
Punophemisms: Language Use in Ghanaian Hiplife Songs

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Abstract

This paper explores how young people, especially Ghanaian hiplife musicians manipulate language through the usage of puns to convey messages without necessarily sounding discourteous. It focused on the communication of such words which are considered inappropriate and yet must be spoken of, and how young musicians of Ghana try to use these words in songs so they are not seen as sounding profane or disrespectful. To find out how this phenomenon takes place, a number of such linguistic items which give their songs an air of style were analysed in some selected Ghanaian songs. The researchers studied the usage of pun by Ghanaian songsters as a means of euphemising their speech. Related literature on the phenomenon was reviewed and the topic was examined through the lenses of Relevance Theory as a methodology for the study of stylistics. The data for this research was drawn from songs of young Ghanaian songsters and the research design was the content analysis. The research employs the descriptive qualitative approach in the analysis of data. The study was basically into the stylistic description of data in some selected Ghanaian songs, and the primary data was the internet where selected songs were downloaded for transcription. In this research, there emerged the term punophemisms to explain and define how pun can be used as euphemism.

Keywords: *punophemisms; pragmatic analysis; relevance; cognition*

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Introduction

The African society is typically conscious of the usage of certain words which are considered taboo or inappropriate when used in public. When it becomes necessary for one to communicate using such words, a lot of caution is taken. This process is what Terry (2020) identified as euphemistic dysphemism.

This phenomenon over time has evolved into an artistic ingredient in the composition of some songs. At every point in time, users of language (including musicians) are caught engaging certain rhetorical figures which enable them to express their thoughts in a pleasing manner. This is in sync with the views of Shao et al (2012) who noted that 'grammar tells what is correct; rhetoric tells what is

effusive and pleasing'. Since music is enjoyed by the larger community, this style of composition is worth a study in academia. Yet, most studies over the years consider only materials in print as those that are worthy of academic attention, and little attention has been paid to these common and informal compositions which have always been part of the society. This study therefore deals with the style of communication among the Ghanaian society which is conveyed through songs.

Also, there have been extensive scholarly works on the study of pun as a concept and its relationship to other areas of language. A lot more of these studies also focused on pun and its linguistic features. Among these researchers was Gibson and Sagarin (2023) whose work focused on pun as a sadistic element that incites laughter in people out of the pains of others. Giorgadze (2014) also conducted a linguistic study on pun using jokes of various kinds and came to the conclusion that puns are created on the basis of syntactic, structural, and lexical ambiguity. He also added that ambiguity is one of the results of punning, and wordplay and its categories are changeable hence new types are formed and developed.

Lems (2013) was among the category of scholars who conducted a study on how to teach the English language using puns. In her study, she did a classification of puns into four different categories. They are; homophones, eg. they care, day care; polysemous puns, eg. kind (to mean 'a type of something' or 'an act of generosity'); close sounding puns (where one word is substituted for each other because it sounds like it); and alphabetic, numerical or simplified puns (@mosphere instead of atmosphere, and 4ever instead of forever). In her paper, Lems emphasised the importance of using pun to teach; which is the fact that it helps learners to relax. She concluded that wordplay (pun) and humour create a stimulating and comfortable environment for English language learners and it also enables them to gain exposure to valuable vocabulary, idioms, and other language features.

According to Cook (2000), understanding jokes is a sign of one's proficiency in a language. This is in sync with Taguchi's (2006, p.152) claim that 'a key aspect of pragmatic competence is the ability to recognize speaker intention, even when it is implicit and covert, and to make accurate inferences about speaker's communicative goals'. They may be considered unique forms of humour because of the choice of multiple meanings they provide for the listeners. Puns are language-specific and are consciously crafted to confuse listeners for many reasons. Although some researchers may try to draw a dichotomy between pun and wordplay, both terms would be used interchangeably in this study. It is considered as a wordplay that suggests how speakers of a particular language can manipulate the pronunciation of certain words either for their artistic sense, humour, or to conceal the effects of 'naked' words which might be considered inappropriate in certain contexts.

