A multimodal generic perspective on Nigerian stand-up comedy

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Abstract

Studies in stand-up comedy in Nigeria have recently begun to gain serious attention. Several articles that describe the psychological and socio-cultural contexts of joke texts of stand-up comedy in Nigeria have appeared within the last few years (Orhiunu 2007; Imo 2010; Adetunji 2013; Filani 2015, 2016, among others.). However, one aspect of the phenomenon that is yet to be explored is the function of a multimodal generic framework and its contributions to the humorous content of the genre. While it is important to maintain the spoken text as many writers have done, the "multiple embodied modes" (Norris 2008: 13) that amplify the spoken text must be given due consideration. This study, therefore, examines the Nigerian stand-up comedy from the perspective of a multimodal-ESP theory to genre analysis. This theory takes cognisance not only of joke-texts, but also of the visual features that enhance the performance. The material for analysis is videoed data of a popular stand-up comedy show in Nigeria, A Nite of a Thousand Laughs. *The study demonstrates that stage management, nonverbal cues (e.g. gesture, movements, and gaze), speeches, body postures, and music/sounds contribute to the communicative value and the production of the genre. Also, it shows how plausible multimodal-ESP approach to genre is in the description of stand-up comedy in the Nigerian context.*

Keywords: ESP; stand-up comedy; multimodality; A Nite of a Thousand Laughs, *genre humour.*

1. Introduction

In the last one decade or two a number of theories have emerged in an attempt to explain the factors that condition stand-up comedy, humour, jokes, funniness, etc. (e.g. Ritchie 2004; Attardo 2011). Proposing a linguistic theory of jokes, Ritchie (2004), for example, reviews a

number of theories that attempt to explain jokes, most of which are essentialist ones, searching for the properties that make a particular text humorous or funny. Also in Attardo (2011), the theories tend to define, characterise, and typify the functional aspects of humour. The insights provided by these theories cannot be overstressed, and have, in fact, influenced studies of stand-up comedy in discourse and pragmatics (e.g. Adetunji 2013, 2016; Nneji 2013; Filani 2015, 2016a, 2016b), and psychoanalysis (e.g. Imo 2016). Available literature on stand-up (see among others Ross 1998; Greenbaum 1999; Rutter 2000, 2001; Olsson et al. 2002, Yus 2002; Rogerson-Revell 2007; Katayama 2009; Imo 2016; Haghish et al. 2012; Nneji 2013; Adetunji 2013, 2016; Brodie 2014, Filani 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b) focus on the formation, features, structures, and functions of humour, joke texts, selected performances and the spoken modes of a few comedians, audience-responses, and compères. The stand-up comedians and the compères are characters but contribute to the generic purpose of a particular stand-up genre. Needless to say, these theories or the emergent research neglect the fact that stand-up comedy is a genre performed with multimodal resources. This study seeks to investigate the uniqueness of the semiotic resources used, their linguistic interpretations, the functions of technology in mediating humour and their implication for EAP.

The idea of language being primary to communication has led to undue emphasis on students' reading and writing/speaking needs and proficiency (Bruce 2008; Douglas 2013) in ESP, especially EAP, and to the neglect of multimodality (Prior 2013). This study demonstrates that stage management, nonverbal cues (such as the comedians-audience's gestural movements), speeches, pictures, music/sounds, and the cognitive moves-sequence contribute to the communicative value and the production of the genre. Also, it shows how plausible a multimodal-ESP approach to genre is in the description of stand-up comedy in Nigeria, and how the ensuing knowledge can be integrated into the teaching and learning of technology-mediated communication (TMC), as in using English for entertainment purposes. In this study, the terms TMC is specifically used to refer to communication via audio-visual modes (such as television) in which both the moving images and the movement contribute to the meaning of the message (jokes/humour) being transferred. ESP may use this knowledge for the training of specialists and non-specialists in the use of language, and other means of communication for the purpose of entertainment.

2. Review of related scholarship

Stand-up comedy as a communicative genre embodies humour, jokes, puns, and laughter, sometimes seen as unserious social discourse (Haghish et al. 2012). These elements of stand-up are generally regarded as universal phenomena, which provide avenues for people to relax, and ease tension or stress after tedious daily activities (Olsson et al. 2002; Rogerson-Revell 2007; Nneji 2013). Stand-up comedy has been studied from different perspectives. For instance, Rutter (2000) characterises the rhetorical strategies used in performances and Rutter (2001) examines the generic move organisation of stand-up comedy introduction and audience-responses. Filani (2015a, 2015b, 2016a) investigates from a socio-pragmatic perspective the activity-type and discourse-types and the use of mimicry as a strategy in stand-up comedy. He distinguishes two important contexts – contexts of jokes and contexts in the joke texts. He argues that the context of the joke determines the one in the joke. Again, Adetunji (2013, 2016) investigates the interactional contexts and addressivity in stand-up comedy and explores the pragmatic strategies the comedians use to enhance, maintain, and sustain the interests of their audiences. Greenbaum (1999) takes an ethnographic perspective on stand-up comedy by looking at the rhetorical strategies (derived from the Aristotelian and Isocratean traditions) that comedians employ to create a comic world of their own where they

set themselves as "authoritative voice on cultural dictum, social mores, and political agendas" (Greenbaum 1999: 45). He states that stand-up comedy is, by nature, rhetorical and as such, comedians employ *ethos*, *praxis, kairos,* and *theoria* to enact a comic discourse.

Katayama's (2009) comparative study brings together stand-up comedy in two separate cultures: American and Japanese. The study observes that solo comedy is the ideal form of stand-up comedy in America, whereas stand-up comedy in Japan is performed by two comedians talking to each other on the stage. In these situations the audiences assume different statuses. In the American contexts, they are direct audience and are addressed directly, while in the Japanese contexts they are over-hearer audiences.

