

A Contextual Analysis of Selected Songs of Bukola Elemide (aka Àsá)

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Abstract

Nigerian Hip-hop Music (henceforth, NHM) is a veritable platform for projecting inherent ideals of Nigerianness. Bukola Elemide, Asa, has distinguished herself as an illustrious Nigerian Hip-hop artiste. Existing linguistic and non-linguistic studies have described the language and classification of NHM. However, the role of context in constructing meaning in NHM has remained outstanding. The nexus between language and socio-cultural identity, which can reveal the multifarious discourse possibilities in Àsá's songs, has not been investigated. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the role of context in her songs with a view to describing how language functions in constructing contextually motivated issues in her songs. This study is anchored on Halliday's notion of context, considering its unequivocal engagement with the politics of language and representation. Thirty-nine songs, laden with robust engagement of Nigerian contextual issues, were purposively selected from two albums: *Asa* and *Beautiful imperfection*. Àsá situates her songs within the Nigerian socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. Through the deployment of rhetorical devices, image-evoking metaphors, repetition, and symbolism, she projects the place of motherhood, gender equity, unity in the face diversity, class difference and social unrest. These contextual issues depict her as a vibrant socio-economic, political and cultural revivalist. Apart from her articulation of Nigeria/African socio-economic challenges, her songs are garnished with pleasant lyrics and danceable beats. This paper recommends a multidisciplinary engagement of NHM so as to provoke further research into the discursive practices in NHM and African musicology.

Keywords: *Context, contextual issues, Nigerian Hip-hop music, Àsá, African musicology*

Introduction

Context is the spine of meaning. It could be described as the physical environment in which communication takes place. Such environment includes the speaker, hearer, locale, time, space and activities. Context helps to unravel ambiguity in language. Songs belong to the poetic genre. We can define song as a composition made up of lyrics and music, with the intent of the lyric being sung, for the purpose of producing a passionate feeling or emotion in relation to a particular matter. Ransom (2015) asserts that for ages, songs have been known as an effective way of communicating to the masses, and lyrics have played a massive role in delivering this communication. MacDonald, Kreutz & Mitchell (2012) posit that music is ubiquitous. Each lyric of songs carries a message. Song is part of a society. In every society, there are people who feel the injustice and evil perpetrated in the society, and feel that the only way to voice out is by singing about such injustice and evil. Every song has a theme or subject matter which it relates to its audience.

Bukola Elemide, whose first album is *Asa*, is popularly known by her stage name, Asa. She was born in Paris to Nigerian parents. Her family returned to Nigeria when she was two. Asa grew up in Lagos, Nigeria. She returned to Paris eighteen years later and started her career as an artiste. Her music is influenced by the collection of music her father had built up for his work as a cinematographer. These records feature musical icons such as Marvin Gaye, Fela Kuti, Bob Marley, King Sunny Ade and Miriam Makeba. When she arrived in Nigeria at the age of twenty, she released her first single, *Ẹyẹ Àdàbà*. Her second album, *Beautiful Imperfection*, was released on 25 October, 2010. The lead single from *Beautiful Imperfection* is titled *Be My Man* and was released in late September, 2010. Asa's third studio album, *Bed of Stone*, was released in August 2014. The lead singles are *Dead Again*, *Eyo*, *Satan Be Gone* and *The One That Never Comes*. On 14th May, 2019, she released new single titled *The Beginning* after a year hiatus. She could be classified as a Hip-pop musician. The power of rhythm that runs through her lines and the prevailing subjects she addresses in her songs endear her to the younger generation. Her songs are devoid of immoral contents.

Recently, pop songs have attracted the interest of linguists and non-linguists. Studies (Olatunji, 2007; Adegaju, 2009; Filani, 2015; Ojoawo, 2016 and Okon, 2017) have investigated songs from cultural, historical, sociological and linguistic perspectives. However, a discursive engagement of context in Asa's songs has not been explored. This study engages Bukola songs from the contextual perspective. The study intends to uncover contextual issues in her songs. To achieve this goal, Halliday's context of situation is considered as an appropriate theoretical framework to analyse how Asa engages contextual issues. Of particular interest to the study is how Asa represents socio-cultural issues, social identity and how she uses linguistic tools to represent contextual issues.

The songs of Asa have enjoyed public acceptance over the years. Yet, there are no corresponding linguistic investigations on her songs. The only available study on Asa's songs is that of Ajayi (2017). Studies are yet to engage Asa's songs from discourse analytical perspective. Dearth of linguistic investigation on Asa's songs has prevented an understanding of how the contextual issues in her songs are uncovered through contextual features. Inadequate studies on Asa have also prevented an understanding of how her songs respond to socio-political and cultural ills in Nigeria. This study is timely and needful as it sets to study how the discursive features in Bukola Elemide reveal contextual issues in her songs. The study adopts Halliday's context of situation as its theoretical anchor. Halliday's context of situation includes the total non-linguistic background to a text or utterance, including immediate situation in which it is used, and the awareness by speaker and hearer of what has been said earlier and of any external beliefs or presupposition. The study describes how context of situation helps to decode meaning in Asa's songs.

