they long for: "them dey pray for blessing/ for better living". Here "suffer" which is contrasted with "blessing/better" embolden the force of the intended message. By the use of this strategy, the singer identifies with the downtrodden who are expected to accept this message of hope and optimism.

Analyses of "Show You the Money"

This song is in line with the current trend where money is used to entice people into taking good or bad actions. The song is one of the tracks in his album titled Ayo (2014). Ayo means Joy in Ayo was the first imprinted work of his "Star Boy" record label. Wizkid has made a difference through creativity, social enterprise and social good in this song. Money and flaunting of money and wealth is the order of the day. It seems to be the necessary excrescence of greatness. Wizkid is seen in (the song's video) "Show you the money" as being intensely competitive, swaggering and indulging in vainglory without a trace of inhibition. However, on a deeper level it is revealed through Wizkid's choice of words that he is, ironically, addressing his contemporaries who, in their songs, incessantly adopt the American 'gonna', an informal term for "going to", to accentuate their supposed edge over their contemporaries. To this end, "Gonna" is constantly repeated in "Show you the money" for beauty and theatrics. The repetition in this case is to foreground his underlying message which is that the love of money is evil and has led many youths astray. As is typical of the average user of Nigerian English, the end rhyme "O" is repeated for emphasis, musicality and mellifluousness:

Baby dance for me o
Don't go funny o
Baby oh oh
Are you gonna dance oo

As is the case today in the world where affluence is flaunted to assuage ego and lure greedy women, the rhyming lines and other lexical items are the spoken words which enliven the display of wealth in the video, He is certain that if he shows how rich he is and boasts well that ladies will "fall for him":

"Dance for me
Show me your body",
True to his words, the ladies fall over him in the video as he displays how wealthy he has become.

ANALYSIS OF "OMALICHA"

"Omalicha" is also one of the tracks in his Album, Ayo. Omalicha is an Igbo word which means beauty. In the lyrics of this song, Wizkid reiterates his love for life and nature. Wizkid is known for his choice of romantic lyrics, that is, love professing words which he carefully selects in communication:

"fine girl no pimples,
Yeah I love your smile and I love your dimples".

Again, he employs the principle of oppositeness to present his idea. A pimple is an inflamed elevation of the skin; a symptom in acne which humans hate to have; whereas, a dimple, a small natural hollow in the cheek is most desirable by humans as it enhances their beauty. The singer, here, presents two rhyming lexical items that are opposite in nature, downplays the undesirable and upholds that which is worth having in order to underline his point. The lines below equally show how exceedingly romantic the singer is:

Every morning when I wake
I just want dey see my kele
Say she dey burst my brain
Every night and day...
Omalicha I'm feeling ur love oh

It is also interesting that the song employs a rhetorical question "who dey who dey my mind?" as an apt announcement and a question to get listeners anxious about who his lover is:

Every morning when I wake
I just want de see my kele
Say she dey burst my brain

The phrase 'burst my brain' is an over exaggeration of the intensity of his love for Omalicha. The repetition of "ehhhh eh oh" in the lines depicts how desperate the musician wants his lover.

Contracted forms and clipped spellings are all indications of desperation and eagerness. He is so desperate to see his love that he has lost the patience to spell English words in full again: becomes 'ur while you is 'u'. This clipping, in itself, endears him to youths who are desperate about change and innovations. Wizkid apparently imagines the love shown by Jesus Christ in the Bible as he seems to be ready to sacrifice all he has for his lover in "Omalicha". His choice of words leaves his listeners with strong romantic feelings. He illuminates the fact that love is ineluctable in human life. He is seen reminiscing about his love, as his heart leaps

each time he thinks of his love. He chooses simple romantic words to express how smart, gorgeous and beautiful his love is inside out. These and many others are visible in "Omalicha" as well as in the recent award winning song "Come closer".

Analysis of "Come Closer"

"Come closer" is Wizkid's award winning song. Just like in "Show me your money". Wizkid again makes a conscious effort to flaunt his wealth by using lexical items that tend to massage sego. In verse one, open-set items like "Hennessy", "paper" and "girls" stand out from the following lines:

Me love my Hennessy...
All of my guys know me all about me paper
Me got me girls all around me, me no chaser, yah...
Me no let nothing come between me and me paper.

Hennessy is an expensive, foreign drink patronised by the rich; that the singer mentions taking this drink and not Star Lager beer, locally produced in his country of origin indicates his desire to display his affluence. Equally, money is a piece of paper creatively designed and accepted as a legal tender. A piece of paper, on its own, is worthless but highly valuable when used as a means of exchange. By Wizkid's use of the word, "paper", in place of money, there is that underlying meaning that he has made excess money and they are now like papers before him. Also, owing to the economic hardship in the singer's country, it is the wealthy that usually has girls flocking around them the way the singer describes in the song.

Theme-Rheme Relationship

Wizkid makes a bold statement in the introduction to the song, "Come closer" when he implies that he has stepped above his contemporaries into stardom. The first line which contains the central idea of the song serves as the theme while the accompanying line is the rheme:

Go outside, big time forward, heh
Starboydey here suh

The open-set items, "go", "outside" and "forward", in the theme suggests Wizkid's burst onto the international scene. It is his idea that he has performed incredibly better than his contemporaries since he began singing: "came into the game, no one replace me"; and so, it is time for him to strike a mark in the international music scene. To buttress this giant leap into the scene, the singer adopts the Jamaican creole as the language of expression in the song. In his previous songs, the lexical items were from either Nigerian English/pidgin or Yoruba. However, the current preoccupation requires an "international" language:

Me, me number one inna me city
Me steady repping, representing for me city, yo
African-born, me rep my ting, yo
Me come clean like me, come inna me video
Me, me come through like a soldier....

In addition to the language, Wizkid is also in collaboration with an International superstar, Drake, to further support the theme of the song.

Pronoun Topicalisation

The first person singular pronoun in the objective form, "me" has not only been repeated twenty-nine times in the song, but also fronted ten times in clauses where the first person singular pronoun in the subject form, "I", would have been appropriate. Even though, this mechanism is in tandem with the linguistic structure of the adopted language of the song, it, nevertheless, is a strategy intended to attract emphasis on the singer who seems to make a statement about his journey in his musical career.

Conclusion

Wizkid is a singer in tune with the times. From the year, 2010, when he became prominent the release of the song, "Holla at Your Boy", till 2016 when following his collaboration with Drake the song, "One Dance" became number one in many countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia, the singer has in his songs employed various lexical items which communicate the intended message, foster in-group membership and accentuate identity. A careful examination of the lexical items employed in the data reveal the use of contracted forms of words together with clipped spellings both of which appeal to the younger generation who hunger for novel language forms.

There are equally repetition of lexemes for emphasis, the use of rhetorical questions to capture interest and retain attention, the employment of lexical oppositeness to contrast varying concepts/ideas with the aim of emboldening the force of the intended message, the introduction of morphological cataphora- a linguistic system which stipulates how meaning can be inferred from contextual cues, as well as the frequent code-mixing and code-switching between lexical items and syntax of English and Yoruba to promote identity and solidarity between the singer and his people. These various linguistic mechanisms ensure Wizkid's songs are a level above that of his contemporaries.

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