

Short Paper

Understanding the Obscene: Discourse Analysis of FlipTop Battles

Adrian Clark D. Perez

AB English Language Department
Pangasinan State University – Bayambang Campus, Philippines
perez.adrian84@gmail.com
(corresponding author)

Laarni B. Perez

AB English Language Department
Pangasinan State University – Bayambang Campus, Philippines
gning3laarni@gmail.com

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Abstract

This qualitative research is a discourse analysis of selected flip-top battles. This study aimed to analyze the discourse of selected FlipTop battles by analyzing the different strategies used by the emcees/rappers in constructing/delivering their lines and by understanding the linguistic features of the FlipTop lines delivered, particularly their phonological and morphological features. Analysis of data reveals that emcees/rappers mainly make use of eight strategies in the construction/delivery of their lines, (Mental Inadequacy, Attack on Physical Attributes, Assertion of Dominance, Comparison to Notable Personalities, Allusion to Fictional Characters, Threats, Sexual Innuendos, and Attacks on Close Relatives and Relationships). As regards phonological features, it is revealed that emcees mainly make use of (1) assonance, (2) consonance, and (3) rhyming. Furthermore, the main morphological features used by the emcees are (1) deletion, (2) compounding, and (3) code switching and code mixing. Based on the aforementioned analysis, the following conclusions are drawn: (1) The emcees share common characteristics when it comes to employing strategies for attacking their opponents in FlipTop battle; (2) the structure of FlipTop lines is different from other forms of poetry as it does not follow proper format but it creates an artistic transition of words; (3) emcees



have the freedom to insult with no boundaries on the use of words and terms; either negative or positive in the sense of alluding the opponent to certain traits of creatures or people; (4) the FlipTop lines embody linguistic features used by the emcees to improve and create an impact in delivery; (5) FlipTop lines may be viewed or understood in different ways; however, some insults have reliable references depending on where they are employed; and (6) emcees' chances to win the battle largely depend on the delivery of lines.

Keywords – *FlipTop, discourse analysis, linguistic features*

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is the study of the relationship between language and the socio-cultural contexts in which it is used. Accordingly, discourse analysis takes into consideration how language represents and corresponds to differing worldviews and understandings (Paltridge, 2012). Discourse also remains a viable point of study and discussion. The field of discourse analysis is a broad term for the study of how language is used in text and contexts, or text surrounding and defining discourse. Discourse analysis, also known as discourse studies, emerged as a field of study in the 1970s (Nordquist, 2020).

In the field of new technology, the government, industry, and academia have been partners in evolving and deploying packet switching, more commonly referred to now as the Internet. The Internet is also used for expressing emotions and spreading ideas across the globe. One of the more popular websites frequented by most users is YouTube. On this site, you can share and upload videos that can be easily accessed by anyone. There are different varieties of videos that you can easily search for, such as music, sports, animation, entertainment, education, film and movies, comedy, and even people who want to share their opinions and interests. Because of this site, the lives of different people, especially celebrities, become more exposed to the public. The popularity of YouTube gave them the chance to be more recognized by people who idolize them.

YouTube has opened the opportunity for FlipTop "Rap Battles," which has become one of the most popular entertainment shows in the Philippines. It was the year 2010 when FlipTop became viral on YouTube, rapidly acquiring millions of views on their official YouTube channel. The FlipTop league is the first and largest professional rap battle conference in the Philippines. It is also a rap battle contest, attended by underground and amateur rappers. Sometimes referred to as a modern-day Balagatasan, FlipTop rap battles are where two rappers are pitted against each other in a battle of Capella rap. There are also several variations to the usual format, like that of Dos-por-Dos, a tag-team freestyle rap contest. It is also important to note that emcees can opt for freestyle-style or prepared written raps (Adre, 2017).

