

Verbal Idioms and Linguistic Distortions in Selected Fela Anikulapo's Afrobeat Lyrics

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have studied the linguistic choices in Fela's lyrics. However, the peculiar verbal idioms and linguistic distortions that the artiste deploys to (re)socialise his audience to African realities have not been sufficiently interrogated. This study, therefore, is a postcolonial reading of his selected lyrics viewed through the lens of anti-language. It examines the verbal idioms and linguistic distortions in the lyrics and relates them to his ideological orientations. The data comprise 5 purposively selected lyrics downloaded from the internet: 'International thief thief I. T. T', 'Teacher don't teach me nonsense', 'Shuffering and Shmiling', 'Beasts of no nation', and 'Army arrangement'. These songs cut across the themes of corruption, culture as a teacher, and people's existential difficulties. These downloaded lyrics are printed and subjected to critical analysis to identify samples of verbal idioms in them. The data were analysed with insights from anti-language and postcolonial theories. Findings show that Fela Anikulapo's lyrics comprise verbal idiom and linguistic distortions that can be classified as anti-language because of his ideological stance on colonialism. The artist deploys peculiar verbal idioms which are products of relexicalisation processes: orthographic reconfiguration, phonological, syntactic, and morphological distortions comprising borrowing and reduplications. It concludes that the linguistic distortions in the verbal idioms are in tune with his anti-establishment ideological stance of reclamation of African values and the creation of a new social order.

Keywords: *anti-language, relexicalisation, verbal idioms, ideology, and linguistic distortions*

INTRODUCTION

Musicians from time immemorial have used their songs to voice the plight of the oppressed in the form of protest songs (Ogidan, 2012). Bob Marley, Fela Anikulapo Kuti, and other musicians have been at the centre of the socio-economic and political emancipation of the people. Fela's Afro Beats is a genre of music which Ogidan (2012) describes as an African classical music with an urgent message for the citizens. It is an amalgam of American funk music with rudiments of highlife, jazz, and other styles of Yoruba traditional music, which focuses on political and cultural (re)socialisation of the citizens. It is a brand of music that calls for social change. Fela's lyrics raise the socio-cultural and political consciousness of Africans in general, and Nigerians in particular, to their existential realities. Through Fela's brand of music, he attempts to "revolutionise musical structure as well as the political context of Nigeria" (Adegoju, 2009, p.7).

In the same vein, Ogunde (2002) submits that afro-beat serves to awaken a sensibility in people to appreciate genuineness and substance. Fela's ideology underpins his style of music and his relationship with society. Ideology, according to Israel (1971, p. 92), is "a system of thought developed by an individual against the background of his/her social position and general life situation". Since language is "effective in the formulation and reproduction of ideology" (Uwasomba, 2012, p. 77), the choice and style of language a speaker deploys is a "constitutive part of reality, deeply implicated in the way the world is constructed" (p. 75).

Fela's ideological stance informs his *Yabis* (satirical songs meant to correct the ills in a particular society) through which he lampoons, pokes fun and "sings back" at the behaviours of the metropolis and the African elite who are agents and purveyors of metropolitan culture and values and (re)socialises them into his "own group culture" of "authentic" Africans. His conscious decision to distort the English language aligns with the ideology that informs his music, which, according to Olaniyan (2009, p. 13), "transgresses the boundaries of established styles, the meanings those styles reference, and the social norms they support or imply".

Fela's anti-establishment posture and his "transformation to a socially conscious Afrobeat exponent" changed him from "an apolitical avant-pop hipster" to a personality with "some ideologies about Africa, culture and identity" (Olaniyan, 2009, p. 41). Fela, the artiste, succinctly opines that "I must clear myself from the mess, I must identify with Africa. Then I must have an identity" (Moore, 1982, p.75). Being "an afrobeat moralist" and "a cultural nationalist" (Olaniyan, 2009, p. 42), Fela detests those he refers to as "the metropolis" who use English with pride. In response to the "self-nullifying attitude" of some Africans to their indigenous languages (Patil, 2006), he deploys some verbal idioms in Yoruba, Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) and deliberate linguistic distortions of English language in his lyrical *Yabis* within the anti-language paradigm to subvert the Standard English and its values at the phonological, grammatical, semantic and orthographic levels.

