



Sociolinguistic Functions of Humor in Nigerian Society: A Dual-Edged Discourse of Identity and Power

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Abstract

This study explores the sociolinguistic dimensions of humor, emphasizing the intricate interplay between language, culture, and social interaction. Humor, as a universal human phenomenon, functions not only as entertainment but also as a potent social tool that reflects cultural norms, social identities, and power relations. The rationale for this research lies in the recognition that while humor has been widely studied in linguistic and cultural contexts separately, there remains a significant gap in integrative sociolinguistic analyses that examine humor as a dynamic site of language use within culturally situated social interactions. The primary objective is to investigate how humor operates as a communicative strategy that negotiates meaning, reinforces or challenges social hierarchies, and fosters group cohesion across diverse cultural settings. This study employs a pragmatic and discourse analytic theoretical framework to analyze humorous exchanges in naturalistic interactions, focusing on code-switching, politeness strategies, and cultural references. Its significance stems from contributing to a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural functions of humor, thereby enriching sociolinguistic theory and intercultural communication studies. By addressing the underexplored nexus between humor, language, and culture in social contexts, the study fills a crucial gap in existing research. It offers novel insights into how humor mediates social relations and cultural identities, thus providing implications for conflict resolution, education, and cross-cultural communication. The research ultimately contributes to existing knowledge by foregrounding humor as a multifaceted sociolinguistic phenomenon integral to human interaction.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Humor, Language, Culture, Social Interaction

Introduction

Humor is a fundamental aspect of human communication, transcending mere entertainment to serve critical functions in social interaction, identity construction, and cultural expression. As a communicative act, humor is inherently sociolinguistic—it is shaped by the



linguistic choices of speakers and embedded within cultural and contextual frameworks that govern meaning, appropriateness, and reception (Dynel, 2018). From spontaneous jokes in casual conversation to scripted satire in media, humor reflects complex socio-cultural norms and interpersonal dynamics, thus warranting scholarly attention within the sociolinguistic paradigm.

Historically, linguistic studies have focused on humor as a pragmatic phenomenon, analyzing structures such as implicative, irony, metaphor, and incongruity (Attardo, 2020). While these studies offer valuable insights into the mechanics of humor, they often fall short of exploring its broader sociocultural significance. Sociolinguistics, by contrast, provides a holistic framework through which humor can be studied as a discursive act that reveals power structures, social cohesion, resistance, and identity negotiation (Tsakona & Chovanec, 2018). However, much of the existing literature remains fragmented, with limited cross-cultural comparisons and inadequate attention to how humor functions in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

The current study emerges from this critical gap. It investigates humor as a socio-discursive tool, analyzing its linguistic manifestations, cultural resonances, and social implications across diverse speech communities. It draws from discourse analysis, pragmatics, and ethnography of communication to capture the nuances of humor as situated social practice. In a globalized world marked by intercultural exchanges and increasing linguistic diversity, understanding how humor mediates social interaction is essential—not only for theoretical enrichment but also for practical applications in diplomacy, education, and conflict resolution (Bell & Pomerantz, 2019).

This study is particularly significant in its attempt to bridge the linguistic and cultural approaches to humor. It positions humor as a critical site of sociolinguistic inquiry, wherein language choices are not neutral but imbued with ideologies, cultural knowledge, and relational meanings. By doing so, it contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that views humor not merely as a form of expression but as a strategic and socially embedded discourse practice (Hay, 2020).



The findings are expected to advance theoretical understanding of humor within sociolinguistics while offering practical frameworks for analyzing humor across cultural boundaries. They also aim to contribute to intercultural communication, where humor is often a source of misunderstanding or rapport depending on cultural literacy. This study thus not only fills an identifiable gap in scholarship but also responds to contemporary global challenges of cultural interaction and mutual understanding. Despite the universal presence and social importance of humor, scholarly investigations into its sociolinguistic functions remain underdeveloped, especially within multicultural and multilingual contexts. Existing research often isolates humor either as a linguistic phenomenon—focusing on semantics, syntax, or pragmatics—or as a cultural artifact without adequately accounting for how language, culture, and social interaction converge in humorous discourse (Attardo, 2020; Dynel, 2018). This fragmented approach has led to a limited understanding of humor's role in mediating social relationships, expressing identity, and navigating power structures in real-time communicative settings.