Some of the most famous FlipTop teams include Loonie/Abra and Sheyee/Smugglaz, the first emcees/Rappers who gained popularity in the FlipTop battle industry. Both sides of the battle rap, dubbed "The Modern Day Balagtasan," throw insulting punchlines at each other. Both sides are given three minutes to deliver their jokes, punchlines, and insults with the flow of poetry. They are free to throw offensive words at their opponents in the form of "jokes" or "bars". They deliver rap with rhymes and also sing to add to the beautiful flow of the lines (Solitario, 2019).

The popularity of FlipTop battles in the Philippines has impacted how people perceive language, its forms, and its functions. As such, there is a need to understand deeper how a specific use of language perceived as insulting is used to express ideas in a poetic-like fashion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rap Music and Rap Battles

Rap (considered a subset of hip-hop culture) is one of the largest music industries in the United States, Germany, and other countries, having evolved from a long history and age-old tradition of rhetorical resistance into its music genre (Meinecke, Hakimi, & Janicke, 2021). In the Philippines, rap is considered a form of Pinoy pop (along with folk songs, dance tunes, ballads, Broadway-type songs, rock 'n' roll, disco, and jazz) and is largely influenced by American lifestyle and pop culture and is created using western pop forms (Canave-Dioquino, n.d.).

Due largely to the rich ethnic diversity in hip-hop's early days, battle rap evolved into one of hip-hop's most prominent sub-genres. By typically pitting two rappers against each other, battle rap allows rappers to try and outwit, outflow, and demean each other before an engaged audience. Though it began as an underground culture reserved for select groups, battle rap quickly gained popularity following the release of the 2022 semi-biographical film *8-mile*. This became the impetus for several battle rap leagues to emerge (*Let's Beef* and *Grind Time*) and give opportunities to rappers (Mavima, 2016).

Battle rap is FlipTop's major component. It is through this type of expression that the "game" operates. Rappers usually deliver their lines in the form of poetry, using the skill of rhyming and other artistic styles of word-playing, and battle emcees "out-rap" their opponents. Indeed, it is through this game that the art of rapping has gained high regard and tremendous public attention. However, before it was utilized in FlipTop and started gaining national recognition, rapping was already an established and profitable talent (Mazon, 2012).

FlipTop

In the Philippines, FlipTop rap battle is considered to be the first Filipino rap battle league, which gained recognition quickly after uploading several videos that became viral on YouTube. Millions of Filipino youths shared the website of videos that contained two men testing each other's skills and capability in the construction of rhythmic and clever lines (Yap, 2012). FlipTop, one of the major hits on YouTube in 2010 and eventually a national craze, has quickly created a name of its own and established a firm position in the Philippine hip-hop society. Pioneers and organizers started it in February of 2010 and predicted it would be a big hit, but they did not expect it would be that soon (Wei, 2010). FlipTop's format is patterned after Grind Time, an internationally recognized and probably the largest rap battle league in the world, and the effort of instituting FlipTop here in the Philippines, on the other hand, is credited to 22-year-old Aric Yuson, more popularly known as Anygma (Abrera & Gonzales, 2010).

The mechanics of the game are essentially unsophisticated. Anygma and her colleagues match and schedule emcees. Battles are held in selected bars, drawing a large crowd of enthusiasts. The game starts with a flip of the coin, and whoever wins gets to decide whether to go first or not. Emcees are allowed to deliver pre-written lines or do freestyles, or both, for their primary goal of insulting each other. They can either use Filipino or English to degrade their opponents. The match has three rounds, with one minute for each round. A panel of judges, who are emcees as well, decides the winner on the basis of spontaneity, impact, style, wit, creativity, and quality of punch lines. So far, winners have also gotten tattoos (Abrera & Gonzales, 2010).

