

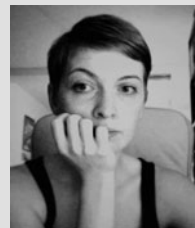
# Rihanna Works Her Multivocal Pop Persona: A Morpho-syntactic and Accent Analysis of Rihanna's Singing Style

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Pop culture provides rich data that demonstrate the complex interplay of World Englishes

## Introduction

Singing is a very dynamic and innovative mode of communication through which artists often express themselves with a set of various voices. Today, pop music circulates across national boundaries and English is the main medium of communication in transnational pop culture. In this special context different varieties of English meet at a high density. Rihanna's single *Work* is an example of this prevalent multivocality in pop music culture. Her language performance attracted public attention of various sorts as she audibly incorporates several Caribbean English Creole (CEC) features. While some critics describe her lyrics as 'gibberish' (cf. Noelliste, 2016), others acknowledge her performance as a 'reclamation of her Barbadian heritage' (Gibson, 2016). The example of Rihanna shows that singers can be transporters of English varieties: she is a Caribbean artist who started a successful career in the US, and whose music today has global reach. Singers, like Rihanna, are thus mobile, transnational linguistic agents. On the one hand, she physically travels the world playing concerts to her audiences. On the other, her persona, music, videos, and further media commodities are part of the global 'mediascape' (Appadurai, 1996). In other words, her products easily spread across the globe and are reproduced, transcending national and social boundaries. New technologies (e.g. smart phones, tablets) and applications (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) facilitate as well



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as accelerate the transnational dissemination of media resources. Moreover, singers show that the linguistic (and cultural) resources as such are mobile. Different language influences are formed into individual linguistic repertoires. Singers often playfully employ certain features to highlight parts of their identity or locate themselves in a particular music genre.

In the last decades sociolinguists have acknowledged that performed language, such as singing, puts transcultural and translinguistic flows on display (Pennycook, 2007). Studies so far have focused on performed accents, hence mainly investigating pronunciation features. We aim to show the complexity of language performances for the highly salient example of Rihanna's *Work*, which inevitably also includes the analysis of morpho-syntactic features. This case study does not only reveal the constituent parts of Rihanna's multivocal persona, but also provides insight into the sociolinguistic interaction of the varieties of English.

## The Sociolinguistics of Singing

### Performed Language

Singers are performers. They are constantly projecting a persona (Coupland, 1988: 139), which is the displayed figure the audience perceives. It can be more or less in congruence with the private person behind the artist, but is still a publicly performed character. Singing, the most crucial and defining part of this projection, is described as 'high performance' (Coupland, 2007: 146–176) because such language performances are planned and rehearsed, stylized communicative events. They are produced explicitly *for* an audience with the aim of entertaining. Along with other modalities such as fashion or music videos, language and specifically '[a]ccent is perhaps the most obvious means by which performers index identity' (Bell & Gibson, 2011: 570) and hence build and maintain their persona. The study of music – or more precisely, of the employment of a specific accent in singing – thus gives insight into the mechanisms of linguistic identity formation.

### Two Trends: American and Going Local

When reviewing sociolinguistic works on the stylisation of accents in singing, two main trends are observable: singers either adopt an 'Americanized' singing style or they 'go local'. Trudgill's seminal study (1983) is commonly considered the starting point for researching the sociolinguistics of singing. He notices that many British artists from the

1950s up to the mid-1970s emulated a somewhat American accent and sets out to investigate possible motivations for this language behaviour. This stylized American accent is characterized by a set of five sound patterns which are supposedly most characteristic of American speech: intervocalic /t/ in *better* as [r] or [d] instead of [t] or [ʔ]; post-vocalic /r/ as in *girl* or *more*; BATH in *dance* or *half* as [æ]; PRICE vowel in *life* as monophthong [a:]; LOT vowel in *body* as unrounded [ɑ:]. This so-called USA-5 model (Simpson, 1999: 345) is a constructed, perception-based accent. Its features do not occur altogether in one single American accent in the US. Trudgill's analysis shows that the actual singing style, rather than being entirely 'American' is better described as a 'hybrid accent' characterized by a mixture of British and prototypical American (and Southern or African American) features. Following LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985; Trudgill, 1983: 155),<sup>1</sup> he ascribes this mixture to acts of conflicting identities which represent singers' multiple affiliations and competing motivations: on the one hand, the US is the cradle of modern pop and rock music. American artists have dominated the music landscape and became role models for other musicians who in turn converged towards them (Trudgill, 1983: 144). On the other hand, the singers analysed are Britons. Moreover, British bands have established themselves as an authority within the music industry (initiated by the Beatlemania) and expressed this new self-perception and self-confidence linguistically. While the use of American features declined, British features, predominantly from working-class accents, gained popularity, especially with the emergence of British Punk music in the mid-1970s (Trudgill, 1983: 154ff).

