

The Humour of Sociolects and Idiolects among Heterogeneous Audiences in Contemporary Nigerian Stand-up Comedies

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ABSTRACT

Stand-up comedy, a trans-tribal and gender-equality profession among talented Nigerian youths, is posed with different linguistic barriers in communication exchange between tribal performers and their heterogeneous audience and between intertribal performers and homogeneous audiences because of cultural differences. In Southwest Nigeria, the Yoruba call it "Efe" and "Apara;" Southeast, the Igbo, "Njakiri;" the North, Hausa/Fulani, "Yan Kama" and 'Waman Sariki. Earlier studies have focused on its entertainment aspects, disregarding its underlying intercultural values and mono-national speech act. Therefore, this study examines the use of the mono-national speech act of Pidgin-sociolect and Pidgin-idiolect (catchphrases and withering scorn) used by Nigerian stand-up comedians in live performances to address linguistic barriers and foster communication exchange between performers and heterogeneous audiences. This is in a bid to create national unity, promote love and foster mutual intelligibility among the heterogeneous audience. Schechner's Performance Theory was used to interrogate performance. Data from live recordings of purposively selected Nigerian Stand-up comedians: Ayo Makun (AY), Helen Paul, Godwin Komone (Gordons), Ahamefula Igwemba (Klint da Drunk), and Aboki, were used. They underwent a performance analysis.

KEYWORDS

Sociolect; idiolect; stand-up comedy; humour; audience

INTRODUCTION

Adekunle (2020: 9) observes that stand-up comedy performances have emerged as a fresh comedy subgenre with extensive global viewership. It creates an atmosphere of laughter in which the audience releases bottled-up emotions (Adekunle 2017: 28). According to Adekunle (2021: 1), it prompts laughter, offers comfort, and brings joy to its viewers. It is a humorous performance (Adekunle 2022: 76). Stand-up is ambivalent laughter preserves for playtime (Nugent 2022: 37). It is discursive humour in tourism (Topler 2022: 62). It is a gender-based analysis (Owen 2022: 147). It is a humour of jurisprudential shows of European and North American courts (Alkiviadou 2022: 50). To Adekunle (2021: 1), stand-up comedy arises as a reflection of the society from which it originates. It is a satirical show (Adekunle 2014: 69). It is a live performance by solo or duet performers before a live audience (Adekunle 2021: 9). Nwankwo (2015: 1), from a historical traditional narrative point of view, reveals that stand-up comedy is a tribal show among the major tribes in Nigeria: Yoruba, Ibo, and Hausa. He further explains that stand-up comedy is a multi-linguistic and intra-cultural value between tribal performers and their homogenous audience.

Nwankwo does not establish stand-up comedy as an intercultural show in his view about stand-up comedy. Filani (2015) examines stand-up comedy to be a mere humorous activity of performer-audience participation without taking into account the best linguistic strategies in which performance could better interaction between the performers and their intertribal audiences. Additionally, Schwarz (2010: 9) asserts that stand-up comedy served as a form of entertainment during Medieval English drama intermissions while awaiting renowned theater troupes to present the main performance expected by the audience. In this context, Schwarz views stand-up comedy presentations as an exclusive cultural activity within English society, without recognizing its global prevalence. Conversely, Harbidge (2011: 28) contends that stand-up comedy constitutes a live performance that delves into the interplay between the comedian and the audience, as well as the dynamic communication interactions among the audience members. This engaging platform is designed to evoke laughter. He thinks that comic show is an intra-cultural experience that is solely predicated on an intra-comedian-audience relationship. His account of narration failed to acknowledge that a stand-up comic is an intercultural narrative that goes beyond a mere local oral narrative. Adekunle (2014) largely examines satiric linguistic narration of a particular society that is deeply directed towards lampooning and correcting the social ills of such a society. He observes satiric devices employed by stand-up comedians in local society. Ajaye (2002: 10) discusses the various responsibilities undertaken by stand-up comedians during a stage performance, including authentic expression, candor, presentation, well-timed delivery, stage charisma, focus, visual cues, fluency, and sound effects. However, Ajaye's analysis does not take into account the vital factor of shared linguistic comprehension between the performers and their audience. Limon (2002: 5) interrogates stand-up comedy from comedians' skill acquisition. He views stand-up comedians should possess the spirit of incorrigibility and indispensability in stage management. He overlooks the significance of the audience's role in theatrical performances. He does not give the audience a prominent role in mutual linguistic interaction on the stage show. Raskin (1984: 30) suggests three possible ways of making humour appeal to the audience, namely cognitive-perceptual, social-behaviour, and psycho-analytical. These concepts of Raskin are too vague, because of his hasting generalization. He does consider the linguistic medium in which the concepts could communicate better to the audience. Tofaya (2009: 12) suggests that stand-up comedy represents a refined form of language, distinctly portraying mono-cultural experiences. His comedic assertion fails to see stand-up comedy from the interlanguage perspective of communication. Therefore, this study investigates interlanguage strategies of sociolect and idiolect of contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedians use to address linguistic barriers and foster communication exchange between performers and audiences in comic shows.

