

Ambiguity as a Communicative Style: A Study of Rufftown Records

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ABSTRACT

Songs are means of cultural education, sustainability and, for many in the show business (showbiz), poverty alleviation. To a large extent, song composition and production are essential in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals One and Four. Considering the importance of songs, this study, from a stylistics perspective, analyzed ambiguity as a communicative style in Ghanaian songs focusing on songs produced by 'Ruff town Records', one of the vibrant production houses in Ghana. The study was based on 15 sampled songs by Ebony Reigns and Wendy Shay, the leading artistes of the record label. The study revealed instances of ambiguity in 10 of the sampled songs with the causes of these indeterminacies being mainly phonological intonation and lexical choices. These ambiguities were euphemistically deployed mostly to highlight sexual images. The study has implications for revealing the trends of contemporary Ghanaian Songs. There is also implication for theorising Ghanaian music discourse and practical implication for the music academy/industry.

Keywords: Ambiguity, Communication, Ghanaian Songs, phonological, Semantics, Stylistic

INTRODUCTION

Songs form an integral part of the Ghanaian culture as they contribute to the socialization of the citizenry. As forms of oral literature, Ghanaian songs have been in existence for a long time. Their relevance is evident in their daily usage at work places, homes, war fronts, festivals and religious activities. The earliest form of (popular) Ghanaian music is Highlife which can be traced to the Mfantse along the Coast of Southwest Ghana (Collins, 1976). Several genres of music like Funk, Reggae, Hip hop, Hip life, Dancehall and Afro beats have since evolved in Ghana, most probably as a result of western cultural contact and inculcation (glocalisation).

Theorizing music is a bit difficult as music practices and musicians are more sophisticated than the theories that analysts apply to them (Kirkegaard, 2002). Studies have been conducted to explore the content and dynamics of African as well as Ghanaian songs (Collins, 1976; Kirkegaard, 2002) but little attention has been paid, if any, to the word play and some consequential ambiguities in contemporary Ghanaian songs. Ambiguity and indeterminacy are

terms associated with Semantics and Meaning. Abbott (1997), for instance, identifies seven types of ambiguity; Semantic, Syntactic, Durational, Narrative, Contextual, Interactive and Ambiguity of Locus. However, the term 'ambiguity' is used in its broadest sense in literary stylistics, as emphasized by Empson, to mean "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (as cited in Leech, 1969). Some lexical sources of ambiguity in English are homophones, polysemy and homonyms. Ambiguity in communication has received some attention from researchers (Jackson, Townsend & Bever, 2005; Kopylov, 2006) but same cannot be said about Ghanaian songs.

Songs, as indicated earlier, are important forms of oral literature and cut across the three genres of literature. However, most literary critics and stylisticians focus mostly on analyzing the written form of poetry, prose and drama hence there exists a knowledge gap as scholarship on the style of song writers remain inadequate. Ghanaian songs remain unanalyzed and the few studies that have been conducted sought to analyze the types of folk music (Collins, 1976). It is against this background that this study analyzes ambiguity in songs produced by Ruff town records. The main objectives of the study are to find out (a) instances of ambiguity in the sampled songs and (b) how the patterns identified in the songs are characteristic of the songwriter and producer of the record label.

In the subsequent sections, we first present a conceptual discussion of the stylistic framework as well as a review of some related literature. These sections are then followed by the data source (Rufftown records), the discussion of findings and conclusions drawn based on the results.

STYLISTICS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

There is a lack of consensus on the definition and scope of stylistics. This mainly results from the relationship that has existed between linguists and literary critics for a while. Leech (1969) refers to this dispute over territory as the 'Lang-Lit' problem. Leech intimates that stylistics is a meeting ground for the two disciplines- linguistic analysis and literary criticism, in his reaction to the problem of integration as he recalls that "studies of language and literature, in English departments and elsewhere, pursue divergent paths, each under its own momentum, and fail to cohere within a single discipline" (p 2).

