Multimodal Code-pairing and Switching of Visual-verbal Texts in Selected Nigerian Stand-up Comedy Performances

Mufutau Temitayo Lamidi

Professor, Department of English,
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Email: tayo.lamidi@mail.ui.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines multimodal pairing and switching of codes as features of visual-verbal texts and how they are used as strategies for evoking humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy performances, an area that has not attracted much scholarly attention. Data were obtained through purposive random sampling and analysed through content analysis. Six DVDs (Vols. 3, 7, 8 & 28 of *Nite of a Thousand Laughs;* Vols. 27 & 28 of *AY LIVE Happiness Edition*) and 6 video clips (downloaded from the Internet) all totalling 8 hours and 20 minutes of play were selected for the study. Incongruity, Layered Meaning and Visual Semiotics serve as theoretical framework. The study identifies different multimodal strategies such as code-pairing and integration in different forms of oral codes, gestures, costume, and symbols; intertextuality; incongruous translations/ deliberate misinterpretations; and mimicry, quotes and paralanguage used to elicit laughter. It suggests that these features are also useful in other speech-making events, and concludes that the integration of codes and modes of communication serves as an effective strategy in evoking humour and laughter in stand-up comedy.

Keywords: Nigerian stand-up comedy, code-pairing, visual-verbal texts, paralinguistic features, multimodality

Introduction

This study is located within the precincts of contact linguistics. Contact linguistics is the study of relations between languages in contact and outcomes thereof. According to Myers-Scotton (2002, p. 5), contact linguistics deals with the 'varied situations of contact between languages, the phenomena that result, and the interaction of linguistic and external ecological factors in shaping these outcomes.' These include 'the diverse kinds of mixture, change, adaptation, and restructuring that result from interaction between (the users of) different languages…' especially 'the social aspects of contact between different linguistic groups.' This means that contact linguistics involves contact between social and grammatical relations between different languages.

In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, languages and cultures often come in contact. Nigeria has many indigenous languages as well as some international languages such as English, French and Arabic. Sometimes, however, the languages are mixed in different proportions to yield values, such as borrowing, language interlarding, and language mixing, which subsume inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching. Inter-sentential code-switching refers to a change of language that occurs at a clause or sentence boundary, where each clause or sentence is in one language or the other. Intra-sentential code-switching, on the other hand, refers to switches that occur within a clause boundary, i.e., switching at clause, phrase or word level (Appel & Muysken, 1986; Romaine 1989). Although there is a difference between inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching, the difference has no effect on the analysis presented in this study. Since code-switching is a generic term for the two phenomena (Clyne, 2003,p. 71), the term is adopted in this study. As a corollary to this, we adopt the definition of code-switching as 'the use of material from two (or more) languages by a single speaker in the same conversation' (Thomason 2001, p.132).

Contact linguistics also involves different channels of communication. The fact is that effective communication is not limited to oral communication. Speakers often use face, costume and gesticulations (including mimicry) to make their speech more clearly understood. Hence, different channels are combined for the purposes of effective communication. In some cases, symbols and signs are used, especially when such are current in the society. This study investigates how these features are used by Nigerian stand-up comedians in their performances.

Many studies on humour such as Taiwo (2013), Chik et al. (2005) and Laineste (n.d.) have concentrated largely on monomodal texts, to the detriment of paralinguistic features. Some studies on stand-up comedy have also been from the perspectives of sociopragmatics (Archakis & Tsakona, 2005) as well as monomodal or code-switched *still* images (such as oral and written texts) (Aranda, 2014; Nadia, 2014). In addition, visual-verbal texts, involving a multimodal combination of different Nigerian indigenous languages, paralinguistic features, as well as costume, in *moving* texts, have received less attention from scholars. This study therefore attempts to fill this gap in contact linguistics scholarship by showing that, aside from contacts within verbal codes, other paralinguistic codes and costume can also be paired and integrated to communicate and achieve an intended feedback. Hence, it finds a meeting point between multimodality, translation and contact linguistics. The aim of this study is to identify the strategies for conveying humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy and discuss how visual, verbal and paralinguistic codes are used in different combinations as strategies to elicit laughter. In this vein, the study examines the codes that are normally used, the combinatorial possibilities of the codes and how they are used to elicit laughter. In pursuing these goals, the study explores

(1) which codes are used by Nigerian stand-up comedians in performances, (2) how the codes are paired, switched or integrated to elicit laughter, (3) what roles visual semiotics plays in the comics' strategies and (4) what multimodal strategies are used to elicit laughter.

Multimodality

Communication, whether verbal or visual, requires the use of a code and at least a mode. A code is the language or variety (Clyne, 2003) used for communication in a society. Such a language must express meanings and have rules of interpretation in the society. The mode on the other hand is the channel through which the message is presented. Such channels may be written, oral, graphic (in form of symbols, cartoons, caricature or symbols) or gestural. What matters is that they are understood to convey some meaning. Thus, both code and mode are related in the sense that while the code contains a message, the mode is the channel through which the message in that code is presented. Sometimes, however, the mode may serve as both a code and a channel as in the case of a universal symbol such as that for love. The symbol of love means 'love' wherever it is used. Members of a community, say Russia, Japan or Nigeria, can interpret the sign in their own indigenous languages. Thus, universal symbols serve as a meeting point between a code and a mode since both are united into one entity.

