

African Multidisciplinary Journal of Development (AMJD)

Page: 560 – 571

<https://amjd.kiu.ac.ug>

SPEECH ACTS AND GENDER IDEOLOGY IN SELECTED YORUBA SONG LYRICS

Funke O. OladunmoyeDepartment of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. Email: funkeoladunmoye@gmail.com

Abstract

Women's representation in Yoruba musical discourse reflects entrenched ideological structures that reinforce gender hierarchies and normalise patriarchal expectations. Although *Àpàlà* and *Fuji* music are popularly celebrated as cultural heritage and entertainment, they also serve as pragmatic sites where gender identities are constructed, regulated, and legitimised through language. Despite the growing body of scholarship on Yoruba musical traditions, limited attention has been paid to the illocutionary mechanisms through which gendered meanings are enacted and sustained in song lyrics. This study investigates how speech acts encode gender ideology in selected Yoruba musical texts, focusing on directives, insults, praises, and evaluative statements that shape cultural perceptions of women's roles and identities. Guided by Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, the study analyses four purposively selected songs: *Àyínlá Ọmọwura's Agídí ò ẹ́ ló ilé ọkọ* and *Ọ̀rò kan jẹ mí lógún*, and *Abass Àkàndé Ọ̀bésèrè's Àsàkàsà* and *Freedom Compilation*. The analysis reveals that illocutionary acts, especially directives and hostile expressives, function as mechanisms of power and social regulation. In *Ọmọwura's Àpàlà*, directives routinely position women as subordinates who must obey, serve, and conform to established moral codes, while insults and negative evaluations construct them as troublesome, irrational, or morally suspect. In *Ọ̀bésèrè's Fuji*, praise expressions, though ostensibly positive, primarily valorise women for physical attractiveness, sexual desirability, emotional devotion, and compliance with male-defined ideals. Across the songs, evaluative statements frame femininity within restrictive moral and aesthetic binaries that privilege male authority. The study concludes that Yoruba song lyrics operate as ideological texts where speech acts serve as tools for reinforcing, rationalising, and reproducing gender inequality. By foregrounding how directives, insults, praises, and evaluations perform cultural power, the research demonstrates that everyday musical expressions continue to shape and sustain patriarchal constructions of femininity within Yoruba society.

Keywords: Speech Acts, Gender Ideology, Yoruba Music, Directives, Expressives, Patriarchy

Introduction

Language is a powerful instrument through which societies construct, transmit, and legitimise social values. In African contexts, where oral artistry remains central to cultural life, musical performance serves not only as entertainment but also as a reservoir of communal ideologies and social commentary (Ajayi, 2004; Barber, 1991). Yoruba musical traditions, ranging from traditional oral poetry to contemporary popular genres, constitute important cultural archives in which identities, moralities, and gender relations are discursively produced. Music, like proverb, chant, and praise poetry, functions as a communicative practice where linguistic choices shape social perception and where gendered identities are continuously negotiated.

Across Yoruba cultural production, the representation of women has historically reflected patriarchal expectations, moral scrutiny, and prescriptive roles. In traditional verbal arts such as *ìjálá*, *ewì*, *oríkì*, and folkloric songs, women are often depicted as mothers, wives, nurturers, moral guardians, or, conversely, as potential sources of disorder, temptation, and social instability (Olateju, 2005; Odeunmi, 2010). These portrayals are deeply embedded in Yoruba cosmology where femininity is policed through cultural proverbs, metaphors, and maxims that encode societal

expectations of chastity, humility, and domestic obedience. Such discursive patterns are reproduced in modern genres, indicating a continuity of gender ideology across time.

Within African popular music, women's representation mirrors this long-standing ambivalence. Genres such as Apala, Fuji, Sakara, and Highlife, though diverse in performance aesthetics, share similar discursive tendencies in their portrayal of femininity. Àpàlà musicians like Àyínlá Ọmọwúra and Fújì artistes such as Abass Àkàndé Ọbésèrè frequently deploy language in ways that reinforce social expectations, admonish women, or evaluate their moral character. Studies show that such musical forms often present women either as vital homemakers who stabilise families or as wayward subjects whose behaviour threatens communal norms (Adegbite, 1991; Waterman, 1990; Adedeji, 2010). Songs thus become ideological tools through which communities regulate behaviour and articulate collective anxieties about marriage, sexuality, and morality.

