LASU JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES (LASUJOH)

A publication of:

LASU Journal of Humanities (LASUJOH)

Volume 14, 2020 Edition

SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES

(Published by the Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria), the LASU Journal of Humanities encourages submissions from a variety of theoretical standpoints and from different disciplines—especially those that traditionally belong to the all-encompassing "Faculty of Arts" including, however, other areas with which the Faculty has affiliation: anthropology, cultural studies, folklore, media studies, popular culture, communication, sociology and political science.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

- **Articles**

Authors should submit research articles of (maximum) 10-20 A4 pages, double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman type, in accordance with the MLA or APA style, and include an abstract of not more than 100 words and a "Works Cited" section. Authors should email their articles as Microsoft Word (version 97-2000 or later) format attachment to: dean-arts@lasu.edu.ng

- **Journal Flyer/Call For Paper:**

Every article for publication must be accompanied by a processing fee of Ten Thousand Naira only in cash or by cheque payable to the Faculty Wema Bank Account: LASU FAC Arts Research, Publications & Conference Account Number: 0240791717. Please request a receipt or written acknowledgement for all such payments..

- **Illustrations**

If an article is selected for publication, electronic copies of accompanying illustrations, photographs and diagrams must be provided, as well as all necessary captions. Permission to publish images must be secured by the author. Uncompressed JPEG/PDF file (300 dpi resolution) is the preferred format for all electronic copies. Electronic copies must be sent as e-mail attachments to: dean-arts@lasu.edu.ng

- Warning—Footnotes are absolutely prohibited

    Journal Address: LASU Journal of Humanities
    c/o The Dean, Faculty of Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo
    Lagos, Nigeria. e-mail: lasujournalofhumanities@lasu.edu.ng

- Subscription—The Journal is published twice annually although submissions are accepted throughout the year

Contributors

1. Aande, Simeon Iember
Dept. of Religion & Philosophy,
University of Mkar,
Benue State, Nigeria.

2. Adegbindin, Omotade
Department of Philosophy
University of Ibadan
Ibadan

3. Ajakah, John Chukwuma
Faculty of Humanities, Social &
Mgt. Sciences,
West African Union University
Cotonou, Bénin Republic

4. Apuuivom, Daniel Bem
Dept. of Religion & Philosophy,
University of Mkar,
Gboko, Benue State.

5. Balogun, Badrudeen Adesina
Dept. of Religious Studies
Ekiti State University
Ado Ekiti, Nigeria

6. Bamgbose, Ganiu Abisoye
Dept. of English
Lagos State University
Ojo, Lagos

7. Bamisile, Sunday Adetunji
Dept. of Foreign Languages
Lagos State University
Ojo

8. Bello, Mufutau Olusola
Dept. of Religious Studies
Ekiti State University
Ado Ekiti, Nigeria

9. Fayemi, Ademola Kazeem
Dept. of Philosophy
University of Lagos
Akoka, Lagos

10. Filani, Ibukun
Augustine University
Epe, Lagos, Nigeria

11. Houenon, Casimir
IBB University Lapai
Niger State

12. Hunjo, Henry Jedidiah
Dept. of English
Lagos State University
Lagos, Nigeria

13. Inyaregh, Abel Aor
Dept. of Religious Studies,
National Open University of
Nigeria,
Jabi, Abuja

14. Loko, Olugbenga Olanrewaju
Dept. of Theatre Arts & Music
Lagos State University, Ojo

15. Macaulay-Adeyelure, Olawunmi
    Dept. of Philosophy
    Lagos State University, Ojo
    Nigeria

16. Ndeche, Chinyere C.
    Spiritan University
    Nneochi, Abia State

17. Ochiai, Takehiko
    Professor in African Studies &
    International Relations,
    Faculty of Law, Ryukoku
    University, Japan

18. Olómù, Oyèwolé Ọlamide
    Dept. of African Languages,
    Literature & Communication Arts
    Lagos State University
    Ọ̀jọ́

19. Ọ̀nádípẹ̀–Shalom, Títílayọ̀
    Dept. of African Languages,
    Literatures & Communication
    Arts, Lagos State University, Ojo,
    Lagos.

20. Onyemelukwe, Ifeoma Mabel
    Dept. of French
    Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria,
    Nigeria

21. Oye, Adetola Olujare
    Dept. of Foreign Languages
    Lagos State University
    Ojo, Lagos.

22. Salman, Hakeem
    Dept. of Foreign Languages
    Lagos State University,
    Ojo, Lagos

23. Taiwo, Adekemi Agnes
    Dept. of Linguistics & Nigerian
    Languages
    Ekiti State University
    Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

24. Umah, Paulinus
    Federal University of Lafia
    Nasarawa State

Contents

6

Referring Expressions in Nigerian Stand-Up Contexts

Filani, Ibukun & Bamgbose, Ganiu Abisoye

Abstract

The importance attached to names and naming in the African society has birthed extant studies on the subject matter of onomastics in the clime. As many studies as there are on this subject, the pragmatic import of names and naming as humour strategy is a phenomenon that has not enjoyed attention from linguists on the one hand and humour researchers on the other. This study therefore investigates the use of referring expressions by stand-up comedians in Nigeria, randomly drawing data from the database of comedians in Nigeria and selected stand-up comedy performances from the most popular comedy show in Nigeria, Night of a Thousand Laughs. *Working within the relevance-theoretic framework, the study identifies three categories of referring expressions namely referring expressions with situational use, referring expression with textual and metaphorical use and referring expressions with textual and interactional functions. The study identifies the linguistic devices and pragmatic strategies which are deployed in enacting humour through referring expressions. Beyond their humour potential, study finds that referring expressions help to understand societal issues such as stereotypes, politicking and different shades of ideologies. The study concludes that referring expressions have both explicit humorous and implicit communicative relevance in the Nigerian comedy industry.*

