

PRACTS IN OLADIMEJI ILERIOLUWA ALOBA'S (MOHBAD) SELECTED DEPRESSIVE SONGS

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Abstract

Studies abound in the literature on how music can signpost depression. However, there is a dearth of research on depressive language in the lyrics of late Oladimeji Ilerioluwa Aloba (Mohbad), a Nigerian popular artiste. Hence, this paper highlights the linguistic markers of depression in selected Mohbad's songs' lyrics. Using Jacob Mey's (2001), Pragmatic Act Theory, the researcher purposively selected five songs from Mohbad's music catalogue with the aim of identifying linguistic choices that index depression, and the Practs (pragmatic functions) of the linguistic strategies. Findings reveal that Mohbad uses referential techniques such as endophoric references, personal pronouns, creative lexicalization (blending) and naming. There are different types of practs in the songs such as doubting, worrying, soliciting and fear. Applying pragmatic principles to musical lyrics helps to gain insights into prevailing issues that artistes may be going through. This invariably means that music provides a platform for accessing the mental state of artistes as explicated in this paper. Songs should not be taken on their face values so that inherent psychological issues can be arrested in good time before they are escalated.

Keywords: Depression, linguistic markers, Mohbad, Practs, Mey (2001) Pragmeme

Introduction

Music is an integral part of life, and it provides various forms of therapy including social, moral, psychological and spiritual benefits. In the context of music, language is used to convey emotions, ideas, and experiences. It is important to note that music performs various functions which can only be understood in context. Moreover, language in music has been shown to have therapeutic benefits, providing a platform to reveal one's emotions and experiences. In pragmatic terms, there are embedded practs within the lyrics of songs. By practs, we mean the functions that utterances perform in line with the context of discourse (Mey, 2001). Sometimes, they teach lessons, narrate personal experiences or address societal issues and emotional struggles. In this paper, we identify and discuss the practs that are embedded in selected depressive songs of Mohbad. By depressive songs, we mean songs that showcase the artiste's mental health status in his songs and those that reflects his traumatic life experiences and struggles. Depression is more than

just feeling sad: it is a complex mental health disorder that can have a noticeable impact on every aspect of a person's life (Crone., et al 2023). It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems, significantly impairing a person's ability to function.

According to WHO (2023), depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide, it can undermine a person's relationships, make working and maintaining health very difficult and in most cases, may lead to suicide. Depression can affect individuals of all ages, genders, and backgrounds. It is characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a loss of interest or pleasure in activities. Understanding the early signs of depression can help individuals get required support in good time.

In an interview with media personality, Chude Jideonwo in January, 2023, Mohbad's best friend — Bella Shmurda, disclosed that Mohbad had suicidal tendencies owing to the fact that he was dealing with depression from the end of his contract with Marlian Music. Sadly, Mohbad

passed away on September 12, 2023, at the age of 27. Hence, in this paper, we explore linguistics markers that signpost the praxis in the identified depressive songs of Mohbad.

Short Biography of Oladimeji Ilerioluwa Aloba (Mohbad)

Oladimeji Ilerioluwa Aloba (Mohbad) is a Nigerian artist born on June 8, 1996, in Lagos, Nigeria. Mohbad's interest in music began during his secondary school days, where he started writing his own lyrics and rhymes. In 2019, Mohbad signed with Marlian Records, a label founded by popular Nigerian artist Afeez Fashola AKA Naira Marley. Under Marlian Records, Mohbad released several successful singles and collaborations, including "Ponmo" and "Koma Jensun". His music gained massive attention on social media platforms and music streaming services, earning him a loyal fan base. Mohbad's time at Marlian Records was marked by creative freedom and experimentation. He explored different sounds and themes in his music, often incorporating elements of Yoruba culture and language. His lyrics often addressed social issues, personal struggles, and street life experiences.

