

Verbal and Visual Interface in Select Nigerian Pop Music Videos

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Abstract

That pop music is one of the popular genres of music with much rhythm and harmony and its emphasis on romantic love songs is not news. What needs clarification is the level of interface in terms of meaning making between the verbal and visual aspects of pop music videos. This study thus investigates visual-verbal interface in some Nigerian pop music videos in order to determine the extent to which both visual and verbal modes encode and enhance meanings in the music. Three popular Nigerian pop music artists, Wizkid, Davido and Iyanya were chosen for their top status in the top-ten music videos in Nigeria in 2019. Two of their songs each were randomly picked out of the 49 music tracks produced by Wizkid, 60 tracks of Davido and Iyanya's 22 singles. Findings indicate that, apart from paying attention to semiotic resources that are available in communicative modes, the variety of modes and their modal affordances, including multimodality account for how each mode interacts with others and how they are orchestrated in specific contexts to produce meaning. An understanding of all the modes and their meaning making properties thus brings about clearer/better understand of texts.

Keywords: *Multimodality, Semiotics, Pop music, Systemic functional semiotics*

Introduction

Visual literacy apart from simple literacy that deals with reading and writing skills is increasingly becoming a subject of interest amongst linguists. The co-occurrence of visual and linguistic signs (written and or spoken) is now a common phenomenon on different media platforms. There is a wide range of computerized and multimedia-based modes of communication in this age that challenge the traditional dominance of the purely linguistic (written or spoken) form of communication with text composers bringing in the visual mode to compliment the spoken/written texts. The visual and verbal modes of representation deployed in texts help text producers to present information in pleasurable and catchy fashion. This apart from bringing to rest the dominance of spoken/written linguistic forms of communication in the print media for both academic and journalistic literature, brings with it the question of interpreting and understanding multimodal texts. This study thus examines the duality of messages presented in select pop music videos to determine how the visual and the verbal expressions convey meaning(s). Pop music is a popular genres of music known for its general appeal to teenagers; and a mild watered-down version of rock'n'roll with more rhythm and harmony and its emphasis on romantic love songs. The importance of such verbal/visual representation in texts constructed is believed to be in the influence such verbal/visuals have on the audiences' attitudes, beliefs, values, and lifestyle.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the verbal and visual interface of select Nigerian pop music videos in order to determine their meaning making connection. The specific objectives are:

- establish verbal and visual interface in pop music videos under study,
- ascertain the meaning making connection of verbal/visual portrayal in the videos, and
- determine the viability of verbal/visual multimodal discourse texts

Methodology

Data for this study were got based on the top ten ranking of the pop music billboard chart in Nigeria for 2019. From which the two songs each of three (3) artists: Davido, Wizkid and Iyanya were chosen for their popularity and the peculiarity of their videos for multimodal discourse investigation. The lyrics of their songs were transcribed verbatim and juxtaposed with their videos to determine verbal visual interface and the meaning making potentials.

Overview of related literature

Extant studies such as Kress and van Leeuwen, (2001, 2006); Baldry, (2000); Baldry and Thibault, (2006); Hagan, (2007) and Matthiessen, (2007) have established that linguistic and non-verbal modalities are bearers of meaning in textual constructions. Jacob and Karn (2003:587) however express concern that, “While there is a wealth of literature dealing with fixation patterns both in reading and in picture perception, little data exists on the viewing of pictures and text in combination as they often occur in instructional materials, news media, advertising, multimedia content...” From the foregoing it is apt to infer that it is yet not clear what the interface between the visual and verbal co-occur of texts in the process of creating meaning especially as it refers to Nigerian pop music videos.

Digital advancement has steadily amplified the ease with which two or more *modes* (semiotic systems such as language, images, sound and movement, also referred to as ‘modalities’) and *media* (the materials and technologies used in the materialization of modes) can be combined in the creation of both electronic and other texts (Baldry 2000; Cubitt 2000; Feldman 1994; Kress 1997a, 2000a; Lemke 1998a; Unsworth 2001). To Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001:20), multimodality is “the use of *several semiotic modes* in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined...” Digitization has also brought about an increased awareness of multimedia texts designed with computers and all meaning-making practices that deploy more than one mode of communication (Kress 1997, 2000b; Kress et al. 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Lemke 1998a, 2000). This awareness is evident in the argument that the meaning-making potential of language, or indeed any semiotic system, cannot be studied by analyzing it in isolation from other modes (van Leeuwen 2004). Moreover, modes have co-evolved to fulfill distinctive functions and therefore each adds value to the meaning of a text. An analysis of multimodal texts thus requires that attention be paid to the ways in which different semiotic modes “separately and interactively construct different dimensions of meaning” (Unsworth 2001:10).

