

Constructing Masculinity, Sexuality, and Power in Nigerian Afrobeats: A Discourse-Historical and Systemic Functional Analysis of Asake's Lyrics

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Received: 25/ 04 / 2026

Accepted: 13/ 05 / 2026

Published: 15 / 07/ 2026

Abstract

Language in contemporary Afrobeats is not merely expressive but constitutive of identity, power, and social relations. Despite growing scholarship on Nigerian hip-hop, limited attention has been paid to how interpersonal linguistic resources function ideologically to construct masculinity, sexuality, and celebrity power. This study addresses this gap by examining how Asake deploys interpersonal meaning to negotiate self-promotion, positioning, and sexual discourse in his lyrics. This study shows how language choice in popular culture shapes social ideas about gender, class, identity, and celebrity culture in contemporary Nigeria. Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Discourse-Historical Approach, five purposively selected songs (2022–2023) were analyzed qualitatively, using a clause-based approach that focused on mood, personal pronouns, vocatives, and expletives. The findings indicate that declarative clauses and first-person pronouns are the most frequent interpersonal resources in the lyrics. They are used as strategies of positive self-presentation and authority construction. Imperatives and vocatives are employed to exert relational control, especially in the portrayal of women. Interrogatives fulfill rhetorical functions that bolster status and appeal. Overall, the lyrics construct a kind of hegemonic masculinity based on success, sexual agency, and symbolic capital. The study recommends that subsequent research examine the ideological implications of popular music discourse, especially its role in normalizing or challenging gender or socio-economic disparities within African popular culture.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, identity construction, interpersonal meaning, Nigerian Afrobeats, masculinity and sexuality

Cite as

Adebayo, O. O. (2026). Constructing Masculinity, Sexuality, and Power in Nigerian Afrobeats: A Discourse-Historical and Systemic Functional Analysis of Asake's Lyrics. *Atras Journal*, 7(2), 226-240. <https://doi.org/10.70091/Atras/vol07no02.16>

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Introduction

Nigerian popular music, especially hip hop, is viewed by Onanuga and Akingbe (2020) as a dynamic cultural and linguistic space where social realities, youth identities, and ideological stances are negotiated. Nigerian hip hop is a non-canonical but potent expressive form that reflects the fears, ambitions, and contradictions of modern Nigerian society (Onanuga & Akingbe, 2020).

Research in hip hop has often approached self-promotion, social positioning, and sex through a deficit lens, primarily as proof of ideological excess, misogyny, or moral decline (Are, 2018). However, the performative, aesthetic, and interactional logics that support hip hop as a cultural practice are being ignored in such discussions. From a discourse viewpoint, hip-hop artists use self-promotion to establish their visibility, legitimacy, and survival in cutthroat cultural economies, rather than as a form of narcissistic excess (Are, 2018). Redefining these discursive practices as artistic strategies rather than ideological deviation helps to portray Nigerian hip hop as a space where language is used to negotiate power, creativity, and entertainment.

Furthermore, although themes such as social positioning, sexual discourse, and self-promotion frequently appear in Nigerian hip-hop lyrics, few studies carefully examine how these meanings are realized through interpersonal resources. Since CDA examines how language enacts power, ideology, and social relations in particular contexts, it offers a helpful framework for filling this gap (Fairclough, 1995). CDA combined with Halliday's SFL, specifically the interpersonal metafunction, allows for an in-depth investigation of how language users use mood structures, pronoun selections, vocatives, and evaluative expressions to assign roles, create identities, and position themselves and their audience within discourse (Eggins, 2004).

One of the most well-known names in modern Nigerian street pop and hip-hop, Asake, makes a strong argument for this kind of study. His lyrics, expressed in urban slang, Nigerian Pidgin, and Yoruba colloquialisms, usually emphasize sexual bravado, romantic pursuit, material success, and self-affirmation. Although his popularity and musical hybridity have been praised by cultural and journalistic commentary, little academic research has examined how his linguistic choices serve as ideological tools to construct sexualised forms of address, negotiate power dynamics, and promote the self. This lack of CDA-informed analyses that connect interpersonal meaning to more general processes of identity construction and social positioning indicates a glaring gap in the linguistic study of Nigerian hip-hop.

