

A Stylo-Semantic Analysis of Selected Female Songs of Dr. Alhaji Mamman Shata

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Abstract

Although the legendary Hausa oral artist Dr. Alhaji Mamman Shata performed with an all-male ensemble, his corpus reflects a profound gender consciousness and socio-artistic inclusivity. Unlike many traditional panegyrists who restricted their praise exclusively to royalty and male elites, Shata composed extensive panegyrics for women across diverse social strata without discrimination. This paper presents a stylo-semantic analysis of three selected female songs by Shata: "Hauwa Maituwo Matar Lado" (Kano), "A'i Kyaftin" (Zaria), and "Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro" (Daura). These songs were purposively selected to reflect wide variations in the social standing of the subjects: a commercial food vendor, a courtesan, and a female aristocrat from different regions of the Northwestern Nigeria. Utilizing Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 2004) and the Pragmatic Layers of Meaning framework (Adegbija, 1987), the study explores how Shata skillfully deploys linguistic, tropes, and pragmatic strategies to negotiate gender dynamics, construct social identities, and convey multi-layered meanings. The findings demonstrate that Shata's artistic genius lies in his ability to adapt his stylo-semantic choices to the unique socio-cultural realities of his female subjects, offering vital insights into Northern Nigerian trade-modern oral literature.

Keywords: Stylo-Semantics, Mamman Shata, Hausa Oral Literature, Halliday's Metafunctions, Adegbija's Layers of Meaning, Gender Representation.

Introduction

Alhaji (Dr) Mamman Shata remains one of the most prominent Nigerian oral poets and folklorists from Northern Nigeria. His expansive discography addresses diverse socio-cultural, political, and economic issues, appealing to audience members across class, age, gender, and regional boundaries. As an independent oral artist, Shata sang for monarchs, politicians, ordinary laborers, and social outcasts alike. A

remarkable aspect of Shata's artistic oeuvre is his affinity for and representation of women. Despite operating within an all-male musical framework devoid of female drummers or vocalists Shata demonstrated a notable gender-inclusive orientation. He composed numerous songs dedicated to women of contrasting socio-economic backgrounds, values, and societal standing. Among these subjects are prominent figures such as MarigayiyavA'i Kyaftin, Hajiya Hauwa Mai Tuwo Matar Lado, Mai Daki Gabas 'Yar Iro, Hajiya Indo Musawa, Principal Salamatu Audu, and SarauniyarvIngila. This paper examines the stylistic and semantic strategies employed by Shata in celebrating women from three distinct social spheres: commercial enterprise (Hauwa Maituwo), social margin/courtesanship (A'iKyaftin), and traditional royalty (Maidakin Gabas 'Yar Iro). By deploying systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 2004) and pragmatic layers of meaning (Adegbija, 1987), the paper aims to situate Shata's music within the continuum of Northern Nigerian trade-modern oral literature, showcasing how oral panegyrics function as tools for socio-semantic negotiation.

Literature Review

Oral poetry (wakar baka) is an indispensable socio-cultural institution within Hausa society. Scholars such as Furniss (1996), Gusau (1996, 2003), Sani (2016), Sani and Tsaure (2018), and Gobir and Sani (2018) have documented how oral songs function as cognitive, historical, and aesthetic channels for the Hausa people. In categorizing the thematic orientation of Hausa poetry, Skinner (1980) proposes seven major thematic classifications: wa'azi (exhortation to ascetic living), yabo (praise/panegyric), tauhidi (theology/Islamic doctrines), fikihi (jurisprudence/religious obligations), tarihi (history and biography), ilimi (education), and siyasa (political discourse).

However, this study argues that Skinner's (1980) taxonomy is overly restrictive and heavily biased toward clerical, religious, and formal political discourses. It fails to capture significant secular, socio-commercial, and popular performance genres that thrive in Northern Nigerian trade-modern music. Specifically, Skinner's framework overlooks talla (commercial advertisement), zambo (satire and innuendo), and kwarzantawa (hyperbolic appraisal aimed at personal social validation). Shata's corpus operates within these neglected spaces, rendering Skinner's classification insufficient for analyzing independent trade-modern panegyrics.

