

16.

A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Satirical Commentary and Social Identity Construction in Falz's "Round of Applause"

Bilkisu Mohammed,

Division of General Studies,
Kebbi State University of Science and Technology (KSUST),
Aliero
08060874809
mbladidil@gmail.com

Abstract

The study conducts a Socio-Pragmatic analysis of satirical commentary and social identity construction in Falz's music, *Round of Applause*. It purposively samples five lyrical excerpts from the song as its data. Employing an eclectic blend of Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication theory and Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory, the study examines how the song's verbal choices perform specific pragmatic functions while also reflecting and shaping socio-cultural identities in Nigeria through satirical commentary. The findings suggest that, through code switching between English, Pidgin, and Yoruba, and the use of various pragmatically identified speech acts, the artist presents satire as a pragmatic act of resistance—mocking, mimicking, and momentarily unsettling the performances of power, neo-colonial concessions, masculinity, and capitalist success—while criticising or affirming national and youth identity.

Keywords: Socio-Pragmatics, Satire, Hip-hop

Introduction

Language is a potent tool for engaging social issues and establishing a sense of identity. Such engagement and identity construction are often undertaken through various artistic forms. Literature is a popular example and, as such, is often referred to as the metaphorical mirror of society. However, such engagement is not limited to literature, as in contemporary African societies, as it was in early African communities since music is also another such instrument. Songs often contained satirical commentary on the state of leadership and morality in traditional communities, in addition to serving as reservoirs for history and genealogy, hence framing identity.

In the contemporary age, several African musicians have continued the role of music in carrying out social commentary and framing social identity and in contemporary Nigeria; one have undertaken this role as well as Afro-Hip-hop artist, Folarin Falana AKA Falz. Falz, the son of a renowned social justice activist and human rights Lawyer, Femi Falana, has continued his father's legacy of social activism in several of his songs, most notably those from his 2019 album *Moral Instruction*. Aside from this, he earned rave reviews for his satirical take on the state of the nation in his popular remix of Childish Gambino's *This is America*, with his *This is Nigeria*. From his recent album, *The Feast*, Falz continues in his role of social criticism and identity framing through the track, *Round of Applause*. Falz's satirical lyrics are interrogated as a performative discourse that captures and critiques the socio-political dynamics of Nigerian society.

The paper's focus on the relationship between language and identity is rooted in the shared emphasis between sociolinguistics and pragmatics on how speakers construct and negotiate meaning in context. This is perfectly summed up by Hymes' position on communicative competence, which he believes is reflected less in linguistic correctness and more in the application of appropriate speech acts in the construction of social meaning. (19) Falz's lyrics embody this employment of contextually accurate speech acts in the construction of social meaning in his lyrics. His songs utilise speech acts to criticise religious hypocrisy and fanaticism, political and moral corruption, and the collapse of the nation's key infrastructures. In addition, they apply pragmatic tools like

implicature, presupposition, deixis, and code-switching to critically engage Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape.

Falz's employment of satire in his lyrics is treated as more than mere rhetorical techniques and is also rightfully treated as a socio-pragmatically anchored concept in tune with Simpson's interpretation of satire as a "discursive practice that foregrounds incongruity, defamiliarises the familiar, and ultimately seeks to disturb hegemonic assumptions" (5). This is evident in the artist's unique exploration of common societal problems in the country, which challenges established norms and power dynamics through subtle and veiled criticism. In *Round of Applause*, Falz wavers between the celebratory and the condemnatory. This deliberate ambiguity commands a form of audience participation that is simultaneously interpretive and evaluative, positioning listeners as co-constructors of meaning.

Based on the foregoing, this paper examines Falz's lyrics in "Round of Applause" from a Socio-Pragmatic perspective through the eclectic combination of Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication theory and Mey's pragmatic acts theory.

Literature Review

The distinctive and satirically rich content of Falz's lyrics has attracted scholarly attention, particularly from linguists who have analysed his work from various angles. One such study is Igwebuike and Eburuaja's examination of Falz's use of impoliteness devices such as bald-on-record attacks, sarcasm, and mock impoliteness in criticising power structures and social issues in Nigeria. This research was based on Jonathan Culpeper's politeness theory and found that the artist, through pragmatic language use, discusses taboo topics within Nigeria's sociopolitical landscape. While this study aligns with the current one by exploring how lyrics serve pragmatic and ideological functions within their socio-political contexts, it does not sufficiently analyse the artist's deployment of satirical commentary and social identity framing through his lyrics.