The interrelationship between language, music, and gender representation in Yoruba tradition is therefore profound as music operates as a linguistic event where speech acts, directives, insults, praise, evaluations, warnings, perform meaningful social actions (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Through textual choices, tonal variation, performance techniques, and audience interaction, artistes shape how women are seen, judged, and positioned within the cultural imaginary. As Obasi (2014) argues, African popular music often functions as a “discursive arena of social authority,” where male musicians articulate gender norms that reflect and reinforce patriarchal dominance. For the Yoruba specifically, musicians serve as moralists, social commentators, and cultural intermediaries whose language influences how gender roles are internalised.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the cultural prominence of Yoruba musical genres such as Àpàlà and Fújì, scholarly attention has largely focused on their aesthetic, historical, and socio-political dimensions, with limited engagement with **the** pragmatic operations of language through which gender meanings are constructed in the lyrics themselves. While prior studies have explored themes, performance contexts, sociological meanings, and moral commentaries in Yoruba music (Haynes, 2016; Ogundokun, 2010; Olaniyan, 2004), fewer have interrogated how musicians use **illocutionary acts**, such as directives, insults, praises, and evaluative statements, to shape cultural perceptions of women and reproduce patriarchal ideology. Consequently, the underlying linguistic mechanisms that position women as subordinate, morally regulated subjects or as objects of sensual admiration remain underexplored. This gap is significant because Yoruba music continues to function as a powerful discursive space that influences everyday understandings of femininity, gender roles, and social power. Therefore, there is a need for a pragmatic analysis that reveals how speech acts embedded in song lyrics operate as tools of ideological reinforcement, shaping and sustaining gendered hierarchies in contemporary Yoruba society. This study examines speech acts as vehicles of gender ideology in selected Yoruba songs, focusing on how directives, insults, praises, and evaluative statements construct women's roles, moral expectations, and social value. Drawing on Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, the study investigates how illocutionary acts function as mechanisms of power, social regulation, and identity construction within Yoruba musical discourse. By analysing how musicians linguistically perform authority, moral judgement, or praise, this research shows how Yoruba music continues to shape cultural understandings of femininity and reinforces, sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly, patriarchal ideologies. The study thus contributes to broader debates on African popular culture, gender representation, and the socio-pragmatics of music.

Text Synopsis

In *Agídí ò ṣé é lo ilé ọkọ* (“stubbornness is not good for matrimony”), Àyínlá satirically condemns women as naturally headstrong, wasteful, and lacking humility, framing them as pleasure-seekers dependent on their husbands. The song prescribes meekness and submission as the only virtues

capable of sustaining marriage and securing a husband's enduring love, thereby reinforcing patriarchal expectations of female docility and domestic discipline.

In *Òrò.kan jẹ mí lógún* Ayínlá descends heavily on the condescending attitude of women and the infidelity in women and their indolence. Ayínlá's criticises their extravagance, promiscuity, and obsession of appearance, linking bleaching to infertility and poor motherhood. The artiste laments the immorality of modern women, particularly on their obsession with bleaching. He admonishes them to remain the way God created them rather than altering their complexion to satisfy worldly vanity. Ayínlá *Qmowura* cautions women against skin bleaching and its consequences.

In *Àṣàkasà* ("Lewdness"), Òbésèré proudly positions himself as the originator of lewd slang in Fújì music, framing his sexually explicit style as divinely sanctioned. Through a narrative of seeking wisdom from God, he legitimises vulgarity and objectification of women's bodies as a unique musical gift, blending pride in his artistry with metaphoric expressions that eroticise and commodify female sexuality.

"*Freedom Compilation*" by Abass Àkàndé Òbésèré, highlights a departure from his usual vulgar style to a more moral and instructive tone. The song advises both men and women, especially bachelors and spinsters that patience and tolerance in searching for a partner will lead to finding a virtuous and suitable spouse. It emphasizes mutual love and emotional openness, urging women to reciprocate affection sincerely. Additionally, the artiste expresses his importance in his relationship, noting how his wife lovingly calls him "my dearest husband." He also portrays his partner as youthful, innocent, and exceptionally beautiful, using descriptive Yoruba expressions to emphasize her physical and symbolic purity.

Review of Relevant Empirical Studies

Empirical research on African oral and popular music shows that song texts serve as important ideological spaces where gender relations, social expectations, and cultural norms are discursively negotiated. Scholars have examined how linguistic choices in traditional and contemporary musical forms encode societal beliefs and reinforce power structures. This section reviews empirical studies that intersect language, pragmatics, gender representation, and Yoruba musical traditions.

Empirical studies on gender representation in Yoruba music demonstrate that women are often framed within patriarchal expectations. Adebayo (2019), analysing ten Yoruba popular songs, found that women were consistently represented through moralistic lenses, emphasising chastity, obedience, and domestic responsibility. The study showed a dominance of derogatory lexical items and metaphors that portray women as disruptive, materialistic, or morally suspect. Similarly, Adejumo (2017), in a discourse analysis of Fuji music, observed that male musicians strategically use evaluative expressions and insults to reinforce gender hierarchy. Fuji performances, he argues, situate women as subjects whose moral conduct is constantly monitored, while men are positioned as judges and custodians of order. Studies specifically examining **speech acts in African musical discourse** have revealed the pragmatic functions of directives, warnings, praises, and insults. Odebunmi (2007), in a pragmatic study of Yoruba song lyrics, identified directives and evaluatives as recurrent illocutionary forms used to instruct social behaviour, often targeted at women.

