

# Ideologies in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

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## Abstract

The bond between language and ideology has caught the attention of discourse analysts. Investigating this bond, discourse analysts have further demonstrated that everyday interactions are embedded in and with different ideologies. Likewise, the performance of humour is motivated by the interlocutors' ideological inclinations. On the strength of these propositions, this study attempts a critical analysis of the ideologies in selected Nigerian stand-up comedy routines (NSC), with particular reference to Fairclough and Wodak's notions of ideology in discourse. Routines were purposively selected from editions of "Night of a Thousand Laughs" (NTL), the earliest stand-up event and a stand-up comedy road show in Nigeria, so as to focus on the performances of practicing and professional stand-up comedians in the country. Two categories of ideologies were found in NSC routines: the first relates to the art of comedy performance while the second relates to the country's sociocultural context. In the first category, the comedians project stand-up comedy as a "dignified" profession, while in the second, they draw from sociocultural beliefs in order to project their ideologies about gender, ethnicity and the political class.

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## 1 Introduction

A major interest of critical discourse analysts is the investigation of ideology in discourse. To these scholars, utterances are not neutral; they portray social identities, relationships and ideologies. The interconnectivity between language use and ideology plays out in the discourse of comedy performances. Humour, itself, is a function of ideological inclinations- what humans find funny depends on their ideological beliefs on what is funny. In stand-up comedy, the performance of jokes is embedded with and grounded in ideologies, which may be or may not be shared with the audiences. Stand-up humour consists of acts which reinforce the ideology that defines the geo-cultural context of the performance or which supplant the ideology that envelope the routines so as to mediate new realities and perspectives. The comedians' act of projecting a sociocultural belief to support or supplant an ideology mirrors the comedians' rhetorics of critically appraising their social, cultural and political realities. It is in this view that studies such as Greenbaum (1999) and Mintz (1985) have described stand-up comedy as rhetorical argument and social and cultural mediation. Following from this, this study, attempts a descriptive analysis of the ideologies in Nigerian stand-up comedy.

Although stand-up comedians make use of nonverbal cues in their performance of humour, they depend more on language in their routines. Most of their jokes and anecdotes depend on manipulation of language, meaning and context. Language use is inspired by the ideologies of the

participants, or as Mills (1997: 46) puts it, a range of different ideologies exists within a discourse. Jokes, as an instance of language use, are also embedded with different ideologies. In this paper, we identify and describe the ideologies which are found in the selected routines of Nigerian stand-up comedians.

For the average individual, stand-up routines are nothing more than entertainment; however, a critical perspective will reveal that it is an outlet to view the society from a different angle. Primarily, humour and its performance mirror the sociocultural context of its users. In Nigeria, humour has been described as being central to the pragmatics of everyday survival (cf. Obadare 2016). Given Obadare's thesis, it seems that the pressing social realities of Nigeria, like unemployment, corruption, poor leadership and poverty, are the motivating factors for the country's popular humorous forms in recent times. One of the dimensions of stand-up comedy in Nigeria is that it tackles the negative postcolonial realities. As entertainers, the country's stand-up comedians interpret the Nigerian social life; they perform a comic dimension to the country's socio-political situation. Scholars have described such performances as instances of strategically coping with the sociocultural realities of Nigeria (cf. Obadare 2016; Yeku 2016). Given these observations about Nigerian humour discourse, one could not but think about ideological deployment in the genre. Besides, since comedy venues are contexts for cultural and identity critique (cf. Gilbert 1997), one cannot play down the role of ideology in such context.

## **2 Methodology and analytical framework**

Nigerian stand-up comedy is made available in video compact disc format (VCD). Recorded comedy shows in VCDs served as the source of the excerpts that were used for the analysis. Purposive sampling was used to limit data to 28 routines of 16 male and 3 female Nigerian stand-up comedians in editions of "Night of a Thousand Laughs" (NTL) and "theComedyBerlusconi" (CB), which were produced between 2009 and 2013. This was to reflect the gender composition of Nigerian stand-up comedians (NSC), focus on popular practicing professional (NSC) and avoid analysing their repeated routines. NTL is the most popular and earliest comedy road show in Nigeria while the CB was a comedy concert produced by one of the foremost comedians, Gordons, in 2013. In a typical show, a comedian is given 10-15 for his/her routine which could be interspersed with musical performances, mimes and pantomimes (cf. Adetunji 2013). Since Nigerian stand-up comedians perform primarily in Nigerian Pidgin (NP), the routines analysed in this study were translated after being transcribed. In the translations, the goal was to help readers to get the meaning as well as form of the language used by the comedians. Thus, the translations tilted towards idiomatic as well as direct translation as dictated by the routines. And since we did not carry out a structural analysis of the routines, only the translations were presented as excerpts. We also indicated the name of the comedian whose excerpt was used for illustration at the end of each excerpt.

The analysis is informed by the analytical framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA views discourse as a social practice and it is interested in the ways by which ideologies are expressed through language (cf. Baker/Ellece 2011: 26-27). Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 67-68) opine that CDA is based on four principles, which are:

- Social and political issues are constructed and reflected in discourse;
- Power relations are negotiated and are performed through discourse;
- Discourse both reflects and reproduces social relations;
- Ideologies are produced and reflected in the use of discourse.

