


Corrosive Language Deployment in The Creative Arts and Its Imports in Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT

This perspective paper examines the many-sided impact of the aberration of language on culture, probing into its role in shaping societal values. Drawing from virtue ethics, discourse analysis and cultural studies, this paper analyzes various creative art forms, including literature, film, and music. It examines how creative expression can challenge the status quo, inspire innovation, and enrich the human experience. It also probes into the intricacies of contemporary creative writing, artistic activities, the language of artists and its significance to society. It discusses the role of literature and other art forms in society, focusing on the African context, and particularly Nigeria. It critiques issues of nudity, sexualization and vulgarity in contemporary Nigerian films and music, arguing that these undermine societal values. Given the rapid changes in society, the study argues that artists need to adapt their works to address the challenges of the modern world, ensures the sustainability of the African identity, particularly Nigerian cultural identity as well as safeguard the age-long environmental wisdom.

Keywords: *Corrosive language, Creative Arts, Innovations, Literature, Nigeria, Society.*

Introduction

The creative arts, renowned tools of societal reflection and moral compass, have undergone profound transformations in contemporary society. This transformation is not merely stylistic or aesthetic but also linguistic and moral. In their myriad forms, the creative arts have been a constant companion to humanity throughout history. They have served as powerful tools for communication, expression, and cultural transmission. They are media through which individuals and societies can explore their identities, beliefs, and aspirations. Beyond their aesthetic appeal, they play a crucial role in shaping cultural values, expressing social norms, and show-casing individual differences. They provoke thought, evoke emotion, and challenge the status quo. They can, as well, engender social change, foster empathy, and promote critical

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thinking. The creative arts can also serve as bridges between cultures, facilitating intercultural dialogue and understanding.

In this paper, the expression, “corrosive language” shall refer to those aberrations in language deployments, deliberately created or fashioned by artists in an attempt to show ingenuity and depth in their artistry. Such aberrations usually appeal to the sensory organ of pleasure because of the humour and wit that often accompany their creation; they, most times, undermine or subvert society’s sense of morality, sacrificing that morality, as it were, on the altar of pleasure. At such moments, pleasure, in whatever manner it is made manifest, becomes overwhelmingly appreciated by all while the societal sense of morality is played down, if not utterly jettisoned though temporarily (Miriam Inegbe 222).

Language is an aspect of culture; without it, culture would never propagate. Literature can express itself through the use of particular language because language is oral while literature can either be oral or written. Literature and language are linked to culture because it is under their belly that cultural norms and nuances are preserved, transmitted and expressed. Language is the product of operations and constructions whose end is to divide the thinkable into a finite number of representations, bringing with them, through their division, the power to render and express any thought (Guillaume Gustave, 1973, 27). Illustrations can be advanced to show, for instance, that different cultures have different wise-sayings, popularly referred to as adages, even on similar subjects. Poets make use of these proverbial adages, using language to entertain society. Among the Esan of Edo State, Nigeria, a popular proverb which admonishes on humility and secrecy is:

Umekhen ireko ghere (The pumpkin produces its budding seed in secrecy)

Among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, the same admonition is seen in:

Bişu eni bá ta, erùpè la fi nbo (A man’s yam that is just budding is covered in earth)

The above wise-sayings show a similar subject-matter couched in different images by different cultures.

The process of borrowing, using, and referring to words or phrases by artists demonstrates dynamism because culture is dynamic. In this regard, literature functions or plays the role of opening up the rehabilitation of the people and, as an extension, the society in general.