Verbal idioms, according to Harwood, Marko, Sterre, Tanja, Norbert, & van Craenenbroeck (2016), are described as expressions with lexical verbs that have non-literal interpretations, and they also comprise lexical items that are found outside of the context of the idioms. These expressions are formed in a manner that obeys the regular syntactic rules of the language of communication. Fela's deployment of these idioms in pidgin, indigenous, and English languages through linguistic distortions agrees with Harwood et al's (2016) view. Although scholars like Olorunyomi (2005) and Omoniyi (2006) have studied the linguistic choices in the music of contemporary Nigerians like Fela Anikulapo Kuti's Afro Beat lyrics, however, his utilisation of verbal idioms and linguistic distortions to (re)socialise the consciousness of his audience to the existential realities of African/Nigerian societies has not been sufficiently interrogated to show how they convey his acerbic wits, ideologies and messages to his audience. This present study is an appraisal of selected lyrics of Fela's Afro Beats viewed through the lens of anti-language. It examines the verbal idioms and linguistic distortions in the selected lyrics, intending to examine the strategies employed in creating and relating them to his ideological orientations within the postcolonial conjectures.

Literature Review

Idioms are words, phrases or expressions with invariant meanings in a language. According to Norbert et al. (2019, p. 725), idioms “denote a meaning that is not straightforwardly derivable from (the combination of) the meanings of the individual lexical items that comprise that expression”. Every language has its idioms, and they are culturally determined. Nunberg, Sag & Wason (1994) identify two broad categories of idioms. These are (i) idiomatic phrases (IdPs) and (ii) idiomatically combined expressions (ICEs). Idiomatic phrases (IdPs) are expressions in which the elements are inseparable in the idiomatic interpretations. They have been mapped into special or fixed meanings. They are otherwise called regular idioms with unclear meanings from the combinations of words when viewed literally. For example, “cost an arm and a leg” has been mapped into “be very expensive”. When this type of idiom is passivised, its meaning changes. Idiomatically combined expressions (ICEs) on their own are irregular idioms where verb nouns are interpreted compositionally. They have clear meanings from the composite words. For example, “spill the beans” is mapped into “reveal the information. Such an expression can be mapped into subparts of the resulting interpretations. This type of idiom can be passivised as “the beans were spilled (by Mary)” and opened to lexical variation as “come on, spill the details” (Norbert et al. 2016, p. 726).

Specifically, verbal idioms, according to Mustansir (1989, p. 5), refer to “verbal compounds ... whose meanings cannot be derived easily from the combined meanings of the individual units of the compounds”. This narrow conceptual definition of verbal idioms needs to be interrogated to make it more holistic. This paper posits that some verbal idioms may include phrasal verbs, verb phrases, verb clauses, or they might just be composed of single words with deeper significations. This aligns with Mustansir’s (1989) submission that verbal idioms may include (i) single words with unusual and hidden meanings, (ii) those without extraordinary or less familiar meanings, (iii) those that are difficult to translate directly, and (iv) those with uncommon grammatical constructions. In other words, some examples of verbal idioms may come inform of metaphorical language meant to convey

complex ideas and emotions, innovative word combinations that create new meanings and idiomatic expressions that are unique in style.

Another key concept in the paper that needs clarification is linguistic distortions. The term refers to the careful modification of language to pass an 'intended' message. Brumbaugh (1939, p. 63) describes this as "linguistic corruption," which manifests as misspellings, slang, pronunciation, coinages, etc. Generally, languages have their orthographic, semantic, and syntactic conventions. The need for linguistic and communicative competence is usually stressed in the deployment of any language. However, these normative traditions are often abandoned for stylistic, semantic, syntactic, ideological, or pragmatic purposes. Linguistic distortions, as used in this paper, involve the deliberate subversion of Standard English (which is usually associated with the elite) and its values at the grammatical, semantic, orthographic, and phonological levels. The distortions entail the conscious deployment of code-switching, neologisms, and semantic shifts in transmitting messages to listeners. Since the traditional verbal idioms in Pidgin and Yoruba are in tandem with the temperament and discourse of defamiliarizing the English and the values attached to their usages, Fela sometimes either spares them of any mutation or extends their meanings in line with his ideological orientation to sell his music by titillating the audience to accept his lyrics. The linguistic distortions of the English language largely led to the creation of certain words that are described as verbal idioms in this paper. This subversion of the standard language is treated within the anti-language paradigm.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data were sourced from five purposively selected lyrics of Fela Anikulapo Kuti from the internet that contain verbal idioms and linguistic distortions. The lyrics were selected from the Internet. The selected songs are (i) *International thief thief I. T. T.* (https://www.streetdirectory.com/lyricadvisor/song/wpleeu/itt_international_thief_thief/), (ii) *Teacher don't teach me nonsense* (<https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Fela-Kuti/Teacher-Don-t-Teach-Me-Nonsense>), (iii) *Shuffering and Shmiling* (<https://www.afrobeatmusic.net/html/suffering.html>), (iv) *Beasts of no nation*

