

PRAGMATICS AND THERAPEUTIC INFLUENCE OF SELECTED YORUBA MUSIC IN ENHANCING SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF INDIVIDUALS IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explores the pragmatic and therapeutic dimensions of selected Yoruba songs by Saheed Osupa and Yinka Ayefele, focusing on their role in enhancing the social and psychological wellbeing of individuals in Southwest Nigeria; because existing linguistic studies on music have not sufficiently examined the psychological relevance of Yoruba songs within the Nigerian social context. Anchored in Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory, the research investigates how five dominant pragmatic acts – acknowledging, informing, assuring, cautioning, and questioning, are embedded in the lyrics and function as therapeutic tools. Drawing data from four albums (two from each artist), the study adopts a descriptive design and pragma-linguistic analysis to examine how these artists use music to address emotional, psychological, and social issues affecting their listeners. Findings reveal that the identified pragmatic acts serve to soothe psychological trauma, foster hope, encourage introspection, and resist social intimidation, particularly in a context where economic hardship and social instability prevail. Through contextually rich linguistic strategies such as metaphor, inference, and shared situational knowledge, the songs provide moral guidance and emotional reassurance. The study affirms that Yoruba music transcends entertainment, functioning as a sociolinguistic intervention capable of psychological healing. It contributes to the discourse on indigenous music and mental health by underscoring the value of culturally grounded therapeutic modalities. The research recommends further interdisciplinary engagement between language, music, and psychology to leverage indigenous musical forms for public mental health education and emotional resilience, especially in non-clinical settings.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Psychology, Music, Therapy, Social Context

Word count: 238

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a popular saying that “if music be the food/language of love, then play on”. It suggests that music communicates emotion and

feelings (Vigl, et al. 2024) and since communication is involved, there is the need to understand the language in all its ramifications. The power of music is evident in the way that

certain songs are attached to people and profound in its healing process (Barnett, 2023). The lyrics can be spiritual, philosophical, psychological and pragmatically inclined; all in different genres, so long as it communicates to the needs of the individual listeners. It can be motivational and inspiring to perform any given tasks (Balogun, 2022,2023) or therapeutic (Something that makes you feel relaxed, happier (Cambridge dictionary).

Music therapy is an evidence-based practice that uses music to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals. It has been found to be beneficial in a variety of settings including hospitals and hospices. Music therapy can help reduce pain levels, promote relaxation, improve communication skills, and provide comfort during difficult times (Victor, 2024). For example, a person can find themes and meanings within lyrics and offer alternative lyrics that apply to their life and experiences, which can help them find the words that represent how they are feeling if they are finding it hard to express this themselves (Zoppi, 2020). To this end, one could easily say that music is truly a universal system of communicating emotions as humans find it easy to infer emotion on the basis of the melodic cues that mimic universal prosodic cues (Akintaro et al, 2025).

Compared with pre-independence Nigeria and up till about twenty-five years ago, Nigeria could be said to be a little better off in all indices of the Human Development Index (HDI) but today, people go through a lot just to be alive with the hope that tomorrow would be better. The poverty level, decay in social and moral values, loss of economic power by the masses, insecurity, kidnapping and so on prevailing in Nigeria can be said to have turned the country into Hobbesian state. Within the Nigerian socio-economic context, life is becoming more meaningless to many individuals. But then, with faith, a few individuals still believe that there would be a turnaround for better. Many now turn to many stimuli (drugs, religion, music, just to mention a few), to cushion the effect of the economic down turn in ameliorating the social and psychological trauma they are going through. The World Health

Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" Akintaro, (2025) identified two types of health challenges, namely those caused by pathogens and those caused by verbal communications. He then focused on music as a form of treatment vector for ailments caused by verbal communication. For this study, we would be focusing on music as a form of succor (therapy) through its pragmatic acts analysis, on seeking harmony between what live is throwing at them now and how they are seeking stability in the social and psychological well-being of themselves.