This study addresses this gap by examining how interpersonal linguistic features in Asake's lyrics function as discursive strategies that construct self-promotion, social positioning, and sexual discourse. The study is guided by the hypothesis that interpersonal resources are not merely stylistic features but ideological tools that enable artists to construct authority, negotiate identity, and reproduce or contest socio-cultural norms. How are interpersonal linguistic resources deployed in Asake's lyrics to construct self-promotion and celebrity identity; how do mood structures, pronouns, vocatives, and expletives function in the social positioning of the artist and his audience; how is sexuality discursively constructed in the lyrics; and what ideological meanings and power relations are reproduced or contested through these interpersonal resources are the questions the study seeks to answer.

Literature Review

Nigerian hip-hop has become a thriving cultural form in the African context, influenced by both global musical flows and local sociolinguistic ecologies. Over the last 20 years, modern

Nigerian hip-hop music has developed into a vibrant, well-known youth culture genre influenced by both geopolitical shifts and technological advances. Its growth and circulation were greatly aided by the development of digital production and distribution technology as well as the freedom of speech that followed Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 (Inyabri, 2016; Gbogi, 2016). Despite being heavily influenced by American hip-hop traditions, the genre is distinguished by syncretism, which combines local language and musical resources with global artistic elements. Its origins may be traced to the politically charged, multilingual performance traditions of Fela Anikulapo-Kuti and to the early DJ practices of Lagos radio MCs in the 1980s (Chiedozie, 2023). To appeal to trans-ethnic and transnational audiences, Nigerian hip hop has evolved from early imitative forms into a unique hybrid genre that combines hip hop, Afrobeats, highlife, reggae, and pop influences.

The moral and ideological critique of Nigerian hip-hop's themes and representations has been a prevalent trend in scholarly work on the genre. Numerous studies highlight how common misogyny, hypersexuality, hypermasculinity, cybercrime, violence, and drug use are in hip-hop lyrics, frequently portraying the genre as a factor in moral decline or social decay (Eze, 2020; Onanuga & Onanuga, 2020). According to this viewpoint, deviant youth behavior and problematic gender norms are often reinforced by Nigerian hip-hop. These studies, however, provide valuable insights into the ideological implications of popular music; because they are primarily evaluative, they tend to treat self-promotional and sexualized discourse as intrinsically negative, leaving little room for alternative readings grounded in entertainment, performance, or interaction. The intricate discursive roles these practices play in hip-hop culture risk being obscured by this moral framing.

Several studies have examined the lyrics of Nigerian Hip-Hop music. Some of these studies employ sociolinguistic (Laidi, 2024; Okpongette & Ordu, 2023), pragmatic and discourse strategies (Gbogi, 2016; Kanu & Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2023; Ajayi, Adesope, Akinrinlola, & Abonyi, 2026), and semiotics (Jemiluyi, 2026). All these studies echo the fact that Nigerian hip-hop artists use language creatively in their lyrics to negotiate their cultural and individual identities. Gbogi (2016) states that Nigerian hip-hop artists employ several linguistic strategies, such as indirection, ambiguity, code-mixing, and inclusive pronominals, to fashion multiple identities and sustain an in-group within a growing urban youth subculture in Nigeria. In a similar vein, Liadi (2024) argues that Nigerian hip-hop artists use language to create a subculture where they and their fans can relate through codes and words that carry symbolic meanings shared by both.

While several studies have examined Nigerian hip-hop lyrics, none have examined the mood system, vocatives, expletives, and personal pronouns from a systemic-functional grammar perspective. Mood, expletives, vocatives, and personal pronouns are examples of interpersonal resources that greatly influence how listeners experience and interpret the lyrics. One can see how Asake interacts with his listeners in ways that foster closeness and an emotional bond by studying the elements of his songs.

Systemic Functional Linguistics

This study adopts SFL as its theoretical framework. SFL views language as a resource for making meaning in social contexts rather than simply a system of formal rules. Halliday's SFL identifies three metafunctions through which language simultaneously operates: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Since song lyrics are

inherently interactional—addressing audiences, expressing attitudes, and positioning listeners—this study focuses on the interpersonal metafunction.

The interpersonal metafunction conceptualizes the clause as an interactive event in which speakers negotiate roles, attitudes, and relationships with their audience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Through interpersonal resources, speakers express feelings, attitudes, and evaluations while simultaneously positioning themselves in relation to others in discourse. These resources include the mood system, modality, vocatives, expletives, polarity, and personal pronouns.

