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THE USE OF PROVERBS IN HIP-HOP MUSIC: THE  
EXAMPLE OF YORUBA PROVERBS IN 9ICE'S LYRICS

**Abstract:** Proverb is a canonized oral form that contains the mores, wisdom and worldview of a particular society. As an oral form of the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria, it is used to (re)create identity, interrogate reality, and mediate real and artistic discourses. It is against this background that this paper examines the use of, and modes of mediation of Yoruba proverbs in the song-poetry of Abolore Adegbola Akande, a popular Nigerian hip-hop artiste whose stage name is 9ice. The data for the paper are selected song-texts of 9ice downloaded from different websites. The proverbs in the selected songs were identified and classified into groups. The study reveals that 9ice uses Yoruba proverbs to perform various global speech acts such as boasting, dissing, warning and teaching.

**Keywords:** 9ice, hip-hop lyrics, erotic music, Yoruba proverbs, pragmatic acts, local culture, identity.

**Introduction**

Proverbs are, often, short value-laden expressions with multilayered meanings that can be decoded only by those who possess a good mastery of the oral art and culture that produce them. Lau, Tokofsky and Winick (2004:8), similar to the definitions of earlier scholars (e.g. Mieder 1993), define proverbs as “short, traditional utterances that encapsulate cultural truths and sum up recurrent social situations.” Yusuf and Mathangwane (2003:408) also define proverbs as “relatively short expressions which are usually associated with wisdom and are used to perform a variety of social functions.”

Yoruba proverbs are typically short although some can be unusually long. The short ones are usually in simple sentences while the long ones may run into two or three lines. A proverb may contain two short or long sentences built by parallelism or

objective correlative structures. There is hardly any hard and fast rule regarding the structure. The important aspect of Yoruba proverbs is that meanings of lexical items in them are not subject to literal interpretation. Meanings of proverbs mostly transcend the literal, superficial and are thus deeply connotative in the manner of poetic writings; the properties of which proverbs mostly share. Thus, target meanings are embedded in the deeper layers of signification of proverbs.

Just as meanings of proverbs are so deep, the production regime and time of production of proverbs can be very elusive. We are assuming greatly that proverbs do not just come into being in one moment without prior processes of developmental maturation. It however seems that people simply grow to proverbs. No African study has actually traced the passage of axiomatic sayings from the non-canonized form to the canonized genre of Yoruba proverbs. Tracing this, we assume, may lead us to the possible roots of creations of different proverbs perhaps by individual proverb makers. What we have known for now is that proverbs do not have individual authors as can be ascribed to novels, plays and poetry collections. Proverbs are communally produced like all other canonized oral genres such as *Oriki* (praise poetry), *Ijala* (hunters' panegyric), or *Ekun Iyawo* (bridal chants) to mention a few.

Proverbs are an oral store of the wisdom and values of Yoruba people and as such a body of knowledge with which life and its constituents in entirety are approached. For example, it is through proverbs that basic moral etiquette is taught in Yoruba setting. This is attested to by the saying *bi iro ba n lo logun odun, ojo kan lotito n ba* (if lie has been going on for twenty years, truth catches up with it in just one day). And with this there is a strong condemnation for telling lies and a commendation for saying the truth among the Yoruba. Thus, proverbs are an archive that is easily accessed by Yoruba matured grown-ups for varying social functions. The maturity in this case is marked by age and experience in the company of elders who are always deemed to be mobile archives of Yoruba proverbs. Aesthetically speaking, Yoruba proverbs are used in the following four ways. One, they are always engaged as formulaic cues or opening glees in any crucial and civilized socio-cultural and political discussions. Beyond this, proverbs are key weapons to unravel compli-

cations and entanglements in discourse. This function is self-referentially captured in the proverb below:

<i>Owe lesin oro</i>	<i>The proverb is the horse of the word</i>
<i>Boro ba sonu</i>	<i>When the word is lost</i>
<i>Owe ni a fi wa a</i>	<i>It is the proverb that is used to recover it.</i>

The 'word' in the translation of the above proverb is discourse and the preoccupation of discourse which could be the discovery of truth or conflict or any other crucial concern in a given discourse. In addition, proverbs are a great tool in exegetical discourse (Lawal, Ajayi and Raji 1997:638). Proverbs possess the intrinsic power to elucidate and elaborate upon ideas in the simplest ways and they equally have graphic strength of summation. Through the use of a single proverb, an idea can be reproduced in a manifold of exegetical works without being exhausted. The inexhaustive nature of proverb-informed interpretations is ensured by the use of proverbs to reinterpret proverbs and ad-infinitum.

The cumulative effect of the aforementioned three functions of proverbs is the fourth which is aesthetic beauty (Fakoya 2007). The Yoruba value beauty of thought and this can only be expressed by witty sayings that are couched using the best language combinations. Yoruba proverbs have proven beyond reasonable doubt to be an indisputably excellent domain of verbal dexterity, mental acuity and language use. There is an enviable social location for Yoruba men and women who have distinguished themselves in the handling of proverbs and language use in general.