This study is significant in a number of ways. Apart from contributing to existing body of knowledge in African musicology, a study of this nature will also illuminate how linguistic variables are negotiated in representing Nigeria's socio-cultural realities in the selected songs. Asa's engagement of the Yoruba language is a way of documenting the language and enhancing its status and utilisation. Apart from serving as a resourceful teaching material for Discourse Analysis, students of Discourse Stylistics/Analysis and cultural studies will find it a resourceful tool.

Studies on Hip-hop

Hip-hop is more than just music; it encompasses a whole culture, and it has become one of the most influential elements that have helped to shape global entertainment and youth self-expression. All over the world, Hip-hop is a tool for explaining the complexities of daily life and speaking truth to power, whether through spoken lyrics, graffiti art, dance or disc jockey mastery.

Researchers have come to agree that Hip-hop is a global culture (Krimms, 2000). Hip-hop gives ample opportunity to disaffected youths in impoverished neighborhoods to channel their frustrations into art rather than violence (Alim and Pennycook, 2007). Through Hip-hop, people in different religions, who would not have ever spoken to one another, come together. Pennycook (2010) asserts that localisation of Hip-hop with the mixing indigenous and non-indigenous languages results into new relations between the languages involved and the cultures associated with them. The mixing of indigenous and foreign languages by Hip-hop artistes results in interrelations between cultures. This healthy linguistic interaction contributes significantly to peaceful co-existence among nations of the world. Hip-hop artistes' engagement of indigenous and foreign languages also enhances cultural identity of the artistes. It is a means of propagating and enhancing the utilisation of indigenous languages for development. Since the evolution of Hip-hop, it has been used by artistes as an instrument of self-expression. Hip-hop artistes ventilate as bluntly or as eloquently as they prefer, making statements on anything from love and abandonment to poverty and corruption.

Quite a number of studies have engaged Hip-hop songs. Some of these studies (Daramola, 2007; Babalola & Taiwo, 2009; Akande & Akande, 2013; Adegoju, 2014; Ojoawo, 2016 and Ajayi, 2017) have investigated the use of codes in NHM. Babalola and Taiwo (2009) observe that the major language used to code-switch in most Nigerian Hip-hop songs is Yoruba, even though most of these artistes are non-Yoruba speakers. The Yoruba language is commonly used in the refrain part of the songs. Furthermore, Babalola et al (2009) reveal that Hip-hop songs in Nigeria undergo code-switching in some other languages which are the English language and the Nigerian Pidgin. They affirm that the traditional Nigerian music has been incorporated into the Hip-hop music. The weakness of the study lies in its scope; the work is too narrow, as it explains only code-switching as the only linguistic feature used in negotiating meaning in NHM.

Ojoawo (2016) observes that items such as *it* and *am* are non-identifiers that are used as replacements for sexual items in NHM. She maintains that non-identifiers help the artistes to covertly distill the intended message while the linguistic context links the substituted item with the substitute. She points to the readers that paralinguistic features, such as facial gesture are used to indicate sexual gesture in the video clips of these songs. She observes that figures of speech such as substitution, imagery, euphemism, hedging, code-switching and metaphor are linguistic devices used to conceal sexual terms. Her study has helped greatly in revealing how Nigerian artistes subtly suggest sexual terms with several linguistic devices. However, she does not adequately engage how the linguistic tools communicate contextual issues in the songs. Adegoju (2014) asserts that artistes in Nigeria suggest socio-cultural and political issues in the country through the title of their songs, and by satirising some of these issues. The Hip-hop genre is used to revolutionalise the political structure in

Nigeria. He asserts that most of our artistes are not only artistes but activists. The artistes project activism through political commentaries, rude jokes, parodies, and acerbic sense of humors and satire.

Ajayi (2017) explains that the setting of the Asa's songs is Yoruba because her songs portray the Yoruba worldviews. She asserts that the artiste harps on the socio-political problems in Nigeria. She affirms that Asa discourages oppression of the masses by the elites. She posits that most poems written in Nigeria are rooted in African beliefs. Notwithstanding, Ajayi (2017) does not adequately engage the contextual description of the discourse stylistic features of the songs. Akande and Akande (2013) assert that the use of local languages by artistes shows that they identify with the languages and the cultures associated with them. They assert that it is the backbone of real Hip-hop. They posit that one of the ways Nigerian Hip-hop has been localised is through the lexis, coinages, foreign slangs such as *fella*, *dude*, *baby*, and local slangs such as *ikebe* and *bakasi*. They assert that other morphological process such as reduplication is used by Nigerian Hip-hop artistes in their lyrics. Examples of such reduplicated words are *copy, copy, jiggy, jiggy*. They affirm that proverbs are used to serve communicative and pragmatic purposes in day to day language use and in performance. They corroborate Daramola's (2007) and Sunday's (2011) submissions on the role proverbs in resolving conflict as well as causing verbal war. They also explain the use of proverbs by citing Finegan (1970:409) who observes that "proverbs are used to advice, rebuke or shame another into compliance". The study successfully points out how linguistic localisation is achieved in Nigerian Hip-hop songs. It is important to assert that the studies above have illuminated Hip-hop as a peculiar music. The studies have appealed to how language constructs sex and other social issues. Apart from the fact the studies do not interrogate Asa's songs, the notion of context and contextual issues in Asa's songs remain outstanding. This explains why this study uses Halliday's notion of context to unpack how language functions in constructing contextual issues in Asa's songs.