Creative arts often mirror the values, beliefs, and concerns of the time and period in which they are created. They can reflect societal issues like inequality, injustice, and cultural shifts. Art forms like literature, film, and music have the power to evoke strong emotions in audiences, fostering empathy and understanding. Creative expressions contribute to the formation and

preservation of cultural identity. They can highlight traditions, customs, and shared experiences. Artists often push boundaries and challenge conventional norms, leading to innovation and new perspectives. Art can be used as a powerful tool to critique social and political issues, raising awareness and sparking dialogue. Engaging with creative works can provide emotional catharsis, reduce stress, and improve mental health. Art facilitates cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, breaking down barriers between different communities. The creative arts industry has contributed significantly to economies through jobs, tourism, and cultural exports. Also, creative expressions can foster personal growth, self-discovery, and a sense of purpose. For instance, a powerful novel can shed light on the experiences of marginalized groups, promoting empathy and social change. A thought – provoking film can challenge societal norms and encourage critical thinking. A visually stunning piece of art can inspire awe and wonder, elevating the human spirit, and a catchy song can become a cultural phenomenon, uniting people across borders.

Traditional folk songs which have been passed down through generations, have long served as vessels of cultural heritage, moral instruction, and practical wisdom. These songs often extol the virtues of hard work, perseverance, and community. They narrate tales of historical events, celebrate agricultural labour, and instil a sense of identity and belonging. These declarations agree with David Bolaji's (2013) assertion that "one of the major channels used in disseminating information, correcting, admonishing, exhort, impacting educational knowledge, (both formal and informal) and sustainability of culture in any African society is its folksongs" (102). The above citation reveals that folksongs are cultural patterns within which positive behavioural ethics and morals are drawn. It also indicates that folksongs are channels that connect the past to the present. For instance, many African folk songs praise the dignity of labour, encouraging listeners to embrace their roles as farmers, artisans, or warriors. By weaving intricate narratives and rhythmic patterns, these songs not only entertain but also educate. They teach about history, geography, and social customs, fostering a deep appreciation for one's cultural roots. Moreover, they instil a strong work ethic, emphasizing the importance of diligence and productivity.

In stark contrast to the values espoused by traditional folk songs, much of contemporary music, particularly popular genres like hip-hop, R&B, and pop, often centres on themes of sex, materialism, and superficiality. Lyrics frequently glorify sexual exploits, objectify women, nudity, indecency in words, and promote a hedonistic lifestyle. The pervasive use of explicit language, suggestive imagery, and sexually charged themes has raised concerns about the

impact of such music on societal values and norms. Critics argue that this content can contribute to the degradation of women, the normalization of promiscuity, and the erosion of traditional moral standards as described in *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (Louis Pojman & James Fieser, 2009, 152). It is important to note, however, that not all contemporary music is devoid of positive messages. Many artists continue to address social issues, promote love, and inspire listeners. Nevertheless, the trend towards explicit and often vulgar lyrics remains a significant concern.

The shift from traditional folk music to contemporary popular music reflects broader cultural changes. As societies become more secular and individualized, the emphasis on communal values and traditional morality has diminished. The rise of consumer culture and the influence of mass media have further contributed to the proliferation of sexually explicit content. It is crucial to consider this impact of these cultural shifts on young people, who are particularly susceptible to the messages and contents conveyed in music and films. By understanding the power of music and films to shape attitudes and behaviours, we can work to promote media literacy and critical thinking skills. Ultimately, the choice of what music or film to listen to or watch is a personal one. However, it is important to be aware of the potential influence of music or films on our thoughts, feelings, and actions. By critically evaluating the messages and pictures conveyed in both traditional and contemporary art forms, we can make informed choices about the kind of culture we want to create.

This paper examines the impact of language of creative artists on morality within the realm of contemporary creative arts, exploring how linguistic innovations and deviations have contributed to a perceived decline in moral values.

Methodological Approach

This study will examine various creative media, including literature, film, and music, to identify and analyze the linguistic techniques employed to convey moral messages or, conversely, to subvert them. By scrutinizing the language in these domains, the study aims to uncover the underlying motivations and societal implications of this corrosive language deployment. This study will, therefore, adopt a qualitative research approach, primarily utilizing textual analysis and critical discourse analysis.