Ballard's (1991) quotation in Delabastita (1994) also posits that most ambiguities that may be posed by the use of wordplay are resolved by their context and hence pose no special difficulties, except for people who are keen on the usage of pun; bears a minimal resemblance to the focus of the current study. However, Ballard's attention was directed to how wordplay affects translation. The current study however acknowledges the fact that the actual meaning that the user of pun has may be presented in its context of usage in addition to his own experiences. This assertion however drives the necessity for the investigation of how pun can be used as euphemism in various fields. Delabastita (1994) again focused on the effects of pun in translation and highlights the importance of the acceptability of wordplays and malapropisms in the culture of the target language.

Also, most works of earlier scholars explored pun as a figure of speech that may be aimed at creating humour. Although Shao et al (2012) hinted at various uses of pun in their study, their main focus was on the contrastive study of pun in English and Chinese languages.

The current study however seeks to find how pun can be used 'to mask unpleasant sores' in Ghanaian songs. It aims at examining how listeners are able to infer meaning from songs that do not state explicitly what they mean but require the listeners to make contextual and cognitive inferences.

The study is grounded in the relevance theory which was proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1985) as a stylistic approach. It states that the listener's ability to make inferences about what the speaker says based on certain clues provided in contexts, and his own experiences culminates in comprehensive communication. This theory suits the stylistic analysis based on the views of Thornborrow & Wareing, (1988) that the stylistic approach is a preferable pragmatic orientation that connects choices in a text to social and cultural contexts to which the current study belongs.

The relevance theory is about how addressees are able to understand utterances made by speakers, relying on bits of either covert or overt clues. It claims that 'the key element in human communication is the recognition of speaker intentions, which is guided by ordinary cognitive inferential processes' (Taguchi, 2002, p. 152). The decision to assign a particular interpretation to an utterance largely depends on the context of the utterance and a collection of assumptions and experiences gathered by the listener over time. Hence, in every communication, there is the need for listeners to evaluate the actual intentions of the speaker by studying all other possible thoughts and assumptions that could cause one to utter a particular speech.

It is appropriate that this study contributes to knowledge by applying relevance-theoretic ideas to stylistics by giving accounts of lyrical texts and the processes related to their comprehension since Clark (2014) claims that accounting for interpretations is a key focus of work in stylistics. The relevance-theoretic stylistics has also influenced discussions on more fundamental theoretical issues, such as the definition of "literariness" and authorial intent. Because it emphasizes the connection

between contextual impacts and the listener's processing effort, this theory is pertinent to the current investigation. Additionally, the study considers some pragmatic elements when assessing the significance of puns employed as euphemisms in Ghanaian songs. Since understanding the speaker's aim is the primary goal of communication, it is the addressee's duty to pay attention to the dialogue and decipher its underlying psychology.

Wilson (2016) argues that the relevance theory attempts to argue that comprehensive communication results from the listener's capacity to infer what the speaker is saying based on specific cues offered in settings. The communicator may have his own reasons for withholding some information from the addressee, which the addressee is supposed to learn using his own inputs (assumptions, experiences, and thoughts) accumulated over time. This is important to keep in mind even though the communicator intends to present the addressee with a set of assumptions. Therefore, the ultimate objective of communication should be to provide information to the addressee in a way that requires the least processing effort on his part.

Sperber and Wilson (1985) advance two principles that form the foundation of the relevance theory: they are cognition and communicative principle. These two processes of effective communication require that in order not to struggle in communication, the listener makes use of all cognitive pieces (intellect) available to him for easy comprehension. Making use of 'cognitive pieces' means that one should be able to interpret other expressions or actions of the speaker and try to relate to the purpose of the communication.

The first principle of relevance states that 'human cognition tends to be geared toward the maximisation of relevance' (Sperber and Wilson, 1985, p.260). According to the relevance theory, when humans are able to use their intellect and experiences to interpret information over time, they develop a variety of mental mechanisms or biases; some innate,

others from experience, which tend to allocate attention to inputs with the greatest expected relevance, and process them in the most relevance enhancing way (Wilson, 2016: p6). Cognitive effects however may differ from one person to the other, and an individual may find an input relevant if only the processing of the input produces positive cognitive effects. The essence of cognition is to maximise relevance. Hence communicators with high cognition tend to get the relevance of an utterance more easily than those with low cognition.