Perspectives on context in discourse

Context favours a shift in paradigm from language as a formal system to that of language user. It has become a major notion in language study. The business of meaning has become an enterprise that is engaged by language. Two major areas of language, semantics and pragmatics have been saddled with the task of meaning. While semantics studies how meaning encoded, pragmatics investigates meaning in context (Levinson, 1983). Pragmatics an inquiry into the contribution context makes to meaning or the examination of contextual or speaker's meaning that is, the interpretation of what people mean by their utterance in a particular context, and how the context influences what is being said (Yule,1996). Context could be described as a small subpart of the universe of discourse shared by speaker and hearer, and it includes facts about the topic of the conversation and the situation.

Ochs (1979) conceives of context as the social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time. He further describes context as the minimal language user's beliefs and assumptions about temporal, spatial and social setting, prior, ongoing and future actions (verbal and non-verbal) and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction at hand. From Ochs' description, one could infer that context exemplifies the relevant aspects of the physical or

social setting of an utterance. To Leech (1983), context is any background knowledge shared by speaker and hearer and which contributes to the hearer's interpretation of what speaker means by given utterance. Considering the dynamic nature of context, Mey (1993) surmises that context is a phenomenon that undergoes continuous change and never remains identical both within and between situations. Each state of the constant development represents a different world state prompted by the continuous interaction between people. On the import of context in discourse, Firth (1957) contests the fact that words and sentences are meaningful in themselves, and believes that the complete meaning of a word is always contextual. He submits that no text should be considered meaningful unless it can be referred to as some generalised context of situation (Firth, 1968).

Halliday opts for the social dimension. He uses context of situation to explicate meaning. Halliday classifies context of situation to include field, mode and tenor. Field of discourse, according to Halliday, concerns the subject of discourse, purpose of the interaction and how social actions are negotiated. Tenor refers to the participants in the discourse, their status, roles and relationship. By mode, he means the role language plays in constructing meaning. It captures the organisation of the text, channel, rhetorical mode and genre. This paper uses Halliday's social dimension to explicate meaning in Asa's songs. Using the contextual import of field, tenor and mode, the paper investigates the contexts in the songs and the contextual issues raised in the songs. The study's adoption of Halliday's context of situation is informed by its strength in handling meaning within context. Halliday's context of situation describes how linguistic variable describe what is happening, the topic of discussion, the social roles between participants, the role of language in discourse and the medium through which the text is rendered. Context of situation identifies the discursive roles of a text; it describes whether a text serves rhetorical, didactic or expository purpose. The study adopts Halliday's context of situation to describe how topicalisation, discourse participants, social roles of participants and medium construct prevailing contextual issues in Asa's songs.

Methodology

Asa has produced three albums with thirty-nine songs. For the purpose of this study, the researchers used two of her albums. The first album which is the artiste's first album ever to be produced is *Asa*. This album contains eleven songs. The second album is titled *Beautiful Imperfections* with twelve songs while the third is *Bed of Stone* with fourteen songs. These albums and the songs contained in each of the albums are: ASA (2007) *Jailer, No One Knows, Awé, Peace, So Beautiful, Iba, 360°, Bi' Ban Ké, Subway, Fire On The Mountain, Iba, BEAUTIFUL IMPERFECTION* (2010), *Why Can't We, Maybe, Be My Man, Preacher Man, Bimpé, The Way I Feel, OK OK, Dreamer Girl, Oré, Baby Gone, Broda Olé, Questions. BED OF STONE* (2014), *Dead Again, Eyo, Satan Be Gone, Bed Of Stone, Moving On, Grateful, Society, How Did Love Find Me, Ife, Situation, New Year, The One That Never Comes, Sometimes I Wonder [Deluxe Edition Bonus Track], Shine Your Light [Deluxe Edition Bonus Track]*.

The motivation behind the choice of these two albums is informed by their resourceful manifestation of socio-cultural, economic and political issues in Nigeria. The songs were played repeatedly via a tablet and earpiece in order to understand and transcribe the lyrics

of the song. The songs were also played via the musixmatch phone application. As the songs were being played, the lyric of each line of the song was displayed on the screen of the phone. The display of the lines was done in order to identify how meaning is negotiated via various discursive tools. For lyrics rendered in Yoruba language, efforts were made to translate them into the English language.

Procedure for data analysis

This study is anchored on the tenets of Halliday's context of situation. The motivation for the choice of theory of context is informed by its strength in handling multiple interpretative possibilities of linguistic data. A contextual classification of the songs was carried out; the songs were classified into social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Within the selected contexts, Halliday's notion of context was used to engage the text (songs). The songs were described in terms of the subject, purpose and social actions negotiated in the songs. The tenor analysis handles the role relations between participants and its implication on the entire discourse while the modal aspect of the analysis is devoted to how language functions in constructing contextual issues in the songs.

