

CRITIQUING THE SOCIETY THROUGH SONG: A SPEECH ACTS ANALYSIS OF *THIS IS NIGERIA* BY FALZ

¹Tersur IANGBA, ² Joseph Terdoo TYONYION & ¹Chioma OKORAFOR

¹Department of English and Literary Studies, Bingham University, Karu

²Department of English, Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Abstract

A song expresses the composer's thoughts and feelings. Through the utterances made in songs, Falz in *This Is Nigeria* critiques the society and exposes the ills of the Nigerian society. With the specific objectives of exploring the speech acts in the song *This Is Nigeria* and analysing the pragmatic effects of the speech acts on the listeners of the song, the purposive sampling technique was used to analyse the extracts of the song in line with the stated objectives. Speech acts theory was used to analyse the extracts with specific attention given to locutionary, illocutionary and Perlocutionary acts. The study revealed that speech acts such as making utterances (locutionary acts), assertives/representatives, directives, expressives, and declaratives are used in the song. Furthermore, the speech acts raise awareness about the dire state of poverty and healthcare facilities, evoke sympathy or a call to action from the audience which is expressed, provoke critical reflection on the exploitative nature of the capitalist system and its colonial roots, possibly sparking discussions on alternative economic models or systemic reform and establishes a connection between fraud, exploitation, and the capitalist system, prompting acknowledgment of systemic issues and potentially galvanizing support for reform efforts and as well highlights the normalization of corruption within institutional frameworks, aiming to provoke outrage or a sense of urgency for systemic change.

Keywords: Song, speech acts, utterances, illocutionary acts, Nigeria.

Introduction

Language helps human beings to exchange information. Oviogun and Veerdee (2020, p. 2) aver that "language is a system of signs". In addition, language is considered a mental system that forms bonds or rules on the elements of language, inclusive of the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels (Kravchenko, 2007; Chater and Manning, 2006). Language as defined above is a system of information exchange which exists in the form of spoken or written signs. As a system that bonds humans together and enable their activities, language features in all spheres of human endeavors including song.

Fornäs (2003, p. 1) defines song as "a multimodal supergenre that mediates between words and music." This definition suggests that song is a combination of different modes of human expression. It further identifies two modes that are

primarily combined in song as music and words. By extension, this definition clearly distinguishes between music and words alternatively called lyrics. As observed, the music and the lyrics are organized logically to express the meaning or emotions of the composer. As distinguished above, music assumes a different definition and is only an aspect of song. Estes, Edosa and Okeke (2011, p. 197) define music as well coordinated sound that is nice to the ear. By well-coordinated, it implies that music is a systematically structured sound. The second aspect of the above definition is that music through its structure is pleasant to the ear. The above definition consequently excludes any uncoordinated sound which is considered noise. McDonald (2021, p. 11) explores the functions of songs or music and notes that "Music facilitates a type of social communication, functioning as a distinctive channel of communication drawing people into shared experienced in ways in which

words, spoken language, cannot". As opined by McDonald, song functions to interact with the society, a situation which involves critiquing of social affairs as observed in Falz' artistic performance. The song genre which is a combination of music and words is a very essential concept in this study.

Performance of songs involves the acts of speech. Scholars and linguists in particular see speech acts as the use of utterances to perform actions. In speech acts, language is not merely conveying information but also accomplishing a specific purpose or effect. Ekor and Gunn (2021, p. 131) aver that "Speech acts theory looks at the pragmatic function of utterances. The theory is premised on the belief that language is used to perform Actions." The quoted text above signifies the focal point in speech acts which is the actual functions that utterances perform. The social actions of language can be manifest through assertions, declarations, commands, promises and many others too numerous to mention.

Broadly, speech acts are grouped into three categories of locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary acts. Locutionary act involves the production of meaningful and comprehensible pieces of information. Illocutionary Act refers to the actual function performed by the utterance while Perlocutionary act refers to the effect it has on the listener. The three acts are observed in all forms of human speech including song. *This Is Nigeria* by Falz is classified as a song having met the criteria of a song's classification enumerated above. This implies that music and words are combined and well-structured by Falz for effective communication. Exploring previous studies on *This Is Nigeria*, Igwebuike and Eburuaja (2020:3) assert that *This Is Nigeria* is a song by Folarin Falana (popularly known as "Falz" and "Falz The Bahd Guy"). Falz is described as a Nigerian hip hop Artist, who also is a song writer and a lawyer. According to them, Falz's song is adapted from an "American Childish Gambino's (Donald Glover) song *This Is America* to the Nigerian society." They further aver that while Glover discusses contemporary issues in America, such as police violence, racism and gun crime, Falz discussed five topical and predominant societal issues in

Nigeria which are corruption, insecurity, police brutality, erratic electricity power supply, unemployment and internet fraud. Essentially, *This Is Nigeria* is composed by Falz to mirror the state of affairs in the Nigerian society. Consequently, he does a critique of office holders, Church leaders, security situation, joblessness, and fraud. Through this song, some Nigerians have better knowledge of the situation of things in the country.