Fairclough (1995) proposes that discourse is made up of three elements: a social practice, discourse practice and text. Underlying these elements is ideology. Analysing ideology in discourse, therefore, entails locating the worldview of the participants, who are involved in the text production, distribution and consumption. Such world view is tied to the participants' actions and the social effects of their actions (cf. Fairclough 1995). In CDA, at the micro level analysis, focus is placed on language use, verbal interaction, linguistic structures and meaning; while at the macro level, investigation of ideology, power relations, dominance and the likes are investigated.

The present paper was situated within the frame of macro level of CDA. However, we began the analysis with an illustration of micro analysis of the routines of Nigerian stand-up comedians. In the second part of the analysis, we uncover the ideologies that are embedded in the routines of the comedians. The conceptual frameworks we adopted for the investigation were derived, primarily, from humour research. For the micro analysis, analytical insight was taken from the incongruity-resolution approach, specifically, Yus (2003), while for the macro analysis, we drew from other different approaches in humour research as dictated by the text of comedians.

### **3 Nigerian Stand-up comedy (NSC)**

Compared with its western counterpart, NSC is a relatively new genre. It seems to have emerged as the most popular source and form of humour performance in the country. A number of studies with different foci on NSC exist (cf. Adetunji 2013; Ayakoroma 2013; Filani 2015a/b; 2016); however, most of these studies are situated within the field of linguistics. NSC is usually traced to Allelujah Atupota Akpobome (whose stage name is Ali Baba) as its progenitor and to 1993 when Ali Baba started performing regularly at a Lagos nightclub (cf. Adetunji 2013). In his review of NSC, Ayakoroma (2013) traces its development, and notes that NSC in its present form is not unconnected with traditional jesters in pre-colonial societies in Nigeria. NSC is characterised by a single performer entertaining a seated audience with his jokes. However, there are instances of duet performances. A defining feature of NSC is the use of Nigerian Pidgin, which could be alternated with English and indigenous languages depending on the composition of the participants or the joke being performed, as the language of performance (see Adetunji 2013).

In general, studies on humour in Nigeria comment on the subversive and critical use of jokes (cf. Adeleke 2005; Obadare 2016; Yeku 2016). In addition, some of these studies view humour performance in the Freudian sense- as a coping mechanism in the county's troubled socio-political life (for instance, Obadare 2016/Yeku 2016). However, linguists who have explored Nigerian humour have focused more on micro analysis, making comments on discourse of jokes, pragmatic strategies and the language of humour performance. For examples, Adetunji (2013) is on the adoption of pragmatic strategies like linguistic coding, stereotyping and self-

deprecation for instantiating humour while Filani (2015a/b) are discourse theoretical approaches to stand-up performance.

In this study we diverge from just the analysis of the linguistic micro level of Nigerian stand-up comedy. Using the interpretive framework of CDA, we take further the linguistic analysis by identifying the underlying socio-cultural beliefs that inform the jokes, the strategies for performing them as well as their ideological implication.

## **4 Humour**

According to Attardo (2011), the word humour has emerged as the technical term that is used to refer to anything that is funny, amusing and/or laughable. Scholars and other individuals usually associate humour with laughter. It is assumed that laughter indicates the presence of humour and vice-versa; however, studies have shown that laughter and humour are two different phenomena (cf. Attardo 1994; Bardon 2005). The presence of laughter may not necessarily mean the realisation of humour while the realisation of humour may be signalled by laughter. Laughter has several meanings and it is not directly proportionate to the intensity of humour, therefore, it exceeds humour (cf. Attardo 1994). Laughter becomes a reaction to humour when it is related to an external stimulus like a joke which has induced amusement. Humour and laughter are found in all human cultures and society.

It is agreed in literature that for anything to be regarded as humorous, incongruity must be found in it. Incongruity is seen as a sort of unusual or unexpected juxtaposition of events, objects, or ideas which violate expectations. Because violation of expectations may lead to fear or anxiety, humour theorists further conceptualise humour as enjoyment of incongruity. The initiator and recipient of humorous stimulus have to feel safe and must not be threatened by the violation of expectations. Humour is the quality that makes an act or art comedy. It is the common element in ridicule, parody, satire absurdities, farces, wits and jokes (cf. Bardon 2005). There are therefore subgenres in the genre of humour. Since stand-up comedy is an interaction where humour is initiated and consumed, it could be viewed as a genre of humour.

### **4.1 Humour and Ideology**

On the surface, the two concepts, humour and ideology, may not be related. However, given that ideology underlies human activities and creative imaginations like drama, writing and music, the deliberate creation of humour will also be laden with ideologies. Also, given the nature of humour, the contexts in which it can be used and the social functions it performs, it is quite possible to relate humour with ideologies. For the present purpose, two perspectives can be identified in relating humour to ideology: the ideology of humour and the ideologies in humour. The first has to do with the nature of humour: how the society has conceptualised humour while the second has to do with the use to which humour is put in the society.

