

A LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF EEDRIS ABDULKAREEM'S 'TELL YOUR PAPA' AND
'NIGERIA JAGA JAGA'

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Abstract

This study examines the lexico-semantic features employed in the songs, 'Tell your papa' (2025) and 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' (2004) by a Nigerian hip-hop artiste, Eedris Abdulkareem. It investigates how Abdulkareem employs lexical choices, semantic fields, Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), metaphor, irony, and code-switching to construct social criticism and articulate the lived experiences of ordinary Nigerians. Despite the growth of lexico-semantic studies on Nigerian music lyrics, most analyses remain synchronic in focus, examining a single text from a single period. This leaves a significant gap in the diachronic dimension of lyrical language. This paper addresses how lexical meaning and lexical choice evolve across time in response to shifting socio-political realities. Using a qualitative research design, the study adopts Cruse and Stubbs' lexico-semantic theory, and draws insights from Fairclough and van Dijk's approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in order to identify recurring lexical patterns that encode themes of political corruption, economic hardship, insecurity, and institutional failure. The study reveals that across two decades, Abdulkareem's lyrical language reflects a consistent ideology that foregrounds the suffering of the Nigerian people, and holds political leadership accountable. The findings show that Abdulkareem's use of Pidgin English, lexical parallelism, and semantic intensification serves not merely as aesthetic choices but as deliberate discursive strategies for political activism. The study concludes that protest music constitutes a significant site of linguistic and ideological resistance in Nigeria, and that diachronic lexico-semantic analysis offers a productive framework for understanding how artists sustain, adapt, and sharpen their critical voice across time and across changing political landscape.

Keywords: *lexico-semantics, Nigerian Pidgin English, protest music, Critical Discourse Analysis, Eedris Abdulkareem.*

Introduction

Language, that is, the words, expressions, and ways of speaking, is never completely objective or free from influence. It mostly carries ideas, values, assumptions, emotions, culture, power relationships and ideologies. According to Etuk and Akpan (2023, p. 70) "...ideologies are embedded in linguistic properties and are usually expressed through language". Speakers make choices in every spoken and written words, be it conscious or unconscious, and this encodes values, ideologies, and suggestions about social relationships. This reflects in protest music, where artists deploy the full resources of language and digital technology (Mbede, 2026) to challenge injustice, criticise authorities, inspire resistance, raise awareness and support social and political change. In Nigeria, music has long served as a vehicle for political commentary, from the Afrobeat of Fela Kuti in the 1970s to the hip-hop and Afropop traditions of subsequent generations (Omojola, 2022). Among the most enduring voices in this tradition is Eedris Abdulkareem, a hip-hop artiste, whose music consistently engages with the political and economic realities of Nigerian life.

This paper undertakes a lexico-semantic analysis of two of Abdulkareem's songs: 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', released in 2004, and 'Tell Your Papa', released in 2025. These two songs span twenty years of Nigerian political history, yet they share a striking continuity of theme and linguistic strategy. 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' was released during the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo and became one of the most controversial songs in Nigerian music history, reportedly earning Abdulkareem a ban from performing at a government-sponsored concert (Olusoji, 2021). 'Tell Your Papa' was released during the administration of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, addressing the president's son, Seyi Tinubu, directly, as a proxy interlocutor through whom the grievances of the Nigerian people are communicated. Lexico-semantics, which is the branch of linguistics concerned with the meanings of words and the relationships between them within a given language system, offers a particularly productive framework for the analysis of protest music, as "...it is the texture a text possesses that differentiates it from an arbitrarily

assemblage of sentences” (Etuk & Urujzian 2024, p. 188). The diction, the construction of words, the deployment of metaphor and irony, and the exploitation of code-switching between English and Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE) all serve as ideological instruments that give form to political critique (Urujzian, 2023). As Fairclough (2015) argues, lexical choices are among the most immediate and transparent indicators of ideological positioning in discourse.