Previous studies on *This Is Nigeria* have examined various pragmatic and discourse features of the song including impoliteness and voicing protest as well as ideologies as reviewed below: Igwebuike and Eburuaja (2020) investigates Impoliteness Strategy in Falz' Satirical Song *This Is Nigeria* and examine the use of impoliteness strategy by Falz in critiquing the societal ills in the Nigerian society. They adopt Jonathan Culpeper's politeness theory to establish how Falz' song subtly protests on behalf of the people with respect to injustices and malpractices happening in Nigeria. The study reveals that four out of the five impoliteness super-strategies which are bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness and sarcasm or mock impoliteness are used by Falz to confront institutions in the country such as the Nigerian government, police, church pastors and selected Nigerian youths. Also revealed is the extension of the song beyond a simple description and reflection of the Nigerian situation to the provision of alternative platforms for the voicing of institutionalised ills. The study concludes by revealing the significance of protest music in the checking of a society's moral stance. While the reviewed article discusses how Falz adopts the Impoliteness Strategy in mirroring the state of affairs in the Nigerian society pointing out social ills, it however differs from the present as the current study focuses on how Falz uses speech acts to critique the state of affairs in the country.

Akingbe and Onanuga (2020) examine Voicing Protest': Performing Cross-Cultural Revolt in Gambino's '*This Is America*' and Falz's '*This Is Nigeria*. The study explores comparatively the dialectics of protest and revolt American Gambino's musical video '*This Is America*' and its

adapted version in Falz's musical video '*This Is Nigeria*' using the framework of Musical Discourse Analysis. The article states that while the African-American youths become the centre of attention in Gambino's '*This Is America*' with racial inequality portrayed, Falz's '*This Is Nigeria*' reflects a devaluation of youths' lives, as well as other local conflicts that affect Nigeria's growth. The study reveals Falz' significant reinterpretation of Nigerian social crises in '*This Is Nigeria*'. Through the adaptation of '*This Is America*' Falz is found to bring a formal order out of chaos. While the reviewed article considers how *This Is Nigeria* relates to *This Is America* viewing song as a form of protest, it considers how both songs are related in their reflection of the various contexts from where they have been produced. It however differs from the present study which considers how speech acts is used to critique the society through song.

Akinwotu (2022) explores language and the ideological representations in selected songs of Folarin Falana (FALZ), *This Is Nigeria* and nine others songs by Falz. Adopting van Leeuwen's Socio-Semantic Model, the songs are purposively selected for their messages of Folarin Falana (FALZ). The outcome reveals that five kinds of social actors are presented as motivators of negative social actors namely individuals, civil/public servants, professionals, leaders/leadership, and groups/bodies. The enumeration is identified as being responsible for negative social actions such as corruption, fraud, favouritism, killing and ethnicity. The article concludes that the Hip-hop songs are socially and politically correct in Nigeria and they help to promote social wellness and national development.

In this study, attention is paid to speech acts in the song "*This Is Nigeria*" performed by Falz. An attempt is made at understanding how the Nigerian artist critiques the state of affairs in the country. Speech Acts theory serves as the framework for the analysis. Essentially, attention is given to:

- I. Exploring the speech acts in the song *This Is Nigeria* and
- II. Analysing the pragmatic effects of the speech acts on the listeners of the song.

Theoretical Framework

Utterances used in language which are otherwise called speeches function more than merely giving information. Language experts have identified the uses of language to state facts, give directives, request actions, express emotions and commit themselves to do things in the future and are classified under speech acts theory. According to Chilwa and Ofulue (2014, p.176), "John Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) recognized that language is a tool for performing actions". They state therefore that 'meanings' are user's intentions and not the literal meanings of words in the utterance.