#### **4.1.1 Ideology of humour**

The ideology of humour stems out of the nature of the phenomenon of humour. As a social phenomenon, humour is believed to be harmless. It is assumed that when people joke, they mean no harm. Conversational analysis theorists have noted how interlocutors deny the social meaning and pragmatic implications of their jokes (cf. Attardo 1994). Utterances like “it’s only

a joke” and “I was only joking” are used to express the “harmlessness” of what has been presupposed to be impolite and harmful to the recipients. Because the use of jokes involves adopting a playful mind frame, humour theorists have proposed that people swap from a serious mode of interaction to a light-hearted one whenever they joke. In this sense, Mulkay (1988) differentiates the serious mode from the humorous mode. In the serious mode, the expectations and presuppositions for social reality are maintained while in the humorous mode rules of social conventions are not adhered to. The distinction of playful mode from serious mode shows that it is assumed that humour is harmless since it does not prop up in serious mode and since people need not to take it seriously. Thus, underlying the use of humour is an ideology through which humour is perceived as a harmless art and act. The ideology that humour is harmless could be termed, as suggested by Mulkay (1989), pure humour. An instance of the use of humour where interlocutors ignore the “serious” potentials of humour is found in stand-up performance.

In instances where humourists initiate jokes, such as cartoons and stand-up comedy, people are not expected to take seriously whatever the humourist projects. Usually, given the social frame in which humour occurs, it is assumed that the primary goal of the humourist is to initiate laughter and amusement. According to Tsakona/Popa (2011), any serious implication that could result from humourists’ acts are downplayed and ignored. For the humourists, whatever they do is meant to amuse people. People are therefore not expected to derive any serious implications from their humour.

Closely knitted to the belief that humour is a harmless phenomenon is that the use of humour endears a speaker to the audience. Its presence in a speech arrests and detains the attention of the audience. Audrieth (1998) refers to how humour could be used to enhance the affects of a speech when he notes that a speaker who can effectively use humour to engage and entertain the audience possesses a valuable gift. We opine that it is because people view humour as harmless that they are easily attracted to it. Since humour is not threatening, people find it enjoyable.

#### **4.1.2 Ideology in humour**

Ideology in humour results from the use to which humour is put. People use humour for different reasons. Besides, before humour can be effectively used, there must be a number of contextual information and background knowledge existing between the initiator and recipient(s). For instance, the users of humour must be aware of who the target of humour is and why the person or group is targeted in a joke. In this instance, humour is considered as a vehicle for social meanings and ideological inclinations. Mulkay (1988) describes the use of humour in this sense as impure or applied humour.

Different studies have investigated how humour has been used as a vehicle for expressing different ideologies. Schmidt (2011) explores how the occupational humour of correctional officers in United States prisons is used to express the users’ ideological inclinations about their jobs as correctional officers; for instance, it marks their belief that they are arbiters for decoding and judging inmates’ lies as well as providing safety for the society by keeping watch over prisoners. In another study, Matsumoto (2009), having studied the use of humour in painful self-disclosures among elderly Japanese women, opines that humour is used to project the ideology of wellness. Through humour, elderly Japanese women project the beliefs that it is normal to

be in perfect health and that infirmity and death are deviant. Similarly, Holmes (2006) highlights how humour is used to project professional identities and gender inclinations. In a previous study, Holmes/Marra (2002), humour is seen as a discursive boundary marker which functions as a tool for bringing to the fore aspects of social identity; for instance, it is used to signal ethnic identity between dominant and subordinate groups.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the use of humour is motivated by different ideologies. In the first place, the participants of humorous exchanges could assume that they are in a playful mood and are enjoying themselves. Thus, they would not attach an underlying meaning to humour. On the other hand, the initiator of humour may use it to project a populist or personal belief. For instance, the genre of political humour usually projects the political class in negative lights. Thus, in some climes, political humour is used as a tool for political liberation.

#### **4.2 Humour in NSC**

This section is dedicated to the micro analysis of the routines of Nigerian stand-up comedians. We draw from cognitive pragmatic approach to humour in presenting an overview of the linguistic micro structure of humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy context. In his summary of relevance theory approach to humour, Attardo (2003) notes that humour has a pragmatic component. Much of the linguistic approaches to humour has attempted to describe this pragmatic component, for instance, the general theory of verbal humour (cf. Attardo 1994), analysis of humorous strategies (cf. Yus 2004) and analysis of cognitive mechanism underlying jokes (cf. Dynel 2012). In this paper, we examine the micro strategy of employing contrasting assumptions and the mechanism of garden path phenomenon in NSC.

Humour primarily works with the discovery and resolving of incongruity. A way through which incongruity is generated is by weaving into the routines contrasting assumptions. Such contrasting assumptions could be realised linguistically through strategies of exaggeration, mimicry, punning and allusion. It is also possible to achieve it pragmatically by manipulating shared contextual beliefs- for instance, contradicting background beliefs. We illustrate this with the excerpt below:

Then I proceeded to Secondary school. I wrote WAEC seven times, to the extent that the year I did not register for the examination, WAEC sent me a result.

(Excerpt 1, Princewill)

In the joke from which the excerpt is taken, the comedian presents himself as a student who consistently fails examination. In the excerpt, the comedian draws from the shared background knowledge about an examination body, the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) which regulates the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in West Africa. WAEC is seen as a stumbling block to students because of the high rate of examination failure which is usually recorded in the SSCE. It is assumed that people generally fail the examination and therefore they have to re-register for it. The comedian jokes about himself, projecting a premise that because he repeated the SSCE many times, the examination body readily recognised his name as a registered candidate who will fail the exam. Thus, for the year he did not register, WAEC prepared a result for him since he is a permanent “customer” who will always register for the examination and whom the examination body will always automatically generate a result for. In the excerpt, the comedian adopts the strategy of hyperbole to achieve humour. He

exaggerates the number of times he sat for SSCE, his failure and the act of receiving a result from the examination body.