Proverbs perform other sociolinguistic functions in Yoruba land in the same way that it is used to achieve a variety of functions in most cultures of the world (see Plopper [1969] on Chinese proverbs, Nwoga [1975] on Igbo proverbs, Nyembezi [1974] on Zulu proverbs). It can be used in the resolution of conflicts (Adegoju 2009). Conflict resolution is very important in any Yoruba setting as the Yoruba believe that people must cohabit peacefully; a belief which is evident in the saying that *alaafia loogun oro* (good health is the medicine of wealth). It is only when a society is healthy and there is no war or conflict that the inhabitants of such a society can acquire wealth. Thus, when-

ever there is a conflict, proverbs may be used to “advise, rebuke or shame another into compliance” (Finnegan 1970: 409-410).

Ironically, proverbs are also deployed in songs meant to ignite conflicts and wars. A special genre of Yoruba poetry, called *Orin Owe* (Proverb Songs), is particularly used in fomenting trouble and causing conflicts. Daramola (2007:122) remarks that in Yoruba traditional setting, “abusive proverbial songs usually flow freely most especially from the women” during quarrels. This is perhaps why the Yoruba believe that *orin ni saaju ote* (songs herald conspiracy). The use of proverbs to warn, persuade or dissuade people from behaving in a particular manner is common not only among the Yoruba but also to all races of the world. A Yoruba proverb says:

*Eni ba se ohun tenikan o se ri  
Oju re a ri ohun tenikan o riri*

*Whoever does what no one has ever done  
S/he will see what nobody has ever seen*

This proverb is a warning and if the person being warned still goes ahead with her/his intention, s/he should be prepared to face the consequence. Mensah (2010:251) seems to sum this up by saying:

Our traditional leaders of thoughts, and men of wisdom, use proverbs as a form of literary expression to warn, encourage, admonish, mock, advise, console and generally establish the verbal convention that is significant to the social order, given some social, cultural and historical circumstances.

#### ***Previous work on Yoruba proverbs***

Research on Yoruba proverbs is very robust as scholars have studied these from different perspectives. Some studies have looked at the sexist nature of Yoruba proverbs vis a vis those of English (Yusuf 1997; 1998; 2002), some have focused on the lexico-semantic and syntactic aspects of Yoruba proverbs (Alabi 2009; Asiyanbola 2007) and there are others which have examined proverbs from a pragmatic point of view (Fakoya 2007; Lawal, Ajayi and Raji 1997). A few scholars have also investigated Yoruba proverbs from a philosophical standpoint (Fasiku

2006; Fayemi 2007, 2010; Oke 2007) while Asiyanbola (2007) attempts a semiotico-syntactic analysis of some Yoruba proverbs. Lawal, Ajayi and Raji (1997) focus on the pragmatics of Yoruba proverbs in order to see if the knowledge of Yoruba proverbs can enrich the theory of pragmatics generally. Using six pairs of contradictory Yoruba proverbs, they attempt to examine the performative acts of the proverbs and, in addition, identify the contexts and corresponding competencies that could help in resolving the contradictions in the proverbs. The study finds out, among other things, that Yoruba proverbs can be used performatively to advise, assert, inform, recommend, make a claim, teach moral lessons or rebuke. They conclude that listeners arrive at the meanings of proverbs by making recourse to “the situational, psychological, social, sociological and cosmological contexts” (Lawal et al, 1997:656). Concerning the resolution of the contradictions in the proverbs, they claim that:

It is also in the deeper networks of context and competence relative to the pragmatics of each proverb that the seeming contradictions between certain pairs of proverbs can be resolved by identifying and employing background facts, feelings, beliefs, situations and view-points which are presupposed or implicated, as the case may be.

Several studies on Yoruba proverbs are concerned with feminist ideology by showing how women have been subjected to linguistic violence and culturally-rooted bias (Adetunji 2010; Balogun 2010; Daramola 2007; Yusuf 1994, 1998). Balogun (2010), using Yoruba proverbs that demonstrate gender bias against women, argues that the oppression of women in Africa is enhanced through proverbs while Yusuf (1997) compares forty-six English and Yoruba proverbs and shows that some of these proverbs dehumanize women by comparing them with animals, plants and so on (also see Yusuf 1994). Omenugha (2007) examines how sexist language is used in Nigerian English-medium newspapers to portray women while Fakoya’s (2007) work, which examines the discourse relevance of sexually-grounded proverbs in Yoruba, shows that most of these sexually-bias proverbs are misogynistic (Fakoya 2007:21) and should be used with caution in a mixed gathering. Daramola (2007), in his work, dis-

covers that offensive proverbial songs are often used among the Yoruba to depict gender construct.