This struggle between two 'cultures' is reported to have emerged when linguists developed interest in analyzing literary texts. Short (1996) explains that stylistics cut across these two disciplines. Highlighting the core of literary criticism, Short explains the role of linguistics in the description, interpretation and evaluation of literary texts. He then suggests that one is a literary critic and also a linguist when s/he sets out to conduct a stylistic analysis of a literary texts. He concludes that Stylistic analysis, which attempts to relate linguistic description to interpretation, is part of the essential core of good criticism as it constitutes a large part of what is involved, say, in supporting a particular view of a poem or arguing for one interpretation as against another. (Short, 1996, p 5)

Thus, the two fields of study complement each other in stylistics and a linguist who seeks to analyze literature must be acquainted with some form of interpretation just as a critic is no critic if he is not familiar with the language which serves as the medium of the literary piece being analyzed. This is summarized by Roman Jakobson in this statement.

If there are some critics who still doubt the competence of linguistics to embrace the field of poetics, I privately believe that the poetic incompetence of some bigoted linguists has been mistaken for an inadequacy of the linguistic science itself. All of us here, however, definitely realize that a linguist deaf to the poetic function of language and a literary scholar indifferent to linguistic problems and unversant with linguistic methods are equally flagrant anachronisms. (As cited in Carter & Simpson, 2003, p 1).

Some previous studies on songs and ambiguity

Negus and Astor (2015) contribute extensively on song writers and song lyrics' architecture, ambiguity and repetition. Their study focuses on some recognizable characteristics of songs focusing on the lyrics of songs and the style of song writers. Concerning the place of ambiguity in songs they explain.

The mutability and ambiguity of language is something that songwriters are acutely aware of – they may deploy it playfully in deliberately ambiguous lyrics or in the use of double entendre or they may attempt to overcome it, particularly if creating a message song. Ambiguity – the play with it, or the struggle against it – is fundamental to the way songs are constructed (Negus & Astor, 2015, p 239).

They also intimate that songwriters are just like poets and novelists and may consciously encourage interpretations of their piece of work by presenting ambiguous concepts since indeterminacy is fundamental in songwriting and the sociology of songs.

Also, Collins (1976), in his article 'Ghanaian Highlife', highlighted the origin, growth and development of music in Ghana and how songs are important to the lives of Ghanaians. Collins' paper reveals how contact with the western world had an influence on Ghanaian highlife especially during the world wars as foreign troops were stationed in the then Gold Coast. According to him, the new breed of music as we have now began around the early 1960s when "western pop music entered Ghana...Their music was rock-and-roll, soul music and reggae..." (p 65).

Collins' paper highlights the importance of lyrics and how artistes of this oldest type of music in Ghana sought to communicate their message through their lyrics. As expected at the period of colonial rule, the songs were mostly political as they overtly sang praises to the likes of Kwame Nkrumah and the CPP in their fight for independence. Because of the belief that "highlife lyrics influence social behavior and standards" (p 67), the lyrics were consciously produced to ridicule the colonial oppressors while praising the 'African heroes.'

Yastanti and Setiawati (2018) conducted a study on ambiguity in soundtrack songs of Moana movies. Adopting a descriptive approach, the researchers analyzed two movies and identified several instances of ambiguity. They further classified the instances of ambiguity into two types; structural and lexical ambiguity. Their classification of structural ambiguity follows Hurford and Hersley's (1983) types of ambiguity where a structure may have more than one meaning even though the constituent lexical items are unambiguous. They classify as lexical ambiguity any word which is indeterminate in meaning. The researchers concluded that ambiguity attracts the attention of audience and also it is a form of style variation.

Another study worth looking at is that of Jamdar, Abraham, Khannar and Duber (2015). They sought to conduct an 'emotion analysis of songs based on lyrical and audio features.' The researchers employed computational research approaches (ANew and WordNet) for data analysis. In doing so, the researchers paid attention to ambiguity as a challenge in song analysis. Jamdar et al (2015) intimated that "One of the biggest challenges with lyrical analysis is dealing with ambiguity" and their justification for this assertion is that "words can have multiple meanings based on context and the way sentences are structured" (p 48). They revealed that songs can be classified into categories or types of emotion based on features of song lyrics. Their study highlighted the importance of song lyrics in communicating the intended message of the author or artiste.

THE RUFFTOWN RECORDS

Songs produced by Ruff town/Midas Touch Records were sampled for this study. This record label is one of the newest additions in the Ghanaian Music Industry but is already making waves for so many reasons. Headed by Ricky Nana Agyeman (Bullet), formerly of "Ruff n Smooth" (a household name in Ghanaian music), this record label could boast of young sensational artistes as Ebony Reigns (of blessed memory), Wendy Shay, Fantana, among other young talents. The record label has one album 'Bonyfied' by Ebony (as at the time of the study) to their credit with an increasing number of Singles by Ebony and Wendy Shay especially. As a producer, artiste and songwriter, Bullet (Industry name for Ricky Agyeman) is credited for writing most of the songs produced under his record label.