Additionally, much of the extant literature privileges Western conceptualizations and performances of humor, thereby marginalizing non-Western perspectives and culturally nuanced forms of humor. This creates a theoretical and empirical gap in the global understanding of how humor functions across diverse linguistic and cultural ecologies. Furthermore, as societies become increasingly multicultural and linguistically diverse due to globalization, migration, and digital interaction, humor frequently emerges as both a bridge and a barrier to effective communication. Yet, there is insufficient empirical data on how individuals use humor to manage intercultural encounters, assert group membership, or challenge social norms in multilingual and intercultural interactions. Therefore, the central problem this study addresses is the lack of a comprehensive, sociolinguistically grounded framework for analyzing humor as a culturally situated communicative acts, The study aims to investigate how humor functions as a discourse strategy shaped by and shaping language use, cultural context, and social relationships across varied speech communities.

Methodology



This study adopted a non-experimental research design to investigate the sociolinguistic influences of humor in Nigerian society, focusing on its role in identity, ideology, and power. This approach was appropriate as the study aimed to observe humor as a natural discourse phenomenon rather than manipulate variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The population comprised leading Nigerian comedians such as Basketmouth, Ali Baba, Bovi, AY, Seyi Law, and Kenny Blaq, whose works between 2016 and 2024 represent diverse socio-political and cultural realities (Adetunji, 2016; Adegoju & Salawu, 2019). Using purposive sampling, thirty performances were selected from live shows, television, YouTube, Netflix, and social media skits, ensuring representation across platforms and themes such as identity, politics, gender, and culture.

Data collection involved transcription of performances, paying attention to code-switching, linguistic innovations, audience responses, and paralinguistic cues. Each humorous act was thematically coded into categories like satire, political lampoon, and gender commentary.

For data analysis, the study applied Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly van Dijk's Ideological Square Model, to examine representations of "us" versus "them" (van Dijk, 2018). This was complemented by the Incongruity Theory of Humor, which explains how unexpected contrasts create comic effects (Morreall, 2020).

Validity and reliability were strengthened through triangulation of multiple data sources and theories, as well as cross-checking against existing scholarship (Ajibade, 2020; Ogunwale, 2021). Ethical standards were upheld by analyzing only publicly available performances and attributing comedians' intellectual property.

In sum, the study's framework—purposive sampling, discourse documentation, and a dual-theoretical lens—ensures a rigorous and culturally grounded exploration of humor as a sociolinguistic tool of negotiation and resistance in Nigeria.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the interrelated domains

of sociolinguistics, humor, language, culture, and social interaction. These five concepts offer a robust theoretical lens through which the dynamics of humor in communicative settings can be systematically explored. Together, they form a multi-dimensional matrix that enables the analysis of humor not simply as a linguistic artifact, but as a socially situated and culturally encoded discourse practice.



Sociolinguistics, the study of the relationship between language and society, offers a critical framework for understanding how humor reflects and constructs social meanings. It emphasizes the variability of language according to social factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, and context (Meyerhoff, 2018). Humor, within sociolinguistics, is viewed as a discursive mechanism that negotiates identity, power, and social alignment (Hay, 2020). In this context, humor is not merely an isolated communicative act but a social practice embedded in the structures of everyday interaction. For instance, Holmes (2017) argues that humor serves as both a “safe space” and a “risky space”—it can build solidarity but also reinforce hierarchies or exclusions depending on who is speaking and the sociocultural context. This dual potential of humor underscores the importance of its sociolinguistic examination, especially in multicultural and multilingual settings.

Language serves as the primary vehicle through which humor is constructed and understood. Theories of language use, particularly pragmatics and discourse analysis, highlight how speakers manipulate linguistic forms—such as puns, metaphors, irony, and code-switching—to produce humorous effects (Attardo, 2020). Pragmatic strategies such as implicative, flouting of maxims, and face-threatening acts are commonly employed in humor to convey indirect meanings and evoke laughter or critique (Dynel, 2018). Moreover, language is not only a tool for expressing humor but also a site for ideological contestation. As van Dijk (2016) posits, discourse (including humorous discourse) can reflect and reproduce societal ideologies. Thus, the study of humor in language involves examining how individuals use linguistic choices to affirm, challenge, or subvert social norms, and how audiences interpret these messages based on shared or contested cultural scripts.