Keywords: Nigerian stand-up comedy, onomastics, humour strategy, ESL, relevance

Introduction

HUMOUR IS PRIMARILY EXPRESSED THROUGH LANGUAGE. IN MANY INSTANCES of humorous language use, content words like nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverb are deployed in unconventional manners so as to achieve humorous groundings; for instance, they could be used in odd or eclectic collocation frames (see Lew 1997). A major preoccupation in linguistic approaches to humour is to account for why certain utterances are humorous and

how peculiar linguistic choices foreground humorous intentions. Scholars have also identified some conversational or discourse markers which function as cues for indicating humorous intentions. For instance, canned jokes are known to be prefaced by expressions like *Oh I remember a joke* which are used by the speaker to negotiate and secure the acceptability of jokes in conversations (see Attardo, 1994). Similarly, Dynel (2009 p. 1286) identifies some "verbal chunks created spontaneously or repeated verbatim for the sake of amusing the recipient, either directly contributing to the semantic content of the ongoing conversation or diverting its flow into a humorous mode/frame/key." These linguistic choices are contextualization strategies which help language users to foreground humour in conversations. However, there are instances where participants do not adopt discourse markers (either verbal as in *oh I remember a joke* or nonverbal as in a facial expression that indicate irony) that explicitly convey humorous intentions. In such instances, the participants adopt lexical categories, syntactic and discourse/pragmatic structures to indicate their humorous intentions. In this paper, we explore how a nominal category can be deployed for humorous intentions. The primary objective is to analyze the use of referring expressions in stand-up contexts.

Stand-up comedy is presently a global phenomenon. As it is with any form of language use, the discourse of stand-up comedy is expected to reflect the sociocultural and sociolinguistic realities of the community where it is situated. Thus, stand-up practice in primarily monolingual and native English contexts is different from stand-up practice in multilingual and ESL contexts in terms of the discourse structure and content. In this paper, we explore language use in Nigerian stand-up comedy. We operationalize Nigerian stand-up comedy as a creative and narrative genre in Nigerian ESL context. In studies on New Englishes and Nigerian English, one of the varieties that have been identified is the Creative English, which is commonly termed Literary English (Akindele and Adegbite, 2005; Adegbite, 2010). Creative English is found in literary genre like poetry, prose and drama. Here, we extend the frontiers of Creative English to include cultural productions like joke-telling and film making which are based on imagination, ingenuity and inventiveness. As narratives, these cultural productions share a lot of features like characterisation, plot, suspense and setting with traditional literary genres. They are also interwoven; for instance, joke-telling may be embedded in a prose work while a literary work may be turned into a movie. Besides, creativity in language use is found in all of them.

Investigating the discourse of humour performance in multilingual and ESL contexts like Nigeria is needful for a number of reasons. The first is that humour research on the pragmatics of humour performed in English has been primarily devoted to native speakers' contexts. As suggested by Adetunji (2013), such studies have neglected humour performances in Nigerian ESL context. It has been five years since Adetunji's assertion and there have been a couple of studies on the discourse/interactional structures and strategies, common ground

features of humour and reaction to humorous utterances from the Nigerian ESL context (Taiwo, Odebunmi and Adetunji, 2016; Filani, 2015 a & b; 2016; Kehinde 2016). However, the existing studies do not consider the linguistic structure of humorous utterances and how lexical choices are embedded with humour. Jokes are made up of lexical categories arranged in a special order and/or endowed with connotative meanings. One of such lexical categories is referring expressions. If we will have a good understanding of humour in the Nigerian context, we must explore humorous texts in all ramifications. This paper, therefore, investigates how referring expressions are deployed in Nigerian stand-up comedy.

Background to the Study

The linguistic situation in Nigeria is a complex one. The country has well over 450 indigenous languages, many of which have numerous dialects. These indigenous languages function as mother tongues in informal contexts and are rarely used in formal circles even when there is official backing for such formal usages. Only two languages are widely used across ethnic boundaries and accepted as lingua francas: English and Nigerian Pidgin (NP). Bamgbose (1995 p. 9) asserts that the "present form and status of English in Nigeria are as a result of the contact between English and Nigerian languages in the sociocultural and political situation". According to him, there are 3 strands which have contributed in making the Nigerian English variety: the Contact English which is realized as Nigerian Pidgin and Broken English, Victorian English which is a transplanted form of English in Nigeria and School English which is acquired through the educational system. All these strands contributed to what is now known as Standard Nigerian English. We must note that English and NP exist in a diglossic situation with English constituting the high variety while NP is the low variety. The notion, Nigerian English, has been given credence by Kachru's theory of concentric circle. Going by Kachru's classification, Nigerian English exists in the peripheral (non-native speaking) outer circle (ESL) situation where English is undergoing a sociolinguistic process called nativization, localization, acculturation or indigenization.

The nativization of English in Nigeria includes the forms and functions of the language in Nigerian environment and this has resulted in English having different features at all levels- phonology, lexico-semantics and syntax (Adegija, 2004; Dadzie & Awonusi, 2009 Adegbite, 2010). Bamgbose (1995) identifies 3 aspects of nativization: linguistic, pragmatic and creative. Linguistic nativization refers to the substitution of Nigerian language features for English ones (e.g. people pronounced as /fifl/), introduction of culture specific vocabulary items (e.g. chewing stick, bush meat) and semantic shift (e.g. go slow to mean traffic jam, saying daddy/father to refer to someone who is not one's biological father, drop to mean alight). Pragmatic nativization has to do with modifying the rules of language use in English native situations with cultural practices of the Nigerian Environment. Creativity manifests in two ways, coinage of expressions to reflect

the Nigerian worldview and translating authentic Nigerian native idioms to English (e.g. put to bed, put in the family).

Both English and NP are strategically deployed in NSC. According to Adetunji (2013), NP is the lingua franca for stand-up comedy performance. The author asserts that Nigerian stand-ups deliberately adopt NP as the language of their narration as an affiliative resource with which they speak with, rather than to, their audiences. It is also common to have the stand-up comics code-alternating NP with English as a marker for indicating voicing in their performances.

Primarily, two features of nativization have been played out in humorous communications in Nigeria. At the linguistic level, Nigerian comics are known to deliberately violate English language structures for humorous effects. Typical examples are seen in a number of Nigerian sitcoms where the characters use a first language induced variety of English. Such variety is typified by wholesale transfer of phonological and syntactic features of one of Nigerian languages (Adesoye, 2018). The second feature of nativization which is commonly deployed in humorous communications in Nigeria is creativity. Creativity is seen in the manner in which Nigerian comics deliberately coin and/or manipulate lexical items and linguistic structures and use them for humorous intentions. We shall explore these two perspectives in this paper by focusing on referring expressions used in stand-up routines.