The study concluded that directives serve as moral instruments that encode cultural prescriptions concerning femininity, domesticity, and marriage. In a similar vein, Musyoka (2018) examined Kenyan popular songs and found that insults and negative evaluations were used to ridicule women's perceived moral failures, indicating a continental pattern of gendered linguistic policing.

From the perspective of **pragmatics and ideology**, scholars have demonstrated that African music employs language to shape social cognition. Ezenwa-Ohaeto (2019), analysing Nollywood and musical discourse, found that proverbs and metaphors function as ideological tools for judging women's behaviour and reinforcing patriarchal norms. Aboh and Oha (2017) likewise examined Nigerian performance discourse and discovered that speech acts such as warnings, admonitions,

and condemnations are central strategies through which musicians discipline or evaluate women in public spaces. These empirical findings support the argument that African popular music operates as a gendered arena of power and identity formation.

Oladunmoye (2025) explores the ideological representation of women in the lyrics of Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's Àpàlà and Abass Àkàndé Ọ̀bésèrè's Fuji using critical stylistics, Halliday's transitivity system, and identity theory. The study identifies four dominant discourse issues: patriarchal hegemony, objectification, sexuality, and stereotyping, through which women are represented as disruptors, subordinates, conceited figures, sex objects, and stereotyped caregivers. These forms of representation are underpinned by ideologies of patriarchy, conservatism, liberalism, and feminism. The findings reveal that Yoruba musical discourse not only mirrors but also sustains gender ideologies, while also allowing traces of liberal feminist perspectives that contest patriarchal dominance. The study underscores how language in Yoruba popular music functions as a powerful site for the construction, reinforcement, and occasional negotiation of gender ideology across different musical eras.

Research on politeness and gender relations further highlights asymmetries in the treatment of men and women. Orji and Nweke (2020) investigated Nigerian song lyrics using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and found that face-threatening acts were predominantly directed at women, especially in contexts of sexuality, marriage, and economic behaviour. These findings align with Babatunde and Alabi's (2015) investigation of Yoruba verbal arts, which concluded that insults and unmitigated directives are commonly deployed against women due to cultural privileges afforded to male speakers.

Empirical studies on Apala and Fuji traditions **also** underscore the ideological weight of these genres. Adeoti (2010), examining Tunde Kelani's musical films, argued that Apala discourse uses proverbs and moralistic language to frame women as either stabilising or destabilising forces in society. Similarly, Waterman (1990), in his ethnography of Yoruba popular music, documented how Fuji performers employ speech acts, especially admonitions and praises, to reinforce gender expectations in performance contexts. These studies affirm that Yoruba musical genres are not only artistic forms but powerful ideological platforms shaping gendered socialisation.

Collectively, empirical scholarship reveals a consistent pattern that Yoruba and African musical discourse uses speech acts to construct, evaluate, and regulate women's roles, while directives, insults, praise, and evaluative statements function as linguistic tools through which musicians enact patriarchal authority and shape gender ideology. These findings underscore the need for a pragmatic study that links speech act performance with gender representations in Yoruba song lyrics, a gap that the present study addresses.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory which provide linguistic tools for analysing how Yoruba song lyrics construct and transmit gender ideology. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) propose that language is a form of action, not merely a vehicle for conveying information. Austin's (1962) foundational claim that "to say something is to do something" establishes language as a form of action. Building on this, Searle (1969) categorises illocutionary acts, such as directives, expressives, commissives, and verdictives, as central to understanding how speakers perform meaningful actions through words.

Speech Act Theory distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, emphasising that speakers perform actions, such as directing, insulting, praising, and evaluating, through utterances. In the context of Yoruba musical discourse, speech acts enable the analysis of how musicians command, admonish, insult, praise, or morally evaluate women. These linguistic actions function beyond entertainment; they shape behavioural expectations and reinforce patriarchal norms. The framework is therefore useful for identifying how musicians use directives