We purposely sampled songs by Ebony Reigns and Wendy Shay, the two leading artistes on the record label with the highest number of released songs. Hence, ten (10) songs in Ebony's *Bonyfied* album as well as five released songs by Wendy Shay; Bedroom Commando, Uber driver, Astalavista, The boy is mine and Masakra constituted the data for this research. In total there were 15 songs. To ensure validity in data treatment, after the songs were obtained from YouTube.com and transcribed manually by the researchers, the service of a colleague researcher was employed to confirm the validity of the transcription. Since some of the songs were characterized by code switching between English Language and some Ghanaian Languages, mostly Asante Twi, we consulted some research fellows in the Ghanaian Language Department of the University of Cape Coast to assist in the analysis. The lyrics of the songs were then analyzed to determine instances of ambiguity and indeterminacy. Relying mostly on articulation of sounds and intonation, the researchers identified and reported all cases of ambiguity in the songs and their possible stylistic implications.

AMBIGUITY IN THE SELECTED SONGS PRODUCED BY RUFF TOWN RECORDS

After analyzing the songs, we identified some instances of ambiguity in most of the sampled songs (10). In this section, the researcher presents the findings of the analysis and the interpretations of each of the ten songs. The analysis includes a profiling of the song and a subsequent discussion of instances of ambiguity.

Bedroom Commando (Wendy Shay)

As typical of songs, the writer uses poetic and dense language. This song seems to sing praises to urge a bedroom 'commando' on as he 'fires'. A commando is a term for soldiers who are "trained and organized as shock troops especially for hit-and-run raids into enemy territory" (Meriam-webster's collegiate dictionary, 1999). One is thrown into a dilemma as to a kind of

soldier whose battlefield is just the bedroom. A thorough analysis of the linguistic choices heightens this indeterminacy as to what the songstress actually meant.

Bedroom commando (Fire aa baby fire)

Squeeze my tomato (Fire aa baby fire)

Calling you my hero oo (Fire aa baby fire)

My tank hit zero oo (Fire aa baby fire)

Anadwo yi wobete pa Wobete pu na wobete pa

(All you will hear this evening are the sounds pa! pu! pa!)

Mene wo mmienu yɛbɛ bu mpa (The two of us will break a bed)

ɛnɛ yɛbɛma mpa akasa (today we will make the bed talk)

One begins to wonder the source of the sound (pa! pu! pa!). Is it an instance of sound symbolism or it is arbitrary? Could it be the sound of a gunshot because we know the addressee to be a soldier and the 'persona' urges the commando to fire? Or could it be the sound of one moaning due to sexual pleasure since we get to know that there is an activity that might destroy the bed? The lack of clarity of meaning spans from the title where the head of the noun phrase 'commando' is premodified by 'bedroom'. This type of indeterminacy is classified under structural ambiguity. This occurs when a structure is open to several interpretations even though none of the individual words are ambiguous.

The songwriter and/or artiste stylistically equates the bedroom to a battlefield where the lover/commando, this time does not fire real bullet but makes desirable advances at the female lover in anticipation of a sexual intercourse. The main stylistic effect is to shroud adult contents from young and 'fragile' teenagers who may come across this song, especially because of the Ghanaian cultural context where sex can be said to be a verbal taboo. Thus, this form of hedging is a common practice as adults tend to speak in proverbs and metaphors when they consider certain topics as unpleasant for young children.

Maame Hwɛ (Ebony Reigns)

The literal translation of this title is 'mother (vocative), look! (verb)'. This song is famous for its advocacy against domestic violence as well as its ambiguity and hence controversy. It begins with a wife professing her hatred for her violent husband. She reports to her mother to bear witness to her suffering even though she recalls her mother had warned her earlier against going for the man (her husband).