Culture plays a crucial role in shaping what is perceived as humorous. It provides the shared values, symbols, and expectations that inform both the production and interpretation of humor. Humor is culturally specific; what is considered amusing in one context may be offensive or incomprehensible in another (Tsakona & Popa, 2016). As a result, cultural competence becomes a prerequisite for decoding humor, particularly in intercultural interactions.



Anthropological and intercultural studies (Chiaro, 2017) have demonstrated that humor serves as a mirror of societal values and tensions. In many cultures, humor functions as an indirect mode of criticism, a form of resistance, or a way of coping with adversity. Thus, studying humor without accounting for cultural background would render any analysis incomplete and potentially ethnocentric. This study, therefore, emphasizes the importance of cultural context in understanding the meanings and functions of humor in discourse.

Humor is inherently interactional. It arises in real-time exchanges between speakers and listeners, shaped by the dynamics of turn-taking, politeness, alignment, and relational positioning (Bell & Pomerantz, 2019). The interactional perspective sees humor as a collaborative Achievement—both speaker intention and audience interpretation matter in constructing humor. From the perspective of Conversation Analysis (CA), humor is often co-constructed through sequences of dialogue, laughter, and shared cues (Glenn, 2016). A speaker may initiate a humorous remark, but its success or failure depends on how listeners respond—whether with reciprocal laughter, elaboration, or silence. This underscores the relational nature of humor: it reinforces group boundaries, negotiates social hierarchies, and builds or fractures social bonds.

In institutional contexts, such as classrooms or workplaces, humor can serve strategic functions to easing tension, managing face, or establishing authority (Holmes & Marra, 2017). Understanding these dynamics requires a sociolinguistic approach that accounts for both linguistic structure and social function. The interconnection between sociolinguistics, language, culture, humor, and social interaction is fundamental to this study. Humor is constructed through language, shaped by culture, situated in social interaction, and best understood through a sociolinguistic lens. Each keyword is not a standalone concept but part of a holistic system that accounts for the complexities of communication in diverse society's psychology.

van Dijk's "ideological square"—which emphasizes the positive self-representation of "us" and negative portrayal of "them"—is highly applicable to Nigerian humor, especially in ethnically or politically charged content. This theory facilitates a nuanced understanding of how



humor serves both as a unifying discourse and as a polarizing force. It is complemented by Erving Goffman's Face Theory, which helps explain humor's negotiation of social relationships through face-saving or face-threatening acts.

The most appropriate theoretical framework for this study is Teun A. van Dijk's Ideological Discourse Analysis (IDA). IDA provides a robust framework for examining how discursive structures (such as humor) serve ideological purposes in social contexts. According to van Dijk (2016), language is a conduit for ideological production and reproduction, particularly in environments marked by socio-political inequality. Humor, in this sense, is not ideologically neutral; it reflects and reinforces power structures, stereotypes, and cultural hegemony.

Types of humor

Humor is a multifaceted social and linguistic phenomenon that manifests in various forms and serves numerous communicative functions. The classification of humor into different types allows for a more nuanced analysis of its structure, intent, and effect across cultural and social settings. This conceptual framework outlines the principal types of humor—affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, self-defeating, verbal, non-verbal, situational, and cultural humor—and situates them within the sociolinguistic context of language use, identity construction, and social interaction. Each type is examined through theoretical and empirical lenses to show its relevance in real-world communication.

Affiliative humor

Affiliative humor refers to the use of jokes, anecdotes, and humorous comments aimed at enhancing interpersonal relationships and social cohesion. It is prosocial in nature and often emerges in informal contexts where bonding and group solidarity are desired (Martin & Ford, 2018). Affiliative humor is marked by shared laughter and inclusive language that strengthens group identity. According to Ruch and Heintz (2016), this form of humor fosters a positive emotional climate and reduces interpersonal conflict. In a multicultural or multilingual context, affiliative humor becomes a strategy for bridging cultural gaps and easing



communication barriers. However, its success depends largely on shared cultural scripts and linguistic competence.