Another relevant study is Oseni and Isola's analysis of Falz's lyrics from selected songs—E No Finish, Brothers' Keeper, and Talk—using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis. Their work interprets Falz's lyrics as discourse texts embodying his ideology concerning national issues and social ills affecting society. Although the study highlights Falz's satirical critique of leaders' lack of commitment to the nation, it does not fully examine his use of satire or the ways he constructs social identity in his lyrics.

Similarly, Ademilokun and Bamigbade's analysis investigates social consciousness in Falz's work through CDA, focusing on his use of slang and everyday language for social critique. As with Oseni and Isola, their study does not explore how these lyrics contribute to identity construction and framing.

From a purely sociolinguistic viewpoint, Akindele and Mayorkun conduct a comparative analysis of Falz and Adekunle Gold's use of Nigerianisms and indigenised linguistic codes via Labov's Variationist approach. They argue that the artists employ bilingual pragmatic markers, coinages, semantic contrasts, loan words, lexical reduplication, local symbolism, and slang to add local colour and convey social meaning, especially among youth populations. While this sheds light on the artists' roles in shaping youth identity, it does not sufficiently emphasise their social satirical commentary.

From the foregoing, it is evident that Falz's work has been analysed from various linguistic perspectives, with emphasis on his lyrical discourse, sociopolitical and satirical commentary, and linguistic creativity. Despite this,

few works have adequately analysed his role in social identity construction or framing, as part of his socio-political criticisms, nor analysed his new body of work beyond his 2019 album, *Moral instruction*. This study fills this vacuum by focusing on a *Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Satirical Commentary and Social Identity in Falz's Round of Applause* from his latest album, *The Feast*.

Methodology

The method used in the collection of data is purposive sampling of the lyrics from Falz's song, "Round of Applause". These lyrical excerpts were sourced from Spotify and verified for accuracy through cross-referencing multiple lyric databases and audio playback. It utilises a qualitative content analysis of purposively selected lyrical excerpts from the song as its method of data analysis. An eclectic combination of Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication theory and Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory as the socio-pragmatic framework for the analysis of how the song's verbal choices perform specific pragmatic functions while simultaneously reflecting and shaping socio-cultural identities in Nigeria through satirical commentary. The data, five (5) lyrical excerpts from the song, are grouped according to identified thematic content in the course of analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs an eclectic combination of Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication theory and Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts theory. Hymes' EoC, founded in 1962, is mainly based on the idea that language results from socio-cultural practices and beliefs. According to Tanimu and Nwaobasi, these socio-cultural practices and rules are more important than the underlying grammatical rules that govern language use. (168) The term EoC refers to the anthropological elements that guide the study of language use from an anthropological perspective. These elements are identifiable through Hymes' acronym SPEAKING, which offers a socio-cultural and situational map of a specific communicative event. For this study, the communicative events are the artist's lyrics, and as such, the SPEAKING model is interpreted accordingly.

Setting and Scene: Locates the song within Nigeria's post-election political atmosphere.

Participants: Falz is identified as a satirical persona, his intended audience (primarily Nigerian youths and politically aware listeners), and the socio-political figures indirectly addressed

Ends: The goals and expected outcome of the song's lyrics include entertainment, social critique, and self-assertion.

Act Sequence: This involves breaking down the song into narrative segments, noting how thematic shifts occur between romantic banter, political criticism, and cultural pride.

Key: Analysing tonal qualities such as irony, humour, and defiance.

Instrumentalities: Documenting language varieties (English, Nigerian Pidgin, Yoruba) and stylistic devices (code-switching, metaphor, and slang).

Norms of Interaction and Interpretation: Relating how Nigerian audiences interpret satire in music within cultural norms of dissent and political commentary.

Genre: Classifying the song within satirical Afropop/hip-hop traditions in Nigerian popular music.

Mey's pragmatic acts model, founded in 2001, expands the classical speech acts theory propounded by J.L. Austin and further developed by Searle. Rather than focusing on the illocutionary (intended action) acts of utterances, Mey expands his scope of analysis to encompass the pragmeme (pragmatic action realised within a

specific context). The central philosophy of the theory is that meaning is formed within the socio-cultural context, shared knowledge, and interactional norms between participants.

The eclectic combination of these two theories is occasioned by the leeway it allows for the analysis of the lyrics within specific situational contexts and through pragmatically realised illocutionary forces. This is because while EOC ensures that the analysis remains grounded in the communicative realities of the Nigerian socio-political environment, Pragmatic Acts Theory captures the functional pragmatics of how satire is constructed and received

Data Presentation and Analysis

Satirical Commentary and the Contradictions of Power Excerpt

“Me, I be citizen and I must see the president / Na me put am there / No be me vote am, Yes!”