There is an ambiguity as a result of the songstress' articulation of 'hwɛ' ('look') which shares the same phonetic environment (...wɛ) with the female sex organ in Twi, *twɛ* ('vagina'). Also, the use of this verb after a vocative (as required in the context of 'mother, look!') is distinctively characterized by a pause before its articulation and by a falling intonation as accurately indicated in the first instance of its use in the song "Now he dey (pidgin, 'always') beat me, every night and day maame, hwɛ". The next line of the song repeats the expression 'maame hwɛ' but in a manner which leads to indeterminacy: "*Maame hwɛ o (Wo) Maame hwɛ, Maame hwɛ o (Wo) maame hwɛ*"

Due to rapid speech, there is no pause realized after the noun 'maame', the expression 'maame' 'hwɛ o' is characterized by a fall-rise (v) tone significantly different from the first instance. A fall-rise tone begins with a falling tone and ends in a high terminal tendency (Halliday, 1967).

There is again an assimilation of the sound /o/ to *wo* ('your'). Assimilation occurs "when one sound is changed into another because of the influence of a neighboring sound" (Ladefoged & Johnson, 2011, p111). The result of all these phonological changes is the expression 'Wo maame' 'hwe' an expression which is ambiguous because the glottal fricative /h/ becomes indeterminate from the alveolar stop /t/. Thus the expression could mean 'your mother is watching' which is most likely the speaker's meaning. However, the context of the expression and the fall-rise in tone could also call for a derogatory meaning. Thus, the wife may be referring to a vulgar expression 'your mother's cunt', an offensive expression used to show despire towards another. This is highlighted by Armah (1968) in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* when the main character 'The man' was verbally abused for his carelessness in crossing the busy road. The taxi driver who almost knocked him down ranted: "Moron of a frog. If your time has come, search for someone else to take your worthless life...your mother's rotten cunt!" (p 9). In Ghana, "wo maame twe" (your mother's cunt) is a common abuse or swear word among the Akan speaking youth. It has been played on as a form of resistance to conformity, especially in both second and third cycle institutions.

The ambiguity in the song has a stylistic effect of expressing the dilemma of any wife who is subjected to inhumane treatment. Though she is full of hatred and disgust for her husband, she cannot explicitly rain such extremely offensive expressions hence she hedges and rather resorts to intonation and the use of expressions in same phonemic environment to achieve this purpose.

Kupe (Ebony Reigns)

In this song, the persona laments the lack of attention from her lover whom she believes is always far away, probably cheating and because of that she is always catching cold. The ambiguity manifests in the chorus of the song where there is an indication that the lover is finally home and because of that '(today) he will hear *kupe* (an unintelligible sound)' '**ene wobete kupe**' [*today, you will hear kupe*]

As to whether the persona plans a quarrel or fight with the supposedly cheating partner since she claims to know of his girlfriend, the reason why he deceives and lies to her always or she will capitalize on his rare presence to satisfy her sexual desires is indeterminate. Thus, *kupe* could mean a sound of fighting, beatings or smashing of properties by an angry lover or the sound of pleasure by a long-awaited lover who finally meets her lover after lonely nights. This emphasizes Empson's perception of ambiguity as any utterance which gives room for different interpretations (as cited in Leech, 1969).

A similar ambiguous expression can be found in this verse of the song "... *sugar, fahye, bɔkɔɔ*" (sugar, insert, slowly).

In this line, the songstress alludes to something sugary to be inserted (destination unknown) rather slowly. One gets the understanding that sugar is being added to something. However, the choice of manner adverb ('*bɔkɔɔ*'/ *slowly*) and the lexical verb ('*fahye*'/ *insert*) leads to another possible meaning. One which indicates that a sugary substance is being inserted but to avoid pain, it must be done slowly (a depiction of sexual intercourse).

The songwriter once again demonstrates a strong appreciation of stylistics through ambiguity and metaphorical use of language. In this way, the message will be appreciated and understood by its target audience without explicitly breaking ethical and moral rules.

Uber Driver (Wendy Shay)

Yet another widely talked about song is this piece by Ruff town record's songstress Wendy Shay. This song made reference to the current and past presidents of Ghana as well as men in general as it acclaimed that 'women will kill men'. Similar to Ebony's 'Maame hwe' song, Uber driver 'plays' on the phonetic environment of the word 'hwe' as she claims that will be the doom of men.

Kuffuor pɛ hwe

Even Nana Addo nso pɛ hwe (hei!)

Mahama pɛ hwe

Baby Jet, Bullet nso pɛ hwe

Agya eii!, ɛna eii!

