



*Rhythm, Rhyme and Riches: Investigating Economic and Wealth  
Themes in Rap Lyrics Through a Pragma-stylistic Analysis*

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الإيقاع والقافية والثراء: دراسة موضوعات الاقتصاد والثروة في كلمات الراب من  
خلال تحليل النص بمنهج اسلوبى-تداولى

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**Abstract:**

*Many prior research has examined diversities of themes portrayed in rap music, including, violence, drug abuse, glorifying alcohol, crime etc. The current study investigates the ways in which rap style uniquely implicates riches, wealth, and power through the strategic use of linguistic devices. By identifying metaphors, hyperbole, parallelism, personification, sarcasm and, irony etc., with slang as key elements, the study explores how these devices collectively shape the portrayal of economic experiences within rap communities.*

*The analysis provides a clear understanding of the economic and wealth theme embedded in rap lyrics, shedding light on how language is employed to critique societal structures, promote messages of economic empowerment, and express the realities of marginalized communities. Furthermore, the study examines how the rhythmic flow, word-choice, and storytelling emphasis inherent in rap style contribute to the thematic exploration of riches, wealth, and power.*

*This research enhances our comprehension of how rap, as an artistic form, engages with economic themes through language and style, offering insights into the unique ways in which rap communicates messages of economic significance and empowerment.*

**Keywords:** *pragma-stylistics, rap music, economic themes, wealth representation, metaphor, cultural references, socioeconomic contexts, linguistic analysis.*

**الملخص:**

قد قامت العديد من الأبحاث السابقة بفحص تنوع المواضيع المصورة في موسيقى الراب، بما في ذلك العنف، وتعاطي المخدرات، وتمجيد الكحول، والجريمة، إلخ. وتقوم الدراسة الحالية بالتحقيق في الطرق التي يشير بها أسلوب الراب بشكل فريد إلى الثروة والثراء والسلطة من خلال الاستخدام الاستراتيجي للادوات اللغوية. فمن خلال تحديد الاستعارات، والمبالغات، والتوازن، والتشخيص، والسخرية، وما إلى ذلك، مع اللغة العامية كعناصر رئيسية، تستكشف الدراسة كيفية تشكيل هذه الادوات اللغوية بشكل جماعي صورة التجارب الاقتصادية داخل مجتمعات الراب. يقدم التحليل فهماً واضحاً لموضوع الاقتصاد والثروة المضمن في كلمات موسيقى الراب، ويسلط الضوء على كيفية استخدام اللغة لنقد الهياكل المجتمعية، وتعزيز رسائل التمكين الاقتصادي، والتعبير عن واقع المجتمعات المهمشة. علاوة على ذلك، تبحث الدراسة في كيفية مساهمة التدفق الإيقاعي واختيار الكلمات والتركيز على سرد القصص المتأصل في أسلوب موسيقى الراب في الاستكشاف الموضوعي للثروات والثروة والقوة. يعزز البحث الحالي فهمنا لكيفية تفاعل موسيقى الراب، كشكل فني، مع الموضوعات الاقتصادية من خلال اللغة والأسلوب، ويقدم نظرة ثاقبة للطرق الفريدة التي ينقل بها موسيقى الراب رسائل ذات أهمية اقتصادية.

## **1. Introduction**

In its brief four-decade existence, rap music has undergone a unique evolution distinct from other music genres. Originating in the 1970's as a cultural and artistic movement promoting non-violence within the Afro-American community in the Bronx (Watkins 2005: 9), its musical expression, commonly referred to as rap music, experienced a significant surge in popularity during the 1980's. This marked the period when it began gaining commercial traction and accessibility to audiences beyond the black community, even outside the United States.

The 1990's brought about the emergence of gangsta rap, sparking debates about the potential erosion of original Hip Hop values and the adverse impact of contemporary rap on its audience. This discussion remains an ongoing concern among both enthusiasts and experts (Watkins 2005:5-6). Scholars frequently delve into the globalization of Hip Hop and its socio-cultural dimensions (e.g., Chang 2005; Watkins 2005; Alim 2006; Herson 2011; Taviano 2013). They explore how American Hip Hop culture, values, and artistic expression have been disseminated to other nations, examining the language used within diverse Hip Hop communities and the role of Hip Hop as a bridge between different cultures.