Communication can be monomodal (as in a news bulletin), bimodal (as in oral and visual communication) or multimodal (involving many channels like language, images and symbols). It follows that any mode can be adopted by language users in the context of communication. Members of a community can convey information through only one single mode of communication, for instance, either by waving a hand or saying *bye bye* to a friend embarking on a journey. This is monomodal communication. Two monomodal codes can also be paired, such that one balances the other. This is referred to as code-pairing. Code-pairing entails the coming together of two or more different codes with each part conveying only part of the intended meaning and one part balancing or completing the meaning or sense of the other code (Lamidi, 2016). The following example from Still Ringing (a comedy group in Nigeria) shows code-pairing between two monomodal texts.

1.   Preacher: Tell your friend: cheer up! (English)

Translator: Ṣọ fún ọ̀rẹ́ rẹ : ju ṣíà sókè! (Yoruba)

'Tell your friend: throw up a chair!'

In this example, there are two codes, English and Yoruba. The preacher used the English monomodal code while the interpreter used the Yoruba monomodal code. Although both texts are from different codes (English and Yoruba), the supposed translation is inaccurate (it is actually a deliberate mistranslation) and therefore forms the punchline of the joke. The crux of the matter is that the mistranslation has to be taken together with the original text to form a joke. This necessary combination is referred to as code-pairing, since the absence of one part of the text makes the other incomplete. In this way, texts in both codes are paired to provide an intelligible text: a joke.

Bimodal communication occurs when the language user combines two modes of communication to convey a message. Such modes can be a combination of speech and gesture, written words and a symbol, a photograph and a written description, etc. It may be inevitable that code-pairing also occurs between different channels or modes of communication. Here is an example:

Figure 1. Code-Pairing and Bimodality (Source: WhatsApp Social Media Platform)

Figure 1 contains the English expression *I love Allah: I,* a symbol for love and a proper noun *Allah*. The three expressions become meaningful when the meaning of each is taken into account, in the sense of compositionality.

The third form is multimodality.Multimodality is 'the use and combination of different semiotic elements, including design, layout, images, photographs, film, color and scent' (Zebrowska, 2014,p. 9) and they are subsequently integrated (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In this sense, more than two modes of communication are combined and integrated for effective communication. Consider Figures 2 and 3:

Figure 2. Simple Code-pairing and Multimodality (Source: www.nairaland.com)

Figure 2 depicts an English word I plus the symbol of love and a sketch of two hands whose fingers describe the act of making love. This is a simple combination of orthography, symbol and a drawing where each mode is clearly spelt out. These different modes and codes are combined and integrated to communicate an idea. The idea being put across in the image is that the person that wears the vest loves the act of making love.

The multimodal text can also be complex, involving different modes and codes.

Fig. 3 Complex Code-pairing and Multimodality (Source: www.nairaland.com)

Figure 3 starts with a thesis that Africa should stay away from female football and adds a picture. The picture balances the written text, and without it, the thesis statement would be incomplete. In the picture, there is evidence of multimodality. There are a set of females in jerseys and soccer boots, which are indexical that they are sportswomen. In the picture too, females are seen clearly breastfeeding their babies or being surrounded by children in casual dresses. The import of this is that the players are breastfeeding their babies at half time. This picture completes the sense in the thesis statement when the author directs us to look at what happens at half time. The implication is that such a team with nursing mothers is not likely to excel, and therefore African football should discourage female participation.

Multimodality in Still and Moving Texts

Multimodality also involves the integration of talk and non-verbal communication such as gestures and facial expressions (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001). Sometimes, the codes are combined in a compositional manner such that we note the contribution of each. Zebrowska (2014) has also observed that multimodality can combine auditory modality, such that there is interaction of phonetic, facial and gestural components. Normally, according to Bonachi (cited in Zebrowska, 2014), verbal components are accompanied by para-verbal, extra-verbal and non-verbal ones to create a multimodal expression system. Hence, in multimodality, three interacting systems can be identified: the visual, the auditory and the non-visual systems (Zebrowska, 2014). Thus, multimodality occurs in *still* and in *moving* texts.

Different scholars have examined multimodality in still and moving texts. On still texts, Wu (2014) and Jayasuriya (2015) discuss the multimodal visual-verbal texts in their respective publications. Wu (2014) presents the relationship between text and image and shows the extensions of the interpretation of the bimodality in the collaboration. These are augmentation, distribution and divergence. While Wu examined picture books, Jayasuriya (2015) investigated the use of multimodality in posters advertising spoken English classes in Sri Lanka. The designers of the posters are said to be creative, using language, visuals/images and ideology in an attempt to outdo one another and then recruit many students. These papers are relevant to the discussion here as they are multimodal in nature. However, they differ from the current study because they are restricted to the visual/image, verbal/text and ideological codes, while this paper includes spoken words, gestures, signs, costume and other paralinguistic features, but excludes ideology.

The studies on moving texts reviewed here, based on their relevance to the study, are Snellinx (2009), Ngamsa (2013), Aranda (2014) and Nadia (2014). Snellinx (2009) discusses humour in a television series. Apart from looking at different types of humour (linguistic and sociolinguistic) in the series, it also explores the multimodal triggers of humour and the effect the humour has on different cultures. Ngamsa (2013) examines intersemiotic cohesion in between visual and linguistic texts in three films and finds out the linguistic items that refer to objects in the films. He then identifies patterns of visual-verbal synchrony where exophoric reference items function as discourse pointers and connectors for meaning-making to readers, viewers and listeners. Place and person deictic items are also said to improve and develop patterns of intersemiotic cohesion for referential explicitness which provides a direct connection between implicit lexical items and their corresponding explicit visual composition. This paper is relevant to the present study as it discusses bimodality and visual verbal text. The first two goals in Snellix (2009) also tally with the focus of the present paper. This present study, however, differs in the subject of research (stand-

up comedians), the context (Nigeria) and the data collected (comedians' live performances). Snellix (2009) discusses only *Sex and City,* but data for the current study were drawn from a variety of stand-up comedy performances in Nigeria. In Ngamsa (2013) too, the elements of synchrony and cohesion are useful ingredients in code-pairing and code-mixing, which are areas of focus for the current study. However, it differs in the sense that it does not deal with stand-up comedy performances.