Listeners devote their minds to contextual clues only when they regard the utterance of the speaker as relevant enough to merit their attention. The communicative principle of relevance states that 'every utterance communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance' (Sperber and Wilson (1995: p.260). The communicative principle of relevance views human communication as relevance driven and relevance according to Sperber and Wilson (1995), is a product of cognitive effects and contextual efforts.

In order to maximise comprehension which would eventually result in effective communication, the speaker should not burden the listener so much with cognition. Rather, he needs to make enough explicit information available which should be complemented with the implicit one, which would then call for the attention of the listener to process the implicit information by using the explicit one as a leverage. In trying to understand such implicit messages, the addressee needs to engage in a broader mind reading of the speaker in order to predict his actual intention.

The relevance theoretic stylistic analysis suits the current study because it gives an account of what authors intend by producing a particular text (Clark, 1996 p. 165). It explores implicit and explicit utterances made in Ghanaian hiplife songs as stylistic elements through the use of puns to create euphemistic effects. It sought to look at how songsters package their lyrics by withholding their intention in order not to sound

straightforward. The study leverages the principles of relevance such as cognition and communication principles to analyse the communication in Ghanaian hiplife songs.

This paper is built on the following hypothesis to attain the aforementioned in Ghanaian hiplife songs:

1. To address contentious issues while keeping to social norms, Ghanaian hiplife songs use punophemisms.
2. People who listen to Ghanaian music exhibit cognitive processing to comprehend punophemisms.
3. The use of punophemisms in Ghanaian hiplife songs makes them more interesting and enticing by increasing listener engagement.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research design, specifically, a stylistic analysis approach. The stylistic analysis was used to examine the linguistic and cultural elements present in the selected Ghanaian hiplife songs. The choice of this approach was influenced by the views of Thornborrow & Wareing (1988) that the stylistic approach is a preferable pragmatic orientation that connects choices in a text to social and cultural contexts to which the current study belongs. It also adopted the qualitative means because it concerns itself with a social issue (Cresswell, 2011) that involves a careful investigation into the language choices of some Ghanaian song artists and how listeners are left confused about the real meanings of the songs.

To get the songs that will serve as the data for this work, a purposive sampling technique was employed. Patton (2002) indicates that with this type of sampling, the researcher determines what information is required and then searches for sources who can and are willing to supply it based on their expertise or experience. The researchers were already privy to some of these songs because it was a trend among Ghanaian highlife artists. In addition to that, the researchers downloaded and listened to a lot of Ghanaian highlife songs

after which they selected those that have elements of punophemisms. In all, twelve songs were selected to serve as the data. The songs were thus purposively sampled from the internet because they had the elements the researchers were interested in. This means that these songs contained a lot of punophemisms and thus the data required to answer the researchers' questions.

The next step was the transcription of the songs. Since the songs were in Twi, they were transcribed into English in order to make the meanings clear to readers. After the transcription, the parts of the songs that contained the punophemisms were identified and highlighted. Further, some people were interviewed to ascertain the meanings they make out of these selected songs. The researchers' intuition also helped in the comprehension of the data since they are native speakers of the Twi language. The next step was identifying the parts of the songs that contain punophemisms; when a pun is used to replace a potentially offensive or explicit word or expression.

Further, the words and expressions that carried the required data were analysed and interpreted based on the relevance of the punophemisms in the context of Ghanaian culture and language. With this, adjacent lines and cultural references were also made to understand the intended meanings of the punophemisms.

The procedure for analyzing the data was divided into the following stages: The writers analyzed the data under the role of relevance in Ghanaian songs where they looked at the fact that relevance is actually considered in the composition and the comprehension of Ghanaian songs; they also analysed the two principles of relevance which are cognition and communicative principles as stylistic elements in the songs. This part of the methodology is the most important as it helped to work around the hypothesis of the study.

Finally, findings from the analysis are interpreted and discussed in the context of the research goals. The researchers discussed the

implications of using punophemisms in Ghanaian songs and the role of relevance in understanding the intended meanings. Conclusions drawn from the study were presented and recommendations were made based on the research findings.