Speech acts theory was first introduced by J. L. Austin (1962) in his work "How to do things with words" and was later developed by Austin's student Searle (1975). The theory posits that speeches perform actions. Chilwa and Ofulue (2014) assert that speech acts show the force that utterances have for counting as actions rather than mere giving of information. It deals with functions of linguistic forms that are beyond information sharing but are capable of affecting social actions. Oha et al. (2010) assert that every speech or language use has a function to perform in the place and time of usage. Austin in the theory posits that all utterances perform actions by having a specific force assigned to them. He classifies the acts into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts respectively. Searle then further divided the illocutionary acts into five namely: assertive, expressive, declarative, directive and commissive acts respectively.

While Locutionary act refers to the production of a grammatical and meaningful speech, described by Wardhaugh (2006) as the utterances we make, which could be used in different ways to achieve the same illocutionary force; Illocutionary act is the actual function of the speech. Austin (1962) describes it as the performance of an act in saying something. Wardhaugh (2006) asserts that it is the expression of some intent that speakers have and cause listeners to do things. Oha et al. (2010) describes the illocutionary acts as actions that are performed in doing something with an utterance. Illocutionary acts are achieved with the aid of

illocutionary force, the actual action of the illocutionary act described by Fromkin et al. (2011) as the speaker's intent. The illocutionary act and force are classified under five main kinds: assertive/ representative acts state facts or lay claims; expressive acts express the speaker's feelings and emotions. Ayeomoni and Akinkulere (2012) aver that expressive acts are achieved through sincerity of the speech act. Another speech act is declarative acts which is used to change the status of things in the world, described by Ayeomoni and Akinkulere (2012) as statements used to say something and make it so; directive acts make the listener to fulfil the Speaker's wish. Directives are described by Josiah and Oghenerho (2015) as utterances of a speaker that try to get the hearer to act in a way as to fulfil what the propositional content represented; and commissive acts, utterances that make the speaker perform some action in the future. The speaker according to Josiah and Oghenerho (2012) becomes committed to act in the way represented by the propositional content.

The use of illocutionary and the force that accompanies it enables the attainment of perlocutionary effects of acts which according to Mbah (2016) is the hearer's reaction to speaker's message. It is further described as the effect of the message on the listener by means of performing the illocutionary act. Perlocutionary effects are successful through Felicity conditions, the socio-temporal factors that are necessary for the success of an act, without which the speech act is infelicitous. To Syal and Jindal (2016) Felicity conditions are prevailing factors that speech acts depend on at the time of uttering the speeches which in their absence, the message may not convey the speaker's intention. For the purpose of analysing *This Is Nigeria* by Falz, speech acts theory has been confined to Austin's locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts as well as Searle's further classification of assertive, declarative, expressive, directive and commissive acts. The selected extracts are analysed in terms of their statements, intended illocutionary force and the effect they could have on the listeners.

Methodology

This paper adopts the qualitative approach

to research. In it, portions of the song are extracted purposively and subjected to speech acts analysis. Both primary and secondary sources of data are employed in the study. While primary data is the lyrics of the song *This Is Nigeria*, the secondary data refers to the literature consulted to complete the study. The selected extracts are interpreted using speech acts theory. The findings from the study are then presented and discussed.

Analysis

1. Extremely poor, and the medical facilities are poor
We operate a predatory, neocolonial capitalist system
Which is founded on fraud and exploitation, and therefore
You are bound to have corruption institutionalised
Many criminal cases are settled in police stations, I bet illegally
2. Eh-eh, eh, eh-eh, eh, eh-eh e-ewo
Eh-eh, eh, eh-eh, eh, eh-eh e-ewo
Eh-eh, eh, eh-eh, eh, eh-eh e-ewo
3. This is Nigeria
Look how I'm living now
Look how I'm living now
Everybody be criminal
4. This is Nigeria (who!)
Look how we living now (oh)
Look what we eating now
Everybody be criminal (go!)
5. This is Nigeria (who, go!)
Just because I'm on TV now (ay, go!)
Person wey no get work is checking to see
If my watch is original
6. This is Nigeria (who, ay)
Wey that Madam Philomena?
Money vanish for your office
36 milli, you talk say na animal
7. This is Nigeria
Never-ending recession, oh
When looter, and killers, and stealers are still contesting election, oh
Politicians wey thief some billion and billion, e no dey go prison, oh
Police station dey close by six, security reason o