In traditional Hausa society, oral musicians are categorized under *sana'armaroka* (the craft of panegyric begging/beseeching). Traditionally, *maroka* operated as court singers attached to royal palaces or wealthy patrons. Shata, however, broke away from both patrilineal musical inheritance (*sana'argado*) and exclusive elite patronage. While traditional Hausa literature often framed women primarily through domestic or moralistic lenses, Shata's compositions present women as active economic agents, royalty, and complex social actors. By devoting major compositions to courtesans (*A'iKyaftin*), food entrepreneurs (*Hauwa Maituwo*), and noblewomen (*Maidakin Gabas*), Shata expanded the boundaries of who could be immortalized in Hausa oral literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 2004) and the Pragmatic Layers of Meaning framework (Adegbija, 1987). Halliday (2004) asserts that language serves three primary metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction analyzes how language encodes experiential realities, which in Shata's lyrics reveals how the artist conceptualizes the social roles, trades, and identities of women. The interpersonal metafunction examines how social roles, intimacy, and power dynamics are established between the artist, the subject, and the audience. The textual metafunction evaluates structural organization, cohesion, thematic fronting, and call-and-response dynamics that unify the oral performance.

Complementing this, Adegbija's (1987) pragmatic layers of meaning account for the socio-cultural depth of African performance contexts. The primary layer captures the literal or denotative surface meanings of the Hausa lexical items. The secondary layer examines the contextual meaning derived from the immediate cultural environment, shared background knowledge, and social norms. The tertiary layer uncovers the deep, pragmatic, and performative intents, including advocacy, commercial promotion (*talla*), satire (*zambo*), and fatalistic validation.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design grounded in qualitative text analysis and sociolinguistic discourse modeling. The primary data for this study consist of audio recordings and transcribed text of three purposively selected female songs performed by Dr. Alhaji

Mamman Shata: "A'iKyaftin", "Hauwa Maituwo Matar Lado", and "Maidakin Gabas 'Yar Iro". Purposive sampling was employed to ensure maximal variation along the socio-economic continuum of Hausa society, representing three distinct female social categories: a courtesan operating on the social margins, a self-employed commercial entrepreneur, and an aristocrat from traditional royalty.

The analytical procedure involved a three-stage linguistic and interpretive process. First, the primary Hausa audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure orthographic accuracy, preserving performance markers, call-and-response structures, and dialectal nuances. Second, the transcribed Hausa texts were translated into formal, scholarly English, capturing both literal denotations and socio-literary nuances. Third, the translated texts were subjected to stylo-semantic critique using Halliday's (2004) systemic functional metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) to decode linguistic structure, alongside Adegbiya's (1987) pragmatic layers of meaning (primary, secondary, and tertiary) to uncover deep socio-cultural contexts, rhetorical tropes, and performative intents.

Analysis of Selected Female Songs

I. A'iKyaftin (Zaria)

A'iKyaftin hailed from Limancin Kona in Zaria. Shata composed this song during her youth when she operated as a commercial sex worker across major urban centers including Jos, Gusau, and Lagos (Sheme et al., 2000). In the lyric, Shata sings:

*Mai nemanduniya 'yar Baba,
Kyaftin da ma daiya rage barci, Kyaftin.
Gama Allah yace ki yikaruwanci,
Ya ajemikishidaidai da aure.*

Translated to English, the lines read:

Anyone who seeks worldly enterprise, O daughter of
Baba,
Kyaftin, must forgo excess sleep,
Kyaftin. For Providence has ordained your life of
courtesanship,

Establishing it as your equivalent of matrimony." At the ideational and primary layer, Shata offers surface advice regarding diligence and industriousness (*ya rage barci*). However, at the interpersonal and tertiary pragmatic layers, Shata employs a strategy of fatalistic validation (*kaddara*). By framing her courtesanship as divinely ordained (*Gama Allah yace...*) and placing it on par with marriage (*daidai da aure*), Shata reframes her status, shielding her from social condemnation. His interpersonal distance is highly intimate and non-judgmental, reflecting a personal friendship rather than moral rebuke.