In a bid to carry out a contextual exploration of the selected songs, discourse stylistic variables, such as context, inference, shared cultural knowledge, shared code, shared situation knowledge and shared beliefs are engaged to reveal how meaning is communicated in Asa's songs. Context of situation is also used to engage various socio-economic, political and cultural practices in the text. These contextual issues are described with the use of various linguistic tools. These linguistic choices are identified and described in terms of their discursive and rhetorical effects. The paper subsequently describes a smooth interaction between the artiste's thematic preoccupation and socio-economic and political challenges in Nigeria.

Data Analysis

Social context of Asa's songs

Asa's songs are laden with prevailing social realities in Nigeria. The songs communicate her perception about the Nigerian environment. She captures how various institutions react to social issues in Nigeria. Within the social context of the songs, a number of contextual issues are communicated. The contextual issues expressed within the social context of the songs are described below:

Social crisis

Asa's songs reflect the recurrent social unrest that characterises Nigeria. The songs harp on the state of social crisis orchestrated by the corrupt tendencies of our political office holders. In *Fire on the Mountain*, she connects her cultural context to express her worry and anxiety at the collapse of peace and unity in Nigeria. The song is drawn from the Yorùbá children's sports song, *iná ñ jó lórí òkè ẹ sáré*. It is meant to warn children of impending danger. She describes the wave of killings and shedding of innocent blood which has become the order

of the day in Nigeria. Asa laments the pitiable state of insecurity in Nigeria, and condemns such unfortunate development. She is more agitated by the fact that conscious efforts are not put in place to stem the ugly tide. The killings instituted by powerful forces sweep across every stratum of the society. The field of the discourse is social crisis. She performs the social action of rebuking and condemning the act of killing and maiming in Nigeria. On tenor, she identifies the participants in the discourse to include the government and masses. The government represents the democratically elected government who exhibits military ideals. She likens the unrest to *fire*. There is the use of image-invoking metaphors to drive home her point. These metaphorical choices are *fire* and *mountain*. These terms describe social unrest as a serious national problem which has not received appropriate response. Asa's worries are captured in lines 1- 4 below:

There is fire on the mountain 1
And nobody seems to be on the run 2
Oh there is fire on the mountain top 3
And no one is running 4
I see the blood of an innocent child. 5

Asa's worries are compounded by the fact that nobody seems to be bothered about the spate of killings. Besides, no one takes cognizance of the devastating effects of the unrest. This is captured in line 4, *And no one is running*. She goes further to portray the pitiable and pathetic circumstances with the mention of, *I see the blood of an innocent child* in line 5. This connotes that the unrest is suffered by all and sundry. The mention of *soldier* presupposes the use of force to institute oppression against the masses. Her depiction of institutionalised oppression against the masses is captured in lines 11-13:

I see an army of a soldier man 11
Marching across the street 12
Hey Mr. soldier man 13

She submits that the soldier man who is employed to advocate the course of the powerful forces is also blindfolded. She opines that such actions of the soldiers are not in the best interest of the nation. Her embittered state is expressed in lines 14 and 15 of the excerpt:

Could it be love for your country? 14
Or for the gun you use in killing? 15

Despair in the face of socio-economic crisis

Asa's *May Be* centres on social crisis as it pertains to pain and anguish in Nigeria. She expresses the need for a revolution against the system, using nature metaphors. The lexical choice, *may be*, connotes uncertainty. She repeatedly uses intentional repetition, *may be*, to express disillusionment, despair, hopelessness and depression. Her choice of *sun* and *stars* in lines 1 and 3 further heightens her misery. Sun and stars are natural phenomena that express hope and prospect. The use of *may be* in the same line emphasises a destruction of the socio-economic sector beyond redemption. She portrays the participants in the discourse as being the government and the masses who share unequal roles. She critiques the actions of the government as being suicidal. Asa expresses uncertainty concerning the economic

boom of the country. She asserts that the economic breakdown in the country is a source of pain and despair to the masses. She uses the lexical terms, *users* and their *useless ways* to refer to the government and their obnoxious policies. She describes the killings in the country, and questions the rationale behind such killings. She informs the readers that those responsible for the killings have not been handled by the security personnel. She also asserts that the killers have more sophisticated ammunition than the security personnel in the country. This portrays the contemporary happenings in Nigeria, where Fulani herdsmen and Boko Haram are responsible for loss of many lives. Asa's pessimistic tone is expressed in lines 1-11:

Maybe, maybe the sun will rise 1
Maybe, maybe (ouh) 2
Maybe, maybe the stars will shine, maybe, maybe 3
This world is full of pain 4
Users and their useless ways 5
There's people dying everywhere 6
Can't someone tell me who's to blame? 7
There never used to be 8
This much attention to security 9
Until the terror and catastrophe 10
And now there's guns and war machines 11

She reiterates that she is uncertain about the progress of the country from a poor developing country to a developed country. She also identifies insincerity amongst our leaders as the bane of development in Nigeria. She takes up a revolutionary role by affirming that she will be the agent of change. This also demonstrates that all artistes are revolutionary agents. The experiences of the masses, Asa inclusive, enable an understanding of the prevalent situation in Nigeria. Her revolutionary tone is captured in lines 15-23:

No one is listening 15
To the truth or is it just me 16
I guess I must begin from now 17
To make that change I always speak about 18
I am waiting for one day to succeed 19
To break down all the boundaries and be free 20
From those who take from me and mislead me 21
For they're greedy and they're empty oh 22
Maybe, maybe the sun will rise. 23

Finally, she ends on the notes that she is still uncertain about the economic status of Nigerians. Using shared situation knowledge (SSK), Asa derides the unfortunate economic realities in Nigeria, and opts to be at the frontline in changing the status quo. Asa's experiences are motivated by the prevailing socio-economic context in Nigeria. This is in consonance with Odeunmi's (2001) submission that context comprises the experience of hearer and speaker both past and present.