This study examines Abdulkareem’s lyrical constructions and language use, and, as well, undertakes a diachronic lexico-semantic analysis, the exploration of how lexical meaning and lexical choice change over time. ‘Nigeria Jaga Jaga’ and ‘Tell Your Papa’ are produced by the same artiste; the songs focus on similar socio-political themes, and address the Nigerian nation, yet they are separated by approximately two decades of political and social transformation (Udoinwang and Akpan, 2023). Most lexico-semantic studies of music lyrics are synchronic, focusing on a single text or a corpus from a single period. Comparative studies that trace the evolution of lexical strategies across time offer a richer understanding of how artists respond to changing social and political contexts through their choice of words. The two decades that separate ‘Nigeria Jaga Jaga’ from ‘Tell Your Papa’ represent not only a change in the political context but potentially a significant shift in the lexical repertoire and rhetorical strategies available to and deployed by Abdulkareem. Consequently, there is a need for a systematic linguistic study that examines how lexical choices, code-mixing, and stylistic features are employed to construct socio-political meanings across the two periods.

Literature Review

Lexico-semantics is broadly understood as the study of the meaning of words and their relationships within the linguistic system. It covers a range of phenomena including lexical choice, polysemy, synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, semantic fields, metaphor, and connotation (Cruse, 2011). In the context of discourse analysis, lexico-semantic analysis goes beyond the level of the isolated word to examine how lexical patterns across a text, construct representations of social reality. This intersection of lexicology and discourse analysis is central to the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough in the 1980s. Fairclough (1992) describes discourse as simultaneously a text, a discursive practice (how texts are produced and consumed), and a social practice (how the text connects to the society). Thus, CDA holds that language is not merely a mode for communicating pre-formed idea, but is itself constitutive of social reality. Dictions, in particular, carry ideological weight: they name, classify, and evaluate social actors and social processes in ways that naturalise power relations and marginalise others (van Dijk, 2015). For instance, referring to fuel subsidy removal as ‘a bold step’ (as in ‘Tell Your Papa’) rather than ‘an anti-people policy’ encodes a fundamentally different ideological orientation. The artiste’s deliberate choice of the latter formulation signals his alignment with the masses and his rejection of official government framing. Enang and Urujzian (2013) argue that the systematic examination of semantic fields in a corpus can reveal the underlying conceptual structures that organise a speaker’s or writer’s worldview. In protest lyrics, semantic fields of suffering, resistance, corruption, and survival tend to be densely populated and rhetorically central. The identification of these fields in Abdulkareem’s songs therefore provides a window into the conceptual architecture of his political critique.

The systematic study of lexical meaning in modern linguistics can be traced to the structural tradition inaugurated by Ferdinand de Saussure in the early twentieth century. Saussure’s (1916/1959) foundational distinction between ‘langue’ (the language system) and ‘parole’ (actual language use), and his conception of the linguistic sign as an arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified (Etuk, 2021), established the theoretical ground on which semantic inquiry would be built. Within this tradition, it is established that words that do not carry meaning in isolation but through their differences and relationships with other words in the system. Ullmann (1962) distinguishes between the name of a word and its sense, arguing that the relationship between the two constitutes the fundamental unit of semantic analysis. He also gave particular attention to the phenomena of polysemy, the capacity of a single word to carry multiple related meanings; and homonymy, the tendency of identical forms to carry entirely unrelated meanings. For him, these phenomena are not linguistic anomalies but central features of how natural languages organise and extend their vocabularies. Lyons’ (1977) framework demonstrates that lexical meaning is not simply a property of individual words but emerges from the structured network of relations that words contract with one another. Leech (1981) identified seven distinct types of meaning: conceptual, connotative, social, affective, reflected, collocative, and thematic meaning. He regarded conceptual meaning as central to others, describing it as the logical or dictionary-definition meaning of a word that constitutes the core, around which all other types of meaning are organised.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the lexico-semantic theories of Cruse (2011) and Stubbs (2001), which together provide the conceptual framework for examining how meaning is constructed, sustained, and interpreted through lexical choices in discourse. Cruse (2011) argues that the meaning of a lexical item is not fixed but contextually variable: words derive meaning through their relationships with other words within semantic networks not excluding synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and collocation; and through the specific contexts they occur. Stubbs (2001), extends this insight by demonstrating that repeated lexical patterns and collocational habits within discourse consistently reveal underlying ideologies, social assumptions, and cultural values. The theory also explains how language users bend lexical choices to foreground specific ideas while back-grounding others.