(<https://genius.com/Fela-kuti-and-egypt-80-beasts-of-no-nation-lyric>}, and (v) *Army arrangement* (<https://genius.com/albums/Fela-kuti/Army-arrangement>). These lyrics were downloaded from the internet. The downloaded lyrics were printed and subjected to critical reading to extract some samples of verbal idioms and linguistic distortions from them. The extracted items were analysed with insights from postcolonial and Halliday's anti-language theories.

Theoretical Framework

Insights from post-colonial and anti-language theories were used in the data analysis and discussion of findings. Post-colonial theory as espoused by Frantz Fanon, focuses on the struggle of people taking back power to their through activism. This theory presents “a counter-hegemonic reaction to the negative historical, ideological, cultural and developmental legacies of European colonialism” (Olusegun-Joseph, 2024, p. 164). It stresses the fact that most wrongs against humanity are a function of the “dominance of the North over the South” (Robert, 2001, p. 5). The theory, therefore, stresses the need for a cultural revolution which becomes a veritable tool for raising anti-colonial, social, self and cultural consciousness in enlisting the people into the anti-colonial agitations in order to turn the tables against the dominant hegemony.

Equally, Anti-language theory, as espoused by Halliday (1978) and Silalahi (2019), provides useful insights in interrogating dialectal thinking and existential behaviour which give birth to peculiar speech styles of a deviant group/ individual. Anti-languages are “special argots of ... prison inmates and other sub-cultures which exist in antagonistic relationship with the norm society” (Fowler, 1979, p. 259). This theory is a “social construct” which foregrounds the social values of the sub-culture/anti-society in creating the “process of re-socialisation” that not only expresses reality but creates and maintains this “separate anti-societal reality” (Halliday, 1978, p. 170). The languages of that ‘sub-community’ are in antagonistic relationship with the dominant culture of the community “as a conscious alternative to it” (Halliday, 1976, p. 570). Anti-language is a special linguistic variety or code created and used by a certain group of interlocutors and embodied by an anti-society, thus

occurring as a resistance to that society (Gilbeal-Harabsheh, Farghal& Al-Rousan, 2020; Ajayi and Bamgbose, 2018). Ajayi (2019, p. 516) further argues that “the social structure created by the use of anti-language foregrounds certain elements (social values) ... are not expressed or found in the normal (ideal) everyday use of language”. All these will enable us to interrogate Fela’s anti-society and anti-establishment posture of his linguistic choices in creating Kalakuta Republic within the Nigerian state. The linguistic choices of the group mirror its anti-establishment posture with “systematic inversion and negation of the structures and semantics of the norm language”, in this case English (Fowler, 1979, p. 263). Such a language shows lexical transformations through two lexical processes: relexicalisation and overlexicalisation

Relexicalisation is the process that explains how new lexical items are coined or how existing ones are given twisted meanings to shift or subvert their values. Hurst (2019, p. 123) describes it as “a decolonial practice, a challenge to coloniality”. The relexicalised codes do not follow the linguistic rules of the standard language. The expressions of these relexicalisations occur at two levels: (i) phonology and (ii) morphology. Phonologically, the sounds of such items are made to undergo some phonological processes, which consequently bring some modifications to their structural components and productions. Such phonological processes include epenthesis, vowel or consonant deletion, and syllabic reconfigurations. Morphologically, new words are created through the processes of abbreviations, euphemism, orthographic reconfiguration, borrowing, compounding, and reduplications.