A central component of the interpersonal metafunction is the mood system. Within this system, clauses are categorized as indicative or imperative, with the indicative further divided into declarative and interrogative forms. Declaratives typically realize statements, interrogatives realize questions, and imperatives realize commands. Structurally, the mood element of a clause consists of the Subject and Finite, whose relationship enables speakers to negotiate propositions and express tense, modality, and interpersonal stance (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Vocatives are deployed to identify or summon an addressee and to draw them into the interaction. They may appear as calls or summons used to attract attention, or as address terms that identify the specific audience being spoken to (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Expletives are expressions that convey strong emotional reactions and are often associated with taboo or semi-taboo language (Biber et al., 1999). They typically appear at the beginning of a clause or as standalone expressions and are used to express frustration, excitement, emphasis, or evaluation. Biber et al. (1999) distinguish between taboo expletives, which directly reference socially restricted domains such as religion, sex, or bodily functions, and moderated expletives, which soften or mask their taboo origins through phonetic or semantic modification. In musical performances, expletives can intensify emotional expression and reinforce the performative energy of the lyrics.

Personal pronouns allow speakers to refer to themselves and others in ways that reflect social relationships and communicative intentions (Liping, 2017). Pronoun choices carry significant interpersonal implications because they help construct the relationship between speaker and audience. Speakers deploy personal pronouns to signal alignment, distance, authority, or intimacy within interaction.

In the context of Nigerian hip hop music, these interpersonal resources are particularly significant because artists frequently engage their audiences through direct address, emotional expression, and identity positioning. This study, therefore, examines how the mood system, vocatives, personal pronouns, and expletives are deployed in selected songs by Asake to construct interpersonal relationships with listeners. The study seeks to reveal how the artist negotiates audience engagement, expresses attitudes, and creates a sense of shared identity with his listeners through his lyrics.

Discourse-Historical Approach

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emphasizes the discursive and linguistic expression of power dynamics in modern societies, according to Ruth Wodak (1996). It examines how language and communication are used to both exercise and challenge power. Instead of being a single, cohesive theory, CDA is a broad research framework that uses a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches to investigate how discourse, ideology, and society are related (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

DHA is a prominent strand of CDA. DHA systematically examines intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, incorporating extra-linguistic, socio-political, and cultural factors into the analysis (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001; 2011). Methodologically, DHA is

grounded in triangulation, combining multiple data sources, theoretical perspectives, and analytical tools in order to minimize bias and enhance interpretive depth (Wodak, 2011).

Central to DHA are three analytical dimensions: (i) the content of discourse, (ii) the discursive strategies employed, and (iii) the linguistic realizations through which these are enacted. Within this framework, five key discursive strategies are identified: nomination (naming and labeling social actors), predication (attributing qualities), argumentation (justifying claims), perspectivisation (positioning viewpoints), and intensification/mitigation (modulating the force of utterances). These strategies enable the analyst to uncover how discourse constructs positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, often in ways that sustain or challenge power relations.

DHA is relevant for this study because it enables a critical investigation of how language choices in Asake's lyrics contribute to the construction of self-promotion, social positioning, and sexual discourse within the sociocultural context of Nigerian Afrobeats. DHA helps to reveal the underlying ideologies that underlie these discourses by placing the lyrics within larger cultural narratives of hustle, success, masculinity, and desire. Furthermore, DHA complements Halliday's SFL. DHA offers a macro-level interpretive framework for elucidating how these linguistic features serve as discursive strategies within particular socio-historical contexts, and SFL provides the micro-level analytical tools for identifying interpersonal meanings, such as mood, pronouns, vocatives, and evaluative expressions. DHA explains the significance of these meanings in terms of power, ideology, and identity, while SFL addresses how meaning is linguistically realized.

Most studies on Nigerian Hip hop have concentrated on sociolinguistic practices, code-switching, identity performance, and pragmatic strategies. However, little attention has been paid to the ideological functions of interpersonal linguistic resources. Moreover, very little of the existing research combines SFL and DHA to study how mood structures, pronouns, and vocatives.