In this excerpt, Falz performs a pragmatic act of ironic assertion while engaging in satirical commentary. While the declarative structure suggests confidence and entitlement, the tone exposes the illusion of democratic agency in Nigerian civic life. By asserting, *“Na me put am there / No be me vote am?”*, Falz both implicates and mocks the public’s complicity in flawed electoral processes. It serves to question the quiet acceptance of the blatant electoral malpractices which marred the presidential elections in 2023.

This aligns with what Simpson identifies as “satirical deixis,” wherein the speaker positions themselves in the linguistic space of the collective, not to affirm it, but to estrange and interrogate it (52). The satirical weight of this utterance lies in its dissonance: it outwardly claims political power while covertly revealing the powerlessness of the common citizen.

The speech act performed here is expressive, functioning as both lament and indictment. Pragmatically, it registers disappointment with the nation’s political leadership, but also self-reflection. Falz does not exempt himself from the structure of failed civic accountability. In this way, satire serves as both a tool of resistance and a form of confession.

Satirical Commentary on National Identity and Neo-colonial Concessions Excerpt

“I’m not really happy with this whole affair Wey we dey talk Anglais Dey worship Français”

Here, Falz is expressly critical of the nation’s post-colonial dependence to the imperialist empires of Britain and France. He acknowledges the linguistic hold of colonial languages like English on the Nigerian psyche and registers his displeasure with our extension of colonial-era servitude to European powers like France in our contemporary age. By codeswitching between Nigerian English and Pidgin, the artist is critical of Nigeria’s historical relationship with Britain and France as former colonial powers.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the speech act performed is an expressive that shrouds the artist's criticism of the neo-colonial dynamics within the Nation. By codeswitching from standard Nigerian English to Pidgin while making the statement, Falz subtly ensures that the criticism is targeted towards the participants in the speech event. He refers to the Nigerian populace in a code that questions their erosion of national identity in favour of worshipping European languages and norms.

The satirical social commentary here is performed through a humorous and satirical criticism of current national dynamics which have a significant impact on Nigerian identity.

Identity, Performance, and the Politics of Masculinity

Excerpt

“Did I tell you that I love your nappy hair, yea? / Your full lips and your perky breasts”

“Tonight, when we dancing in the sac / I beg you please, please, shey you no go let me rest?”

Here, Falz’s lyrics oscillate between erotic performance and the aestheticisation of African features, producing a satirical tension between appreciation and objectification. The phrase “nappy hair” evokes Afrocentric beauty politics, while “perky breasts” drags the language back into the register of male gaze and sexual consumption.

This part of the song highlights the artist’s ability to juxtapose his goal of social critique with the playfulness of entertainment and pleasure. The codeswitching between standard Nigerian English and Nigerian pidgin, serves to further serves to highlight the transition to playfulness from more serious social commentary, albeit still carried out with a relatively playful tone. Within the context of this lyric, Falz is engage in a sexual propositioning with the end goal of critiquing the politics of masculinity. This is achieved by painting a hyper-realistic portrait of how the male gaze influences Nigerian hip hop.

From a pragmatic standpoint, the utterance performs both assertive and directive speech acts. The speaker asserts admiration while also issuing a sexual request (“shey you no go let me rest?”), couched in a jocular, almost plaintive tone. This fusion of humour and sexuality contributes to a broader identity performance that critiques the hyper-masculine bravado of mainstream Afro-pop.

Soft Life and the Satire of Aspiration

Excerpt

“Soft life / Soft nyash / More shine / More pies / No surprise say more guys dey come back”

This part of the song features as a repetitive refrain that highlights the enjoyment culture, which is the major aspiration of the contemporary Nigerian youth. On a literal level, the lyrics seem to glorify pleasure, consumption and sexual liberation, but beneath this lies a subtle critique of this culture and its underlying ephemerality and vanity.

The juxtaposition of “soft life” and “soft nyash” introduces a linguistic flattening of value, pleasure, wealth, and women’s bodies become sites of gratification. This reveals what Simpson would call “parodic collapse,” where satire mimics excess to expose its emptiness (47). The speaker does not directly mock these values; rather, he embeds critique within participation, performing the same lifestyle he subtly questions. Falz is also critical of the hypocrisy embedded in contemporary Nigerian youth identity. He notes that the main reason why his past friends are returning to the fold is due to his increased affluence and participation in the enjoyment lifestyle.