Results and Discussion

In puns, different sets of ideas are expressed, yet the listener is presented with a series of words or sentences (Bergson 1914), and listeners are able to assign other meanings to those words. In pun sentences, the concentration of meaning may be carried by a minimal portion of the sentence (Kao et al, 2016). Interestingly, in most Ghanaian songs, this minimal portion of the sentences becomes the most important element in the songs. This is confirmed in the current study where a song like '*bεema bia pehwe*' which literally means every man likes to look has become concentrated with meaning. Listeners tend to assign their own meaning by changing '*pehwe*' to '*petwe*' and this is such that most people need no prompting to do so. This process comes intuitively and renders those particular portions of the songs the most important that listeners may need to pay attention to.

Ambiguity is one of the useful tools in pun. It is a linguistic situation where an utterance projects more than one meaning. In the case of the current study, songsters intentionally create double meaning for their utterances as a style. For example, the utterance '*efiri se wokote ano aa na eye a mepε*' [because I like it when you buy new things] may be assigned a different meaning from what it generally appears to mean. Concerning ambiguities, Wahyuni (2014) noted that background knowledge and environments account for the varied meanings assigned to utterances by listeners. To a large extent, this assertion has been affirmed by the current study.

The role of 'relevance' in Ghanaian songs

The semantic relevance of a particular pun may be due to its relatedness to the sentence meaning (Kao et al, 2016). There is also the fact that most of these puns are used

as ‘punch lines’ in the Ghanaian songs and often form part of the chorus. The relevance of these songs are drawn from the multiple sense presented in a line. Although the sentence may provide a wide range of meanings, the most relevant one often has support from other sentences in the songs. The kind of meaning a listener wishes to assign a particular pun in a song depends on how well they are able to sift all possible meanings that are not relevant. Based on the adjacent clues provided around the pun, the listener is able to determine which of the meanings should be considered relevant.

Relevance theory focuses on the fact that ‘the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough, and predictable enough to guide the hearer towards the speaker’s meaning (Wilson & Sperber, 2004). It discusses the relationship between meaning and context, both text-external and text-internal (also referred to as the co-text) context (Dooley 2008). In the Ghanaian context, because certain words are considered taboo words when spoken in public, euphemism becomes the best option for conveying such words and messages to listeners. Listeners who know their cultural system and how language works in the Ghanaian context, also tend to get the relevance of such words and expressions easily even when they are punned. As a stylistic element, relevance preserves the culture of the people by helping listeners to get the meaning of utterances even when they are hidden by the use of punophemisms.

Relevance in Ghanaian songs

Regardless of how songs are manipulated stylistically to conceal their actual meaning, several studies confirmed that such meanings are understood anyway (Clark 1991; Gibbs 2002) by listeners. Extracts from some selected Ghanaian songs have proven this point as portrayed below:

1. *Bema bia pe hwe (Every man likes to [look]).*
2. *Se me twa mu a na omu hwe (They look at me [when I’m passing]).*
3. *Kufuor pe hwe (Kufour likes to [look]).*

4. *Even Nana Addo pe hwe [Even Nana Addo likes to [look]].*
5. *Mahama pe hwe (Mahama likes to [look]).*

Most of these songs often play with the words for both artistic and pragmatic reasons. Stylistically, such words, which are usually profane or unpleasant are stressed thereby rendering the songs melodious. The above song means ‘all men like to look’. However, when listeners pay critical attention to adjacent words in the song, they eventually realize that the word ‘*pe hwe*’ does not really mean what it is portrayed to have meant but rather ‘*pe twe*’, which means ‘all men like the female genital organ’. The songster succeeded in hiding the meaning of the song anyway, but the relevance of the song, drawn from the cultural background and the adjacent words would reveal to the listener what the songster really means.

Me koti eyε mi ya ([All I hear] is it’s paining me)

Make I enter skolom (Let me enter [skolom])

Some of these songs may present a different meaning superficially but they do not fail to give a clue of what the song is really about in other parts of these songs. The line ‘*me koti eyε mi ya*’ in Ebony’s song for instance superficially means ‘all I hear is it’s paining me’. Meanwhile the intended meaning is ‘*my male genital organ is paining me*’. The songster succeeded in euphemizing her intended meaning by using a pun which was created by the insertion of [ε] to the word that may have posed controversy to the listeners. This however does not necessarily prevent listeners from getting the intended meaning of the song. There are adjacent words in the song which would confirm whatever contrary thought the listener might be conceiving. For example, the lines ‘*cool it for me, slow down, me sisi ye mi ya*’ (my waist is paining) confirm to the listener that, that portion of the song is about sexual act. So these final meanings provided by the songster tend to disambiguate whatever ambiguity might be posed in the earlier lines of the song.