MUSIC AND THERAPY

According to APA dictionary (2018), therapy is a form of treatment of diseases where certain steps are taken to ameliorate the conditions of the person so affected by the diseases, and when the applied object/subject does what it was supposed to do, we then conclude that, it has healing effect. "Therapeutic" refers to the activities that make a person feel good or relieve anxiety (NCI, 2025). Hence, music therapy is the use of music and/or elements of music (like sound, rhythm and harmony) to accomplish goals, like reducing stress or improving quality of life. However, music therapy isn't the same as listening to music to help you relax. (Music therapy involves a clinician (Expert, professional, that use certain standards to treat a patient), whereas listening personally to a music can serve as a therapy on its own depending on the needs or moods of the individuals. This is aided further by the genre, lyrics, instruments and language adopted. Therapeutic music is a method for relaxing you or lifting your emotions in times of need. It does not require a music therapist and can involve a range of experiences. This can be as simple as listening to calming music through headphones (Cleland clinic, 2025). Music therapy involves harnessing music elements such as lyrics, melody, and rhythm to facilitate recovery from various conditions.

Music therapy is broadly of two main types:

1. **Physical Music Therapy:** This involves physical movements in response to music therapy. It includes activities such as singing, playing musical

instruments, or moving to the rhythm of music. These physical responses stimulate various organs and systems within the body. For example, the increased heart rate caused by music therapy can improve blood circulation. Therefore, physical music therapy can aid in the recovery from conditions such as hypertension, migraines, and cardiovascular diseases.

2. **Psychological Music Therapy** focuses on an individual's emotional and psychological well-being. Listening to music therapy can positively impact one's mood and shift their attention toward themselves. Moreover, the sound of music can synchronize brainwaves, inducing a state of deep relaxation similar to meditation, which can help alleviate symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and relief from anxiety and stress. Additionally, music therapy stimulates the release of endorphins, promoting a sense of happiness and reducing symptoms like nausea

Music therapy can incorporate various genres of music, depending on the preferences of the individuals receiving music therapy. Music therapy encompasses a gamut of musical styles -- classical, pop, jazz, or any other genre. The present study is focused on music as a pragmatic-psychological form of therapy. Music therapy offers several benefits across three dimensions: **Emotional and Psychological** (release negative emotions, improve mood, and cope with stress and anxiety); **Physical** (stimulation of physical responses, such as increased heart rate, improved blood circulation, and enhanced motor skills, aiding physical recovery and alleviation symptoms of various conditions); **Social** (creates a sense of community and promotes social interactions. It can enhance communication skills and foster positive relationships among individuals (Medpark Hospital, 2025).

MUSIC GENRE AND CULTURE

Music characteristics, such as genre, familiarity and tempo have been investigated. For example, it has been suggested that low-information music produces optimal arousal for task performance (Kiger, 1989). Other research (e.g, Wolf & Weiner, 1972) has found that unfamiliar sounds distract more than familiar

sounds. The influence of music type, personality, and task context have been reported in the literature. Cassidy and McDonald (2007) compared music with high arousal and low affect, music with low arousal and positive affect and basic background noise on the recall and cognitive task performance of students classified as extroverts and introverts. Performance was lessened in the presence of any background sound (music or noise) versus silence. Further, performance was poorer with exposure to high arousal music compared to low arousal music and noise.

A characteristic of music and its influence on behaviour is the issue of genre, as well as that of the language in which it is being rendered (indigenous versus non-indigenous). Preference to a particular genre of music, combined with language that the person is familiar with has been found to be very germane to benefits derived from such music as far as behaviour and psychological wellbeing is concerned (Balogun, et al 2013, 2022, 2023). Balogun, et al (2022) reported that genre of music help facilitates task performance where males did better while listening to *Fuji* music than females, while females did better than males while listening to gospel music. A corollary of this was that people do better in task performance when listening to music in native language than "foreign" language (Balogun et al 2013). In the study, it was reported that Botswana indigenes performed better when listening to music in "Satswana" (local language) than when the music was rendered in French or English.

