

Pragmatics of Code Selection and Alternation in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

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Abstract

The realisations of joke performances are subtly and richly encrusted in linguistic and discourse strategies. In a multilingual setting, stand-up comedians need to negotiate the linguistic code(s) to convey their jokes. This study analyses how Nigerian stand-up comedians negotiate codes and voice within the performance space. Although studies have identified the use of code alternation in stand-up performances, the pragmatic and performance functions of code selection in Nigerian stand-up comedy have not been examined. This study, therefore, attempts to fill this vacuum by analysing code switching, selection and voice alternation in purposively selected routines of four Nigerian stand-up comedians. Inputs from functional approaches to code switching and code selection, the concept of voice, and the notions of context and contextualisation are key to this study. Nigerian stand-up comedians adopt two contexts: context-of-the-joke and context-in-the-joke, which are synchronous with the primary and secondary narrative levels in the performances. Selecting and alternating codes within a routine is a strategy which indicates who speaks in the narration of jokes.

Keywords: *Voicing, Nigerian Stand-up comedy, Context, Narrative levels, code selection*

Introduction

The aim of this study is to investigate the use of code selection and alternation in Nigerian stand-up comedy performance. Stand-up comedy is an interaction which is founded upon the production and consumption of humour. It has been described as an encounter in which a comedian behaves comically and/or says funny things directly to an audience (Mintz, 1985). Investigating the code selection and alternation in Nigerian stand-up comedy is needful as it will help to underscore their significance and further characterise Nigerian stand-up comedy performance, which has received only little attention from researchers.

This study is divided into six sections. In the introductory section, the aim of the study is identified. Section two presents a review of related studies. In Section three, the theoretical framework on which the analysis is anchored is examined, while section four presents the methodology adopted for the study. In section five, the analysis and findings are presented. The conclusion of the study is given in section six.

Literature

The existing linguistic studies on stand-up comedy have different emphases. Scholars such as McIlvenny, Mettovaara and Tapio (1993) and Scarpetta and Spagnolli (2009) adopt conversational analysis in describing how stand-up comedians produce humour in the context of their performances. They identify conversational devices and strategies like fillers, surveys, pags and laugh traps which comedians use in involving their audience during the performance of humour. Katayama (2009) compares the Japanese version of

stand-up comedy (Manzai) with the American stand-up comedy. Katayama observes that humour in American stand-up comedy occurs from the common ground between the comedian and the audience while in Japanese, it occurs from the performance distance that exists between the stand-up comedians and their audience. Yus (2004) is a relevance theory approach to stand-up performance. Yus shows that humour in stand-up performance results from making mutually manifest collective background assumption. Greenbaum (1999) presents a rhetorical analysis of American stand-up performance. A significant observation to the present study from Greenbaum (1999) is that stand-up comedians speak with multiple voices. Specifically, the author notes that American stand-ups use the dialogic style, which is more pluralistic than the monologic style, to bridge the narrative space and to infiltrate boundaries. The monologic style is associated with the language of the ruling class while the dialogic style mixes genres and is full of voices of several people (Greenbaum, 1999).

In Nigeria, stand-up comedy performance has also been studied. Ayakoroma (2013) presents a historical survey of Nigerian stand-up comedy in which he describes Nigerian stand-up comedy as a veritable medium of live artistic entertainment. One of the major observations of Ayakoroma is that stand-up comedy is thriving very well in Nigeria while other theatre practices are struggling for survival. In our view, the present success of stand-up industry in Nigeria is not unconnected to the linguistic and discourse dexterity of Nigerian stand-up comedians. Nigerian stand-up comedians have continued to enjoy patronage because they adopt the dialogic style with which they speak to all Nigerians across sociocultural and ethno-linguistic boundaries. Adekunle (2014) adopts a literary approach in investigating the satiric devices and the performativity techniques of Nigerian stand-up comedians. He underscores the satirical import of Nigerian stand-up comedy by noting that Nigerian stand-up comedians perform three kinds of satire- political, religious and social. Adetunji (2013) investigates the pragmatic strategies of Nigerian stand-ups. He observes that linguistic coding, stereotyping, formulaic expressions, call-and-response, self-deprecation and shared experiences are strategies employed by the stand-up comedians in involving their audience in the production of humour. As part of linguistic coding, Adetunji (2013) identifies the use of Nigerian Pidgin and code switching as the language of performance and as pragmatic strategies which enhance the common ground between the comedians and their audience. Specifically, the author notes that Nigerian Pidgin functions as an affiliative resource with which the comedians speak with their audience. Unlike Adetunji (2013), the present study describes the act of code selection and code switching in Nigerian stand-up performance as a strategy for voicing. Using this perspective, the study accounts for the performance significance of code selection and switching. Filani (2015A) and (2015B) are discourse analytical approaches to Nigerian stand-up comedy performance. The first describes Nigerian stand-up comedy as an activity type, while the second conceptualises the discourse acts in stand-up performance. In another study, Filani (2016) underscores the pragmatics of mimicry in Nigerian stand-up performance. Precisely, he observes that comedians use mimicry as a strategy for distancing themselves from the actions and characters in their jokes.

Theoretical Background

Code selection (CS)

In bilingual speech communities, speakers will mix languages as they switch back and forth between two codes in interaction. Language mixing is used as a term to include both code mixing and code switching. Code mixing is the use of linguistic features of two or more languages within a sentence while code switching refers to the use of linguistic features of more than one language within a discourse (Khullar2018). Code mixing is determined by grammatical principles and it is motivated by psychological factors (Boztepe, 2003; Banjo, 1996). Its domain is always within a sentence. However, the domain of code switching is above the sentence. It is sociological, situational and/or discourse motivated (Banjo, 1996).