Another micro linguistic concept that we identified is the use of garden path phenomenon in NSC. Dynel (2012) describes the garden path phenomenon as deceiving the audience into arriving at a readily available interpretation which has to be ultimately cancelled, on the strength of an incongruous punchline. In Dynel's analysis, the joke text must have a covert ambiguity, which would be resolved with the humorous peak of the text. The covert ambiguity may be semantic or pragmatic. One way by which pragmatic ambiguity is embedded in comic narrative texts in NSC context is irony and/or sarcasm- a deliberate manipulation of linguistic structure and deliberate linguistic misrepresentation of situation. An example is seen in the routine of Bovi.

I like women, but all women are mischievous. And anything that involves women attracts a lot of debates; they said a senator married a 13 year old. You don't believe it? It is very true. But they were lying against the man! I can feel his pain – that they lied against him that he married a 13 year old. The girl is not 13. She is 14.

(Excerpt 2, Bovi)

In this joke, Bovi dwells on an act that was extensively criticised in the country- a senator's marriage to a 13-year-old girl. In the lead-up of the joke, he made it overt that he was going to criticise the senator for the marriage as a lot of people have done. He made it explicit that people had not been sincere with the girl's age, and by extension, the senator ought not to be criticised for the marriage. However, with the punchline which still portrayed the girl as too young for marriage, the audience would realise that Bovi's intention was to humorously criticise the senator's marriage to the underage girl. Technically, Bovi adopted irony and also had the covert intention of criticising the senator while he overtly indicated that he was not going to criticise the senator.

## **5 Ideologies in Nigerian Stand-up comedy**

### **5.1 Stand-up comedy is a profession**

The first ideology found in NSC borders on how comedians project what they do. In analysing this ideology, it is important to note that the comedians' workplace is the performance arena, where they are being watched and listened to by their audience. In the wider social context, the comedy "work" is not taken as a "serious" work. The society views the comedian as someone who is not capable of logical thinking, hence, as someone deserving pity. In Mintz's (1985: 74) words, the comedian is "physically and mentally incapable of proper action". The society also takes the art and act of comedy light-heartedly. This negative view of the comedian is further perpetuated and strengthened by imaginative works like movies and literary texts. For instance, in Shakespearean plays, the comedian is tagged a fool (cf. Adeleke 2007). In these imaginative works, and the society at large, the fool (and in the present context – the stand-up comedian) is not taken seriously. The fool is expected to appear only when people need comic relief. Thus their role is restricted to instances when people or character needs to take a break from their professional works.

The perspective that the fool is an unserious individual, lacking the needed prerequisite for serious professional work is transferred into how Nigerian stand-up comedians are perceived. To the average person, a stand-up comedian is not a professional since s/he engages in ‘what does not need rigorous and logical thinking’. In countering this perspective, Nigerian stand-up comedians instantiate communicative acts through their jokes and appearance on stage.

The jokes of the comedians are instances of their verbal acts. The verbal acts of the comedians are instances of comic language use or comedy language. Nigerian stand-up comedians’ comedy language is designed and constructed in a way to maintain the performer-audience sphere. The speech acts and communication cues instantiated by the comedians are meant to build, emphasise and sustain the institutional identities of the participants of stand-up interaction. Specifically, the discourse is constructed in a manner that the comedians will be constantly viewed as funny individuals. Mintz (1985) describes the comedians’ jokes as an instance of distortion which is achieved through techniques like exaggeration, stylisation, incongruous context and burlesque. To correct the audience ideological stance about what they do, Nigerian stand-up comedians weave into their jokes speech acts that emphasise the fact that performing a joke is an instance of a professional act. In some instances, they make a joke out of the act of performing jokes. An instance is seen in Gordons’ routine. The following lines are taken from his narration

And I tell the truth, a lot of comedians have come and you didn’t clap for them. It’s not easy to crack joke. If you think it’s easy, go and crack joke for a politician who lost out in an election.

(Excerpt 3, Gordons)

From these lines, Gordons is referring to how difficult it is to make the audience laugh while performing. The implied premise is that not everyone can deliver a joke effectively and, given the contextual knowledge of what comedy performance entails, the implication that can be derived from the lines is that only professional comedians can make people laugh. Apart from instances where Nigerian stand-up comedians overtly refer to their act and art of joke performance as a professional activity; so as to imply that they are trained professionals for comedy, they also orientate their audience towards finding humour in whatever they do while performing. In our opinion, only professional comedians can achieve this.

Besides the comedians’ verbal acts, their nonverbal acts also picture them as professionals. Specifically, their mode of dressing is one which will make the audience to view them not as comic characters but as professionals who work in government ministries and parastatals and business organisations like banks and international conglomerates. Commenting on how Nigerian stand-up comedians dress, Ayakoroma (2013) opines Nigerian stand-up comedians wear designers’ suits as professionals, their performances hold in high profile venues and attract high profile fees. He further describes (stand-up) comedy as a veritable business, an industry and factory which employs a lot of people. To us, what comedians do by the way they dress for their performance is to project an image of professionals and a sense of professionalism. They seem to say that they are also like other career-oriented individuals who must be properly dressed.

## 5.2 Political Ideology: Nigerian Political class is corrupt and irresponsible

By political ideology, we do not mean the ideological inclinations like capitalism, marxism or communism. Our use of the term political ideology refers to the populist views about the political class in the Nigerian society. To properly ground our concept of political ideology in Nigerian stand-up comedy, there is a need to review existing studies on political humour.

