

## **RAPE CULTURE AND LANGUAGE ENABLERS IN SELECT NIGERIAN POP MUSIC**

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### **Abstract**

Existing studies have examined rape culture using critical discourse theory, feminist theory and new media theory perspectives. However, a pragmatic approach in deconstructing the language used in some Nigerian pop music and how they act as enablers of rape is sparse in the literatures. Hence, this paper builds on existing literature by exploring the subject from a pragmatic perspective, using Mey's 2001 Pragmeme – a theory which emphasizes contextualization of linguistic choices in given settings and insights from Conceptual Metaphor theory. This paper therefore examines how language used in selected Nigerian Pop songs propagate rape culture and other acts of sexual violence. Two songs were purposively selected from two Nigerian pop artistes – Olamide and Lil Kesh to interrogate how the songs enable rape culture from a pragmatic perspective. Findings revealed that the reference strategies deployed in the songs index rape culture, use of dysphemistic metaphors to refer to sex and other body parts, propagation of erroneous beliefs about sex and other related phenomena. The language used in the songs trivializes sex and sometimes normalises rape culture. Nigerian Pop music is a site for exhibiting counter hegemonic designs which provides us with the belief systems and ideologies of the ever-adventurous youths.

**Keywords:** rape culture, language enablers, ideologies, Nigerian pop music, metaphors

### **Introduction**

Sex music sells. Sex themed songs pervade the Nigerian pop songs' space. However, when these songs act as enablers of rape culture, it becomes imperative to investigate the multifaceted ways that this is done implicitly or explicitly. Bearing in mind the influence of music on a people's world view, attitude and behaviours, one cannot but consider this genre of music as it is a manifestation of a popular culture in the Nigerian public space. According to Kayla (2019), "studies have been performed to determine how exposure to rap music with misogynistic lyrics can cause a person to become sexually aggressive and violent to their significant other (Kistler and Lee, 2010). This is why lyrics laden with sexual discourses need to be interrogated to determine what they are projecting. Pop music being a music that is generally accepted by majority of the people, especially young people, have a lot of influences on the acts and attitudes of its listeners. Most of the themes inherent in the music that are popular surround everyday trends, acts, and belief system (implicit or explicit) that are perpetuated by the fans of the genre of music. Hence, in this

paper, I examine the manifestations of rape culture in the select pop music based on their acceptance amongst Nigerian youths.

### **Rape culture and language enablers**

Rape culture is used to name a society or environment where rape is pervasive and normalised due to societal attitudes about sexual assault, sexual abuse and gender objectification. Steibert (2018) defines rape culture as a culture where rape and other expressions of sexualized violence occur with some frequency, and where societal attitudes about gender and sexuality are normalised or trivialized. When artistes with sexualized lyrics are celebrated and popular due to societal acceptance of such, then acts propagated are trivialized. This is the case with pop music in Nigeria. Other forms of normalizing rape include victim blaming, propagating culture of silence, under-reporting of rape cases, biased reporting of rape cases, use of language that trivializes sex and other related phenomena.

Language (verbal and nonverbal) serves as a vehicle for the transmission of feelings, thoughts and beliefs. Language use reveals a lot of implicit assumptions about a speaker. Hence, expressions used in any rape culture index a lot of set beliefs. According to Halliday, one of the functions that language performs is that of ideational — there is no facet of human experience which cannot be transformed into meaning. In other words, language provides a tool for the expression of human experiences, and certain resources of the lexicogrammar of every language are dedicated to that function. We call it the ideational metafunction. When language is used in such a way that it makes light the incidences of rape, oversexualization of women's sexuality through vivid description of sexual parts to the delight of listeners, and propagation of sex as conquest, language becomes a powerful tool in the continued propagation of rape culture

The word enabler according to the Oxford dictionary means person or thing that makes something possible. In this context, we use it to mean language use that encourages another person to continue in self-destructive behaviours. Such language expressions normalise different forms of deviant behaviours in subtle ways to the detriment of the cause being pursued. The way language is used to incite, encourage and propagate deviant sexual behaviours in music makes it function as an enabler. This validates the fact that language is not used in a vacuum. It can be used to perform different things – positive and negative. In this paper, our focus is on the use of language to encourage negative acts in sexual discourses in selected Nigerian pop songs.