Methodology

The data for the study consist of the lyrics of five songs by Asake, produced between 2022 and 2023. The five songs are selected because they are among his most popular singles, produced during a period that can be tagged the artist's peak. The popularity of the songs is measured by the number of listeners across platforms like *Spotify*, *YouTube*, etc. The lyrics of the song were copied from the artist's *Spotify page*. Another criterion for song choice is the richness of the lyrics. Only songs that make use of a plethora of words rather than rhythmical repetitions of slang and sounds are selected for the study. The selected songs are *Lonely at the Top* (2023), *Organize* (2023), *Basquiat* (2022), *Joha* (2023), and *Terminator* (2023). All the songs utilize English, Nigerian Pidgin English, and Yoruba in their lyrics. However, the artist also uses French in one of the songs.

The research is descriptive qualitative research. The analysis was conducted in two complementary stages combining SFL and DHA. First, the selected lyrics were transcribed and segmented into clauses. The researcher also carefully translated the parts of the songs in other languages into English where necessary. Using the interpersonal metafunction proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), clauses were analyzed to identify interpersonal resources, specifically mood types (declarative, interrogative, imperative), personal pronouns, vocatives, and expletives. The frequency and distribution of these resources were examined to determine how the artist structures interaction with listeners. In the second stage, the identified linguistic

patterns were interpreted through the DHA's discursive strategies. Particular attention was given to nomination, perspectivisation, and intensification strategies to explain how interpersonal linguistic choices contribute to the construction of self-promotion, social positioning, and sexual discourse within contemporary Nigerian hip-hop.

Analysis

Following the analytical procedure outlined earlier, the lyrics of the five selected Asake songs were first segmented into clauses and analyzed for interpersonal resources using the interpersonal metafunction of SFL, as proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). After eliminating repetitions, 143 full clauses were identified. The results show that declarative clauses constitute the majority of the mood types (58%), followed by imperatives, while interrogatives occur least frequently (15%). The predominance of declarative clauses indicates that the lyric persona primarily presents himself as a source of information, offering personal experiences, beliefs, and evaluations to listeners. This pattern reflects what Bustam (2019) describes as the use of declaratives in song discourse to construct authority and credibility. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, particularly within DHA, these declarative constructions function as perspectivisation strategies that foreground the artist's worldview and personal narrative. The declaratives, therefore, contribute to the discursive construction of self-promotion and identity positioning.

Self-Promotion as Discursive Strategy in Asake's Lyrics

One of the dominant discursive patterns in the lyrics is self-promotion. Self-promotion in the data is not merely an aesthetic feature but a discursive enactment of hegemonic masculinity, characterized by dominance, resilience, and success. The recurrent use of first-person pronouns ("I", "me", "my") mapped onto DHA nomination strategies constructs the artist as a central, agentive subject. However, beyond identity construction, these pronouns participate in the production of what can be described as entrepreneurial masculinity, where self-worth is tied to achievement, visibility, and recognition. Within the analytical model, declaratives serve as perspectivization strategies, whereas first-person pronouns facilitate nomination and predication, portraying the artist as a pivotal social actor with distinct attributes. Declarative clauses enable the lyric persona to present statements about his achievements, artistic ability, and personal experiences. For instance, extract 1 illustrates how declarative clauses are used to narrate the challenges and aspirations associated with celebrity status.

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Extract 1

It's lonely at the top

Money on my mind

Don't care what they yarning about me in particular

Out here on the road chasing my dream because I know no one can chase it for me (Lonely at the Top)

The declarative structures in this extract construct a narrative of ambition, isolation, and determination. The lyric persona emphasizes individual struggle and perseverance while simultaneously downplaying external criticism. The predication of perseverance and indifference to criticism attributes resilience and focus to the lyric persona. Discursively, these statements reinforce a self-made success narrative, which is a recurrent ideological motif in hip-hop discourse. Extract 1 does more than narrate experience; it constructs a classed masculinity in which success is measured by financial accumulation and upward mobility. Within the socio-economic context of Nigeria, such discourse resonates with broader neoliberal ideologies that equate masculinity with economic success and individual hustle. Thus, linguistic choices here reproduce class-based aspirations, positioning wealth as both a marker of masculine achievement and a marker of societal relevance.

Declaratives are also deployed for self-adulation and artistic positioning.