Unity in the face of diversity

Asa's *360°* emphasises unity among the various multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria. She also describes the need for unity among nations of the world. She encourages Nigerians to invest

in their country, and create golden opportunities that would fast-track development instead of going to the western world to seek greener pastures. She sees peace as a huge investment, and persuades all and sundry to thread the path of peace. Her disdain for brain-drain is expressed in her songs. She educates Nigerians to appreciate and develop their country through various home-ground initiatives. In her lyrics, she asserts that everything we need to become successful in life is within us. Her admonition on the need to take advantage of the opportunities in Nigeria is depicted in lines 1-7:

We don't have to go 1
The 360 degrees, 2
Now it's time to go the 180 3
You don't have to climb 4
The highest mountain 5
For all you're looking for 6
Is within you. 7

Three hundred and sixty degree and one hundred and eighty degree (360^o and 180^o) serve metaphorical significance. They are symbolic. 360^o symbolises the idea of travelling out of one's native land/ country to the western world to harness wealth while 180^o symbolises our native land/country, which is Nigeria. The use of the nominal group, *The highest mountain* symbolises the height Nigerians go in seeking better life outside the shores of their country. Asa dwells on the lives that have been wasted during wars. She submits that it is not too late to change, and that all we need to co-exist is love. Asa's resolve for peace as a panacea for inherent hostilities is portrayed in lines 24-28:

The world has gone past times of fighting 24
So drop your guns and your swords 25
And let us live all as one 26
We all need love and understanding 27
So drop your guns and your swords 28

She laments the quality time wasted by these fun seekers in their quest to improve their status. She admonishes that amends could still be made. She preaches against hostility, hatred and killings among Nigerians. She advocates the need to lay down arms and pursue the path of peace. She equally condemns racism. She makes use of the second person pronouns in the song. These pronouns include *we* and *you*. The pronouns are used to reinforce the fact that her message concerns everybody, including herself. The subject addressed by Asa is a sensitive one, considering the present state of unrest in Nigeria. There is a clarion call to salvage the nation by preaching peace across all boundaries of division in Nigeria. As a multilingual nation, Nigeria is beset with myriads of divisive factors. Asa urges all Nigerians to live above these walls of division, and explore such differences for development. She hopes that these words will cause a positive change in Nigeria. She expresses hope for a change in lines 31-32:

I'll be waiting 31
I'll be 32

Economic depression

In Asa's *Ilu*, the field concerns economic depression in Nigeria. The tenet of such economic downturn, as noted by Asa, cuts-across feeding, devaluation of naira, insecurity and neglect

of agriculture, which used to be the mainstay of Nigerian economy. She attributed Nigerian economic breakdown to the carefree and corrupt attitude of her leaders. She repeatedly says this in order to emphasise that our leaders are responsible for the misfortune that has befallen Nigeria. The social action performed in the lines is that of criticising Nigerian political office holders for being the architect of the nation's misfortune. She identifies the leaders and the masses as the participants in the discourse, and attaches the fortune or misfortune of the nation to the leadership qualities displayed by the leaders. She uses conditional clauses to assert that her stance in lines 1-4

Tí ìlú ò bá dùn (If a country is prosperous) 1
Tí ìlú ò bá dùn at all (If a country is not prosperous) 2
Tí ìlú ò bá dùn (If a country is not prosperous) 3
Éyin lẹmọ bẹ̀ese sé (You are the one that can explain how you handled it.) 4

She uses historical allusion to take the audience down memory lane to the time when there was plenty of food to eat. She uses contrast to distinguish between the prosperity recorded in the past, and the economic hardship that has become the order of the day in present-day Nigeria. These negative happenings include devaluation of naira, high inflationary trend, insecurity and general economic downturn. In the good old days, money had significant value and individuals got real value for money. Families were comfortable and sufficient with little money. She identifies the government as wicked and bereft of transformative economic policies. She laments that food items have become extremely expensive to such an extent that they are no longer within the reach of the common man. Even food items that are peculiar with the poor are scarcely available. This depicts the heights of government's insensitivity to the welfare of the masses. Her disillusionment is captured in lines 9- 17:

I remember long time ago 9
I remember láyé àtíjọ́ (I remember in the olden days). 10
Bóomú sílẹ̀ kan, lọ fi ra oúnjẹ sí ilé (If you take a shilling to buy
food items for the home) 11
Bàbá á jẹ yèyè á jẹ omo á jẹ yó (The family will eat to satisfaction). 12
Oúnjẹ àjẹ jù (Sufficient food) 13
Oúnjẹ àjẹ wòbì (Sufficient food) 14
Oúnjẹ àjẹ yí (Excessively sufficient food) 15
Àmọ̀ nísinsin yí (But right now) 16
Gaàrì ti wón, èpà ti tán (Gaàri is expensive, Groundnut is finished). 17