Referring Expressions

According to Hurford, Heasley and Smith (2007:37), "a referring expression is any expression used in an utterance to refer to something or someone (or a clearly delimited collection of things or people)". It is a linguistic form that can be used to point out an entity outside language. They can, therefore, be described as linguistic forms that are used to identify the entities they denote.

The concept of referring expression brings up notions like reference and denotation. The notion of reference is used to describe the relationship between a linguistic form (referring expression) and the entity it denotes (its referent). Thus, reference deals with the relationship between language and entities in the world. It is through reference, that language users can indicate what they are talking about. Cruse (2006: 45) opines that "the denotation of a linguistic expression is that aspect of its meaning which is involved in its potential for use in making true statements about the world." Kreidler (1998:43) succinctly differentiates reference from denotation as follows

> Reference is the relation between a language expression such as *this door, both doors, the dog, another dog* and whatever the expression pertains to in a particular situation of language use, including what a speaker imagine. Denotation is the potential of a word like *door* or *dog* to enter into such language expressions. Reference is the way speakers and hearers use an expression successfully; denotation is the knowledge they have that makes their use successful.

Meaning is more than denotation, which is the central aspect of a word meaning. There is also connotation, which refers to the personal aspect of meaning and the emotional associations that the word arouses (Leech, 1981; Kreidler, 1998). Kreidler (1998) identifies some observations that underlie the relationship between referring expressions and their referents: a referring expression is not a referent, there is no natural connection between referring expressions and their referents; existence of a referring expression does not guarantee the existence of a referent in the real physical-social world; and two or more referring expressions may have the same referent. These observations explain why referring expressions can be used denotatively and/or connotatively and why they could be manipulated for the purpose of humour. For instance, Kreidler also observes that some jokes achieve their humorous effects by ignoring the distinction between a referring expression and what it represents.

On humour in Language

One way to look at the language of humorists is to see it as a register, if we take register as "a specialized code or variety of language associated with a specific social practice and designed to serve a specific social goal" (Baker and Ellece, 2011: 113). It is in this view that many scholars conceptualise register; e.g. Halliday (1985). Attardo (1994) reviews how the notion of register has been applied to humour research. He highlights a number of studies where register has been applied to humour analysis. In Bally's stylistics of humour, one of the studies reviewed by Attardo (1994), a word is said to have a natural affect and evocative affect. The first derives directly from the expression while the second is triggered by associations to a linguistic expression. It is the mismatch between the natural affect and evocative affect that leads to humour. We can apply the distinction between natural affect and evocative affect to referring expression and their referents. The referent of a referring expression depends on whether the speaker has used the expression denotatively or connotatively. For the present purpose, we will see denotative use of referring expressions as instances of natural affect and the connotative use as instances of evocative affect. Most importantly, as part of their craft and in a bid to achieve their intentions, comics may decide to use a referring expression in the connotative sense even when they have initially suggested a denotative sense and vice-versa.

Relevance theory (RT) is adopted in this paper as the framework for uncovering how referring expressions in Nigerian stand-up comedy contexts are used in instantiating comedic intentions and achieving humorous effects. Attardo (2011) submits that RT approaches to humour are within the ambits of incongruity-resolution account of humour. Specifically, we adopt Yus' (2003) and (2004) analyses of jokes and stand-up routines. Since this paper is about referring expressions, RT becomes handy in accounting for how different processes for utterance construction and interpretation in communication exchanges are manipulated by comics. In jokes, processes like ad hoc concept construction,

enrichment and reference assignments manipulated for humour. As Yus, (2003) observes, humorous utterances may demand extra cognitive efforts because of the deliberate exploitation of these processes, however, participants are always eager to devote extra cognitive efforts to the interpretation of jokes for the promise of the enjoyment that results from the resolution of incongruity in jokes. In another paper, Yus (2004) argues that what enhances the interpretation of jokes in comedy contexts is that recipients/ audience members are in a psychological state to be entertained, thus, they readily accept the comics' presentations as stimuli for humour.

RT considers contextual factors in communication exchanges and view communication as a cognitive process that is dependent on manifestation and interpretation of assumptions from the context of communication (See Blakemore, 2002). Assumptions are derived from the stimulus that is made mutually manifest as well as from experience (non-linguistics) and speech situation (both physical, on-going situation and sociocultural). Furthermore Yus (2003) and (2004) show that rather than violating the principle of relevance (RP), initiators of jokes use RP to lead the hearers to interpret the joke in a particular manner by foregrounding humorous intention, withholding relevant information, choosing to be obscure, ambiguous or irrelevant in their bid to create incongruity. Humour in RT terms, therefore, has a pragmatic component and is explained in terms of favouring relevance-seeking interpretive steps in the interpretation of the stimulus (Yus, 2003). Yus proposes that two interpretations are derived from humorous utterances, an initially accessible interpretation (an overt one) and an unlikely interpretation (a covert one). The first interpretation, which is the one selected by and which is the most accessible to the addressee out of the several interpretations, is got from the build-up. The covert interpretation, which is recovered after the punchline is performed, creates a cognitive dissonance with earlier part of the utterance. Though the hearer has not entertained the covert interpretation before the punchline is released, s/he finds out that it is the correct interpretation and that it is more coherent with the whole text. Yus (2003) uses the terms Multiple-Graded-Interpretations (MGI) and single-covert-interpretation (SCI) to refer to the first interpretation and the covert one respectively. The analysis of Yus agrees very much in principle with humor analysis of other relevance theorists like Jodlowiec (1991) and Curco (1998).

In the recovery of the meaning of referring expressions in stand-up routines, the needed cognitive effect may not necessarily be derived by juxtaposing the MGI and SCI. The interpretation of the referring expressions depends on the hearer's ability to extract contextual assumptions from them and use them to yield appropriate contextual implications. It is these implications that will further enhance the derivation of the whole text (either MGI or SCI). The present premise is based on the fact that humorous discourses are based on presuppositions and moral, social and linguistic assumptions shared by the comic and the recipient. Both the presuppositions and assumptions are manipulated to create

incongruity and to enhance overall interpretation of the whole text. Assumptions on linguistic forms, functions and meanings are manipulated to yield contextual implicatures within the context of the humorous text. In this paper, by focusing on referring expressions, we examine how comics manipulate presuppositions and assumptions about language.