II. **Hauwa Maituwo Matar Lado (Kano)**

Hauwa Maituwo was a prominent food vendor at Tashan Kuka in Kano. Shata and his ensemble frequently dined at her establishment, where she treated them with exceptional generosity (Sheme et al., 2000). The core composition opens with an exchange between Shata and his chorus:

SHATA: Alhajiya Hauwa Kululumaiabinciuwar Dije.
CHORUS: Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.
SHATA: Alhajiya Hauwa Kululumaiabinci na
saidawa.
CHORUS: Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.
SHATA: Ina Kululumaiabincinasaidawa?
CHORUS: Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.
SHATA: A 'yan tuwo-tuwoita ab-babba.
CHORUS: Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.
SHATA: Ai kun yadda da Allah kekomai, sukace mani
Alhajiya Hauwa.
CHORUS: Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.
SHATA: Don ita take tuwonta ta saidaduk.
CHORUS: Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.

In English, this translates to:

SHATA: Hajiya Hauwa Kululu, the food vendor,
mother of Dije.
CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
SHATA: Hajiya Hauwa Kululu, the vendor of food for
sale.
CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
SHATA: Where is Kululu, the vendor of food for sale?

CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
 SHATA: Among all tuwo vendors, she stands supreme.
 CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
 SHATA: You all agree that God is the maker of all things; they told me it is Hajiya Hauwa.
 CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
 SHATA: For she disposes of her entire batch of food in sales.
 CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado."

Shata further extends his eulogy and direct business advice to Hauwa in the subsequent stanzas:

SHATA: *Kai tsaya! Ko 'yan tuwo da akwaibabba.*
 CHORUS: *Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.*
 SHATA: *Ga babbarsu nan Kuluwa Hauwa.*
 CHORUS: *Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.*
 SHATA: *In kin yituwon kina 'yan birni, kin gyaramiyarki ta 'yan birni, muddin kin kai shi Tasharkuka, kin hau benci in kin zauna, in 'yan birnisuka zo susaya, sun jalayi sun rikekwano, rikatsaregidaHajiyaHauwa, kadamasoabinciya taka ki.*
 CHORUS: *Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.*

Translated to English:

SHATA: Lo! Behold! Even among tuwo vendors, there is one who is superior. CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
 SHATA: Here is their leader, Kuluwa Hauwa! /
 CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado.
 SHATA: When you prepare the refined tuwo suited for urban folk, and prepare your soup tailored for city dwellers, once you transport it to Tashar Kuka motor park, and take your seat upon your bench, when the urbanites queue up to buy, standing in line holding their bowls, maintain your composure and dignity, Hajiya Hauwa, lest hungry patrons trample over your decorum.

CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado."

To solidify her commercial superiority, Shata deploys satire (zambo) against an unnamed competitor:

SHATA: *Tsaya! Wata maituwo a cikinbirni, tuwo-tuwon ta take birni, takantuwonta ta saidaduk, sai 'yan birnisukaruda ta, sun zuga ta, sai ta ja Hauwa. Sai gashi tai tuwo bata saidaba, ta yitalla ta gasasaidawa, ta kai shigida bata saidaba, sai ta yitsugunne tana kuka: "Wayyoni Allah! 'Yan birnikunizani, kungazafiddani!"*

CHORUS: *Hauwa maituwomatar Lado.*

English translation:

SHATA: Behold! Consider another tuwo vendor in the city, who cooks her tuwo within the urban center. Occasionally she sold all her food, but the city dwellers misled her; they incited her to challenge Hauwa. Consequently, she cooked food but could not sell it; she advertised it but failed to sell; she carried it back home unsold, whereupon she crouched down in tears: 'Woe unto me! City folks have ruined me, and left me stranded in my plight!'

CHORUS: Hauwa, the tuwo vendor, wife of Lado."

Socio-semantically, Shata acts as a commercial promoter (talla), using mercantile vocabulary (abincinasaidawa, saidaduk, jalayi) to elevate Hauwa's brand equity. In the advisory stanza, Shata addresses Hauwa directly, offering professional counsel on maintaining spatial authority and personal dignity amid customer rushes. Finally, the satirical narrative shift toward the failed rival vendor uses dramatic monologue ("Wayyoni Allah...") to emphasize the rival's defeat, thereby cementing Hauwa's commercial dominance.