Simpson (1999: 350–354) adds Halliday's (1978) concepts of tenor, field, and mode of discourse to the discussion. He shows that these artist-specific aspects are crucial for the performer's choice of style and hence add to the complexity of motivations. Their language behaviour is strongly influenced by persona (tenor) and lyrical content (field) which both might demand taking on an alter ego's voice. Additionally, singing-inherent influences (mode) determine the intensity of style-shifting. While performing, an artist can include different modes such as singing or speaking. The more a singer approaches the speaking mode, the closer will the performed accent be to his/her vernacular voice (Simpson, 1999: 360).

More recent studies show that the trend of 'going local' observed by Trudgill perpetuates in modern music and especially in specific genres such as

indie rock and pop, punk, hip hop, or reggae. These are strongly intertwined with subcultural flows that often entail e.g. certain social backgrounds, political views, clothing styles, and linguistic choices which are regarded appropriate for a genre (Trudgill, 1983: 143–144). O’Hanlon (2006) is the first to have observed a shift in the associations of singing accents. While most music genres in Australia seem to follow the ‘ubiquitous American pronunciation model’ (O’Hanlon, 2006: 202), Australian hip hoppers do not accommodate but instead stick to their local voice. They ‘keep it real’ by taking pride in their origins and upholding a close connection with their target audience. Pennycook (2007) shows that such localized versions of hip hop can also be found in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) countries such as Japan. Beal (2009) investigates the British indie rock band the Arctic Monkeys and shows that their frontman sticks to his ‘natural voice’ by exclusively using Sheffield features. The band is well-known for their strong identification with their home city. Beal explains that the associations triggered by the American-influenced singing style have changed throughout the decades. Since it has become virtually omnipresent in popular music, it does not evoke the association ‘American’ or ‘Americanness’ anymore, but instead indexes ‘mainstream music’ (Beal, 2009: 226, cf. Gibson, 2010).<sup>2</sup> This way of singing has become so well-entrenched that it is the default mode for many popular music genres (Gibson & Bell, 2012: 160). This also leads to the assumption that this ‘mainstream singing accent’ is more marketable and reaches a broader audience, which in turn results in financial success. The case of singers ‘going local’ is an active choice against an American-influenced mainstream and towards linguistic and creative independence and authenticity (Gibson & Bell, 2012: 141).

### Rihanna’s Pop Culture Persona

28-year-old Rihanna is a born and raised Barbadian singer-songwriter of international recognition. With support of music producer Evan Rogers she recorded demo tapes which, after an audition, eventually led to DefJam Recordings, an American hip hop label, signing her on a six-album contract in 2005. She introduced herself linguistically as a Caribbean artist with her debut single *Pon de Replay*. The title itself contains two CEC features: the preposition *pon* for *on* and TH-stopping in *de*. Since then Rihanna has become one of the most successful solo artists worldwide. Her music accolades include many number one hits in the US and other