Analysis

For the purpose of analysis, we have classified referring expressions in stand-up contexts into three and these are referring expression with situational use, referring expression with textual and metaphorical use and those with discourse functions. As it can be deduced from the terminologies adopted for each of the class, the basis of categorization is the function of each category. The classes are analyzed and exemplified below:

Referring expressions with situational use

The first class of referring expressions in stand-up comedy constitutes nominal entities that the comics use in identifying themselves. Primarily, this class is made up of proper nouns which have been adopted or coined by the comics as their stage/performance names. Names and naming are linguistic items and processes which are situationally and culturally motivated. Naming practices in Nigeria are not arbitrary but they are meticulously carried out to indicate different purposes like stylistic, thematic, ideology and identity (see Odebunmi, 2008; Filani and Melefa, 2014). Of particular interest in the paper is how the comedians' naming practices are used to create comic identity and frame their comic style. In this view, we identify two classes of proper names in comedy contexts, the first deals with the names the comedians give to themselves while the second denotes the names which the comedians use to refer to the targets. In the first, there is an instance of stage-naming while in the second, there is an instance of tagging. Furthermore, we can identify the structural aspect of the meaning of these referring expressions and their pragmatic aspects. The structural aspect of their meanings is based on the morphemes which constitute the referring expressions as well as their meaning based on the principle of denotation and ostensive definition. On the other hand, the pragmatic aspects are grounded on the assumptions manifested in the names and the contextual implicatures derived from them. Both the comedian and audience depend on the principle of saliency in uncovering the relevant contextual information needed for uncovering the pragmatic aspects of the names. At the same time, they are also guided by the principle of relevance in their expectations of humorous performance from comics whose name might not have suggested "humorousness" given the meanings derived from the morphemes that constitute the names and the denotation of the names through reference assignment; for instance, if there is no morpheme in the name that suggests humor and the audience is just meeting the comic for the very first time.

The instances of stage naming are therefore categorised into two, the first

category involves names which are embedded with humorous producing styles and techniques (Table 1) while the second category includes names without such humorous styles (Table 2).

Table 1

Comedians' names	Lexical process/ English domestication strategies	Humor strategies
I Go Dye	Compounding (I+Go+Dye)/ Outright adoption of English lexis in a Nigerian Pidgin expression	Punning: deliberate play on the word "Dye", which could be read and interpreted as "Die." Should the word be interpreted as die, comedy recipients are likely to view the name as absurd I Go Dye depicts a basilectal variety/ use of English language.
Lepacious Bose	Affixation (Lepa+ cious) and compounding (Lepacious +Bose)/ Hybridisation; the use of the affix "cious" is an instance of Anglicism.	Irony: The comedienne uses this name to refer to her body weight (She is overweight). The word "lepa" is Yoruba slang for being slim. To call herself lepacious means that she has described herself as a slim lady.
Basketmouth	Compounding/Outright adoption of English lexis	Hyperbole: here, the comedian alludes to basket as a "container" with many holes/leakages, thus, which cannot store/hold anything that is kept in it. This allusion is an indirect reference to his comic license.
Funny Bone	Compounding/ Outright adoption of English lexis	Synedoche: the comedian uses a part of his body to represent the whole. It is however humorously creative to choose bone of all body parts to represent himself.
Dan D'humorous	Compounding/ outright adoption of English lexis	Alliteration: this comic repeats the consonant sound /d/ to achieve a rhyme in his pseudonym. This is because the use of 'd' in the name should be formally rendered as 'the'.

Comedians' names	Lexical process/ English domestication strategies	Humor strategies
MC Shakara	Acronym/compounding/ hybridisation/borrowing. MC is an acronym for master of ceremonies and used together with a Yoruba word, Shakara, it generates a hybridised compound.	Irony: The irony in this nomenclature is the word *shakara*, which can be interpreted jest making and which is characteristic of women or children in the Nigerian society. It is however humorously ironical to depict an adult man with such a name in the Nigerian setting.
Elenu	Borrowing. The word elenu is borrowed from Yoruba and contextually means someone who is talkative.	Exaggeration: this nomenclature is a deliberate choice at saying he is a great talker which is a prerequisite for being a comedian.

Table 2

Comedians' names	Lexical process/ English domestication strategies
I Go Save	Compounding/ adoption of English lexis in a Nigerian pidgin structure, an act which depicts a basilectal variety/use of English in Nigeria
AY	Acronym
Gordons	Coinage
Tee A	Acronym
Ali Baba	Compounding
Akpororo	Borrowing

Regardless of the fact that a comedian may explicitly adopt strategies of humour or not, we opine that the stage naming practices of these comedians generate the same assumptions from the audience interpreting their monologue. The reason for this is that in comedy contexts, the audience are in the mood to be entertained (Yus, 2004) and have submitted themselves to be led in the garden path. Thus, they do not question the credibility of the comedians' contributions. However, the names in which the comics deployed humorous strategies may require more cognitive effort in processing than those in the second category since they involve humorous motifs. Apart from identifying the bearers of the names, one may be further driven to ask why a comedian adopted such names given the combinatorial possibilities in naming in the macro context of the comedy performance since such combinations are not previously known in macro context. Beyond just assigning the referring expressions to the comic, one will want to uncover the meaning in them. For instance, one may be driven to ask: why "I Go Dye" and "Lepacious Bose".

Furthermore, since both the comedians and the audience are guided by the principle of relevance, they would find the stage names serving two pragmatic

functions. The first is that the names will yield a contextual implicature, especially those embedded with humour strategies (see Table 1 above). Beyond identifying who the comics are, an assumption which results from the synthesis of the names, the institutional and participant roles of the bearers, and expectation of the audience is that the names function as a confirmation for what the bearer does. In the Nigerian cosmological context, names are believed to perform more than identity functions. It is assumed that names, like prophesies, predict personality and the trajectory of the bearer. Given this sociocultural belief from the macro context of the performance, it can be seen that the comedians are only strengthening an existing assumption from the macro context and which the audience are very much aware of. Thus, the second pragmatic function is that the names reinforce a shared belief as the names function as the premise on which an assumption about naming practice in the shared culture is made mutually manifest. Additionally, this has consequences for generating humorous effects as it amounts to what Yus (2003:324) terms "playing with collective cultural representations". According to the author, "much of the enjoyment in the audience comes from the collective realization that certain assumptions made manifest by the comedian are in fact mutually manifest to the audience, 'cultural' in a broad sense". What the comedians' names do is to remind the audience of the shared beliefs on names and that the comedians' names reinforce the naming practice, which is a form of cultural practice and a possible source of humour.