Overlexicalisation is the process in which alternatives are given to important concepts to depict the counter-culture orientation being expressed by the group. Here, several words are employed to denote the same thing (Gilbeal-Harabsheh, Farghal, and Al-Rousan, 2020). In all, these lexical items are assigned different dialectal significance in tune with the ideological and resocialisation orientations of the group.

These insights drawn from Anti Language and Post-colonial theories will provide invaluable understandings into the complexity of Fela’s multilingual, stylistically hybrid

lyrics through lexicalisation and overlexicalisation, satirical critique, code-switching and code-mixing, and linguistic innovations. Since Fela's Afrobeats centres on the last stage of colonisation as identified by Fanon (1967), which is decolonisation, the post-colonial theory will specifically account for Fela's outcry for the black people to retrieve their distinctiveness, culture, and sovereignty. In accounting for the complexity of multilingualism, stylistic hybridity, and satirical elements in his lyrics, the paper will engage in a culturally critique of his lyrics and lexical choices. Since anti-language is a linguistic emergence from the margin is quite consistent with postcolonial discourse; therefore follows that anti-language aligns with the struggle for marginal agency against supremacist orders.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The data analysis revealed that Fela's verbal idioms and linguistic distortions serve as effective tools of (re)socialisation because they were deliberately deployed to subvert dominant power structures, reclaim African identity, and promote social change by empowering the marginalised communities through his lyrics. His music also has a great effect on the audience's ideological orientation towards promoting African pride and self-awareness and challenging colonial legacies. Fela's lyrics are replete with several relexicalisation and overlexicalisation processes, which not only generate peculiar musical aesthetics but are also ideology-laden. The identified verbal idioms and linguistic distortions in the data are discussed below:

1. Verbal idioms

In the data, one of the observable relexicalisation processes used by Fela is the creation of his verbal idioms that are made up of verb phrases, noun phrases or they might just be composed of single words with deeper significations. Some of the identified verbal idioms in *shuffling and Shmiling* lyrics are:

'Dem go go for Rome',
'Dem go go for Mecca'

In the excerpt above, the reference to “Rome” and “Mecca” are not just a city in Fela’s reckoning, but they are places of spiritual and economic exploitation. Fela is alluding to the holy pilgrimages that are ritually embarked upon by Africans due to their adherence to “foreign religions” of Christianity and Islam, which have become tools of economic and spiritual abuses by their leaders, like the Bishop, Pope, and Imam.

Another verbal idiom from “International thief thief” lyrics is “we don tire to carry anyone of them shit”. “Shit” on the surface denotes excreta. However, at the connotative level of meaning, this statement, “we don tire to carry anyone of them shit”, means that Africans are weary of accepting rubbish or allowing the oppressors, be it the imperialists or corrupt elite, to continue to plunder their commonwealth or enslave them anymore. Another example of verbal idioms from “Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense” is “babanla nonsense” (forefather of nonsense). Babanla is a Yoruba word for forefather. The phrase “babanla nonsense” does not mean “forefather of nonsense”. Rather, Fela has used it to describe the unworkability and impracticability of all the foreign and colonial economic prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP), democracy, austerity measures, etc., to African countries on how to overcome their challenges. Fela tags all these prescriptions as absolutely unworkable, hence the phrase “babanla nonsense”. Also, “basket mouth wants start to leak again oh” is another verbal idiom in “Beasts of No Nation” lyrics. “Basket mouth” as used in the lyrics is an exocentric/idiomatic word whose meaning is outside the lexeme. It is not a kind of mouth but a kind of person (a talkative) whose calling is to speak on issues affecting society through his *Yabis*.

Additionally, “na animal talk be that” is another verbal idiom in Fela’s “Beasts of no nation” lyrics. Ordinarily, animals are incapable of talking and using language since language is basically a human phenomenon. Connotatively, “na animal talk be that” refers to discussions of the world leaders in what Fela describe as “Dis-united Nations” instead of United Nations (UN) in their various meetings and recommendations about human rights. Discussions at such meetings to him are animal talks since they are incapable of resolving

the conflicts between Israel and Lebanon, Reagan and Libya, Iran and Iraq, etc. To Fela, “Animal can't dash me human rights,” and all the leaders’ discussions and doublespeak at UN are animal talks. He extends this animal imagery with another verbal idiom, an animal put on agbada. Agbada is a Yoruba traditional dress for chiefs and men. This idiom refers to the “bad civilian” leaders in Africa whose leadership styles are equally despotic like those of the military leaders.