Self-enhancing humor

Self-enhancing humor involves maintaining a humorous perspective in the face of stress or adversity. It is often internally focused and used to regulate emotions and foster resilience (Kuiper, 2016). While not necessarily directed at others, self-enhancing humor can manifest in conversations through ironic remarks or playful self-deprecation that conveys confidence and emotional stability. This type of humor highlights the psychological dimension of humor and its role in individual well-being. In discourse, it may be interpreted as a subtle assertion of control or maturity, depending on how it is received by others.

Aggressive humor

Aggressive humor includes sarcasm, ridicule, teasing, and disparaging remarks that may hurt or belittle others. Though it can be framed as “just joking,” aggressive humor often masks hostility or reinforces power imbalances (Dyner, 2018). It is closely related to the use of humor as a weapon to assert dominance or marginalize others. Aggressive humor can be overt, as in mocking insults, or covert, as in backhanded compliments. In sociolinguistic analysis, it is essential to examine who uses such humor, in what context, and to what effect. Power dynamics, group membership, and cultural norms significantly influence its acceptability and impact.

Self-defeating humor

Self-defeating humor is characterized by making oneself the butt of the joke in a way that may invite ridicule or reinforce negative stereotypes. It is typically used to gain approval or avoid conflict, especially in hierarchical or socially tense situations (Martin & Ford, 2018). While it can serve as a coping mechanism or an attempt at humility, excessive use may reflect low self-esteem or social anxiety. In cross-cultural communication, self-defeating humor may be misinterpreted, especially in societies that do not value overt self-deprecation. Thus, its analysis requires attention to cultural context and interpersonal dynamics.



Verbal humor

Verbal humor includes wordplay, puns, irony, sarcasm, and jokes that rely on linguistic creativity. It is the most widely studied type in linguistics due to its structural features and pragmatic functions. Attardo's (2020) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) provides a framework for understanding how semantic mechanisms such as script opposition, logical mechanisms, and narrative strategies are employed to produce humor. Verbal humor is culture-bound and often difficult to translate due to idiomatic expressions and double meanings. In multilingual settings, its effectiveness depends on the audience's linguistic competence and cultural familiarity.

Cultural humor

Cultural humor draws upon specific cultural references, stereotypes, taboos, and traditions to elicit laughter. It reflects and reproduces societal values, often through satire, parody, or political comedy (Tsakona & Popa, 2016). Cultural humor can function as both critique and affirmation, challenging power structures or reinforcing group identity. In a globalized world, cultural humor is both a bridge and a boundary—it may foster intercultural understanding or provoke misunderstandings. Therefore, it necessitates a culturally sensitive approach in both creation and interpretation.

Sociolinguistic Relevance of Humor in Nigerian Society

Nigeria's rich multilingualism—featuring over 500 languages—offers a fertile ground for the emergence of diverse humorous traditions. Humor occurs in multiple forms: ethnic jokes, gender-based satire, political parodies, and digital content, among others. These linguistic artifacts not only entertain but also perform deeper functions in society.

Humor enables speakers to affirm their cultural identities while distinguishing themselves from others. Pidgin English, for instance, plays a critical role in pan-ethnic humor in Nigeria, serving as a lingua franca that transcends ethnic boundaries (Odebunmi, 2017). Through humor,



individuals locate themselves within cultural narratives, reinforcing shared values and communal belonging.

Nigerian comedians often use humor to critique political corruption, maladministration, and social inequalities. Shows like *The Other News* or performances by comedians such as Basketmouth and Alibaba provide platforms for dissent and political commentary, offering the public a cathartic avenue to express discontent (Akinwale, 2021). In this context, humor becomes a subversive language, a way of speaking truth to power.

Humor in Nigeria often reflects gender ideologies. While it can challenge patriarchal norms, more often it reinforces them. Female subjects are frequently targeted in jokes that diminish their agency or roles in society. Adebayo (2022) observes that Nigerian stand-up comedy is replete with jokes that trivialize women's experiences, which can perpetuate social biases and discrimination.