### **Nigerian Pop music**

Here, 'popular' refers to a cultural form which is 'intended for ordinary people', whether in terms of accessibility, of mode of address, or of the facts of reception. 'The popular' can also be understood as that which is prevalent among, or accepted by, the people. The popular' is that which is well liked by several individuals, or that which is accessible to the lay man. Popular music (henceforth pop music) in Nigeria has undergone significant changes over the years, reflecting the country's cultural, social, and economic development (Oyewole, 2015). One of the key factors contributing to the growth of Nigerian

pop music is the influence of globalization and technological advancements (Okoro, 2018). The widespread use of social media platforms, online music streaming services, and mobile phones has enabled Nigerian artists to reach a global audience and gain international recognition (Oyewole, 2015).

Some Nigerian pop music artists have gained popularity over time due to the acceptance of their music globally. Artists like Wizkid, Davido, and Tiwa Savage have recorded international success and have collaborated with global artists (Okoro, 2018). In a quest for popularity, several Nigerian pop artists promote excessive materialism, sexism, and violence (Moore, 2016). No doubt, Nigerian pop music is a force to reckon with in the Nigerian demographic space as well as internationally. Its role in shaping the country's cultural identity and promoting social commentary cannot be overemphasized. Hence, interrogating the lyrical contents for scholarship is imperative as we have done in this paper.

### **Brief biographies of Olamide and Lil Kesh**

Olamide Gbenga Adediji (Olamide) is a popular hip-hop artist in Nigeria. He was born on the 15th of March 1989. He started his music career in 2000. His first music production was “Eni Duro” under Id Cabasa’s Coded Tunes Record label. This gave him fame in Nigeria and within a short time he was among the famous artists across the country. Olamide established YBNL Nation as his own record label and produced for different artistes such as Adekunle Gold now AG baby, Olufemi Bosede aka Fireboy DML, Lil Kesh, Chinko Ekun, DJ Enimoney, Picazo and Temmie Ovwasa (YBNL Princess). He has received many awards such as Best Rap Album, Album of the Year in “The Headies 2014”. With a career spanning over two decades, Olamide is an influencer in the Nigerian hip hop music.

Keshinro Ololade (Lil Kesh) was born on March 14, 1995, in Bariga, Lagos State, Nigeria. He attended the University of Lagos, where he studied Linguistics before leaving to pursue a career in music. According to Kate(2019), Lil Kesh's music career began in 2012 with the release of his single *Lyricality*, which became a hit at universities in Nigeria. His subsequent release, *Shoki*, in 2014, was a major hit and led to two remixes, including a female version featuring Cynthia Morgan, Chidinma, Eva Alordiah, and another version featuring Davido and Olamide. Lil Kesh's rise to fame earned him a nomination for Best New Act at the 2015 Nigeria Entertainment Awards. He won the Nigerian Teen Choice Awards and City People Entertainment Awards in 2015 for his song *Shoki*. He has collaborated with several musicians, including Olamide, Davido, Patoranking, and Duncan Mighty. He was signed to Yahoo Boy No Laptop Nation (YBNL Nation), an independent record label founded by Olamide Adediji in 2012. Under YBNL, he released several hit singles. After the expiration of his contract with YBNL, Lil Kesh established his own record label, YAGI Records (Young and Getting It). Lil Kesh released his debut studio album, "Young and Getting It" (YAGI), through YBNL Nation in March, 2016. The album features productions from Young John and Pheelz, with vocals from Phyno, Ycee, Wale, Patoranking, Adekunle Gold, Davido, Viktoh, Olamide, and Chinko Ekun.