to instruct or regulate women's conduct, how they use insult to discipline, ridicule, or delegitimise female agency, and how praise acts as reward for compliance to culturally prescribed gender roles and evaluative statements to shape perceptions of women's moral and social roles. By examining the illocutionary forces encoded in song lyrics, the study reveals how gender norms are enacted through linguistic performance.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using pragmatic analysis, drawing specifically on Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory to examine how linguistic actions in Yoruba song lyrics construct gender ideology. Four songs were purposively selected for their thematic relevance to gender representation: two Àpàlà songs by Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà (*Òrò Kan Jẹ Mí Lógún* and *Agídí ò ẹ é lẹ ilé ọkọ*) and two Fuji songs by Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè (*Àsàkasà* and *Freedom Compilation*). The songs were sourced from audio recordings and online platforms, transcribed from Yoruba and translated into English with sensitivity to cultural nuance, ensuring that proverbs, insults, directives, and praise expressions retained their pragmatic and ideological force. Analysis focused on identifying key speech acts, particularly directives, insults, praise acts, and evaluative statements, through which gendered meanings are enacted. Austin and Searle's framework guided the identification of illocutionary forces embedded in the songs, enabling an understanding of how musicians perform actions such as admonishing, commanding, warning, praising, or morally judging women. The methodological emphasis is therefore on how speech acts encode gender norms and sustain patriarchal ideology within Yoruba musical discourse. The scope of the study is limited to the selected songs and does not extend to the artistes' full repertoires or performance contexts.

Data Analysis

This section examines twelve excerpts selected from Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's Àpàlà songs and Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè's Fuji songs. Applying Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, the analysis investigates how the musicians deploy directives, insults, praise acts, and evaluative statements as pragmatic tools through which gender ideology is performed, reinforced, and normalised. The analysis emphasises the study's core objective: to understand how illocutionary acts operate as mechanisms of power, social regulation, and identity construction within Yoruba musical discourse, shaping cultural understandings of femininity and sustaining patriarchal expectations.

Speech Act Type: Insult + Negative Evaluation

Excerpt I

Òrò.kán jẹ mí lógún Mo fé.sọ, Ọmọge iwòyí tó fé.bayé jé.	There is an issue pressing heavily on my mind Which I want to discuss Modern ladies are set to ruin the world.
O bórá tán O dí rọ́tọ́wú, Ará tí sẹ̀hì O jẹ.lọ dágbo èélá sínú ilé	You bleached your body entirely, And now you are swollen and disfigured your skin has lost its natural quality, you had better begin to use herbs for eczema.

(Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà : *Òrò Kan Jẹ Mí Lógún*)

The utterance performs a moral verdict, aligning modernity with immorality. Mockery of bleaching is an expressive act that polices women's bodies. The expressive act functions as a moral condemnation giving a negative evaluation of modern ladies and projecting them as a gender persistently eliciting all sorts of immoralities such as skin bleaching; while mockery of bleaching practices is an expressive insult. The description also constructs modern womanhood as corrupted. The artiste positions traditional standards as morally superior while framing modern femininity as degraded. By contrasting "modern ladies" with Yoruba moral codes, the musician asserts himself as cultural guardian. The speech act constructs acceptable femininity as traditional, modest, and controlled, reinforcing patriarchal nostalgia for an idealised past.

Speech Act Type: Hostile Expressive Insult + Negative Evaluation**Excerpt II**

Jéwọ òbùn ká dásọ ró ẹ
 Ẹ wò'!lé.dàrùn
 Ọmọ abàwòjé.

Reveal your filthiness and let us clothe you
 the perpetually lazy woman,
 the complexion mutilator.

(Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà : Òrò.Kan Jẹ Mí Lógún)

“Complexion mutilator” is a derogatory naming strategy, an expressive act that mocks and humiliates and an expressive insult rooted in bodily shaming. Accusing the woman of laziness functions as a negative evaluative act asserting moral and social inadequacy, hence elevating the singer to the role of moral evaluator. Negative evaluation serves as a disciplinary tool, reducing the female body and behaviour become objects of scrutiny and a target of regulation whose behaviour must meet communal standards, thereby reinforcing patriarchal surveillance of female conduct.

Speech Act Type: Negative Evaluation (Representatives)**Excerpt III**

Ọsẹ tán fi ní bóra ni
 Sérékodé, ẹ wo'síra lágá
 è.ń rùn.

It is the bleaching soap that has ruined them.
 Hag, look at how hideous you have become,
 you are disgusting.

(Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà : Òrò.Kan Jẹ Mí Lógún)

The lyric exemplifies a negative evaluative representative speech act in Searle's framework. By presenting subjective, culturally loaded judgments as factual claims. According to Searle, representatives (Assertives) are speech acts in which the speaker commits to the truth of a proposition. Within this category, negative evaluation occurs when the speaker presents subjective judgments as objective facts. In this lyric, the speaker performs a representative speech act by attribution of cause with the lyrics “*It is the bleaching soap that has ruined them*”. This constructs a causal narrative, presenting skin bleaching as inherently destructive. This claims that *bleaching soap has “ruined” the subject* and asserts that the addressee is “Hag”, “hideous” and “disgusting”, which are direct insult. These lexical choices encode moral and aesthetic condemnation, not just observation. These are not neutral descriptions but value-laden assertions framed as truths. The artiste also deploys presupposition of deviation by implicitly judging the subject against a normative standard of beauty, suggesting they have deviated and are therefore inferior.