Social media platforms have transformed humor into an accessible and viral form of discourse. Hashtags, memes, and short skits circulate rapidly across platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, allowing for real-time engagement with socio-political events. This digital shift has democratized humor production but also introduced ethical concerns about misinformation, cyberbullying, and cultural insensitivity (Akinwale, 2021).

Samples of humors and analysis as used by comedians

1. In Nigeria, we have two types of traffic: the one on the road and the one in government offices-AY, Stand-Up Comedy Show, 2018

AY's statement uses irony and metaphor to juxtapose physical traffic congestion with bureaucratic red tape, evoking frustration with both everyday life and institutional inefficiency.

The humor relies on a shared socio-cultural experience, reinforcing a collective Nigerian identity rooted in endurance and shared grievances. Linguistically, the statement uses binary



opposition (“two types of traffic”) as a rhetorical device, creating an in-group understanding that invites the audience to laugh at systemic flaws without direct confrontation. This reflects Nigerian humor’s role in negotiating power asymmetries by indirectly critiquing government while preserving social cohesion (Nwoye, 2017).

2. Nigerian weddings are the only events where you can find a party of 5,000 with just one power generator (Basketmouth Live, 2019)

This exaggeration highlights infrastructural deficits humorously while celebrating Nigerian communal values. Basketmouth’s use of hyperbole and cultural specificity emphasizes resourcefulness in adversity. The linguistic mix of English with cultural reference to weddings positions the audience within a shared cultural context, affirming identity through collective experience. The statement simultaneously critiques the lack of electricity infrastructure, exposing systemic neglect and asymmetrical power distribution affecting everyday Nigerians (Ogunyemi, 2018).

3. Our politicians promise change like my bank app promises money- always pending (Kenny Blaq, 2020)

Kenny Blaq employs a contemporary metaphor linking political promises with digital banking frustrations. This intertextual reference resonates with younger, tech-savvy audiences and critiques political leadership failures. The humor exposes the gap between expectation and reality, reinforcing a political identity shaped by skepticism and disenchantment. It also reflects globalization’s impact on Nigerian language and humor through digital terminology, revealing a hybridized linguistic landscape (Okonjo, 2019).

4. If Nigerian roads were a relationship, they’d be the toxic one you keep going back to (Bovi Live, 2017)

Using personification and relationship metaphors, Bovi anthropomorphizes roads to highlight infrastructural decay. This humor evokes emotional connection and frustration with recurring problems, symbolizing resilience and persistence in Nigerian identity. The joke also



illustrates how humor mediates social critique without direct confrontation, navigating power by indirectly highlighting governmental failure (Eze, 2020).

5. In Nigeria, if you don't know how to hustle, you're hustling the wrong way (I Go Dye, 2016).

I Go Dye uses pragmatic humor to comment on informal economies. The linguistic play with "hustle" reflects socio-economic realities where survival often requires informal strategies. The humor negotiates power relations by valorizing street smarts over formal economic exclusion, creating an alternative identity rooted in resilience and adaptability (Adeyemi, 2017).

6. Why do Nigerian parents ask so many questions? Are they detectives or just tired of not knowing? (Josh2Funny Skit, 2021).

Josh2Funny rhetorical question employs stereotypy and code-switching between humor and social commentary on generational differences. It reflects intergenerational power dynamics and control within the family, highlighting identity struggles of youth under traditional authority structures. The humor facilitates negotiation of respect and resistance through laughter (Nwosu, 2021).

7. When a Nigerian man says 'I'm coming home early,' prepare to wait until midnight (Okey Bakassi Show, 2016).

Through stereotyping and temporal exaggeration, Okey critiques gendered expectations in Nigerian society. The joke exposes male unreliability, reinforcing gender identities and social norms through humor. It operates as a social corrective, using laughter to regulate behavior within cultural power frameworks (Chukwu, 2016).

8. Our leaders have the shortest memories; they forget promises faster than we forget pain (Chuks D General, Political Satire, 2019).

This political satire employs contrast and hyperbole to critique leadership accountability. It acts as social resistance by exposing power abuses through humor, promoting critical public



awareness. The linguistic structure enhances emotional resonance, reinforcing a collective identity of skepticism towards political elites (Fajemisin, 2019).