Scholars have also worked on Nigeria hip-hop (e.g., Omoniyi 2006, 2009; Onanuga 2010), but no scholarly searchlight seems to have been directed to the use of proverbs in Nigeria hip-hop. The reason for the paucity of works on Nigeria hip-hop, in general, is because it just came onto the Nigerian musical scene in the early 2000. This is in addition to the fact that most people, including Nigerian scholars, associate hip-hop with thugger, vulgarity and perhaps violence because of the manners in which hip-hop artistes dress and use language. This paper seeks to contribute to the few existing studies on Nigerian hip-hop by focusing on the use of Yoruba proverbs in the lyrics of Adegbola Abolore Akande, a hip-hop artiste popularly known as 9ice. In order to achieve this, the study investigates the pragmatic acts that the proverbs used by 9ice exemplify. The data for this work are drawn from selected lyrics of 9ice such as *Gongo*, *Aso*, *Street Credibility*, *Photocopy*, *Petepete Alapomeji* and *Little Money Expended*.

### ***Theoretical framework***

Briefly discussed here is Speech Act Theory which is believed to be the originator of performativity. Speech Act Theory was developed by Austin (1962) in *How to Do Things with Words* using a small set of verbs which 'perform' what they say. Austin divides speech acts into three categories, namely: the *locution* of a speech act (the actual words used in an utterance), its *illocution* (the force or the intention of a speaker behind the utterance), and its *perlocution* (the effect of the utterance on the listener) (Jaworski and Coupland 2006:13). In Austin's sense, performatives consist in the tendency of some verbs to do what they say. Austin attempted a distinction between, among other things, performative and constative acts. On the one hand, constative acts are statements of fact which can be true or false and this means that constatives are verifiable and testable. Examples of these are assertions, reports and statements. On the other hand, performative acts are neither true nor false but when such utterances are made, it is believed that the speaker is not just saying something but s/he is doing something. Performatives are

therefore either felicitous or infelicitous i.e., successful or unsuccessful.

Searle (1977:34), in order to improve upon Austin work, classifies speech acts into five categories: representatives which are assertions, directives geared towards getting listeners to do something or to behave in certain ways, commissives which create obligation and commitment on the part of the speaker, expressives and, lastly declarations. However, Kreidler (1998:175-194) proposes seven major speech acts each of which contains specific pragmatic acts. These are:

- a) Assertive utterances which contains such acts as informing, predicting, reporting, alleging etc
- b) Performative utterances which includes the acts of arresting, sentencing, betting, naming, pronouncing, declaring and so on.
- c) Verdictive utterances that includes accusing, criticizing, blaming and praising
- d) Expressive utterances which includes acknowledging, admitting, apologizing and denying
- e) Directive utterances which cover acts like commanding, suggesting and requesting
- f) Commissive utterances which cover acts like offering to do something, agreeing to do something, refusing to do something and pledging; and,
- g) Phatic utterances which especially consist in the establishment and maintenance of social bonds such as greeting.

In this study, the focus is on specific acts of Kreidler as this gives us the freedom to navigate away from the general speech acts such as commissives and expressives and move on directly to such specific acts such as naming, advising, suggesting and so on.

Pennycook (2007:69) says performativity deals with “the way in which we perform acts of identity as an ongoing series of social and cultural performatives rather than as the expression of a prior identity.” Pennycook argues that identity is not pre-given, as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) would have us believe, but it is the productive force of language that constitutes identity. Citing English as an example, he notes that no language exists as

a prior system but a language undergoes the process of sedimentation through acts of identity. He questions the foundationalist categories by emphasizing that “identities are formed in the linguistic performance rather than pregiven” (p. 76). Also related to Performative Theory (PT) is Transgressive Theory. By Transgressive Theory, Pennycook emphasizes cultural flows from one setting to another setting (translocality), from one text to another text (transtextuality) and from one mode to another mode (transmodality).

Close to the heart of Kreidler’s performative utterances which perform among other things the pragmatic acts of naming, pronouncing and declaring is the task of Yoruba proverbs as an artistic horse that is in search of the word or genre of hip-hop. In the enterprise of indigenization and domestication, the artiste 9ice has deployed Yoruba proverbs to carry all the weight and nuances of the hip-hop genre for the Yoruba urban underclass and wealthy elite who ordinarily could not have wanted to patronize hip-hop music because of its association with vulgarity and violence. In using Yoruba proverbs in the naming of this genre, the hip-hop sub-genre of 9ice has also carried the weight of Yoruba proverbs in the manner of hybrid aesthetics. What this has done is to create a sub-genre of hip-hop that can be described as Yoruba hip-hop which a great majority of Yoruba people can identify with and describe as their own.

The aesthetic subsuming of hip-hop in Yoruba proverbs or vice-versa takes us further into Pennycook’s transgressive theory. What Pennycook considers as “cultural flow from one text to another” is what is aptly described as intertextuality in literary parlance. Intertextuality is the dialogue that exists between two different texts for varying purposes. The flow or dialogue of different texts could be to uphold or disapprove of an ideological or aesthetic project as the case may be. Whatever the purpose, the dialogue will result in either pastiche or eclecticism of art such that boundaries or territorial aesthetic purity of each text will be lost in the interest of cultural hybridity and globalization. The aesthetic process of deploying Yoruba proverbs in the hip-hop of 9ice is a performative pragmatic act which is geared towards naming, pronouncing and declaring Yoruba proverbs as a carrier of the weight of hip-hop or using hip-hop to carry the weight of

Yoruba reality through the aesthetic nuances and strategies of Yoruba proverbs.