2. PRAGMATICS OF MUSIC

The concept, 'Pragmatics', within the field of Language, is the study of how **context influences the interpretation of meaning** in communication. Context here, could be socio-cultural, situational and/or linguistic context. These contexts are major linguistic variables upon which speaker's meaning is inferred. It is against this backdrop that Akintaro, et al (2025:6) define music as an artistic tool which is embedded with diverse pragmatic acts aimed at addressing social issues affecting individuals within society. In other words, music encapsulates the passing of information to its hearer through a lyrical composition by a being

who has been able to combine some musical notes and linguistic sounds. By implication, music and language are universal human abilities with many similarities relating to their acoustics, structure, and frequent use in social situations (Brown and Jordania, 2013). It therefore suffices to posit that music remains an artistic tool which deploys diverse pragmatic acts to address social issues affecting individuals within a society.

Pragmatic acts are the actions derived/inferred from a speaker's utterance(s) (Mey, 2001). By implication, there are actions (such as warning, promising, giving hope, entertaining, informing etc.) embedded in musical renditions. This is so because music is rendered through language. In essence, since language serves as a major tool through which music is rendered and communicated, it is appropriate to assert that the meanings derived from musical renditions are not solely embedded in the lyrics or melodies themselves but are also deeply influenced by contextual factors. These factors may be linguistic, social, or cultural, and they play a significant role in shaping how musical messages are interpreted by diverse audiences. This contextual sensitivity forms the central concern of a pragma-linguistic approach to the study of music; one that emphasizes how meaning is negotiated through language in musical settings, considering not just what is said or sung, but how, when, to whom, and in what context it is communicated.

However, it has been observed that a large number of linguistic studies on music tend to focus predominantly on stylistic analysis, critical discourse analysis, and comparative studies. These approaches, while valuable, often overlook the pragmatic dimension of how meaning is dynamically co-constructed in musical experiences (serving as adjunct therapy to human emotions). For example, in the work of Oikelome (2012), the study presents a stylistic analysis of Nigerian hip-hop music, specifically examining the musical output of Innocent Ujah Idibia (2Face). Oikelome investigates how local African elements are blended with Western popular music features, thereby constructing a unique musical identity. His analysis is grounded in descriptive

and stylistic theory, with particular attention given to five of 2Face's songs. The study dissects these songs using conventional musical concepts such as melody, rhythm, harmony, and form, all illustrated through staff notation. This analysis highlights how the artist merges indigenous and foreign musical traits, contributing to the hybridized nature of contemporary Nigerian music.

Furthermore, Mosobalaje (2018), in his work titled *Textual Migration in Ebenezer Obey's Juju Musics*, explores the phenomenon of textual migration; a process by which musical content is freely borrowed, adapted, and repurposed within new performances. Focusing on the legendary Juju musician Ebenezer Obey, Mosobalaje explains that this practice is rooted in the traditions of Yoruba oral performance, where there were historically no intellectual property restrictions. A closely related work on music as being therapeutic is the work of Ibitayo and Olusegun (2020) which examined Saheed Osupa songs as a tool for socialization within the current Yoruba cultural setting using the content exploration approach mode. Additionally, a study done by Akintaro, et al (2025) only looked at the emotive relevance of Yinka Ayefele's songs without paying much attention on the psychological relevance of Ayefele's songs.

These studies collectively illustrate that while music is often analyzed for its structural and stylistic features, its pragmatic functions; how it therapeutically communicates, persuades, influences, and connects people deserve equal attention. Music, much like language, can be understood as a universal medium of emotional communication, as listeners across cultures are capable of intuitively recognizing emotions through melodic patterns that mimic prosodic (intonational) cues used in speech. Just as language operates under syntactic rules; such as those outlined in Transformational Generative Grammar, music also follows its own set of syntactic principles for organizing elements like notes, chords, and intervals into meaningful and expressive wholes. The overlap between music and language extends even to the neurological level, where similar brain regions are involved in processing both. This shared cognitive basis