### **Statement of the problem**

There is a growing body of literature on how music shape peoples' attitudes towards sexual violence, gender and cultural norms. Existing studies in Nigeria have examined the representation of gender and sexuality in music using critical discourse analysis theory, feminist theory and content analysis to examine content and themes in selected pop music. However, a pragmatic approach in deconstructing the language used in some of the music and how they act as enablers of rape is nonexistent in the literatures. Hence, this paper builds on existing literature by exploring the subject from a pragmatic perspective, using conceptual insights from Mey's 2001 Pragmeme – a theory which emphasizes contextualization of linguistic choices in given settings. This paper therefore examines how language used in selected Nigerian Pop songs index rape culture and act as enablers of rape and other acts of sexual violence. I purposively selected two Nigerian pop artistes – Olamide and Lil Kesh and interrogate one of their songs each that enable rape culture from a pragmatic perspective.

### **Theoretical framework**

This paper draws on conceptual ideas from Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory which examines how language is used in context to convey meaning and insights from Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual metaphor theory. Mey's pragmatic act theory involves a total user involvement and has two things that are involved in his explanation of context.

#### **Context**

Context of the user involves the situation, by being an active (co) participant and language user; the situation involves the user by defining what he or she can say in the situation. Most importantly, Mey is not only concerned about users but also about how the users within the confines of their environment are able to utilise their language resources to communicate, that is, 'what the empowerment of the participant is grounded in'. In essence, Mey (2001: 226(Mey1985:336) observes that whenever people communicate, society is the 'silent', but by no means 'sleeping' partner. In other words, the social construction is subject to societal constraints but the way individuals find their way around such constraints is of importance in Mey's pragmatic theory – pragmatic acting/ pragmeme. Pragmatic acting is defined basically as "using language on common ground", involving the other participants of the situation as well as the material and other conditions determining the "ground". Hence, when it comes to Nigerian pop music, the artists determine the "grounding" based on several variables – reference strategies with least economy of effort, Metaphor based on shared sociocultural knowledge and the possible pragmatic function. These are concepts from the theory that can be applied to the analysis of the music texts. We discuss these in turns: Reference, metaphor and contextual beliefs (Assumptions).

#### **Reference**

Reference deals with the way listeners assign names to objects being discussed. In line with Yule (1985:22) "reference is not simply a relationship between a word or phrase and an object or person in the world. It is a social act, in which

the speaker assumes that the word or phrase chosen to identify an object or person will be interpreted as the speaker intended". Hence, reference assignment may include (but not limited to) the use of personal names, address terms, use of deictic expressions and particularly indexicals.

### **Metaphor**

In explaining conceptual metaphor, Lakoff describes a love relationship thus: *our relationship has hit a dead-end street*. In this proposition, love is conceptualised as a journey. Other examples about love in the English language are: *look how far we've gone*; *our relationship is off the track*, *the marriage is on rocks*. These are everyday English expressions, and they are neither poetic nor are they used for any special rhetorical effect. The expressions simply involve matching the experience from one source domain of journey to a target domain of love. In cognitive mapping, correspondences are made between domains in terms of structural, ontological and orientation mappings.

Lakoff explains further that our cognitive orientation is formed through our lived experiences and "these experiences will definitely have their cultural bearing" (Maaleej (2004:50). In discussing an issue such as sex, the choice of words used in metaphorising sex and other related phenomena will reflect interactants' socio-cultural experience. Also, we must note, according to Cazal and Inns (1998:184) that metaphorisation is possible because "meaning does not reside firmly in a concept or word." This fact enables words and concepts to be carried from one domain to another via link of association and similarity. The conceptual bearings of embodied experiences shared via socio and socio-cultural cognition by the selected artists will be explicated in our analysis.

### **Assumptions**

An assumption in pragmatic terms is used to mean an interaction or action-based belief shared by discourse participants. Yule (1985:127) explains that "in order to recognise what is meant, even when it is not actually said (or written), the speaker(s) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations. That is, what is said against a background of what is unsaid but taken as given." Such unsaid things are foregrounded based on shared beliefs or mutual contextual beliefs (MCB). Hence, a lot of assumptions are deployed in the choice of words used by the artists in their songs based on shared beliefs and in-group membership.