Language in Literature and society

Language is the foundation upon which literature and society are built. It is the tool used to communicate ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Without language, man would be unable to share his experiences, learn from each other, or create the literature of human culture known to man today. Language, therefore, “finds credence in a social group and thus, the cord between language and culture remains inseparable” (Miriam Inegbe 62). In literature, language is the medium through which authors craft their stories, poems, and plays. It is the words on the page that bring characters to life, evoke emotions, and transport readers to different worlds. The skilful use of language can elevate a work of literature from mere words on a page to a powerful and meaningful experience. In society, language plays an even more fundamental role. It is the glue that binds communities, allowing people to share their values, beliefs, and customs. Language shapes a people’s identity, influences their thoughts, and determines how man perceives the world around him. It is through language that man learns about history, science, and the arts, and it is through language that man passes his knowledge and traditions to future generations.

Literature is a phenomenon that has been frequently defined throughout the ages. Etymologically, the word is derived from the Latin “literal” or “literati” which is described as people of letters; this word means “grammar” or “of letters or learned”. The word “litterateur” thus has been considered as a critic and it implies a writer as well; one who engages in literary pursuits. According to the Universal Dictionary (1995), litterateur is defined as “man of letters, writer” (703). From this perspective, the word “literature” emerged. The Universal Dictionary conceives the word literature as a set of literary works realized by means of language, oral or written, considered both from a formal and an aesthetic point of view as well as ideological and cultural. The Collins Robert's Dictionary (1998) conceives “literature” as a documentation on travels or pedagogics, as well as writing produced in a particular language, country, or age” (1508). These pertinent, intellectual, and superficial definitions are limited. For example, what happened to literature in the Middle Ages? The relevance of this question leads us to the moment when we conceive that literature at that time was born from historical evidence, in particular oral facts; for example, William Shakespeare wrote stories based on the literary criteria of the 16th-century English society. Among others, we could cite Charles Dickens, and literary activists in Africa such as: Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, JP Clark, Sony Labou Tansi, Ahmadou Kourouma, Buchi Emecheta, Sembene Ousmane, Calixthe Beyala, Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o; among others. One way to

understand the literary works of the above writers is to explain their etymological content if one is to consider them from a lexical point of view. A play is performed on a stage before an audience. Novels are designed for reading, understanding and enjoyment, while poetry, through diction, symbolism, and imagination, appeals directly to the emotions. All of these literary or creative art forms are intended to reconcile man and his immediate environment. As such, their themes are largely drawn from the settings where humans carry out their immediate ideologies and ambitions. Consequently, there is an observable symbolic relationship between literature and society. Writers and artists draw their resources from their environments and then use them to create impacts on society according to their literary abilities. This has been the link between literature and society since the dawn of humanity. Despite different ideologies, literature has maintained its aesthetic value. Patrick Ebewo, in Thompson, et al (1991, 60), submits that:

Literature brings us to the realities of human situation through speculations.... It shows us human motives and reveals the dilemmas and fragmentations of human life. Beyond these general functions, literature, in more specific terms, helps to reveal the institutions of society.

Literature is important in a people. Artistic activities within the domains of man have revealed that literature is the aesthetic that edifies the soul. Literature serves as a didactic and psychological tool. These functions have been useful for emerging pre-industrial needs. With the development of society, evolution in technology, computer science, and explosive science, a new ideology is required of the artist so that he can achieve the purpose of things. In this regard, new experiences are emerging with the hope of controlling the ills that threaten the programmes designed for contemporary society. Jean-Paul Sartre (1950 vi), a philosopher, has argued that literature is a powerful ontological tool for social and liberal service. In Graeco-Roman times, writers were concerned with serving their society.