Two approaches to code switching are identified in linguistics: structural and sociolinguistic (Boztepe, 2003). The structural approach is concerned with the grammatical aspects of code switching, as it identifies syntactic and morphosyntactic constraints on CS while the sociolinguistic approach sees CS as a discourse phenomenon as it focuses on social meaning generated by and discourse function of CS. The sociolinguistic approach can be labelled as functional approach to CS. This study is more concerned with functional use of CS, since it analyses the performance and interactional significance of CS in Nigerian stand-up comedy performance.

The term code is taken to mean a language variety which could be standard language, dialect, sociolect or idiolect, which is adopted by a participant in an interaction. In conversations, participants select a code which they could competently use for conveying their intentions. Choosing a linguistic code for interaction is also influenced by other factors such as the topic of the interaction, location of the interaction, interpersonal considerations and the linguistic repertoire of the recipients. According to Odebunmi (2010), the act of choosing a linguistic variety in a conversation is termed code selection.

Odebunmi (2010) distinguishes two kinds of code selections: simple and complex. Simple code selection is found in monolingual societies where participants can draw from only one language and its varieties, while complex code selection is found in multilingual societies where participants can draw from at least two languages, their dialects and other varieties. The complex code selection presents a complex linguistic situation in which participants have to negotiate their choice of linguistic variety. The negotiation of codes involves code mixing and code switching. Nigerian Stand-up comedy performance is an instance where participants, especially stand-up comedians, are faced with the challenge of complex code selection because Nigerian stand-up performance is generated from a multilingual context.

There is no consensus among scholars about the boundary of code switching and code mixing. According to Boztepe (2003), scholars do not agree on the distinction between the terms code switching and borrowing on the one hand, and code switching and code mixing on the other. Thus, there are different terminologies and definitions for the concepts. The lack of consensus is due to different methodological, theoretical and individual predilections. Some scholars have used code switching as the cover term for the alternative use of different codes in a conversation (e.g. Myers-Scotton 1993; Gumperz 1982). Auer (1995) adopts code-alternation as a hyponym to replace code switching while Kachru (1983) adopts the term code-switching for inter-sentential switches only and use code-mixing for intra-sentential switches. Intra-sentential refers to switches within the sentence while Inter-sentential refers to switches between sentences.

For analytical purpose, the term code alternation is adopted in this study and it is construed as a cover term including code mixing and code switching but excluding instances of borrowing. For definitional purpose, following Auer (1995), code alternation is taken as an umbrella term to cover instances of linguistic varieties within a speech exchange or conversation. Code alternation is chosen because this study is more concerned with functions of language mixing in the discourse of stand-up comedy.

Gumperz (1992) sees code alternation as a contextualization cue, in that it is used as an implicit way for conveying intentions in conversations. In a previous study, using the term code switching, Gumperz (1982) observes that it functions as a means of membership categorisation in that a switch may indicate a 'we' code or a 'they' code. He also differentiates between situational and metaphorical code switching. In situational code switching, "the speaker's choice of language is constrained by factors external to her/his own motivations, for example, the status of the interlocutor, the setting of the conversation, or the topic of conversation". In metaphorical code switching, "speakers build on their own and their audience's abstract understanding of situational norms to communicate metaphoric information about how they intend their words to be understood" (Gumperz 1982:61). Situational code switching is predictable while metaphoric code switching is not predictable.

Other models of code switching are inspired by Gumperz's approach. Myers-Scotton (1993) develops the markedness model which is premised on the notion that speakers are rational actors who make code selections in a way to minimize costs and maximise the outcomes of interactions in their favour. In Myers-Scotton's speaker-centred approach, code selection strategies are on a continuum, from unmarked choice to marked choice. Unmarked choice refers to the linguistic code that is expected while the marked choice refers to the linguistic code that is unexpected for a social interaction. For Auer (1995), code alternation could be participant-related or discourse-related. Participant-related code alternation reflects language competence or preference of the speaker while discourse-related alternation indicates topic change. Odebunmi (2010) identifies two kinds of code selection strategy: non-strategic code selection and strategic code selection. His non-strategic code selection is synonymous with Gumperz's situational code switching and Myer-Scotton (1993) unmarked choice as it describes instances of use of expected language choice. Conversely, the strategic code selection refers to instances of goal-driven language choices by speakers to pragmatically express their intentions, since it "relates largely to Myers-Scotton's marked choice maxim and Auer's discourse-related code-switching. It also establishes a relationship with aspects of Auer's participant-related code switching" (Odebunmi, 2010: 17).

The observations in discourse approaches to code alternation serve as incentives for analysing the significance of code alternation in Nigerian stand-up performance. Nigeria is a multilingual country, therefore, it is expected that Nigerian stand-up comedians are bilinguals in at least three languages- the comedian's first language, English and Nigerian Pidgin (Adetunji, 2013). In previous studies on Nigerian stand-up comedy, it has been observed that these comedians alternate codes during their performance of humour (Adetunji, 2013; Filani 2015A). In addition, the nature of stand-up performance is one-sided, in that only the comedians are allowed to hold the floor for the period of the interaction. Nigerian comedians, therefore, have to initiate strategies by which they can negotiate their language use while performing jokes to a multilingual audience. The code

selection of Nigerian stand-up comedians can be described as strategic since their performance is taking place in a complex code selection situation. In addition, their act of code alternation is motivated by their intention to generate humorous effects in the contexts of their jokes.