III. Maidakin Gabas 'Yar Iro (Daura)

Maidakin Gabas was the noble wife of the Emir of Daura (Alhaji Muhammadu Bashar) and daughter of the Chief of Fulani in Niger

Republic. Shata praises her noble lineage and patronal generosity in the following exchange:

SHATA: *Bari wannan, ko inamulkice, 'Diyar Sarkin Fulanin Nijar.*

CHORUS: *Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro.*

SHATA: *Duk Bafillataninduniyar nan kona, dawa, zuwabirni, dukbaban kike ikonsu.*

CHORUS: *Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro.*

SHATA: *Kai! Ko ta inakajemulki ne, gashiUbanta Sarki ne shi, kana mijinta Sarkin Daura.*

CHORUS: *Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro.*

SHATA: *Ta ce ga rigunamai Shata, kana ta ba da dawaki, can kyautacikinFulfullandetace: "Ga Saniya kai tatsa."*

CHORUS: *Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro.*

SHATA: *Mai dakitace ga Saniya kai tatsa.*

CHORUS: *Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro.*

SHATA: *Ni dai bani kukankudi, sannan bani kukanyunwa, Mai dakin Gabas nazaune.*

CHORUS: *Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro.*

English Translation:

SHATA: Behold! Here is nobility through and through, the daughter of the Chief of Fulani in Niger.

CHORUS: Maidakin Gabas, daughter of Iro.

SHATA: Every Fulani across the globe from the bush to the urban centers falls under your father's authority.

CHORUS: Maidakin Gabas, daughter of Iro.

SHATA: Lo! Wherever you turn, it is royal majesty; consider her lineage: her father is a monarch, while her husband is the Emir of Daura.

CHORUS: Maidakin Gabas, daughter of Iro.

SHATA: She bestowed robes upon Shata, and presented fine horses, and in Fulfulde she declared: 'Here is a cow for you to milk.'

CHORUS: Maidakin Gabas, daughter of Iro.

SHATA: Maidaki declared, 'Here is a cow for you to milk.'

CHORUS: Maidakin Gabas, daughter of Iro.

SHATA: I suffer no financial distress, nor do I complain of hunger, as long as Maidakin Gabas reigns.

CHORUS: Maidakin Gabas, daughter of Iro.

Socio-semantically, the lexical choices (*sarki, mulki, iko, birni*) establish an aristocratic discourse. Shata validates her royal authority through bilateral connections, both her father (Sarkin Fulanin Nijar) and her husband (Sarkin Daura), while adopting an interpersonal stance of formal deference and traditional patronage reciprocity. The narrative highlights patronage (*riguna, dawaki, saniya*), establishing a traditional symbiotic relationship between the panegyrist and royal patrons. The singer carefully handles several themes in the three songs, the theme of love and appraisal, praises, support, advocacy, royalty, sarcasm or innuendo, business advertisement and fatalistic/subversive framing.

Ideational Function

The ideational metafunction entails language serving as a semiotic instrument for the encoder (the singer) to construct, encode, and represent internal experiences and worldviews (Halliday, 2004). In the analyzed corpus, Shata tactfully articulates his lived experiences and socio-cultural perceptions of the three female subjects. Regarding A'i Kyaftin, Shata negotiates a highly controversial narrative through a fatalistic, subversive framing. Rather than condemning her lifestyle, he asserts that her social status as a courtesan was divinely preordained (*kaddara*), effectively placing it on par with matrimony:

Gama Allah yace ki yikaruwanci
 ("For God has ordained that you engage in courtesanship")
Ya ajemikishidaidai da aure
 ("Establishing it as your equivalent of marriage")

Through this ideational construction, Shata reframes her marginalized identity, shielding her from societal ostracization. Conversely, in his portrayal of Hauwa Maituwo, Shata constructs an ideational reality

centered on commercial dominance, positioning her as supreme among all food vendors ("*A 'yan tuwo-tuwoita ab-babba*").