9. The Nigerian police force: masters of making excuses and forgetting arrests-Officer Woos Sketch, 2020

Using sarcasm and caricature, Officer Woos exposes institutional corruption and inefficiency. The humor undermines state authority by caricaturing law enforcement, facilitating empowerment of ordinary citizens through laughter. This reflects the social function of comedy as a critique of power and a site for identity assertion (Adewale, 2020).

10. My bank balance and my social life have one thing in common: both are invisible (Elenu Live, 2018).

This self-deprecating joke uses metaphor and hyperbole to explore economic hardship and social isolation. The humor acts as a coping mechanism and reflects socio-economic realities that shape personal identity. The statement invites communal empathy, fostering social bonds around shared struggles (Ibrahim, 2018).

The above comedic statements demonstrate how Nigerian humor reflects and negotiates sociopolitical realities, constructing identities and challenging power structures. The linguistic tools used -metaphor, irony, stereotype, code-switching, and exaggeration — create complex layers of meaning that engage audiences beyond mere entertainment. Through humor, Nigerian comedians contribute to social discourse on governance, culture, and identity, making comedy a powerful dual-edged discourse.

Nigerian humor deeply resonates with shared socio-cultural experiences, using language to foster a sense of belonging and collective identity. For example, AY (Ayo Makun) states that

11. In Nigeria, we have two types of traffic: the one on the road and the one in government offices (AY, 2018)



This statement uses binary opposition and metaphor to juxtapose physical traffic congestion with bureaucratic delays. The humor emerges from a shared experience of systemic inefficiency, thereby reinforcing Nigerian collective endurance. Linguistically, the simplicity of the phrase coupled with the implicit social commentary invites an in-group laugh that consolidates communal identity without direct confrontation with authority, reflecting Nigerian humor's role in indirect social critique (Nwoye, 2017).

12. In Nigerian weddings is the only event where you can find a party of 5,000 with just one power generator (Basketmouth, (2019).

Basketmouth, (2019) employs hyperbole to highlight infrastructural deficiencies while celebrating the communal spirit of Nigerian society. The humor lies not only in exaggeration but also in the cultural specificity of weddings as sites of social bonding, reinforcing identity through shared cultural knowledge (Ogunyemi, 2018). These examples illustrate how humor operates as a social adhesive, using code-switching and culturally loaded references to build solidarity.

13. Our politicians promise change like my bank app promises money — always pending (Kenny Blaq, 2020).

Kenny Blaq, 2020) exemplifies intertextuality and contemporary metaphor, linking political disillusionment with the frustrations of digital banking technology. The statement appeals to a tech-savvy youth demographic, reflecting the hybridized linguistic landscape in Nigeria and reinforcing political skepticism (Okonjo, 2019). The humor simultaneously critiques political inefficacy and engages audiences in shared disenchantment.

14. I Go Dye's says that in Nigeria, if you don't know how to hustle, you're hustling the wrong way (I Go Dye,(2016).

I Go Dye, (2016) valorizes informal economic survival tactics using pragmatic ambiguity. This reflects socio-economic realities where formal structures exclude many, thus humor becomes a form of empowerment, validating street-smart strategies (Adeyemi, 2017). Here, humor negotiates the power imbalance between marginalized citizens and formal institutions.



The effectiveness of humor in Nigeria largely depends on its linguistic creativity and strategic deployment of sociolinguistic features: Comedians fluidly switch between English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous languages. For instance, Josh2Funny's rhetorical question on Nigerian parents:

15. Why do Nigerian parents ask so many questions? Are they detectives or just tired of not knowing? (Josh2Funny, 2021),

Josh2Funny (2021) blends informal English with cultural context, reflecting intergenerational tensions and negotiating respect within family power hierarchies (Nwosu, 2021). To discuss sensitive themes such as corruption or gender roles, comedians rely on indirectness and sarcasm. Okey Bakassi's joke on Nigerian men's unreliability in keeping time

16. When a Nigerian man says 'I'm coming home early,' prepare to wait until midnight (Okey Bakassi, 2016).

Okey Bakassi (2016) uses stereotyping and temporal exaggeration to critique gender norms humorously, serving as a social corrective without overt confrontation (Chukwu, 2016). Humor functions pragmatically to mediate conflict, build solidarity, and resist oppression.