The act of code selection and alternation is viewed as performance related. For the purpose of this study, it is proposed that it is narrative determined since it is in the narration of joking stories that the comedians adopt code alternation. This study aims to show how code alternation is used to indicate voicing in the comedians' joking stories

The operational contexts in stand-up comedy

A joke is an utterance or a discourse unit which has a humorous peak and which is aimed at amusing its recipients. In his definition of joke, Ritchie (2004) suggests a text is a joke if it appears in a context where it is labelled or experienced as a joke. Stand-up comedy routines are made up of funny stories and short jokes. Stand-up comedians as well as their audiences usually term the narratives in the stand-up routines as jokes. It is in this sense that the word joke (or joking story) is used in this study.

Jokes are utterances produced in secondary speech situations. This is because, in joke exchanges, joke-tellers report the speech or action of other individuals to the recipients. Jodłowiec (1991:244) describes secondary speech situations as “acts in which the speaker reports to the hearer on somebody’s linguistic behaviour”. By definition then, two sets of speakers and hearers are involved: on the one hand, the joke teller and his audience, and on the other, the characters in the joke.” Bearing this view in mind, two speech situations can be identified in stand-up comedy routines: the first is the one between comedians and their audiences (context-of-the-joke- C1), and second is the speech situation found in the joking stories of the stand-up comedians (context-in-the-joke-C2).

Differentiating C2 from C1 in stand-up performance presupposes a double-layered context, with one embedded in the other. The C2 is embedded in the C1. The distinction also presupposes a dynamic context and fixed one. The C2 keeps changing as much as stand-up comedians present their audiences with different jokes. The C1 remains the same as long as a stand-up comedian maintains a routine- a single stand-up interaction with the audience.

The C1 is made up of the interactional context of stand-up performance. It is in this context that the participants in stand-up comedy find affordances to realise their intentions. The comedians are able to perform jokes while the audience get entertained (Scarpetta and Spagnolli, 2009; Adetunji, 2013). Filani (2015B)¹ attempts a conceptualisation of C2 and proposes that the features of C2 include the joke utterance, the participants-in-the-joke, and the activity-in-the-joke. The joke utterance refers to the joke text. The participants-in-the-joke are the characters mentioned in the joking stories of the stand-up comedians while the activity-in-the-joke refers to what the stand-up joking story is all about- the event or situation mentioned in the joke.

¹ Filani (2017) presents a further theorisation of the context of humour. However, we shall not review the nitty-gritty of Filani (2017) since this paper is not on context and/common ground in humour routines. We must note that Filani (2015b) serves as the basis for the latest model and that Filani (2015b) serves our present purpose.

Voice

Since stand-up performances are carried out by narration of jokes, the concept of voice, or as Bal (2006:661) puts it, “who speaks” in the narration is vital to the analysis of stand-up performance. Mey (2011) calls the teller of a story the narrator and argues that s/he is different from the author. Techniques and devices like characters and their accompanying voices are deployed to convey a narrative to the recipients. Voice, according to Bal (2006: 663), “is a term invented to terminate authorship.” In Bal’s view, voice presupposes a pragmatic view of language use, such that recipients of narrative texts take the utterances in the narrative as spoken by individuals (characters in the narration) and not the author.

The question, “who is the speaker in a narration?” suggests the concept of narrative level. Following Bal (1985), Mey (2011) distinguishes between primary level and secondary level. At the primary level, the “actions unfold” and we have the “narrator’s text”. However, at the secondary level, “the actors come in and their voices are heard” such that the recipients are “confronted with the actors’ text” (Mey, 2011: 514).

The question who speaks in a narration and Mey’s narrative levels can also be applied to stand-up performance. The narrative levels can be viewed as synchronous with the contexts in stand-up performance. The primary narrative level is the level where the stand-up comedian meets the audience. At this level, we have the context-of-the-joke, the speech situation that births the texts of stand-up performance (the comedians’ jokes). There is a need to distinguish between the stand-up comedian as a professional performer and as an individual- a member of the society. As a comedy performer, the comedian speaks (narrates) to the audience with the narrative voice, which is denoted with a contextualisation cue. At the secondary level, the audience meets participants-in-the-joke who perform the actions in the joke. The secondary level is synchronous with context-in-the-joke. Voice comes to play in the stand-up performances in the way in which the stand-up comedians are able to assign utterances to the participants in the operational contexts of stand-up comedy, most especially, how they are able to assign voices to the participants-in-the-joke. In other words, how in the primary narrative level, they are able to accentuate for the audience the features of the secondary narrative level. As the narrators in the primary level, they present the joking stories. At the secondary level, they present the participants-in-the-joke who perform the actions and make the utterances in the joking stories.

Methodology

The data for this study were drawn from video compact disc version of Nigerian stand-up performances. There are many sources of Nigerian stand-up comedy; however, Night² of a Thousand Laughs (NTL) was selected as the source of data because it is the earliest and most popular platform for stand-up performances in the country. NTL is a comedy show that is staged in different cities across Nigeria on national holidays (Adetunji, 2013). It features a large number of professional stand-ups as well as upcoming ones. All the routines that were referred to in the analysis were those that appeared in Volume 21 of the NTL. The analysis focused on the performances of four comedians, Youngest landlord, Bovi, Princewill and Seyilaw because of their extensive use of code alternation. Their routines were transcribed from the VCD and Excerpts were taken from the transcription as samples in the analysis. To indicate code alternation in the Excerpts, the utterances in the

² Sometimes spelt as *Nite*.

embedded codes were underlined. Because Nigerian comedians perform in Nigerian Pidgin, translations of the Excerpts were presented beside each line, where necessary.