Gender discrimination

Asa's *Awe* dwells on gender discrimination. She openly expresses the discrimination the society places on women. Women in African society are limited, short-changed and restricted. The male folk continuously dominate women, and subject them to series of untold embarrassment and hardship. *Awe* captures this social reality. She identifies a particular man who wanders aimlessly seeking momentary pleasure. This is captured in lines 1-2 of the song: *àwé ibo lo lo ká* 1 (friend, where have you been?). *Ta n fì wáọ ká* 2 (we have been tracing your whereabouts)'. This man eventually impregnates a lady who happens to be his neighbour. Having been put into the family way, the lady in question revealed the identity of the person responsible for the pregnancy. Asa's satiric tone is captured in lines 7-10:

Ó wí pé o (She said). 7
Òun lóyún fún o (She's pregnant for you). 8
Oyún osù méjì (Two months pregnancy) 9
Ó lóyún fún o (She's is pregnant for you). 10

Asa emphasises the public ridicule which the woman is exposed to. She stresses that the woman is old enough to give birth to the man. This underscores the fact the women serve as object of ridicule in the society. She goes further to describe the woman as a prostitute who could have been made pregnant by different men. Her ridiculous description of the woman's sexual escapade is further portrayed in lines 15-22:

Ó tó bí ẹ lómọ/ìwọ nàà (She's old enough to give birth to you/you of all people). 15
Ànti tó lóyún fún o (The older lady that is pregnant for you). 16
Ó tó bí ẹ lómọ (She is old enough to give birth to you). 17
Ó tó bí ẹ lómọ oh oh (She is old enough to give birth to you). 18
Ó bí 'mon (She gave birth) 19
Ìre ló ni mú, ẹsè (The child's nose and legs resemble yours). 20
Irun orí, ìwọ dúdú (The hair is black). 21
Ọmọ pupa báwo ló se rí? (The baby's fair, how could that be)? 22

In the above lines, Asa exposes the travail of women, as created by the society. She presents the woman in question as someone who is being manipulated and used by men. The man that impregnated her is even younger than she is. Besides, she accuses the woman of infidelity. The woman is portrayed as a prostitute in line 20. This unpleasant sexual experience, according to her, resulted in clash of identity between the new born baby and the supposed father in terms of complexion, colour of hair and other bodily features. The unfortunate development creates crisis at the doorstep of the man. Using historical allusion, she uses an example of the king of Èjìgbò, a town in Yoruba land. She likens the social crisis that emanated from the unfortunate development to the one that took place at the palace of the king of Èjìgbò. Lines 26-30 below capture the travails of the woman in question:

Èwá wọjà láàfin 26 (Come and watch a fight at the palace). 26
Oba Èjìgbò (Of the king of Èjìgbò) 27
Àtabo, àtakọ (both male and female) 28
Wọ̀n jà láàfin ọba (They fought at the king's palace) 29
Láàfin Ọba (At the king's palace) 30

Cultural context of the song

In some of Asa's song, she portrays the Yoruba worldview. She also indicates some of the traditions and beliefs that are peculiar to the African society. Culture-specific issues expressed in her songs are:

The Place of the mother in African society

So Beautiful by Asa describes the place of the mother in African society with the use of metaphorical expressions. She begins by praising the mother and describing the beauty of her mother, and how much she values her mother. Using shared cultural knowledge, she

describes her mother as the best thing that has ever happened to her in life. She uses the lexical word, *beautiful*, to describe motherhood in this context. The lexical choice, *beautiful*, is used to describe her excited and fulfilling moments with her mother. Her excited state is captured in lines 1-7:

Beautiful is your name 1
Wonderful is what you are to me 2
It's you I see in my dreams 3
Everyday and I pray for you 4
Queen of my life 5
You're so beautiful mama. 6
You're beautiful 7

Asa's lines above presuppose that the absence of her mother connotes misery, frustration, despair, hopelessness. Within the African socio-cultural context, it is believed that a mother develops intimate relationship with her children. This explains why children are more emotionally attached to their mother. As stressed in line 3 of the song, *It is you I see in my dreams*. This statement underscores the fact that she is emotionally attached to her mother. She describes her as the queen of her life in lines 8-9:

Èmí n wá mà má kan (I am looking for a mother). 8
Ta ló rí yèyè yen? (Who have seen the queen)? 9

She code-switches English and Yoruba expressions to portray the premium placed on motherhood in Yoruba culture. She describes her mother as a woman who perseveres and endures series of untold hardships in her husband house in a bid to secure the future of her children. In lines 1-13, she describes her as one in a million:

Mà má mi ò rójó rí (My mother never saw an eye). 10
And that's why I'm loving you. 11
Nítórí ọmọ o jiyà (My mother suffered for the sake of her children).
Nílẹ ọkọ (In her husband's house) 13