According to Pennycook's theorizing, the Yoruba hip-hop identity that the sub-genre of hip-hop of 9ice attains is achieved within the context of linguistic and aesthetic performance of Yoruba proverbs and identity. As a new gatepost for the survival of Yoruba proverbs, 9ice's sub-genre of hip-hop becomes a more readily available domain for the dissemination of Yoruba ethical values for Nigerians and the global world. In one word, the artiste under study has deployed Yoruba proverbs not only to name and arrest hip-hop genre but also to carry the weight of hip-hop and for the genre of hip-hop to in turn carry the weight of Yoruba proverbs with the intents to indigenize it and produce a sub-genre of Yoruba hip-hop.

***Structure of Transgressive Text in 9ice's Hip-Hop***

The most crucial trademark of hip-hop in Nigeria is bilingualism (or sometimes multilingualism) as opposed to monolingualism which characterizes western hip-hop. 9ice's use of proverbs is replete with both intra-sentential and inter-sentential switches. For instance, in one of his songs, he says:

*They forget say ogbon ju agbara lo*  
*They forget that wisdom is greater than power*

Evident in this proverb is an intra-sentential switch from Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) to Yoruba. Hardly can we see any hip-hop artiste in Nigeria who does not make use of NPE. Since NPE is not regionally bound as other indigenous languages are, the use of NPE by artistes may be an attempt to appeal to a wider audience. More importantly, the use of NPE may be interpreted as one of the ways Nigerian artistes perform their 'Nigerianess' and by so doing, have projected their national identity. On other occasions, the switch is between English and Yoruba as the proverb below illustrates.

*I told yah egbe isu koni iyan*  
*I told you that pounded yam is superior to yam*

Apart from the fusion of codes generally, 9ice sometimes mixes English and Yoruba together in his proverbs as evident in the above example where the first clause 'I told yah' is clearly

English and the second is clearly Yoruba. The use of ‘yah’ as a pronoun instead of ‘you’ has its root in AAVE, a dialect which is arguably associated with the origin of hip-hop. In one of his albums entitled *Photocopy*, he warns other artistes not to copy him in the way he uses Yoruba as his use of Yoruba proverbs and idioms constitute his trademark. He says:

*Photocopy ko easy*  
*(It is not easy to copy others)*  
*You can never be like me*  
*This is my identity*  
*Teni nteni, takisa ntaatan.*  
*(One’s own is one’s own; rags belong to the dunghill)*

The switch here is at the inter-sentential level from English (This is my identity) to Yoruba *Teni nteni, takisa ntaatan*. The switch between English and Yoruba instances the meeting of the global and the local in 9ice’s songs and as Omoniyi (2006:198) has argued, this is one of the ways Nigerian hip-hop artistes have modified their songs “in resistance to a wholesale assimilation by global hip-hop culture and to carve out an independent glocal identity.” With this fusion of codes, 9ice seems to be engaged in “local articulation of identity” (Pennycook and Mitchell 2009). 9ice uses English as a global means of communication to ensure that he also makes some connection with the outside world; especially America where hip-hop supposedly originated from. This he achieves in his lyrics through several means. Apart from switching between Yoruba and English, the use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) syntactic features such as *BE* deletion and reduplication exemplify some of the means through which 9ice has made further connection with the global. The following proverb illustrates this:

*Money speaking speaking*  
*Any idea waiting waiting*

There is no doubt that there is a *BE* deletion in the first line of this proverb while it is also obvious that *speaking* and *waiting* are duplicated. These are syntactic features that characterize AAVE although these features are also present in non-Standard Nigerian English (non-SNE). It could, however, be argued that in

the context above the *BE* deletion is an AAVE feature rather than a feature of non-SNE since 9ice is highly educated.

### ***Data Analysis and Discussion***

We proceed here to analyse and discuss the Yoruba proverbs in the lyrics of 9ice with the aim of showing some of the pragmatic acts that the proverbs used have enunciated. It is important to remark here that a pragmatic act classification of proverbs can only be done effectively by making recourse to the contexts in which they are used. Also important is the fact that there may be an overlap as a proverb can perform more than one pragmatic act. It is possible for a proverb that performs the pragmatic act of warning to also threaten. In this paper, the Yoruba proverbs used are translated into English. Sometimes, a proverb is given a literal translation and sometimes a metaphoric one. However, attempts are made to ensure that the ideas in Yoruba proverbs are, to a large extent, reflected and maintained in the English translations. The identified pragmatic acts such as informing, teaching, asserting, boasting, bragging, warning, threatening and inciting are neatly grouped under three broad headings which are depiction of local culture, defence of commercial precincts and political music making.