reinforces the argument that music and language are interrelated systems of human expression. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify that music, despite its emotional and communicative power, does not function as a language in the strictest sense; it cannot be universally used to convey any thought to any person, in the way that natural languages can. Still, the parallels in structure, function, and interpretation between language and music are profound, warranting more integrated studies that explore the pragmalinguistic dimensions of musical expression. It is therefore, on this note, that this study has been limited to selected Yoruba music enhancing social and psychological wellbeing of individuals in southwest Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were purposively selected from two (2) Saheed Osupa (*New Dawn* - 2023; *Pacesetter* - 2023) and Yinka Ayefele's (*New Dawn* – 2005; *Next Level* – 2006) musical albums. The choice of selection is based on the view Osupa and Ayefele's songs are embedded with linguistic contents that capture contemporary social issues dominant within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Furthermore, the contents of their songs counter the hypothetical belief that Fuji music (for Saheed Osupa) and Tungba music (for Yinka Ayefele) are morally irrelevant to the society. While Saheed Osupa is an acclaimed Nigerian Fuji artist and a university graduate, Yinka Ayefele remained an award-winning artist who through his music career has been conferred a national honour – Member of the Order of the Niger (M.O.N) in 2011 by then-President Goodluck Jonathan. Explicitly, two excerpts were taken from each of the selected Osupa and Ayefele's albums. These music albums are available on Audiomack (an internationally acclaimed music downloading channel). The descriptive design was adopted while the data were subjected to pragmatic analysis. Therefore, Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts theory served as the framework.

A literary translation (which is context-based translation) was used to translate data excerpts from the Yoruba language to the English language.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings reveal that five pragmatic acts (shortened as practs): acknowledging, informing, assuring, cautioning, and encouraging are dominant in the selected Yoruba songs. These acts are specifically deployed as supplementary therapeutic linguistic tools enhancing both social and psychological wellbeing of music recipients (mostly) within the southwest, Nigeria. Meanwhile, it is pertinent to acknowledge that the World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) in its findings opined that human beings are susceptible to diverse health related issues ranging from communicable to non-communicable diseases. Akintaro (2025) suggests that while anti-malaria medicine may be prescribed to cure malaria, a communicable disease, music (among other prescriptions) may be prescribed for non-communicable diseases caused by some almost inevitable social stressors like debt, disappointment, betrayal etc. (some of which cause insomnia, emotional/psychological trauma and depression). To this end, Osupa and Ayefele have used the aforementioned pragmatic acts to – emphasise socio-therapeutic influence of Yoruba music, account for psychological ailments Yoruba music can suppress, raise positive hope, suppress socio intimidation and inferiority complex, and give motivation for the troubled minds. The realisations of these pragmatic functions are enhanced by shared situational knowledge (SSK), metaphor (MPH), inference (INF), relevance (REL), linguistic and social context. It is through these practs that this study posits that Saheed Osupa and Yinka Ayefele's songs function as therapeutic linguistic tool through which social and psychological issues are identified and resolved. A further discussion is made below:

4.1.1 Acknowledging pract deployed to emphasise socio-therapeutic influence of Yoruba music

Acknowledging is fundamentally an act of realizing, accepting, and affirming the truth or reality of a situation, achievement, or contribution (Low et al., 2013). It involves not only the intellectual recognition of a fact or experience but also an emotional and sometimes public expression of gratitude or validation. In a similar vein, acknowledging can also be seen as the conscious act of recognizing the value, importance, or quality of a person, group, or even an inanimate object. Interestingly, Saheed Osupa, in his *New Dawn*, uses this act to affirm and emphasise the socio-therapeutic influence of his songs on his music recipients. Excerpt 1 below justifies this claim:

Excerpt 1: Saheed Osupa's *New Dawn* (Track 1)