In the present day, rap music stands as a global cultural phenomenon and a widely recognized music genre on the

international stage. The vocal technique of rap has also proliferated, finding adoption in a surprisingly diverse array of genres and contexts. Nowadays, examining the Hip Hop becomes a fascinating exploration of how linguistic and stylistic choices contribute to the genre's cultural impact. The language employed in Hip Hop lyrics, often characterized by its rich use of metaphor, wordplay, and urban vernacular, serves as a key aspect of communication within the community. On that account, the present study attempts to explore the linguistic devices employed in rap artists by means of the stylized, artistic and implicit representation of words.

## 2. Theoretical Background

Studies of English varieties within US black communities first emerged in the mid-sixties (e.g. Abrahams 1964; Mitchell-Kernan 1971; Labov 1972), paving the way for the analysis of Black English, which would then characterize the Hip Hop Community (Alim 2006: 5-6). The sociolinguistic aspects of American Hip Hop culture began to be discussed by academics in the early nineties. One of the first such academics was Professor Marcyliena Morgan with her paper *Hip Hop Hooray!: The Linguistic Production of Identity* presented in 1993, along with Geneva

Smitherman, who wrote *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* in 1994.

After then, scholars like Trapp (2005) explore how rappers utilize language as a platform for social commentary, addressing issues like social injustice, economic disparity, and political critique. Alim (2006) investigates the dynamic relationship between language, technology, and creativity in rap music. Cultural specificity and metaphor form another crucial area of study. Chang (2006) highlights the importance of considering cultural context when analyzing rap lyrics. Álvarez-Mosquera (2015) examines how rappers utilize language to construct their identities, navigating the complexities of social and cultural contexts. The study explores the concept of "recreolization," a potential strategy employed by African American rappers to maintain their distinct identity in the face of perceived threats. Beyond identity, the intersection of language and creativity fuels vibrant research. However, the examination of this language style within the pragma-stylistic framework has yet to be addressed, serving as the primary focus of the present study. Rap lyrics serve abundance of figurative and artistic content creating an opportunity for research in pragma-stylistics.

Broadly, many scholars tackle the functional and aesthetic aspect of language and how words interact with context. Leech (1983: 5) for instance emphasizes that meaning is derived not solely from

formal properties but from the usage and context of utterances, marking the domain of pragmatics as a "theory of appropriateness." Levinson (1983: 5) extends this notion, defining pragmatics as "the study of language use," where language is viewed as an active instrument shaping perceptions and realities. Shifting to stylistics, Babajide (2000: 123) defines it as "the study of style," focusing on the effectiveness of expression. Stylistic decisions are influenced by factors such as emotional attitude, context, and rhetorical goals. Leech (1969; 1-2) places literary stylistics at the intersection of linguistics and literature. Notably, Fabb (2002: 16) and Norgaard et al. (2010: 6) introduce pragmatic stylistics as the application of theoretical pragmatics to the study of style.

Examining stylistic models, Crystal and Davy (1969) and Leech and Short's (1996) stand out, but both lack a clear pragmatic dimension, limiting them as pragma-stylistic models. Pragmatics, centered on "appropriateness," and stylistics, leaning towards "effectiveness," converge in their exploration of speaker choices within grammatical bounds, albeit with distinct focal points. Recent years have seen stylistics gravitate towards pragmatics, giving rise to pragma-stylistic studies that manifest how linguistic form interfaces with pragmatic interpretation, particularly in guiding listeners to discern underlying meanings. This fusion

enhances stylistics with pragmatics, shedding light on the practicality of pragmatic theories in literary interpretations.

### **3. Methodology**

This research employs a pragma-stylistic analysis to examine the representation of wealth and economic themes in rap lyrics. Pragma-stylistics combines pragmatic analysis, which focuses on the communicative intentions behind language use, with stylistic analysis, which examines the linguistic features and rhetorical strategies employed to construct representations of wealth.

Data gathering is sourced from <https://www.azlyrics.com/>, recognized as one of the most dependable platforms for song lyrics. In selecting rap songs for analysis, a purposive sampling approach is utilized. This involves choosing songs that prominently feature themes of wealth, economic prosperity, and related topics. Criteria for selection include relevance to the research topic, popularity within the rap music genre, and diversity in artist backgrounds and styles.