To buttress our analysis of stand-up comedians names as a rhetorical strategy for grounding their humorous intentions, we will further draw from and exemplify with instances where a stand-up, I Go Dye, jokes with naming practices and targeted his own stage name.

> ### Example 1
>
> Now people dey talk, I Go Dye try and change your name. How can you be calling yourself I Go Dye? I Go Dye change your name. Why? How you go just force me now make I change my name from I Go Dye to something! Make I answer your name? [Audience Laughter] Don't you see the president of this country, Goodluck, the name follow am; Dis dat, dat dat. Forget! No matter the name wei you call yourself, If you no hustle you go broke.[Audience laughter] I don see people wei dem dey call Success, They are Failure. Na only name dem take dey success. Dey just shake you, "I'm Success" […] Failure; Some Hope, hopeless. [Audience Laughter] Tell me, I Go Dye, change your name change your name. Don't you see the president of this country? As demdey tell me, na him I say make I just try. Na hin I go meet my mama, say mummy, I wan change my name oh from I Go Dye. Na im my Mama say en! You wan change your name to I Go wetin? I say I Go Make Money since name dey help, I Go Make Money [Audience laughter] My Mama say no try am oh! You dey answer I Go Dye money dey come, we dey think of how you go take answer Burial or Coffin. [Audience laughter].

In Example 1, I Go Dye makes manifests a sociocultural belief attached to

Nigerian onomastic practices- the assumption that it is the name of individuals that determine their level of success in life. In the first two lines where he asserts that people have been pressing him to change his name from I Go Dye, he made manifest the cultural stereotype attached to names and to how human efforts and labour are viewed in Nigerian cultural context. At the micro level, we can assume that he only deploys his stage name as part of strategies for humour and in this sense, we will make reference to analysis of the names as shown in Table 1. However, we can take this further by analyzing the cultural assumptions that make I Go Dye's joke on his stage name possible. As much as the comedian is aware of these assumptions, they are also accessible to the audience members since they are members of the same society. From these assumptions we can derive a number of implicatures that serve as the basis of the humour. For instance, since he overtly asserts that people have been pressuring him to change his name from I Go Dye, we can derive the following implicatures: the name I Go Dye is a terrible one, the bearer of such a name violates onomastic practices, and, since the name suggests that the bearer will die (or is dying), the bearer life's will be cut short. Furthermore, by citing Goodluck, the name of Nigeria's President at the time I Go Dye was performing this particular routine, he reinforces the shared assumption about Nigerian onomastic practices.

Another factor that contributes to the humour in I Go Dye's anecdote about his name is that he contradicts manifested assumptions. Having presented implicatures that reinforced assumptions about names, he rejects the belief that the name of an individual is a major determinant of the individual's success. This he does by asserting that *if you no hustle, you go broke* and by exemplifying with people with names like *Success* and *Hope* and whose lives do not in any way reflect what their names suggest. As a specialist joker, I Go Dye then goes on to present propositions that indicate that he supports the cultural assumption about name when he asserts that he went to his mum to inform her that he wanted to change his name. Technically, what he did by mentioning that he informed his mom that he would change his name is that he led the audience in a garden path. What is implicitly suggested is that the comic has realized that his name is actually a bad omen and therefore, would adhere to the onomastic practice by changing his name from a referring expression with negative connotations to one with positive ones. Of particular interest is the choice of a new name by the comic- I Go Make Money which represents contemporary thought on what success is. In the Nigerian popular culture, success is defined in terms of wealth and materialism. Thus, I Go Make Money is suggestive of a shared belief and sociocultural expectation. The request for permission from the mum to change his name is also motivated by the comic belief in cultural values since in the macro cultural context of the comic, an individual is not allowed/supposed to make the choice of his/her name. The duty of naming lies solely on parents. However, it is surprising that the request to change his name from I Go Dye to I Go Make Money was not welcomed by the mother. His mother's reasons include since the name I Go Dye has become

a license for the comic to become wealthy through the comedy craft, he should keep to the name, or, he could even adopt a more obscene term like Burial or Coffin.

The mother's suggestion that the comic should adopt either Burial or Coffin definitely generates a surprise effect in the audience. It violates the audience expectations on what the mother ought to have suggested and must have been considered as uncanny by the audience for a number of reasons. First, given the already manifested assumption about naming practices and shared background knowledge on what culturally acceptable name is, the audience would have expected the mother to at least agree with the change of I Go Dye to I Go Make Money, or suggest another name with positive connotations. It must be emphasized that the "Dye" in the comedian's name is taken as "Die". Second, the mother's proposal of Burial and Coffin as the name for her son suggests a sinister and morbid image about the mother. The mother's suggestion generates new sets of implicatures, the first of which has immediate implications for the comedians- the name I Go Dye is just good enough to make the comic wealthy; and, to become wealthier the comic should adopt a more morbid name like coffin or burial. The second set of implicatures has to do with wider cultural context and the traditional belief on onomastic practices—a name does not necessarily determines the bearer's life trajectory and success/wealth.