Battles in Discourse

Battling is one of the most intriguing linguistic aspects of contemporary hip-hop culture, which is a highly competitive and creative style of discourse whose aim is the verbal domination and embarrassment of one's opponent through a combination of creative rap lyrics and effective delivery. The cipher (or cipa), the street-corner arena where many battles take place, is referred to as the hyperactivated, communal hip-hop lyrical testing and stomping grounds of verbal mastery (Alim, 2006). Recently, battling has gained popular recognition as a result of a growing interest in hip hop as a whole. Battle discourse contains the intention of negotiating respect and social status while simultaneously functioning as a creative outlet for verbal art and craftsmanship. It is an intensely competitive speech genre whose aim is the verbal domination and humiliation of one's opponents to decrease their status and increase one's own (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

The general aim of this study is to describe FlipTop battles as a form of discourse. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method, specifically utilizing discourse

analysis in investigating knowledge about language beyond the word, clause, phrase, and sentence levels (Stubbs, 1983:1). This method is used to describe the data in words or to interpret the results. The exact transcribed lines of emcees or rappers are the basis of conducting the study. The researchers purposively watched the top three most viewed FlipTop battles on the official YouTube channel of FlipTop, namely, *Loonie vs. Tippy-D*, *Sinio vs. Sheyee*, and *Sinio vs. Tippy-D*. The researchers transcribed the exact terms, words, phrases, and sentences used by the emcees and rappers. The researchers used a manual method of transcription in each round.

The transcribed lines were analyzed according to their emcees/rappers and the given round of battle. The meaning is derived from the analysis of words, phrases, and sentences in each round given to the emcees/rappers. The researchers employed a Discourse Analysis method of research. The researchers also used the coding process as indicated in Grounded Theory to collate the gathered data from the selected FlipTop battle. In this study, the researchers used Holton's (2007) coding process in gathering and analyzing the data.

Open Coding

The researchers applied the principles of open coding in the process of transcription of the selected FlipTop videos. The transcription of each video is divided by round and by the emcees performing.

Delimiting for Selective Coding

Potential core variable(s) are identified from the transcribed lines in open coding and followed by subsequent data collection and coding, particularly in the strategies employed by the emcees in line construction and delivery, specifically their linguistic features.

Theoretical Coding

At this point, the identified core variable(s) in terms of the emcees' strategies and the linguistic features of their delivered lines are elaborated on in order to be integrated into a functional understanding of the subject matter.

RESULTS

The following are the findings in terms of emcee and rapper strategies, as well as the linguistic features of FlipTop battles.

Strategies Employed by Emcees

These are the strategies that rappers/emcees use to deliver their lines and attack their opponents. Some of these strategies share common characteristics depending on how they are utilized. Additionally, these strategies became the basis for evaluating the rapping skills of the emcees.

1. Mental Inadequacy

This strategy attacks the mental capabilities of the opponent by degrading their intellectual and emotional capacities. Examples of how this particular strategy is employed are shown below:

- Sinio Vs. Shehyee
(Round 1. Shehyee's lines)

*Bat dada ka nang dada?
Eh syempre hindi mo nga naman feel ang parangal na binigay sa gitna.
Kung ito'y para sa libro na hindi ikaw ang may akda.
Ano daw?
Sa madaling salita,
Kaya hindi mo naramdaman na binoto kita.
Kasi yung linya mo, si Sak ang may akda.*

- Loonie Vs. Topsy-D
(Round 2. Topsy-D's lines)

*Oh ano luto yung laban mo kay sheehyee.
Ilang beses kong pinanuod yung video ang wack nito.
Yung panira mo basic, parang straw lang at sago.
Kung baga sa panira ng bala ng tirador,
Puro magaan lang dala mo.*

- Sinio vs. Shehyee
(Round 1. Sinio's lines)

*Ganun ka na ba kayaman, dudung?
Na para lang mag-kampeon kailangan mo pa ng smuglazz na katulong?
Tangina naman tsong.
Tapos sasabihin mo utak mo ginamit kung bakit nag-champion kayong dalawa.
Talagang nakakaduda.
Kasi parang wala ka namang isip na ginagamit sa tuwing may battle ka na mag-isa.*