Literature, as a true cultural weapon, can function as a tool for the expression and understanding of a particular people and their social history. And according to Miriam Inegbe (2024) in JINCES, it “shapes cultural and social identities, as well as a means of communication and expression for citizens within a nation” (342). For instance, no individual needs to have lived in the pre-colonial Igbo society to understand the ideology of a true Igbo man if that individual has read Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* translated into French as *Le Monde s’Effondre*. This is also true of the works of Wole Soyinka, Charles Dickens, Sony Labou Tansi, Ahmadou Kourouma and others in relation to their various societies. The important submission of Isidore Okpewho in Thompson, et al (1991) when he explicates literary ideology is worth considering:

The commitment to one's fellows and to the artist social environment is more strongly emphasized by Marxist thinkers and writers. ...Jean Paul Satre argues that nobles, as universal ideals in Arts are, the most immediate constituency of the artist is his own people; and that the duty of the writer is to liberate the spirit of his fellow people as well as himself. (71-72).

In the same vein, Wole Soyinka, through an observation of his society, presents a character who suffers a spiritual problem in his poem, "Abiku". The word, "Abiku", is a Yoruba word that refers to a child who dies repeatedly only to be born again and again. Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, a child with this inclination is referred to as an "Ogbanje", while among the Ibibio of South South Nigeria, such a child is referred to as "Eyen Okposaja" or "Eyen Essienemana".

For the literary or creative artist to be considered contemporary, s/he must identify with the history of his /her people. Tunde Adeniran (1994) has argued that if people today are not interested in poetry, a genre of literature, it is because poetry has not bent to the problems of the people concerned. He adds that:

In our time, not many are showing interest in philosophical and literary works, especially poetry, ostensibly because people are not interested anymore. We never cared to probe why people loved poetry in the past and now seem to abhor it. Part of the problem revolves around the issue of "relevance" (4).

There is no doubt that literature has played a crucial role in human history. For example, Pierre Corneille's *Le Cid* caused political upheaval in the 17th century France. In Africa, Hubert Ogunde, Wole Soyinka, Fela Ransome-Kuti, Sony Labou Tansi, and Ngugi wa Thiong'O have been exiled numerous times due to the ideological stance of their literary works. Aderenth asserts that a writer is notable only if he manages to study society and exposes it while detecting the major problems that surround it in order to address them. (see David Craig, 1975, 445).

The relationship between language, literature, and society is complex and multifaceted. Literature reflects the society in which it is produced, shaping and being shaped by the language of that society. Language, in turn, is constantly evolving, influenced by literature, culture, and social change. Language is an essential element in both literature and society. It is the tool that allows man to connect with his fellows, express himself, and create meaning. By understanding the role of language in literature and society, man can gain a deeper appreciation of the power of words and the importance of preserving and protecting his linguistic heritage.

Contemporary Creative Arts and the Nigerian Society

The expression, “contemporary creative arts”, is an umbrella term used in referring to the various art forms and subverted artistic expressions and practices that are produced in present day Nigerian society. Such art forms reflect current ideas, and themes and they are expressed in the literary arts (modern poetry, fiction and non-fiction that explore contemporary issues and narratives in experimental forms and styles); performance arts like theatre, music, dance, and films); fashion and design arts as well as the visual arts. These art forms are dynamic and continually evolving, creating new narratives on aesthetics, culture, and society. Many contemporary Nigerian artists have consciously migrated from known conventional styles to newer forms with their “...own peculiarities and defining characteristics ... (deploying) language coloured with changes in the social lifestyle of the people” (Inegbe 60). These artists frequently experiment with new concepts and techniques, pushing boundaries and challenging traditional notions of what art should be. Artists have more freedom than ever to express a wide range of wild ideas and emotions, often moving away from established norms and exploring personal interests. Some of these artists prioritize what they feel are modern ideas and trendy concepts over time-tested traditional aesthetic values. For instance, a film actress like Halima Abubakar was once written against by journalists for “forgetting” to wear some underwear while attending some notable events; Rukky Sanda, Mbong Amatah, Cossy Orjiakor, Chika Ike, Omoni Oboli and Tonto Dikeh had on occasions been berated by social media practitioners for wearing very revealing outfits which were considered indecent; Ini Edo was once banned from featuring in Nollywood films because of her style of dressing which was considered as indecent; and Samha Inuwa, a popular film actress has just been banned in Kano State for indecent dressing and vulgar content posting. In the music industry, artists like Tiwa Savage, and Emma Nyra are notorious for bad dressing. Shisha Miley Cyrus is also noted for bad dressing and drugs promotion (The Crest Nigeria 2025; Nairaland Forum 2024; Vocal Media 2020). This pattern of indecent dressing has “pragmatically appeal to the audience psychologically” (Inegbe 2025), as many youths modelled their sense of fashion after these popular artists. This has also contributed to the decline in Nigeria cultural values and ethics. However, a considerable number of contemporary works addresses issues like identity, race, gender, environment, and globalization, often reflecting and critiquing current social and political contexts.