Aranda (2014) and Nadia (2014) have discussed the use of code-switching in stand-up comedy in California and Algeria, respectively. While Aranda examines Gabriel Iglesias' stand-up comedy, Nadia analyses Abdel-kader Secteur's. Both authors argue that code-switching is used as identity and comedy markers in their respective comedians' shows. Aranda examines Iglesias' use of techniques such as exaggeration, ridicule, repetition and coincidence, but Nadia (2014) observes that switches can be triggered by change of setting, interlocutors and context in order to assign specific functions and pragmatic meanings to texts. These studies are in the same field as the current study. However, they are limited to individual stand-up comedians while the current work cuts across different Nigerian stand-up comedies. In addition, while they investigated the use of code-switching as identity and comedy markers, the current study investigates the use of code-pairing, code-switching and visual-verbal integration as strategies to elicit laughter.

Similar to the foregoing is Tabaru and Lemmen's (2014) study of 'raised eyebrows' in two American television-series: *House M. D.* and *The Big Bang Theory.* The study is multimodal in nature, arguing that facial expressions pertaining to hyper-understanding and sarcasm accompany humorous utterances. The study illustrates how raised eyebrows function as gesture triggers and convey explicit and implicit humorous meanings to hearers. Tabaru and Lemmen's work (2014) is very much in line with the current study. They are on the same pedestal, except that their subjects and areas of focus are different.

The current research is a further development of the ideas in Lamidi (2016) which explored code-pairing and code-switching of written texts and images used as comments on the Facebook Forum. This new study presents another dimension in the use of multimodality (by moving from *still* to *moving* texts). It examines the use of verbal codes (including code-switching and (mis) translation) and audio-visual codes (including costume, signs, gestures and other paralinguistic features) which are used simultaneously for communication in audio-visual records of comedians' performances. Thus, it hopes to push further research in contact linguistics by investigating the different codes and how they are used to communicate humour. It also tests and confirms the effect of the strategies used by collecting natural data from stand-up comedians' performances where audiences react positively by laughing and clapping.

Visual-verbal Texts and Intertextuality

Visual texts are those that are perceived by the sense of sight. They are either moving or still. The fact is that they communicate meaning when they are seen. The authors of visual texts lay premium on its ability to convey intended messages. This they do by carving out specific forms, sometimes using computer simulation (photoshop). Sometimes too, actors in a play contort their faces, wear specific costume or walk in a particular manner to ensure a particular message is put across; and the audience is expected to pick some meanings from the cues given, even when the actor has not spoken. Verbal texts are expressions delivered in an oral form, using any language accessible to the audience. Sometimes, however, verbal texts may be written to be spoken (as in poems, plays and chat texts in online forums). Visual texts may also be combined with verbal texts to constitute an integrated visual-verbal text.

Texts can also be intertextual such that references are made to texts/situations outside the visual-verbal texts. Intertextual texts can be interpreted based on the context of culture, context of occurrence and context of speech. There may be co-texts, such that within a text, we may find allusions to different texts (literary allusion, biblical allusion, etc.). In addition, the environment plays important roles in the realisation of a text (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). This is because the authors and the receivers of the text fall back on their shared background to encode/decode the text.

Another aspect of the intertextuality of texts is in the realm of translation where a text is presented and translated into another language for the benefit of language users or for humour, as this study hopes to show. Mimicry and parody are also possible means of making multimodal texts intertextual. In multimodality then, all shades of communication and inferences can be used to achieve success in communication.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is eclectic due to the multivariate features in the stand-up comedian's performance. One part of the performance is incongruous, another part is verbal while yet another is visual/paralinguistic. Hence, the study adopted a blend of Incongruity Theory, Layered Meaning Theory and Visual Semiotics Theory.

Incongruity Theory accounts for the inconsistency in the logic of expressions in a text. It deals with the conflict between what the speaker of a joke says and what the listener expects (Veale, 2004; Jensen, 2006). Usually, humour texts consist of expressions with a punchline that serves as the turning point in the humour text. The punchline brings a twist that is incongruous to the logic presented at the beginning of the text and thus serves as the trigger of humour and laughter. This feature manifests in several scenes in the stand-up comedies

under investigation as the analyses below hope to show.

The second aspect of the framework is Clark's (1996) Theory of Layered Meanings. In this theory, it is assumed that texts have different layers/levels of meaning. There is the surface level, found in the denotational meanings of expressions, and there is the underlying meaning, arrived at through implicature or imputed meanings. These levels of meaning are very important in unravelling both the deep and surface structures of still texts as well as the dramatized versions of moving texts. There must be a clash between what is said and what is intended/expected before a humour text can be successful. There will also be some intervening background knowledge, which serves as a link between the layers. We may interpret this intervening knowledge or dividing line between the layers as the punchline, which demarcates the layer and allows readers to decipher the literal meaning and the joke aspect. In essence, there is a cognitive aspect to this theory. In this case, the layers have to be linked through the listener's or decoder's cognitive ability. Thus, a humour text inevitably has two layers, with a clash between them. When decoders listen to this, they exert their cognitive ability guided by the background or punchline, to interpret it as humour.