*Younger my brain is where my pen is
Nti mede wow) mo de breaki mo virgin
smashi, nadal tennis*

The lines above are examples of the same occurrence described in the previous paragraph. The portion of the song 'pen... is' is the line which puns, playing between the words 'penis' and 'pen is' by delaying the portion that may be considered indecent. However, the second line that follows it provides a clue to which of the pun options the song is referring to. Also, the pun in the song was created by delaying a part of the song which gives it a touch of decency, hence it would suggest that anyone who has any other meaning apart from what the songster overtly presented would be said to be mischievous.

All of these indicate that listeners' minds interpret songs according to what is pertinent to them. Knowing that in Ghanaian culture, there are some phrases that cannot be used in public and that when it is absolutely necessary to do so, the public is pardoned by using the phrase "kafra" or "taflatse" facilitates this process. Therefore, when using such phrases or expressions, euphemisms are used.

Cognition in Ghanaian songs

Cognition as defined by Leaver et al. (2005, p. 38) is 'thinking or using mental processes, such as observing, paying attention, making guesses and assumptions, observing what is being said, interpreting what is being read or heard. In the cognition of Ghanaian songs, it is evident that most Ghanaian songs are sometimes explained by the timing of the songs, and situations existing at the time of their release. Such songs are easily understood by the public because they all share a background to the song. The song 'Nana awuooo mmua nna' is an example of such songs. The above song for instance was released by Daddy Lumba in the year 2008 after the then flag bearer of the National Patriotic Party (NPP) lost in the national election. Of course, this is a confirmation of the fact that cognition of concepts is not static, but is subject to variation over time, depending on

how the message is delivered and what it is intended for at a particular time. It was easy for Ghanaians to assign meaning to the song since it was the same songster who composed the campaign song for the said flag bearer. This is a confirmation of Dooley's (2008) assertion that both text-external and text-internal contexts (co-text) combine to provide the needed meaning to a text.

Also, listeners may find it easy to get the cognition of a particular song based on the tradition that existed at the time of composing the song. This also affirms the fact that cultural variables play a role in cognition. Also, such songs are easily understood because listeners find salience in the contents and utterances of the songs (Zheng & Wang: 2022). Songs with utterances like 'bedi medwa (come and buy my products [come and sleep with me]), yekote asore (we are going to set up a church[our male genital organ has erected]), ehwe papa nie (this is good looking [this is a good female genital organ]) me koti eye mi ya (all I can here is it is paining me [my male genital organ is paining me], efiri se wokote ano a na eye a mepe (because I like it when you open brand new things [I like the tip of your male genital organ]) were all composed around the time that there was the revolution of such songs. This therefore made it easy for listeners to realize the puns created in the songs and also get their meaning for the current generation. Listeners' minds are therefore tuned to such songs hence making it easy for them to understand them subsequently (obiaa boa, kogye bediɛɛ, boys pe chow etc). The above finding agrees with Schogler's (1998) view that there is an intuitive coordination of psychological factors which are infused into social conditioning and convention, hence creating the possibility for such songs to be understood easily.

The cognition of songs can be likened to the mechanisms of language acquisition where children are said to be able to learn language through both innate ability and social/environmental factors. Some Ghanaian songs can easily be understood just by listening to them which is directly related to the innateness in cognition. However, there are certain songs that may not easily be

understood if the listener does not share the same social or environmental background as the speaker. Getting the understanding of a concept to which Ghanaian songs belong, depends on the combination of cognitive processes and social context (Long, 1997, p. 19); and the more listeners engage in finding meaning to such songs the more skilled they become in interpreting them (Tahiri & Muhaxheri, 2020, p. 1736).

The majority of listeners may be able to understand the songs from Ghana, but they also need to pay attention to them and be aware of what they are hearing, which is symmetrically matched with Leaver et al.'s (2005) assertion that attention is a major contributor to cognition.