### **Review of relevant literature**

Existing literatures have examined rape culture from different perspectives. For instance, Ibitoye (2022), using Fredrick and Robert's Objectification (1997) theory selected music that objectifies the female body. According to the study, the songs are suggestive of sexual objectification with lyrics laced with sexual innuendos and weird erotic dance movements.

Using content analysis, Kayla (2019) identified sexual themes in different genres of music in America. The study findings revealed that rap and hip-hop music provide the audience with misogynistic views against women than any other genre of music. The five misogynistic themes discovered are: sexual slurs, objectification, aggressive behaviour, explicit content, and manipulation.

Cable (2017) shows that rape culture is prominent in American pop music by comparing song's lyrics to general themes of rape culture and testimonials of sexual assault. Using Critical discourse analysis, the study found out that most of the songs selected reveal trivialization of sexual violence, victim blaming and men's dominance.

Khan (2017) condemned the categorization of songs as rape music or rape culture. He is of the opinion that the music pleasurable dynamic can be understood through a non-normative kinky fetish framework. He is of the opinion that such binary categorizations are devoid of a good understanding of the music landscape. The foregoing paragraphs reflect scholarly attention to gender, sexuality and rape culture in music. However, a study on the two artistes interrogated in this paper is sparse. This paper therefore fills this gap on rape culture in music from a pragmatic perspective.

### Methodology

We have purposively selected a song each from Olamide (July,2014) and Lil Kesh (July,2015) based on their popularity and prevalence of rape culture in the songs. Going by google trend data analytics, the two songs still trend as of 2025.

Category: All categories			
Region		Olamide story for the gods: (1/7/14 - 2/11/25)	Lil Kesh Efejoku: (1/7/14 - 2/11/25)
Abia			100%
Adamawa			
Akwa Ibom			
Anambra		68%	32%
Bauchi			
Benue			
Borno			
Bayelsa			
Cross River		100%	
Delta		84%	16%
Ebonyi			
Edo		70%	30%
Ekiti			
Enugu			

<b>Federal Capital Territory</b>		65%	35%
<b>Gombe</b>			
<b>Imo</b>		50%	50%
<b>Jigawa</b>			
<b>Kaduna</b>		56%	44%
<b>Kebbi</b>			
<b>Kano</b>			
<b>Kogi</b>			
<b>Katsina</b>			
<b>Kwara</b>			100%
<b>Lagos</b>		65%	35%
<b>Nasarawa</b>			
<b>Niger</b>			
<b>Ogun State</b>		62%	38%
<b>Ondo</b>		60%	40%
<b>Osun</b>			100%
<b>Oyo</b>		66%	34%
<b>Plateau</b>			
<b>Rivers</b>		50%	50%
<b>Sokoto</b>			
<b>Taraba</b>			
<b>Yobe</b>			
<b>Zamfara</b>			

Downloaded from: [https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2014-01-07%202025-02-](https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2014-01-07%202025-02-11&geo=NG&q=popular%20rape%20themed%20music%20in%20Nigerai,Olamide%20(story%20for%20the%20gods),Lil%20Kesh%20(Efejoku&hl=en)

11&geo=NG&q=popular%20rape%20themed%20music%20in%20Nigerai,Olamide%20(story%20for%20the%20gods),Lil%20Kesh%20(Efejoku&hl=en

The songs were subjected to pragmatic analysis while focusing on the linguistic elements that index rape culture.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings**

Music, especially pop music, is a platform where beliefs, feelings, attitudes and intentions towards issues can be accessed. In the selected Nigerian



pop music, we find use of different reference strategies, use of metaphors and propagation of erroneous assumptions amongst others.