Following Searle's idea that language contributes to social reality construction, this utterance naturalizes ideology by presenting anti-bleaching sentiment as undisputed truth, rather than opinion. Hence, the evaluation becomes taken-for-granted knowledge within the discourse. The lyrics also reinforces gendered beauty norms. The use of “hag” (a gendered insult) targets female identity, linking worth to physical appearance and also perpetuates the ideology that women's value is tied to natural, socially approved beauty standards. The harsh descriptors act as produces social sanctions, discursive punishment, discouraging behaviours (like bleaching) by attaching shame and disgust.

The negative evaluation encodes broader gender ideology through moral policing of female bodies in which women's appearance becomes a site of public judgment. It also projects authenticity vs artificiality binary in which “Natural” beauty is valorized while “altered” beauty is condemned. The lyrics also internalized cultural standards through the reflection of societal anxieties about identity, modernity, and Western influence.

Speech Act Type: Insult + Negative Evaluation**Excerpt IV**

Agídí ò sẹ́ é lolé ọkọ	Stubbornness cannot sustain a marriage
Iwà'irèlẹ̀ ló n' yókò nínú Igídá, èyónú	Its humility that pacifies husband. Careless and
obìnrin Adójú kọkọ rósọ	troublesome woman
Wọ̀n kii gbóhun tokó bá n' wí	Who dresses provocatively before husband,
	such women do not heed their husband's counsel

(Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà : Agídí ò sẹ́ é lẹ́ ilé ọkọ)

The utterance labels the woman “careless” and “troublesome,” functioning as expressive speech acts in form of insult used to condemn and morally judge by publicly assigning negative identity markers to the woman. According to Searle, expressives reveal the speaker’s psychological attitude; here, the artiste’s disapproval becomes a cultural voice of judgement and overt disapproval. The description of dressing “provocatively” serves as a verdictive evaluation, framing the woman as morally wayward and by declaring stubbornness incompatible with marital stability, thereby establishing a normative standard for feminine behaviour. Women are positioned as agents of marital instability, while moral responsibility is placed almost entirely on their behaviour. The excerpt links female morality to the success or failure of marriage, assigning the woman exclusive responsibility for domestic harmony. The singer’s linguistic performance creates a regulative discourse where women must conform to behavioural expectations to maintain social acceptance.

Speech Act Type: Insult + Direct Directive

Excerpt V

Jejẹrẹ̀ iyàwó mí a gbó,	cancerous wife, listen,
Kì í bókọ dàmòràn	she doesn't counsel her husband rightly
Nílẹ̀ e rẹ̀ntì pé kó lẹ́ kó'lé	living in a rented apartment to build a house.
àkòṣẹ̀gbón ló n' yọ̀ wón lẹ̀nu,	lack of morals is troubling them,

(Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà : Agídí ò sẹ́ é lẹ́ ilé ọkọ)

Calling the wife “cancerous” is a hostile expressive act, using metaphor as a dehumanising insult portraying her as a social disease. The directive “listen” is an illocutionary act of commanding (a direct directive). It is an attempt to control the woman’s behaviour, hence positioning the woman as subordinate and requiring correction. This aligns with Searle’s categorisation of hostile expressive aimed at moral correction. The directive positions the male speaker as authority figure, while the insult delegitimises female autonomy. The metaphor of disease constructs female disobedience as a social contamination that must be controlled. The woman is framed as a threat to communal order, demonstrating how language performs patriarchal power by disciplining women into submissiveness.

Speech Act Type: Negative Evaluation + Implied Directive

Excerpt VI

Bí wón ní kó sẹ́bẹ̀ á fàrigá,	when asked to cook, she flares up in arrogance,
Ní gbà tí kò mò, ó sẹ̀,	since she does not know how to cook,
Ẹnu èébú ti fọ́ wón lórí.	she specialises in abusive words.

(Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà : Agídí ò sẹ́ é lẹ́ ilé ọkọ)

The statement evaluates the woman’s behaviour, functioning as a **representative** speech act that asserts a claim about her character. This representative act constructs the woman as emotionally unstable and disrespectful. The reference to cooking is an **implied directive**. The focus on cooking establishes an implicit directive: a woman **ought** to cook without resistance. By encoding domestic duties as inherently feminine, the song naturalises gendered labour divisions. The illocutionary act becomes a **mechanism of social regulation**, prescribing the roles that women must occupy. This reinforces domestic labour as a compulsory feminine duty and positions non-compliance as deviance.