This study further draws insights from the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Fairclough (2015) and van Dijk (2015). CDA is concerned with the relationship between language, power, and society. It examines how discourse structures reproduce, maintain, or challenge social inequalities and ideological dominance. Fairclough (1992) sees discourse as a form of social practice, arguing that language reflects and shapes social realities. His three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, first elaborated in *Discourse and Social Change* (1992) and further developed in *Language and Power* (2015), distinguishes between the analysis of text, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice, emphasising that language cannot be adequately comprehended beyond the social and institutional contexts in which it is produced and received. Similarly, van Dijk's (2015), focus on the cognitive and ideological dimensions of discourse, explains how language structures influence people's perceptions, beliefs, and social representations. According to him, discourse often serves the interests of dominant groups by controlling public knowledge and shaping societal attitudes. CDA therefore goes beyond the surface meaning of words to investigate hidden ideologies, power relations, and implicit assumptions embedded in texts.

Lexico-semantics explains how meaning is encoded through lexical choices and semantic relations; CDA explains why such choices are made and what ideological functions they perform within specific social contexts. The study therefore examines not only what is said in the text, but also who says it, in what context, to what audience, for what purpose, and with what possible social effects. By combining lexico-semantic theory with Critical Discourse Analysis, the study achieves a comprehensive understanding of how language operates as a tool for meaning construction, ideological expression, and social influence.

Methodology

This study adopts qualitative research design. The data were purposively selected based on themes that capture the Nigerian socio-political environment, specifically in the years 2004 ('Nigeria Jaga Jaga') and 2025 ('Tell Your Papa'). The data for this study comprise the complete lyrics of 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' and 'Tell Your Papa' by Eedris Abdulkareem, as transcribed from the original recorded versions. The songs are treated as primary texts and are subjected to close linguistic reading informed by Cruse (2011) and Stubbs' (2001) lexico-semantic theory and Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk's (2015) approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis. At the level of text, the analysis examines lexical choice, semantic fields, metaphor, irony, and grammatical mood. At the level of discursive practice, it considers the rhetorical strategies employed and the audience they address, and at the level of social practice, it situates the linguistic findings within the political and historical context of Nigeria at the time of each song's release.

Lexical and Semantic Construction of Disorder and Political Decay

'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' and 'Tell Your Papa' reveal a dense network of lexical items organised around semantic fields of violence, corruption, suffering, disorder, and political criminality; and a strong socio-political commentary on economic hardship, insecurity, corruption, and governance in Nigeria respectively. The lyrics reflect ideological resistance, class division, public dissatisfaction with political leadership; and critique bad governance, inequality, and systemic corruption in Nigeria. One of the most immediately striking features of both songs is the density of vocabulary drawn from semantic fields of disorder, suffering, and moral failure.

In 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', the title itself, which is repeated emphatically in the chorus, establishes the dominant semantic field of the song. 'Jaga jaga', as expressed in the song, means 'in complete disorder' or 'totally ruined'. Its reduplication intensifies the sense of absolute and unredeemable chaos. Similarly, 'scatter scatter' operates as both a description and a metaphor: it describes a physical dispersal but implies a breakdown of social order, a fragmentation of the national whole. The co-occurrence of these phrases creates what may be described as a semantic cluster organised around the concept of systemic failure, a pattern consistent with Stubbs's (2001) observation that repeated lexical co-occurrence reveals underlying ideological assumptions.