2. Attack on Physical Attributes

This strategy attempts to ridicule the opponents by attacking their physical appearance. In particular, perceived physical deformation/defects are highlighted. Additionally, the physical attributes of close relatives and friends of the opponent may also be focused on. The following are some examples:

- Sinio vs. Shehyee
(Round 1. Sinio's line)

Kaya [expletive] mo mata!
Yabang mo na ah.
Ano bang tingin mo sa sarili mo?
Kung matahin mo'ko sa battle 'kala mo kung sino ka ah.
Porket ba ganun na kalaki yung kita mo?
Kaya ganun na lang kaliit tingin mo sa akin?

Kasi mababaw lang daw yung jokes ko.
Pero alam naman natin,
Na wala kang maipagmamalaki kasi mas ma-BABA ka sa 'kin.
Kaya wag mo na kami bilugin.
Yung mukha mo tatsulok.
Pero pare, haba.
Habang tumatagal, palala ka nang palala
Member ka ba ng sexbomb?
Kasi pababa ka ng pababa.

- Loonie vs. Topsy-D
(Round 1. Topsy-D's lines)

Yow, minsan ka nang naging pari na nagpalayas ng masamang espirito
Tas naging payaso na mas mukha namang may hepatitis na piccolo
Salamat sa iyo diko na kailangan na katawa-tawa na lyrico
Kasi literal na ginawa mo nang katawa-tawa yang sarili mo.

3. Assertion of Dominance

This strategy focuses on the dynamics of supremacy and superiority and being in a position of power. The emcees regularly incorporate metaphors to assert their superiority over their opponents and to manifest their dominance over them.

- Topsy-D vs. Sinio
(Round 2. Topsy-D's lines)

*Di ko na kilangan pa na magpatawa para punitin ang yung papel
Ang talunin ka di ko na kailangan pa na magpatawa at bumaba sa'yong lebel
Oo, kapatid kita sa division pero ayoko magpigil
Kasi di naman nagpapatawa si Cain nung pinatay niya si Abel.*

- Sinio Vs. Shehyee
(Round 2. Sinio's lines)

*Sige ikaw na celebrity, ikaw na nasa TV
Ikaw na nasa mainstream na may mataas na talent fee
Pero ako, wala akong paki
I can make my own money gamit ang aking ability and that's the life of a true
Emcee!
Hindi kita pinasisikatan Shehyee, tirik ang araw ko
Tanghaling tapat kaya ako mainit sa tao
Ikaw, dapit-hapon na career mo palubog na*

4. Comparison to Notable Personalities

There are two views employed in this strategy. The first view compares the opponent to a well-known or notable person in a negative way to put the opponent down. All the negative traits of the said person will be compared to the opponent, particularly if those negative traits/features are highlighted and used to describe the opponent.

The second view compares the opponent to a notable person in a positive way. This comparison usually includes positive traits in terms of intellect, talents, skills, and physical appearance.

- Sinio Vs. Sheyee
(Round 2. Shehyee's line)

*Kaya kapag sinabi kong panget asawa mo, realltalk yun
Pati si Zaito paano ka nainlab dun
Yung mahal ko mukhang taga South Korea
Mala Krystal Jung
Yung sa'yo mukhang taga-North ala Kim Jong-Un*

- Topsy-D vs. Sinio
(Round 3. Topsy-D's line)
*Kung mamamatay ka man ngayon, ay wag sa impyerno, sana kunin ka na ni God
Mga namatay na komedyante nagtatag ng imperyo, hinihintay ka na nila brad*

*Tulad nila Redford, Babalu at Tado ang galit 'di mapigilan sa bigat
Gugulpihin ka na lang nila sa langit tatal gusto mong kumalaban ng sikat*

5. An Allusion to Fictional Characters

In FlipTop battles, fictional characters are commonly used to portray strengths and weaknesses. An allusion to a fictional character can be used in different ways; it may refer to the physical, intellectual, and emotional aspects of both the opponent and the character being alluded to. Using powerful characters from anime, superheroes, and mythological creature is commonly employed to assert dominance.