8. My brothers and sisters, I want you to put
your hands up right now
Because your miracle is coming this
week
If you believe me, let me hear you say
"Amen!" (Whoo)
9. Uh, this is Nigeria (whoo)
Praise and worship, we singing now (ay)
Pastor put his hand on the breast of his
member
He's pulling the demon out
10. This is Nigeria (yeah, yeah)
No electricity daily, oh (yeah)
Young people are still working multiple
jobs
And they talk say we lazy, oh
11. This is Nigeria (ay, go!)
There's plenty wahala sha (whoa)
Fulani Herdsmen still dey slaughter
Carry people dey massacre
12. This is Nigeria
Works in my area
This is democracy
Political hysteria
13. Yahoo Yahoo don tear everywhere now
And we act like it's so cool
Casting the P, I'm being castigated just
for trying to be noble
14. This is Nigeria
Look at my nation, oh
SARS stop me for road, any explanation,
you go talk am for station, oh
15. "Sir, I'm-, Sir-, look, I'm sorry, I'm just a
student
I'm a student of the University of Lagos
We are just coming from the club, okay?
So, my friend and I, we-
No, sir, I have my ID to prove"
16. This is Nigeria
Look how I'm living now
Look how I'm living now
Everybody be criminal
17. This is Nigeria
Look how we living now
Look what we eating now
Everybody be criminal
18. But what happens every day is that, the
system has allowed it

For instance, there is no law that allows
you to take money from the church
Invest in business, and privatize it, no!
It is only in Nigeria where you can take
money from the church
Money contributed by poor congregation
members
You go and set up a university that the
members cannot attend
Cannot send their children to
It's against the rule of our beloved God
It's against our constitution

This Is Nigeria is a song performed by a Nigerian artist, Falarin Falana, also known as Falz. As Fornäs (2003) avers, song is a multimodal supergenre that mediates between words and music. As a result, the nineteen-stanza song is made up of various speech acts that are necessary for the expression of its pragmatic content. By producing a song that is meaningful and understandable by all listeners, the musician succeeds in producing locutionary acts in all the stanzas of the song. In agreement with Wardhaugh (2006), locutionary acts are the utterances we make. Consequently, all the parts of the song are uttered meaningfully and are counted as acts of locution.

There are various illocutionary acts and forces that accompany the various stanzas and verses of the song. In agreement with Ekor and Gunn (2021, p. 131), "Speech acts theory looks at the pragmatic function of utterances. The theory is premised on the belief that language is used to perform Actions." Consequently, the illocutionary acts in the song include assertives, expressives, directives, declaratives, and commissives. Assertives or representative acts feature as the most prominent speech acts in the song. Representative or assertive speech acts are utterances that report the state of affairs or state claims in the society. Accordingly, lines one, two, three and five of the first stanza are all representative acts. In addition, stanza five, six, seven, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and eighteen all perform assertive speech acts. They all report critical issues in the society which include poverty, corruption of public office

holders, laziness and joblessness of the youths, prevalence of corrupt practices over the law, insecurity, corruption in the Church, and erratic power supply. The enumerated issues agree with Igwebuike and Eburuaja (2020) who aver that Falz uses the song to confront institutions in the country such as the Nigerian government, police, church pastors and selected Nigerian youths. The first stanza “extremely poor, and the medical facilities are poor” reflects the theme of poverty that is expressed by the poem as the citizens are poor and unable to access good living including medical facilities. Also, “which is founded on fraud and exploitation, and therefore you are bound to have corruption institutionalized” as well as “many criminal cases are settled in police stations, I bet illegally” all in stanza one reflect the level of corruption in the society reflecting the unlawful collection of public properties for individual selves as well as the illegal ending of cases by officers at the police stations probably after illegally collecting money and judging in their favour. Corruption in the public sector in Nigeria is also expressed in the seventh stanza “never-ending recession, oh. When looter, and killers, and stealers are still contesting election oh. Politicians wey thief billion and billion, e no dey go prison oh” which reflects the extent of the corruption in the society which is observed in recession, looting of public funds, killing of citizens and the free movement of the killers and corrupt office holders which all reflect the prevalence of corruption in the society over the laws of the country.