Theoretical perspective

This study adopts systemic functional semiotics (SFS) as its theoretical framework for investigating the verbal and visual interface in pop music videos in Nigeria in order to determine how the pictorial and verbal elements complement each other to form a single and cohesive text.

Systemic functional semiotics is derived from M.A.K Halliday's (1978) social semiotic view of language. The theory views language as functional (in terms of what it can do); semantic (in that it is able to construct meanings and reveal its differences between the different ways of describing events). In other words, it represents aspects of reality and establishes interpersonal links (Goodman and Graddol, 2003); it is semiotic and contextual (in that social and cultural situations affect and influence the exchange of meanings). The core idea of systemic functional semiotics has it that every semiotic artifact operates on three levels. First, it represents 'reality' that is, it denotes objects, situations and actions (ideational). Second, it establishes a certain kind of social contact and interaction with the recipient (interpersonal). Third, it builds a textual structure whose parts cohere formally and content-wise (textual). These levels are called "meta-functions" of semiotic objects or events. The essence of a visual grammar is the belief that there are formal configurations or patterns (i.e. spatial arrangements of signs) in pictures, which come equipped with certain, more or less stable social meanings.

Multimodal text analysis has become a crucial part of research, teaching and practice for a wide range of academic and practical disciplines. A variety of techniques, theoretical frameworks and methodologies have therefore evolved for such analysis. For linguists, in particular, concerned with accounting for the communication of meaning within texts, issues arising from the consideration of semiotic resources other than language, in interaction with each other and with language – such as gesture, gaze, proxemics, dress, visual and aural art, image-text relation and page-layout, cinematographic and sound design and production resources, etc – have emerged in recent decades as important challenges. Meanwhile, the emergence of multimodal studies as a distinct area of study in linguistics has also revealed a range of issues specifically relevant to the multimodal text analyst.

Multimodal analysis includes the analysis of communication in all its forms, but is particularly concerned with texts which contain the interaction and integration of two or more semiotic resources – or 'modes' of communication – in order to achieve the communicative functions of the text. Such resources include the semiotic action of other bodily resources such as gesture (face, hand and body) and proxemics, as well as products of human technology such as carving, painting, writing, architecture, image and sound recording, and in more contemporary times, interactive computing resources (digital media hardware and software). The different semiotic resources bring with them their own affordances and constraints, both individually and in combination, as well as analytical challenges in terms of the natures of the media, the detail and scope of analysis, and the complexities arising from the integration of semiotic resources across media.

Table 1: Correlation Kress and van Leeuwen- Halliday's meaning functions

Kress and van Leeuwen	Halliday
Representational meanings	Ideational meanings
Interactive meanings	Interpersonal meanings
Compositional meanings	Textual meanings

The following which is based on Kress and van Leeuwen's work (2006:45- 210), describes how each meaning (i.e., representational, interactive and compositional) is conveyed in visuals.

Representational meanings

Representational structures (Halliday's ideational meaning) are connected to the participants involved in communication, not only talking about human beings but also places and objects (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001). Two kinds of participants are involved in the description of visuals: the interactive participants (i.e., the creator or the viewer) and the represented participants (i.e., the people, places and objects we see in the actual visual).

Interactive meanings

The second type of meaning established by Kress and van Leeuwen corresponds to interactive meanings (Halliday's interpersonal meanings), which are transmitted from the relation between the viewers and what is represented inside the visual. Essential elements involving the realisation of interactive meanings are contact, social distance, perspective and modality.