2. Linguistic Distortions

The obvious linguistic distortions in the data are not only a reflection of Fela’s anti-establishment posture but also an attempt to assert linguistic inventiveness and blending of different cultures, depicting his bilingual backgrounds and experiences. Some of the observable linguistic distortions in the data are discussed under the following subheadings:

i. Orthographical Distortions

In the data, one of the observable linguistic distortions used by Fela in his lyrics is orthographic reconfiguration of the lexical items. Fela creates these spellings that differ sharply from the existing norms in Standard English as a way of creating an identity for the subculture he is promoting. Usually, the English language has its conventional orthographic representations, like every language, in line with Standard English. English uses an opaque or deep orthographic style (Koffi, 2006). An opaque orthography is a model in which there is no one-to-one correspondence between letters and sounds. Transparent orthography is based on the sound-to-letter correspondence principle. However, Fela’s anti-establishment posture deliberately lowers the deep orthographical standard permissible in English by coining his own spelling style. Some of the noticeable orthographic representations in the data are shown as English versus Fela’s orthographies. The italicised words represent Fela’s orthography as extracted from the selected lyrics for the data.

- (i) them – *dem*, (ii) ITT – *itt*, (iii) suffering and smiling – *shuffering and shmiling*, (iv) Seraphim – *Seraphoom*, (v) Cherubim – *Cheruboom*, (vi) Celestial – *celestical*, (vii) in spiritual heavens – *in spiritum heavinus*, (viii) Israel – *is-i-rael*, (ix) Libya – *lib-i-*

ya, (x) Iran – *iran-i-ohdis*, (xi) United Nations – *Dis-united nations*, (xii) innocent – *innocentio*, (xiii) I challenge – *I challengeie*, (xiv) father – *fada*.

In all these orthographical distortions, it is evident that there is the ideology of a deliberate demystification and corruption of the “perfect English language” of the metropolises who that believe they are the best. For example, the third-person plural pronoun (i) “them” is written as “dem”. The acronym (ii), ITT (International Telecommunication Technology) is equally written as “itt” with a new meaning (international thief thief). The norm in Standard English is to represent acronyms in capital letters. It should be stressed that ITT, like any other international conglomerate, has been used to undermine the development and sovereignty of Nigeria in particular and the Third World in general. Similarly, one of Fela’s lyrics “Shuffering and Shmiling” has the spelling of its title distorted as *Shuffering and Shmiling*’ instead of “suffering and smiling”. There is a deliberate defamiliarisation of the familiar spellings of these words to depict the opaque nature of the suffering of the people without their coming to terms with that reality. The religious expressions (iv-viii) are not spared in words like Seraphoom, cheruboom, celestical, in spiritum heavinus and is-i-rael as seen in the excerpt from *Shuffering and Shmiling* lyrics below:

...Any goddamn Celestical
Including Seraphoom and Cheruboom
..."In Spiritum Heavinus"
lyric

These new spellings depict the corrupted version of seraphim, cherubim, celestial, in spiritual heaven, and Israel. Israel, a nation and a proper noun, is written with hyphenated small letters is-i-rael. This is an ideological distancing from Christianity or Western religion. Spiritium for “spiritual” is a spiritual metaphor of drug as opium which is already intoxicating the adherents of the Christian religion against the African beliefs and values which have resulted into self-nullifying attitudes they openly show to their cultures.

ii. Phonological Distortions

Phonological distortions, be it at the segmental, syllabic or prosodic levels, largely affect lexical, phrasal or sentential meaning of utterances (Faleye & Adeseko, 2018). The artiste,

despite his training in England, deliberately speaks with his Nigerian accent to adjust English pronunciation to its new ecology. In his lyrics, Fela jettisons the Standard English pronunciation and uses the Nigerian spoken English (NsE) to reach out to a large audience. His spoken utterances are in tandem with his ideological stance. For instance, like an average speaker of Nigerian English (NE), the following phonological features are noticed in his lyrics:

a. Segmental Substitutions

The segmental substitutions occur at the consonantal and vocalic levels. Characteristic of NsE, some segments that are not part of the phonological inventories of Nigeria's indigenous languages are often substituted by some speakers of English. In this case, the artiste, Fela, consciously substitutes some segments in some words to change the texture of the standard spoken English in tandem with his ideological stance. At the consonantal level for example, the deformation of the word "them" as "dem" as seen from the excerpt from *International thief thief* lyrics below