The pervasive influence of the entertainment industry, particularly the film industry and music, on societal values and norms is undeniable. The portrayal of indecent dressing and nudity in

movies and at other social engagements of actors and actresses has sparked significant debates regarding its impact on society. Indecent dressing and nudity can undermine cultural values and traditions, leading to a loss of identity. Frequent exposure to indecent content can desensitize individuals, leading to a decline in moral values and a blurring of lines between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. The portrayal of women as sexual objects or men as hyper-masculine figures can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to gender inequality. Young people, particularly adolescents, are highly susceptible to the negative influence of the media. Exposure to indecent content can lead to premature sexualization, unhealthy body image issues, and unhealthy sexual behaviour. Also, the glamorization of substance abuse, violence, and other harmful behaviour in films can encourage young people to engage in these activities, believing that they are socially acceptable.

One of the wonderful verbal expressions that humans possess is the voice. With this, humans can create music, sing and make the environment peaceful. Thus, humans sing as a means of edification, elevation, spiritual control, leisure, praise, and sometimes, as a direct means of communication, aiming to be in tune with the world around them. The notable 18th-century English literary figure, William Shakespeare once declared: “If music be the food of love, play on; give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, the appetite may sicken, and die” (1958 66). The word, 'love', is conceived by many contemporary Nigerian musicians and singers from a vulgar perspective. Interestingly, their audiences do not see anything wrong in some of these trendy songs as these singers use language connotatively. Such usage of language according to Miriam Inegbe (2020), is “deliberately fashioned to change the will, opinions or attitudes of its audience” (122). Many contemporary Nigerian musicians, for example, indulge in music by praising the female world from the perspective of female physique. These musicians and singers do not only address physical portraits but also portraits that can incite men to analyze the female disdainfully, with emphasis on the female buttocks and her way of showing love. Ironically, women derive much more pleasure from these songs than their male counterparts. In many music videos that accompany many of such songs, women are included in the staging process in various unholy acts. The question that may be asked is: “Does the popularity of such indecent songs accord them social promotion in terms of social and emotional stability?” Tunde Adeniran (1994) puts it better in the following words: “Today the nation's soul is on fire, there is hunger and misery, criminal corruption and bare-face tyranny. There is structural and social decadence. ... without the slightest regard for humanity (4). From the original contextual origins of things in traditional societies, music has always served positive, functional roles, correcting

the ills of society, encouraging diligence, social relations, allowing the world to be entertained during social activities and reducing stress. Music has even been used as a means of productivity from a biological or agricultural point of view. A good example is seen in this Ibibio folk song:

Afo sin ubok k'èkpat asaja k'usung
Ubok utom afo uyeneke
Afo udu nam didie unam akere?
Asuk akekere
Mkpong nya bup ufok enyong,
Ado ubok utom afo uyeneke
Afo udu nam didie unam akere?