Extract 2

Walking poetry, I am greater

I'm a work of art to Basquiat

Here, the declaratives explicitly construct the artist's identity as exceptional and aesthetically valuable. The lyric persona symbolically aligns himself with artistic brilliance by comparing himself to the renowned artist Jean-Michel Basquiat. The intertextual reference to Basquiat functions not only as an artistic comparison but as a symbolic capital appropriation, aligning the artist with global cultural elites. Within the DHA framework, this constitutes a nomination-and-intensification strategy through which the artist elevates his cultural status. The discourse here does not merely describe artistic identity; it constructs it as exceptional and indisputable.

Similarly, declaratives are used to respond to perceived criticism. Extract 3 further demonstrates how declaratives operate as argumentation strategies:

Extract 3

I'm guilty, them say my swag e dey kill, I no go appeal

Know it's hard to swallow the pill

Extract 4

Don't care what they yarning about me

Out here chasing my dream

In Extract 3, the artist acknowledges criticism while simultaneously reframing it as evidence of envy. The declarative constructions function discursively to invalidate criticism and reinforce artistic superiority, thereby consolidating the persona's authority within the musical space. The use of third-person pronouns ("them") constructs an out-group, while the declarative tone asserts epistemic authority. This aligns with DHA's positive self-presentation versus negative other-presentation, reinforcing a competitive ideological structure.

Personal pronouns are important interpersonal resources that reveal how speakers construct identities and relationships within discourse (Temitayo & Filani, 2015). The analysis of the lyrics

reveals a high frequency of first-person singular pronouns (“I”, “me”, and “my”), which together account for more than half of the pronoun usage. The quantitative dominance of first-person pronouns further consolidates this discourse. Within the analytical model, these pronouns function as identity markers, constructing the artist as an agentive, autonomous, and exceptional figure. Within the SFL framework, these pronouns indicate strong self-referential positioning, whereas in CDA terms they function as identity-construction strategies. The repeated use of first-person pronouns emphasizes personal agency and ambition as seen in Extract 4. In Extract 4, the repetition of self-reference foregrounds agency and ambition, producing what can be interpreted as a discursive performance of entrepreneurial selfhood, a recurring motif in contemporary Afrobeats.

Extract 5

Walking poetry, I am greater

I'm a work of art

In Extract 5, pronouns reinforce the artist's centrality within the discourse. By foregrounding the self, the lyrics construct an image of artistic excellence and uniqueness.

The prevalence of declarative mood and first-person pronouns establishes a discourse of self-promotion in which the artist portrays himself as authoritative and exceptional. From the perspective of DHA, this indicates positive self-presentation, where language choices are deliberately deployed to validate status and success.

Second-person pronouns serve a different interpersonal function.

Extract 6

You are too wise

In this extract, the pronoun “you” addresses critics and challenges their authority. The use of second-person reference, therefore, establishes discursive boundaries between the artist and opposing voices.

Third-person pronouns such as “they” or “them” also contribute to this boundary construction.

Extract 7

I tell dem before make dem stop to dey f'enu fọ

These pronouns construct an oppositional group whose criticisms are dismissed as irrelevant.

Asake's lyrics construct the self-made man along three intersecting axes: Endurance, Divine Validation, and Street Credibility. These axes are not separate but mutually reinforcing, forming a coherent masculine ideology where survival on the street is proof of both moral strength and divine approval

Social Positioning

Beyond self-promotion, the lyrics also reveal strategies of social positioning, whereby the artist situates himself in relation to listeners, critics, and competitors. These strategies are realized through a combination of imperative constructions, second-person pronouns, and rhetorical interrogatives. Within the analytical model, these features map onto nomination, perspectivisation, and intensification strategies, constructing relational hierarchies between the artist and others.

Second-person pronouns (“you”) function as perspectivisation devices, directly engaging listeners while simultaneously establishing evaluative distance:

Extract 8

You are too wise

This utterance, while seemingly neutral, operates as a discursive challenge, positioning the addressee as misguided or inferior. Similarly, third-person pronouns construct out-groups:

Extract 9

I tell dem before make dem stop...