One of the most significant lexico-semantic features in 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' is violence and criminality. Expressions such as "arm robber," "gunshot," "Gboosa," "6ft down," and "kill" collectively create an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and death. According to Cruse (2011), lexical items derive meaning not in isolation but through their relations with surrounding words within semantic domains. In this context, "arm robber" conventionally denotes a violent criminal who does not only steal properties for economic gain but also find solace in taking the life of a fellow human. However, the artist subverts this conventional semantic expectation through the rhetorical questions:

Which arm robber no want money?
Which arm robber no want jolly?
Na political armed robber be that
Na wetin dey kill Nigeria oo

Stubbs' (2001) theory of semantic clustering is evident in the repetitive collocations "scatter scatter," "suffer suffer," and "jaga jaga." These reduplicative expressions function as intensifiers of social breakdown. While "Scatter scatter" symbolises institutional collapse, "suffer suffer" foregrounds the continuous hardship experienced by the ordinary citizens. The phrase "Everything jaga jaga" serves as a denouement that encapsulates disorder and chaos. Through repeated collocation, the song establishes a discourse in which corruption, poverty, insecurity, and institutional decay are interconnected social realities.

Lexical items such as "prison," "jail," and "lock am" depict the coercive power of the state. The references to individuals allegedly imprisoned introduce a discourse of political persecution and suppression of dissent. Fairclough's (2015) CDA framework explains that discourse reflects social power relations and institutional control. In this case, the prison symbolises the state's dominance over oppositional voices and constructs the government as repressive rather than democratic. "Poor man dey suffer," "Fuel scarcity," "100 naira," and "NEPA" introduce economic hardship, evoking deprivation and infrastructural failure in Nigeria. These lexical items carry strong cultural and socio-political associations beyond their literal meanings. "Fuel scarcity," for instance, functions metonymically as a symbol of governmental inefficiency despite Nigeria's status as an oil-producing nation. "NEPA" historically associated with unstable electricity supply, becomes a lexical marker of failed public infrastructure. According to Cruse (2011), such words accumulate connotative meanings through repeated social usage, allowing listeners to infer broader critiques of governance from seemingly ordinary terms. There are lexical references to fraud and corruption through the use of expressions like "419," "Liberia mafia," and "buy estate." By collocating political actors with "419," the artiste semantically associates governance with organised fraud. This reflects van Dijk's (2015) argument that discourse structures often reveal ideological positions. The song, 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' constructs a binary opposition between "the poor masses" and "corrupt elites." Ordinary citizens are represented through the discourse of suffering and victimisation, while political elites are represented through greed, criminality, and excessive wealth accumulation.

The use of Nigerian Pidgin English itself is ideologically significant. Fairclough (2015) argues that language choice reflects social identity and power relations. By using Nigerian Pidgin rather than Standard English, the artiste aligns himself with the common people and creates accessibility for a broader audience. Language is a tool of resistance against elite political discourse typically associated with officialdom and authority (Mbede & Etuk, 2026). In 'Tell Your Papa', the chorus introduces a series of NPE terms that collectively construct discourse of moral and political corruption:

"Jaga jaga",
"Yama-yama",
"Wuru, Ojoro",
"Mago-mago",
"Where the mago-mago dance?"
"Where the wuru-wuru dance?"
"Where the mago-mago dance?"

Each of these terms carries specific semantic weight. 'Yama-yama' in NPE denotes something disgusting or reprehensible. 'Wuru-wuru' (also rendered 'wuru') refers to deception or trickery. 'Ojoro' means cheating or fraudulent conduct. 'Mago-mago' refers to dubious or shady dealings, particularly in business or politics. By stringing these terms together in rapid succession, Abdulkareem creates a semantic accumulation that overwhelms the listener with the extent and variety of the political wrongdoing he makes efforts to name. This technique, which might be termed lexical cataloguing, is a characteristic feature of Abdulkareem's protest lyric style and represents a deliberate rhetorical strategy for constructing an impression of pervasive, systemic corruption. Lexical items such as "hunger," "luxury," "hardship," "inflation," "school fees" and "country hard" collectively construct discourse of suffering and poverty. Conventionally, luxury refers to expensive or non-essential goods

associated with wealth and comfort. However, the artist semantically redefines the term to suggest that ordinary necessities have become inaccessible to average Nigerians. Fairclough's (2015) approach to discourse reflects unequal power relations between political elites and ordinary citizens. Abdulkareem strategically contrasts elite experiences with public suffering through the expressions:

You dey fly private jet, insecurity no be your problem
and

Nigerians wey dey travel by road, some of them dey face death sentence.