The analytical approach adopted for the current study is pragma-stylistic. By scrutinizing how language is utilized to convey notions of wealth and economic status, this analysis highlights the social functions and implications of rap music as a form of cultural expression. Simultaneously, the stylistic analysis examines the linguistic features and rhetorical strategies employed to construct representations of wealth and economic prosperity within rap

lyrics. This involves an examination of figurative language, including metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and personifications, often employed to decorate descriptions of wealth. The implications of language use in rap lyrics for understanding socio-economic inequalities, consumerism, and materialism in contemporary society are discussed. This interpretation offers insights into the complex interaction between language, culture, and society in the rap music genre.

#### 4. Data Analysis

##### Lyrics 1:

*“Make it back tomorrow don't care how much I spend  
Think I'm a G wait 'til you meet my friends  
A beast I've been now they wait on line  
'Til I sign their CD for them I am  
All who question sleep on him  
Eating good soup don't leave a piece for them  
We gon' smoke palm trees, drink some gin  
Couldn't walk in my shoes, know what your feet fit in  
Since I been off the leash like I had a couple of drinks  
Watch my buzz increase, now we twistin' up sipping champange  
On a beach, what either gets in our game*



*go deceased nigga, nigga Right about now...*" (Planet VI, No Limit – verse II)

### **Analysis:**

The claim that the speaker can "make it back tomorrow" regardless of the amount spent is likely an exaggeration. While it emphasizes financial confidence, the immediacy of the recovery may be overstated. Also, describing oneself as a "beast" may be a hyperbolic metaphor for strength or prowess. The idea that people "wait on line" to meet the speaker exaggerates the anticipation and popularity surrounding the artist.

Beyond the act itself, the mention of "signing CDs" indirectly alludes to the financial gains derived from the artist's popularity. Fans purchasing CDs, especially signed ones, contribute to the artist's revenue stream. The metonymy suggests a direct link between the artist's popularity, the act of signing CDs, and the financial success derived from their music sales. The line "We gon' smoke palm trees, drink some gin" again contains symbolism and metonymy. "Smoke palm trees" symbolizes the act of consuming marijuana (a reference to the cannabis plant often associated with a leisurely lifestyle). The mention of "drink some gin" could be metonymic, representing indulgence and luxury associated with alcoholic beverages.

The contrast in "Couldn't walk in my shoes, know what your feet fit in" juxtaposes the exclusivity and uniqueness of the speaker's experiences and possessions with the listener's. It implies a significant difference in lifestyle and wealth

On a literal level, eating soup is a simple, everyday activity that doesn't inherently connote wealth or luxury. However, the irony arises when this mundane act is presented in a context where it implies opulence. The act of "eating soup" is usually associated with commonplace sustenance, yet in this context, it's presented as part of a lavish lifestyle

### **Lyrics 2:**

*"I came from nothing I won my money making machines  
I'm selling raps 'cause there ain't no escaping the fiends  
All over the map just me and my caribbean team  
A few from Atlanta, my other niggers repping the B  
High definition it seems like we live on the screen  
Not 'cause it's clear as day, because me and my niggers be clean  
We stay fly haters hate when we step on the scene  
'Cause we young black and living the american dream..."*(Planet VI, No Limit – verse III)

### **Analysis:**

The lexical choice of "Machine" in "...I own *my money making machines*" is often associated with reliability and consistency in their output. The metaphor conveys the idea that the speaker's ability to make money is not sporadic or erratic but rather methodical and dependable, mirroring the predictability of a well-functioning machine. Besides, the meaning of the object (i.e., machine) is modified by the noun 'money' to narrow down its function. That is, the metaphor suggests that the speaker and their endeavors possess qualities reminiscent of machines designed for a singular purpose – to generate money. This symbolism implies a high level of efficiency, precision, and reliability in the speaker's ability to convert effort into financial success.

The phrase "money making machines" can be seen as a metonym for the broader process of selling rap music. Here, "money making machines" stands in for the entire mechanism through which the rapper generates wealth, with the metonym emphasizing the lucrative nature of selling their creative output. Still, by pluralizing "machines," the rapper suggests diversified sources of income streams beyond just selling rap music. Each "machine" could represent a different avenue through which they generate wealth. The term "stay fly" serves as a symbolic expression suggesting a continuous state of being stylish, fashionable, and, in the context of wealth, financially successful. The word "fly" carries

connotations of opulence and a lifestyle associated with affluence. The cohesive reference between "haters" and "we" reinforces an in-group identity, distinguishing between those who have achieved success (the "we") and those who express resentment (the "haters"). This linguistic distinction enhances the theme of wealth and prosperity.