Personal Translation

Hands tucked deep in the pockets with pride
A source of livelihood you do not have
How would you make plans?
With big and tall dreams
Tomorrow I will build a big mansion
Yet no source of income
How would your dreams come true?

This traditional Ibibio folk song emphasizes that the only way to succeed in life, the hope of a secure and productive future is through diligence and hard work. It also suggests that a life without a means of sustenance is a precarious one, regardless of lofty aspirations that may never be met. This edifying song connects us to the very essence of life, condemning laziness, daydreaming and idleness. Rather, it encourages hard work. Another popular music that stresses on good morals is a Yoruba song, sang by Christiana Essien Igbokwe titled “mo mi s’ohun rere”.

Contemporary Nigerian music has, undeniably, shaped the people’s cultural landscape, permeating every facet of the society. This is obvious in the pulsating beats of hip-hop to the introspective lyrics of rock and roll and reggae. These songs often evoke emotions, inspire thoughts, and challenge norms. An example is Mandator’s Rat Race, (reggae) which mirrors the Nigerian political system, querying the sufferings meted on the masses in the midst of plenty. However, with evolution and time, newer Nigerian songs appear to be shifting their concerns from their surroundings and their impact on society. Emphasis of contemporary music is shown in their potential to promote vulgarity. Here’s an example of contemporary Nigerian music by a Yoruba music artist, Sunny Ade:

What do you di saya, baby?
What do you have under?
Sweet banana
Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet banana!

Personal translation:

What do you desire, woman?
What do you have under?
Sweet banana
Sweet, sweet, sweet, sweet banana.

The second song is by another Nigerian singer, Kollington Ayinla:

Sẹ ki n'to sibe?
E ma a to sibe!
Sẹ ki n'rojo sibe?
E ma a rojo sibe!

Personal translation:

Do I pee inside?
Yes, you may pee inside!
Do I allow the entire rain in?
Yes, the entire rain may be allowed in.

Both songs, although trendy, undermine societal values. In the first example, Sunny Ade plays on the English word and verb, 'desire', which sounds almost like the Yoruba expression, “*dì sáyà*”. Words function “within the domain of language and the right or wrong choice of words can go a long way in making or marring a people”(214). The expression “*dì sáyà*” in the first song means, “have on your chest”. This is a direct reference to the female “breast”. Simply put, therefore, the musician is asking the woman: “what do you have on your chest?” but he is not done yet as he probes further in the third line, deploying another play on words: “what do you have under?” which, literally means; “what do you have between your thighs?” and the choral response is: “sweet banana”. So, a woman’s breasts and her private part are equivalent to “sweet bananas”. In the second example, the underlined words or vulgar expressions portray a man at the point of ejaculation. The man’s semen is comparable to “pee” and “rain”. The man is asking the woman if he should release the semen (like pee) inside of her, and if he should make it splash or pour like rain. The question that arises is; what does the society stand to gain from these songs? It is time to reconsider these anti-social songs. The reason why these songs proliferate is that society accepts them. On the contrary, songs that address the contemporary needs of people are needed.

The question of diligence is inevitable given to Lanre Bamidele's observation (2000, 33) that society must function with the help of the artist. Since each society has its peculiar problems, the presence of the artist is necessary.

Conclusion

Literary and creative arts are seen as powerful tools that can shape society and individuals. This perspective paper criticizes the overtly sexual and vulgar content of much of contemporary Nigerian artists, arguing that it promotes negative values. Creative art has an undeniable and profound impact on culture. It serves as a mirror reflecting societal values, a catalyst for social change, and a vehicle for individual expression. By preserving cultural heritage, challenging the status quo, and fostering empathy, art enriches the human experience and shapes the world we live in. Based on the findings of this research, this study recommends that the negative impact of indecency in words, dressing and nudity in the creative arts industry should be addressed by creating stricter censorship guidelines to regulate the content that is accessible to the public, to ensure that content aligns with societal values and ethical standards particularly for the younger audience.

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