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| 1. <i>Medical doctor ti mo fe ki 'ndi na re</i> | (This is the medical doctor I had wanted to be) |
| 2. <i>Mi o sewosan fun enikan kan pelu abere,</i> | (I don't heal people by giving them injection) |
| 3. <i>Bi mi o se ise abe ki gbewon wo theatre o,</i> | (Even if I don't perform any surgical operation to heal) |
| 4. <i>Ko mean pemi ki'se doctor o,</i> | (That does not negate the fact that I'm a doctor) |
| 5. <i>Aimoye eniyan lorin wa ti fun n'wosan</i> | (My songs have healed many individuals) |
| 6. <i>Ogun logo eyan ti rigbala lara wa.</i> | (Many people have been saved through my songs.) |
| 7. <i>Mo ti forin tun orisirisi idile se</i> | (I have used my songs to restore family peace) |
| 8. <i>Mo ti fi gbawa ibaje pata lowo agun baje,</i> | (Recalcitrants have turned a new leaf; courtesy of my songs) |
| 9. <i>Mo ti ko papa orin pabi'da sir ere</i> | (I have used my songs to positively change lives) |
| 10. <i>Alupaida ede 'nbe lenu baba...</i> | (My songs really perform magic...) |

Excerpt 2: Saheed Osupa's *New Dawn* (Track 1)

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|---|---|
| 1. <i>Na me be Sahidon P wey people dey talk</i> | (I am Saheed Osupa that people talk about.) |
| 2. <i>Gbogbo nise lorin wa nigba kugba se</i> | (My songs resonate with all issues at all time) |
| 3. <i>O kan le wa depressed, mari doctor kankan</i> | (If you are depressed, no need to see a doctor) |
| 4. <i>Gbogo nise lorin wa nigba kugba se</i> | (Because my songs heal at all time.) |
| 5. <i>Everybody lagbaye lo'njijo mi</i> | (Everybody in the world dances to my music) |
| 6. <i>Titi to fi de odo awon Professor...</i> | (Even professors...) |

In excerpts 1 and 2 above, acknowledging pract is realised through indirect speech act, reference (REF), relevance (REL), and metaphor (MPH) to emphasise the socio-therapeutic influence of Saheed Osupa on individuals that listen to his songs. Between turn 1 and 4, Osupa indirectly acknowledges that he is not a trained medical doctor who is expected to heal the ailing through administering injection or surgical operation, but then, his music recipients acknowledge and admit that his songs have healed many individuals with non-infectious health related issues such as depression (excerpt 2, turn 3) and socially induced stressors such as family crises and bad habits (excerpt 1, turn 7-9). Furthermore, Osupa makes REF to the academics (excerpt 2, turn 6) to make a presupposition that the learned in the society listen to his music as a therapeutic-supplement enhancing their well-being. This REF is relevant, considering the cognitive stress academics (professors) undergo and that is why Osupa says in turn 2 of excerpt 2 that his songs resonate with all issues at all time. Finally, Osupa metaphorically acknowledges that his songs are magical as it has been a tool for positive social change making the recalcitrant to turn a new leaf (excerpt 1, turn 8 and 10).

4.1.2 Informing pract deployed to account for how music suppresses psychological ailments

An act of informing is a fundamental communicative act that serves to notify or enlighten a discourse participant(s) about a particular state of affairs, intention, or reality. It functions not merely as a transmission of facts, but often carries embedded pragmatic intentions such as persuasion, assurance, or emotional appeal. In the context of the selected songs by Ayefele, this communicative act is prominently employed to account for how music suppresses psychological ailments. The singer utilizes informing not only to deliver explicit messages but also to establish a rapport with his audience, assuring them of the therapeutic and emotionally satisfying nature of his musical offerings. This act of informing serves a dual purpose: first, it highlights the intrinsic value of the music, and second, it functions as an implicit call to action; encouraging listeners to engage with his music as a source of emotional support and inspiration. Thus, the informing act in Ayefele's music is pragmatically loaded, aimed at aligning the emotional expectations of his audience with the affective capacities of his songs. This is explicated in excerpt 3 below:

Excerpt 3: Yinka Ayefele's *Next Level* (Track 2)