As shown in Tsakona/Popa (2011), political humour is conceptualised in two dimensions: humour by politicians and humour about politicians. In the first instance, the term refers to how politicians employ jokes to target the opposition and to attract the affiliation of the populace. In the second instance, it refers to jokes in which people satirise and parody the political class. The second perspective of political humour fits our goal in this study. Studies like Tagangaeva (2013) and Popa (2011) have shown that citizens use jokes as valves for expressing their passive resistance to governments. Popa (2011) further suggests that the deployment of political humour in the media enacts an active and sharp process of questioning and critique so as to animate democratic health.

In our view, by including Nigerian political actors in their routines and constructing their jokes around the (in)actions of Nigerian political elite and government agencies, Nigerian stand-up comedians identify with, expand and strengthen the populists' ideology about politics in Nigeria. To construct political humour in their jokes, they draw on the shared knowledge about political actors and events. They employ as their targets, politicians and political office holders, and base their joke on what these actors have done in the country. Excerpts 4 and 5 are examples which indicate the populist ideology about the Nigerian political class.

Thank God I'm a Nigerian and I'm proud to be a Nigerian. But the things being introduced into the country cannot work. It may work but I'm not sure it will work. Rebranding Nigeria. Where did they get the idea? Have they passed through Lagos Road? We are just paying lip-service all the time. Paying lip-service- Rebranding Nigeria. The other time, they said by this time two years ago, this time, we would have uninterrupted power. But till now, what we have is standby generator. Our leaders with their talks, most time, get me angry. It is not this country that needs rebranding, it is the leaders that need to be rebranded.

(Excerpt 4, I Go Save)

What the comedian, I Go Save, dwells on in Excerpt 4 is the contextual assumption and belief that Nigerian government officials do not take seriously their responsibilities and the act of governing the country. They rather pay lip service to correcting the pitiful situation of the country. In the excerpt, the comedian targeted the Nigerian Federal Government's public orientation policy tagged Rebranding Nigeria, which was popularised by a former Minister of Information in the country. The Minister of Information, who introduced the programme, had argued that what the country needed was an improved public image and that the country was not as bad as it was perceived by the citizens and perhaps other countries. However, the comedian views the policy as a means of paying lip service to solving the infrastructural challenges in the country. To make explicit his view, he exemplifies with the deplorable state of Nigerian roads by mentioning "Lagos Road", a very busy expressway which has been neglected by successive governments, and the government's continuous promises of stable electricity. By dwelling on the lack of sincerity by politicians in tackling national problems, the comedians project the

perspective that the political actors in Nigeria are irresponsible. Closely knitted to this perspective is the popular view that Nigerian political class is corrupt. In many routines, comedians refer to corrupt acts and practices of the country's political class and government agents (and agencies), for instance, bribery in the Nigerian police force. This is obvious in Excerpt 5.

Police arrested me last month, April first. Everybody I called thought I was joking. They arrested me for armed robbery. I called my dad, "Hello Daddy, I was arrested". He said I was joking. The policemen said, "Today you are a dead man. Write your statement." Then I took the pen and wrote what I knew. Then the police took the biro and signed, April fool. They said, "You comedians always make jokes on us; how do you feel now?" I got up and wanted to leave but they said I was not going anywhere. I asked, "Why, but you just said it was a joke". The police officer replied, "Do people joke with money? Call your people, they have to bail you!"

(Excerpt 5 Bovi)

To understand this joke that targets the Nigeria Police Force in Bovi's routine, two contextual assumptions are pertinent. The first is that, on the first of April, Nigerians make fool out of their friends and acquaintances. For instance, a person could pretend to be sick to get his wife's and children's attention. When such care and devotion has been/ is being given, he can turn the scenario to joke by saying 'April fools'. The second has to do with the operational knowledge of the Nigerian Police Force. Due to the perceived high level of corrupt practices of the force, it is assumed that policemen could be won over by financially inducing them, since it is commonplace to see policemen requesting for financial inducements while carrying out their statutory responsibilities. These contextual assumptions set up the political humour in the joke.

In the joke, Bovi was wrongly and deliberately arrested; the police offer made light of the illegal detention by saying it was just a joke. To bring about the incongruity needed for the humour, one expects that the comedian would be allowed to leave the police station since his arrest was a joke; rather, he was further detained until someone would go and bail him. Bailing in the Nigerian police operational context is said to be free; however, in practice, police officers do charge some money for bail. They, therefore, abuse power as law enforcement agents and usurp the power of the court to grant bail. With the joke, Bovi projects the police, the Nigerian government's main law enforcement agency, as corrupt.

In several instances in Nigerian stand-up comedy where political actors and government agencies are mentioned, as shown in Excerpts 4 and 5, Nigerian stand-up comedians project political ideologies that are grounded in the Nigerian populist perspective of the country's political class. In the two examples, these populist views are: Nigerian political leaders are irresponsible and Nigerian political class is corrupt. These two views strengthen the idea that the country has remained underdeveloped due to lack of good leadership.