### ***Depiction of Local Culture***

To begin with, 9ice claims to have learnt the use of proverbs from his 75-year-old grandmother with whom he lived while growing up and who always thought and spoke in proverbs. With this background, his approach to music was to recreate the language use culture in which he grew up and create an entirely new sub-genre of hip-hop that would be his and Yoruba at the same time. The principal deployment of Yoruba proverbs as horses of culture in the hip-hop sub-genre of 9ice, as hinted at earlier, is for the effects of local colour that will mark the music as a creative and cultural expression of the Yoruba. 9ice's hip-hop sub-genre therefore becomes elevated given the language richness that accompanies the wisdom contained in Yoruba proverbs. His hip-hop has hereby been invested with marked respectability that attracts the patronage of the Yoruba and Nigerian middle class, educated and wealthy elite around the country who hitherto, as argued earlier, would not have listened to hip-hop music owing to its vulgarity and gangsterism. The intertextual context has

served to tame the vulgar contents such that most of 9ice's erotic lyrics are couched using a heavy shield of euphemisms that most likely would shut out under-age children.

The various boastings and braggings of 9ice, using Yoruba proverbs, are presented following socially acceptable modes of addressing seniority and superiority. Ultimately, the eclectic experimentation of 9ice in the interest of indigenization of hip-hop for the Yoruba people has resulted in a transgressive pragmatic act and loss of aesthetic purity on the part of hip-hop or what could be appropriately described as globalization. The global hip-hop has been halfway deterritorialized to serve the interest of Yoruba proverbs as a survival medium and for the Yoruba people who find it comfortable identifying with hip-hop. The hip-hop of 9ice performs Yoruba ethical values and worldviews (Alim2003:55) through the pragmatic acts of teaching, informing and recommending various aspects of Yoruba life as depicted in the song-texts below:

1)

*This is my identity  
Teni nteni, takisa ntaatan  
  
Apalara, igunpa niyekan*

*This is my identity  
One's own is one's own; rags  
belong to the dunghill  
Your arm is your kin, and your  
elbow your family*

2)

*Daddy, you know you always  
tell us  
To live in harmony  
Ba reni fehinti  
Bi ole laari  
Oju to ma bani kale  
  
ko ma ni f'arose'pin*

*Daddy, you know you always  
tell us  
To live in harmony  
If there is no one to rely on  
We would be like lazy ones  
The eyes that will serve one till  
old age  
Do not run liquid matter in the  
morning*

3)

*That thing called love, omo  
no be film trick  
E dey do me anywhere wey I  
dey like*

*That thing called love, friend, it  
is not a film trick  
It always rocks my being to  
want*

<i>make she dey there, together</i>	<i>Her to be with me all the time</i>
<i>We are meant to be, forever</i>	<i>We are meant to be forever</i>
<i>Ekuro l'alabaku ewa</i>	<i>The kernel dies with the bean</i>

The song in excerpt 1 celebrates one of the cardinal principles of the Yoruba concept of *omoluwabi* (gentleman or gentlewoman of integrity) within the context of dignity of labour to earn a respectable place in the society. Yoruba people place much emphasis on work because it humanizes and enhances a befitting social location unto whoever can dissipate his or her sweat in a choice trade or profession. It is believed that whoever does not work cannot be an important person and thus would not be accorded any form of integrity in life. It is this work ethic that informs the notion that you are what your handiwork can make of you. Therefore, one of the most treasured parts of the human body should be his or her arms, which symbolically represent all other parts engaged in all socially-acceptable and socially-evolving professional pursuits in the society. Contained in this performative pragmatic act of informing is indigenization of hip-hop as a forum for cultural education. What 9ice is doing here is shoring himself up in the work ethic of his culture with the full implications that his commitment to his career is the only thing that can see him up the ladder of his set goals as an individual worthy of emulation.

It is this same ethic that is further pursued in excerpt 2 in which he recalls the teacher figure of his father and the generational mode of imparting knowledge in Yoruba culture. Father in this sense could be literal or symbolic because we can observe two levels of artistic heritage that 9ice is indebted to in terms of the two songs in excerpts 1 and 2. His first point of indebtedness goes to the tradition of proverbs that are a product of the Yoruba work worldview. His second point of indebtedness goes to scholars of Yoruba literature who inscribed the Yoruba work ethic into memorable poems in Yoruba Primary School books which 9ice must have read while in school. Lines such as *bi a koba r'eni fehinti, bi ole laari* (if there is no one to rely on, we would be like lazy ones) and *apalara, igunpa niyekan* (Your arm is your kin, and your elbow your family) were directly lifted by 9ice from the must-memorised title *Ise Logun Ise* of those days into the third level of artistic heritage brought about by his trans-

gressive pragmatic act of arresting the hip-hop genre for his proverb-imbued sub-genre of hip-hop.

The song in excerpt 3 asserts the Yoruba conception of loving, relationship and family life. According to the Yoruba, the coming together of a young man and a young woman transcends mere realities of the material incarnation. In popular parlance, they say, husband and wife belong to each other both in life and in death. This goes to show that Yoruba people do not approve of divorce in relationships because it tampers with what they describe as *okun ebi* (family thread/cord) which they live to continually build as an essentially family-oriented ethnic group. It is this social ideology that is captured in *ekuro lalabaku ewa* (the kernel dies with the bean). *9ice* is thus evoking the essential social and sacred bonds that are at the heart of marriages in Yoruba land. The pragmatic act of asserting, here, sums it up that both in life and death, husbands and wives must never be separated.