countries, selling more than 200 million tracks worldwide, as well as numerous awards (rihannanow.com). Rihanna is known for repeatedly re-inventing her persona musically and fashion-wise. She switches and mixes genres ranging from reggae and dancehall, through hip hop and R’n’B, and to rock and electro dance music. Her collaborations with renowned artists from various music genres demonstrate this musical versatility: reggae and dancehall performer Elephant Man, US hip hop artists Jay-Z and Eminem, R’n’B star Chris Brown, and Scottish rock band Coldplay, just to name a few. The influencing genres above are also associated with specific performance codes: US hip hop is strongly connected to African American English (AAE), reggae and dancehall singers often include Jamaican or more broadly CEC features, whereas rock and dance mostly use Standard American English (StAmE). Although Rihanna reports that when moving to America she had to ‘adjust her accent’ (TheCelebFactory, 2012) towards an American model in order to be properly understood in interviews and doing official business, she turns out to be versatile linguistically as well. Rihanna incorporates resources from both her musical influences and corresponding linguistic styles to represent and perform her pop-culture identity. Her persona is more than a displayed character created by herself alone. It is composed and influenced by a list of people who are part of the production process (cf. Eberhardt & Freeman, 2015: 313). In *Work* she collaborates with various artists from different musical and ethnic backgrounds. Among her co-writers are hip hop and R’n’B artists and producers from Canada with Jamaican roots, white as well as African Americans. Her co-performer, Drake, is a Canadian artist with African-American and Jewish-Canadian roots. Along with Rihanna, seven artists are credited with creating the single *Work*. All of them are part of constructing and presenting Rihanna’s persona in this single.

### Analysing Rihanna’s Multivocality in *Work*

Rihanna’s *Work* is a multilayered piece of art on different levels of modality. Content-wise the song addresses different levels of *work*: a) working relentlessly for a career and its consequences for a personal life, b) putting *work* into a romantic relationship, or c) the *work* that is put into fulfilling sexual desires. On a linguistic level the single fuses different varieties of English which represent

Rihanna's transnational pop culture persona. All examples given in the text below refer to the transcription of the song in the appendix.

### Morpho-syntactic and Accent Variation

We analyse Rihanna's multivocal linguistic performance in *Work* both on a morpho-syntactic and on an accent level. Bell & Gibson (2011: 570) stress the central role of accent for performances and most sociolinguistic research on music has focused on pronunciation (e.g. Trudgill, 1983; Simpson, 1999) while only more recent corpus studies (e.g. Werner, 2012; Kreyer, 2015) have investigated morpho-syntactic variation in pop songs. However, research on linguistic variation in hip hop (e.g. Lee, 2011) has shown the benefits of including different structural levels of variation in linguistic research on music. In order to illustrate the mixture of different varieties of English in *Work* we identify individual salient features which are typical of specific varieties. In his analysis of performed language in New Zealand broadcasting Bell shows the benefits of such an approach as a successful language performance is often 'more a matter of individual occurrences of salient variables than of quantitative summings and relative frequencies' (1992: 336).

In contrast to other songs by Rihanna, *Work* includes numerous typical morpho-syntactic features of CECs (Kortmann & Lunkenheimer, 2013; Hackert, 2012): the use of *na* as a negator, copula absence (line 10: *you na righteous*); the absence of the inflection {-s} on third singular verbs (line 3: *he see*); the personal pronouns *me* and *him* in subject position (line 6: *me na care if him hurt*); modal auxiliary *hafi* (line 2: *me hafi work*); quotative *se* (line 2: *he se me hafi work*); and the progressive construction *a go* which indicates prospective future meaning (line 5: *when you a go learn*). While some of these features, such as the future marker *a go*, are shared by most CECs, including Barbadian Creole/Bajan (Denny & Belgrave, 2012) which is the local vernacular of Rihanna's home country Barbados, all of them are typical of Jamaican Creole (JC) (Patrick, 2008). JC is the most well-known Creole variety of the Caribbean and is 'one of the globally relevant contact vernaculars' (Mair, 2013: 264) mainly due to the world-wide success and spread of reggae and dancehall music. However, it is not possible definitely to attribute specific features to JC or Bajan because for instance copula omission and third person singular {-s} absence are also typical of AAE (Wolfram, 2008). Rihanna does neither consistently nor

exclusively use CEC grammar but switches back and forth to Standard English morpho-syntax: she uses Standard English case sensitive pronouns (line 26: *I mean who am I to hold your past against you*; line 14: *You took my heart on my sleeve for decoration*), inflections on verbs (line 27: *I just hope that it gets to you*), copula (line 30: *I'm trying babe*), and negation with *do* support (line 23: *Don't leave me stuck here in the streets*). Thus, the morpho-syntactic variation positions Rihanna's multivocal persona in between CEC (most likely Bajan and JC) and StAmE. AAE is another possible influence but Rihanna does not use any morpho-syntactic features exclusive to AAE, only the two features mentioned earlier shared with CEC.