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|--|--|
| 1. <i>Ayefele tii de Alujo ti tun de</i> | (Ayefele has arrived, melodious music is here again,) |
| 2. <i>Oya wa ka jojo ilu oloyin momo,</i> | (come, let us dance to my honey-filled music.) |
| 3. <i>Hypertension o le raye bilu ba'ndun,</i> | (You cannot have hypertension when you listen to my song) |
| 4. <i>Alujo po ninu ilu mi, e mon now,</i> | (You already know that my music is filled with melody.) |
| 5. <i>Paronu ti, ore bere wa ka jojo</i> | (So, you don't have to be sorrowful; instead, dance to my music) |
| 6. <i>Ironu pupo, hypertension ma lo'n fawa...</i> | (because too much of deep thought can make one hypertensive.) |

In excerpt 3 above, Ayefele uses informing pract to explain how his music helps in suppressing psychological related ailments. This act is enhanced by shared situational knowledge (SSK), and linguistic context. Using top-bottom approach, Ayefele begins (turn 1) and ends (turn 6) the excerpt with an informing act. In turn 1, he informs his listeners of the arrival of his new melodious music and does the same in turn 6 by informing his listeners of the psychological harm caused by having too much deep thought – '*Ironu pupo, hypertension ma lo'n fawa...*' (because too much of deep thought can make one hypertensive). Meanwhile, it should be noted that Ayefele is able to use this act to perform pragmatic function (of explaining how his music helps in suppressing psychological related ailments) by building on the SSK between the singer (Ayefele) and the music recipient. That is why Ayefele in turn 4 says 'You already know that my music is filled with melody'. Furthermore, there is a shared situational knowledge between the musician and his listeners about the unfavorable socio-economic conditions of the country which affect the human psyche. Hence, Ayefele admonishes his listeners in turn 5 and 6 (of excerpt 3) not to be sorrowful; 'instead, dance to my music because too much of deep thought can make one hypertensive'. Finally, the (linguistic) contextual metaphoric usage of 'my honey-filled music' in turn 2 presupposes that Ayefele's music performs the same role which honey does. Honey, of no doubt gives sweetness and take away bitterness. Additionally, in the medical context, honey is considered therapeutic (Ranneh, et al., 2021). This therefore upholds the relevance of likening Ayefele's music with honey.

4.1.3 Assuring pract deployed to raise positive hope

An assuring pract is such an action that functions to instill confidence, relieve doubts, and encourage a positive outlook in the hearer. When deployed effectively, it strengthens the emotional state of the audience, especially in contexts where uncertainty, distress, or discouragement may prevail. In the case of Ayefele's musical renditions, the assuring act is strategically employed to inspire positive hope and emotional upliftment. Through affirming messages, optimistic expressions, and hope-laden lyrics, Ayefele reassures his listeners of better days ahead, divine support, or personal resilience in the face of challenges. This act is not

just informative; it is performative in that it actively changes the emotional stance of the listener from doubt to hope, from despair to belief. Excerpts 4 and 5 explicate this:

Excerpt 4: Yinka Ayefele's *New Dawn* (Track 3)

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|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Ko so'un to le ti kiiri o</i> | (There is no difficult situation that cannot be suppressed) |
| 2. <i>Igbeyin a dara mo roye o,</i> | (I assure you, there shall be a glorious latter end) |
| 3. <i>Ko so'un to le ti kiiri o,</i> | (There is no difficult situation that cannot be suppressed) |
| 4. <i>Igbeyin a dara mo roye o,</i> | (I assure you, there shall be a glorious latter end) |
| 5. <i>So, shake your 'body'...</i> | (So, shake your 'body'.) |

Excerpt 5: Yinka Ayefele's *Next Level* (Track 2)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>...ko sowo leni, owo'nbo bo dola</i> | (there is no affluence today but there shall be 'tomorrow'.) |
| 2. <i>Agan ma ma beru mon, omo'nbowa</i>
<i>surely be fruitful.)</i> | (you that you are barren, do not fret for you will surely be fruitful.) |