Communication in Ghanaian Songs

Like language, music is one medium of human communication that members of a particular community use to pass information to one another in culturally appropriate ways (Cross, 2006). Also, every musician has their target audience and they also think of how to capture their attention. In Ghana, highlife music is enjoyed mostly by the elderly (from 50 years upward). Hiplife music however is usually directed towards the youth. These are the songs that address youthful exuberance and issues that interest the youth. Some of the themes that are explored in such songs include: love, sex, lust, obsession, romance, gifts and money. Youthful song artists therefore satisfy their clients by providing them with the exact music they want. However, for the sake of cultural awareness and criticisms from the elderly for putting out such verbally explicit contents in the public domain, musicians tend to hide the actual meaning of their songs by using euphemisms.

Although these songsters do not often use verbally explicit utterances in their songs, they are able to vividly convey their intended messages to the audience. In sync with the views of Sperber and Wilson (1995, p. 260), which states that 'every utterance communicates a presumption of its own

optimal relevance', these songs optimally project their intended meaning without burdening listeners with too much cognitive effort.

Punophemisms in Ghanaian Songs

In defining what constitute a distasteful or offensive expressions that would require the usage of euphemisms, culture plays a significant role. It determines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable or offensive. Culture draws the demarcation between what is a taboo and what the society upholds. Allan and Burridge (1991, p. 11) define euphemism as an alternative to a dispreferred expression, in order to avoid possible loss of face: either one's own face, or through giving offence that of the audience, or of third party.' Hughes (2006, p. 151) also defines euphemism as the use of deliberately direct, conventionally imprecise, or socially 'comfortable' ways of referring to taboo, embarrassing, or unpleasant topics.

Considering why musicians use euphemisms in their songs, Liszka (1990) noted that euphemism is one of the strategies by which topics that are associated with intense negative effect are displaced. It is a way 'to shield and avoid offence' (Burridge, 2012). It is also a means of protection for the people or group which is being talked about (Schmidt: 2021). For some of these reasons, Ghanaian hiplife singers adopt the use of euphemisms in their songs.

Similarly, puns are also used in music to conceal otherwise weighty lyrics. When musicians realise that the contents of their songs are too obvious, they tend to use euphemisms as a way of making the words lighter. In the selected hiplife songs, euphemisms were achieved using puns. With this, words were played with in a manner that makes it unlikely for the audience to easily identify certain words in the songs. The fusion of pun and euphemism to achieve such notable linguistic, cultural and artistic effects is what is known as punophemism in the current study. Such puns include the following:

Bεεma bia pεhwε (every man likes [looks]).

Ehwε bekum mo oo ([looking] will kill you).

In the above song by Wendy Shay, the songster tries to say a verbally explicit content (*all men like [the female genital organ]; the female genital organ will kill you*). If such words were said explicitly, it would raise a lot of questions morally, and it would also be against the culture of the Ghanaian society. Hence, musicians explore creativity in an attempt to euphemise their intended content. Interestingly, the youth understand exactly what these musicians mean to say and also enjoy patronizing such songs. Ironically, those who would have criticized these songs in their originally intended form because of the cultural constraints are also found singing these songs because of the usage of punophemisms.

In the Ghanaian context, proverbs are one of the ways of embellishing language. When proverbs are used, they make the language of communication rich and culturally appropriate. As a result, musicians also try to fit into the culture of communication by infusing proverbs into their songs. From the songs, usage of proverbs have been seen to be a stylistic and a creative way of applying puns as euphemism. Below is a typical example of this phenomenon.

'3ky3 behu ne wura na w'abr3 oooo' ([the hat] gets tired by the time it locates its owner)

The meaning of the above proverb is that 'people do not easily own up for their offences'. The [hat] stands for a problem or an offence. When there is an offence, nobody likes to own up or associate with it. So the hat (offence) keeps hanging forever, and by the time it locates its owner, it gets too late.

The elderly community would gladly sing this song to advise its members with a proverb

of this kind. Songsters arrest the interest of the listeners by using puns in proverbs to hide their intended meaning. What the songster really wanted to say is:

[Etwε] behu ne wura na w'abrε ([the female genital organ] gets tired by the time it locates its owner).