### **5.3 Ethnic Ideologies: the canny, the stupid and the promiscuous ethnic groups**

A common feature of Nigerian stand-up comedy routines is the performance of jokes in which various ethnic groups in the country are targeted. Ethnic humour makes fun of an ethnic group by targeting their behaviours, customs, traditions and any other trait which indicate their socio-cultural identity (cf. Haghish et al. 2014). In the Nigerian stand-up comedy context, one would expect that comedians will only target ethnic groups that are not theirs; however, comedians are found to mock their own ethnic groups.

Ethnic humour in Nigeria is better understood when the multi-ethnic setting of Nigeria is considered. Nigeria has approximately 514 indigenous languages which are spoken across ethnic divides (Lewis 2009). These ethnolinguistic groups are classified using different political criteria. For instance, the first classification, which is the most referenced, divides Nigeria ethnolinguistic groups into major-minor dichotomy. As Ogunsiji (2001) observes, the political arrangement regarding some ethnolinguistic groups as major and others as minor does not go down well with the indigenes of the so-called minority groups, for fear of being marginalised socially, economically and politically. The division, therefore, breeds a situation of struggle for supremacy amongst the ethnolinguistic groups (cf. Oha 2003). It is in the context of the politics for ethnic supremacy that jokes on indigenous ethnic groups are set-up in Nigerian stand-up context. Comedians use their jokes on ethnic nationalities, not as a means of indicating ethnic supremacy, but as a coping strategy in a cultural space that is marked by volatile ethnic struggles. This is why comedians do mock their own ethnic group(s). In this manner, ethnic humour in Nigerian stand-up context is not overtly hostile, rather, it “clarifies the inter-group boundaries, decreases ambiguity by targeting social, geographical, and moral boundaries, and consequently makes living in a multi-cultural society easier” (Haghighi et al. 2014: 74).

Davies’ (1990) theory of ethnic humour “attempts to discover societal regularities in the anecdote traditions of different countries by contextually describing jokes” (Laineste 2005: 8). We must note that Davies (1990) adopts the binary notion of scripts suggested by Raskin (1985) in developing his theory of ethnic humour. He suggests that the scripts employed in constructing jokes are derived from social facts and that joking traditions of various countries are predicated upon principles which determine the ridiculed qualities and ethnic group. Most importantly, it is assumed that there exist cultural tenets which function as presuppositions for conceptualising the targets of the jokes as diverging from the norm and average. Thus, ethnic groups that are featured in the routines of Nigerian comedians have comically defective attributes which form the basis for targeting them. Besides, in the emerging Nigerian culture, such attributes are viewed with the perspective that they are unbecoming for the Nigerian nation. We are, therefore, of the opinion that ethnic jokes in Nigerian stand-up comedy are not markers for creating ethnic boundaries and identities, but are meant to create a central identity- the Nigerian identity.

A common strategy used by Nigerian stand-up comedians in instantiating ethnic jokes is naming. Usually, they adopt a tag, which could be the geographical location where an ethnic group is mainly domicile, name of the ethnic group or a word commonly used to refer to people from the ethnic group, and then depict the targeted group as possessing a negative script. Examples are highlighted below:

- i. The canny script which is exemplified by the tags Warri boy and Benin people. In several instances, Warri boy and Benin people are projected as shrewd. Comedians use the statement “Warri boy no dey carry last” which translates to “A Warri boy cannot be beaten at his game” to depict the canny script. Whenever this script is projected, comedians present their target as breaking rules and not adhering to protocols so as to take advantage of people.
- ii. The foolish script which is exemplified by the tags *Aboki* and Yoruba man/girl/woman. *Aboki* is the Hausa word for male young adult; thus, it is a term that is used for targeting the Hausa ethnic group. In their routines, comedians conceptualise *Aboki* as the individual who carries out tasks that do not demand rigorous thinking, for instance, fetching water and

operating *okada* (Nigerian English term for commercial motorcycle). In jokes where *Aboki* appears, he is usually offered an amount of money that is higher than the bill he charges the person who patronises him, however, *Aboki* will insist that he wants the exact pay since he is not a fool who can be cheated. To further strengthen the foolish script, comedians mimic a speech pattern which is marked by large scale interference of the Hausa language while they are voicing the utterances and actions of *Aboki*. Likewise, the Yoruba ethnic group is commonly targeted because of mother tongue interference in their spoken English.

- iii. The promiscuous script is usually attached to Benin and Calabar ‘girls’. In the routines, the comedians project females from these cities as seeking sexual gratification from males.

There are repeated utilizations of ethnic related scripts in NSC. We shall illustrate this with the canny script which is used in constructing the jokes on Warri indigenes as seen in Excerpt 6. Of particular interest in this excerpt on Warri boys is the fact that the comedian, I Go Dye, from whose routine the example is taken, is an indigene of Warri. In the routine, he deliberately denigrates his people and hometown for comical effect.

We Warri indigenes, we are never beaten at anything. When people are performing jokes, you are all laughing. But in Warri, the audience deliberately will not laugh because they know that the degree of hilarity which each comedian evoked from the audience would be used in deciding the pay of the comedian. If you all do not laugh well, I would not be paid appropriately. The more you laugh, the more my pay. This is why Warri audience would plan not to laugh in comedy shows. They could decide, today, we want to destroy the comedy career of I Go Dye. Warri people, they would make you to explain jokes.