Significance

The study investigates how interlanguage strategies of sociolect and idiolect of Pidgin foster mutual linguistic interaction among heterogeneous audiences in Nigerian stand-up comedy which is just evolving. The interlanguage strategies of sociolect and idiolect help to break linguistic barriers, foster communication exchange, and, at the same time, promote mono-national speech act, intercultural values, and diversity in unity in and outside stand-up comedy shows in Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODS

Data comprise recordings of live performances captured on digital video discs of the purposively selected contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedians: Ayo Makun (AY), Helen

Paul in Southwest Nigeria; Godwin Komone (Gordons), Ahamefula Igwemba (Klint da Drunk), Southeast; Aboki, Northern Nigeria. The purposively selected digital recordings are based on their interlanguage's choice of words (sociolect/idiolect), informing sociological realities (intercultural values) and satiric styles (unshielded catchphrases and withering scorns). Based on the nature of data collection, Schechner's Performance theory was employed to analyze the linguistic actions of intertribal performers and the underlying reasons for their significant appeal to heterogeneous audiences. The data are subjected to performance analysis, with a special focus on interlinguistic strategies of sociolect and idiolect in contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedies.

Richard Schechner's Performance Theory

Schechner's performance theory encompasses all human activities, aligning with the societal norms and regulations of various cultures. It serves as a mirror that reflects and distorts the everyday actions of human existence. This encompasses ceremonial practices, ritual enactments, animal hunting, theatrical exhibitions, cinematic creations, dramas, games, sports, scripted plays, dances, and music. According to Schechner, the term "performance" is comprehensive in scope (Schechner 2002: xiv). Historical occurrences, artistic displays, and speculative concepts all fall under the umbrella of performance. These underlying structures encompass the entire process, from preparations involving training, workshops, and rehearsals, to the satisfaction of the audience, and the subsequent social and aesthetic impact on society (Schechner 2002: xiv-xv).

In the context of this study, Schechner's Performance Theory serves to uncover the sequential layers of actions that trigger laughter among the spectators. It emphasizes a heightened sense of authenticity and reality compared to ordinary experiences. The amalgamation of theatrical music, songs, costumes, impersonation, dialogues, spectacle, and other non-verbal communicative rituals constitutes the dramatic elements that elicit laughter from the audience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic Strategies of Homogenous Audience among Three Major Tribes in Nigeria

Language barriers have disintegrated and disconnected performers and their intertribal audiences in Nigeria in stand-up comedy live performances. Many intertribal audiences find it difficult to access and understand the oral narrative styles of their mono-tribal performers who came from a particular linguistic background and culture different from theirs. The tribal performers only localize and tie their narratives to a mono-tribal experience and mono-socio-cultural and political scenes at the expense of national interests. For instance, in Southwest Nigeria, the Yoruba call it "Efe" and "Apara"; in Southeast, the Igbo, "Njakiri;" the North, Hausa/Fulani, "Yan Kama" and "Waman Sariki. As a result of this, their mono-tribal comedies lack mutual intelligibility and likewise promote ethnic sentimentality, and tribal division within and outside stand-up comedy shows among intertribal audiences in Nigeria. In an attempt to solve the linguistic barriers, some tribal performers forcefully wanted their intertribal audiences to learn their native languages in their stand-up performances to understand their shows. Despite this, the attempt failed because the tribal performers failed to fully consider their intertribal audiences' mother tongues in their shows for mutual understanding.

Interlinguistic Strategies of Sociolects and Idiolects in Nigerian Standup Comedy

Investigation on language interaction of stand-up in Nigeria has revealed the interlanguage strategies of Pidgin sociolect and idiolect employed by contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedians in their live performances. The interlanguage strategies are constructed from words, sounds, and body languages of multiple languages and cultural differences of the intertribal audiences. Some of the interlanguage strategies observed in their stand-up comedy shows are English (superstrate, the language of colonials) and Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa (substrate, the languages of the indigenous people in Nigeria). Both strategies are a product of code mixing and code switching linguistic items of sociolects (social status) and catchphrases and withering scorns of idiolects (varieties particular to individuals) in contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedies. Sociolects are varieties of a language determined by the social status of the users, while idiolects are a totality of the features of linguistic usage peculiar to an individual (Adeyanju, 2007; Yunus, 2001, Quir. & Greenbaum, 1987; Kachru, 1985; Wallwork, 1980). Some of the code-mixing in the performance above are:

Sentence Construction

- i. Yoruba: Awon boys wakawaka on the country level (English: boys, on the country level; Awon (those);
- ii. Igbo: wakawaka (travel), you na sabi the show (English: you, show; Igbo: Na sabi (know))
- iii. Hausa: I no get wahala (English: I, no, get; Hausa: Wahala (trouble).