This lexical opposition foregrounds class inequality and social exclusion. Fairclough argues that discourse functions as social practice, and in this context, the song exposes how political elites are detached from the realities of ordinary Nigerians. Terms, such as "connive," "mago-mago," "compromised judiciary," and "multiple trillions" construct a semantic field of institutional corruption, where "mago-mago" connotes deception, manipulation, and fraudulent practices. Through this lexical choice, Abdulkareem portrays government projects and public institutions as dishonest and exploitative. The questions: "Tell me wetin your papa don do?" and "How much your papa don save?" imply governmental incompetence, inviting listeners to carefully evaluate political leadership. The semantic field of food and economic survival is equally central to both songs and constitutes one of the most linguistically rich areas of the analysis. In verse one of 'Tell Your Papa', vivid enumeration of foodstuffs are deployed:

"Hunger wan kill us",
"To buy food na luxury",
"Kpomo, èjà, iresi, èwà, ishu, garri",
"Indomie, Spaghetti",
"People dey jump inside lagoon",
"Because of economic hardship"

The list of everyday food items, such as, kpomo (cow skin), èjà (fish), iresi (rice), èwà (beans), ishu (yam), garri (cassava flour), Indomie (instant noodles), spaghetti reflects what Stubbs (2001) describes as lexical clustering. These food-related lexical items collectively symbolise survival and ordinary living. Their association with the phrase "to buy food na luxury" foregrounds the severity of economic hardship. These items represent the daily struggles of ordinary Nigerians; they reinforce the ideology that inflation has transformed basic survival into a privilege.

Metaphor and Figurative Language

Metaphor is deployed extensively in both songs, and its analysis reveals a sophisticated conceptual architecture underlying what might superficially appear as simple political complaint. The most pervasive conceptual metaphor across both songs is what may be identified as the nation as a body in distress. This is consistent with the broader tradition of nationalist discourse, in which the body politic is imagined as a human body susceptible to illness, injury, and death (Musolff, 2016). In 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', the suffering of 'the poor man' functions metonymically for the suffering of the national body as a whole. The line 'Poor man dey suffer, suffer' is not merely a description of individual poverty but a synecdoche in which the figure of the poor man stands for the Nigerian nation. The questions: Which arm robber no want money? Which arm robber no want jolly? destabilise the traditional meaning of robbery by introducing the phrase "political arm robber." Through semantic extension and metaphorical transfer, politicians are equated with armed robbers, thereby constructing governance itself as criminal activity (Udoinwang & Akpan, 2022). This lexical metaphor intensifies ideological criticism and suggests that political leaders are more dangerous than ordinary criminals because they exploit citizens under the guise of governance.

In 'Tell Your Papa', the metaphorical framework is elaborated and made more specific. The government's removal of the fuel subsidy is described as a 'bold step', a phrase that is clearly ironic in context: the lyrics immediately question what savings have actually been made from this 'bold step', implying that the boldness is a fiction used to obscure a policy whose benefits have accrued to the elite rather than the poor. The irony here operates through what Sperber and Wilson (1986) describe as echoic use: the phrase 'bold step' echoes the language of government communication and official press releases, but is recontextualised in discourse of popular suffering that exposes its emptiness.