- *Sinio vs. Shehyee
(Round 3. Shehyee's lines)*

*Kasi ang battle na to'y Mr. Edi Wow versus Mr. Actually, 'di ba?
Bansag pa lang alam n'yo na ang pinagkaiba
Ang laban na to'y parang batang Naruto versus Itachi Uchiha*

- *Tipsy-D vs. Sinio
(Round 3. Tipsy-D's lines)*

*At wala akong paki kung ikaw ang taga dito at ako ang bago rito,
Dahil kahit saan magpunta, ako ang paborito
likot ka sa hangin ko parang ipo-ipo
Titiklop ka sa punches ko parang lppo*

6. Threats

In this strategy, emcees use artistic ways to attack their opponents. It is also known as "creative killing," which is brutally delivered through words. It is noteworthy to remember that threats are not put into practice but are used mainly to emotionally and mentally attack the opponent.

- *Tipsy-D vs. Sinio
(Round 1. Tipsy-D's line)*

*At kahit nasa Pampanga teritoryo ko to bitch! You couldn't just walk here
Walter white jr. this bitch! Uuwi kang naka walker
O kaya, papasabugin ko ulo mo na para bang walker
Tapos career mo pagbangga mo sa'kin parang si Paul Walker*

- Topsy-D vs. Loonie
(Round 2. Topsy-D's line)

Diba mahilig ka magpasanib? O sige magtawag ka
Nagpapapasok ka sa katawan nang katawan nang katauhan ng iba
Sana makulong ka na lang sa seldang may kasama na arabo na lima
Pagkatapos pagsawaan sana patayin ka nila
Tagain, ichop-chop ulo, kamay mo at paa

Mga organs mo i-donate sa nangangailangan talaga
Tatal mahilig ka naman ipagamit yang katawan mo sa iba.

7. Sexual Innuendos

It is a strategy that uses lewd and sexually promiscuous language. It is sometimes used to refer to the gender identity and sexual experience of the opponents. Attack on relatives can also be employed alongside this strategy. Profanities are also used to intensify the delivery.

- Sinio vs. Shehyee
(Round 3. Sinio's lines)

Sige ikaw na rebuttal king
P*t* biruin niyo tapos na yung battle, nire-rebutt niya pa
Shehyee?
T*ng*n* tunog pa lang pang bakla na mukha ka pang lesbi
Gusto mo pala ng cute name eh hindi mo ginagawang Girlie o Lovely
P*t* Shehyee?
"She" na "He" pa
Confused ka yata sa gender
Kaya ang pagiging male mo mali
Supot lahat ng battle, hindi pa tuli
Kaya pala
Trip na trip mo si Abra
Si Apeks at ako
Magaling ka pumili
Galing ka pa sa t*m*d ni Loonie kasi meron ka pa sa labi
P*t* l*nd*

- Loonie vs. Topsy-D
(Round 3. Loonie's line)

Kaya pala yung kasal niyo ni Nela hindi na naman natuloy
Kinokenekta mo na lang kasi lahat e

Hiniwalayan ka tuloy
Yung love story nila away bati parang palabas
Hindi naman criminology yung kurso nung babae pero iniwan siya para sa batas
Diba? Tapos hinayaan mo na lang diba para wala ng away
Kung sa bagay okay lang na k*nt*t-k*nt*tin ni batas syota mo para wala ng away
Total mukha naman nanay

8. Attack on Close Relatives/Relationships

This strategy is usually employed by emcees to attack the close relatives of the opponents, particularly girlfriends, wives, parents, sisters, brothers, and friends. Emcees use profane and obscene language to attack relatives, which may affect the opponents emotionally. This strategy falls under "sexism," which refers to negative and biased views about women. This can be used alongside other strategies.