She praises her mother by code-switching English and Yoruba expressions, *Ebámi kírà fún mà má mi òrìsà bí ìyá ò sí*. She likens her mother to a Yoruba idol, *Òrìsà*. Using shared knowledge of the Yoruba people, *Òrìsà* is a deity in Yoruba land which sees and coordinates the affairs of man. The context of the text under study facilitates meaning. The use of code-switching in the above lines enables a smooth understanding of the place of motherhood in Yoruba culture. The social action enacted here is that of praising her mother's role in seeing her through the challenges of life. She equates her mother to an *Òrìsà* who is to be worshipped and appeased at intervals. She harps on the mother's invaluable contribution to her life, and the untold hardship she passed through in the course of bringing her up. The power of life and death resides in the hands of the deity. Her mother's unquantifiable roles are captured in lines 20-24:

Ebámi kí mà má mi (Help me to sing praises of my mother). 20
Òrìsà bí ìyá 21 (A god like her) 21
Kò sí láiyé (Can't be found). 22
Woman there is 23
No one like you. 24

Power of nature

Asa emphasises the power of nature in *Ẹyẹ Àdàbà*. This song takes its source from the Yoruba cultural tradition. Her recourse to the Yoruba tradition justifies why an interpretation of the song relies on shared cultural knowledge of the Yoruba culture. A contextual exploration of the song reveals how meaning is negotiated in the song. Asa relies excessively on the use of symbols to drive home her points. She identifies nature as an indicator of success or failure, as portrayed in lines 1-4:

Ojúmó ti mọ (It's a new day). 1
Ojúmó ti mọ mi (I have seen a new day). 2
Nílẹ yí o o (In this house) 3
Ojúmó ti mọ – mo rí re o (I have seen good things). 4

The lines are rendered in the Yoruba language. At the break of day, *Ojúmó* in Yoruba culture, presents a fresh opportunity for people to explore their environment and invest richly. Individuals are naturally expectant of bountiful reward from such investment. However, people do not reap the same measure of reward for their hard work. There are no justifiable excuses for these natural occurrences. This explains why at the *break of the day*, every individual resorts to prayers so as to have a successful outing. The song writer says that she has witnessed the break of another day. She expresses optimism in line 4 of the song *Ojúmó ti mọn – mo rí re o*. She seeks God's fortune in her daily endeavours, as she goes about her daily routines. Another lexical choice that serves symbolic purpose in the lines above is, *Ẹyẹ Àdàbà*. Within the Yoruba worldview, *Ẹyẹ Àdàbà* signifies peace and good fortune. She identifies that, *Ẹyẹ Àdàbà* flies in the air. She further invites the dove into her dwelling place. The invitation of the dove signals Asa's quest for peace and prosperity. Morning, in African traditional belief system, brings good tidings. Her symbolic use of *Ẹyẹ Àdàbà* is captured in lines 5-8:

Ẹyẹ àdàbà (Dove) 5
Ẹyẹ àdàbà (Dove) 6
Ẹyẹ àdàbà tìn fo ló kè lo ke (which flies very high in the sky) 7
Wá ya lé mi o o (come and dwell in my home). 8

Marriage as a subset of culture

In Asa's *Bamidele*, she code-switches Yoruba and English to reflect the premium placed on marriage in African culture. She emphasises marriage as a sub-set of culture. It is a song that preaches culture from the perspective of marriage. She projects the importance of marriage in African culture by using the Yoruba traditional marriage system as a case study. She harps on the significance of bride price in the Yoruba culture through her deployment of repetition. Her attachment to culture is expressed in lines 1-4:

Bí'nú ẹ bá dùn, bí'nú ẹ ò bá dùn, (Whether you are happy, or not,) 1
On' láti bámi délé (You need to follow me home). 2
Bí o bá fé, bí o bá kò (Whether you like it, or you refuse to). 3
On' láti bámi délé bàámi (You must follow me to my father's house). 4

She informs the audience of the carefree attitude of her fiancé towards the issue in spite of his level of education. This is conveyed in line 16, *Lawyer alagidi* (Stubborn Lawyer!). She reaffirms that she is from a typical Yoruba family, and that she is well cultured. She submits that she is not ready to do away with her cultural training. Her attachment to her culture is expressed in lines 19-21:

Ìyá mi ló bí mi (My mother gave birth to me). 19
Bàbá mi ló tó mi (My father trained me). 20
Mì ò kì'n sọmọ Registry (I'm not for Registry wedding). 21

She employs the Yoruba language to drive home the cultural import of the song. These lines portray her inextricable attachment with her culture. In other words, she is committed to upholding the values of the Yoruba culture. Using shared cultural knowledge, she harps on the need to approach marriage the cultural way. She identifies her suitor as Akínyelé, a learned fellow who, according to her, lies to achieve what she wants. Asa's cultural inclination is further portrayed in lines 14-17:

Sèbí the same thing lo sọ fúnmi lána (Wasn't it the same thing you told
me yesterday?) 14
Mo tún dé/ wá tẹlé mi lọ'lé (I'm here again/ come, follow me home) 15
Lawyer alágídí (Stubborn Lawyer) 16
First class liar.17