Rihanna's accent variation in *Work* also shows a diverse linguistic repertoire and allows for an even more fine-grained differentiation of linguistic varieties. Similar to the morpho-syntactic level her accent in *Work* is strongly marked by several features typical of Caribbean English and CEC (Roberts, 2007): monophthongization in FACE (line 12: *adoration*; line 13: *patience*; line 14: *decoration*; line 15: *foundation*); word-final (-t, -d) consonant cluster absence (line 9: *dealt, nicest*, 11: *text*, 19: *act*); and TH-stopping, i.e. the realization of TH as an alveolar stop (line 15: *with, the*). The latter two features are also typical of AAE (Edwards, 2008) but again there are no accent characteristics exclusive to AAE in *Work*. Furthermore, her accent is marked by word-initial H-deletion (lines 6, 7, 8: *him*; line 6: *hurt*), a salient feature of JC which distinguishes it from other varieties in the region. Yet again, her performance varies between realizations of non-standard varieties and a StAmE pronunciation (Kretzschmar, 2008): for example, she retains word-initial H in *heart* (lines 13, 14), *hold* (line 26), and *hope* (lines 27, 28, 29), realizes TH as an interdental fricative in *that* (lines 16, 17, 18) and *this*, retains consonant clusters in *believed* (line 12) and *don't* (lines 22, 23), and realizes FACE with an upgliding diphthong in *baby* (line 22), *babe* (line 30), and *say* (line 30). Her accent is also marked by features of the USA-5 model: she deletes /t/ in *wanted* (line 16), she realizes the two BATH tokens *chance* (line 24) and *past* (line 26) as [æ] as well as the LOT vowels in *all* (line 12 and 16) and *wanted* (line 16) with an unrounded fronted vowel. She monophthongizes the PRICE vowel in *recognize* (line 30). In words such as *like* (line 8) and *nicest* (line 9) she also shows the tendency to elongate [a], although this partial monophthongisation can also result from singing-inherent modifications (Coupland, 2011: 575).

Apart from in *never* (line 17) her accent is consistently rhotic, which is a further characteristic of StAmE but also of Bajan, the only fully rhotic Creole in the Caribbean (Wells, 1982: 570). Particularly in the chorus Rihanna's pronunciation is marked by a high degree of nasalization and an under-articulation of consonants, two further features which together produce a typical Bajan sound pattern (Roberts, 2007: 96–97). Furthermore, Rihanna realizes *act* and *it* (line 8) with a glottal stop, another salient characteristic of a Bajan accent (Wells, 1982: 584).

The analysis shows that Rihanna's performance varies mainly between CECs, mostly JC and Bajan, and StAmE while AAE is another potential influence given her hip hop affiliations. This multivocal variation is not expressed randomly, but reveals certain patterns. Some passages in the song correlate more intensely with a Caribbean English voice while others lean towards an American English sound. Bajan accent features occur most densely in the chorus. Through the repetitive structure of the chorus the individual words 'blur into each other', which results in assimilation of sounds and the elision of word-final consonants: this reinforces the Bajan impression. The CEC accent and morpho-syntactic features occur most consistently in the chorus and the first verse. Rihanna's Caribbean voice leans more towards speaking and sounds rather mumbling and blurred in these parts of the song whereas her singing style is very clear in the last two verses, which are mainly produced with a StAmE accent. On a content level, these last two verses focus on the work put into romantic relationships, whereas the chorus and the first verse are more ambiguous as they address career aspects of work with sexually loaded metaphors. This distribution shows that while Rihanna uses many different varieties of English in her performance, she does not blend them completely: Rihanna's multivocal persona is constructed by the co-existence and only partial overlap of diverse linguistic features from different varieties of English.