The third aspect is Visual Semiotics Theory. Visual Semiotics deals with the interpretations of signs. Signs can be in indexical, iconic or symbolic relationship with a referent (Sharp 2011,p. 2). Signs refer to items with specific meanings. This might be in form of gestures, images or inscriptions. The main requirement is that it must be meaningful in the society. Signs are indexical if they have an inherent relationship, such that there is a link between the sign and what it represents. Hence, storm is indexical of rain. Iconic signs have a direct relationship with the referent. Thus, a photograph or caricature is iconic, pointing out the referent directly. The final item is the symbol. This involves an arbitrary relationship between a referent and the symbol. A ready example is the flag representing a particular country. The arbitrariness involves the fact that the flag may be changed as there is no rigid connection between the two. Once the ideology behind the flag is disowned, the flag becomes an ordinary piece of cloth.

These three theories are relevant to the current study. The Incongruity Theory accounts for the illogicality between verbal expressions, Visual Semiotics examines the gestures displayed by the comedians and Layered Meaning explores the different layers of meaning inherent in comics' art as presented in the data.

Methodology

Data were collected from two major sources. Digital video discs (DVDs) containing stand-up comedy performances were bought and video clips of stand-up comedy performances were downloaded from the Internet. Relevant performances were selected from both sources through the purposive random sampling method. While DVDs and video clips were randomly selected, only

those performances that involved the use of multimodal communication were purposively selected for the study. The stand-up comedians featured in the data spread across different cadres of stand-up comedians and across the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and a few others. These are Ali Baba, Basket Mouth, Helen Paul, Omo Baba, Gordon, Gandoki, AY, Funnybone and Still Ringing. Hence, the data were considered representative of different categories of stand-up comedians in Nigeria. In all, six DVDs (Vols. 3, 7, 8 & 28 of *Nite of a Thousand Laughs* and Vols. 27 & 28 of *AY LIVE Happiness Edition*) and six video clips (downloaded from the Internet) were selected for the study. The total period of play was 8 hours and 20 minutes. The data were transcribed and relevant portions are analysed below through content analysis.

Code-pairing Involving Translation from a Verbal Code to Another

Translation is often used in stand-up comedy to make people laugh. Translation may be conceived as the transfer of a message from a source language to a target language. In the context of humour, translation involves conveying the sense of humour from one language to another. Scholars have identified untranslatability as a major problem associated with humour translation. This untranslatability is traced to language, culture, history and words (Vandaele 2010, Day Translations Blog, 2016). For linguistic untranslatability of humour, denotation and connotation are the culprits as concepts may differ from a language to another. Cultural untranslatability and history also cause problems to translators because of differences in history, culture and social relations. Finally, according to Day Translation Blog (2016), 'words may constitute the core of a joke, especially in dry humour, a subgenre of comedy in which there is practically no physical expression'. In this sense, a joke may depend on some kind of wordplay of the original language such that it is impossible to translate it (Day Translations Blog, 2016). Nevertheless, one area that is overlooked is the translation that is itself the cause of humour. In other words, the humour was not in the original text but it is introduced in the course of translation, especially through wordplay. In essence, the punchline is located in the translation. This feature is discussed in this section.

In addition, translations, especially of humour texts, are susceptible to typing mistakes (in case of subtitling), censoring and mistranslation. These were demonstrated by Okyayuz (2016) in the study of the American sitcom *Two and a Half Men.* According to him, translations may be creative to bring out humour more clearly in a text or censored if it belongs to any of the classes of political satire, strange culture/language, offensive expressions, controversial issues and incomprehensible humour, among others. Mistranslation of materials from a language into another implies a deficiency in the art of interpreting/ subtitling. However, another aspect that is relevant to this study is deliberate misinterpretation. In Nigeria, the comedians renowned for this feature are

the Still Ringing duo. Their performance is based on a preacher-interpreter relationship in a church setting. The preacher preaches in English while the interpreter interprets in Yorùbá. It means that two languages are involved in the performance. In this manner, they become meaningful as a humour text. The interpretation is deliberately made inaccurate, so as to make people laugh. The humour text can also be monolingual or bilingual. If monolingual, it is only in Yorùbá; if bilingual, it involves code-switching (CS) between English and Yorùbá languages. This is part of contact linguistics: two languages coming into contact, especially in communication. The two languages bear different texts and different meanings individually. However, they are combined to render a new text: code-pairing. Consider the following data:

2.   Preacher: ...because the host of **angels are set**.

Interpreter: E ṣóra fún àwon **áńgélì** tó ń jí **handset**.

'Beware of angels that steal handsets/cell phones.'

3.   Preacher: **Thanksgiving** is the **foundation** of this ministry.

Interpreter: Àwon ènìyàn f'orí ru **tank** nígbà táà ń ṣe **foundation** ṣooṣi yii.

'People carried (water) tanks on their heads while we were constructing the foundation of this church.'

4.   Preacher: **Gratitude** is what makes you keep scaling higher **altitudes**.

Interpreter: **Grà-grà** tẹ́ẹ máa ń ṣe ló jè kẹ́ẹ máa ta *pure water* **ti ò tutù**

'Your grandstanding caused you to sell sachet water that is not cold.'