Analysis

Code selection in Nigerian stand-up comedy

Ayakoroma (2013) and Adetunji (2013) have opined that the lingua franca of Nigerian stand-up comedy performance is Nigerian Pidgin (NP). However, it is not enough to identify the principal language of performances in Nigeria comedy shows; there is a need to justify such choice and explain its pragmatic significance.

Considering that most Nigerian stand-up comedians are university graduates (Ayakoroma 2013), they will be multilingual in their native/first language, the English language and NP. Thus, their speech repertoire consists of one of the numerous Nigerian languages, English language- the country's lingua franca and NP which is a contact language. Nigerian stand-up comedians are in a code selection situation in which they have to choose a language that best serves the purpose of stand-up comedy interaction. This situation can be described as a complex code selection. The choice of NP is motivated by the need to select a language which cuts across all the ethno-linguistic groups in the country and other social divides. Should they choose to perform in their first language, their performance will be intelligible only to individuals who are competent in the comedians' native language(s) and the performance will be inaccessible to people of other ethnic affiliations. This would cut-off the possibility of performing for a large audience which will be made up of people across Nigeria's ethno-linguistic divides.

The need to choose a language which cuts across all the ethnic groups in the country limits their choice to two languages: English and NP. Considering the function of English in Nigeria, one will readily assume that Nigerian stand-up comedians will select English as the language of performance. Also, as educated Nigerians who are competent in English, it is logical that they should select English as the language of performance. However, English has not been chosen as the language of comedy performance. Excerpt 1 below, which is taken from the performance of Youngest landlord buttresses that English is not used as the language of performance

Excerpt 1

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. You are welcome.
My name is youngest landlord, comedian of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
I've realised in comedy
It is not all about cracking jokes with Pidgin English
That actually makes you a professional comedian, you understand?
As a comedian you gat to use English in cracking your jokes
That will make the audience know you are a little bit educated
You understand
Most audience think that we comedians, we are drop out³, you understand
That's why I will be the first comedian tonight
that will be cracking my jokes with simple and correct English

In the Excerpt, Youngest landlord comments on the continuous use of NP as the language of performance in stand-up shows. He is of the opinion that the continuous use of NP

³ A Nigerian English word for someone who was registered for a degree in a school, but who did not stay long enough to acquire the degree.

constitutes a face threatening act to the stand-up comedians since the audience would assume that they cannot speak English. We must note that, in Nigeria, English is acquired through education. Thus, the inability to speak the language connotes that one is not educated. Youngest landlord is of the opinion that the audience do assume that Nigerian stand-up comedians are uneducated because they have been using NP as the language of their performances. He proposes that English should be used so as to enhance the positive face of Nigerian stand-up comedians as entertainers.

Although English performs high functions as it is used in formal circles in Nigeria, Nigerian stand-up comedians have chosen not to adopt it as the language of performance. The choice of abandoning English might have been influenced by the language's sociolinguistic profile and functions in the country. Banjo (1996) provides a classification of English social varieties in Nigeria. According to him, there are four varieties. Variety I is spoken by semi-literate, people with elementary education, and it is marked by high rate of negative transfer from the mother tongue. Variety II is spoken by people with secondary education and it exhibits minimum transfer from the mother tongue. Variety III is spoken by people with university education. Unlike the previous two varieties, it makes vital phonemic distinctions and it is nationally acceptable as well as internationally intelligible. Variety IV is identical with Standard British English. Although it is internationally acceptable, it is ridiculed in the country because it sounds artificial. As the country's official language, English serves as the language of education. It is also used as the language of informal communication among Nigerian elite. Therefore, using English as the language of comedy performance might make the routines to lack the needed relaxed atmosphere for joke performance. Using English will also suggest that their performances are meant only for the (educated) elite. Should the comedians adopt Variety I or II, which depicts low level of education, educated Nigerians may develop negative attitude to comedy shows, in that they may opine that the comedians' language will negatively impact on theirs. Also, should they perform in a standard variety, III or IV, the comedians will appear too sophisticated and bookish for some members of the society, especially those who do not speak or comprehend the standard varieties. Therefore, the use of English might reduce the number of prospective audience. It should be noted that several Nigerian stand-up comedians are university graduates and can converse extensively using Variety III. It is important to note that in Banjo's classification, Variety III is described as nationally acceptable and international intelligible. Thus, it is suggested as the standard Nigerian English.

Nigerian stand-up comedians' choice of performing in NP is an act of being pragmatically strategic in a complex language situation. It is an instance of strategic and participant-related code selection. Mowarin (2009: 1-2) summarises the functions of NP in Nigeria as follows:

Naija (NP) is an indi-exogenous language...it has a national spread and it is central to the lives of many Nigerians.... As an ethnically neutral language, Naija is now a bridge between English and the indigenous languages.... Although Naija does not exist officially, it is the most widely spoken language in Nigeria. It is Nigeria's language of wider communication.

Because of the repeated and consistent use of NP in Nigerian stand-up comedy, it is the language or code that signifies the comic voice with which stand-up comedians

perform their jokes. As a signifier of the comic voice, the use of NP rhetorically notifies the audience that the stand-up comedians are initiating their humorous interaction.