Compositional meanings

The last meaning Kress and van Leeuwen pay attention to in their grammar of visual is labelled as compositional (Halliday's textual function) and embraces the representational and interactive meanings of visuals through three interconnected systems: information value, salience and framing. These systems are currently acquiring more and more importance since they are not only being applied in the analysis of individual pictures but also in the exploration of multimodal texts. Although, at first, Kress and van Leeuwen question how meanings from multimodal texts should be analysed, taking into account the individual meaning from each semiotic mode or through the interaction of all modes simultaneously; finally, they opt for examining meanings from modes as integrated parts of a whole text. This integration of the different semiotic modes is achieved by "the work of an overarching code, whose rules and meanings provide the composite text with the logic of its integration" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006:177).

Data Analysis

Establishing verbal and visual interface in pop music videos under study

Here, clips from the music videos are snapped and put side by side the lyrics of the music to establish if there is an interface between the lyrics and the snapped video clip.



Fig. 1 Iyanya



Fig. 2 Wizkid



Fig. 3 Wizkid



Fig. 4 Davido

Song lyrics 1

All the girls them are running helter-skelter them coming to my condo,
Me no talk but she follow,
... See the things money don cause, we young and getting it,
And that is why all the girls love us.
You can chop my money go now... – *Sexy Mama* (Iyanya)

Song lyrics 2

I get lady wey like designer, she too like money,
... I know you like expensive shit...
Come make we roll in my Lamborghini,
Make you *chop* my money, I no mind na God give me.
Expensive shit - Wizkid

Song lyrics 3

Your bum bum bigger than Bombay
Your bum bum make me throw way Aham
Na you dey for my mind O
Baby girl your body bad nunu
Come close give me kiss nunu
I dey for heat give me breeze nunu...

– Bombay (Wizkid)

Song lyrics 4

When it's time to get down now to spend the dough,
To all my sexy girls in here please just let me know
Why you come dey vex, because she no want your own
...She already snatch my phone,
... You know we run the town
...you make me want to spend it all on you,
... She like my Rolex ... I'm getting richer.

– *Gbon Gbon*. (Davido)

Multimodality presumes that to understand verbal and visual texts, one must consider both the images which contain as much (culture-bound) information as the verbal message, and secondly, that new meanings may result from textual-visual interaction. Thus, it is crucial to approach the message as an integrated unit, with competency in the analysis of both code systems. In this section where the interface between the visual and the verbal is being determined, the thrust is to juxtapose the lyrics side by side the video-clip so as to determine the connection.

Fig.1 is a clip from the song *Sexy Mama* by Iyanya. Part of the lyrics reads “All the girls them are running helter-skelter them coming to my condo, Me no talk but she follow ...See the things money don cause, we young and getting it and that is why all the girls love us. You can chop my money go now...” The artist is portraying himself as one that has acquired financial wealth and part of the effect of the wealth is that he is flocked by women who are leaching in for some of it. As this is being sung, the artist is flanked in a video with huge sums of money by his side to show the wealth he is made of that is attracting the women to him.

Fig. 2 is from Wizkid's soundtrack *Expensive shit*. He declares in the track that “I get lady wey like designer, she too like money ...I know you like expensive shit... Come make we roll in my Lamborghini, Make you *chop* my money, I no mind na God give me.” The artist claims affluence which is typified in the surrounding in the video clip that depicts an exquisite apartment. He affirms that his lady also likes designer, a term that reflects love for exotic things. The picture clips also show ladies, whom he calls, for them to roll in his Lamborghini, an Italian luxury sport car. It is observed from the foregoing that while the song talks of luxury, aspects of luxury are also captured in the video, from the apartment to the car to corroborate what is being communicated.

Similarly, Fig. 3 is from Wizkids soundtrack *Bombay*. In the track the artist declares that “Your bum bum bigger than Bombay. Your bum bum make me throw way Aham. Na you dey for my mind O Baby girl your body bad nunu. Come close give me kiss nunu. I dey for heat give me breeze nunu...” The sound track adores womanhood, stating how the wriggling of the waist turns him on sexually. This depiction of the female folk in the song is juxtaposed with female dancers skimpily dressed in erotic dance steps. This correlation between the song and the pictorial depiction in the video shows an interface between the verbal and the visual.

Fig. 4 is from Davido's soundtrack *Gbon Gbon*. In the track Davido flexes himself as one with sufficient money to throw around and calls on all the ladies around to flock him. This

call is accompanied by a company of ladies who engulf him in the video clip indicating the interface between the verbal and the visual in the song. In all, it is deductable that indeed there is interconnectedness between the verbal and the visual codes in the musical videos that showed an interface of the two modes used in communicating meaning and intention in the music.

