



***Identity Negotiation in Street Musical Performances of Kemi Special: A Sociostylistic Perspective***

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**Abstract**

Identity construction and negotiation are central to most discussions surrounding the feminist ideology. Scholars, literary critics, and professionals across diverse areas of human callings have, over the years, contributed to this discussion to bridge the gender gap. Despite the existence of a myriad of dialogues on feminism, the gaps in culturally defined roles and expectations of males and females within the African context still prevail. Therefore, identity negotiation is still an order of the day. This paper examines how Kemi Special negotiates feminist identity in her musical performances on the street through the lenses of sociolinguistics and stylistics. The data for this study, constituting purposively selected songs from musical performances of Kemi Special, were analysed using Tajfel & Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT). Also, stylistic features that are inherent in the songs are analysed. The study found that the music artiste deploys sociostylistic features constituting specific word classes, street jargons, neologisms, declaratives, analogy, and eulogy. Through the deployment of the sociostylistic features, Kemi identifies with the strengths of womanhood. She portrays these strengths as the drivers of female socio-economic and political existence amidst adversaries.

**Keywords:**

*Sociolinguistics,*

*Stylistics,*

*Social Identity,*

*Feminist Ideology*

**Introduction**

Language as a tool of communication is used for interactions between individuals. When individuals lack a common language, communication becomes a problem in society. Sociolinguistics is a field of linguistics that studies the intricacies of language use for communication in society. The discipline of sociolinguistics concerns itself with the part language plays in maintaining social roles in a community by examining the relationship between language and society. It evaluates the way language is used, and society affects language according to its study of the sociological aspects of language, that is, the study of how language is used in relation to social factors such as gender, ethnicity, cultural norms, and expectations, as well as context (Saville-Troke, 2003).

Sociolinguistics' evaluation of varieties of language use cutting across social factors and contextual variables is its meeting point with the discipline of stylistics. According to Stockwell & Whitely (2014), stylistics explores how writers or speakers creatively exploit the resources of language to communicate effectively and to express their individual voices. The voices expressed by individuals often illuminate their identity expression and negotiation. Such identities could be cultural or gender identity. The stylistic approach that explores gender related identity expression is feminist stylistics.

According to Mills (2009, p.221), feminist stylistics is concerned with the analysis of the way that questions of gender impact on the production of the interpretation of text i.e. feminist stylistics aims at utilising stylistics tools for the investigation of those concerns and preoccupations traditionally identified in the feminists approach to the study of language. Rather than assuming the notion of gender as simply, a question of discriminatory messages about sex difference embedded in text, feminist stylistics is concerned with unravelling the complex messages that may deduced from the text and also with analysing the way that readers pieces together or resist these messages. The aim of this study is to examine how Kemi Special (Iya Wasila) negotiates feminist identity in her musical performances on the street through the lenses of sociolinguistics and stylistics.

## Literature Review

### Feminist Ideology and Stylistics

Feminism and stylistics are two different terminologies which have found their way in critical studies. Feminism as a term is the study associated with the struggle for women equality while stylistics is the study of the linguistic tools in literature. Yet, both have been synergised to create the stylistics theory called Feminist stylistics. The development of feminist stylistics cannot be divorced from the development of the different waves of feminist ideology and this makes it impertinent to briefly discuss feminism.

Various cultural, historical and political traditions have linked the existence of women to their relationship with men and this has been called to question by feminist thinkers who have shown a “resistance to masculine code of conduct” (Javeed, 2017, p. 3373). This resistance and protest have been termed Feminism. Feminism according to Nahel (1990) is a “mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome”. It is the study of the right of women and its history is tied to the history of feminist movement which seek equal social and legal rights for women as seen in literature. As a theoretical concept, the development of feminism according to Maggie Homm can be divided into three; the first wave, second wave and the third wave. First wave feminism has been linked to the struggle for equal rights championed by Mary Wollstonecraft in her literary treatise *A Vindication for the Rights of Women* (1792). This wave of feminism seeks to address the rights of women and suffrage movements in both Britain and America (Aliyu 2013). The first wave feminism ended with the publication of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) which signals the second wave feminism of the 1960s. Second wave feminism campaigned for equal legal and social rights for women Elaine Showalter and Kate Millet are notable ideologies of this period of feminist movement. The third wave feminism is a continuation and reaction to second wave feminism known to have begun in the 90’s. In contemporary age, scholars believe that there is a fourth wave feminism which “started in 2012 (and) is associated with technology like Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram and other social networking” (Javeed 2017, p. 3373).