NP is used by the stand-up comedians to create an intimate performer-audience relationship with the audience. It is in this sense that Adetunji (2013:6) asserts that comedians use NP as “an affiliative resource, and index of a desire to speak with, rather than to, their audiences”. The choice of NP reduces the performance space between the comedians, who due to their institutional identity, hold the position of conversational superiority in the interaction. NP enhances bonding between comedians and audiences. Its use projects the participants of stand-up comedy interaction as members of the same speech community. In the context of performance, it is a “we” code. It thus establishes the participants of the interaction as members of the same speech community. NP signifies stand-up comedians’ deliberate adjustment of their speech behaviour vis-à-vis the audience. The use of NP is an act of convergence of speech style, which directly enhances realisation of the goal of the stand-ups to create humorous effects in the audience. In humorous exchanges, an underlying assumption is that hearers submit themselves to be led in a garden-path and do not primarily question the logicalness of jokes. In the context of Nigerian stand-up comedy, comedians’ use of NP rather than English or any of indigenous language motivates the audience to positively evaluate the comedians as public jokers.

Code alternation in Nigerian Stand-up comedy (NSUC)

In NSUC, there are CA patterns involving NP- English, English- NP, and, NP- indigenous language. These instances are exemplified next:

NP- English CA

The NP-English CA is a movement from indi-exogenous language to exogenous language. In this instance of code selection, the comedians begin their narrations with NP and then switch to a variety of Nigerian English. Several instances of NP-English code switching abound in Nigerian stand-up comedy. Excerpt 2 below illustrates NP-English CA:

Excerpt 2- Bovi

*Yesterday, because we wan be fifty years,
I no know whether una notice, all our police,
dem wash their uniform, them clean(AC),
I come drive one way, nahin police stop me
as I see them I say I don enter,
police just come meet me say
sir, please this is one way⁴, please, go back.*

Yesterday, because we turned fifty
I wonder if you observed it, our policemen
washed their uniform, they were neat
Then I took a wrong lane while driving
As I sighted them, I knew I was in the soup
An officer came to meet me and said

In Excerpt 2, the comedian, Bovi, begins his narration in NP and as he progresses, he switches to English as seen in the last line of the Excerpt.

English-NP CA

The English-NP CA is a movement from exogenous language to indi-exogenous language. In this instance of code selection, the comedians commence their performance using the English language, especially using English phatic expressions like *Good evening* and *how are you* to salute and recognise the presence of their audience, and then they switch to NP

⁴ One way is a term which means to drive on the wrong lane/side of the road.

to indicate that they are about to commence the performance of jokes. Excerpt 3 illustrates English-NP CA

Excerpt 3- Princewill

Praise the Lord! Do we have Christians in the house?

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! en hen

Jesus is a Christian.

Something happen for church for Sunday

I came here to share with you

Because if una dey there

Somebody here for help me beat the pastor.

Something happened in church on Sunday

because if you were there

Someone here might have beaten the pastor for me

In Excerpt 3, the comedian, Princewill begins his narration in English using the formulaic expression- *Praise the Lord*, which is a common phraseme among Nigerian Christians. In Line 2, the comedian switches to Yoruba when he uses *en hen*, a discourse marker which functions like a filler in the context where it is used. Likewise, in Line 4, he switches to NP, in Line 5 he switches back to English and then finally to NP.

CA involving indigenous languages

During their joke performance(s), Nigerian comedians do switch from English or NP to any indigenous language. What determines the indigenous language is usually the target(s) of the joke being narrated. In this kind of CA, the comedians use an indigenous language that will signify the tribal affiliation of the target of the joke. Hence, with this kind of CA, the audience easily uncover the targets of jokes.

Excerpt 4- Youngest Landlord

He get one man en,

Benin people wei dey here obagha to kpere

There was a man

Benin people in this place [Benin cultural salutation]

Excerpt 5- Seyilaw

my uncle no talk,

something wei happen for February,

my uncle wait till December

na only him come meet the pikin

Ah Bola, how would you like to go to Nigeria and visit grandma

Yes I want to visit grandma

my uncle say ah!ti eti ba e, o tiku

My uncle said nothing

it happened in February

my uncle waited till December

Then he went to his son

My uncle said Ah! You are in deep trouble

Excerpts 4 and 5 present instances where comedians use indigenous languages in their CA. In 4, Youngest Landlord switches from NP to Edo language. In 5, Seyilaw switches from NP to English (Line 5), the switch is sustained to Line 6. In Line 7, he switches again to NP, before switching to Yoruba. In each of these alternations involving Nigerian languages, the comedians make use of the Nigerian language which is the first language of the participant(s) in their jokes.

Significance of Code Alternation in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

In the sampled Nigerian stand-up comedy performances, code selection and/or alternation is an instance of a contextualisation cue. The comedians use it as part of their joke

performance strategies to orientate their audiences towards an interpretation; for instance, the continuous use of NP as language of performance by Nigerian stand-up comedians is a way of conveying to the audience that humorous mode of communication is active and sustained during the performance. In Myer-Scotton's terms, this shows that Nigerian stand-up comedians are rational social actors who select NP to maximise the outcome of stand-up interaction for the realisation of their goals.

Through practice and consistent use, NP has become the code of choice for the performance of jokes. Its use can thus be described as an instance of predictable and situation-determined code selection. In some instances, where the comedians alternate NP with another language, their code alternations could be an instance of metaphorical or discourse related code alternation. Such instances and other significance of code alternation in the sampled Nigerian stand-up comedy performances are examined in the following sections.