Mmaa bɛku mmariima (2x) (women will be the end of men)

ɛhwe bɛku wo oo

ɛhwe bebre bɛku woo

The message of this song begins clearly that men like to 'stir (sensually)'. There is a sense of idolizing the female body as it serves as both attraction to men and an object of desire. Ambiguity sets in when the persona screams 'agya eii!, ɛna eii!' (Literally meaning father! mother !) which creates an image of one moaning in pain and/or pleasure (contextual). One then begins to wonder what 'stirring' has got to do with screams calling for one's parents. This ambiguity concerning the meaning of 'hwe' heightens when the songwriter makes the assertion 'even Nana Addo nso pɛ hwe'. The use of the adverb 'even' indicates that something is surprising and unexpected. The question then arises; is it surprising if someone who is not visually challenged stirs? It then remains indeterminate what the songwriter actually meant by his use of 'hwe'. It becomes obvious then that, as highlighted by Negus and Astor (2015), "ambiguity is fundamental to the way songs are constructed" (p 239). Any attempt by the researcher to disambiguate will strictly be an assumption. For instance, the screams and the surprise that Nana Addo likes 'hwe' can lead one to conclude that the writer understands the concept of minimal pairs and carefully chooses a phonemic environment similar to the female sex organ *twɛ* (this may explain the surprise indicated in the 2nd line in the extract). Whatever be the case, he succeeds in foregrounding his message and this explains why it is one of the most discussed songs.

Sponsor (Ebony Reigns)

This is one song that made waves in Ghana with its popular maxim 'a boyfriend who can't buy you food when you are hungry, *mtseew* (hiss) is that one too a boyfriend?' The song highlights a practice where young girls have intimate relationship with older men who in turn shower them with gifts and money (hence 'sugar' daddy). From the lyrics, these 'sponsors', however, are weak and cannot satisfy their sexual needs like their energetic but poor boyfriends do. One is faced with an indeterminacy in the line below as the expression in bold is open to two interpretations

eda a ɔbɛba me nkyɛn me so ne mu a aɛm a ɔka ne sɛ;
(When he finally comes to me all that he says when I touch him is ;)
“Cool it for me slow down, *me sisi yɛ me ya* (*my waist hurts*)
Cool it for me slow down ***me kɔti a eyɛme ya***.
Honey cool it for me slowdown”

The expression *me kɔti a eyɛme ya* can be considered as a bi-clausal construction, consisting of two parts: “mekɔte a (only for me to hear), *eyɛ me ya*. (it hurts me). Here, ‘Kɔte’ (hear) is a verb. On the other hand, the entire expression can be a monoclausal construction where *mekɔte* (my penis) is a possessive noun construction. The singer modulates the prosody to emphasise the ambiguity of the structure. It is the possessive (my penis hurts), sexually appealing meaning that initially impinges on the listener and attracts them to the song. The second meaning (only to hear “it hurts me”) is perceived only after careful listening to the lyrics of the song. This bi-clausal, perceptive meaning of the construction even still manipulates the Akan language to maintain the profanity of the construction. The reference of the pronominal prefix *ɛ-* (*third person singular, non-human*), *eyɛme ya* (‘it causes me pain’) is not explicit and can be a substitute of penis, a taboo word that has been avoided for the listener to fill in, or a substitute for waist, which has been mentioned in the preceding verse. This ambiguity is more so because the song text is oral and a written version will serve to disambiguate it based on one dimension-quotations. The extract above is a direct quote of what the lover says when she makes advances on him and like any direct quote there is verbatim report. Should the expression in bold fall within the quotation, then the meaning can only be *–my penis hurts*, on the other hand if the quote is closed before the expression, it will only mean a comment on the quote hence- *only for me to hear that it (his waist) hurts*. This indeterminacy once again foregrounds the message of the song and the writer succeeds in getting music lovers and stylisticians to investigate this piece.

Masakra (Wendy Shay)

In this song dubbed ‘Masakra’ (I have changed), the songstress who laments that people blame her for the deviant behavior of some youth renounces her ways and decides to establish a church. Once again there is an element of indeterminacy and ambiguity because an expression used is open to more than one interpretation.