The cohesion between "haters" and 'young black' in "cause we young black and living the American dream" establishes a thematic connection by juxtaposing external negativity with the speaker's pursuit of the American dream. The analysis recognizes the implied ethnic hatred based on color, suggesting that the criticism or opposition faced by the speaker may be rooted in racial prejudice. This cohesion adds depth to the narrative, highlighting the intersectionality of challenges faced by young Black individuals in their pursuit of the American dream.

### **Lyrics 3:**

*"We fly high, No Lie, You know this  
Foreign rides, outside, its like showbiz  
Hips and Thighs, Oh my, Stay focus  
... Ya boy gettin paper, I buy big cars  
I need fly rides to drive in my garage  
Stay sky high, Fly wit the stars  
T 4? Flights, 80 grand large ..."* (Jim Jones, We Fly High, Verse  
I)

### **Analysis:**

The use of "we" to refer to a single important person is sometimes referred to as the majestic plural or royal "we." This linguistic choice is historically associated with royalty or individuals in positions of authority, emphasizing their importance and grandeur. Together with the verb phrase 'fly high' he further utilizes metaphor by equating the act of flying with achieving financial success or reaching great heights of wealth. Besides, the shift to "I" indicates a transition to an individual perspective. This change signals that the subsequent statements are more personalized and directly attributed to the singular speaker.

The term combines two elements: "fly" and "ride." "Fly" is a slang term signifying something fashionable, cool, or stylish. When applied to a "ride," it metaphorically refers to a vehicle, usually a car, that possesses these desirable qualities. 'Fly' when collocates with 'rides' in this context implies that the vehicle is not just functional but also aesthetically appealing and fashionable.

The use of "big" in the phrase "I buy big cars" indeed involves a form of wordplay, exploiting the dual denotations of the word. In this context, "big" serves as a clever linguistic device that simultaneously conveys both size and luxury.

The rapper conveys an exaggerated sense of financial success in another instance through the metaphorical expression "Stay sky

high." Here, the rapper suggests an ongoing pursuit of elevated success, ambition, or influence. The metaphor draws on the symbolism of the sky, often associated with boundless possibilities, indicating a commitment to reaching ambitious goals and achieving remarkable accomplishments.

#### **Lyrics 4:**

*".. What's it gon be today? (Let's see)*

*The yellow Benz or the red Navi'*

*Eeny, meeny, miny, moe*

*That's the way I pick when I'm ready to roll*

*Murph Dert got the limos wit his vehicles*

*(Yeah that's the way it go when you got money to blow)*

*Ho! well then, say no mo'*

*Just think, I was on my way to the sto'*

*I got scratched but I don't got nails*

*Got my own truck but I want to drive trails..."* (Murphy Lee,

Hold Up, Verse I)

#### **Analysis:**

The interrogative structure "What's it gon be today?" and then he carries on by saying "The yellow Benz or the red Navi'" to manifests his assorted rides that he needs to choose from. This is followed by and the subsequent decision-making process using "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe ". This type of rhyme falls under the category of 'counting-out rhymes' or 'counting rhymes.' the These

rhymes often have a repetitive and rhythmic pattern and are used to select a person or item by pointing or a similar method. They are commonly used in children's games and activities. The repetition of the rhyme scheme in "Eeny, meeny, miny, moe" and "money to blow" creates a sense of rhythm and emphasis, drawing attention to the choices and abundance associated with wealth depicting a scenario where the rapper has multiple high-end vehicles to choose from. This implication aligns with the theme of wealth, portraying the rapper as a person of considerable affluence who can effortlessly decide which luxury vehicle to use on a given day. The playful and carefree approach to choosing between such lavish options underscores the abundance of the rapper's material possessions and adds a touch of extravagance to the depiction of wealth.