These different waves of Feminism are significant because it heralded the development of different feminist theories and models of analysis such as Androgyny, Gynocriticism, Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Postcolonial Feminism, Ecofeminism and Feminist Stylistics. Each of these models emphasise different critical feminist dimensions. For instance, Showalter’s (1979) Gynocriticism creates an alternative to women’s writing by identifying women misrepresentations while radical feminists challenge traditional gender roles particularly issues related to patriarchy. Within this model frameworks, it thus becomes imperative for a deep evaluation of the language of gender, and this forms the basis for a feminist stylistic. Thus, feminist stylistic can be classified as a sub-theory of feminist ideology as parts of its principles align with the literary concept of feminism and the other part is linked to Stylistics. What is Stylistics?

Stylistics according to Leech and Short (1981) responds to the questions of the why and the how in a discourse. According to Kamalu (2018) stylistics is “concerned with the ways meaning is created through language in literature and in other non-fictional texts” It studies the ways in which language has been used in texts and this way can be classified as style. The style a writer adopts is the primary focus in a stylistic analysis as it is believed that literature was the major concern for early discourse in Stylistics (Kamalu 2018). However, over the years, it has been employed in the study of other non-fictional paradigms as seen in different stylistic analysis of cartoons, political speeches, film, news items, advertisements and other publications.

In simple terms, feminist stylistics is the identification and interpretation of gender terminologies and concepts through the linguistic patterns used in portraying them. It is a close linguistic reading of texts which reveals how gender representations are infused in the language mechanism of such texts. In a feminist stylistic analysis, the thematic ideology of the text is revealed through linguistic choices and forms.

Mills, Cameron and Talbot have been key figures in the propagation of feminist stylistics. Mills (1995) affirms that stylistics is an objective and alternative way to literary evaluation. Mills (1995, p.1) notes that feminist stylistics is “a form of politically motivated stylistics whose aim is to develop an awareness of the way gender is handled in a text”. It is an evaluation of a text within the feminist purview to identify linguistic features which exposes female oppression and injustice and seeks to resolve them. Feminist stylistics addresses metaphoric language use, point of view and other devices related to gender expressions. Such evaluation is focused on the analysis of words, of phrase and sentences and the discourse context. In essence, while feminism identifies the oppression of women, feminist stylistics presents how women are oppressed to language embedded in the text. Feminist stylistic does not “identify sexism...it examines the linguistic mechanisms through which [sexism] is produced, reproduced, or resisted (Mills & Mullany 2011, p. 256)

### Gender Perception and the Female Identity

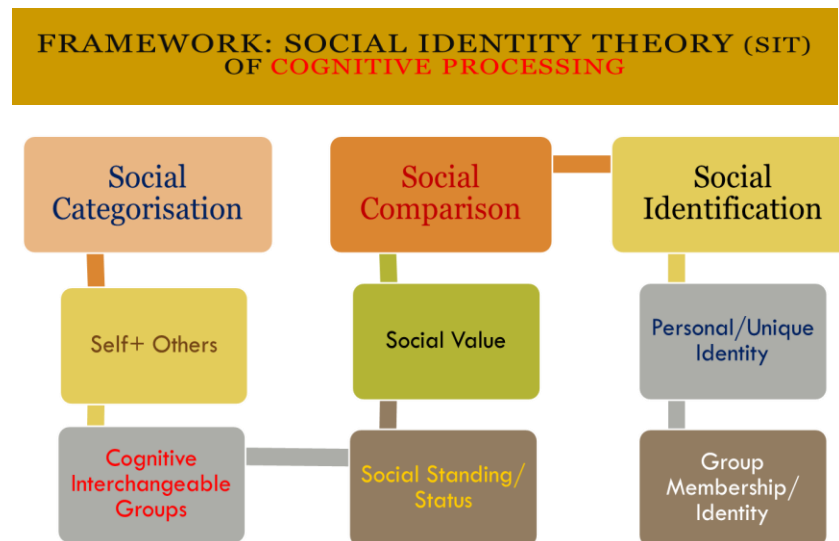
Gender is a social phenomenon that has shaped individual identity and it has been dependant on race, class, sexuality and other social categories, Crenshaw (1989). Fernandez (2023) equally affirms that gender is influenced by