Articulating who speaks in the jokes

It has been pointed out earlier that two sets of participants are found in a joke exchange and these are the participants-of-the-joke and the participants-in-the-joke. In stand-up comedy performances, the participants-of-the-joke include the stand-up comedians and the audience. The stand-up comedians are the initiators and speakers in the stand-up interaction. When the stand-ups present their humorous narratives, they mention characters who act and speak in the humorous narratives. The term participants-in-the-joke is used in this study to refer to characters mentioned in the stand-up humorous narratives. A major character in the narratives is the target. Thus, in any stand-up comedy performance, two sets of speakers can be identified. The first is derived from the participants-of-the-joke while the second is derived from participants-in-the-joke. As one of the participants-of-the-joke, the stand-up comedians double as narrators who speak through the comic voice in the context-of-the-joke and who speak through the voice of the participants-in-the-joke. NP signifies the comic voice which is used by the narrator. In the sampled performances, several instances of CA are used to indicate a change in voice, from the narrator's voice to a participant's-in-the-joke voice. Such CA makes the audience to look beyond the primary narrative level to the secondary narrative level where they can hear the participants-in-the-joke speaking. At the secondary narrative level, utterances are no more attributed to the comedians, but they are attributed to the participants-in-the-joke.

Bovi's routine presents an instance in which CA is used to signal voice. The comedian begins the routine using NP, and then later switches to English. His switch indicates a change in voice in his humorous narration.

Excerpt 6- Bovi

*Yesterday, because we wan be fifty years,
I no know whether una notice, all our police
dem wash their uniform, dem clean
I come go drive one way, na him police stop me
as I see them I say I don enter am*

*police just come meet me say
Sir, please this is one way, please go back.
Because they say go back, I no dey process am*

Yesterday, because we turned fifty
I wonder if you observed it, our policemen
washed their uniform, they were neat
Then I took a wrong lane while driving
As I sighted them, I knew I was in the
soup

An officer came to meet me and said

Because he asked me to go back, I didn't
believe it

*I don already dey beg, say sorry, sorry
 he say Sir, I say sorry now, he say
You don't understand go back and take the right way
 I say this na trap so I come put hand for pocket
 come bring 50 card,
 you know say officer come hold this
 he say, Stop! That is not accepted!
 I say you no know how we dey do am?
 he say please don't let me arrest you for trying to bribe
the officer of the Nigerian police force.*

I started begging him immediately
 He insisted, but I persisted, He said

 I felt I had been trapped, I attempted
 bribing him with Fifty Naira
 begging (him) to collect the money

 I persisted, asking him to take the money

In this humorous narration, Bovi begins with the comic voice. For participants-in-the-joke, he selects a policeman and himself. Specifically, he makes the policeman the target of the joke. He purposely uses English to voice the statements of the policeman in the joke while he uses NP to indicate his own utterance as a participant-in-the-joke and as the narrator. In Line 7, he switches his code from NP to English to show that it is the Policeman that utters the statement. This pattern of switching to English from NP is sustained in the routine (Lines 11, 15 and 17-18) to signify the voice of the policeman. On the other hand, while connoting his voice as a participant in the joke, he retains NP.

The use of English to signify the voice of the policeman in the joke enhances humour. NP is the unofficial lingua franca of the Nigeria Police. Nigerian policemen communicate among themselves and with people using NP even while carrying out official duties. It is, therefore, a shared knowledge between the comedian and his audience that the operational language of Nigerian policemen is NP. Bovi's CA from NP to English contradicts the shared knowledge on the operational language of the country's police force. By mentioning "police" in his narration, Bovi places his audience in an interpretive frame that demands bringing up their knowledge of how Nigerian police operates. The audience will expect that the utterances which will be adduced to the "police" as a participant-in-the-joke will be rendered in NP. The police officer in the narration is on a road patrol and as it is expected of a typical Nigerian police officer, it is assumed that he will interact with the comedian using NP. However, to indicate the voice of the "police", he uses a standard variety of Nigerian English- Variety III. By adopting English rather than NP, Bovi presents the "police" in a different light and contradicts the audience expectation as well as shared background knowledge on the operational language of Nigerian police officers. According to Yus (2004), one of the pragmatic strategies which humourists do adopt for generating humorous effects is contradicting background knowledge.

Another performance-cum-pragmatic function of code alternation is that it signifies comedians' deliberate act of distancing themselves from the actions and utterances of the participants-in-the-joke. When the comedians attribute utterances to participants-in-the-joke, and use CA to signal it, the audience attribute such utterances or actions to the participants-in-the-joke, rather than to the stand-ups. A strategy that enhances the comedians' attribution of utterances to the participants-in-the-joke is their adoption of reporting verbs. In Excerpt 6, Bovi makes use of the NP reporting verb "say" to indicate that he is reporting the utterance of a participant-in-the-joke. In Lines 6, 10, 15 and 17, he code switched from NP to English after the reporting verb to show that it is the target of his joke that is speaking.

Activating collective background beliefs

Background or contextual beliefs have been regarded as assumptions held prior to or during an interaction and which facilitate the communicative process (Odebunmi, 2006). For a humorous narration to be successful in stand-up performances, the narration must draw from collective background beliefs of the participants-of-the-joke. As pointed out by Yus (2004), stand-up comedians play with and manipulate collective background beliefs derived from language, human behaviour, culture and the situation of stand-up performance. One of such beliefs is stereotypes. Stereotypes are mental images people have about others or something. Gruner (1997:99) observes that “a stereotype is merely a very handy kind of shorthand to provide the essential framework for understanding the content of a joke”. Stereotyping works well in the production of humour when foregrounded features are exaggerated absurdly.