Na mene no abɔmu (so that together)
Na yakɔte asɔre (we will establish a church)
Nti yekɔte asɔre oo
Yekɔte asɔre oo (2x)

Afeideɛ masakra (I am now a changed person)

The word ‘kɔte’ has two meanings as it can belong to two word classes: noun and verb. In English, words with the same sounds but different meaning are called homonyms. English disyllabic words like ‘export’ only differ in placement of stress. As a verb, the stress is placed on the second syllable and as a noun it is placed on the first syllable. Similarly, the Akan (Twi) word ‘kɔte’ becomes a noun (penis) when the two syllables are assigned high tones (kóté) and a verb (establish) when they are assigned low tones (kòtè). Interestingly the similarly ambiguous word ‘**asɔre**’ (‘church’, ‘erect’) can complete the meaning in each usage of the word. In the case of the noun (penis), ‘**asɔre**’ (has erected) is a verb phrase while with the verb (establish), **asɔre**

becomes an object (church). This heightens the ambiguity and even though the context of the song will call for the meaning 'establish a church', one cannot deny the intentional variation of tones by the songstress to create ambiguity. There is ambiguity brought about as a result of manipulation of tone in the expression in italics. This ambiguity is meant to dilute the claim that the songstress has really changed as she appears to still thrive on controversy and ambiguity of expressions. Probably, the writer meant to say she is being herself and not just to please anyone.

Hustle (Ebony Reigns)

This song has had its fair share of appreciation as well as criticism. The song summarizes the struggle of most Ghanaian traders who work tirelessly (hustle) to make ends meet for the family. The message gets indeterminate in a plea by the songstress as captured in italics below

(I am not making any headway in my trade)

Mese monni me oo

monni me dwa

Obi mmedi me oo

monni me dwa

The two possible meanings in this line is that of '*come and buy items from me*' (*monni me dwa*, literally, 'eat me trade'). This sounds logical as the persona is a trader and will understandably call in for customers. However, there is a possibility that she is not inviting business customers but rather 'sex' partners '*come and have sexual intercourse with me*' (*monni me oo*, literally, 'eat me') possibly because sex trade may be more profitable as she is in dying need of money to provide for her family. This meaning is emphasized by the isolation of the construction 'monni me' ('eat me'). The underlying point of distinction between the two possible meanings is that; if the utterance ends as '*monni me oo*', which has the structure of Subject prefix (Mo)-Verb (nni)-Object (me) then it means the call for sex but if it takes a direct object ('dwa' trade) as in '*monni me dwa*', then there is a call for business customers to buy from her. The focus of this ambiguity is the verb 'di' which is open to several meanings (to eat, to have sex and, to engage in trade). The ambiguity here results from two articulatory process: a pause and complementation of the verb. Pauses in speech are important as they determine clausal elements and boundary. A pause may indicate an end to an utterance and the beginning of another while its absence may indicate a continuation of an action. This ambiguity, which appears to be a conscious style of the author, has an effect of communicating the plight and possible solutions that the vulnerable mostly resort to. The writer succeeds in presenting the options available to the poor and needy in our society: either they give in to sexual advancements or they cry out in need of customers in their menial jobs.

Astalavista (Wendy Shay)

This song, produced under the same record label, reveals a female who makes demands of a male, presumed to be her lover. There seems to be a challenge thrown at the male fellow and in the course of this, there is an instance of indeterminacy as a result of dual meanings made from the same utterances.

Me hia no anɔpa a fama me (If I need it in the morning, give it to me)

Me hia no awia fama me (If I need it in the afternoon, give it to me)

Me hia no anadwo a fama me (If I need it in the evening, give it to me)
Come over let's take a ride on my sofa
The night is young baby unleash your cobra

This part of the song gets one thinking as to what actually she wants that she will need it in the morning, afternoon and evening. Is it money? Or probably because they appear to be lovers it could be sexual intercourse. As to what she means by 'taking a ride on a sofa', it is totally confusing because it is not clear as to the kind of journey that can be made on a sofa and more ambiguous is a man who seems to have a cobra. What is the role of a poisonous snake in the ride these two lovers plan to take? There are numerous conceptual metaphors at play here as we assume that the songstress equates the act of sex to a journey (i.e sex is a journey) and a penis to cobra. The song suddenly takes a turn and presents yet another uncertain narration in the lyrics below;

Aduane no aben besen kɔdi ɔse ɔnni oo (The food is served but he says he won't eat)
Aduaba no abre besen kɔdi ɔse ɔnpɛ oo (The fruit is ripe but he says he dislikes it)
Today nothing happened
Tonight nothing happened

The seeker-turned-provider in this part of the song and unlike previously when she was making demands, she is offering 'food' and 'ripe fruits' to the man. She complains vehemently of his refusal to eat and once again the indirect metaphorical expressions heighten the ambiguity in the song. The style employed in this song is that of metaphor and euphemism. The writer presumably realizes the unpleasantness of the subject of the song and uses certain expressions to tone down the severity of the concept.