Referring expression with textual and metaphorical use

The second class of referring expressions in our data consists of instances of noun phrases which include nouns and their modifiers. Noun phrases are like nouns in that they occupy the same grammatical positions and perform the same grammatical functions in sentences. Because we are interested in their situational use rather than their grammatical use, we have described them as referring expressions with textual and metaphorical use. By textual, we mean that, as an integral part of the comedy text, they serve as means by which the comics conceptualise information and experience about the object/target of humour as well as means by which the comics orient their audience towards a particular semantic and pragmatic interpretation of whom/what they are talking about. Referring expressions with textual and metaphorical use include instances of representations of the participants-in-the-joke (the characters which appear in the narrations of the comedians). This is not to say that proper nouns, as analyzed above, cannot be used in the representation of characters in the narrations, but the difference lies in the situation of the representation. In the first instance, we have a comic adopting a nominal entity which represents the comic image and which has become the pseudo/stage name of the comic. In many instances, the audience and wider society may know the comic only by this name. In the second instance, the comic attaches more modifiers which would make more explicit the referent and at the same time, could enhance the impact of humorous effect. The first is an instance of representation of the participants-of-the-joke while

the second is an instance of the representation of participants-in-the-joke (see Filani, 2017). Because of the evaluative functions of modifiers, they are important discursive strategies/representations for intentional portrayal of participants-in-the-joke. Through their use, stand-up comedians achieve the ostentation of their comic representation of the characters in their narrations. Instances like this abound in NSC and we shall cite examples from Gordons.

Example 2 (Gordons)

And I tell you the truth, a lot of comedians have come and you didn't clap for them. It's not easy to crack jokes. *You think say he easy, go crack jokes in front of politicians wei lose election* [Audience Laughter]

[Translation: If you think it's easy, go and crack joke before a politician who lost out in an election]

Example 3 (Gordons)

Because of economic recession, could you believe a man brought out his family, shot his 5 kids, his wife and himself? *God punish devil, dat kind thing cannot happen for Naija; even Igbo man wei dey soak garri, he get plan.* What do you mean about, we were born in recession; we progress in recession; we are making money in recession [Audience Laughter]

[Translation: May God punish the devil. That kind of thing cannot happen in Nigeria. Even the Igbo man that eats garri has a plan]

Example 4 (Gordons)

Thank God for women, but look women, you started to do something that I don't like. If you look at the woman, if you look at the structure *of a woman, the Coca-Cola bottle shaped woman, with good factory fitted things and God bless you abs*, oh my God [Audience Laughter]. Hello? Are you still there? If you see that kind of woman, you will know that she was structured to fit into something.

Given the examples, we have the following instances of NPs referring expressions

1. A noun with embedded relative clause (the underlined in Examples 1 and 2).
2. Prepositional phrase as modifier of noun (Example 3—"of a woman"; "with good factory fitted things and God bless you abs").
3. Noun phrase as apposition to another noun (Example 3—the Coca-Cola bottle shaped woman).

An important aspect of these referring expressions is what Adetunji (2013) terms linguistic coding. By linguistic coding, Adetunji (2013) refers to the strategic use of language in stand-up performance. In the Nigerian stand-up context, linguistic coding cannot be divorced from the multilingual and ESL features of the country.

What motivates the kind of modifier selected in instances of referring expressions with textual and metaphorical use is the language in which stand-up comedians performs their routines. As can be seen in Examples 2–4, when the comedian uses Nigerian Pidgin, the referring expression will include an embedded relative clause while when English is adopted as the language of narration, it is common to find comedians use prepositional phrases and appositive constructions as modifiers of the referring expressions. Not only this, the choice of relative clause, prepositional phrase or any other modifier vis-à-vis pragmatic meaning of and referent of the referring of the referring expression is dependent on linguistic and cultural presuppositions which are integral aspects of the macro context in which the comedy performance is situated. The pragmatic functions of these referring expression is to make manifest the needed linguistic and cultural assumptions needed for interpreting the referent and for uncovering the kind of representation intended by the comedian. Nonetheless, the motif for adopting modifiers is based on the humorous intention and representation intended by the comedians.

An important aspect of the referring expressions is the implicit meanings embedded in them. For the present purpose, we shall examine the implicit meanings of the referring expressions and their modifiers derived from the process of inferences and how such meanings suggest the comedian's portrayal of the referents of the referring expressions. The strategy of ad hoc concept formation in interaction is adopted by the comedians in communicating their intended propositions whenever they adopt modifiers in qualifying the referring expressions in their routines. In Example 2, Gordons is critical of the audience for not applauding. In the routine, he tries to show his audience that the task of a comedian, to make people laugh, is a herculean one and that comedians are professionals who could evoke laughter from any individual. He cites *politicians wei lose election* as an example of his comedy audience. Given the encyclopaedic knowledge of electoral process (specifically, losing an election), the encoded concept in *politician wei lose election* is a cheerless and angry individual; however, given the intentional use of the referring expression, the communicated concept in *politicians wei lose election* is an audience member in a comedy venue who can be made to enjoy humor.

We must note that in this instance, the humour does not result only from the modifier together with the referring expression, another strategy for humour is also adopted by Gordons- comparing concepts, a cognitive process which will make the audience to view themselves as comedians performing for a difficult audience and which will make the audience to view the comedians as professionals who could perform for any kind of audience. Of particular interest is the first perspective with which Gordons assign the proposition, an individual who is difficult to please, to the word politician, and discursively represents his audience as a cheerless group of people.

Similarly, in Examples 3 and 4, we have the following ad hoc concepts: Example 3: *Igbo man weidey soak garri.*

Encoded concept: An Igbo man who takes garri is poor/ the business of an
Igbo man who takes garri has collapsed.

Communicated concept: An Igbo man who takes garri is only being
strategic.

Example 4: The structure of a woman, the Coca-Cola bottle shaped woman
with good factory fitted things and God bless you abs

Encoded concept: A woman has well-structured body figure

Communicated concept: A woman's body indicates that she is made for a
man.

Deriving the encoded and communicated concepts cannot be a difficult cognitive task for the audience since, in the first instance, the comedians have suggested them through the propositions in the referring expressions as well as in the co-text of the referring expressions. We must note that in any instance of joke, comedians make ostensive aspects of the encyclopaedic knowledge, linguistic knowledge and sociocultural knowledge which would be used in deriving the ad hoc concepts. These manifested assumptions are further deployed in generating implicit meanings which the comedians intentionally use for achieving humour. For instance Example 3 is an excerpt from a routine in which the comedian talked about the economic recession in the USA and Europe around 2008 and 2009. He cited the case of an American who killed his family members and then committed suicide because of losing his investments in the recession. By focusing on recession, he activates in the audience assumptions on recession from the encyclopaedic knowledge, and then narrow down to the shared sociocultural knowledge when he talks about recession in Nigeria. Specifically, he draws from ethnic stereotyping in Nigeria when he rejected the possibility of Nigerians committing suicide because of economic recession. In the referring expression, *Igbo man wei dey soak garri*, he underscores stereotyping of the Igbo ethnolinguistic group in Nigeria as having a niche for business enterprises. Furthermore, from the excerpt, we can derive the following implicit meanings: Nigeria is constantly in recession and Nigerians are accustomed to living in recession; because of their business acumen Igbo men strategically live like paupers while investing their money; and Igbo men know how to profit in deteriorating economic situations.