### Other Levels of Modality

On a musical level *Work* is similarly complex and rich in influences as Rihanna's linguistic choices. It combines elements from Jamaican dancehall, pop music, contemporary R'n'B, and hip hop. This both multivocal and at the same time 'multimusical' impression is supported and even strengthened by the song's visual representation. One of the two videos produced for this song is set in a Caribbean restaurant in Toronto, called *The Real Jerk*, and

portrays a dancehall event. Rihanna, at the centre of attention, is staged as a 'Jamaica Dancehall Queen' (Carlos, 2016). The setting is dominated by the traditional pan-African colours black, red, green, and yellow which are strongly associated with the Caribbean or, more precisely, Jamaica, reggae, and Rastafari. Rihanna and others are performing typical dancehall queen moves such as wining, i.e. 'dance erotically by swinging the hips vigorously while thrusting the buttocks back and forth' (Allsopp, 2003: 606). Men and women are joined in well-known, practiced dancehall move routines. We see Jamaican (Red Stripe) and Trinidadian (Carib) beer brands and the preparation as well as smoking of marijuana cigarettes. Also, jerk chicken – a Jamaican specialty – is being served in the background. In comparison, the other video version is free from any Caribbean references – except maybe Rihanna's wining moves, but those can be seen in many videos by other non-Caribbean artists as well.

### Rihanna Works Her Co-existing Identities

In her single *Work* Rihanna mixes different linguistic and cultural identities to underline and express her multivocal pop music persona. Trudgill (1983) describes this kind of hybrid accent as a result of 'conflicting identities.' Our analysis, however, shows that in Rihanna's case it is more appropriate to speak of 'co-existing' identities. She seems to consciously and skilfully play with the linguistic resources that reflect certain parts of her identity and represent different musical genres. Rihanna combines two trends: she goes both local and American. The analysis detects Bajan and JC (or more generally CEC), StAmE, and possibly AAE features on an accent and morpho-syntactic level. Her use of different varieties of English is inconsistent, but not unstructured. The observable correlation between the choice of variety(/ies) and specific parts in the song can be explained with the different degrees of singing (modes of discourse) Rihanna exhibits in certain passages. Following Simpson (1999), singing-inherent influences play a role in singers using their vernacular voice in rather spoken passages and an American-influenced style when singing. In Rihanna's case, the closer she gets to the speaking mode the stronger her Caribbean background determines the voice. The higher the degree of singing, the more she accommodates to an American singing-style. This distribution of varieties also corresponds to the content of the song



(field of discourse): she uses StAmE for expressing the romantic aspect of love while her Caribbean voice describes work in a more sexually suggestive way. The language performance and the video exoticize and sexualize the Caribbean.

Public reactions show that *Work* stirred up attention. Especially the typically Bajan tendency towards nasalization and under-articulation of consonants led everyday listeners to dismiss Rihanna's singing as unintelligible and 'gibberish.' Additionally, many of the CEC morpho-syntactic features might not be very prominent and easily intelligible for non-CEC speakers. Therefore, the use of StAmE features may also indicate Rihanna's intention to address her main target audience, which is perhaps not well-versed in CEC. Switching back and forth between CEC and StAmE features allows her to express her Bajan identity while at the same time being intelligible for an international audience. Nevertheless, the impression that *Work* is devoted to her Caribbean roots prevails. Some salient features that have been established by reggae musicians over decades clearly trigger associations of 'Caribbeanness.' Additionally, the 'dancehall video' straightforwardly evokes further typical Caribbean modalities and complements the linguistic observation. Her Bajan features, on the other hand, probably appeal to no more than a small in-group of Bajan speakers.