...I read dem for book ee-o

The deformation of the word *them* as *dem* is not only at the level of spelling but at the phonological level.

i. /ð/ → [d]

Fela being a Yoruba-English speaker substitutes the voiced dental fricative /ð/ in the onset of the monosyllabic word in item (i) "them" /ðəm/ with voiced alveola plosive [d] in "dem". The distortion occurs both at the place of articulation, alveola for dental, and manner of articulation, plosive for fricative. Similarly, in capturing the pain and deplorable state of the mind of the people as a result of political and religious oppression, he deliberately distorts the realisation of the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in 'suffering' /'sʌf.ər.ɪŋ/ and "smiling" /'smaɪ.lɪŋ/ as voiceless palato-alveolar fricative in shuffering [ʃʌfərɪŋ] and shimiling [ʃmaɪlɪŋ] respectively in his lyrics.'

ii. /s/ → [ʃ]

The distortion of the voiceless alveolar fricative in smiling coupled with the insertion of the epenthetic-i at the initial syllable reinforces and increases the suffering of the people which the artiste is drawing attention to.

Distortions equally occur at the vocalic level where the unrounded half-close front vowel /ɪ/ is realized as a rounded close-back vowel [u:] in items (iv) and (v). The unrounded half-close front vowel /ɪ/ in the final syllables of seraphim /seræfɪm/ and cherubim /tʃeru:bɪm/ is consciously modified as [u:] rounded close back vowel in the last syllable of Seraphoom [seræfu:m] and cheruboom [tʃeru:bu:m] respectively. The articulatory shift from front vowel /ɪ/ in “phim” and “bim” to back vowel position [u:] in “phoom” and “boom” foregrounds the booming nature of Western religion and its backward and destructive effects on African religion and values. The onomatopoeic nature of “phoom” and “boom” in the new words connotes the spread and destructive effects of foreign religions and values on the consciousness of Africans, which the artist is drawing attention to.

Fela also deploys o-, i- and u-epenthesis in his lyrics. The o-epenthesis, for example, is a Yoruba vocalic substitution for the closing diphthong /əʊ/ in English. For example, the o-epenthesis occurs in the excerpt from *International thief thief* below:

Na true I wan talk again o

If I dey lie o....

Other example of o-epenthesis is found in the lyrics “Teacher don’t teach me nonsense” lyrics:

...Na the samu category-o

In the phrase “...category o”, Fela successfully deforms the standard form of the pronunciation of the word category /'kæt.ə.gər.i/ to [ka.ti.go.ri.o].

Another example of i-epenthesis is seen in pass-ee pass-ee. This is aptly shown in *international thief thief* lyrics: Corner corner, pass-ee pass-ee. The hyphenated “ee” is an insertion meant to distort the pronunciation of a monosyllabic word “pass” /pɑ:s/ as a

disyllabic word “pass-ee” [pɑ:sɪ]. The insertion of the i-epenthesis has reconfigured the syllable structure of “pass” from CVC in /pɑ:s/ to CV.CV in [pɑ:sɪ].

Similarly, the artiste equally uses u-epenthesis in “me and you no dey for the samu category” lyrics. The monosyllabic same /seɪm/ changes to a disyllabic word *semu* [semu] in the lyrics. The u-epenthesis is equally observed in animal- I put-u tie o, animal I put- u suit - u. Through these deliberate epenthetic insertions and other segmental distortions, Fela can advance and enliven the rhythmic beats of his revolutionary songs.