(Excerpt 6, I Go Dye)

In the routine, I Go Dye portrays Warri indigenes as difficult to please in comedy performance. Certain background beliefs are needed to better understand the comedian’s stance, two of which are the notions that Warri indigenes are very funny and that they are naturally restive. Thus, when a comedian has Warri indigenes as members of the audience in comedy shows, the comedian is faced with an uphill task because the audience group is one that will deliberately not laugh at what is funny. Technically, we will say that the Warri audience would choose not to cooperate with the comedian or would suspend the assumptions required for interpreting jokes.

As observed above, these ethnic jokes are not meant to create ethnic identities but they are constructed to project a national one. What the comedians, who are from different ethnic nationalities in the country, both major and minor, try to do with the ethnic jokes is to show how the perceived differences, as exemplified by the stereotypes in the jokes, do not fit into the national culture. Ethnic jokes in Nigerian stand-up comedy foster community and further project a sense of mutual support for common belief and behaviour through shared laughter. As suggested by Mintz (1985), they are instances of plural reflexivity- ways by which Nigerians portray, understand and then act on themselves.

#### 5.4 Gender Ideologies: doing gender in comedy routines

Much of the development in scholarship on the relationship between discourse and gender stems from the publication of Lakoff’s (1972) article, language and woman’s place (Eckert/McConnell-Ginet 2003). Scholars have investigated how women’s speech is different from men’s and how the society constructs the differences between men and women. This

construction of gender types amounts to what can be termed subjectification of gender (see Mills 199: 77-103). In this study, we follow Wodak's (1997: 2) suggestion that gender should be investigated in connection with the sociocultural and ethnic background of the interlocutors as well as the power-dynamics of the discourse investigated. Our goal in this section is to outline and exemplify how Nigerian stand-up comedians do gender, produce and reproduce it in their routines.

Yus (2004) opines that in stand-up performances, the comics are predisposed to projecting two types of beliefs, collective cultural beliefs and the comedian's personal belief. We opine that these two beliefs underscore the articulation of gender inclinations in Nigerian stand-up comedians. Nigerian stand-up comedians could project their own personal beliefs about gender, thereby, contradicting and rejecting the sociocultural construct of gender types. On the contrary, they may project the collective sociocultural subjectification of gender, thereby, strengthening the collective cultural ideologies about gender.

Holmes (2006) shows that there is a measure of diversity in the ways employees use humour at work. Contextual factors like the social construction of gender contribute to diversity found in workplace humour. On stand-up comedy and gender, Mesropova (2003), working on Russian stand-up comedy, has discovered that the routines of Russian stand-up comedienne are filled with highly negative male denigrating motifs even though those routines might have been written by men. Such motifs range from lack of physical strength and financial success to sexual incompetence. These motifs contradict the collective beliefs which are derived from Russian ideology about what masculinity means. For instance, Mesropova (2003: 431) notes that Russian tradition views male promiscuity as an imperative mode of male behaviour, however, the female comedians present the men "as overtly uxorious "wet rags" who are incapable of any sort of naughtiness or sexual infidelity".

The analysis of gender motifs and ideologies in Nigerian stand-up comedy should begin with the recognition of the gender imbalance in the number of comedians. There are more comedians than comedienne, particularly in the Nigeria context. Adetuji (2013) places the difference in the ratio of five males to one female. It was not until few years after the first official stand-up show in Lagos in 1996 that we began to find female comedians. Nigerian stand-up comedy, since its inception, has been dominated by men. In this study, we will examine gender ideologies in Nigerian stand-up comedy in the following perspectives: how male comedians conceptualise women and how female comedians conceptualise women. These are illustrated in the excerpts below

I have discovered that as girls grow, their age depreciates. It appreciates, then it stagnates, and then it... (drops his hands steadily) till a man comes. Most times, when girls celebrate their birthdays, they don't put their real age on the birthday cake.

(Excerpt 7, Eneche)

But look women, you've started to do what I don't like. If you see a woman, if you look at the structure of a woman, the Coca-Cola bottle shaped women with good factory fitted things and God bless you ABS... If you see that kind of women you know that she was fashioned, she was structured to fit into something. I am astound at how women could be attracted to women, because, if I ever came home and met my wife with another woman in bed, the way I would scatter

them for not inviting me. So I can't even imagine it, how women begin to have sensual passion for women. And when you ask these women, they say we have nothing to do with men. Excuse me! That's rubbish! You have everything to do with us. You may not like it but you are not the owner of the show! You can't do without us! For you to do without us, it therefore means you want to spell a woman without a man, or you want to spell a Mrs without a Mr. Perhaps, you want to spell a she without a he, or a Madam without an Adam. You need us! Hello? And have you noticed, everything which troubles women, men is in it: Mental breakdown, Men; Mental stress, Men; Menopause, Men; Menstrual pain, men; even gynaecologist has guy in it!

(Excerpt 8, Gordons)

And girls, you can kill. Boys, don't allow women to deceive you, saying common, common, do it, do it, you can do it. You can only kill yourself and they will be laughing at you. If you can't swim, don't go near the swimming pool where you will be urged to dive, by the time you dive, the ladies who urged you to dive will be the ones who will drag you out of the water and press water out of your stomach.

(Excerpt 9, I Go Dye)

The three male comedians whose routines serve as the source for Extracts 7, 8 and 9, paint the female gender in negative motifs. The basis for conceptualising women in the manner they did is derived from common sociocultural belief about women in the wider Nigerian society. For Eneche (Excerpt 7), a woman does not give out her actual age. In several cultures in Nigeria, it is assumed that a lady should be married at a particular age. It is also believed that after a certain age range, especially after thirty-five years, it may be difficult for a lady to get engaged. Thus, the popular belief is that women, especially when they are unmarried, always claim to be less than thirty. Thus, Eneche projects women as never being sincere with their actual age.