Here, “dem” refers to the critics as a collective, while the imperative (“make dem stop”) reinforces hierarchical positioning. This interaction between pronouns and mood exemplifies how nomination and argumentation converge to produce an “us versus them” discourse, a central feature of hip-hop ideology. In Asake’s lyrics, the “us versus them” dynamic is an important discursive strategy for building street credibility, authority, and symbolic power. Through constant use of pronouns such as “I,” “we,” “they,” and “them,” the artist creates a sharp line between himself and the oppositional faction of critics, rivals, doubters, or outsiders. This is consistent with the strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation within the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), in which the self and in-group are presented as authentic, resilient, and successful, while the out-group is depicted as jealous, fake, or incapable.

The second most frequent mood type in the data is the imperative mood. Imperatives typically realize the speech function of demanding goods or services (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In the lyrics analyzed, however, imperatives often function beyond literal commands and instead operate as discursive devices for establishing authority, solidarity, and performative energy. Imperatives often function as directives that invite listeners to engage in particular actions or adopt particular attitudes.

Extract 10

Make we just dey fire dey go, ko de ni su wa

(Joha)

The use of the collective pronoun “we” transforms the imperative into a solidarity-building device, inviting listeners to participate in a shared experience of resilience and enjoyment. The use of Nigerian Pidgin and Yoruba further reinforces cultural proximity between the artist and his audience. Within the analytical model, this reflects a shift from hierarchical to collective positioning, constructing an in-group identity grounded in shared struggle and enjoyment. In other instances, imperatives function as motivational or philosophical statements.

Extract 11

Tell me what Olúwa no fit handle (Tell me what God cannot handle)

Jẹ́gbádùn l'oma gbádùn (Basquiat)

Here, the imperative construction encourages listeners to maintain faith and embrace enjoyment despite life’s challenges. Such constructions resonate strongly with audiences within the socio-economic realities of contemporary Nigeria.

Imperatives are also used to assert dominance over rivals.

Extract 12

Slow down, slow down

Screw a nigga if a nigga think I give a fuck

Me I don dey street since when dem sing Gongo Aso

Imperatives directed at rivals or abstract others function as dominance markers, as seen in Extract 12. Here, imperative forms combined with expletive intensity enact discursive aggression, reinforcing the artist’s authority and dismissing opposition. These constructions align with DHA’s intensification strategy, amplifying competitive identity and symbolic power.

Pronouns and imperatives function as positioning strategies. Using "I" puts the focus on the individual, while using "you," "they," and "them" sets up relational boundaries. Imperatives further establish the artist as authoritative, exerting dominance and control. These patterns fit with DHA's strategies of nomination and perspectivisation, which make it a "us versus them" context.

Although interrogatives appear least frequently, they play a significant rhetorical role in the lyrics.

Extract 13

Sh'oni power? (Do you have power?)

B'oni, kowa (If you do, bring it.)

These rhetorical questions challenge listeners while simultaneously elevating the artist's perceived power or desirability. Within the analytical model, such interrogatives function as argumentative challenges rather than genuine requests for information. They invite alignment while presupposing the artist's superiority, thereby reinforcing his positioning. The interrogatives, therefore, operate as discursive tools for self-positioning and audience engagement. In Asake's lyrics, "power" is less constructed as political authority, but more as financial, symbolic, and performative dominance. In the recurring "Mr. Money" persona, wealth is a visible marker of success, influence, desirability, and social mobility in the competitive world of Afrobeats and Nigerian youth culture.

Expletives occur infrequently in the data, with only 2 instances identified.

Extract 14

Eji malaika

The expression "malaika" (angels) evokes religious imagery commonly associated with certain Christian worship traditions in southwestern Nigeria. In this context, the term is used metaphorically to intensify emotional expression within the performance.

Sexual Discourse and Gendered Representation in the Lyrics

Another prominent discourse identified in the analysis is sexuality and objectification. The analysis shows that sexuality in lyrics is often framed as a symbolic reward for masculine power, success and celebrity status. Sexual relationships are presented not as shared interpersonal experiences but as the product of wealth, fame, influence and male dominance. This is primarily realised through imperative clauses, vocatives addressing female personas, and suggestive lexical choices. Vocatives are address forms used to attract attention or identify addressees (Formentelli, 2017). In the data analysed, 18 instances of vocatives were identified. Sexual discourse is constructed through imperatives, vocatives, and metaphorical language. These elements are often seen as misogynistic, but they can also be seen as performative and specific to the genre, showing how Afrobeats fits into the larger culture. However, they simultaneously perpetuate gendered power dynamics, underscoring the contradictory ideological nature of such discourse.