She, however, confronts him with the requirements of marriage in her culture. She is bent on bride price as the first requirement. She reaffirms that she is from a typical Yoruba family, and she is well-cultured. She submits that she is not ready to do away with her home training on the grounds of love. Although, she is emotionally committed to the relationship, she still insists on approaching marriage the traditional way. She expresses strong hatred towards wedding conducted at the registry. She affirms that such form of marriage is alien to Yoruba culture. Her stance is depicted in lines 19-21:

Ìyá mi l'ó bí mi (My mother gave birth to me). 19
Bàbá mi ló tó mi (My father trained me). 20
Mì ò kì'n sọmọ Registry (I'm not for Registry wedding). 21

Political context of the song

Asa preponderantly reflects on the political realities in Nigeria. She repeatedly captures the neglect of the welfare of the masses. She describes the aged-long difference in class orchestrated by political office holders between the government and the masses. Some of the politically-motivated issues that cut-across her songs include:

Oppression of the masses by the political class

In *Jailer*, Asa employs lexical metaphors to describe the antics of the oppressive government in Nigeria. She expresses the fact that both ruler and the ruled share similar characteristics, and there is no point for the ruler to initiate policies that constantly suppress the masses. In the first instance, the word *Jailer* is a metaphorical depiction of what an oppressive government symbolises. In line 2 of the song, she uses pronominal references *I*

and *you* to create difference in social class. This is expressed with the use of, *I wear uniforms and you wear uniforms too*. The pronoun, *I*, refers to Asa who represents the less privileged who are usually at the mercy of the policies and decisions of the rulers. The pronoun, *you*, refers to the power that be. The choice of *uniform* connotes an instrument of oppression instituted by the privileged. She employs military terminologies such as *uniform, prisoner, jailer, strategies, oppress, victim* and *policy* to create a distinction between the ruler and the ruled. She identifies herself, a member of the less privileged group, as a prisoner. Her portrayal of class is captured in lines 1-10:

I'm in chains you're in chains too 1
I wear uniforms and you wear uniforms too 2
I'm a prisoner, 3
You're a prisoner too Mr. Jailer 4
I have fears you have fears too 5
I will die, you sef go die too 6 (I will die, you too will die.)
Life is beautiful 7
Don't you think so too Mr. Jailer 8
[Chorus:]
I'm talking to you jailer 9
Stop calling me a prisoner. 10

She, however, informs the reader that even the ruler too is a prisoner, who is constantly intimidated with fears of the unknown. She affirms that irrespective of class difference, certain identified parameters cut-across these social classes. The first is that the two of them are victims of death, and both of them are poor sinners. This identifies that the jailer does not have what it takes to castigate her. She employs biblical allusion to justify her position. This can be seen in John chapter 8verse 7. The said portion captures the tale of a Jewish woman who was found in the hands of another man. She was brought to Jesus to be condemned. Jesus told the people who brought her that if they were without sin, they should pick up a stone and throw at her. None was able to condemn her because they were all guilty of sins, and Jesus turned, and told the woman that He also would not condemn her. The biblical allusion is portrayed in lines 11-12:

Let he who is without sin 11
Be the first to cast the stone Mr. Jailer, Mr. Jailer Man 12
You suppress all my strategies 13
You oppress every part of me 14
What you don't know, 15
You're a victim too Mr. Jailer 16
If I die another will work for you 18
So you treat me like a modern slave Mr. Jailer 19
[Chorus]
Life is not about your policies 24
All the time 25
I hear my baby say 29
I wanna be president 30
I wan chop money 31
From my government 32

She describes the government as oppressors, but also portrays them as victims of their obnoxious policies. This is conveyed in lines 18-28 of the song. She explains how corrupt practices in Nigeria have negatively affected the psyche of the upcoming generation; the

younger generation now conceives of governance as an avenue to become rich through embezzlement of public funds. This is portrayed in lines 29-32. Asa laments that poor leadership in Nigeria has become a continuum. Such unfortunate development has also become a recurring decimal. Unfortunately, the younger generation has decided to propagate the status quo. Trajectories of corruption, embezzlement and nepotism are characteristic of leadership narratives in Nigeria. She admonishes the government to change its policies, and be responsive to the needs of the ruled. It could be safely said that Asa's songs are context-dependent. The songs reflect inherent contextual realities in Nigeria. Asa is motivated by the need to create a consciousness in the listener to join the forces in creating a saner society.

Conclusion

This study has investigated linguistic representations of context in selected songs of Asa. The songs reveal Asa as a cultural, social, and political revolutionist. Asa creates a peculiar Hip-hop that is replete with contextual issues in Nigeria. Her resounding commitment to contextual issues resonates in her lyrics. An application context as a theoretical tool reveals that Asa's songs achieve meaning through the use of context sensitive discourse features. The language of her lyrics creates unequal power relations as a recurring ideological issue in the society. Asa reacts to these contextual issues by expressing her displeasure about the socio-economic problems. The language of Hip-hop is conceived as a form of expression that artistes use to create cultural and socio-political awareness. Studies could also investigate a comparative analysis of Hip-hop and traditional songs. Such studies will ascertain the areas of convergence and divergence between these two approaches. Studies could also engage how language functions in expressing contextual issues in the works of other Nigerian Hip-hop artistes.

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