Pragmatically, this chant functions as an activity type—a recurring cultural routine in Afro-urban music that normalises extravagant living. Yet, the tone is not entirely celebratory. The very repetition suggests mechanical indulgence, hinting at exhaustion, irony, or even satire in the face of capitalist overdrive.

Linguistic Fluidity and Cultural Code-Switching

Excerpt

“Gbe mi los’okun, mofẹ ki Yemoja / Ẹtif’orowa le ni? We dey for ghetto now”

Here, the shift into Yoruba signals cultural embeddedness and spiritual invocation, especially by referencing Yemoja, a water deity in Yoruba cosmology. The code-mixing of Yoruba, English, and Nigerian Pidgin is

reflective of what Ayo Bamgbose describes as the polyglot reality of Nigerian communication, where multiple languages coexist fluidly in artistic expression (14).

This code-switching performs several pragmatic functions. Firstly, it localises the speaker within a specific socio-cultural milieu—the ghetto, the spiritual, the communal. Secondly, it marks solidarity, aligning Falz with a working-class identity often neglected in elite political discourse. Thirdly, it serves an indexical function, pointing to cultural depth and invoking ancestral power amid socio-political despair.

Through this multilingual performance, Falz constructs a layered social identity—a traditionally attuned Nigerian, a ghetto child, a conscious lyricist. These identities are not mutually exclusive but coalesce through linguistic hybridity to challenge dominant narratives of elitism and erasure typical of Nigerian society.

Conclusion

This *Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Satirical Commentary and Social Identity in Falz's "Round of Applause"* revealed that across the analysed lyrical excerpts, Falz manipulates language in the performance of what Mey calls contextualised acts of meaning which is speech that is not just uttered but situated within broader social struggles and cultural negotiations (Mey 219). Within the theoretical dynamic of Hymes' Ethnography of Communication, these lyrics are also positioned as living social performance and not just textual speech acts. The meanings of these lyrics and their role in satirical commentary and social identity are only evident by examining them in the context of their social implications.

Therefore, in *Round of Applause*, satire becomes a pragmatic act of resistance, which mocks, mimics, and momentarily unsettles the performances of power, neocolonial concessions, masculinity, and capitalist success. Falz's satirical voice invites listeners to decode, reflect, and sometimes laugh at the tragic contradictions of their socio-political realities. In doing so, he strengthens or questions aspects of national and youth identity in his lyrics. Ultimately, *Round of Applause* is in tune with the majority of Falz's discography, which employs ingenious and indigenous use of language in satirical socio-criticism and identity construction.

Works Cited

- Ademilokun, Mohammed Ayodeji, and Waheed Adeyimika Bamigbade. "Social Consciousness in the Lyrics of Folarinde Falana (Falz): A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective." *International Journal of Language & Literature*, vol. 9, no. 2, Dec. 2021.
- Akindele, Julianah, and Rosemary Mayokun. "Indigenised Linguistic Codes and Nigerianism in Selected Hip-Hop Songs of Adekunle Gold and Folarin Falana." *Africana*, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 2025.
- Bamgbose, Ayo. *Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh University Press, 1991.
- Falz. *Round of Applause*. B.A.H.D Guys Entertainment Limited, 2025. Spotify, open.spotify.com/track/2n8KwSmr3pBiS8ZzM8xk8g?si=e9494fe76ce54c43. Accessed [8th August, 2025].
- Hymes, Dell. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974.
- Igwebuike, Ebuka, and Chiagozie Eburuaja. "Impoliteness Strategy in Falz's Satirical Song *This Is Nigeria*." In *Applied Linguistics, Linguistic Variations and English Usage in the Nigerian Context: A Festschrift for Moses Alo*, University of Ibadan University Press PLC, 2020, pp. 335–46.
- Mey, Jacob L. *Pragmatics: An Introduction*. 2nd ed, Blackwell, 2001.

- Olatunji, Felix, and Shalom Ibironke. "Examining the Influence of Exchange between Artiste and Society: A Case Study of Falz the Bahd Guy's Music." *Benin Journal of Music and The Arts*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 2023.
- Oseni, Abdullateef Babatunde, and A. T. Ishola. "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Songs of Folarin Falana (Falz)." *Journal of African Resilience and Advancement Research*, vol. 3, no. 2, Feb. 2024.
- Simpson, Paul. *On the Discourse of Satire: Towards a Stylistic Model of Satirical Humour*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003.
- Tanimu, Yusuf, and Chidinma Esther Nwaobasi. "Sociolinguistic Study of Language, Social Identity and Behavioural Patterns of Keke Operators in Lafia Metropolis." *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research* 14.1 (2024): 164-172.