Many of these vocatives involve female names or affectionate address terms, such as *Joanna*, *Unaka*, or *Joha*. These forms serve to create immediacy and interpersonal connection within the lyrical discourse.

Extract 15

Unaka sungbalaja, no dey waste time

The vocative "Unaka" directly addresses a female persona, thereby personalising the interaction. Within the DHA framework, this functions as a nomination strategy, constructing

specific identities within the narrative of the song. The vocative “Unaka” personalises the interaction, but this apparent intimacy is immediately subsumed under an imperative that directs the female addressee’s behaviour. This combination reflects a hierarchical gender relation, where the male subject occupies a position of control and the female subject is constructed as responsive and available. Within DHA, this constitutes predication, attributing passivity and compliance to the female figure.

Extract 16

Joanna ju ibadi bi omo Ghana.

In this example, the vocative “Joanna” directly addresses a female persona and is followed by an imperative encouraging dance. Such constructions are common in Afrobeats and hip-hop performances, where sensuality and bodily expression are central components of musical entertainment.

Imperatives are also used in contexts involving romantic or sexual interactions.

Extract 17

Omo e don tey, je a s'ere d'ele (Beautiful woman, it’s been a while, let’s go home to play)

Extract 18

Joanna ju ibadi bi omo Ghana (Joanna, shake your buttocks like a Ghanaian woman)

Extract 19

Come chop my bana' (Come and eat my banana)

The metaphorical expression in Extract 19, intensified through imperative mood, constructs sexuality as male-driven and performative, with emphasis on potency and desirability. Imperatives and vocatives in the lyrics are often addressed to female figures, as seen in Extracts 19 and 20, positioning the male persona as the active and dominant subject and constructing the female figure as responsive, compliant, and available to male desire. Such linguistic choices reproduce gendered power relations in which masculine authority is normalized, and female agency is subordinated to male pleasure and performative dominance. These constructions align with broader discourses of hypermasculinity, where sexual prowess functions as a key marker of male identity. However, it is important to recognize that these representations are not simply reflections of patriarchal ideology; they are also embedded within the performative conventions of Afrobeats and hip-hop.

Within the broader discourse of Afrobeats and hip-hop, such expressions contribute to the performative aesthetics of the genre, where sensuality, rhythm, and audience engagement are central to the entertainment experience.

Discussion

The findings indicate that interpersonal linguistic resources operate as discursive strategies that shape identity, authority, and desire. The study demonstrates the connection between micro-level linguistic choices and macro-level ideological processes by integrating SFL and DHA.

The analysis of mood types, pronoun use, vocatives, and evaluative lexical items in Asake’s lyrics demonstrates how linguistic resources function as discursive strategies for constructing identity, authority, and desirability within Nigerian Afrobeats. These patterns reveal systematic strategies of self-promotion, positioning, and sexual discourse that operate simultaneously at the textual, discursive, and socio-cultural levels.

First, the predominance of declarative clauses functions as a strategy of self-legitimation and self-presentation. In DHA terms, declaratives contribute to nomination and predication strategies, through which the artist constructs himself as an authoritative and successful figure.

Asake discursively constitutes an aspirational identity aligned with the competitive ethos of Afrobeats by narrating achievements, wealth, artistic brilliance, and resilience. Similar patterns have been observed in African popular music, where lyrical self-assertion functions as a symbolic performance of success and credibility (Adedeji, 2022). In this sense, declaratives do not merely recount experience; they legitimize the artist's authority within the symbolic economy of popular culture.

Imperatives further reinforce this positioning through what DHA conceptualizes as strategies of intensification and involvement. Commands directed at listeners, rivals, or romantic partners function less as literal directives than as performative markers of dominance and confidence. Their frequent deployment in Nigerian Pidgin English and Yoruba also indexes cultural authenticity, allowing the artist to align himself with local linguistic identities while maintaining accessibility to a transnational Afrobeats audience. This supports the argument that language choice in African popular music often operates as a resource for negotiating both local belonging and global visibility (Adedeji, 2017).

Although interrogatives occur less frequently, their rhetorical use contributes to the discursive construction of prestige and desirability. Questions that implicitly highlight wealth, talent, or sexual prowess function as evaluative positioning devices, inviting the audience to affirm the artist's superiority. Such rhetorical questioning aligns with the broader tradition of competitive boasting in hip-hop culture, where lyrical performance often revolves around symbolic contests over status and authenticity (Rose, 1994).