cultural norms, education, identities and empowerment and these norms vary from different societies. Smitha (2024, p.1) infers that “from traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity to the diverse and evolving roles shaped by globalization, the way gender is perceived and experienced varies widely across different societies” and this is an indication that gender is perceived based on different principles which diminishes self identity. Gender focus has been one of the significant concepts in feminist studies as it presupposes that there is a difference in the way men and women are treated in the society. Many feminists perceive that female identity has been streamlined and preconceived through “cultural texts [which] naturalize[s] the oppression of women through their stereotypical representation of women as weak/vulnerable, seductress, obstacles, sexual objects, or procreating devices” (Soni 2024, p. 653). This stereotypical representation of women has been the foundational precepts of feminist and their struggle for female identity devoid of cultural and political subjugations. The female identity is embedded in a consciousness of self identity which is not influenced by social forces.

In addition, in feminist parlance, the question of gender also transcends only an identity based on societal configurations because there are situations where the identity of the other gender might be assumed to fulfil certain responsibilities. Women have been seen to adapt to societal situations by taking up responsibilities identified with the men. Ogundipe-Leslie (1987. P.8) affirms that “the concept of a woman is a complex one. Womanhood does not only relate to gender, because situations exist where women adopt other gender roles”. This paper thus examines how the female identity is represented in the selected songs of Kemi Special.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The analytical framework for this study is a blend of a sociolinguistic theory and the stylistic elements. Social identity theory examines intergroup identities, categorised as in-group and out-group identities with the aim of challenging relative group behaviour through collective voices thereby ascribing one group as being superior to the other (Blair, 2015). The Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1986) is a sociolinguistic theory which is rooted in sociolinguistics and psychology, hence the components of the theory include concepts such as stereotyping, social value and ethnocentrism (Jekins, 2014). The theory of social identity also provides a model for the evaluation of intergroup behaviour cutting across hostility and group identification/ characteristics as well as strategies for social change through the evaluation of the psychological processes of language users, including their motivation, emotion and cognition (Rupert, 2021).



**Figure 1: Tenets of the Social Identity Theory**

As a theory which provides explanations for intergroup behaviour, Social Identity theory has three major tenets. These are social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison. While social categorisation provides the basis for the understanding of the phenomenon of self and others based on the cognitive perception exhibited by the individual groups. This may lead to phenomenon such as in-group bias; including biases such as positive or negative self-image (Viki, Abrahams & Winchester, 2013). By social comparison, Tajfel and Turner emphasise social values and social standing/ status as the bases for the comparison of behaviour between members of the in-group and out-group. And lastly, group identity is measured by the sense of personal/ unique identity of a member of a group or based on individual’s perception of his/her group membership (Sechrist & Young, 2011).

Apart from Social Identity Theory, preponderant stylistic features of lexico-syntactic parallelism and borrowing, as well as the lexico-semantic and pragmatic features of language use, will be analysed in the data. The next section discusses the research methodology.

### Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive design and a qualitative research method. To achieve the objectives of the study, the data for the study, consisting of two songs from Kemi Special's street musical performances, were purposively selected. The selected songs were analysed using Tajfel & Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT). Also, inherent stylistic features in the songs were analysed from the feminist stylistic perspective. For the analysis, prevalent social identities in Kemi Special songs were analysed, this includes the appraisal of the artiste's exploration of the social values and status through the elements of feminist stylistics.

Kemi special is the stage name for Iya Wasila (Wasila's Mum), a Nigerian female Fuji artiste, who is associated with the male artiste, Wasiu Alabi Pasuma. Kemi Special is the mother of Pasuma's daughter, Wasilat, hence she is popularly called "Iya Wasila". As a Fuji artiste, most songs/ music of Kemi Special are live performances, including street performances.