In these examples, the preacher presents ideas in English, and the interpreter recasts them in Yoruba or CS. It probably would not have been remarkable if the translations were correct, but the interpreter deliberately created humour out of the translations by infusing incongruous mistranslations into the process (note the bolded sections). In the context of this paper, a blend of the original text and their assumed translations form a code-paired text which is used to evoke laughter from the audience. Without either of the English text and its Yorùbá mistranslation, the audience would probably not perceive any humour. Again, we see two layers of interpretation here. The preacher preaches sensibly, the interpreter translates inaccurately. The human cognition and shared background

will have to process the utterances by the two comedians and conclude that the text produced is actually a joke.

Code-pairing of Costume, Gesture and Verbal Texts

The use of costume plays a major role in eliciting laughter from audiences. The comedian or clown may dress in an awkward manner to elicit laughter from the audience. This awkward dressing often presents the comedian as uneducated, backward or downright silly. This is a means of deprecating self to elicit laughter. It belongs to the class of monomodal communication. In our data, comedians used a combination of costume, gestures and verbal codes to elicit laughter. One of the instances is the combination of AY, one of the Still Ringing duo (Ayo Ogunsina) and Helen Paul. They all dress in the long white robes for which members of some Pentecostal churches in Nigeria are known. AY's dress is very spectacular for its marked flamboyance. His robe is embroidered. On his embroidered cape is written *Baba Alakoso* 'the (Father) Controller', which ultimately makes him the head of the supposed clergy and congregation. Helen Paul also has a beret on her head, but Ayo Ogunsina does not wear a cap. The trio easily fit into the Nigerian context as such churches often have a husband and his wife operating as prophet and prophetess, respectively, with the regalia suitable for their offices. The husband preaches while an interpreter, a third person, interprets. The white robes communicate their respective statuses to the audience. They are a prophet (AY), a prophetess (Helen Paul) and an interpreter (Ayo Ogunsina).

Accompanying the costume are paralinguistic features. They all sing and dance onto the stage with their robes flying around them. The preachers swirl and jump; an indication that they are possessed by the Holy Spirit. Helen and AY also speak differently (Helen especially spoke 'through her nostrils.') to depict spirit possession. The statements, prayers or 'revelations' by AY are normal, but the translations are quite ludicrous! They are incongruous with the original statements. For instance, let us consider the following data:

5.   AY: Lord, transform their lives!

     Still Ringing: Olúwa, ẹ gbé *transformer* sílé ayé won!

     'Lord, install transformers into their lives!'

6.   Prophetess Helen: .....Ahaannh! Ayé burú. *Life people are wicked. I see Mama Patience...going back to Enugu...*èyíbàààh...Wòlíì! *I see... Osinbajo should grow taller o! ...When he was receiving his certificate, camera did not see him o*

In text (5), the translation is way off the intended message presented by AY. This brings in the elements of incongruity, layered meaning and cognition. In text (6), Helen Paul makes a 'revelation' about a public figure whose husband, Goodluck Jonathan (former president of Nigeria), has just lost an election and another one, the current vice-president of Nigeria, that is too short. She sees a 'vision' that the first will return to her hometown and (suggests) that the second should grow taller because when he was receiving his certificate of election into the public office he currently occupies, the camera could not find him! From the foregoing, intertextuality is at play. Text (6) makes reference to the major players in Nigeria's 2015 presidential election. Only people who could relate the joke to the last presidential elections in Nigeria would infer the butts of the joke. Further, three codes have been combined for effective communication which evokes laughter among the audience. These are costume, paralinguistic features of gambolling and speaking through the nose, and other verbal texts. There is also a pairing of three codes to form a composite whole that evokes humour and consequently elicits laughter from the audience.

In another text, the Still Ringing duo play a similar role in a real church setting, with the congregation fully in attendance as the audience. The comedians were dressed in suits, typical of some Pentecostal churches (the suit has become a uniform of sorts for church officials in some of these churches, hence the costume). On the pulpit, they have sheets of paper (probably texts of their jokes!) from which the 'preacher' reads and says things in English. As the 'preacher' moves about, the 'interpreter' follows him about like a typical interpreter and actually interprets into code-switched Yoruba-English texts. He comes across as a half-baked interpreter/bilingual who understands Yorùbá but just gets by in English. Hence, he provides incongruous and humorous mistranslations of the preacher's message; and when the preacher suspects a wrong interpretation, he convinces him that he (the interpreter) is right. Here are samples of his interpretation:

7. Preacher: Tonight is **your chance**.

   Interpreter: Wọ̀n ní lénìí, ẹ ti wọ *one chance.*

   'He says today, you've got into a one-chance vehicle (trouble).'

8. Preacher: **Illuminants** are scarce in the **market** of life.

   Interpreter: Àwón **Ilumínátí** ń ta *black market* lénu'jó méta yìí.

   'The members of Illuminati were selling (fuel) at a black market rate recently.'

Preacher: Hén? ('What?')

Still Ringing: Mo ràá nígbà táà ń bọ̀ now.

'I did buy it (fuel) while we were coming.'

9.   Preacher: But right now, I see you in the **wilderness.**

Interpreter: Hà-háà, wón ní ẹ̀ tún ń **mugbó**!

'Ha-haa, he says you also smoke weed!'

In (7) 'your chance' is misconstrued as *one-chance,* a parlance for commercial vehicles used to commit crimes, such as kidnapping people and extorting money from them. In (8) *illuminants* (whatever it means) is rendered as Illuminati (a supposed group of powerful cultists) and *market of life* is rendered as *black market*. The translation of (8) is therefore incongruous. In (9) *wilderness* is translated as *weed*, possibly because of the sound similarity of the initial syllable*, wild*; and the remaining part of the sentence is made to collocate with it. What one sees here, then, is that comedians use setting, space/gesture (movements), costume and verbal expressions in different combinations as parts of the strategies deployed in stand-up comedy to evoke humour.