Speech Act Type: Praise Act + Positive Expressive**Excerpt VII**

Wá wo kàkà rí lá	Come and behold this massive buttock,
Kàkà yíí tún ga,	This voluptuous buttock;
Ìbàdí ọlómọge,	the buttocks of the damsel,
Tí n bá rí kàkà tó le kú	if I behold buttocks so full and firm,
Mo lè kú nítòrí è,	I could die for its sake.

(Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè: Àsàkàsà)

This is a praise act (positive expressive) idealising female sexuality. The imperative “come and behold” is an invitation directive, directing attention to female sexuality. The hyperbolic admiration is a positive expressive act. The hyperbolic claim (“I could die”) is an expressive act showing admiration. Women are valued primarily through their physical attributes alone. The directive frames the woman’s body as a public spectacle, reinforcing objectification as a culturally acceptable mode of praise.

Speech Act Type: Praise Act + Evaluative Statement**Excerpt VIII**

Kàkà yíí tún ga,	This voluptuous buttock;
Ìbàdí ọlómọge,	the buttocks of the damsel,

(Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè: Àsàkàsà)

The artiste performs a positive expressive act, emphasising beauty and sensual desirability. The praise reduces a woman’s worth to her body, reproducing gendered aesthetic expectations. This is a direct praise act, assigning evaluative attributes of beauty and desirability. The woman’s worth is tied to her sexual appeal. Such praise celebrates femininity not as agency but as aesthetic pleasure, subtly reinforcing the idea that women exist to be admired, not to act.

Speech Act Type: Praise + Positive Evaluation**Excerpt IX**

Ọmọdé yíí gbòsàn sí mi lénu,	This young girl, place your orange in my mouth,
wón sọ pòsàn ẹ dùn,	They say your orange is sumptuous
nínú gbogbo ọsàn àgbáyé	among all the oranges of the world,
tì ẹ ti ládùn jù.	yours is the sweetest.

(Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè: Àsàkàsà)

This is a praise act (positive expressive) idealising female sexuality through the excerpt “they say your orange is sumptuous”. The metaphor of “orange” functions as a positive evaluative statement, indirectly attributing sweetness and desirability to the woman’s body. The line “young girl, place your orange in my mouth” operates as an imperative directive, inviting intimate engagement while framing the woman’s body as consumable. The superlative claim “among all the oranges of the world, yours is the sweetest” is a hyperbolic evaluative act, elevating her above all others based on sensual appeal. The expressive admiration reinforces desirability as her defining value. Women are thus constructed primarily through metaphors of taste and consumption, and the directive element positions the female body as an object for pleasure, normalising objectification within praise.

Speech Act Type: Evaluative Statement (Representatives)**Excerpt X**

B'ókùnrin bá ní wáyá	If a bachelor is searching for a wife
tó bá ní sùúrù	and he is patient,
Á ráya tó dáa fé.	He will find a good wife to marry,
B'óbìnrin bá ní w'ókọ	If a spinster is seeking a husband
tó bá ní sùúrù	and she is patient,

(Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè: Freedom Compilation)

These lines function as representative acts, expressing a general truth about relationships. The evaluation of “good wife/good husband” reflects normative gender roles. Patience is framed as a virtue for both genders, but the construct of a “good wife” carries heavier cultural expectations tied to submission and morality. The statement generalises partner selection into a pseudo-proverbial truth. Representatives, per Searle, create social norms through declarative assertions. While appearing balanced, the phrase “good wife” carries heavier social expectations than “good husband.” The illocutionary act thus subtly reinforces asymmetric gender roles where female goodness implies submission and moral behaviour.

Speech Act Type: Praise Act + Affectionate Expressive**Excerpt XI**

Tí n bá sẹ fàájì òsẹ̀.méṭa níta,	If I stay out for three weeks
tí mi ò bá sun lé,	Enjoying merriments without going
ojó tí n bá jàjà, tí n bà lọ	home, on the day I eventually go
sí'lé,	home,
15 sọ o rí'iyàwó mi,	you see my
á máa kọrin fún mi	wife, she sings
á ní Abass Akàndé, my dearest	for me
husband,	she says 'Abass Akàndé; my dearest husband,
jò.ó.tètè má a wálé,	please come home early,
o sàà mọ condition tí mo wà.	surely you know the condition I am.

(Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè: Freedom Compilation)

This is a positive expressive where affection and admiration are publicly declared. It evaluates the husband favourably while framing the woman as emotionally dependent. It reinforces relational hierarchy where the husband is central to the woman's emotional fulfilment. “My dearest husband... please come home early, surely you know the condition I am”. Affection is expressed as praise, but the emotional dependence of the woman frames the husband as central to her fulfilment. This creates a relational hierarchy where feminine identity is tied to romantic devotion. Praise becomes a soft mechanism of gender regulation, idealising women who prioritise their husbands.

Speech Act Type: Praise + Evaluative Statement**Excerpt XII**

ọmọdé yì í,	This girl,
t'ẹbá w'ojú è, kíké lojú è, t'ẹbá w'omú è,	When you look at her eyes, they are adorable,
kíké nimú è,	when you look at her nose,
t'ẹbá w'owó.è,	her nose is adorable;
àní kíké.l'owó è,	when you check her hands,
especially t'ẹbá w'ojú òtóróró,	her hands are adorable,
òtóróró sisí èyí o,	and especially when you behold her narrow passage.
kíké.ní.	This lady's narrow passage,

Ọmọdé yì í, olójú funfun,	This girl, with bright white eyeballs,
ọmọdé yì í eléí funfun, ọmọdé yì í, ọlówó.	This girl with whitish ears,
funfun,	this girl with fair hands,
ọmọdé yì í, onímú funfun,	this girl with a fair nose.

(Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè: Freedom Compilation)

The singer performs an expressive act praising the girl's beauty. Each bodily feature becomes the subject of evaluative judgement. The artiste describes the woman as "a young girl, an epitome of beauty, a stunning face, attractive nose, exquisite hair." Gender identity is equated with physical desirability, reinforcing patriarchal standards of beauty as a core attribute of womanhood. The musician performs a multi-layered praise act focusing on bodily features. Each attribute is evaluated and publicly displayed. The excerpt constructs ideal femininity as youthful, beautiful, and performatively attractive. By foregrounding appearance over agency, the speech act sustains patriarchal expectations of feminine desirability.

Discussion Of Findings

The analysis reveals that Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's Àpàlà and Abass Àkàndé Òbésèrè's Fuji deploy linguistic acts that do more than entertain, they actively construct, regulate, and reproduce gender ideologies within Yoruba society. Through Austin and Searle's Speech Act Theory, the study demonstrates that the musicians' use of directives, insults, praise acts, and evaluative statements function as pragmatic strategies that shape cultural understandings of women and legitimate patriarchal authority.

In Ọmọwúrà's Àpàlà, insults and directives dominate the discursive environment, projecting the musician as a moral instructor whose authority permits him to discipline female behaviour. The frequent use of demeaning labels, such as "cancerous wife," "careless woman," "complexion mutilator", constitutes hostile expressive acts designed to shame and correct. These expressions serve as symbolic violence, representing women as moral threats whose behaviour must be curtailed for societal stability. Similarly, directives such as "listen" and implied instructions relating to domestic labour position women as subordinates requiring guidance. These speech acts operate as mechanisms of social regulation, reinforcing expectations of women as obedient, domesticated, and morally restrained.

Òbésèrè's Fuji lyrics contrast with Ọmọwúrà's in tone, yet they reveal a complementary ideological pattern. While overt insults are absent, praise acts and aesthetic evaluations reduce women to sensual objects, constructed for male admiration. Female worth is tied to physical beauty, youthfulness, and sexual desirability. Such praise, though positive in surface meaning, still perpetuates patriarchal ideology by defining femininity in terms of male-centred aesthetics. In both genres, therefore, the illocutionary acts, whether corrective or celebratory, function as performative tools that shape gender identity, legitimising men as arbiters of morality, beauty, and social behaviour.

A striking pattern across the songs is the normalisation of male authority. Even where praise is given, it reinforces a relational hierarchy where women flourish when they embody submissiveness, beauty, and emotional devotion. The songs thus construct a gendered worldview in which men speak, evaluate, regulate, and define, while women are spoken about, judged, corrected, or admired. The findings underscore the role of Yoruba music as a discursive space where cultural assumptions about femininity are continuously encoded and disseminated.

Across the four songs, insults and directives dominate Ọmọwúrà's representations, while praise and aesthetic evaluations dominate Òbésèrè's lyrics. Using Speech Act Theory, the data show that: Directives (Ọmọwúrà) enforce obedience, humility, and domestic roles, revealing how men linguistically perform authority. It regulates women's behaviour (e.g., "listen," implied instructions). Insults police women's morality, sexuality, and conduct, functioning as mechanisms of social regulation. It functions as expressive acts to shame, correct, and reinforce patriarchal authority. Praise acts in Fuji music (Òbésèrè) reward women for fulfilling aesthetic and emotional expectations while reinforcing objectification and idealised femininity.

Evaluative statements naturalise patriarchal norms by presenting subjective ideology as cultural truth, framing gender norms as natural and unquestionable.