Pennycook (2007) and others (e.g. O'Hanlon, 2006; Gibson, 2010) have mostly concentrated on locally popular bands when investigating language trends and shifting indexicalities in music. Rihanna, however, is a transporter of English varieties on a different scale. She is a multifaceted mainstream artist, a fashionable pop persona and global player. Her language performances are

work work work ajebebnslsnwbjwpajdb  
work work work adbejkwbsbdbjdjs dur  
dur dur



Figure 1. Meme about Rihanna's performance in *Work*<sup>3</sup>

determined by her multilingual background and ethnic roots. Her products, such as the single *Work*, are part of the mediascape and, due to her persona's popularity, have global reach. They give insight into the dynamics of global Englishes. Especially in music vernacular varieties such as JC or AAE gain worldwide reach and prestige (Mair, 2013: 256, 264). Public reactions show that only insiders – mostly CEC speakers – recognize and appreciate her Caribbean voice. Others comment and mock Rihanna's voice via social networks and other mainstream media, or add e.g. memes to the discourse. Blommaert defines memes as 'a particular multimodal semiotic genre of online discourse — an image accompanied by a caption — specifically *made for virality*' (2015: 18). The popular meme below (Figure 1) shows that the specifically Bajan-sounding parts with CEC morpho-syntax of Rihanna's performance are unintelligible to many listeners and even equalled to a nonsensical sequence of sounds. Clearly, this meme does not only make fun of Rihanna's singing style; it also shows the audience's ignorance towards her Bajan accent CEC morpho-syntax and its misinterpretation as 'gibberish' (cf. Noelliste, 2016).

Sociolinguistic research on the language of globalization and World Englishes should emphasize the importance of popular culture products and their interplay with sociolinguistic change. They show a very dense co-existence of different varieties and styles. Such cultural products have the potential to reach global audiences and give linguists the opportunity to study effects and reactions by listeners, e.g. by studying public reactions and attitudes in the media. Such language performances, creative, poetic, and consciously produced, are less constrained by national borders, speech communities, and standard language ideologies than other communicative contexts. Thus data from transnational pop culture, e.g. unique performers' voices as well as people's reactions in response to them, open up a small window which gives insight into the global variation of English today.

## Notes

1 LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985) analyze linguistic choices of individuals particularly with respect to multilingual communities, giving insight into the speaker's language behaviour towards a linguistic model. They describe a multilayered situation of conflicting identities in which language use is modelled after the group/s speakers want to identify with.

2 Gibson (2010) confirms that also for New Zealand singers the American-influenced singing accent has

widely become the default pronunciation when performing.

3 The meme about Rihanna's performance in *Work* was retrieved from <http://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/30102/1/rihanna-s-patois-and-your-mis-informed-memes>, 28. Oct. 2016.

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AAE a third and fourth level of transcription is provided. The third level is a gloss, i.e. an analytical explanation of the individual units of the line. The fourth level is a translation to Standard English. Grammatical information in the gloss is given as abbreviations in small caps: PRO pronoun, SG singular, PL plural, PRO pronoun, S subject, O object, POSS possessive, QUOT quotative, MOD modal, CONJ conjunction, PREP preposition, FUT future, PROG progressive, NEG negation, INDEF indefinite, ART article, 1/2/3 person.

## Appendix: Transcription

The transcription contains four levels. The first level gives an orthographic transcription of the lyrics. The second level presents a phonetic transcription. If the line contains features of CEC or

[Chorus]

(1) Work work work work work work  
wɜ:k wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ:k

(2) He se me hafi work work work work work work  
ə se mi afi wɜ:k wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ:k  
3SG-S-PRO QUOT 1SG-S-PRO MOD work  
'he says I have to work'

(3) he see me do me dirt dirt dirt dirt dirt dirt  
ə si mi du mi dɜ: dɜ: dɜ: dɜ: dɜ: dɜ:  
3SG-S-PRO see 1SG-O-PRO do 1SG-POSS-PRO dirt  
'he sees me doing my dirt'

(4) so me put in work work work work work work  
sə mi pʊt ɪn wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ: wɜ:  
CONJ 1SG-S-RRO PUT PREP work  
'so I put in work'

(5) when you a go learn learn learn learn learn learn  
wɛn ju ə gə lɜ:n lɜ:n lɜ:n lɜ: lɜ: lɜ:  
when 2SG-S-PRO FUT learn  
'when are you going to learn'

(6) Me na care if him hurt hurt hurt hurt hurting  
mi nə kɛr ɪf ɪm ɜ:t ɜ:t ɜ: ɜ: ɜ:tm  
1SG-S-PRO NEG care if 3SG-S-PRO hurt hurt-PROG  
'I don't care whether he is hurt'