Assuring act is realised from excerpts 4 and 5 through direct speech act, and MPH. The direct speech act of assurance deployed to raise positive hope is evident in excerpt 4 (turn 2 and 4) and excerpt 5 (turn 1). Going by the musician's life experience which makes him incapacitated (with a spinal cord injury), he still believes that there is no difficult situation that has no happy ending. Hence, he is known for extending this same assurance to give hope for his listeners passing through one difficulty or the other. Metaphorically, Ayefele also extends his assuring act (excerpt 5, turn 1) to the needy in the society who must have thought that the tide will not be in their favour. 'Tomorrow', as used in this context, does not mean a day after today, but a time when there will be breakthrough. Although, the time may not be as near as 'tomorrow' (a day after today), but then, the fruitful day will actually come. Additionally, the word 'body' actually presupposes 'burden'. Therefore, Ayefele enjoins his listeners to shake away their 'burden' in anticipation for the good day ahead.

4.1.4 Cautioning pract deployed to suppress socio intimidation and inferiority complex

A cautioning act is a pragmatic act that involves warning, advising, or drawing attention to potential risks, consequences, or undesirable behaviours. When deployed in discourse (especially in music), it functions not only to correct but also to empower by sensitizing listeners against internal and external threats to their dignity or self-worth (which is a fundamental aspect of the human psyche). In Saheed Osupa's songs, the cautioning pract is frequently utilized as a conscious linguistic and psycho-philosophical tool to resist socio-intimidation, combat class-based oppression, and suppress feelings of inferiority among the less privileged. This is explicated in excerpt 6 below:

Excerpt 6: Saheed Osupa's *Pacesetter* (Track 1)

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|--|---|
| 1. <i>Aditu laye yii Olorun loda pelu asiri,</i> | (God has created and has made this world mysterious) |
| 2. <i>Research aye mo se debe yen</i> | (I know this due to my research about human existence) |
| 3. <i>Moribi ti won fabere gun iyan ta'nje</i> | (I have been to where needle is used to make pounded yam) |
| 4. <i>Ninu emi mo ti reran wo debi kan</i> | (In the cosmos, I have seen different wonders) |
| 5. <i>Mo debi tan fowu omo ala'untakun sodo po</i> | (I have seen where cobwebs are used to make clothes.) |
| 6. <i>Mo ti ririn aare Saheed repete</i> | (I have wandered in this world) |
| 7. <i>Mo da idan mo, debi pe mo mo otito.</i> | (...that I know what is authentic or fake.) |

The word 'aditu' (mysterious) as used in excerpt 6 (turn 1) captures the unexplainable nature of life. By implication, it presupposes that one cannot understand absolutely the mysterious way God has created the

world (*God has created and has made this world mysterious*). While some individuals have been destined to be great early in life, some are destined to be greater late; so, there is no need for human beings to get intimidated when life is rosy for some and not for another. So, in essence, Osupa uses metaphorical expressions such as ‘I have been to where needle is used to make pounded yam...that I know what is authentic or fake’, to caution his listeners about how desperate some individuals have gone in search of wealth and power which brings about the question of what is authentic or fake. Hence, one should not get intimidated as it affects one’s psyche which may eventually make one morally out of control.

4.1.5 Questioning pract deployed as motivational cue

A questioning pragmatic act is not merely a request for information; it can be strategically used as a rhetorical and motivational tool. When deployed in this way, it challenges the listener to reflect, re-evaluate, and find strength within. The motivational questioning act is especially powerful in music where it serves to stimulate introspection, reframe negative thoughts, and prompt self-belief. In musical or poetic discourse, such questions are not necessarily seeking answers, but are meant to awaken latent strength or courage, push listeners to think differently about their situations, challenge feelings of helplessness or despair, rekindle ambition or hope. These kinds of questions are provocative and empowering. They push the listener beyond passivity and stimulate a psychological shift from doubt to confidence, from resignation to action. In this sense, the questioning act becomes a motivational cue by challenging limiting beliefs, initiating a personal awakening, and driving emotional and cognitive engagement. Additionally, in musical performances, such as those by artists like Saheed Osupa and/or Yinka Ayefele, the questioning act becomes a powerful lyrical device that inspires psychological upliftment and promotes mental toughness amidst adversity. This is evident in excerpt 7 and 8:

Excerpt 7: Saheed Osupa’s *Pacesetter* (Track 3)

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|--|---|
| 1. <i>O se maro pe o feku, tori pe o lowo,</i> | (Why would you say you wish to die because you are poor?) |
| 2. <i>O se maro pe o feku, tori pe o bimo</i> | (Why would you say you wish to die because you are barren?) |
| 3. <i>O se maro pe o feku...</i> | (Why should you think of dying?) |
| 4. <i>Aimoye igbese lo le gbe,</i> | (There are many positive steps you could take) |
| 5. <i>Ko to le kanku</i> | (That worths more than death.) |
| 6. <i>Beru ba gun to kan oke</i> | (No matter the difficult situation,) |
| 7. <i>O tuni ibi to le gbesi...</i> | (There is actually a way it can be resolved) |
| 8. <i>O se maro pe o feku</i> | (So, why should you think of dying?) |

Excerpt 8: Yinka Ayefele’s *New Dawn* (Track 3)

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. <i>Ta lo sope kosijo mon?</i> | (Who said there is no more beat to dance to?) |
| 2. <i>Ta leni to sope kosijo mon?</i> | (Who EXACTLY said there is no more beat to dance to?) |
| 3. <i>Ijo ‘nbe lese gbogbo wa</i> | (There is beat to dance to) |
| 4. <i>Ijo ‘nbe lese gbogbo wa.</i> | (Surely, there is beat we can all dance to.) |

By embedding motivational content into emotionally resonant musical lyrics, the questioning pract stimulates the human psyche, aligning with both psycholinguistic and socio-pragmatic goals of discourse. Using rhetorical questions in excerpts 7 and 8 (turns 1 and 2 respectively), Osupa and Ayefele motivate their listeners on the reasons they need not to the emotionally and psychologically down. The two musicians, using this pragmatic act, is actually an attention-seeking strategy used to call the attention of their listeners to the message that is to be passed through their songs. Precisely, Ayefele uses MPH in turn 1 of excerpt 8 when he makes reference to ‘beat’. ‘Who said there is no beat to dance to?’ actually presupposes that – who says one

cannot have a reason to celebrate? This question, hence, hinges on SSK and an inference that – an individual must have been looked down on in the past, making such person to feel like there is no reason to forge ahead again. Ayefele, therefore makes emphasis on ‘who EXACTLY’ is such person who has earlier looked down on a fellow human being. As a follow-up motivational cue, Ayefele says ‘there is beat to dance to’ (turn 3); meaning that breakthrough is achievable; hence, activating psychological frameworks such as self-efficacy, hope, and resilience.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the pragmatic and therapeutic functions of selected Yoruba songs by Saheed Osupa and Yinka Ayefele, establishing how these musical renditions serve as adjunct tools for enhancing psychological and social wellbeing among individuals in Southwest Nigeria. By drawing on Jacob Mey’s Pragmatic Acts theory, the research identified and analyzed five dominant pragmatic acts - acknowledging, informing, assuring, cautioning, and questioning, as they occur within the artists’ lyrics. These acts do not merely function as rhetorical or stylistic devices but serve as communicative strategies through which the artists provide emotional support, moral guidance, and psychological healing to their listeners. In contexts where economic hardship, social instability, and emotional trauma persist, music emerges as a culturally resonant and

psychologically effective tool for navigating daily struggles. The songs studied communicate messages of hope, caution, affirmation, and empowerment, tailored to the lived realities of the audience. By leveraging familiar linguistic, cultural, and musical elements, these artists achieve therapeutic outcomes that rival conventional psychotherapeutic models, particularly in non-clinical, everyday settings. Ultimately, this study affirms that Yoruba music through its embedded pragmatic acts, transcends entertainment to function as a sociolinguistic and psychological intervention. The integration of pragmatic analysis into music therapy research broadens the horizon for interdisciplinary engagement and underscores the need for further scholarly exploration of indigenous music as a vehicle for public mental health and cultural resilience.

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