b. Syllabic Reconfiguration

The lyrics of Fela’s songs also manifest some distortions at the syllable structures of some words. This denotes the totality of the distortions in his bid to demystify the standard rules of word formation and pronunciation of the English language. For example, “Celestial” (Adj.) /sə'les.ti.əl/ is represented as “celestical” (Adj.) [se'les.ti.kæɫ] which is a new coinage. Celestial/sə'les.ti.əl/ is realised as celestical [se'les.ti.kæɫ] thereby producing the syllable structures CV.CVC. CV. VC as CV.CVC.CV. CVC. The phonological implication of this representation is that the syllable structures of the polysyllabic word “celestial” CV.CVC. CV. VC becomes CV.CVC.CV. CVC in “celestical”. The final syllable in celestial <VC> becomes <CVC> in ‘celestical’. Also, Israel/ɪz.re.ɪəl/ is realized as [ɪs.ɪ.rel]. The coda, voiced alveolar fricative, in the first syllable of Israel /z/ is realized as voiceless alveolar fricative [s]. The last syllable in /ɪz.re.ɪəl/ VC is realised as CVC in [ɪs.ɪ.rel]. The medial syllable CV in /ɪz.re.ɪəl/ is realised as V in [ɪs.ɪ.rel]. In all, the syllable structures changed from VC.CV.VC in /ɪz.re.ɪəl/ to VC. V. CVC in [ɪs.ɪ.rel]. The disyllabic structures in Libya /lɪb.jə/ <CVC.CV> are changed to trisyllabic structures in [lɪb.ɪ.jæ] <CVC. V. CV>.

iii. Morphological Distortions

Equally, some of the relexicalisations in Fela’s lyrics are products of some morphological processes like reduplication, borrowing, and coinages. These are discussed under the following subheadings:

a. Reduplication

These are compound words that are identical or slightly different. They suggest alternative movements, insincerity or instability. Examples of such words denoting alternative movements or insincerity in Fela's lyrics include: *pass-ee pass-ee* and *corner corner*. The word "pass-ee pass-ee" comes with the i-epenthesis after *pass*. The word captures the various shoddy deals and movements involved in various corrupt practices among government officials. Also, *corner corner* points to the backdoor steps in siphoning the national commonwealth by the leaders. The use of reduplications is seen from the international thief thief lyrics:

Friend friend to journalist.
friend friend to commissioner...

underscores what he terms *padipadi* which points to nepotism and favouritism in high places where merits have been jettisoned for the promotion of primordial feelings in national affairs. The overall implication of all this is the creation of 'pain' in the hearts of all the citizens. Fela captures this in his deployment of the reduplicative word *suffer suffer*.

b. Borrowing

This is one of the processes deployed in the use of languages to increase their vocabulary strengths. In Fela's lyrics, he borrows some of the vocabulary from Latin, Yoruba, Igbo, etc. For example, in *spiritum heavinus* is from Latin. In one of his lyrics, *international thief thief* (ITT), he refers several times to latrine in different names in some African indigenous languages:

...for Yorubaland na Shalanga
For Igboland na Onunu-insi
For Ashanti-land na Yarni...

Fela posits further that most of the English coinages for these lexical items have equivalents in African indigenous languages. This he does by codeswitching effortlessly in his

deployment of indigenous words in different languages. To him, all the high-sounding vocabularies in newspapers are only meant to “dabaru” (confuse) us Africans.

c. Relexicalisation

This is the process that explains how new lexical items are coined or how existing ones are given twisted meanings to shift or subvert their values. This is one of the strategies of antilanguage. In Fela’s lyrics, some English words are relexicalised to devalue their meanings. Some of these words include inside world for ‘prison’, outside world for ‘outside prison’ as shown in *Beast of no Nation* lyrics:

The time wey I dey for prison, I call am “inside world”
The time wey I dey outside prison, I call am “outside world”

Additionally, *demoncrazy* and *crazy demon* are used to replace “democracy”. The relexicalisation of the word “democracy” as “demoncrazy” (demon+crazy) has serious semantic implications that is totally different from the form of government, democracy, being championed by United States of America as the best form of governance. Fela sees that form of governance as alien and a contraption which causes instability in Africa, hence he describes it as evil and “demoncrazy”. Similarly, seraphim and cherubim are relexicalised as seraphoom and cheruboom, respectively. The “phoom” and “boom” in the relexicalised words foreground the attitude of the artiste to the booming nature of western religion and its regressive and damaging effects on African religion and values. Finally, latrine is euphemistically relexicalised as big big hole. By so doing, he aptly paints the ordinariness of English and deflates the high value the elite placed on the language.

iv. Syntactic Distortions

Moreover, the data display some apparent syntactic errors. These are errors that are associated with ungrammatical/ill-formed expressions in English. Solecisms are sources of laughter and debasement of some values. In the lyrics, *Teacher Don’t Teach Me Nonsense*, Fela ends the song with these expressions