Furthermore, the repeated use of *This Is Nigeria* is used to indicate and reemphasise the country in which the ills mentioned are dominant. It also features as a representative act as it agrees with the facts alleged in the song. The corruption in the church is expressed in the extract “pastor puts his hand on the breast of his member, He’s pulling the demon out” and the report of the use of Church funds for building private businesses at the expense of church members. Another instance of corruption is the capturing of the millions from the offices without any proper account of such monies. In addition, corruption is seen in the unlawful arrest and detention of youths and students without allowing for explanations and bail while the actual

yahoo boys are free from all forms of intimidation. Insecurity is expressed in the extract “Fulani herdsmen still dey slaughter, carry people dey massacre” which reflects the frequent killings of humans by the herdsmen in the Nigerian society and “police station dey close by six, security reason o” which reflects the inability of the security agencies in the country to contain the security challenges in the country. The laziness of the youths is expressed through the mention of their attitude of youths criticizing the clothes and jewelries that are worn by people on the television screen. The attitude reflects the joblessness of the youths who instead of investing their time wisely, waste it criticizing people’s dresses. This tallies with Akingbe and Onanuga (2020) who aver that Falz’s ‘This is Nigeria’ reflects a devaluation of youths’ lives, as well as other local conflicts that affect Nigeria’s growth.

The musician expresses his feelings through expressive acts in the exclamation “eh-eh, eh-eh, eh-eh e-ewo” which is used to show the singers criticism and mockery of the situation described in the song. “look how I’m living now”, “look we living now” and “look how we living now” all are expressives which indicate the disappointment of the speaker over the state of affairs in the country. As Ayeomoni and Akinkuolere (2012) aver, expressive acts are achieved through sincerity of the speech act. Accordingly, Falz makes his utterances which earnestly express his feelings. In addition, it functions as a directive which indirectly calls the attention of the listeners to the ills in the society as well as the improper feeding that many are having. Furthermore, the speaker expresses disappointment with the attitude of the leaders who represent the youths negatively in “young people are still working multiple jobs, and they talk say we lazy, oh”.

Also, the speaker employs a directive in the statement “my brothers and sisters, I want you to put your hands up right now” which mimics the speech of pastors who are presented as corrupt and unjust and reflects some of their service sessions in which they carry out their corrupt actions. “Everybody be criminal”, “it’s against the rule of our beloved God” and “it’s against our

constitution” are the few instances of declarative which are used to make the position of the speaker known and change the status of the acts and the persons executing the acts. While the persons are declared criminals, the acts are stated to be unconstitutional and against the laws of God.

The utterances in the song perform numerous Perlocutionary acts which are successful with the aid of prevailing factors. According to Syal and Jindal (2016), Felicity conditions are prevailing factors that speech acts depend on at the time of uttering the speeches which in their absence, the message may not convey the speaker's intention. With the aid of these conditions, the song succeeds in raising awareness about the dire state of poverty and healthcare facilities, evoking sympathy or a call to action from the audience which is expressed other extract “Extremely poor, and the medical facilities are poor”; provoking critical reflection on the exploitative nature of the capitalist system and its colonial roots, possibly sparking discussions on alternative economic models or systemic reform. The effect is achieved through the caption “We operate a predatory, neocolonial capitalist system”. Furthermore, the song establishes a connection between fraud, exploitation, and the capitalist system, prompting acknowledgment of systemic issues and potentially galvanizing support for reform efforts and as well highlights the normalization of corruption within institutional frameworks, aiming to provoke outrage or a sense of urgency for systemic change. These effects, the song achieves through the extract “Which is

founded on fraud and exploitation, and therefore You are bound to have corruption institutionalised”.

The song also Raises awareness about the prevalence of corruption within law enforcement, potentially sparking indignation and a demand for accountability, which is expressed in the extract “Many criminal cases are settled in police stations, I bet illegally”. Other effects that the song has on listeners include intimating them of the living conditions in the country and attracting sympathy while awakening listeners minds on the general attitudes of Nigerians.

Conclusion

The musical genre is used to express emotions. *This Is Nigeria* by Falz is used to express the ills that are prevalent in the Nigerian society. Some of the issues raised are corruption across politics, religion, and public life, alongside poverty, insecurity, unemployment, and erratic power supply. While the issues raised are reflections of the situation in the society, the aim is to create awareness and awakening the minds of listeners on the issues affecting the Nigerian society and is also aimed at provoking the conscience of the government to address the issues in the society. Each line in “Song” by Falz serves a specific illocutionary purpose, whether it’s conveying information, critiquing societal norms, or engaging the audience emotionally, with the aim of eliciting particular responses or reactions (perlocutionary effects) such as awareness, reflection, outrage, or emotional engagement.

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