CA by sampled Nigerian stand-up comedians contributes to activating collective background beliefs that are needed for the interpretation of routines. Usually, when comedians alternate codes, their CA is context-in-the-joke motivated. The choice of the embedded language is determined by who the target of their jokes is. In their CA, stand-ups change their code to one that is associated with the butt of their joking stories. In instances like this, the audience are able to identify the target and activate the necessary background information needed to interpret the joke. This function of CA in the performances is found when stand-up comedians adopt the codes that are associated with ethnic groups.

Several of the selected routines involve instances where the comedians use CA for activating collective background beliefs. At the start of Princewill’s performance, he consistently alternates English and NP while he describes the action of a pastor who asks the congregants to close their eyes so that the congregants will not see him while he pilfers church offerings. Princewill uses NP to indicate the comic voice while English is adopted to indicate the pastor’s voice. He uses English language for the pastors’ voice because it is the language that is always adopted by renowned television-evangelists in the country for preaching. Similarly, Federation Mallam adopts ethnic varieties of Nigerian English while narrating his joking story. He uses Hausa-English while he describes himself as a Hausa man. Likewise, Seyilaw alternates his codes using three languages: NP, Yoruba and English. When his CA involves English, he uses an ethnic variety of Nigerian English, Yoruba-English. Seyilaw adopts a pronunciation pattern which is associated with Yoruba-English speakers. For instance the words “am” and “father” are articulated by him as /jam/ and /fa:hda:h/. Seyilaw uses Yoruba-English in his CA because the target of his humour is a Yoruba man who had lived in the UK for almost 20 years but could not use Standard British English pronunciation.

Switching of codes to the language forms associated with the target of their humour is meant to activate in the audience the stereotypes associated with the target of the narration. For instance, in Seyilaw’s performance, he repeatedly articulates the intrusive glottal fricative on the low back English vowel, a phonological feature of Yoruba-English. Such deliberate pronunciation stereotypes Yoruba people as Nigerians who cannot overcome their first language phonological interference while speaking English.

Identity functions

Another function which CA performs in the sampled Nigerian stand-up performances is to create cultural identity and initiate humour from the identity that has been made manifest in the routine. In this sense, CA indicates that the stand-up comedians align with the cultural group which speaks the code adopted by comedians as the embedded language. The stand-up comedians may also use the switch as a marker of categorising the audience into different identity groups. Comedians may then use the knowledge from their alignment with a cultural group or from membership categorisation of the audience as part of the sources of humour (see McIlvenny, Mettovaara and Tapio 1993).

Primarily, alternating codes within a discourse is an indication of speakers' cultural affiliations. Speakers can use it to mark friendship or solidarity with other participants. Speakers also use CA as a linguistic mechanism of manipulation when they use it to exclude a participant (Aranda, 2014). In stand-up comedy, these aspects of code switching are alluded to when the comedians alternate codes to align with a cultural group or categorise the audience.

The performance of Seyilaw illustrates stand-up comedians' use of CA as a marker of a speaker aligning with a cultural group, while the performance of Youngest landlord illustrates stand-up comedians' use of CA for categorising the audience into identity groups. Seyilaw begins his joking routine by differentiating between staying in the UK and living in Nigeria. Although he appreciates living in the UK, he disaffiliates himself from the behaviours of UK citizens. For instance, he criticises UK citizens for children's right to report their parents to authorities, an act which seems unacceptable to him as a Nigerian. In his routine Seyilaw, narrates his experience when he visited the UK. In his CA, he uses his switch from NP to Yoruba as a 'we' code while his switch from NP to English indicates the 'they' code. Mostly, he switched to English to describe the situation, events and actions of the participants-in-the-joke (UK citizens), which are unbecoming and unacceptable to him as a Nigerian while he switches to Yoruba or Yoruba-English to describe the actions or quote the utterances of the participants-in-his-jokes whose first language is Yoruba.

Excerpt 7- Seyilaw

I nearly provoked go beat one of our neighbour

*where we gather dey gist, we come dey talk,
neighbour come write letter, You are disturbing
if you don't stop that your stupid noise I will call the cops
I say enh, na this thing una dey allow them?*

Una dey craze, so now you come dey call police say

I got angry to the extent that I want to beat our neighbour when we were chatting the neighbour wrote a letter to us

I asked my host if that's what they have been tolerating They are crazy. So she wanted to report us to the police for chatting

Excerpt 8- Seyilaw

As dem dey inside plane, dey come Nigeria

Wey dey just announce, now we are descending into

*Muritala International Airport, na my uncle put
(demonstrates beating someone)*

*People dey say, Ki lo se?
do?*

o≡fi olo≡o ɛpa≡mu≡mi lA≡me≡ri≡ca ɛ

As they were in the plane descending into Nigeria It was announced, Now we are descending into Muritala International Airport My uncle started...

People asked my uncle, what did he do?

He reported me to the police in America

o≡ fi olo≡ o ʔpa≡ mu≡ mini ≡ London
na people come join hand, o mo buru≡ ku≡ ni e≡

he reported me to the police in London
 People joined hands with my uncle to beat his
 son, saying 'you are a bad child'

Excerpt 9- Youngest landlord

He get one man en
Benin people wei dey here, obagha tokpeye!

There was a man
 Benin people in this place [Benin cultural
 salutation]

Audience reply: ise!