Words (Stage names of performers):

- i. Yoruba: Maleka (angel), Elenu (orator), Aje Baba (wizard), Lepacious Bose (lepa, a Yoruba name that takes a suffix of English "cious". It is intentionally used to provoke laughter from the audience. It means a fat person. Bose, a Yoruba name); Seyilaw (compound name);
- ii. Hausa: Aboki (means friend)
- ii. Pidgin English: I Go Dye, I Go Save, Klint De Drunk.

Code Switching (Constructed from the three major tribes in Nigeria):

- iii. Sebi, you people were here (Yoruba: Sebi, English: You people were here),
- vi. Abi, you no see am (Yoruba: abi; Pidgin English: You no see am),
- iv. I maghi i he ana-ako, you talk am for room (Igbo: I maghi i he ana-ako (I am ignorant of the situation),
- vi. Pidgin English: you talk am for room),
- vii. See yourself, I here anaghi eme ya (English: See yourself, Igbo: I hear anaghi eme ya (means she is never shame of herself/actions).

Unshielded catchphrases from comedic social contexts:

- viii. Yahoosay puff-puff (fraudster's puff-puffs),
- ix. Alleluia (religious term used to arouse the audience's interests),
- x. I con laff (I laugh),
- xi. Medicinal laffta (medicinal laughter),
- xii. Comedy Klinik (comedy clinic),
- xiii. Naija (Nigeria),
- xiv. Oyinbo (the Whites) and

- xv. Nite (night) of a thousand laugh.
- xvi. Withering scorns are: Light no dey dey for naija (eclectic power supply in Nigeria),
- xvii. Asewo (means a prostitute in Yoruba directed to lampoon to societal acts of immoralities),
- xviii. Na today (sarcastic word uses to ridicule irregular practices in Nigeria),
- xix. Nigeria na borrow, borrow and chop chop (scornful phrases for Nigeria's debt habit and corrupt practices),
- xx. You no get shame (meaning you are a shameless person) and cars no fit drive well for naija (it means that Nigerian roads are badly constructed and full of potholes).

CONCLUSION

the investigation revealed that Pidgin (of sociolect and idiolect) becomes the interlanguage of stand-up comedy shows in Nigeria for mutual understanding and interaction between intertribal performers and intertribal audiences. It is also observed that stand-up comedy performances have become a speech community of Pidgin (sociolect/idiolect) which helps to promote national unity, break linguistic barriers and, at the same time, uphold mono-linguistic acts in the country. Hence, according to Adeyanju (2011: vii), the undeniable presence of language in every facet of human enterprise is indisputable, and no substantial undertaking can be achieved without the essential role of language. To Apete (1985:199), language is social interaction. Stubbs (1983: 1) asserts that language is the product of social context. Language is an instrument of socialization (Fowler 1986: 19).

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Appendix

AY:

Now I need to advise Nigerian Musicians now, very important, very important. Why I need to advise them, some of dem dey make money, instead of them to invest like "real estate", do something, invest in the future, or going into profitable business, for where! Big cars na him dem dey buy full for everywhere. Now, I no pray for bad things to happen, if bad thing happened... You know wetin I dey try talk be say, make una warn them, beg them; them be your friends, because one day, anything fit happen. You just see Olu Maintain for road (dramatizing on the stage how the musicians will be hawking goods on the roads to passers-by and commuters) saying: "Awon boys kawaka on the country level. Ejo ejami. Yahoosay puff-puff. E bami ra Yahoosay puff-puff (boys sell the puff-puff, because of poor economy recession, please, buy my Yahoosay's puff-puff)". Or you go see D-Banji for road say: "John Jackson, fi ile, moni kofisile, gbabe, if you are still sitting there without buying this biscuit, you are sitting on a long thing, ebi mapaniku (I will be starved to death). Or you see somebody like P-square. P-square feel enter road saying: "Ladies and gentlemen, please, join us. Yes, this dome-and-do-you condom. Buy your do-me and do-you condom, very good for browning. It will help your future.