- Sinio vs. Shehyee
(Round 2. Shehyee's lines)

Pero bitter siya kay Abra
Alam niyo ba kung bakit bitter si Joseph kay kay Abra?
Kasi yung girlfriend niya kamukha ni Joseph Amara

- Sinio vs. Shehyee
(Round 3. Sinio's lines)

Alam n'yo po bang si Ann Mateo nag-medic siya.
Opo totoo itanong n'yo pa sa kanya.
'Di ba medic (may dick) siya?
Meh dick siya.
Kasi ok lang naman kung titir*hin ko si Ann 'di ba?
Kasi 'di naman bago sa'yo pag tinitira siya ng iba.
Kaya yang girlfriend mo, My Ghad!
Patitikimin ko yan ng special na nakatuwad.
P*t* wala nang hubad hubad kadyot na agad!
Long neck na b*r*t ang ipapasok ko sa p*kp*k niyang lapad.
B*b*stusin ko yan nang buong magdamag tulad ng ginawa mo sa girlfriend ni
Kamandag!

- Topsy-D vs. Sinio
(Round 2. Topsy-D's lines)

Yow!
Dinamay niya yung girlfriend ko,
Ito kahit simple rebut lang, malamang maubos ang baraha mo,

*Diba malaki yung ngipin ng girlfriend mo?
Sa t'wing hinahalikan mo siya ako maaalala mo! ulol!*

Linguistic Features

The linguistic features analyzed refer to the patterns and considerations of the emcees in the selection, formulation, and delivery of their lines. These, however, are not strict rules that emcees religiously adhere to but instead are followed by the emcees on their own accord.

1. Phonological

In FlipTop battles, emcees generally employ select phonological features to add artistic layers and flow in the delivery of their lines.

a. Assonance (repetition of vowel sounds within phrases/sentences)

- *At wala akong paki kung ikaw ang taga dito at ako ang bago rito
Dahil kahit saan magpunta, ako ang paborito
likot ka sa hangin ko parang ipo-ipo
Titiklop ka sa punches ko parang lppo iho*
- *Bat dada ka nang dada?
Eh syempre hindi mo nga naman feel ang parangal na binigay sa gitna
Kung ito'y para sa libro na hindi ikaw ang may akda
Ano daw?
Sa madaling salita,
Kaya hindi mo naramdaman na binoto kita
Kasi yung linya mo, si Sak ang may akda*

b. Consonance (repetition of consonant sounds within phrases and sentences)

- *Kaya pala yung kasal niyo ni Nela hindi na naman natuloy
Kinokenekta mo na lang kasi lahat e
Hiniwalayan ka tuloy
Yung love story nila away bati parang palabas
Hindi naman criminology yung kurso nung babae pero iniwan siya para sa batas
Diba? Tapos hinayaan mo na lang diba para wala ng away
Kung sa bagay okay lang na kantot-kantotin ni batas syota mo para wala ng away
Total mukha naman nanay
Di ko na kilangan pa na magpatawa para punitin ang yung papel
Ang talunin ka di ko na kailangan pa na magpatawa at bumaba sa'yong lebel
Oo, kapatid kita sa division pero ayoko magpigil*

Kasi di naman nagpapatawa si Cain nung pinatay niya si Abel.

c. Rhyming (use of different rhyme schemes)

- Yow, halos apat na taon na pala nung una tayong nagka kilala a
Kamusta na daw sabi ni abra a
Sayang marunong ka na sanang humawak ng espada a
Kaso lang, lalo kang, nag mukhang lesbiyana a
Walang hiya ka nasaan na yung partner mo dati na parang tanga a
wala ka na ngang naiambag sa kultura nagsama kapa a
Tapos sabi nila a
Pagdating kay Topsy D wag daw ako mag titipid ng sobra a
Kasi malaki na daw improvement nya a