Code-pairing Involving Code-switching

Code-switching often occurs where the Still Ringing interpreter's inaccurate interpretation ensues, and this causes laughter. Apart from that, the way he keeps a straight face as if he was oblivious of the havoc he wreaks on the message being interpreted is also funny. Sometimes, his face may be contorted to match his statements/translation:

10.   Preacher: There is no **alternative shortcut.**

Interpreter: **Ọ̀tá** ò lè wọ *native* lórí **bum short.**

'The enemy cannot wear a native dress on a bum short.'

11.   Preacher: You will make **impact**.

Interpreter: Wàá ta *spare parts.*

'You'll sell (vehicle) spare parts.'

12. Preacher: Our **political weather** is about to **change.**

Interpreter: Kò sí *politician* tó máa gbe'ṣẹ fún *welder* tí ò ní dúró gba *change.*

There's no politician that will give a job to a welder and would not wait to collect change.'

In these translations, the interpreter uses sound similarity (usually homophonic pun) to arrive at his translations. *Alternative* is rendered as 'enemy' and *native* 'mufti/native dress' and *shortcut* is rendered as *bum short* (a type of fashionable pants usually worn by females). The unexpected incongruity in the meaning of the code-switched translations is the harbinger of humour and laughter. Notice that this appeals to only bilinguals in English and Yoruba. In these examples too, two verbal codes are being used: Yoruba (normal typeface) and English (italics). These are convenient means of recasting the preacher's expressions to engender humour and elicit laughter from the audience.

We also note that this style of interpretation thrives on substitution of names, concepts or terms that have sounds with some semblance of similarity, either in part or in whole. In the above example (12), *weather* is deliberately misrepresented as *welder;* and the meaning of *change* in the original statement (transformation) is different from that in the translation (balance of money paid). The direct switch and the disparate meaning of *weather* compared to *welder* as well as that of *change* caused the audience to roar in laughter.

Let us consider the following datum too:

13.   Preacher: Why are you dancing **shockingly** to the tune of **Ahitophel**?

Interpreter: Kílódé téé ń jó **Shoki** s'órin **Ayéf**élé ?

'Why are you dancing Showkey (style) to Ayefele's song?'

The words *shockingly* and *Ahitophel* are the markers of humour in the translation. They are changed to *Shoki* and *Ayefele,* which happen to be names of popular Nigerian musicians: Daddy Showkey and Yinka Ayefele. The other words are added just to make the sentence complete.
Further, let us consider (14). Helen has just made a powerful political figure the butt of a joke and AY warns her:

14.   AY: Helen, *you are on your own* o! Eko la wà.

'Helen, you will bear the consequences of your statements alone. We are in Lagos'

AY's statement is a code-switched text from the Nigerian variety of English into Yoruba. Helen Paul had ridiculed a high-ranking government official in her joke. In (14), AY tries to absolve himself from blame, pragmatically telling Helen that, should there be a reprisal, she would bear the consequences of her jokes alone. His fear probably emanated from the fact that the performance was staged in Lagos where the butt of the joke lived.

Another aspect of code-switching occurred when AY, Still Ringing and Helen Paul sing as they dance to the stage as prophet, interpreter and prophetess, respectively. AY leads the song in Yorùbá and code-switches with glossalalia / esoteric language.

15. Alagbárá l' Ólóhùn mi o, alagbárá ni Jesu mí o; bóbá ti sóró béé náà ló ń rí. Jáh hílohìm, jáh hílohìm, jáh hílohìm...

'My God is powerful, my Jesus is powerful; when He says something, it comes to pass. Jáh hilohìm, jáh hilohìm, jáh hilohìm...'

16. Prophetess Helen: .....Ahaannh! Ayé burú. *Life people are wicked. I see Mama Patience...going back to Enugu...*èyíbàààh...Wòlíì! *I see... Osinbajo should grow taller o! ...When he was receiving his certificate, camera did not see him o!*

When AY invites Helen to deliver her 'revelation', she switches between English, glossalalia and Yoruba (as in 5 above, repeated as 16). This means that two verbal codes are used in the speech.

Code-pairing, Code-switching and Intertextuality

Part of the intertextuality is that jokes can be built round members of the audience. Deploying the same preacher-interpreter style, Still Ringing effectively identifies members of the audience, such as Austin Okocha (a former Nigerian soccer star), Funke Akindele (a Nigerian actress), Mrs Fashola (the wife of the then Lagos State governor), Ali Baba (a comedian) and a host of others. Here are examples:

17. Preacher: You will catch a **rhema** by his **mercy** when you come **under attack**.
Interpreter: *Combination* **Neymar** àti **Messi** kò dáa ní ***counter-attack.***

'The combination of Neymar and Messi is not suitable for counter-attack!'

18.   Preacher: …to enable the **government fashion** out **a way**.

Interpreter: **Ìjòba Fashola** ò *like* kéèyàn máa gba *one-wa*y!