### Reference strategies in selected Nigerian Pop Music

Referring expressions include proper names, definite noun phrases, indefinite noun phrases, pronouns and anaphors (anaphoric, homophoric and cataphoric). Reference strategies act as place holders for things or people being discussed in the songs. In using these strategies, the artists give a way of identifying the thing or person being discussed or mentioned in their songs. For example, let us consider the use of naming in the songs. Naming in the songs, refer to things and people. Sometimes, naming could be the real names of items or slangy words. These naming as a reference strategy requires some level of common ground or shared cultural knowledge. Let us exemplify with sample extracts from the songs:

mo ti mu dogoyaro (dorogoyaro) { I have drank dogoyaro}  
 Like monkey tail (Monkey Tail, Monkey Tail)  
 Caro, Ba mi wey Claro (Claro o Claro o) { Help me warp claro}  
 I want to do sina today (Sina today) ( I want to flirt today)

In this song extract, Olamide informs that he has taken dongoyaro. Dogoyaro is a medicinal leaf in Nigeria (Neem leaves) with several benefits. Dongoyaro in this case acts as a stimulant. He also mentions ‘monkey tail’. Monkey tail is a slangy expression; it is a concoction that some people make by themselves. It is maurijuana leaf soaked in gin or whisky. Then, he finally names another stimulant – Caro (Ba mi we claro). From information gathered, claro is the last part of weed. All of this preparation and naming reveals the artists quest “to do shina” – to flirt.

Name dropping as a reference strategy helps the listener to have a clearer picture of what the artist intends to communicate. These names are only relatable to those who have the same shared cultural knowledge of the ideas expressed therein. Thus, in-group membership, which most youths are expected to have given them access to the intended information packed in the song. It gives them an idea of how the artist is able to flirt with an inducer or stimulant before engaging in his sexual activity.

It is not out of place to infer that anyone who has been induced may not be in his/her right senses. Such a person might engage in sexual violence. Hence, the song not only normalizes rape but gives the listener the process involved in preparation for the sexual activity ahead.

Let’s consider naming in Lil Kesh

Lil Kesh uses phonoaesthetics and ellipsis to name a stimulant that a certain child of a pastor uses before engaging in illicit acts.

For example:

Igbati mo wo club t imo ri omo to n ..... mo kigbe lailai

Omo pastor **ton faa ci** –

The use of ellipsis in the first instance means that the artiste was reluctant to name what he initially saw the child of a pastor doing. Then, he dropped the



name through the use of a sound. ‘Ci’ as used here could stand for anything-cigarette or any other thing that can be smoked.

### **Use of Metaphors in selected Nigerian pop music**

Metaphor provides a platform for describing or talking about a thing in terms of another. Let us consider an excerpt from Lil Kesh’s song:

Bami loke oh, eda ri jimi keh { my father in heaven, forgive me}  
Awon omo eleyin **caterpillar** yi o mafe gbemi le {These  
children with backsides like caterpillar don’t want to leave me}  
Emi ti yo bai, mi ode le gboran mon –{ I am drunk now and I  
can’t be obedient anymore}.  
Maye ti sanwo sinu account mo tife turn up gan

Here, reference is made to ladies with big buttocks who are head bent on having a go at him. He compares the lady’s backside to a caterpillar. This is a structural metaphor. The artist later announces that he is now drunk and cannot hear anything again. Getting drunk as a stimulant aid whatever act he engages in. This part encourages drinking and getting drunk before engaging in any sexual act. The vivid description of the lady’s backside aims to objectify the potential of the backside as an object that can be used as a tool. As a follow up to the task ahead, the artiste informs that he is about to engage in the sexual act with the use of metaphor.