In 2022, Mohbad announced his departure from Marlian Records, citing creative differences, a desire for independence, constant attack he received which was orchestrated by Naira Marley and unpaid royalties as agreed since 2009. He continued to release music as an independent artist. Sadly, Mohbad passed away on September 12, 2023, at the age of 27. His death was met with shock and sadness from the music industry and fans worldwide. His death sparks a social movement with the hashtag '#justiceformohbad', allowing many people to express their anger over the bullying he faced in the music industry after his exit from Marlian Records which surfaced and was posted on blogs, such as Instablog, Gistloverblog, Mazitundeednut and others few hours after his death. Despite his short career, Mohbad left a lasting impact on Nigerian music scene.

Review of literature

Language and mental health are intimately connected, Dennis (2022) explains that language and mental health disorders are closely connected, impacting an individual's daily functioning.

Language is a multidisciplinary phenomenon that can be explored in various ways to understand mental health disorders. Two key approaches can be used to identify mental health issues: psychotherapy and mental diagnosis. Psychotherapy involves verbal interactions between therapists and clients while mental health diagnosis is related to examining language use by individuals in given contexts. Smirnova, et al (2018) use automated text analysis to examine posts from over 6,400 individuals across 63 online forums. They discover that people with depression tend to use more first-person singular pronouns, such as "I" and "me," and fewer third-person pronouns like "they" or "she." This suggests that depressed individuals have a stronger focus on themselves when compared to others. Additionally, the study notes that people with depression also use more negative descriptors in their language, such as words like "lonely" and "miserable." However, it remains unclear whether a self-focused mentality leads to depression, or if depression causes people to become more self-focused. Nonetheless, these linguistic markers could potentially provide insight into an individual's mental health status based on the way they express themselves.

Al-Mosaiwi & Johnstone, (2018) identify several linguistic markers that are associated with individuals with depression. They also find the use of first-person singular pronouns, negative emotion words, and absolutist words in their communication. These linguistic features are believed to reflect the self-focused attention, negativity bias, and absolutist thinking that are characteristic of depressed individuals. The study notes that while these linguistic markers have been well-documented, other domains of cognitive theories of depression have remained relatively unexplored in linguistic studies.

Makinde et al (2024) using Critical Pragmatics analyse selected songs of Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba. The study examines his music using speech acts theory. The study emphasizes the significance of context in understanding language. The findings reveal that the artist uses variety of speech act such as assertions, declarations and expressive utterances which are pointers to the struggles of his journey from

hardship to success. The study did not interrogate depression as we have done in this paper.

Barette et al (2024) investigate the representation of mental health in contemporary music and assert music is a powerful medium for emotional expression and narrative. Through music, artistes have addressed themes of resilience, personal challenges and mental health. The study highlights the need for further analysis of songs that specifically address personal struggles by adopting a grounded approach in Narrative Psychology Theory. Through thematic analysis, the study identifies common themes

relating to personal challenges and the process of overcoming adversities.

The foregoing paragraphs show that there is a gap in linguistic scholarship on language index that signpost depression in music of Nigerian pop artiste. This paper fills this gap.

Theoretical framework

This study deployed Mey (20021) Pragmatic act theory to interrogate the data set for this paper. Mey’s theory has two parts: textual and Contextual part. The context part provides the anchorage for our analysis. The theory is represented below