**Figure 2: The Artiste Performing on the Street**  
Source: MC Churchillkay TV

### Data Presentation

The two songs under consideration in this study were selected from Kemi Special's 2023 Eid Carnival performance. The two selected songs of Kemi Special are entitled, *The Encounter* and *Street Blues*. The two songs explore the themes of self-pride, self-consciousness, agitation against patriarchy, sense of gender equality, self-esteem amidst oppression from male dominance and upholding the strength of femininity. Based on their thematic explorations, the two songs are presented in table 1, appendix 1.

### Results and Discussion

The results from the analysis of the data for this study constituting two selected songs of Kemi Special's street musical performance are presented in this section under two headings. The first is the discussion of the prevalent social identities in Kemi Special songs while the second heading is the artiste's exploration of the social values and status. Each of the headings highlights and discusses the marked linguistic styles that characterise the artiste's manner of projecting and negotiating feminist identity through her music.

#### The Prevalent Social Identities in Kemi Special Songs

The artiste, Kemi Special, in the two selected songs for this study, negotiates her social identity through diverse means. From the lyrics of the song, it has been found that artiste negotiates the feminist identity through her word choices and expressions, which reflect the social network she belongs. Through the deployment of both language and style in the selected songs, indicators of social identity in the artiste's language and style include narrative styles, specific choices of lexico-syntactic features including nouns/ name calling, borrowing, colloquial expressions/ street jargons, slangs, declaratives and eulogy.

For instance, in the *Encounter*, the artiste adopts a narrative technique which is indicative of a first person narrative technique. The artiste adopts this style to tell the story from her own point of view to stir the emotion of the listeners. Beyond appealing to the listeners psychologically, Kemi Special's choice of the first person narrative technique is aimed at transforming the song to an immersive experience beyond entertainment, so as to foster empathy

and create a shared memorable experience. This explains her choices of the first person pronoun as reference both in the nominative and accusative cases. See the illustration below:

Bobo kan rimi o pe <b>mi</b> , Olohun fema s'aye e o <b>Mo</b> wa wo omo boi Mowa fun lesi o Moni to ba ti le se hun ti mo fe fun mi o, <b>Emi</b> a ju'wole , ama je mun la e lo.	A young man approached, to woo <b>me</b> , <b>I</b> looked at him And said; Provided he could do whatever I want, <b>I</b> will give-in/ agree to his advances.
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Beside the use of the first person narrative technique in *The Encounter*, the artiste negotiates the social identity, that could be tagged: “street identity” through the use of slang expressions such as “bobo” and “omo boi” for “young man”, “s’aye” (the act of wooing, which is equivalent to having possession of a lady, including sexual pleasure). “s’aye” as used in the context of the text, even though it is a slang expression, is also used euphemistically. This is characteristic of a feminist style in context. Even though Kemi identifies as a “street lady”, she is still self-conscious, acting as a true woman. Unlike men, women code their words when they want to talk about privacy and intimacy. Despite the fact that the use of euphemism is not consistent in the songs because the artiste identifies with the street, she still reflects her feminist attributes through her language use.

Another preponderant slang used in the extract of the song is “ju’wole” meaning, “will agree”. These expressions, like other slang expressions through which the artiste express her street identity, including name-calling, “iya’gboro”/ “omo’gboro”, meaning “street mama”/ “street lady”, do not only originate from the Yoruba language but also characterise street jargon. The use of these linguistic attributes is not only for negotiating identity but also for reflecting the artistes' sociolinguistic background. Other illustrations of linguistic style that characterise Kemi’s means of negotiating identity are presented in Figure 1 as follows:

SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION			
S/N	Indicators	Yoruba Texts	Meaning in English
1	Noun/ Name Calling	<i>Iya Igboro</i> <i>Bobo, Omo boy</i> <i>Onisekuse/ onidokudo (insult)</i>	Town Mama Young man Wayward person
2	Declaratives		
3	Street Jargons	<i>Saaye (Euphemism)</i> <i>Ko soro</i> <i>Je mula</i> <i>Fo loke</i> <i>Se mi</i>  <i>Sase e lo</i> <i>Binu-ori</i>	Having sexual intimacy No issue Sexual enjoyment Air travels Leave/ forget (about something)  Disrespect/ disregard