- Pero ang aking balita, meron ka daw syotang maganda, a
puta kamukha daw ni DARNA, a
Pero sana lagi mo siyang ingatan, b
dahil 'pag yan naumpog sa bato, sigurado magwa-WONDERWOMAN b

- Sa ibang babae gustong lumamutak a
May asawa ka pa niyan b
Sobrang berde ng iyong utak a
Nilulumot na ba yan? b
Kanta mong Cerberus malaburak a
Hindi naman sa pag mamaselan b
pero bakit ako papasok sa iyong utak a
Eh napaka dumi niyan b

- Ikaw pumayat. a
Kasi pag nagluluto yung asawa mo ng pagkain, siya lang din kumakain. b
Kaya tignan n'yo yung katawan. b
Puro buto yung content. a

2. Morphological

Morphological refers to the general patterns employed by emcees in the selection and formulation of words to be utilized in the delivery of their FlipTop lines.

a. Deletion (removal of morphemes)

1. 'ko for ako
2. to'y for ito ay
3. 'di for hindi
4. 'kala for akala

5. 'kin for akin
6. t'wing for tuwing
7. n'yo for niyo
8. 'tangina for (Filipino term for whore mother)
9. 'tong for itong
10. sa'yo for sa iyo

b. Compounding (combination of two or more words)

1. Batman
2. Cellphone
3. FlipTop
4. Facebook
5. Girlfriend
6. Lastikman
7. Mainstream
8. Nightmare
9. Punchline
10. Soundtrip
11. Threesome

c. Code Switching and Code Mixing

Code-switching and code-mixing are the linguistic features where the change of words happens from one language to another. Most of the time, features and a balanced pace are used to make it easier to understand. Sometimes, code-switching and code-mixing is used to lighten up and create an impact on the message being delivered.

The following lines below illustrate used of code switching and code mixing:

- *Sige ikaw na **celebrity**, ikaw na nasa **TV**
Ikaw na nasa **mainstream** na may mataas na **talent fee**
Pero ako, wala akong paki
I can make my own money gamit ang aking **ability**
and that's the life of a true Emcee!
Hindi kita pinasisikatan Shehyee, tirik ang araw ko
Tanghaling tapat kaya ako mainit sa tao*
- *At kahit nasa Pampanga teritoryo ko to **bitch! You couldn't just walk here**
Walter white jr. **this bitch!** Uwi kang naka **walker**
O kaya, papasabugin ko ulo mo na para bang **walker**
Tapos **career** mo pagbangga mo sa'kin parang si Paul Walker*

DISCUSSION

By making use of Holton's coding process (2007), the selected videos from FlipTop's official page have been analyzed and interpreted to understand the strategies employed by the emcees/rappers in the construction and delivery of their lines, particularly their linguistic features.

Strategies Employed by Emcees

Using the principles of discourse analysis to uncover FlipTop lines, common strategies employed by emcees in constructing their lines can fall into one or more of the following: (1) mental inadequacy, (2) attack on physical attributes, (3) assertion of dominance, (4) comparison to notable personalities, (5) allusion to fictional characters, (6) threats, (7) sexual innuendos, and (8) attack on close relatives/relationships.

In employing one or more of the aforementioned strategies, the general objective remains to be the same, that is to make fun of the opponent, insult them, and in the process, demonstrate that the emcee's skills and abilities are better than the other. This particular finding is also mirrored in the study of Lumabao (2018).

Mavima (2016) notes that battle rap, the basis of FlipTop, is mainly defined by braggadocio. Whether it be self-praising remarks or demeaning lines directed towards the opponent, boasts and brags are the core of FlipTop lines. As such, power and respect, much like the origins of hip-hop and battle rap (Fitzpatrick, 2005), are also central in FlipTop.