The musicians' illocutionary acts operate as performative tools that shape gender identity, reinforce patriarchal values, and define acceptable femininity within Yoruba cultural space. The analysis demonstrates that Yoruba music is not merely entertainment but a discursive arena where gender is constructed, policed, idealised, and regulated through language. These speech acts collectively reveal how Yoruba musical discourse performs ideological work in shaping, regulating, and reproducing gendered expectations.

Conclusion

This study examines how illocutionary acts embedded in Yoruba song lyrics function as mechanisms of power, social regulation, and identity construction. Using Speech Act Theory, it demonstrates that Àpàlà and Fújì music constitute potent ideological tools through which musicians perform authority, moral judgement, and praise. Across the analysed excerpts, Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà's reliance on directives and insults constructs women as moral subjects who must be corrected, disciplined, or evaluated according to culturally sanctioned expectations. Conversely, Abass Àkàndé Ọbésèrè's use of praise acts and aesthetic evaluations idealises women's bodies, reinforcing notions of femininity centered on beauty and desirability. Despite stylistic differences, both musicians reproduce patriarchal ideologies that position women within narrow behavioural and aesthetic boundaries. The study concludes that Yoruba popular music remains a powerful site where gender ideologies are produced, legitimised, and circulated. The illocutionary acts deployed by musicians do not merely reflect culture; they actively shape cultural consciousness by defining acceptable forms of femininity. As such, Yoruba music continues to serve as a discursive instrument through which patriarchal norms are sustained, teaching audiences how to perceive, judge, and respond to women within society.

References

- 1) Aboh, R., & Oha, A. (2017). Gender, ideology and discourse strategies in Nigerian performance texts. *Discourse & Society*, 28(6), 652–670.
- 2) Adebayo, R. (2019). Gendered discourses in Yoruba popular songs: A critical discourse analysis. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31(4), 480–495.
- 3) Adedeji, W. (2010). *Music as a medium of social engagement in Yoruba popular culture*.
- 4) Adegbite, A. (1991). The socio-linguistic functions of Yoruba traditional music. *African Languages and Cultures*, 4(1), 29–44.
- 5) Adejumo, A. (2017). Women in Fuji music: A discourse analytic study. *African Music Review*, 12(2), 55–72.
- 6) Adeoti, G. (2010). Orature and the aesthetics of modern African films: Tunde Kelani's cinematic idiom. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 22(2), 203–218.
- 7) Ajayi, B. (2004). African oral performance and cultural continuity. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 13(1), 45–58.
- 8) Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford University Press.
- 9) Babatunde, S., & Alabi, T. (2015). Politeness and gender ideology in Yoruba verbal arts. *Journal of West African Languages*, 42(1), 90–108.
- 10) Barber, K. (1991). *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town*.
- 11) Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- 12) Ezenwa-Ohaeto, N. (2019). Proverbs and moral didacticism in Nigerian cultural productions. *Humanities Journal of Nigeria*, 4(2), 55–70.
- 13) Musyoka, M. (2018). Pragmatic strategies and gender representation in Kenyan popular songs. *Eastern African Literary Studies*, 5(1), 77–93.
- 14) Obasi, C. (2014). Popular music and the politics of gender in Africa. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 26(2), 215–228.
- 15) Odebunmi, A. (2007). Pragmatic functions of songs in Yoruba sociocultural discourse. *Linguistik Online*, 30(2), 15–32.

- 16) Odebunmi, A. (2010). Pragmatics of Yoruba proverbs in sociocultural contexts. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42(2), 458-469.
- 17) Oladunmoye, F. (2025). Ideological Representation of Women in Selected Lyrics of Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà And Abass Àkàndé Òbésèré (*unpublished PhD Thesis*). University of Ibadan
- 18) Olateju, M. (2005). The semantics of Yoruba proverbs in gender representation. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(3), 324-340.
- 19) Orji, E., & Nweke, U. (2020). Politeness, facework and gender in contemporary Nigerian music. *International Journal of Language and Communication*, 8(1), 120–138.
- 20) Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge University Press.
- 21) Waterman, C. (1990). *Jùjú: A social history and ethnography of an African popular music*. University of Chicago Press.

DISCOGRAPHY

- 22) Abass Àkàndé Òbésèré. (2001). *Àsàkasà*. Sony Music.
- 23) Abass Àkàndé Òbésèré. (2020). *Freedom compilation*. Dudu Heritage.
- 24) Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà. (1973). *Òrò.kan jẹ mí lógún* (Vol. 17:6). EMI Records.
- 25) Àyínlá Ọmọwúrà. (1976). *Agídí ò sẹ é lo'lé ọkọ* (Vol. 14:1). EMI Records