#### ***Defence of Commercial Precincts***

A couple of pragmatic acts are deployed by popular artistes ranging from boasting, warning and in some cases cursing in order to engage supposed or real enemies. We must state right from the outset that beyond being a culture producing musical form, hip-hop music is a commercial genre aiming to break even in terms of profit. What this translates into is that hip-hop artistes deploy all strategies to hold fast their clientele and patronage at all levels of social strata. That the same Nigerian market has to be shared by all hip-hop artistes demands all forms of struggles to attain prominence. Depending on creative ingenuity, some hip-hop artistes would secure more patronage than others and become more successful.

This success is marked in several ways. First and foremost is the change in the social status of the artiste from the lower rung of the society to becoming a big man like the patrons who brought him up. The indices of the present status range from having free money to flaunt affluence to numerous abroad trips for performances, winning of awards, being honoured with chieftaincy and honorary institutional titles, maintaining a fleet of cars and mansions and a host of others. Attainment of these or getting close to attaining some of them could become a basis of jealousy and competition among musical peers or between artistes who

have attained stardom and those just coming up. Largely, boasting and warning are pragmatic act tools used in contesting and defending creative and/or commercial space that is jealously guarded by each hip-hop artiste as contained in the following:

4)

<i>Omoj'omo lo l'Adigun</i>	<i>Children are greater than children, Adigun</i>
<i>Mo koja omo eniyan t'a n peri</i>	<i>I am more than a person whose guardian soul can be put under a spell</i>
<i>B'aba r'erin, ka so pe a r'erin</i>	<i>If we see an elephant, let's agree we see an elephant</i>
<i>Ajanaku koja mori nkan fi wi</i>	<i>The elephant is beyond The grasp of a single eye span</i>
....	
<i>T'abaju ada soke ni igbaagba</i>	<i>If we throw up a cutlass countless times</i>
<i>bee ni</i>	<i>Yes</i>
<i>Ib ipelebe lo ma fi le le</i>	<i>It will always fall on its side</i>

5)

<i>I'm beyond your beef talk</i>	<i>I'm beyond your beef talk</i>
<i>Ojumo kan, imokan</i>	<i>One day is one knowledge</i>
<i>Ere kan, arakan, asakan</i>	<i>One show is one wonder and one culture</i>
<i>Just like Chameleon</i>	<i>Just like Chameleon</i>
<i>Olomosikata loba agbado</i>	<i>The sparsely populated maize cob is the king of maize</i>

6)

<i>I told ya</i>	<i>I told you</i>
<i>You can never be like me</i>	<i>You can never be like me</i>
<i>Now I see, no be for free</i>	<i>Now I see, it is not free</i>
<i>Kogba agidi, e ya lo ka A B D</i>	<i>It is not by struggle, just go and read your A, B, D</i>
<i>E ko A B C, e joo same nani</i>	<i>Learn A, B, C, it is all the same</i>
<i>Itakun to so gba</i>	<i>What is good for the goose</i>
<i>Tolohun o so legede</i>	<i>Should also be good for the gander</i>

<i>Melo la feka</i>	<i>How many can we count</i>
<i>Ninu ehin adipele</i>	<i>In Adepele's teeth?</i>
<i>I told ya</i>	<i>I told you</i>
<i>Egbe isu kon'iyen</i>	<i>Pounded yam is superior to yam</i>
<i>Ajurawa lo jo</i>	<i>Being superior to one's peer</i>
<i>Ani tijaadi ko</i>	<i>Is not a test of wrestling</i>
7)	
<i>I'm a coded tune pick, who wan tackle me</i>	<i>I'm a coded tune pick, who wants to challenge me</i>
<i>Ere taja fogun odun sa</i>	<i>The race run by a dog for twenty years</i>
<i>Irin faaji ni fun esin mi,</i>	<i>is child's play for a horse (The strength of a horse is unrivalled)</i>
<i>Adigun always moving</i>	<i>Adigun is always moving/ ahead of them</i>

The proverbs in excerpts 4 -7 above are used by 9ice to boast that he has no match among Nigerian hip-hoppers. Excerpt 4 is an example of boasting but largely situated within the cultural orientation of the Yoruba people who believe firmly in the mutual interplay between the material and supernatural dimensions of existence. It is within this tradition that people's fate and destiny are held to be open to spiritual tampering and attacks by opponents through the services of herbalists, pastors, Moslem clerics or witches. It is not such a ridiculous development that popular artistes seek the assistance of herbalists or witches to protect and promote their musical career. It is this tradition that has found expression in the boasting of 9ice that no one is capable of invoking his *ori* (head) guardian soul for evil machination. Using two metaphoric proverbs, he has compared himself to an elephant whose massiveness cannot be denied or undermined and to a cutlass that always falls on its side no matter which way it is thrown by enemies, especially to achieve a desired negative result.