Ascertain meaning making connections of verbal/visual portrayal in music videos

Kress and van Leeuwen, (2001:2) aver that multimodality is a “contemporary semiotic practice”; an approach that describes the full repertoire of meaning-making resources in aspects such as: designs, layouts, images, photographs, films, colours, scents, speeches, gestures, and writings that people combine and use in different contexts to make meaning. Multimodality thus assumes that all communicative resources as listed above are socially shaped to become meaning making resources that articulate the (social, individual/affective) meanings demanded by the requirements of different communities. How these feature in pop music videos are exemplified in the following excerpts.



Fig 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

Figs. 5 to 8 are captions taken from Iyanya's music video *Sexy Mama*

Song lyric 5

I'm feeling your sexy waist
Sexy mama
See this sexy lady
This girl is one of a kind, Her nyash dey make me maga
Sexy Mama (Iyanya)

The title of the song is *sexy mama*. The term sexy entails an exciting sexual desire or a tending to arouse sexual desire or interest in another. Hence, right from the title of the song, one has this notion that, what is the focus of the song is the demonstration of sex appeals. This is supported in the videos with clips of half-naked women with seductive looks. The lyrics of the song as captured in the excerpt above describes the sexual feeling that is roused due to the twitching of the female buttocks and other alluring features. These go to show a synergy between the verbal and visual elements in the video to describe and demonstrate sexual inducement.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

Figs 9 to 12 are captions taken from Wizkid's *Bombay*

Song lyrics 6

Baby girl your body dey burst my brain
Oh girl I'm going insane
Oh baby girl please make my day 'cause their profit no reach my gain
Your bom bom bigger than Bombay
Your bom bom make me throw way Aham
Na you dey my mind
O baby girl your body bad nunu
Come close give me kiss nunu
I dey for heat give me breeze nunu...
Wizkid's Bombay

The word '*Bombay*' in Wizkid's soundtrack has many possible meanings. First, it was the name of one of the major cities in India; Maharashtra's capital city, Mumbai, was originally known as Bombay. It was also the title of the acclaimed award winning 1995 Indian movie, Tamil that was directed by Mani Ratnam; Bombay is also the name of an exotic wine. It is equally the title of several music tracks, including this by Wizkid.

From contextual determination in the lyrics of the song, it is obvious Bombay as used in the song refers to size. "*Your bom bom bigger than Bombay*" connotes that even though Bombay is big, your bom bom is bigger. *Bom bom* is a common lingo in Nigeria that refers to the buttocks. The song literally adores womanhood; it highlights different aspects of the female folks and specifically describes the bum bum something that turns one on heat. This is corroborated in the video by clips of females in bum-shorts wiggling their buttock in erotic sensations and other alluring features and postures. These together intersect the meaning making process between what is sung in the lyrics of the song; thus bringing about a verbal / visual interface.



Fig. 13

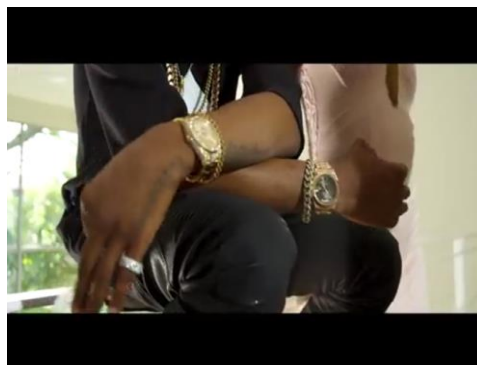


Fig. 14 Wizkid's Expensive shit

Song lyrics 7

Omo the way you shake
The things you do, makin' me craze
Rockin' expensive shit, oh yeah eh eh eh eh
I say wetin you wear
The things you do, makin' me craze
I know you like expensive shit. Oh yeah eh eh eh eh eh eh
Wizkid's Expensive shit

Wizkid's soundtrack 'Expensive shit' is a display of wealth, a quality of profuse abundance that reflects a state of being rich and affluent; having a plentiful supply of material goods and money. The song lyrics talks of one "Rockin' expensive shit," meaning one is using and enjoying expensive things; "...I say wetin you wear" this is adoring all that one has on in terms of clothing; "I know you like expensive shit." And the video displays an affluent environment: a magnificent house, exotic cars, expensive wears – clothing and accessories such wristwatches, necklaces and rings among others. These demonstrate a significant interface between what is sung in the song and the visuals that are seen in the video, thus bringing about a verbal visual interface that enhances the meaning making process that is communicated in the music.

