

CODE-SWITCHING IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN HIP-HOP MUSIC

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Abstract

While Nigerian scholars have examined code-switching in conversation and in literary language (Akere, 1980; Amuda, 1986, 1994; Goke-Pariola, 1983; O'Mole, 1987; Lamidi, 2004; Ayeomoni, 2006), this study presents a critical examination of code-switching in contemporary Nigerian hip-hop music. In spite of the fact that most Nigerian hip-hop singers use English, they still try to identify with their roots by mixing English with their indigenous languages. We present code-switching in the lyrics of five Nigerian hip-hop musicians: Sunny Nneji, Weird MC, D'Banj, P Square and Styl Plus. The objectives are to examine the nature of the phenomenon of code-switching, to examine the reasons for code-switching, to discuss the stylistic effects of this trend, and to examine the implications of this practice for communication through music. Our findings reveal that while most code-switching is done in three languages – English, Nigerian Pidgin and Yoruba – Yoruba plays a prominent role. This makes the language the vehicle for the elaboration of themes within the songs. We also observe two major kinds of code-switching; ones in which chunks of ideas in different languages feature in turns, (inter-sentential code-switching) thereby producing switches at discourse boundaries; and ones in which expressions from other languages are sandwiched between those of a dominant language (intra-sentential code-switching). The study concludes that the unique identities created by code-switching in Nigerian hip-hop have positive local and global influences for music and artists, and reflect the ethnolinguistic diversity of the Nigerian nation.

Key words: Nigerian Hip-Hop, Code-switching, Yoruba, English, Nigerian Pidgin.