**Mo fe da’ko, mo fe gbin cassava** ----- I want to farm, I want to  
plant cassava ( metaphoric)

O ti di passa d passa – euphemising the movement of the backside  
You dey make me dey shaba d shaba – You make me doff my hat!  
Emi ni the mana the mana – I’m the man!  
Emi ni mo mu fun won ma lo kana – I service other girls  
Won awilo awilo – **sexual connotation links to the waist dance  
of awilo**

For the champion, I fi be milo -----For his prowess, he likened  
himself to a champion and milo advert has used that slogan ‘ milo  
for champions’

This extract of the song is laden with vivid description of his sexual encounter. In line 1, he makes reference to his intention to farm. Here, farm refers to the female vagina (ontological/structural metaphor), while cassava refers to the penis (Structural metaphor). Hence, the artist makes his intention known after being drunk. He also describes the movement of the backside with a euphemistic phonesthetics. Later in the song, he asserts that he is indeed a champion. This goes to show how different metaphors are explored to give a vivid description of how to engage in any sexual encounter with emphasis on a stimulant.

### **Assumptions in Olamide’s Story for the gods and Lil Kesh Efejoku**

Assumption in pragmatic terms is used to mean an interaction or action-based belief shared by discourse participants. Yule (1985:127) explains that “in order to recognise what is meant, even when it is not actually said (or written),

the speaker(s) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations. That is, what is said against a background of what is unsaid, but taken as given.” Such unsaid things are foregrounded based on shared beliefs or mutual contextual beliefs (MCB). Beliefs inferred from the selected songs are as follows:

### **Propagation of erroneous belief about Consent**

Olamide’s *‘Story for the gods’* propagates the erroneous belief that when a girl says no, she means yes. Let us examine an excerpt from the song:

“She say she no wan wait ...”

“Now, she says morogo, he has broken my hand bla blab la”

Here, the artist informs that the girl in question initially did not want to engage in sex with him but that when he finally gets down with her, she changes her tune because she enjoyed the act. Invariably, her excuses are ‘story for the gods’, they are not true and should not be taken as anything serious. For any fan who believes in this artiste, it is enough reason to disregard any female gender’s words when it comes to sexual matters. This goes against the culture of “No” means “No”.

Also, Drug and getting drunk before Sex is propagated in the two songs: The two songs give a general belief that it a good thing to be on drugs before engaging in an sexual encounter

Consider Lil kesh:

Emi ti yo bai, mi ode le gboran mon –{ I am drunk now and  
I can’t be obedient anymore} and Olamide’s mo ti mu  
dogoyaro (dorogoyaro) { I have drank dogoyaro}  
Like monkey tail (Monkey Tail, Monkey Tail)

### **Sex as conquest**

When sex is metaphorized as conquest, it means that there will be a victor and a villain. The victor is the conqueror. Here, Olamide projects the idea of a conqueror. Someone who is ready to do anything to get his satisfaction. He explicitly says he will be aggressive and is not bothered about what his partner feels. He practically tells the lady to endure the act even if she is pained. This extract encourages listeners to be insensitive to the feelings of their sexual partner. This aggressiveness signpost violence and this might extend to rape. As such, encouraging fans to disregard feelings and go for the kill act as an enabler of rape culture.

La leyi odaron {Tonight, you’re in trouble}  
Sare saluwa la salamo { quickly do ablution and get ready to pray}  
Bo ba dun e ko faramo { Endure it even it is hurting you}  
Cause laleyi ma kanran mo {cause tonight I’ll be aggressive}

Judging by the lyrics of the song, Olamide advocates sex as a conquest where the villain deserves no pity. Such strong choice of words as being in trouble, being aggressive, and enduring pain in sexual context act as indices of violence which may be emulated by the artist’s fan base.

## Conclusion

Rape culture can be propagated in various ways. In this paper, we have identified how the artistes used an enabler before engaging in any sexual encounter. By so doing, they get ideas into the heads of their listeners who aspire to be like them. The artistes often use slang words for common drug substance that known on the streets, most especially by young persons who are in tune with what is going on around them. The artistes use different naming strategies to refer to things, people and acts. This include the use of slangs, metaphors, phonesthetics and ellipsis, all of which are deployed with the background knowledge that there is some level of sharedness of what these things mean in the context of discourse. Pop songs provide a veritable site for interrogating goings-on amongst the youth in any given society. It is thus essential to provide pragmatic explanation to some of these songs in view of prevailing acts in them which might be useful for engaging and developing youth orientation programs.

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