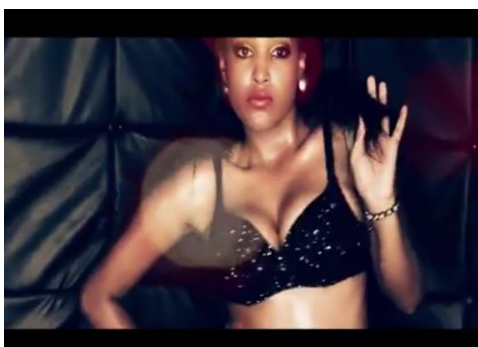


Fig. 15

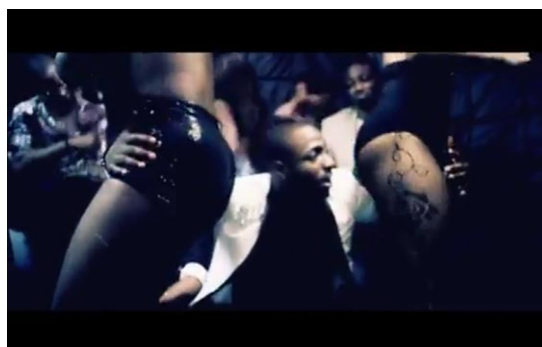


Fig. 16

Song lyric 8

To all my sexy girls in here please just let me know
Why you come dey vex, because she no want your own...
She say she dey lonely
She wants to gbon gbon me...
She wants to gbon gbon gbon gbon gbon...
Davido's Gbon gbon

The phrase ‘gbon gbon’ in Yoruba that recurs severally in Davido song translates literally to mean ‘smell a lot’. The human body odour says a lot about people’s personalities. Pleasant smells emanating from people attract opposite sex to each other. This phenomenon of ‘gbon gbon’ thus talks of a close intimacy with someone that breeds familiarity and affection. In the songs: “She say she dey lonely” indicates that the one that is lonely is seeking companionship. “She wants to gbon gbon me...” then signifies that, what the lonely person wants is not just mere companionship but deep affection and intimacy that leads to knowing the other the way things are perceived through the sense of smell. Corroborating this in the video, Fig. 15 shows a lady all by herself; affirming the adage that says “a woman without her man, is incomplete.”

It therefore substantiates the aspect of the song that says “She say she dey lonely”. Conversely, the aspect that says “She wants to gbon gbon me...” is corroborated in the video with the clip where Davido is seen seated amidst female dancers who are dressed in bikini and bum-short. To buttress the gbon gbon aspect, Davido is seen gazing intently at the butt of one of the ladies as though to perceive the smell there from. The implication is that, in a similar manner that farts are expelled and the odour is perceived, intimacy in relationship brings about a knowing the can be felt just as we smell. This again highlights the verbal-visual interface in the song.

Determining the viability of verbal/visual multimodal discourse texts

This section accounts for the extent to which meaning making possibilities are brought about by verbal-visual texts. It establishes the point where the verbal and visual modes meet and interact in enhancing a clearer/better understanding multimodal texts. This will aid a better understanding of messages that are encoded in language use.

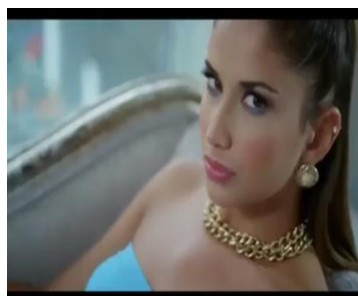


Fig. 17

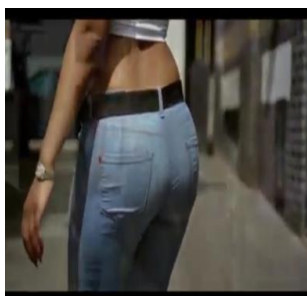


Fig. 18

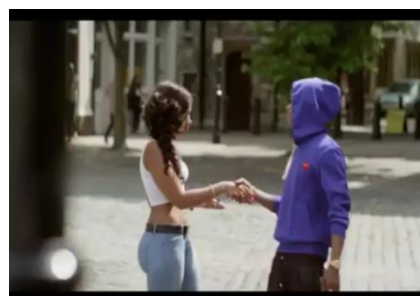


Fig. 19

From Wizkid’s album – Caro

Song lyrics 9

Caro your body necessary ah necessary
Caro carry leave story, ah leave story
Caro dey make my head turn
Caro dey make me wan dey lose am
Caro dey make my head dey bang
Caro dey make my head dey scatter
Caro your body necessary necessary...