In excerpt 5, he boasts about his achievements and likens himself to a Chameleon. In Yoruba tradition, it is believed that a Chameleon has many clothes and can choose whichever pleases

him at any time. Before referring to himself as a Chameleon, however, he claims that he could afford to come up with a new song, a new style on a regular basis as he has more than enough in his repertoire: *Ojumo kan, imo kan* (one day is one knowledge). Thus, he is the self-acclaimed ‘King’ of Nigerian hip-hoppers *the sparsely populated maize cob who is the king of maize*. In excerpt 6, he likens his colleagues to kindergarten pupils who need to start by first of all mastering the alphabet of hip-hop. The first proverb in this excerpt which makes reference to *igba* and *elegede* signals the pragmatic act of *equaling* which is evident in other Yoruba proverbs like *Ibi koju ibi, bi a se bi eru la bi omo* (childbearing is the same, the same way a free child is born is the way a slave is born).

However, the fact that 9ice uses this proverb to show that A, B, D (the Yoruba letters) and A, B, C (the English letters) are the same and ask his colleagues to learn these letters indicates another act: *arrogating*. He boasts that his achievements and songs are too numerous to count by using a fragmented proverb: *Melo la fe ka ninu ehin Adepele* (how many can we count in Adepele’s teeth?). This proverb was fragmented probably to match with the rhythm and tempo of the song. The full version of this proverb in Yoruba is: *melo la fe ka ninu ehin Adepele, tiwaju ogun, teyin ogbon, otalenirinwo lo subululelehin* (how many of Adepele’s teeth can we count? She has twenty front teeth, the back teeth are thirty and four hundred and sixty at the back). Two other proverbs which depict 9ice as being boastful are *egbe isu koniyan* and *A jurawa lo, tija kadi ko* which are translated as (pounded yam is superior to yam) and (being superior to one’s peer is not a test of wrestling) respectively. Although the English proverb “What is good for the goose is also good for the gander” does not really exist in Yoruba, this English proverb seems to be the appropriate loan translation from English that carries the weight of the Yoruba proverb *Itakun to so agbe, lo so elegede*.

These proverbs further suggest that 9ice sees himself as the best among his colleagues and as if to strengthen his opinion, he again, in excerpt 7 likens himself to a horse and his colleagues to dogs by saying *Ere taja fogun odun sa, irin faaji ni fesin* (The race run by a dog for twenty years is child’s play for a horse, i.e., The strength of horse is unrivalled). What takes his colleagues several years to achieve, the self-acclaimed King of Nigerian

hip-hop has achieved even more without any stress; a proverb which further cements his claim that he is superior to other hip-hoppers. With these proverbs, 9ice has created for himself and presented himself to other artistes as somebody whom they should respect and should accept as their leader.

***Political Music Making***

Undoubtedly, political music making and protest traditions are crucial political processes in indigenous Yoruba societies. Oral chanters participate actively as the conscience of the society in challenging political misrule in the interest of common men. To a large extent, oral chanters enjoy immunity in the cause of the common people such that it is popularly held that *Oba ii p'okorin* (the king never molests an artist) (Isola 1992, 19). The protest tradition has survived into the post-independence Nigerian society in the music of artistes such as Fela Anikulapo Kuti, Ologundudu, and Beautiful Nubia in the recent times. Being a Yoruba artiste, 9ice must have been influenced by this rich tradition of protest music. His own contribution to the tradition would be his heavy deployment of Yoruba proverbs within the context of hip-hop performance. A major pragmatic act enunciated by 9ice through Yoruba proverbs in this regard is warning. Through this act, he has deployed his hip-hop to making political statements in relation to issues of health, sickness and well-being of the Nigerian society. The purpose of his artistic intervention in politics is to spread awareness and raise consciousness of common people to the socio-cultural, political and economic condition of their being. Nigerians are thereafter left with whatever they think they can do with the awareness of the condition. The songs below confirm the use of warning for possible incitement for mass action:

8)