Fashola's government does not like people contravening the one-way traffic law!' (Still Ringing)

In (17), the comedians sight Austin Okocha, a former Nigerian soccer star. They promptly invoke the strategy of intertextuality by making reference to Neymar and Messi who are current soccer stars. This is made possible because the words *rhema* and *mercy* occur in the 'preacher's statement and they have similar sounds with the players' names. The interpreter also changes *under attack* in the preacher's speech to *counter attack* so as to collocate with *Neymar* and *Messi,* and be meaningful to the audience. In the second example (18), the comedians see a State governor's wife and twist their joke to make her laugh. The preacher mentions *fashion* and *a way*, which the interpreter misconstrued as *Fashola*, the governor's name, and *one-way*, which clearly has a meaning difference from *away*. The interpreter's versions in the two examples are also code-switched expressions. The statement makes the audience reel with laughter. It follows that a combination of costume, code-pairing and intertextuality is also a strategy that comedians use.

Code-pairing of Verbal and Paralinguistic Texts

Another aspect of code-pairing in stand-up comedians' art is a blend of gestures and verbal expressions. In a joke, Ali Baba explains that when he went to South Africa, a member of the audience asked him if he was Jenson Washington or Darling Glover. The audience sneers, and he feigns anger and retorts:

19.   Ali Baba: 'Your father! Your father! Your father!'

In saying this, he simultaneously faces the audience with an open fist: an indirect insult to their mothers in the Nigerian context. Because he is holding the microphone in one hand, he cannot use both hands to demonstrate fully the intended insult to the audience. So, he removes one of his shoes and stretches one leg out so that the sole also faces the audience. In Nigeria, when the user has no means of retaliating an insult, the gesture of directing one's open fist at another is normally invoked as an insult to the person's mother. It is considered more intense when one uses two hands. Ali Baba has brought creativity into it by adding his foot. These are done simultaneously as he complements them with *Your father!...* This is a pairing of a verbal code with a gestural code.

Omo Baba, another comedian, also tells a joke involving gestures and verbal texts. He first warns the audience not to gloat on the fact that he is ugly, that they are not the first to tell him so. Then he narrates how he saw a pretty lady and blew her a kiss. The lady dodged the imaginary kiss, struggled and caught the kiss, put it under her foot and rammed it into the ground with the statement: 'God punish you!' Each action supposedly performed by the imaginary lady is demonstrated by Omo Baba. In this joke, we see a combination of verbal and paralinguistic features.

Mimicry, Quotes and Paralanguage

Generally, comedians often mimic other people's actions, and quote their statements with exaggeration or with parody. These features are accounted for under visual semiotics. Gordons, for instance, demonstrates how his father beat him when he (Gordon) woke up in the middle of the night, ostensibly to attend to nature's call. The father used a combination of slap, kick, punch and knock with matching verbal expressions to punish Gordon, who had woken up *in wrong timing* 'at a wrong time' in their one-room apartment.

20.   Any day [SLAP] when you wake up [BACKHAND SLAP] anyhow

[KNOCK ON THE HEAD] in wrong timing, say you wan piss [PUNCH

IN THE STOMACH], na dat day [KICK] you go piss last

[BACKHAND SLAP.]'

'Any day you wake up at a wrong time saying you want to urinate, that

would be the last time you urinate.'

In this example, the quotation from the father is paired with different gestures: knock, slap, punch and kick. The visual data show that the old man paused each time he delivered his punch, knock or kick on the boy. Hence, Gordons imitates and combines his father's paralinguistic features with the verbal outbursts to elicit laughter.

In the same vein, Funnybone compares how girls behave when they are being wooed. He compares the behaviour of traditional girls to that of modern girls. He mimics how traditional girls shyly answer questions posed by their admirers, whereas modern girls boldly ask their suitors what they want, making the suitors uncomfortable.

21.   Suitor: What's your name?

Traditional Girl: (faces her imaginary friend) Chioma, he's asking my name!

Suitor: Do you like me?

Traditional girl: I don't know o! (shyly hiding part of her face behind her cocked hand).

22.   Modern girl: (Looking boldly into the imaginary suitor's face) Hello!

What is it? Do you like me?'

Boy: (scratching his head) Hey, my sister, I don't know o!

In this mimicry, there is also a combination of verbal and paralinguistic features. We should also note that the comedian changes his voice to suit the traits of the person that he mimics. The combination creates the desired effect of evoking laughter.

In another joke, Omo Baba, creates different voices for football commentaries by foreigners in Nigeria. He mimics the voices and states how the Pope and the Imam run football commentaries. He also mimics how different people sing the popular nursery rhyme, *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.* He starts with the percussion, using his mouth. Then, he adds a chorus *Walahi, shege!* In essence, he is the lead, the chorus and the drummer (the audience later serves as the chorus).

23.   Omo Baba: Twinkle twinkle little star.

Audience: *Walahi, shege!*

Omo Baba: How I wonder what you are!

Audience*: Walahi, shege...*

Then, he changes to Yoruba:

24.   Omo Baba: Twinkle twinkle little star...*Ìyáa wọn, wọn-ọ̀n tíì pọ̀ tó!*

Wàìwàì lóń sáná.

'...To hell with their mothers! They're still not enough!...'

This is combined with verbal percussion and gestures as he moves about on the stage like a musician. This means that the comedian can shift between codes and between styles to make people appreciate his jokes. All these fall under visual semiotics.

Another comedian, Basket Mouth, tells a joke about violence in Warri. He states that the war in Warri is not fought by able-bodied men, but by the cripple. Then he demonstrates how cripples walk and talk when they are about to engage in violence:

25.   [Addressing an imaginary fellow] See am, en? E go rough. Anyone wey do anyhow, e go see anyhow... My guy, you just wan implicate yourself. Dis one you dey follow me so, if yawa come, you go fit run?