Pronoun choices further intensify these strategies of positioning. The dominance of first-person singular pronouns foregrounds the artist's individuality and success, reinforcing what Hyland (2005) identifies as the self-promotional function of personal reference in discourse. In Asake's lyrics, first-person singular pronouns become central tools for constructing a narrative of self-made achievement and resilience. Conversely, second-person pronouns create a dialogic relationship with listeners, positioning them as witnesses, admirers, or occasionally challengers within the discursive space of the song. Third-person plural pronouns enact a classic discursive polarization strategy in DHA, constructing an implicit boundary between the successful artist and his critics or rivals. This "us versus them" dynamic is a common rhetorical device in popular music cultures where credibility and authenticity are continually negotiated.

Vocatives and interpersonal address forms also play a significant role in shaping relational dynamics within the lyrics. As noted by Formentelli (2007), vocatives simultaneously create intimacy and signal power relations. In Asake's case, the use of female names or affectionate address forms constructs a discursive space where masculine authority and romantic desirability intersect. These patterns resonate with broader gendered discourses in Afrobeats, in which male performers frequently position themselves as dominant figures in romantic and sexual narratives (Adedeji, 2022).

Expletives and vulgar expressions, meanwhile, contribute to what might be termed discourses of authenticity, rather than merely representing linguistic deviance; such expressions function as stylistic markers of street credibility and emotional intensity. Their presence aligns with the performative realism often associated with hip-hop and Afrobeats cultures, where linguistic rawness can index authenticity and resistance to sanitized mainstream norms (Rose, 1994).

When interpreted within the broader socio-economic context of contemporary Nigeria, these discursive patterns acquire additional significance. Themes of hustling, success, pleasure, and

resilience reflect the aspirations of a generation navigating economic uncertainty and social inequality. Through the strategic deployment of linguistic resources, Asake's lyrics transform personal success narratives into collective symbols of possibility and upward mobility. In DHA terms, the songs draw on shared socio-historical knowledge about struggle, ambition, and survival, thereby enabling listeners to interpret the artist's persona within familiar cultural frames (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

These findings demonstrate that self-promotion, positioning, and sexual discourse in Afrobeats should not be understood solely as manifestations of narcissism or moral decline, as often echoed in existing scholarship on hip-hop discourse. Instead, they function as discursive performances of identity, artistry, and entertainment within a competitive cultural field.

Conclusion

This study examined how linguistic resources in Asake's lyrics construct discourses of self-promotion, positioning, and sexuality within Nigerian Afrobeats. Drawing on insights from Wodak's DHA and integrating categories from Halliday's SFL, the analysis demonstrated how grammatical and lexical choices function as strategic resources for identity construction and audience engagement. The predominance of declarative clauses, the strategic deployment of imperatives and rhetorical interrogatives, and the patterned use of personal pronouns collectively contribute to discursive strategies that construct Asake as authoritative, resilient, and aspirational within the competitive field of Afrobeats. These linguistic patterns reveal how the artist mobilizes nomination, predication, and intensification strategies to legitimize his persona while simultaneously differentiating himself from rivals and critics. Rather than merely reflecting narcissism or moral decadence, the findings suggest that self-promotion, sexual bravado, and competitive positioning operate as performative and culturally embedded elements of artistic expression. In this context, the lyrical performance of success, desire, and dominance functions as both entertainment and symbolic capital within contemporary African popular music cultures.

Furthermore, the study highlights the capacity of Afrobeats lyrics to reflect and negotiate socio-economic realities in contemporary Nigeria, where narratives of hustling, ambition, and pleasure resonate with the lived experiences and aspirations of young audiences. Future research may extend this approach by examining larger corpora of Afrobeats lyrics, comparing discursive strategies across artists, or exploring audience reception of these narratives.

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AI Statement

It should be noted that the author is solely responsible for the primary intellectual content, data interpretation, and conclusions offered. However, this text has been improved by using Grammarly to modify its linguistic style, as well as to fix grammar and spelling, which may result in certain AI-generated language patterns.

Statement of Absence of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, findings, or recommendations presented in this paper. All conclusions drawn are independent and unbiased.

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