*Sebe l'ema sun*

*Is this where you will be sleeping?*

*Te ba sope e o mon Kankan*

*If you say you do not know what is going on*

*Eyin aro lema waa*

*You will be behind the hearth*

*Ojo re bi ana ta gb'ominira,  
1960*

*It was just like yesterday that  
we got independence in 1960*

<i>N'igba yen tis easy gege bo se wi</i>	<i>Then, the country was so easy and good as told</i>
<i>Ta rugbo, t'omidan lo ndunu pa ti d'ominira</i>	<i>Everybody was happy because of independence</i>
<i>Ominira indeed abi, ewo naira wa</i>	<i>It has indeed become our undoing, look at our naira</i>
<i>Ilu polukurumusu</i>	<i>The land is in turmoil</i>
<i>T'ewe t'agba lonj'eyan won nisu</i>	<i>Everybody is suffering</i>
<i>Abe ori, ewe eri, sugbon e o fewi</i>	<i>The youth have felt it but they do not want to say a word</i>
<i>Abe ori, agba eri atenuje lofe p'ayin</i>	<i>The elders have seen it but kept quiet because of what they want to eat</i>
<i>Petepete t'ana ni popa</i>	<i>Whoever gets splashed by the mud that was</i>
<i>Eni ba taba, kolo mo feni</i>	<i>hit with a stick should run away</i>
<i>Bo dasiko 'bo yen won a wa s'adugbo</i>	<i>When it is election time, politicians will come</i>
<i>Won a'somo jeje</i>	<i>And they will behave themselves</i>
<i>Eje kan wole tan</i>	<i>Let them win elections</i>
<i>Gbogbo eje tan je a w'oke se</i>	<i>All their pledges will go unfulfilled</i>
<i>Toba tun se were, la siko ibo</i>	<i>At another election time</i>
<i>Won ani k'odo to lo bere</i>	<i>They will get the youth to line up endlessly</i>
<i>Won a senu mere, kalokalo gbenkan mi senu wuye</i>	<i>But keep a smart sealed lip Gambling machine that gulps money without a trace</i>
<i>Jagunlabi tuntun wole</i>	<i>The upstart has won the election again</i>
<i>Talo dibo fun?</i>	<i>Who voted for him?</i>
<i>Pasan ta fi nayale</i>	<i>The cane used to beat the senior wife</i>
<i>o nbe lori aja fun.</i>	<i>Is kept in the rafter for the junior wife</i>
<i>Odo elo tunra mu</i>	<i>Youth of the land, go and buckle up</i>

9)

<i>Make dem talk</i>	<i>Let them talk</i>
<i>Oun ton ri lobe, ton se waru</i>	<i>What they have seen in the soup</i>
<i>owo</i>	<i>That makes them to recline their arm</i>
<i>Make dem talk</i>	<i>Let them talk</i>
<i>Kulikuli poun kan, odi naira</i>	<i>One pound groundnut cake has become one naira</i>
<i>kan</i>	
<i>Make dem talk</i>	<i>Let them talk</i>
<i>We want to know wassup, idi</i>	<i>We want to know why the price of farina has risen</i>
<i>ti garri se won</i>	
<i>Make dem talk</i>	<i>Let them talk</i>

The pragmatic act of warning in excerpt 8 performed by 9ice and Asa, another rap artiste in Nigeria, is contained in the proverb *petepete t'ana ni popa, eni bata ba, kolo mo feni* (whoever gets splashed by the mud that was hit with a stick should run away) which is a strong signal to corrupt post-independence rulers who have ravaged the economy shortly after the brief euphoria of independence. The warning is stringent as it is couched within two tropes of forces of mobilization which are the first stanza *sebe l'ema sun?* (is that where you will sleep?) and the last line of the excerpt *odo elo tunra mu* (youth of the land, go and buckle up) that warns the people to shake off their docility and get ready for a popular onslaught against the reprobate Nigerian power elite. The second proverb *pasan ta fi nayale o nbe lori aja fun* (the cane used to beat the senior wife is kept in the rafter for the junior wife) equally warns about terrible consequences from common men to the dishonest political elite who use unscrupulous means and strategies to rig elections and wangle their way into offices. They are compared to junior wives who become favourites of husbands all of a sudden but who would soon meet up with the fate of senior wives. In both proverbs, beating is used to anchor the spirit of the warning.

Excerpt 9 by 2 Shotz, a popular rap artiste in Nigeria, featuring 9ice is realized as a court of the people in which corrupt Nigerian leaders are summoned to render accounts for political misrule using the proverb *oun tori lobe, to se waru owo* (what they have seen in the soup that makes them to recline their arm). In this proverb, the pragmatic act of arresting is being carried out

and an invitation to come and explain the reasons behind the reclining of the arm is a summon served by the society to the small ruling elite. The ruling elite have been summoned to explain the skyrocketing increase in the price of goods and basic amenities of living that serve as guarantors of a good life and human dignity. The summon therefore is a symbolic call for political action and mass mobilization to oust the undesirable ruling elite. In putting music at the service of the people as exemplified by the pragmatic acts of the three proverbs identified under political music making, 9ice has chosen to also be functioning within the tradition of Yoruba oral chanters as the fearless conscience of society for the modern post-independence Yoruba and Nigerian societies.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined the pragmatic acts enunciated by the proverbs 9ice engages in his sub-genre of hip-hop using conceptual and theoretical insights from Kreidler and Pennycook. It is observed that 9ice has deployed Yoruba proverbs to perform, in the main, the pragmatic acts of naming, pronouncing and arresting the hip-hop genre as a sub-genre that bears the oral and musical orientation of the Yoruba people. Within this broad context of arresting and marking the hip-hop genre as that of the Yoruba, 9ice's proverbs have also been engaged in a variety of pragmatic acts such as boasting, bragging, warning, threatening, inciting, teaching, instructing, and suggesting to paint local colour and teach Yoruba ethical values, defend his commercial territory against external aggressors and address political issues current in his society. 9ice's musical experiment has been in full keeping with Pennycook's notion of identity as a product of performance.

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