Interpersonal Function

The interpersonal function "helps to establish and sustain social relations" (Ogunsiji, 2001, p. 77). Through his musical register, Shata negotiates complex social relationships between himself, his female subjects, and his broader audience. He functions as a mediator, deploying Hausa to simultaneously praise his targets and entertain the listening public. The interpersonal dynamics vary significantly depending on the subject's social status:

A'i Kyaftin: As documented by Sheme et al. (2007), Shata shared a close personal friendship with A'i Kyaftin, frequently staying at her residence in Zaria. This intimate interpersonal bond manifests in the lyric's non-judgmental stance. Structurally, however, the chorus employs a third-person, non-direct refrain ("*Hakanan ne Mamman Kanin Idi wan Yalwa*"), validating the singer rather than directly addressing the target.

Hauwa Maituwo: The interpersonal dynamic is grounded in socio-commercial reciprocity. Shata engages in direct, horizontal communication (apostrophe) through explicit vocatives in both the stanzas and the chorus:

TsayaKuluwamatar Lado! ("Hold on, Kuluwa, wife of Lado!")

TsayaKuluwainnarDije! ("Hold on, Kuluwa, mother of Dije!")

Mai dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro: Built upon traditional royal patronage reflecting Shata's well-established alliance with the court of the Emir of Daura, Alhaji Muhammadu Bashir. Here, the horizontal address in the chorus ("*Mai Dakin Gabas 'Yar Iro*") signifies formal deferential respect and aristocratic acknowledgement.

Lexico-Semantic Analysis

Decoding the multi-layered meanings of Shata's female songs requires examining both the primary (literal/denotative) and tertiary (pragmatic/contextual) layers of meaning (Adegbiya, 1987). At the primary layer, lexical items such as kyaftin ("captain"), maituwo ("food vendor"), maidakingabas ("matriarch/royal wife"), karuwanci

("courtesanship"), and lahira ("hereafter") denote basic socio-occupational and spatial categories.

At the tertiary layer, these lexical choices reveal deep socio-cultural functions characteristic of Hausa oral literature (wakar baka), including panegyric appraisal (yabo), commercial promotion (talla), innuendo, and subtle satire (zambo). The temporal and social contexts during which these songs were composed typically coinciding with the peak of each subject's socio-economic agency are pivotal to their interpretation:

Aristocratic Discourse: Foregrounded through royal collocational sets such as sarki ("emir"), iko ("authority"), mulki ("reign"), dawa ("hinterland"), and birni ("city").

Commercial/Mercantile Discourse: Established through economic collocates and phrases such as maituwo ("tuwo vendor"), maiabincinasaidawa ("vendor of food for sale"), and saidaduk ("sold out completely").

Stylistic Tropes and Literary Devices

Across the three selected songs, Shata deploys a sophisticated range of classical literary tropes and stylistic devices to enhance aesthetic resonance, structure oral delivery, and reinforce his thematic objectives. Structural parallelism and thematic repetition are strategically utilized to establish rhythmic cadence and mnemonic emphasis, as demonstrated in the emphatic assertion "A 'yan tuwo-tuwo, ita ab-babba" ("Among all tuwo vendors, she stands supreme"). Furthermore, Shata relies heavily on honorific epithets such as "Kululumaiabinci" ("Kululu the provider of sustenance") and "'Diyar Sarkin Fulanin Nijar" ("Daughter of the Chief of Fulani in Niger") which function as onomastic tools that elevate the subjects' social visibility and bestow cultural prestige. Finally, the strategic deployment of direct address (rhetorical apostrophe) bridges the interpersonal distance between the performer, the female subjects, and the audience. By directly invoking his subjects within the performance space, Shata collapses deictic distance, transforming the listening public from passive observers into active witnesses of his subjects' validated identities.

Conclusion

This article has provided a stylo-semantic analysis of selected female songs by Dr. Alhaji Mamman Shata using Halliday's (2004) Systemic Functional Linguistics and Adegbija's (1987) Pragmatic Layers of Meaning. The analysis demonstrates that Shata was a dynamic oral artist whose engagement with gender extended beyond traditional norms. By tailoring his linguistic choices, thematic structures, and pragmatic strategies to suit a courtesan, a commercial entrepreneur, and a royal matriarch, Shata illustrated the adaptability of Hausa oral panegyrics. Ultimately, his female songs serve as valuable socio-cultural records that document the diverse roles, identities, and agency of women in Northern Nigeria.

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