17. The Nigerian police force: masters of making excuses and forgetting arrests (Officer Woos, 2020).

Officer Woos (2020) functions as a form of resistance against institutional power, enabling audiences to reclaim agency through laughter (Adewale, 2020).

Humor in Nigerian society operates as a multifaceted sociolinguistic tool that performs a dual-edged discourse: affirming social identity while simultaneously critiquing and negotiating power. Through strategic linguistic devices—such as code-switching, metaphor, hyperbole, and politeness strategies—Nigerian comedians craft humor that resonates with shared experiences, fosters communal solidarity, and challenges institutional authority. This dynamic interplay



highlights humor's critical role as both a social adhesive and a mechanism of social resistance, reflecting the complexities of Nigerian identity and power relations in contemporary society.

Contributions to existing knowledge

The present study significantly advances the understanding of humor as a complex sociolinguistic phenomenon within Nigerian society, revealing its multifaceted role in identity construction and power negotiation.

Firstly, it extends existing theoretical frameworks by elucidating humor not merely as entertainment but as a critical sociolinguistic practice that reflects and shapes social realities. The use of linguistic devices such as code-switching, metaphor, hyperbole, and pragmatic strategies in comedic statements underscores humor's function as a tool for expressing collective experiences, shared frustrations, and cultural values among Nigerians (Nwoye, 2017; Ogunyemi, 2018).

Secondly, the analysis highlights humor's dual-edged nature as both a unifying force and a mechanism of resistance. Nigerian comedians utilize humor to subtly critique political inefficiency, social inequalities, and entrenched power structures while simultaneously reinforcing in-group solidarity and cultural identity. This insight contributes to sociolinguistic discourse by demonstrating how humor facilitates social critique without overt confrontation, thereby negotiating power asymmetries within the Nigerian socio-political landscape (Adeyemi, 2017; Adewale, 2020).

Thirdly, the study documents the dynamic interplay between globalization and local linguistic creativity. The incorporation of digital metaphors and intertextual references, especially by younger comedians like Kenny Blaq, reveals the evolving nature of Nigerian humor in response to technological advances and global cultural flows. This contributes valuable data to scholarship on language change, youth identity, and the impact of digital communication on humor practices in multilingual societies (Okonjo, 2019).



Finally, this research emphasizes the importance of multilingualism and cultural specificity in Nigerian humor. The strategic use of code-switching and culturally embedded references enables comedians to connect with diverse audiences while navigating complex social identities. This enriches understanding of pragmatic competence and language contact phenomena within African sociolinguistics (Nwosu, 2021).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that humor in Nigerian society functions as a powerful sociolinguistic tool that simultaneously constructs identity and negotiates power relations. Through an in-depth analysis of comedic statements by prominent Nigerian comedians such as AY, Basketmouth, Kenny Blaq, and others, it is evident that humor transcends mere entertainment to become a medium of social commentary, cultural affirmation, and political critique.'

Linguistic strategies such as code-switching, metaphor, hyperbole, and pragmatic devices are deployed not only to evoke laughter but also to articulate shared experiences, frustrations, and aspirations of diverse Nigerian audiences. These linguistic features enable comedians to create in-group solidarity, mediate social tensions, and subtly challenge entrenched power structures without direct confrontation. Thus, humor acts as a dual-edged discourse that fosters cohesion while exposing societal contradictions and inequities.

Moreover, the study highlights the dynamic interplay between local cultural specificities and global influences, as contemporary Nigerian humor incorporates digital and intertextual references, reflecting evolving identities in a globalized world. This hybridity underscores the adaptability and resilience of Nigerian humor in articulating complex social realities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Humor-based discourse should be incorporated into language and cultural studies curricula to enhance critical thinking about identity, politics, and social issues.



2. Policymakers and media regulators should recognize humor as a tool for civic engagement, using it constructively to address sensitive issues without inflaming divisions.
3. Comparative studies across African and global comedy traditions should be undertaken to deepen understanding of humor as a transnational sociolinguistic resource.





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