The focus here is to determine how multimodality facilitates the possibilities of identifying, examining and reaching conclusions about the production of meaning through the interrelation of resources and social context. From the lyrics and the video clips above it is observed that the song is dedicated to a lady ‘Caro’. This is noted right from the title of the soundtrack. The song praises and adores the qualities of Caro and to juxtapose what is said in the soundtrack, the video shows a pretty lady, her ladylike curves, and her romance with the artist. This presents case of saying the same thing in two different ways; if the one does not make clear and definite impact the other ensures meaning and intention is communicated. Hence, while the lyrics praises and adores Caro, the video conveys visually, who Caro is, her physical ladylike features, and how she is being adored. The communication from both the verbal and visual modes in this instance helps in bringing in concrete terms what ordinarily will be an abstraction that is left for imagination, where it only said. In this instance, multimodality brings about clearer and better understanding of texts.

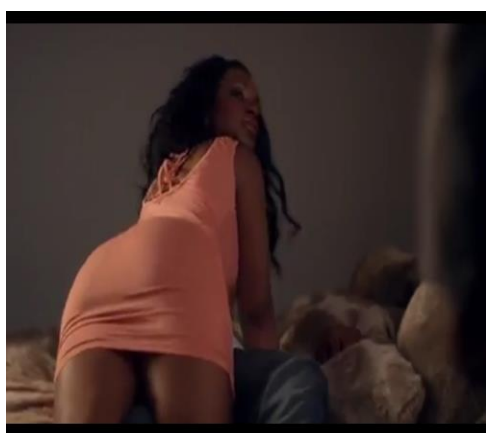


Fig. 20



Fig. 21



Fig. 22



Fig. 23

From Davido's album Gobe

Song lyrics 10

Girl your behind is a killer
I can see you sensual; see gobe, omo see gobe
The way you wriggle and waver you must be intentional,
see gobe, omo see gobe Mo gbe oh,
...Girl I love the way you look tonight
I wanna put my hands on your waist

'Cos I'm loving your sexy body
Won't mind to have a taste
Dey feel like hanging over; Dey roll like jangolover
Good things come to those who wait...

In Davido's soundtrack '*Gobe*', the artist flirts with a young lady as he describes how her behind (buttocks) takes his breath, how the way she wiggles the backside, and her body sensually turns him on. As the song describes the features of the lady and how they arouse his passionate desire for her, the video shows the alluring backside of the lady with him. There is also the display of women wiggling their waists in erotic sensation. This dual representation of feminine features and sensational affections in verbal and visual modes combine to reinforce what is said and seen for a better a clearer comprehension of what is communicated in the song. The verbal/visual interface thus enhances a better encoding and decoding of intended meanings.