[Verse 1]

(7) dry me a desert him no time to have you lurking  
dɪr Mi a dɪsɜ:t ɪm nə taɪm tə hæv ju lɜ:kɪm  
dry 3SG-S-PRO PROG desert 3SG-O-PRO NEG time PREP have 2SG-O-PRO lurk-PROG  
'I am bored / I am deserting him / I don't have any time to have you hanging around'

(8) Him a go act like him na like it  
ɪm ə gə æ? la:ɪ? ɪm nə lɑ:k ɪ?  
3SG-S-PRO FUT act like 3SG-S-PRO NEG like 3SG-O-PRO  
'he is going to act as if he does not like it'



- (9) You know I dealt with you the nicest  
 jə no aɪ del wɪd jə də na:ɪsɪs  
 ‘you know I dealt with you in the nicest possible way’
- (10) Nobody touch me you na righteous  
 nəbədɪ tʌtʃ mɪ jə na raɪtʃəs  
 INDEF-PRO touch 3SG-O-PRO 2SG-S-PRO NEG righteous  
 ‘nobody touches me / you are not righteous’

- (11) No bother text me in a crisis  
 Na badə teks mɪ ɪn ə kɹaɪsəs  
 NEG bother text 3SG-O-PRO PREP INDEF-ART crisis  
 ‘don’t bother to text me when you are in a crisis’

[Verse 2]

- (12) I believed all of your dreams adoration  
 aɪ bæli:vɪd əl əv jəˈ dɹi:mz ədɔːrɪʃən
- (13) you took my heart and my keys and my patience  
 jə tʊk maɪ hɑ:ɪt ən maɪ ki:z ən maɪ peɪʃəns
- (14) you took my heart on my sleeve for decoration  
 jə tʊk maɪ hɑ:ɪt ə:n maɪ sli:v fə dekeɪʃən
- (15) you mistaken my love I brought for you for foundation  
 jə mɪˈstekən maɪ lʌv aɪ brɔ:ɪt fə ju fə faʊnˈdeɪʃən
- (16) all that I wanted from you was to give me  
 əl ðæt aɪ wənəd frəm ju wəz tu ɡɪv mi:
- (17) something that I never had something that you never seen  
 sʌmθɪŋ ðæt aɪ neva hæd sʌmθɪŋ ðæt ju: neva si:n
- (18) something that you never been mh  
 sʌmθɪŋ ðæt ju: neva bi:n m̩:
- (19) but I wake up and act like nothing’s wrong  
 bət aɪ weɪk ʌp ən æ? laɪ nʌnɪŋz ɹɔŋ
- (20) just get ready fi  
 dʒʌs ɡe? redi fi  
 just get ready PREP  
 ‘just get ready to’

[Chorus]

- (21) before the tables turn turn turn turn turn turn  
 bɪˈfɔ: də teɪblz tʃn tʃn tʃ tʃ tʃ tʃn

[Verse 3]

- (22) beg you something please baby don’t you leave  
 beg ju: sʌmθɪŋ pli:z beɪbi doʊnt ju li:v
- (23) don’t leave me stuck here in the streets uhu  
 doʊnt li:v mi: stʌk hɪə ɪn ðə sti:ts əhə

- (24) If I get another chance to  
 if ai get ə'nʌðə tʃæns tu:
- (25) I Will never no never neglect you  
 ai wil nevə no nevə nə'glekt you
- (26) I mean who am I to hold your past against you  
 ai mi:n hu: əm ai tə hoʊld jə' pæs əgenst ju:
- (27) I Just hope that it gets to you  
 ai dʒʌst hoʊp ðæt it gets tə ju:
- (28) I hope that you see this through  
 ai hoʊp ðæt ju: si: ðis θru:
- (29) I hope that you see this true  
 ai hoʊp ðæt ju: si: ðis tru:
- (30) what can I say please recognize I'm trying babe  
 wat kæn ai sei pli:z rekəgnə:z aɪm traɪɪŋ beɪb
- (31) I hafi  
 ai afi  
 1SG-S-PRO MOD  
 'I have to'  
 [Chorus]
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