Referring expressions with textual and interactional functions

The last class of referring expression in Nigerian stand-up comedy context is made up of expressions that are used in the place of nouns. This class includes pronouns and pronominals which are deployed by the comedians to perform textual and interactional functions. In the textual sense, they are used as substitutes for referring expressions in the narrations, while in the interactional functions; they serve as means of identity mapping. In the later sense, pronouns and pronominals serve as conversational devices for membership categorisation. However, in textlinguistics, pronouns and pronominals constitute a class of

cohesive device since they are restricted to linguistically encoded relationship in a text (see Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Blakemore, 2002: 159). Conversely, as argued by Blakemore, interpreting the meaning/referent of pronouns demand more than linguistic resources, thus, there is need to look beyond cohesive possibility and turn to connectivity of content- coherence. According to Blakemore (2002), the search for coherence leads to successful comprehension and provides the key to discourse comprehension.

Likewise, in membership categorisation analysis (MCA), the interpretation of interactional devices like pronouns and pronominals goes beyond cohesive links. The focus is on the tie of content with commonsensical and cultural understanding of people in interaction so as to uncover notional concepts used by cultural members to classify persons. These notional concepts are termed membership categories (MC) and they are meaning making resources which are open-textured and relevant to contextual specificity and use (Freiberg and Freebody, 2009; Hester and Hester 2012). In MCA, MCs are recognized as membership category devices (MCDs) which are based on common knowledge of people. MCDs indicate that participants are social actors who are constantly engaged in the act of inference making since discourse participants use categories to embed and interpret potential meanings and intentions. Since instantiating and interpreting MCDs involve inference, Freiberg and Freebody (2009: 55) assert that "the classification of persons, objects and actions as members of a class provides for unspoken things to be "known" or assumed about them."

Carrying out inference is, therefore, important in uncovering what is intended in any use of MCDs. The interpretation of MCDs will not be dependent on decoding the meaning of the linguistic item but inferring the intended situational and/or sociocultural meanings. In the use of pronouns and pronominals as MCDs, participants will not depend on the presence of antecedent nouns but on the manifested assumptions. In other words, their search for the relevance of the MCDs will not be dependent on cohesiveness but on the coherence with mutually manifestness assumptions from the cognitive environment of the participant. We find the use of pronouns as MCD for categorizing the participants-in-the-joke while instantiating a sense of collectiveness and exclusiveness. Example 5, in which the comedian Seyi Law narrates his experience in the UK illustrates the use of "we" and "they" as MCDs

Example 5

> After about a week in the UK,
>
> I come dey dey bored, they are just so organized
>
> You know, everything, their management level
>
> Everything is so organized, I come dey miss Lagos
>
> I miss! the lawlessness in Lagos men
>
> As I come back, only me nah in stop for Ojota

Run cross road, KAI run follow me (AL)

As the guy hold me, na him I tell him say, Oga wetin I do?

He say you run cross road

I say you nko? (AL)

Na the two of us break the law make we just dey (P) (Intensified AL, AC)

> [Translation: Line 2- I began to feel bored/Line 4- I began to miss Lagos/ Line 6- as I returned, I deliberately stopped at Ojota,/I ran across the high way, traffic control officer ran after me/ as the official arrested me, I asked him what my offence was/ he said you ran, crossing the high way/ I asked him what about you/ it was the two of us that broke the law, let it just be]

In Example 5, the comedian has adopted the first person plural pronoun (the collective we) and its polarized counterpart, the second person pronoun (they) as MCDs. Primarily, he uses them as markers of affiliation with the societies that are mentioned in the routine- the UK and Nigeria. The routine is the comedian's commentary on the two societies- the UK, a well organized society (Lines 1-4) and he compared such well-structured community to one in which the citizens deliberately violates law and social order, Nigeria (Lines 5-11). Three pronouns are used in the example as MCDS: the first person singular pronoun (I), which is used to foreground his institutional and sociocultural identities as the narrator and the comic spokesperson who is narrating his life experiences; the first person plural pronoun (we)appears at the point where he is talking about Nigeria; and, the third person plural pronoun (they), which appears at the point where the comedian is referring to the UK. These pronouns do not have antecedent nouns, therefore, in uncovering their exophoric referents as well as how they amount to MCDs, the participants will have to depend on inferencing their situational and social meanings from the manifested assumptions.

It should be noted that, given English language grammatical rules, the comedian's use of these pronouns is wrong. However, given the Nigerian English context, the comedian's use of the pronouns is permissible. Thus, his use of the pronoun is a reflection of (linguistic) common ground existing between him and his audience. The manner in which "we" and "they" amount to a category pair becomes uncovered when an attempt is made at uncovering the social meanings Seyilaw is evoking. Since the "they" refers to the UK, it connotes what he is commenting on in the routine—an orderly community. In like manner, the "we" connotes a disorderly community. The embedded category pair "an orderly society/ a disorderly society" can be identified. Given the way the participants-of-the-joke perceive their country and the UK, another category pair can be identified—UK is a well-organized society, and, Nigeria is a highly disorganized one.

Furthermore, as a category pair, both "they" and "we" perform discourse functions as they both serve as social deixis. Yule (1996) suggests that social

deixis are used to mark social status and contrast. Seyilaw uses the pronouns to map boundary and construct identities. In his use, the category pair mirrors the sociocultural differences between the UK community and Nigerian community. He uses "they" to alienate himself from the UK while he uses "we" as a marker of inclusiveness. The "we" includes both the comedian and the audience and it is used to map a cultural difference from the UK community and at the same time, construct their social identity as Nigerians. With the choice of this category pair, an instance of social difference between UK citizens and Nigerians is mapped. Thus, through it, an ideological segregation between the two communities is instantiated. The use of the category pair in this manner is made possible because participants use language to segregate, polarize, map boundaries, and construct identities and ideologies

Conclusion

This paper has examined the deployment of nominal categories as instrumentality for the enactment of humour by stand-ups. The authors analyzed names as referring expressions, paying attention to how the denotative or connotative referents of such expressions have implications for the creation of humour. The relevance attached to onomastics and the cultural belief among Nigerians that names shape existence in that they are instrumental to a person's virtues or vices have resulted in a robust literature on names and naming from different scholarly purviews. We contributed to this list of existing literature by examining the pragmatic import of referring expressions for the creation of humor.