'See, it will be rough. Anyone that misbehaves will be dealt with... My friend, you just want to put yourself into trouble. As you now follow me, can you run if there is trouble?'

He says this while he wobbles to and fro on the stage, swinging his arms. He shows, especially, how cripples use the bad legs to walk away very fast. In this joke, the comedian merges the speech with the mode of walking that could be associated with cripples. One also notices incongruity here: a war is fought by the cripple rather than by able-bodied men and a cripple, confident of his own ability, asks if a normal biped can run in case there is trouble!

In another act, Basket Mouth tells a joke about a friend who always visited his house whenever food was almost ready. He narrates the incident of a particular day when he and his sibling had insufficient food and this same friend came. Basket Mouth and his sibling cleverly devised a linguistic means of excluding the visitor from the beans meal on fire. They were playing draughts when the visitor arrived and they played language tricks to edge him out, but he got them:

26.   Basket Mouth: See where e be you suppose chop from now...you dey do head like food wey don done.

'Look at the place where you could have won some points... your head (is shaped) like food that is ready.'

Sibling: (pretending to take offence) Bright, mind the way you talk to me. I'm your elder brother. You dey craze? You wey do mouth like person chop beans remain for person.

'Bright, ...Are you crazy? You with a mouth like one that eats beans and leaves some for someone.'

Visitor: Bo, una too dey distract me o! Wey una do eye like person...
people wey wan chop beans for person back.

'Friends, you are distracting my attention too much! Your faces look
like those of someone...people who want to eat beans behind another
person.'

In this joke, Basket Mouth matches his words with actions. He poses differently
as the two brothers, engaged in the game of draughts, as well as the unwanted
visitor. In the first place, he points at the imaginary draughts board as he speaks.
In the second, he plays the role of the 'brother' as he plays the game; and in the
third, he plays the game as he speaks like the 'visitor'. In all, he combines the
actions of playing draughts, going to and from the kitchen to cook beans, and
making relevant statements at each action he makes. The audience is able to
'visualise' all the actions as Basket Mouth combines his speech with gestures.

Finally, Gandoki tells a joke about how to avoid police harassment in
Nigeria. He suggests two ways of doing this. First, he advises motorists to park
when asked to do so. Then they should pretend to be deaf when policemen
question them. They should first remain silent and later blurt out statements in
the form of deaf speaking. He demonstrates these: parking the car, speaking like
a deaf person and finally being allowed by the police to leave. In the second joke,
he advises motorists to park their cars. When a policeman says 'come down,'
they should not budge; they should hesitate. When the policeman insists, they
should alight and walk like a lame person. These actions are demonstrated in a
funny manner. We need to know that in the context, verbal and paralinguistic
texts are merged to evoke laughter from the audience.

In all the examples in this section, the comedians play specific roles and
make relevant speeches demanded by the jokes. They show physical activities,
such as changing their accents, wobbling, walking (Basket Mouth; Omo Baba),
slapping/knocking (Gordons), imitating sounds of singing and percussion (Omo
Baba), role-changing (Funnybone; Basket Mouth) and playing deaf and dumb
(Gandoki). The members of the audience are able to see these actions on stage,
listen to the speeches/songs and interpret them based on shared background. The
subsequent laughter shows that the comedian has indeed achieved his/her aim.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, we can infer that the codes used by Nigerian comedians include verbal codes of different languages such as Pidgin (Funnybone, Basket Mouth), English (all comedians) and Nigerian indigenous languages, especially Hausa (Omo Baba), Yoruba (Still Ringing) and Igbo (Funnybone). However, due to the multilingual nature of Nigeria, the comedians often use Pidgin, which is understood by most Nigerians. This is followed by English. The indigenous languages are either code-switched with English or used for specific tasks. This is very important since the comedian wants a large audience to enjoy his/her jokes and create an avenue for further patronage. Another code is the combination of costume and symbols (though, sometimes, they may occur independently). The costume creates a specific identity intended by the comedian. It might also be necessary to put a symbol as an index or a marker of such identity (as in AY's church costume discussed above). Furthermore, the comedian uses paralinguistic features such as the movements of legs and arms, to achieve a particular goal. Often, these are exaggerated for the audience to notice and laugh.

Given these communication resources identified above, the comedians devise several strategies to evoke laughter among the audience. One of these is the use of texts code-paired with incongruous mistranslations. As we saw in the analysis, the preacher's utterances and the mistranslation form a code-paired text. In addition, the resultant illogicality of the incongruous mistranslations evoked laughter. In addition to the code-paired text, the strategy of code-switching is also used. This enables the interpreter to construct humorous sentences which are built on similarity of sounds between English and Yoruba words/expressions. The code-switched structures in the code-paired text facilitate laughter among the audience. Thus it becomes another strategy for comedians. The comedians also used gestures constantly. The visual codes of paralinguistic features are merged with costume and integrated with speech for effective communication. These observations lead us to the conclusion that the oral codes, gestures and symbols all combine as multimodal strategies used by comedians in their performances. The multimodal codes are integrated in different ways to elicit laughter.

Having explored different aspects of the Nigerian stand-up comedy performance, this study concludes that the integration of codes and modes of communication serves as an effective strategy in evoking humour and laughter in stand-up comedy. Hence, such strategies may be effective in other speech-making events such as teaching, radio/TV jingles and political campaigns to catch the attention of listeners, retain their interest in the discussion and put across intended messages. Finally, the study extends the frontiers of contact linguistics to issues of code-pairing and multimodality in humour research.

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