The 'crime' metaphor is central to 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', and is deployed with particular analytical precision in Verse 1. The verses explore the figure of the 'political arm robber', a compound metaphor that merges the criminal category of armed robbery with the category of political leadership:

"Arm robber came to your house",

"He no take money, he no rape your wife",
"He went straight up to your bed side",
"(Gboosa!)",
"6ft down you down",
"Which arm robber no want money?",
"Which arm robber no want jolly?",
"Na political arm robber be that",
"Na wetin dey kill Nigeria ooo"

The rhetorical strategy here is sophisticated. Abdulkareem begins by establishing the figure of the conventional armed robber, a figure his audience knows well from lived experience in a context of high violent crime, and then systematically distinguishes the 'political arm robber' from this type. The conventional robber takes money and commits sexual violence; the political robber does something far worse: he simply kills. The comparative structure ('which arm robber no want money? which arm robber no want jolly?') works as a series of rhetorical questions that builds towards the devastating conclusion: only a political arm robber kills without even the 'excuse' of material self-interest. The lexical item '6ft down', a reference to burial depth, is a lethal metonymy that condenses the consequences of political violence into a single stark image.

The building metaphor in 'Tell Your Papa' relates to infrastructure. The Lagos-Calabar coastal road project is described in concrete monetary terms, 'four point nine billion per kilometer', before the absurd implication is made explicit: normal roads within towns receive no attention. This juxtaposition works through what might be called semantic incongruity: the enormous figures associated with prestige projects are placed in immediate semantic proximity to the absence of basic urban infrastructure. The incongruity is the critique.

Irony and Evaluative Language

Irony is one of the most powerful weapons in Abdulkareem's rhetorical arsenal. Both songs make extensive use of ironic inversion, the deployment of positive or neutral terms to describe what are obviously, negative realities. In 'Tell Your Papa', the repeated structure 'to buy data na luxury' is particularly effective as an ironic device. 'Luxury', in conventional usage, connotes excess and privilege, things that go beyond necessity. By applying this word to food, electricity, data, and clothing, Abdulkareem inverts its conventional meaning: in contemporary Nigeria, he implies, the most basic necessities have become so inaccessible that they have taken on the character of luxuries. The repeated application of this inverted semantics creates a cumulative ironic effect that is more devastating than any direct accusation.

The evaluative language employed in 'Tell Your Papa' is organised around a series of direct and indirect assessments of government performance. Some of these include explicit negative evaluations such as 'Your papa no try', 'Your Papa no be the best president', 'Too much empty promises', et cetera. As noted by Urujian (2024), some lexical items could be employed to accentuate the ideological position of a writer, speaker or artiste. Such words include, 'Balabu' which carries connotations of excessive, empty speech; and 'wahala' which means trouble or problem. Together these terms construct a semantic portrait of a political discourse that produces trouble rather than solutions.

The naming of specific political figures, Keyamo, Kingsley Agbe, Adebendel in 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga'; and Akpabio, Natasha, and Dave Umahi in 'Tell Your Papa'; is a significant lexico-semantic strategy. This use of proper names, as van Dijk (2015) observes, is one of the most direct forms of nomination in political discourse: it refuses abstraction and insists on individual accountability. In 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', the mention of specific names associated with legal and political scandals of the Obasanjo era situates the song's critique in verifiable historical reality. In 'Tell Your Papa', the reference to 'Even Dave Umahi don do worse mago-mago' draws on the audience's knowledge of a specific political figure to ground the accusation of corruption.

Repetition, Parallelism, and Lexical Intensity

Repetition is among the most prominent formal features of both songs, and its lexico-semantic implications are significant. In 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', the chorus repeats four core phrases, 'Nigeria jaga jaga', 'everything scatter scatter', 'poor man dey suffer suffer', and 'gunshot inna the air'; with only minor variation across multiple iterations. This repetition operates as a disorder, a refusal to move forward, and this presents a nation trapped in cycles of bad governance.