As Gansinger et al. (2021) assert, the power of words in battle rap is brutally fierce, blunt, and vulgar. It is therefore not surprising that looking on from the outside, the language of FlipTop (peppered with insults, profanities, sexism, and threats) may be viewed as extremely offensive and obscene. It is important to note, however, that FlipTop takes place before people who fully understand the context and purpose of the language and strategies used by the emcees. As Song (2010) opines, linguistic, situational, and cultural contexts are of primordial importance in understanding any form of discourse, and any attempt to study or analyze discourse without proper understanding of its context is an exercise in futility.

Phonological Features

The structure of FlipTop lines is different from other forms of poetry as it does not follow a fixed/consistent format but also relies on the artistic transition between words. As observed, emcees have the freedom to insult with no boundaries.

FlipTop lines mainly make use of three phonological features (assonance, consonance, and rhyming). Emcees generally utilize these phonological features to add a layer of

artistry and creativity in the delivery of their lines. Additionally, the use of the said phonological features also adds to the general appeal and impact of their lines to be appreciated or rated highly by the audience and the judges, lending a higher chance for them to be adjudged as the winner.

Of important note in the analysis of the phonological features is the presence of rhyming and rhyme schemes. Lumabao (2018) notes that emcees in FlipTop generally display their ability and prowess through the use of rhymes and word games. This can be seen as one important consideration in the selection of certain words over others. Ultimately, it is through these emcees can establish a “flow” of their lines, something that Aleksanyan (2018) defines as the use of rhythm and rhymes that is extremely valuable in conveying the content of their lines, an element that takes center stage to impress the audience.

Morphological Features

Since the choice of words is crucial in the construction of effective and powerful FlipTop lines, emcees generally take into consideration certain morphological features, particularly (1) deletion, (2) compounding, and (3) code switching and code mixing.

The use of deletion and compounding can be seen as largely in consideration, again, of the “flow” of their lines. In particular, deletion is sometimes employed to “save” syllables in an attempt to construct a line that conforms to a structured syllabic pattern. Additionally, compounding (either of the utilized structures of noun-noun, noun-adjective, adjective-adjective, and verb-noun) is also employed to emphasize the words and to highlight/showcase the “flow” of the delivered line (Aleksanyan, 2018).

Code-switching and code-mixing, on the other hand, are utilized to balance the pace and simplify the lines for easier understanding and comprehension by the audience. Sometimes, code-switching or code-mixing is also used to “lighten up” the message being delivered and/or emphasize the message of the lines. This is also echoed in the results of Lumabao (2018).

The features and variations in the language used through code mixing and switching are so closely intertwined and embedded that some emcees use them effortlessly and unconsciously.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Though normally shunned and heavily criticized due to the profanity and sexism in the lines, FlipTop (and by extension, the emcees participating) is in actuality a testament to the differing uses and contexts and dynamism of language. Additionally, FlipTop emcees exhibit their linguistic creativity and poetic prowess in the construction of scathing and rhyming lines.

Though there appear to be several strategies available for use by the emcees in the construction of their lines, the traces and semblances to hip-hop remain; from the dynamics of power and dominance that permeate the themes of the lines, to the use of various phonological and morphological features to showcase and highlight the rhythmic quality of the "flow".

FlipTop, ultimately, is but another form of artistic expression, not too distinct from the traditional Filipino debate form of 'Balagtasan'. There may be structural and content differences, especially since Balagtasan is strictly governed by word usage and is limited to a single topic, but both make use of creative language and are a battle of wits among participants.

As it can still be considered in its formative years, more studies and research should be done to better understand other aspects of this developing form of expression; from a deeper analysis of the consideration of the rhythmic "flow" to a more encompassing survey of emcees. Also, studies can be conducted on several related subject areas, like the differences between pre-written and freestyle battle raps, and the culture being created by FlipTop in cyberspace. In purely linguistic research applications, a semantic and pragmatic differentiation analysis can also be conducted, along with semiotic and/or rhetorical analyses of FlipTop.

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