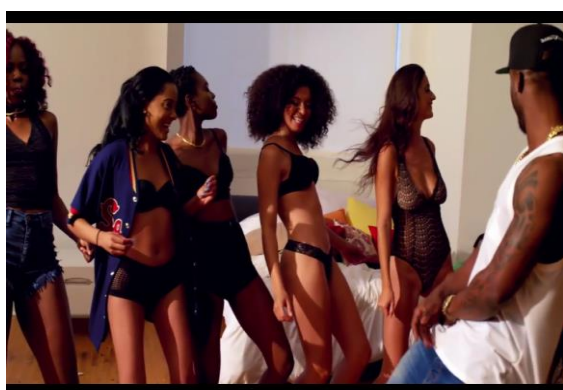


Fig. 24

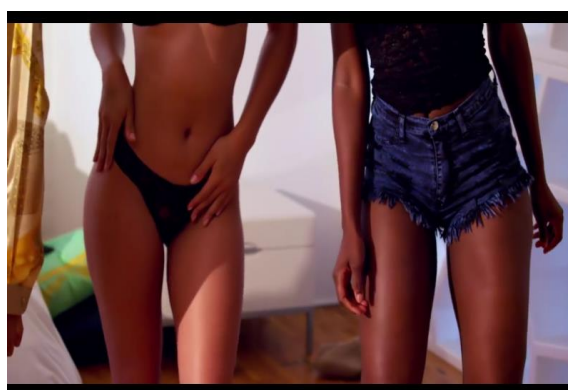


Fig. 25



Fig. 26
From Iyanya's Album – Mr Oreo

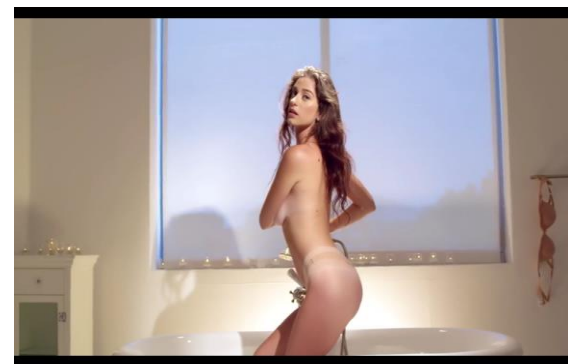


Fig. 27

Song lyric 11

I want to be the one to drive you crazy (Drive you crazy)
Listen I wanna make you come back, come back, come back
Come back to me
And let me make your head swell, I got what you need
I got what you need girl
You go gaga when you log on to this...

In the song ‘*Mr Oreo*’, the artist portrays the image of a perfect gentleman with the charm to not only attract but also keep a lady within his web. As the lyrics of the song affirm the ability to make ladies desire more love and affection from the man, the video shows a group of ladies parading in bikinis in the glare of a young man, who is poised to captivate at least one of the ladies, with a promise in the song to make lasting impression on the lady/ladies to keep longing for him. The video further shows the man bathing the lady in a bathtub in a sensational move that marks the man as a gentleman – someone who is there, handy by his woman to provide help and assistance. This idea is not only conveyed in the song but also in the video that accompanies the song. An aspect of multimodality that indicates how verbal/visual interface enhances the encoding and the decoding of meaning making possibilities in texts in ways that are more assessable and comprehensible.

Conclusion

This study has established that verbal and visual modes in pop music videos interface to communicate meanings and intentions of artists. As demonstrated in the analysis, the visuals corroborate and further establish aspects of the verbal modes. These enhances the meaning making process in the music videos as what is heard and seen is in tandem with each other makes comprehension more assessable. \for instance, in Devido’s song ‘*Gobe*’ when he sang ‘Girl your behind is a killer’ fig. 23 shows the image of a lady from behind in a skimpy dress to show how alluring she is, to show how it is she kills by being breath taking. Thus, there is interconnectedness between the visual and the verbal modes in the music videos that ensure cohesion in the texts.

It is established therefore that the visual-verbal modes in the music videos operate on three levels identified in our theoretical framework. First, it represents ‘reality’ that is, it denotes objects, situations and actions of persons that represent ideational meaning. Second, it establishes some social contact and interaction with viewers/listeners, who identify with what is heard and seen and represents interpersonal relations. Third, there is textual structure as both the verbal and visual modes cohere formally and content-wise (textual).

Based on the foregoing, the study sums that, apart from paying attention to semiotic resources that are available in communicative modes, the variety of modes and their modal affordances, multimodality concentrates on how each mode interacts with others and how they are orchestrated in specific contexts to produce meaning. This representation of different modes working at the same time to produce meaning in particular settings is known as multimodal ensembles. When more than one mode is used intentionally by communicators to give out information, it is said they ensemble; and meaning is inferred based on their interrelation.

The communicator orchestrates multimodal ensembles, based on designs, where each mode has a determined function (Kress, 2010), “each mode is partial in relation to the whole meaning” (Jewitt & Kress, 2003:3 in Maier, 2011). In other words, spoken or written language is no longer the dominant mode which produces all meanings. In other words, spoken/written language is seen as another means of communication of equal importance to the other modes (like visuals) in the process of meaning making. The incorporation and

dissection of both modes in any meaningful meaning making discourse will thus bring about a clearer and better understanding of texts

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