In 7, Seyilaw switches to English while he narrates the action of his neighbour in London (Lines 3). The switch reinforces his previous observation about the UK; he has commented that the UK, as a highly organised society, is very boring to him- a Nigerian who is familiar with disorderliness in a Nigerian mega-city, Lagos. The switch to English further reinforces the idea that the UK habitants are different from people living in Nigeria. His code switch here amounts to his disaffiliation with the UK and her citizens. Conversely, in 8, he chooses Yoruba to voice the utterance of his uncle and other Nigerians in the aircraft. The Excerpt is taken from his joke on his uncle who was arrested by the police in the UK because his son reported him to the police. Thus, he uses the switch to Yoruba, his mother tongue, to affiliate with a participant-in-the-joke. In Excerpt 7 and 8, Seyilaw's CAs are used to indicate "we" and "they" codes. In 7, his switch to English indicates a "they" code in that in the shared culture of the participants-of-the-joke, reporting one's neighbour to the police would be regarded as an improper action. Thus, he uses a language that is relatively "alien" to convey a strange action carried out by a participant-in-the-joke. However, his switch to Yoruba in Excerpt 8 indicates a "we" code in that it is used to convey what is accepted in the shared culture of the participants-of-the-joke. In the first place, the switch to Yoruba is synchronous with the participants'-in-the-joke arrival to their home country. Secondly, the switch is retained so as to convey the attitude of the people who joined his uncle in beating the child. It should be noted that in the Nigerian context, the action of his uncle and the people who joined him in beating the child is motivated by a cultural ideology that children are meant to be brought up by not only by their parents, but by everyone in the society.

Excerpt 9 presents an instance where a comedian uses code switching to "involve and find out about the audience" (McIlvenny, Mettovaara and Tapio 1993: 239). Youngest landlord has earlier switched from English to NP to indicate the comic voice. In the Excerpt, he switches from NP to Edo. The peculiarity of his CA is to direct his utterance to audience members of Benin ethnic affiliation. His switch to Edo language indicates that his salutation is not meant for all audience members but only for those who are Benin. It should be noted that he uses Edo phatic utterance through which Benin people recognise the supremacy of their monarch. Thus, he salutes the Benin people in the audience with their traditional greeting style, which involves paying homage to the king. His act of creating cultural affiliation with the audience is to suggest the target of his joke. After instantiating the greeting, he targeted Benin people in his narration.

Discourse functions

Since stand-up comedy can also be viewed as an instance of language in use, insights from systemic functional grammar can be evoked to explicate how the selection and alternation of codes in the comedy texts enhance how the discourse itself is construed by the participants-of-the-joke. In systemic functional linguistics, language is viewed as a social

practice and as a central element in social life. Thus, its analysis is situated within the social context where it occurs. In relation to this, a text or discourse, is said to perform metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. With ideational functions, systemic functional linguists refer to how language is deployed by participants to represent their experience of the world and how language is used to show the relationship between parts of their experiences. By interpersonal function, Hallidayan linguists emphasize the role of language in communicative relationships and the establishment and maintenance of personal and group relationships. The textual function underscores how linguistic units and constituents in texts are connected to produce a cohesive and coherent whole.

Of particular interest is how code selection/alternation can be used to achieve interpersonal and ideational functions in the context of comedy performance. As discussed above, the alternation from one code to another pragmatically marks a difference between a 'we' code and a 'they' code. For example, in Excerpt 7, the comedian uses NP as a 'we' code while he uses English as a 'they' code. Our interpretation of the codes as markers of identity is further reinforced by the use of the 'we' pronoun in the utterances where the NP is used, and the use of the 'You' pronoun in the sentences where English is used. In the stand-up narrative context, such an identity distinction is used as a means of isolating the target of the jokes from members of the society in the macro context of the performance, for instance, when the comedian moves from the 'they' code to the 'we' code. In the same way, the alternation, if it is to a 'we' code, indicates that the comedian is aligning him/herself with the audience and maintaining group relationship. A major reason why a comedian may say a joke as a participant-in-the-joke and then switch places to become a participant-of-the-joke is to reflect the way in which stand-up performance is construed in the society. Switching between these institutional identities is a way of mirroring how the experience of stand-up performance is interpreted in the society as a genre of narration. In the comedy context, the comedian is seen as a member of the macro context (the wider society in which the comedy performance is situated), who talks about the things that unfold in the society. S/he is also seen as a character who is telling a story in the comedy venue (micro context). As s/he switches institutional identities through code switching, the audience are met with different personalities, which they do not question because of the comedy situation. In addition, code alternation activates a cognitive consideration in the audience on the choice of a code, the rationale for such choice and its significance in the comedy context. Code alternation is used as a strategic means of changing the audience's cognitive environment. This may promote a sense of in-group affiliation with some listeners while concurrently probably alienating others.

Conclusion

This paper is a modest attempt at investigating the significance of code alternation in Nigerian stand-up performances. In investigating code alternation, impulses have been derived from functional approaches to code-switching and from the concept of voice. Given that two sets of participants are found in stand-up contexts, the participants-of-the-joke and the participants-in-the-joke, Nigerian stand-up comedians use NP as the code which indicates the comic voice, while they use code alternation to foreground the voices of the participants-in-the-joke. CA is, therefore, used as a performance strategy to indicate who speaks in the humorous narrations. Pragmatically, Nigerian stand-up comedians use CA to distance themselves from the utterances and actions of the participants-in-the-joke

and to activate collective background knowledge. Stand-up comedy performance is a cultural space where language plays a major role. It is hopeful that this paper will prompt further studies on other linguistic aspects of Nigerian stand-up comedy.

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