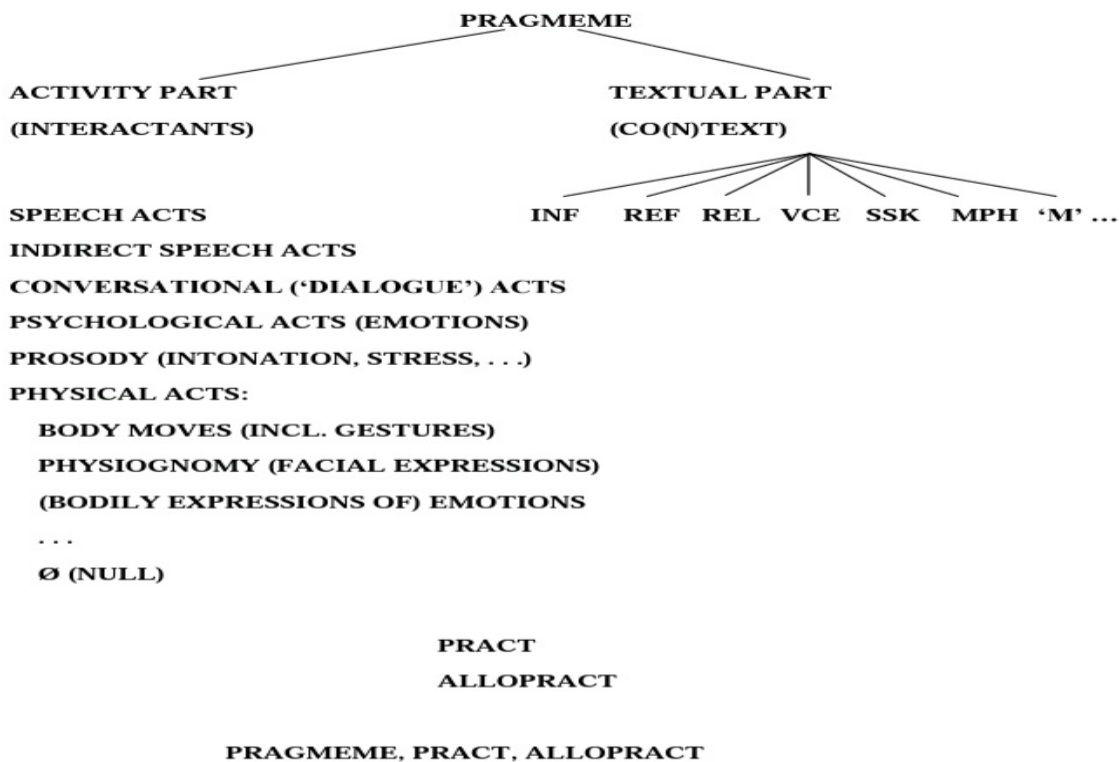


Fig 1: Mey’s Pragmatic Act Theory

The study concentrates on the textual part and explain concepts such as reference (Ref), Shared situational knowledge (SSK) and practs which are deployed in our analysis.

Reference deals with the way speakers assign names to objects in the context of use. In line with Yule (1996:22) “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. Hence, reference strategies deal with how speakers assign references to

objects and people as we shall explicate in our analysis section.

Sharedness is a key concept in every human communication. It refers to several shared beliefs of which shared situational knowledge is one. Shared beliefs aid access to the meaning of the reference choices that are used in the discourse. Invariably, a lot of assumptions are taken as given and there is economy in the use of expressions/words that relates to the subject of discourse. Shared situational knowledge requires not only the understanding of the in-text context but context that is outside of the text which are available common ground to listeners by virtue of being in-group members.

According to Mey (2001), pragmatic act is realized through individual actions, termed “practs” or “allopracts”. It is considered a specific realization of pragmemes. The activity part of a pragmeme shows various options available to interlocutors in a text, conversational act, psychological acts, prosody and body language. Context is a major factor in understanding pragmatic acts – physical environment, social setting, cultural norms and temporal factors, it is a dynamic component that interact with communication actions. Pragmatic act considers interactional dynamic between participants such as roles and relationship between participants and power dynamics and the collaborative process of co-constructing meaning. Further, it recognizes the importance of multi-modality in communication – non-verbal elements, such as gestures, facial expressions and body language contribute to conveying meaning and achieving communicational goals.

All three concepts work together for meaning generation in the songs selected for analysis in this paper.