The lyricist, in this context, uses his own name to refer to himself in the third person. It is a stylistic choice known as "illeism." The use of illeism can serve various purposes in communication, and in the context of these lyrics to serve branding purposes. It helps in creating a memorable and recognizable identity for the artist, contributing to their recognition within the music industry. This can be particularly relevant if the artist wants to establish a persona associated with wealth, success, or a particular lifestyle. In addition, The phrase "limos wit his vehicles" can be seen as a form of metonymy, where one term is substituted with another closely

related term. Here, "limos" is used metonymically to represent the broader category of all Murph Dert's vehicles.

### **Lyrics 5:**

*"I used to pray for times like this, to rhyme like this, so I had to grind like that to shine like this."* (Moment of Clarity, Jay-z, Verse I)

### **Analysis:**

Irony is present in the contrast between the initial wish/prayer for success ("used to pray for times like this") and the subsequent acknowledgment of the hard work and grind required to achieve that success ("had to grind like that to shine like this").

In addition, the repetition of the phrase "to rhyme like this, so I had to grind like that to shine like this" creates a parallel structure. This structure emphasizes the cause-and-effect relationship between the desire to rhyme well, the necessity of hard work, and the achievement of success. The choice of the metaphor "shine" brings with it a semantic field associated with light, brightness, and visibility. This implies not only success but a level of prominence, recognition, and standing out.



### **Lyrics 6:**

*“Dreams of living life like rappers do*

*Bump that new E-40 at the E-Zoo*

*Probably smoke some weed, man, you know just how it goes*

*I'll be out here on the front porch, standing ...”* (Kendrick Lamar, Money Trees, Verse II).

### **Analysis:**

The use of the word "dreams" implies a sense of aspiration and longing, suggesting that the lifestyle of successful rappers is seen as something distant and perhaps even unattainable for the speaker. The term "dreams" conveys a level of idealization, emphasizing the perceived opulence and success associated with the lives of rap artists. Furthermore, the notion of living life "like rappers do" implies recognition of the extravagant and often luxurious aspects of the rap lifestyle. The use of "dreams" conveys the idea that this way of life is considered a distant goal or a fantasy, reinforcing the notion that it is associated with extreme success and affluence.

In the context of certain subcultures within the rap scene, the use of marijuana is sometimes portrayed as a symbol of relaxation, celebration, or indulgence. In this way, it becomes part of the cultural symbols associated with a particular lifestyle that may include markers of wealth and success. The use of "probably"

indicates a likelihood or high probability of the speaker engaging in the mentioned activity. It implies a routine or common occurrence in the speaker's life.

## **5. Findings**

The analysis of rap lyrics reveals incorporation of pragma-stylistic devices, contributing to the genre's thematic elements of wealth and success. Exaggeration is employed to emphasize financial confidence, creating a heightened sense of abundance. Metaphor and hyperbole serve to symbolize strength and prowess, enhancing the artist's image within the lyrics. The anticipation of fans waiting in line is a pragmatic device amplifying the perceived popularity and influence of the artist.

Metonymy is used strategically, linking actions such as signing CDs to broader financial gains and revenue streams. Symbolism and metonymy come into play in drug references, conveying a lifestyle associated with leisure and opulence. Juxtaposition and irony serve to underscore disparities in lifestyle, creating a layered narrative. Metaphorical language, including the portrayal of financial endeavors as "money-making machines," contributes to a systematic and efficient image.

Symbolic language such as "stay fly" enhances the portrayal of a continuous state of stylishness and success. The use of illeism, referring to oneself in the third person, serves branding purposes

and contributes to the artist's recognizable identity. Counting rhymes introduce a playful rhythm, highlighting abundance and choice in the selection of luxury items. Irony surfaces in narratives, creating contrasts between aspirations and the realities of hard work required for success.

## **6. Conclusions**

The study unveils a number of pragma-stylistic devices employed in rap lyrics by the artists. As a material that is rich of artistic and figurative language, rap lyrics provide a good opportunity for rappers to express their lavish lifestyle through diverse group of devices including metonymy, metonymy, symbolism, hyperbole and exaggeration etc. The analysis also illustrates the illocutionary force indicating devices (IFID) through which wealth and economy theme is implied in rappers' lyrics. The pragma-stylistic tools help understand how rappers implicitly and artistically encode messages expressing how they are economically successful. Social variables including the special importance of the financial status of the African American communities contribute to the motivation behind the focus on the affluence manifestation employed by those lyricists.

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