The pun in the song is between [ekyε] and [etwε]. The two words have been played with the intention of covering the latter for the former. The only difference between the two words is the labialization [w] in the latter word. Considering the adjacent words to those lines, the song is referring to the fact that before some ladies marry, their genitals would have suffered, considering the kind of lives they are living. This play of words is a successful way of hiding the unpleasant reaction that would have accompanied the original intent of the song. Another example of songs in this category is:

Boys pε chow (boys like [food]).

Boys pε ['twε] ooo (boys like [the female genital organ] ooo).

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995, p. 260), the communicative principle of relevance states that 'every utterance communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance'. Only those who have relevance of the actual meaning would dare to look into it in order to unravel the hidden meaning. In DL's song '*boys pε chow*' for instance, '*chow*' is a pidgin word that means food. However, other parts of the song create the avenue for people to presume the actual relevance the song is intended for, which is to say that 'boys like [the female genital organ]'. This finding also confirms Ballard's (1991) quotation in Delabastita (1994) that most ambiguities that may be posed by the use of wordplay are resolved by their context and hence pose no special difficulties.

One thing to note about the usage of punophemisms in Ghanaian hiplife songs is that they does not run through the whole song. Its usage works in songs just like the application of wisdom in communication.

There may be other parts of the songs that are not relevant to the theme intended to be projected. Only about a line or two in each song actually contain such punophemisms and tend to change the meaning of the entire songs. Such songs are usually termed as 'controversial' songs in Ghana.

Although punophemisms contribute essentially to the stylistic presentation of Ghanaian songs, they represent a less but significant portion of the lyrics of the songs. It also shows that subdued and aesthetically pleasing words are most preferred to repulsive and negative ones when composing songs. The stylistic composition of the songs also revealed that both implicatures and explicatures are employed in the composition of Ghanaian songs, confirming the views of Sperber and Wilson (1986). However, punophemisms constitute the implicature aspect of Ghanaian songs because they are intended to engage listeners to apply relevance to whatever they listen to in order to deduce their meaning.

Conclusion

This study has looked at the creative and culturally relevant ways that Ghanaian hiplife songs use punophemisms to convey delicate themes. Evidence suggests that musicians can skillfully use puns to obscure obvious themes in their songs while still retaining the music's social acceptability and engaging the target audience. The investigation has shown that the listeners' cognitive and pragmatic skills are crucial for understanding the intended meanings of these punophemisms.

The study has also highlighted how important relevance theory is for understanding punophemisms. As a stylistic avenue, exploring punophemisms through the lenses of relevance theory confirmed Tahiri & Muhaxheri's (2020) assertion that while listeners find meaning of these controversial songs, their critical thinking skills are aroused which ultimately helps to sharpen their interpretive skills. It portrayed that the listener must draw conclusions about the deeper meanings of the songs from the

context, co-text, and cultural background, marking Taguchi's (2006) claim that an essential component of pragmatic competence is the ability to recognise speaker intentions and be able to draw conclusions, even when it is implicit and covert. It also provides evidence that Relevance theory helps improve communication effectiveness by defining the delicate line between providing the audience with explicit information and allowing them to draw conclusions about implicit meanings.

The use of proverbs as punophemisms has also been recognized to add to the depth and cultural complexity of the songs. Well-known proverbs are skillfully employed by musicians to imperceptibly convey messages while maintaining cultural relevance. Punophemisms are a relatively little but substantial part of the songs, according to the study's quantitative analysis. These skillfully crafted lines can entirely change the meaning and impact of the songs, establishing them as "controversial" songs in the Ghanaian hiplife music scene.

Overall, this study highlights the creative genius of Ghanaian song writers, who use punophemisms to enthrall their audiences while upholding social values, confirming Liszka's (1990) claim that that euphemism is one of the strategies by which topics that are associated with intense negative effects are displaced. It emphasizes how crucial it is to see non-formal compositions like songs as worthwhile academic research topics. The study advances our knowledge of language and communication dynamics in Ghanaian society and creates new opportunities for linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural studies research. It also highlights the necessity for academics to acknowledge the relevance of studying the art and language of music since it can provide information about a people's culture, history, and societal ideals. We can better grasp the artistic expressions and communication styles that influence our culture by focusing on the many rhetorical devices and language strategies used in songs.

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