Three categories of referring expressions with humorous implicatures are identified in the study namely; referring expressions with situational use, referring expression with textual and metaphorical use and referring expressions with textual and interactional functions. The first category focuses on the use of pseudonyms which serve as actual names for stand-ups. Such names have implication for humour through the deployment of lexical categories which are compounding, blending, acronym, borrowing and hybridisation and humour strategies which are punning, allusion, irony, hyperbole and alliteration. The second category considers the use of noun phrases to depict participants-of-the-joke and participants-in-the-joke while the third category considers the use of pronouns and pronominals as exophoric references of membership categorisation. The second and third categories of referring expressions rely on relevance-theoretic strategies such as encyclopaedic knowledge, comparing concepts, stereotyping; and reinforcing and contradicting assumptions. These strategies help facilitate the common ground between the stand-ups and the audience which help activate the joking frames.

The study adds to the existing literature on onomastics from the novel perspective of how names and other referring expressions can be pragmatically manipulated for humorous purpose by stand-ups. The study also helps understand how stand-ups convey issues of societal concerns beneath their joke

performances. Such issues as shown in this study are stereotyping and politicking. Lastly, the study also shows the potential of humour in stand-up comedy for the investigation of ideologies. This is seen in the subtle us-them dichotomy established with the third category of referring expressions.

REFERENCES

Adegbija, E. (2004). The domestication of English in Nigeria. S. Awonusi & E.A. Babalola (Eds.), *The domestication of English in Nigeria: A festschrift in honour of Abiodun Adetugbo* (pp20-58). Lagos: University of Lagos Press.

Adesoye, R.E. (2018). Phonological distortion as a humorous strategy in Folarin Falana's Comedy Skits. *European Journal of Humour Research* 6(4) pp 60-74.

Adegbite, A.B. (2010). *English language: usage, use and misuse(s) in a non-host SL context.* Ile-Ife: OAU Press.

Adetunji, A. (2013). The interactional context of humor in Nigerian stand-up comedy. *Pragmatics,* 23(1), 1-22.

Akindele, F. and Adegbite, W. (2005). *Sociology and Politics of English in Nigeria.* Ile-Ife: OAU Press

Attardo, S (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humour.* New York: Mouton de Gruyter

Baker, P. and Ellece, S. (2011). *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis.* London: Continuum.

Bamgbose, A. (1995). English in the Nigerian Environment. In A. Bamgbose, A. Banjo and A. Thomas (Eds.), *New Englishes: A West African Perspective* (p.9-26). Ibadan: Mosuro

Blakemore, D. (2002). *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cruse, A (2006). *A Glossary of Semantics and Pragmatics.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Curco, C. (1998). Indirect echoes and verbal humor. In V. Rouchota and A.H. Jucker. *Current Issues in Relevance Theory.* Eds. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company. 304-325.

Dadzie, A.B.K and Awonusi, S. (2009) *New English: Influences and Characteristics.* Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publications

Dynel, M. 2009. Beyond a joke: types of conversational humour. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3.5: 1284-1299.

Filani, I. (2015A). Stand-up comedy as an activity type. *Israeli Journal of Humor Research,* 4/1:73-97.

Filani, I. (2017). On joking contexts: an example of stand-up comedy. *Humour: International Journal of Humour Research* 30/4:439- 460.

Filani, I. (2015B). Discourse types in stand-up performances: an example of Nigerian stand-up comedy. *European Journal of Humour Research*, 3 (1), 41-60.

Filani, I. (2016). The use of mimicry in Nigerian stand-up comedy. *Comedy Studies,* 7 (1), 89-102. DOI:10.1080/2040610X.2016.1139810

Filani, I. and Melefa, O.M. (2014). A Sociosemiotic study of nicknaming among undergraduates in a Nigerian university. *Linguistik Online,* 68(6), 21-42.

Freiberg, J. &Freebody, P. (2009). Applying membership categorisation analysis to discourse: when the 'tripwire crtitique' is not enough. In Le, T., Le, Q., & Short, M (Eds.), *Critical Discourse Analysis: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (pp.49-64). New York: Nova Science Publishers.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, R. 1976. *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

Hester, S. & Hester, S. (2012). Categorical occassionality and transformation: analysing culture in action. *Human Studies,* 35(4), 365-581.

Hurford, J., Heasley, B. and Smith, M.B. (2007). *Semantics: a Course Book*. Cambridge: CUP

Jodlowiec, M. 1991. What makes a joke tick. *UCL working papers in Linguistics* 3: 241-253

Kehinde, O.F. (2016). A night of a thousand laughs: a pragmatic study of humour in Nigeria. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications, 6*(6), 2250-3153.

Kreidler, C.W. (1998). *Introducing English semantics*. London: Routledge

Leech, G. (1981). *Semantics: the Study of Meaning*. Second Edition. England: Penguin Books

Lew, R. (1997). Towards a taxonomy of linguistic jokes. *Studia Anglica Posneniensia* 31: 123- 152.

Odebunmi, A. (2008). Names in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah. Marang: Journal of Language and Literature* 18 pp 49-67

Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, O. and Adetunji, A. (2016) (Eds) *Analyzing language in Online Communication.* Hershey: IGI Global.

Yule, G. (1996) *Pragmatics*. Oxford: OUP

Yus, F. (2003). Humour and the search for relevance. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 35, 1295-1331.

Yus, F. (2004). Pragmatics of humorous strategies in El club de la comedia. In R. Marquez-

Reiter & M. E. Placencia (Eds.), *Current Trends in the Pragmatics of Spanish* (pp. 257-280). Amsterdam, Netherlands: John Benjamins.