That is the conclude ee
The conclude ee of my song

It is necessary, however, to point out that Fela is deliberately violating the syntactic rules of the English language for ideological reasons. The use of the verb form “conclude” instead of the noun form “conclusion” in the object position in the sentence “that is the conclude” is a violation of the English grammatical rule. To underscore the deliberate attempt at flouting the rules, the artiste repeats the same error in the second expression, “the conclude ee of my song”. He knows the rules but pretends that he does not. The joke of this deliberate violation is on the elite whose measure of social mobility is their level of competence in English. The import of the above excerpts illustrates the fact that artists in protest mood present themselves as people above the laws, be they grammatical or moral. Laws, as far as anti-language enthusiasts are concerned, are meant to be broken. There will always be misprision and breakdown of communication because language itself, especially English language as used in the lyrics of Fela, is an imperfect tool. As outcasts, they do not want to be kept in the prison house of language.

v. Pidginisation

Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) is a product of contact linguistics occasioned by colonialists whose major goal is facilitating commercial relationship between the Europeans and the multilingual local people (Elugbe & Omamor, 2001). Many Nigerians in addition to learning one of the major languages (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) or English have adopted pidgin for inter-ethnic communication (Akande & Salami, 2010 and Usoro, 2024). Though pidgin is pejoratively referred to as “broken English”, Fela’s Afrobeat which is an amalgam of western instrumentation with traditional rhythm uses it as a medium that can best convey his artistic vision and thematic concerns to the target audience. For example, Fela, through his yabis in pidgin, draws the attention of Africans to the shortcomings of democracy which he tagged “democracy” like rigging, corruption, ballot snatching, buying of votes and poor leadership in a vicious cycle. This except from *Army Arrangement* lyrics aptly illustrates how Fela uses pidgin to resocialise the minds of Africans.

Why for Afrika? (Demo-crazy)
As time dey go (Demo-crazy)
Things just dey bad (Demo-crazy)
They bad more and more (Demo-crazy)

In spite of its pragmatic relevance, Pidgin is denied the social prestige enjoyed by British and American English by some elite Nigerians because it is associated with peasants and barely educated Nigerians. In his attempt to demystify this arrogance and sense of superiority attached to these European languages, especially English and their speakers, Fela gives potency to NPE. To him, NPE serves as a better means of galvanising the vast heterogeneous majority of the Nigerian people, especially the oppressed and peasants, across ethnic and generational divides on the need for them to protest against Western cultural expansionism. Onwudinjo & Mgbojirikiwe (2016, p. 8565) further argue that “Pidgin gives the artist adequate freedom to initiate and sustain a visionary alliance with the oppressed masses”.

CONCLUSION

Given the performance-oriented import of Fela Anikulapo’s Afrobeats, a purely textual analysis might likely limit the interpretation of the verbal idioms and linguistic distortions in that the analysis might not take cognisance of the rhythm and prosodic textures, performance, audience interaction and the inability of textual analysis to capture the totality of the nuances of these traditions. However, in this paper, the analysis of the linguistic textual contours of Fela’s production covers the textuality of his music and stage performances, which inescapably involve his audience in its holistic production.

This paper has shown that Fela’s Afro Beats is a social satire which he deploys to spread and reproduce his ideology. Its values go beyond the aesthetics of the lyrics and the rhythm alone. The lyrics of Fela Anikulapo Kuti are reflective of his ideology of Africanism and Pan-Africanism, of solidarity with the oppressed lower classes, exposing the social ills and contradictions inherent in the polity. His lyrics are very didactic and prophetic. Most of

the issues that are foregrounded in his lyrics are still relevant in contemporary African or third-world countries.

The insights from Halliday's anti-language theory have assisted greatly in understanding that Fela's choice of multilingual, stylistically hybrid lyrics and linguistic innovations as evident in the linguistic distortions noticeable in his verbal idioms are not accidental or arbitrary; rather, they are coined to reflect his ideology. They are consciously created in tune with his ideological stance on anti-establishment, redemption of African values and traditions, and the creation of new social order. His attempt at breaking the rules of the English language at all levels is a protest to draw attention to the fact that laws are not obeyed in the face of tyranny, oppression and deprivation.

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