**Figure 1: Indicators of Social and Feminist Identity**

In figure I above, the linguistic features of identity negotiation by Kemi Special include the use of declaratives. Unlike in the first song, *the Encounter*, in *Street Blues*, the artiste uses more assertive/ declarative expressions. The style adopted is not narrative this time but confrontational. *The Encounter* is more dramatic in style and structure. Both the artiste’s choice of words and the rhythmic effect of the beat, reflect a “drama of confrontation”. The tone is not subtle but harsh. The artiste’s style variation in terms of manner of presentation of the second song is also reflective of identity negotiation.

While Kemi negotiates street identity in *Street Blues* through the dramatic manner of presentation, she portrays her-self as a representative of all street ladies, who has it tough; those that are tagged “olosho”— “prostitutes”, “ale”— “concubine”, whom the society ascribe the stigma of immorality. Through a confluence of linguistic choices, including slangs, assertives, and sarcasm, Kemi identifies with this category of women by portraying their strengths,

rather than their weaknesses. She portrays them as survivors of the street, whom even though are tagged harlots and relegated in the society as being wayward, are actually, the “wives” of the commissioners and senators, because these set of influential men are their clients. This is why Kemi refers to the senators and commissioners in the lyrics of the song, as their “husbands”. In the song, she emphasises repeatedly the utterances, “iyawo senator”/ “senators’ wives” and “iyawo commissioner”/ “commissioners’ wives”.

Like in *the Encounter*, in *Street Blues*, the artist also employs name-calling, assertives/declaratives, street jargons, and eulogy. While eulogy is a common attributes of fuji artistes in life performances, Kemi’s use of Eulogy in *Street Blues* is to emphasise her position as the “Mama of the Street”. This is her manner of establishing females of the street as important components of the society, who should not be undermined.

#### Indicators of Social Values and Status

The important themes, which are emphasised in the two songs under consideration in this study, *The Encounter* and *Street Blues*, are social values and social status. To start with, Kemi Special establishes that there are social values, and one of the values of the society is that a woman should be pampered and catered for by a man. She emphasises this in *The Encounter*. Ideally, if a man is not capable of catering for a woman, such a man is identified as being irresponsible, and is not expected to be respected. This justifies Kemi’s reaction in her narrative of the encounter with the young man, who proposes to have an affair with her. The artiste’s reaction is justifiable by the ideal societal standards. This is exemplified as follows:

Kaka komo boi ko fun mi lesi o Ni se lo tese mo rin Oni kin semi o...	Instead of him to respond to my requests, He ran, ...
Mo wa pariwo, Oya, gboko elo fobo mile se (2ce) Sha she e lo fobo mile se (2ce) Onisekuse mi o se mo! Oni do kudo mi o do e!	Then, I exclaimed, Leave my body (vagina) and take your exit Carry your body (penis), and leave me alone Wayward man, leave me alone! Gigolo, take your leave!
Sele lao ko ni o, Tewan binu ori? Gboko elo fobo mile o (chorus)	Is it a house I have not built, That you are now misbehaving? Carry your body, and leave me alone
Moto wa la ra o? Sha she e lo fobo mile o (chorus)	Is it a car I do not have? Carry your body, and leave me alone

Also in *Street Blues*, the social value emphasised by the artist is associated with morality. Here, the artiste condemns the one-sided perception that women are the immoral ones when it comes to infidelity or “waywardness”. She establishes that both men and women are supposed to be held accountable for flouting the social ethics of decency and fidelity. She frowns at the one-sided perception and treatment of the so-called “wayward” women in society, especially the “street ladies”, but acknowledges the polygamous nature of men. She decries the society’s justification and understanding of the waywardness of men but not of women. Kemi Special reflects this through the use of assertives, sarcasm, and metaphor in the illustration below:

Eni mo ri, mo fun je o She bemi mo lobo mi	Whoever I like I can have sexual relation with, after all, it is my body.
Olosho enikan, Ale enikan ni. Iyawo enikan, Ale enikan ni.	One man’s prostitute, Is another man’s concubine. One man’s wife, Is another man’s concubine.
Iya ’gboro jomo ’gboro lo! (2ce) Mama ’gboro jomo ’gboro lo! (2ce)	A street lady is senior to a street girl A street lady is senior to a street girl

Iya 'gboro lemi se! Iya 'gboro lemi se (chorus) ...	I am a street lady I am a street lady
Iyawo senator (chorus) Opor ... opor (chorus) Iyawo commissioner (chorus) Opor opor ... jo jo, mama e (chorus)	I am a senator's wife. (Praises) I am a commissioner's wife (Praises)

In the illustration above, the artist emphasises specific expressions, which are assertive, to establish the right of women to the lifestyle they deem fit, as men. The extract below emphasises this fact.

Eni mo ri, mo fun je o      Whoever I like, I can have a sexual relation with,  
She bemi mo lobo mi      after all, it is my body (vagina)

Also, sarcasm is used to establish the need to judge a man and a woman equally in society in terms of moral values.

Olosho enikan,              One man's prostitute,  
Ale enikan ni.              is another man's concubine.  
Iyawo enikan,              One man's wife,  
Ale enikan ni.              is another man's concubine.

The lines above establish the equality of man and women in terms of immorality.

### SOCIAL CATEGORISATION

#### Indicators of Social Values and Status

Social Values	Status	Linguistic Indicators
Affluence	Social necessities: Accommodation Mobility (luxury cars)	i. Allusion of place- "Lekki" and "VGC" ii. Naming (of cars)- "Venza", "ile" (house)
Self-worth	Gender awareness/ Gender-related social power	i. Parallelism "Gboko e lo fobo mile" (repeated 6ceand in chorus) (rejection of a male sexual advances using sex organs, "oko" and "obo") ii. Synechdohe: "oko" and "obo" (the male and female sex organs are used as representations of the entity they represent iii. Rhetorical question: " tori kini na?, meaning, "because of what?"  The artiste quantifies offering sexual pleasure higher than material things and therefore places a higher price on it.

**Figure 2: Indicators of Social Values and Status**

Kemi special also emphasise the essence of social status as a means of identity negotiation and categorisation. While she acknowledges the fact that she is of the street, she emphasises that affluence is a core aspiration of every human, both male and female and it should be attributed and attained equally. This theme is characteristic of both songs. In *the Encounter*, the artiste uses wealth and other necessities of life as the basis for her decision to have sexual relationship with the man who approaches her. She believes that it is only ideal that the man values her and meet her needs. She decries men's subjugation of women, as well as their association of affluence with fellow men alone. She ascribe social necessities of befitting accommodation and other luxuries such as standard means of transportation

“Venza” (a luxurious model of a car) and “fo loke”, meaning air travels, among others, as indicators of social status which a woman equally has the right to despite whom she is in terms of social placements.

The artiste further establishes social status in Street Blues by qualifying “herself” and the “street ladies”, whom she represents as “senators’ wives” and “commissioners’ wives”. She reckons with the reality of the street, which is the difficulty faced by the “street mamas” and “ladies” to make ends meet, the result of which is their choice of the socially relegated livelihood. In spite of being socially relegated, notable men seek them for pleasure; hence, this changes their status. She perceives such a situation as being beneficial to the ladies because the “high status” men find them indispensable.

### Conclusion

This study has examined two songs of the artiste, Kemi Special, also known as Iya Wasila, a street Fuji artiste in Nigeria, from the socio-stylistic perspective to evaluate how she has negotiated identity in the lyrics of the songs. From the analysis of the two songs, it has been found that the artist employs both narrative and dramatic styles to negotiate identity and get her listeners immersed in the performance. The features of style that are characteristics of Kemi Special’s street performances for negotiating the feminist identity include the use of assertives, name-calling, slang expressions, street jargon, sarcasm, metaphor, and eulogy. While these style elements were used preponderantly for special stylistic effects, they were also deployed by the artist to convey underlying messages towards the promotion of the feminist identity in the context of the street.

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