Klint De Drunk:

[Trembling and weeping as he recounts the incident that led to his mistreatment before Basket Mouth and the Mobile Police.] The young boy emerged from this spot, and as he was approaching, I failed to notice him. You might have asked me twice, at the very least. [After this third dramatic episode, he resumes his introduction to outline what the audience can expect in the fourth act.] That's the Mobile Police, but an army slap is an entirely different level of slap. When an army personnel slaps you, you don't attempt to reason with the soldier; you explain to others. And while you're recounting the incident to others, the soldier might call you back. Upon your return, you'll address him with those two formal words: "SIR." These words tend to be excessively used in a sentence, to the point that the sentence itself loses its original meaning. Allow me to illustrate my point. [In this fourth act, Basket Mouth assumes the role of a "Soldier Man," while Klint De Drunk portrays a Civilian. The scene commences as Klint De Drunk confronts Basket Mouth, the Soldier.] [Facing Basket Mouth] I happen to be the brother of the Major-General. I guarantee that you'll hear about this. You're about to be sent back to your village. You'll transform into a farmer because I am prepared to deal with you. [Following this intense exchange, Basket Mouth, playing the role of the Soldier, delivers a resounding slap to Klint De Drunk's face. Klint De Drunk reacts with lively movements and gestures in response to the forceful slap, and then he turns to the audience to explain the altercation that led to the quarrel between him and the soldier.] So, weren't you all present when the boy emerged? Did he see me? Did I see him? Did he slap me right here?

Basket Mouth:

Naija eh! you know! It's truly undeniable, whether we acknowledge it or not, that Nigeria stands as the foremost country in Africa. This isn't a mere jest; it's a fact that warrants serious consideration. Take a look at it closely. Over in the United States, there's a constant barrage of natural disasters. Tornadoes, hurricanes left and right, earthquakes - it's a never-

ending cycle. Snow piles up on streets, causing traffic chaos and accidents. And then there's Naija, where our only natural disasters seem to be misgovernance and those pesky potholes. Now let's talk about the USA. They go on and create these new cities, envision a Dubai-level transformation. Picture this: a new city. You can only imagine the hefty price tag; imagine the amount of dollars exchanged to bring it to life. A whopping 22 billion dollars allocated to construct this New City. And here's the twist, they're not just halfway into the project; they're seeing it through to completion. Now let's contrast that with our reality. We had 16 billion dollars earmarked for the power sector, specifically NEPA. And what did we get? A situation worse than what we had before. NEPA's power supply situation barely even improved. I'm telling you, it's a dire state of affairs. It's as if Lagos, the entire expanse of Nigeria, has been turned into one giant nightclub. Look around you, even here in Lagos, a consistent power supply is a rarity. It's not because of any perceived wrongdoing; it's the result of the bureaucratic quagmire they've created in their offices. And that's why we often find ourselves in the dark.

Helen Paul:

After a span of two or three years, she became pregnant and gave birth to two or three children.

Then, her friend, Olu Oyinbo, who had lived abroad [a been-to, referring to the first woman], returned. Oyinbo said to the second woman, "You haven't lost your sanity; you still look beautiful, even more so." The second woman replied, "I've been waiting for the madness to set in. First child, second child, third child, and still no sign of madness." To which the first woman responded, "We must revisit the herbalist. Please accompany me back."

Subsequently, both women returned to the herbalist's place. At Baba's dwelling, the second woman addressed him, "Baba, you told me I would go mad if I sought to conceive. My friend said she couldn't have children, but now she's seeking the same blessing." Baba retorted that she had indeed gone mad, though she was oblivious to it. Perplexed, she protested, "I've never experienced madness, sir." Baba counteracted, "I say you've been mad." She questioned, "Oh?" Baba explained, "Were there not instances when you woke up in the middle of the night?" She responded, "No." Baba inquired further, "When your child cried, did the child specifically instruct you to awaken?" She again replied, "No." Baba continued, "Yet you rose of your own accord?" She conceded, "Yes, I did." Baba pressed on, "Is that not madness? Moreover, during your pregnancy, didn't you engage in bouts of vomiting [illustrates] for no apparent reason? Isn't that madness?" She justified, "Well, I was feeling nauseous." Baba asserted, "You've exhibited madness."

The first woman expressed remorse, "Oh, I apologize. I didn't realize that's the type of madness he was referring to." Baba responded, "My dear, it's too late; you can't be considered mad anymore." He then proceeded to provide examples, "As a mother, when you witness someone reprimanding your child, you intervene, threatening, 'If you dare lay a finger on Bilike again, I will unleash my wrath upon you. I'm not kidding, I'll deal with you.' Is that not madness? On the day of inter-house sports, you stand in the scorching sun, cheered on by the school, 'Come on, parents, race for your children!' And in a race, you dash forth without any prizes to offer, except perhaps some plastic trinkets. Isn't that madness? Yet, we embrace this madness today. Mummy Patience..."