Poison (Ebony Reigns)

In this dancehall tune (so they call it), the songstress highlights her qualities as an expert in love-related issues 'number one bedroom love teacher'. She highlights a number of lessons to be learnt by her lover (presumably). However, the researcher identifies lack of clarity in one such 'lesson' as illustrated below:

Slow motion no rushing
Shh shh quiet follow my instructions
Let me sit down pon [on] it
Boy, I know you [are] feeling it
You cannot stand it
The way I am doing it
I kill it kill it Ebony upon it...
Me just ah work pon him [I just worked on him]
He is already screaming

There is the frequent use of the non-personal third person singular pronoun 'it' in this particular verse. According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1990), "Personal pronouns function as replacements for co-referential noun phrases in neighbouring (usually preceding) clauses" (p 103). However, there is no such co-referential noun phrases that the pronoun 'it' is used as an exophoric reference item which refers to an entity in the imaginary world of the song. Thus, the listener has to assume the identity of the *it* which could mean anything at all. From the context

of the song, *it* is first presented as an object that one can sit on, presumably a chair (*Let me sit down pon [on] it*), but the subsequent address to the 'boy' creates an image of a sexual activity which defeats the earlier referent of the pronoun 'it'. This could be a conscious decision to shroud the actual referent mainly because it may be inappropriate, a common practice in the Ghanaian society where elders hide adult contents from younger ones.

Turn on the light (Ebony Reigns)

As one of the oldest songs (comparatively) of Ebony Reigns, *Turn on the light* creates a visual imagery of a love scene as the female lover urges the male to put on the light so as to appreciate her better. As illustrated in the lines below, one is at a loss because the message suddenly becomes metaphorical.

Turn on the light and see good body shape
 Turn on the light Oh boy before ***we start the game***
 See me fresh and sweet, rude boy you *nuh fi* (can't) slack

The noun 'game' is open to several interpretations: it can be a sport, hunted animals, just to mention a few and this helps the songwriter to shroud his message. This results in lexical ambiguity. The next line heightens the lack of clarity of the message. What kind of game concerns itself with the player being fresh and smooth? The choice of verb 'slack' (to avoid working) raises question as to what work is being done by this 'rude boy' that the female fellow urges him on and entices him with her 'sweetness' and 'freshness'?

We observe that the choice of words helps in concealing the actual message of the song and this creates defamiliarization as the obvious is not presented. This style of presentation once again reflects the Ghanaian way of communicating very sensitive matters.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to analyze ambiguity in songs produced by Ruff town records, a music record label in Ghana. The study focused on songs by the two leading artistes of the label; Ebony Reigns (of blessed memory) and Wendy Shay. The study revealed that there were instances of ambiguity and indeterminacy in 10 of the sampled songs which constitute more than half of the sampled data. The predominant patterns of indeterminacy and ambiguity characterizing the sampled songs appear to be an authorial style associated with the songwriter and artistes of this record label. This is congruent to the conclusion made by Negus and Astor (2015, p 239) that "the mutability and ambiguity of language is something that songwriters are acutely aware of – they may deploy it playfully in deliberately ambiguous lyrics..." This conclusion also corroborates views shared by Short (1996) and Simpson (2004). More especially Short (1996) as he asserts that a distinct way of writing which is recognizable as belonging to a particular writer is his/her authorial style.

The findings of this study have several implications. The first implication is that this study contributes to scholarship on stylistic analysis of Ghanaian and African songs. This study is a foundation for other stylisticians interested in analyzing the style of Ghanaian musicians and songwriters. Also, this study will help in the appreciation of styles employed by musicians based on the stylistic effects of such styles.

Based on the findings of this study, a number of studies can be made as a follow-up to this study. First, the study was conducted on songs produced by Ruff town records. Other style analysts could replicate the study on other production houses to determine the universality of these findings. This study focused on ambiguity in songs. Thus, other techniques of presentation can be analyzed as well.

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