The reduplication is exploited throughout both songs for purposes of semantic intensification. 'Dey suffer suffer' is semantically stronger than 'dey suffer.' It adds a sense of ongoing, intensifying, never-ending suffering that

simple iteration of the verb cannot portray. Similarly, 'scatter scatter' conveys a more thorough and irreversible disorder than 'scatter' alone. Faraclas (1996) notes that reduplication in NPE is a highly productive morphosyntactic process that serves both aspectual and intensifying functions; in Abdulkareem's lyrics, it is systematically exploited for its intensifying potential, building a portrait of suffering that admits no degree and allows no mitigation.

Parallelism, the repetition of syntactic structure with varied lexical content, is equally prominent. In 'Tell Your Papa', the series of parallel constructions built around the structure 'to [verb] [noun] na luxury' create a powerful anaphoric effect:

To buy food na luxury,
Electricity na luxury,
To on AC, na luxury,
To buy data na luxury,
To buy cloth wear na luxury.

Each new item in the series extends the range of the claim and intensifies its force. The grammatical invariance of the structure, showing how each clause is built around 'na luxury', creates a sense of inevitability and exhaustiveness, as if the list could continue indefinitely. This is, in van Dijk's (2015) terms, a discursive strategy of generalisation: the individual instances accumulate into a totalising claim about the condition of Nigerian society under the current administration.

Code-Switching and the Politics of Language Choice

Both songs make extensive use of code-switching, moving between NPE, Standard Nigerian English, Yoruba, and colloquial Nigerian English in ways that are semantically and politically significant. As noted above, the use of NPE as the dominant medium of both songs is itself a politically meaningful choice: it aligns the artiste with the masses and against the elite. However, the patterns of switching between NPE and other codes reveal a more nuanced linguistic strategy.

In 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga', the chorus and the verse narrative are primarily in NPE, but switches to Standard Nigerian English occur at moments where the lyric engages with official political discourse or identifies specific political actors. This pattern suggests that Standard English is being used to echo and expose officialdom, while NPE is the authentic voice of popular experience. In 'Tell Your Papa', the code-switching is more elaborate. The opening of Verse 2 switches briefly to a more formal register, 'on behalf of Nigerians, take our message to him', before returning to NPE for the specific political accusations that follow. This shift to formal English at the moment of official representation is significant: it enacts the act of formal petition, placing the popular grievances expressed in Pidgin within the framework of democratic political communication.

The use of Yoruba vocabulary, 'Emi ló kan' (It concerns me or it is my turn), 'Won ti gbowa wa ja NEPA' (They have taken our money to fight NEPA), 'Won ti di regular 419' (They have become regular fraudsters), in 'Tell Your Papa' and 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' respectively, introduces a specifically Yoruba cultural and political dimension. These phrases are spoken as if addressing a specifically Yoruba audience, or as if drawing on shared Yoruba cultural knowledge to authenticate the critique. As Ofulue (2019) observes, the insertion of Yoruba into an otherwise NPE lyric typically functions to invoke a specific cultural community and to claim insider status within it.

Discourse of Address and the Construction of Political Accountability

One of the most linguistically distinctive features of 'Tell Your Papa' is its mode of address. Rather than address the president directly, as in 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' which implicitly addresses the Obasanjo administration, 'Tell Your Papa' addresses the president's son, Seyi Tinubu, nominated as an intermediary. This rhetorical choice has significant lexico-semantic implications. The vocative 'Seyi' is repeated throughout the song as a form of direct address that simultaneously personalises the critique and makes Seyi Tinubu a participant in the political drama. The son becomes the messenger, and his assumed access to the father, an access denied to ordinary Nigerians, becomes a symbol of the structural inequality between the governing elite and the governed.

The imperative 'tell your papa' functions as the song's central speech act. It is a command, a demand that information be transmitted, but it is also a reproach, an accusation, and a lament. The recurring imperative 'tell' implies that the president does not know, or does not want to know, the conditions of ordinary Nigerians: it positions the president as wilfully ignorant and the artiste as the bearer of truth that power refuses to listen to. This is consistent with the broader tradition of protest music as described by Eyerman and Jamison (1998): the protest

song speaks truth to power, bridging the gap between the experience of the marginalised and the indifference of the powerful.