Methodology

This paper is a descriptive work and adopts qualitative research method. The researcher listened and translated the selected songs of Mohbad in a bid to identify and analyse the linguistic markers that index depression in the songs and explain the pragmatic functions of the of the references implored. The researcher purposively selected five songs of Mohbad from different albums. The songs selected are: *Sorry*,

Blessing, *Feel Good*, *Peace* and *Beast and Peace* and these songs were translated to English language and analysed. These songs were downloaded from music platforms such as: Boomplay, Netnaija, and Muzikz Box.

Data Analysis and Discussion of findings

The linguistic choices deployed in the songs reflect several instances of a depressed person. There are several instances where the artistes talked about his past struggles and how he felt at different stages of his life. Emphasis on self with personal pronouns have been identified in songs as an index of depression which are also seen in the songs selected for this paper. A vivid example comes from an extract of the song *Sorry* as seen below:

This kind life e tire me.

The deictic element “this” to signpost personal experience which is narrated after its use in the song shows that the listener must wait for the kind of life that the artiste hopes to explicate. The audience is made to wait for the reference of ‘this’ in the content of the music. As he begins to roll out the kind of life that ‘tire’ him. This is used to introduce the theme of despair early in the song using an endophoric reference. Also, the choice of the Nigerian Pidgin English “tire me” helps the listener to connect to the artiste’s personal life. He deliberately narrates the array of experiences that he went through to show how miserable and tiring he felt during the time of reference. The context of the song justifies the choice of words in the opening lyrics. The beginning of the song indicates the tone of the song. The song chronicles his struggles and the reality of what he faced before he decided to follow his dreams and become a superstar. It is easy to sense that depression could set in through the lyrics, as Mohbad is fed up of the life he is living— a life that does not yield any productive result. This is the context upon which the lyrics is grounded as his depression originates from his being frustrated at the life he lived and the situation around him at that point. His use of first personal pronoun ‘me’ explicitly directs attention to him. He is basically talking about his life. From this line of thought, we move on to discuss the observable practs in his songs:

Practs of Worrying in Selected Songs of Mohbad

Worry is a universal human experience, often showing up as overthinking, anxiety, fear and frustration. Mohbad's songs paint a clearer picture of the emotional battle using vivid imagery and stories to show the weight of worry, his lyrics lay bare his personal struggles and the pressures from the society, unveiling hopelessness while looking for comfort through his music. For instance:

*Wetin be this one like dis,
Been through many things
Many, many gists
But, I still find my peace.*

These lyrics explicates with the mindset of Mohbad as he deliberately uses first person pronoun. While the last lyric boldly states his search and desire for peace, the first three lyrics reference the conversation on depression. Here, we find the pragmatic act of frustration and anxiety. "wetin be this one like this" directly translates "what is it about this now?" meaning that he seeks to question his reality as one that continually frustrates him and makes him afraid, he is not going to achieve much for himself anytime soon which was expressed in the Nigerian Pidgin English to bring listeners of the song to the same wavelength. In the next two lyrics, we see him reminiscing about his past and the "things" which gave him challenges throughout the course of his life. Throughout the song, he talks about his past, especially with his relationship with people he thought were his friends but had become something else. These lyrics is an attempt to find and then hold on to a treasure that is often ignored and underappreciated: peace. From the title, the intention of Mohbad is clear as he is interested in finding peace and being at peace with himself. Peace is a crucial want for Mohbad, especially if the struggles of his upbringing are taken into consideration, and now that he has reached a point in his life where he has all that he needs, and he has relatively seen all that he should see, he decides to relax and advocate peace. The first four lyrics reflect the intention of Mohbad to advocate his peace, despite the struggles he has faced in his life. The implicature here is that he is seeking

answers from all the complexities surrounding him. As he sings:

*"L'àt'aye Genesis
I bin dealing with frenemies."*

The above lyric means that ever since he was young or before he became the man he is now, he always had dealt with frenemies. The use of the term "Genesis" showcases how long he has dealt with frenemies. The use of Genesis is apt, as not only is it the first chapter in the Bible, it is a chapter that is particular about the history of the world and the actions of God in creating the world. By referencing that term, Mohbad is referencing his history and all that he had experienced in his past up until that moment. Moreover, *frenemies* is a creative morphological framing. It is a blend of two words - *friend and enemy*. It is a word that shows how a person can have a friendly and a not-so-friendly relationship with a particular person. From the context of the song and this research, this term is applicable as a person can be your friend today and later be your enemy the next day without a warning. It is this reality that makes Mohbad fearful and led him to depression before he had attained fame and success.

Further, the pragmatic act that is indicated in his lyrics is not only that of frustration, but of pain. He is frustrated of the path his life took, which led to his pain that further fueled his being depressed. The lyrics that come after this continue the trend of frustration and hopelessness that are likely to prompt his descent into depression. Extract from the lyrics below is presented below:

*Daddy no get salary
Ten years I no see money
Stepmother no care.
Landlord dey worry
My brothers are hungry.*

These lyrics reflect the situation he faces that could prompt his descent into depression and the motivation for his "hustle". To start, the line "Daddy no get salary" is worrisome enough for anyone who lives with at least a parent. The "context" of salary can imply two things; it is either his father has a job or does not receive his salary on time, or he does not have any job at all. Either way, both situations are dire, as it is the duty of a father to constantly meet the needs of his

family by providing for their needs and making sure they lack nothing. When this is not achieved, there is a possibility of worry and frustration for both the head of the family and the rest of the family, which may lead to depression if the worry is not watched. This idea moves on to the next lines with linguistics choices such as: *Ten years I no see money, Landlord dey worry and My brothers are hungry*. All these are embedded in a lack of money and basic amenities. If he had the means to consistently see money, his brothers would not be hungry as he could provide for them anytime and any day, his landlord would no longer “worry” him, which seems to bother him as he would have the money to pay for the rent. Basically, the context of these lyrics is on the need for money, the lack of it and the frustration that comes from not having it, all of which can lead to depression.

At the textual level of the pragmeme, there is reference to these indices as a contributing factor of depression that affects Mohbad and his journey through life. Moreover, in that line *Stepmother no care*, the context relates to the overlying theme which is the lack of money and the frustration that leads to not having any. He briefly captures the stereotypical image of most stepmothers. This reveals that he and his siblings are living with a stepmother and not their mother. As it appears, the stepmother does not care whether they survive or not. He had no one to take the burden of worry and support him through his struggles. It is usually believed that one major reason people fall into depression is the lack of a support system that would keep them strong and firm, and with the context of these lyrics, Mohbad implies his stepmother would have been that person to have prevented his being depressed. The need and desire to be surrounded by people that would act as a pillar and provide a strong hold are mentioned in subsequent lyrics of the song. Another instance is in the lyrics cited below:

*“Ahn, I am on silent mood, but beast ní mí”
Mo lé cause violence but still, peace ní mí”*

These lyrics portray him as someone who is both capable of peace and violent acts. It also indicates that he should not be underestimated because he can unleash both parts of himself, depending on the situation he finds him. Despite this being the

overall theme, there are elements of depression that are referenced as pragmatic acts in the song lyrics. The pragmatic act of worry is still at play, although his stance is more focused on reality.

Pract of Soliciting Help in Selected Songs of Mohbad

Mohbad captures the complexities of depression through the pract of soliciting, thereby yearning for emotional validation, relief and guidance. Through his lyrics, listeners can establish his desperate need for help and escape from the current situation he finds himself.