In Excerpt 8, Gordons projects an image of women which is predicated on the popular ideology that the centre of a lady's life is her husband. It is believed that women exist to make men's living easier. In the Nigerian cultural context, a lady is subservient to man- her father, her husband and other male members of her family. In Excerpt 8, it is thus improper for a lady- the comedian's wife to have sensual affection for another woman since she has been "factory fitted" for her husband. Rather, the husband- the comedian, should be invited to be at the centre of the sensual interaction the two women could be having. Gordons further reinforces the ideology that the woman's life is dependent on that of the man punning on the words in the semantic field of femininity- woman, Mrs, madam and gynaecologist, among others. For the comedian, women depend on men and women cannot do without men.

Furthermore, Excerpt 8 also borders on sex and sexuality of women. In the Nigerian cultural context, sex and sexuality are not topics to be discussed in open public conversations. Thus, the comedian's choice of these topics in his routine amounts to Limon's (2000) description of stand-up comedy as abjection and to Mintz's (1985) description of stand-up act as a liminal activity. For Mintz, stand-up comedy is "an opportunity for society to explore, affirm, deny and ultimately change its structure and its values" and stand-up comedian as "negative exemplar", "comic spokesman" and "Shaman" (Mintz 1985: 73-74). Not only does the comedian violates the social convention on public speech by discussing sex and sexuality, but also projects Nigerian women, typified by his wife, as having "wrong" sexual orientation. This challenges the traditional ideology on what a woman's sexuality should be. In the traditional sense, women's

sexual desire can only be satisfied by the male sexual organ. However, the comedian projects women as having “nothing to do without men”. To be a professed lesbian in the Nigerian context is criminal as the country’s government has legislated against homosexuality.

For *I Go Dye*, women are tempters who lure men into their deaths. In Excerpt 9, there is an indirect allusion to the Biblical Delilah who lured and trapped Samson into his death. The extract is taken from a routine in which the comedian berates women for expecting much from men and enticing men into tasks which demand more energy and skill, even when such men do not have the capacity to carry out such duty; for instance, having long sexual intercourse so as to satisfy women and swimming. As seen in Excerpt 9, because women require more from men, *I Go Dye* labels them as murderers.

We must note that it is not in all cases that male comedians portray the female in the negative light. There are instances in which the comedians draw from positive ideologies on the female gender and their roles in the society. For instance, in one of *I Go Dye*’s routines, he labels women as Angels and describes them as lovely and beautiful beings that should be well taken care of by men. He further admonishes men to spend their wealth for women who are angels and who should not be made to experience difficult situations.

Likewise, the female comedians do project a positive image of female gender while they attack males. An instance of this is found in the routine of Helen Paul, who accuses men of being too selective and selfish. Excerpt 10 is taken from her routine.

Women, be using wisdom. As I am, I said it now, I have branded myself. Because I am small, people don’t look at me two times but now people take a second look at me. This place now is packaged, (touching her breast) let me show you (brings out the clothes with which she padded her brassier). Total package. We like to package so that boys will not be sieving us away. I even packaged this place toll (brings out the clothes with which she padded her buttocks). Total packaging.

(Excerpt 10, Helen Paul)

In Excerpt 10, we see Helen Paul making a joke out of her physique. She has padded her brassier and pants so that her breast and buttocks will look bigger so that she will look more attractive to men’s preying eyes. What motivates her actions and humour in this routine is the cultural ideology that plump women are well taken care of. Thus, since she is slim and the social context where she operates is gender biased in that it permits only men to ask out the opposite sex, she has to devise means by which she could overcome her physical deficiency. We must note that it is the masculine-motivated belief that healthy ladies ought to be plump that informs her joke about her physique.

## 6 Conclusion

The discourse of comedy, especially that of stand-up comedy, is made up of acts which are grounded in the comedians’ ideological inclinations. Whatever the stand-up comedian does in his routine is a function of the ideology s/he wants to project. In Nigerian stand-up comedy, the stand-up comedians’ routines are products of the comedians’ ideologies, which are, in turn, also the products of the sociocultural environment where the routines are domiciled. In this study, we have presented an outline of how Nigerian stand-up comedians project different ideologies

in their routines. The ideology projected in each Nigerian stand-up comedy performance is motivated by the country's sociocultural realities, for instance, the comedians' ideological inclinations about gender which strengthens the negative subjectification of women in the Nigerian cultural context.

We began this study by examining the concept of ideology. A major preoccupation of critical discourse analysts is ideological analysis. Since our goal was to analyse the ideologies found in Nigerian stand-up comedy routines using the analytical framework of CDA, we reviewed the tenets of CDA as proposed by Fairclough/Wodak (1997). In the section, we established the relationship between ideology and humour. We argued that underlying the use of humour is the ideology that humour is harmless and that every act of humour is laden with an ideology. From the analysis, two categories of ideologies were found in NSC routines: the first relates with the art of comedy performance while the second relates with the country's sociocultural context. In the first category, the comedians project stand-up comedy as a "dignified" profession, while in the second, they draw from sociocultural beliefs in order to project their ideologies about gender, ethnicity and the political class.

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