The direct challenge embedded in the lines 'Seyi, try travel by road without your security, make you feel the pains of fellow Nigerians' is particularly instructive as a lexico-semantic act. The conditional imperative 'try' followed by the purpose clause 'make you feel the pains' constructs an experiential argument: the son (and by extension the father) cannot claim legitimate authority over a reality they have never experienced. The lexical item 'pains' is semantically loaded, more bodily, more immediate, and more visceral than the more abstract 'problems' or 'difficulties' that official political language might prefer. The choice of 'pains' insists on the physical, embodied reality of the suffering Abdulkareem is describing.

A Diachronic Analysis

The lexico-semantic analysis presented above reveals a set of consistent and sophisticated discursive strategies that operate across both songs and across the twenty-year gap between them. These strategies collectively serve to construct a particular representation of Nigerian political reality: one in which the gap between rulers and ruled is absolute, in which official political language is exposed as deception, and in which the suffering of ordinary Nigerians is given linguistic form with a specificity and intensity that challenges any official narrative of progress or prosperity. The diachronic analysis reveals continuity in socio-political dissatisfaction after two decades; both songs emphasise corruption, bad governance, poverty, insecurity, and leadership failure. Where 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' employs broader national criticism, 'Tell Your Papa' uses a more direct and personalised political confrontation, pointing to "Seyi" the president's son. This shift reflects changing patterns of political engagement and public discourse in Nigeria.

Urujzian (2016) reiterates the relevance of restarting lexemes that make up a semantic field in an attempt to make meaning. The persistence of the same core semantic fields, disorder, suffering, corruption, food insecurity, violence, across both songs is itself a significant finding. It suggests that Abdulkareem's dictions are not merely a response to the particularities of any given political moment but reflects a deep structural analysis of Nigerian governance (Affiah, Amaku & Akpan, 2022). The fact that the same metaphors, the same NPE vocabulary, and the same rhetorical strategies are deployed in 2004 and 2025 implies that, in Abdulkareem's assessment, the fundamental conditions of Nigerian political life have not changed. This is, in itself, a political statement, one that is communicated not through any explicit claim but through the stubborn return of the same linguistic resources across two decades.

Conclusion

This paper has undertaken a lexico-semantic analysis of Eedris Abdulkareem's 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' (2004) and 'Tell Your Papa' (2025), examining how the artiste, Abdulkareem, deploys lexical choice, semantic fields, metaphor, irony, parallelism, reduplication, and code-switching to construct a sustained critique of Nigerian political leadership. The analysis has demonstrated that these songs are linguistically sophisticated texts that exploit the full resources of NPE, Yoruba, and Nigerian English to give voice to the political aspirations and lived experiences of ordinary Nigerians.

The key findings show that 'Nigeria Jaga Jaga' (2004) and 'Tell Your Papa' (2025) draw on dense semantic fields of disorder, suffering, corruption, and violence that collectively mould a picture of systemic political failure. Abdulkareem also employs a range of metaphorical strategies, including the nation as body, the politician as criminal, and the basic necessity as luxury, to make invisible political realities visible and morally legible. The lexico-semantic strategies across a twenty-year gap suggest that Abdulkareem's linguistic repertoire demonstrates a profound critique of Nigerian governance that goes beyond the specific characteristics of individual administrations. They also speak to broader questions about the relationship between language and political power: Abdulkareem's music is a reminder that the naming of suffering, the ironisation of official lies, and the speaking of truth in the language of the people are not merely artistic acts but political ones. In a context in which official discourse consistently obscures the realities of power, protest lyrics that name those realities with precision and passion perform a vital democratic function. Fairclough (2015) reminds us that language is centrally implicated in relations of power and domination, in this regard, Eedris Abdulkareem's music emerges not merely as artistic expression, but as a powerful discursive instrument through which social realities, political dissatisfaction, and ideological resistance are articulated and contested.

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