The lyrics below is an instance of such soliciting;

*Eshi biri biri ke bo mi o
Iwaju loloko yi wamilo eyin loloko yi
wamilo mio mo ye oo*

These lines reflect the desire for him to have a support system around him. He realizes that his suffering and frustration at life is not something that he can handle alone, which is why he needs to have trustworthy people by his side constantly in order to ease the pain he feels. In the second lyric, he notes that he is directionless and devoid of focus. It is seemingly dangerous for a person to be devoid of focus because such a person may not achieve much of what he/she wants to achieve in life. Moreover, from the description of the lyrics, it is a truth that Mohbad deals with and what prompts him to seek help so that he would not be led astray and not fulfil his dreams. From these lyrics, the pragmatic act of soliciting help is observed as he pleads with people not to leave him alone so that he would remain focused and get away from the clutches of depression, although originally the above lyric is associated with King Sunny Ade in his song titled *Eshi biri biri ebomi* in the context of his, he was not calling for help but was stating the obvious that he knows what is ahead -from the discussion, judging by the context of the two songs, it is a different context but related through the lyrics. In the above excerpt, he explains that he is in a confused state of mind about where life is taking him to. Here, one can derive an implicature that the artiste needs help.

Pract of Doubting in Selected Songs of Mohbad

Another pract that is prominent in the lyrics of his song is doubt that comes from people about his actions. His songs capture paralyzing

grip of doubt which is one of the features of depression. The pragmatic act of doubt is observed as he complains about the perception that people have about him and how he lives his life. A lyrics that explains this is seen below:

Torípé mó wọ ñkán, wọn sọ pé
{Because I am focused, they say I am
on drugs} *mowá on drugs.*

In this lyric, he is worried about peoples' doubt about his ability to be focused without drugs. According to him, he has become vigilant and more careful. To him, he asks if they would have preferred him to be docile and dull so as to please them. It is as a result of this that he says they believe he is on drugs, something he states that he does not indulge in and is not the cause of his vigilance. This doubt is further portrayed through the feelings of his family about his new achievements. He sings in these lyrics:

*"Uh, mummy mi ati daddy mi { My mummy
and dady}*
wán kan lò question mi. { questions me}
*"Wọn ní, "Ìbò l'otí rí vibe yi, { they asked me
where I get this sort of vibe}*
şé ọwọ demon?"
{Are you possessed by demons?}
*Áwọn tọ senior mí, wọn bèrè, { my seniors
ones too are asking questions}*

These lines reinforce the pragmatic act of doubt that is related to the theme of depression in this analysis. He is worried and confused by the doubt people have about being wealthy and becoming famous. From his parents asking him where he gets his "vibes" to those who are older than him inquiring about the source of his wealth, he is bothered by the reality that those around him do not trust and have faith in him and his person. He worries that what is the point of his being rich and those who he hustles for do not believe that he would get rich in a legitimate manner. This reality

seemingly disturbs him, and this is what inspires his lyrics, as well as the title and the focus of the song. The fact that his parents have to ask if his riches come from a malevolent spirit like a demon further fuels his worry that could lead to depression.

Pract of fear and uncertainty

At times, the artiste expresses his fear and uncertainty in his song. Often times, he prays for protection from God and reveals his religious beliefs. For instance, let us consider an extract:

Plenty enemies wey dey follow me.
Maje kan mu mi, even if na die minutes.

The pragmatic act that is prominent here is fear and uncertainty. Despite his "feeling good" he does not let his guard down as he is being fearful for what his enemies are planning for him. He knows that he has enemies who can plan to end his life at any time, which is why in these moods, he makes a supplication to God that he should not let his enemies get a hold of him. Being oblivious of the reality of enemies who surrounds him and choosing to openly talk about it, reflects his state of mind.

Conclusion

Music provides a platform for expression. Lyrics are not written in abstraction; there are always underlying contexts that prompts their compositions, which is why it is important to understand the message a song attempts to pass across, and the pract the language use aims to fulfill. This paper offers a distinct interrogation of a popular artistes' songs as a precursor to his depression even before his death. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how artistes express and convey themes of depression through music, which provide insight into the artistic representation of mental health related issues.

Discography

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