So far, studies on Nigerian stand-up comedy (NSC) have focused mainly on identification, characterisation, and description of linguistic and pragmatic techniques employed by comedians in their routines. The present study goes a little further than the mere description of rhetorical strategies to a more fundamental issue of production and the application of multiple semiotic resources by which rhetorical strategies are realised. The study also shows that joke narratives manifest unique cognitive and discursive moves different (but related) to the sequential structuring of stand-up comedy (Schwarz 2010; Scarpetta & Spargnolli 2009), only analysable in relation to particular joke texts rather than routines in general.

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA)

Multimodal approach to discourse is a new perspective that looks beyond, but integrates, language modes (i.e. writing, speaking, listening, and reading) in the analysis of discourse with multimodal resources (O'Halloran 2004; Busch 2006; Bhatia, Flowerdew & Jones 2008; Jewitt & Jones 2008; Norris 2008). As an emerging field, "MDA extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, actions, music, and sounds" (O'Halloran 2004: 120). From this perspective, meaning is co-produced by a number of semiotic resources including language (Gu 2006; Hong 2012). In other words, any message in any medium integrates at least two of these modes of communication (Kress 2002: 6).

The scope of MDA covers both theory and methodology for analysing "semiotic resources and semantic expansion that occur as semiotic choices combine with multimodal phenomena" (O'Halloran 2004: 121). NSC is a multimodal phenomenon that incorporates sensory modalities in the production of humour and entertainment for audience consumption. O'Halloran (2004), Bhatia et al. (2008), Bower & Hedberg (2010), and Hong (2012) show that MDA draws on a number of theories from other fields, such as Halliday's (1978, 2004) social semiotics and Systemic Functional Linguistics, Gu's (2006) corpus linguistics, Engestöm's (1987) activity theory, Bateman' (2007) film studies, etc. to analyse different aspects of multimodal texts or multimodal phenomena. With each of these theories come different frameworks and methodologies such as O'Halloran's (2004) intersemiotic and resemiotisation, Norris's (2008), Jewitt & Jones' (2008), Ruiz-Madrid & Fortanet-Gomez's (2015) qualitative study in office, classroom ability, and humorous conference presentations contexts, Bower & Hedberg's (2010) quantitative study in (teaching and learning) web-conferencing context, and Hong's (2012) ethnographic and quantitative study in teaching English language skills context. This study applies the qualitative approach to the study of multimodal resources.

3.2. Multimodal genre theory (MGT)

MGT is MDA but with a focus on teaching-learning tasks. The social and institutional aspects of meaning creation through multiple semiotic resources (O'Halloran 2004) draw MDA to the attention of generic study. According to Prior (2013: 519), "the shift from idealised speakers of unified national languages to a more situated, practice-oriented notion of discourse might have made mode and multimodality a central concern for ESP". The concern of multimodal ESP in genre study, therefore, is to meet the needs of English language learners and teachers in contexts other than native speakers' (Bruce 2008: 26; see also Royce 2002: 192; Guo 2004: 215). The point of departure, therefore, is the application of multimodal approaches to the study and analysis of genre which incorporates situational and socio-cultural contexts (O'Halloran 2004: 135) for the consumption of language learners (Bower & Hedberg 2010; Hong 2012). Swales' (1990) and Bhatia's (1993, 1999, 2004) concepts of *discourse community*, *communicative purposes*, and *institutionalised or conventionalised discourse* are also important to the study of multimodal genre in ESP, especially of NSC in which comedians, live audiences, viewer audiences, the production crew, and the public constitute members, in their capacities, of the comic discourse community which understand and utilise the communicative purpose (entertainment) of the NSC. It can be said that Multimodal analysis in ESP contexts can equip language learners in developing multimodal competence, especially in meaning making in professional and academic endeavours (Royce 2002: 192; Guo 2004: 215).

4. Materials and methods

 Data for this study are gleaned from online sources. Fifteen comedy series were collected from *NTL*; *De Original Laugh*; *AY* shows; *Crack Ya Ribs*; *Mega Laugh*; *Aboki for Christ*; and *Stand-up Nigeria* by Bunmi Davis which are available in video.onlinenigerian.com./Drama/adHL.asp?blurb;   www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo;and www.youtu.be/ApBu2b1nWG0.   After a careful viewing and observation of the data sets, a purposive sampling method was used to select routines from 21 comedians in *NTL*. *NTL* is one of the comedy arenas for stand-up comedy in Nigeria. It is produced by Opa Williams. It started in the mid-1990s and it is, according to Filani (2016a: 92) and Adetunji (2013:3), "produced in major cities in the country on national holidays" (e.g. Christmas, Independence Day, Democracy Day).

4.1. Method of transcription

The data appear in raw visual forms, which are converted into analysable multimodal text forms involving a process called *entextualisation*. This process entails the detachment of language data from its natural context of production and conversion of same into analysable linguistic objects (Jones 2011). Two levels of transcription were carried out on the data. The software versions of TRANSANA and ELAN 4.9.1 were used to transcribe, annotate the data, and capture important frames for gestural analysis. Speech mannerisms follow Jefferson's (2004) conversational analysis and transcription styles used also in Rutter (2000, 2001), Adetunji (2013, 2016), Filani (2015, 2016). The identified moves are based on personal observations of the researchers.

This study takes some methodological insights from Gu's (2006) corpus linguistics, the analysis of the participants, participations and interpersonal interaction in Levinson's (1979 [1992]) activity type, the explication of gestures according to Kendon (2004), McNeill (1992, 2006), Haviland (2006), Querol-Julián' (2011) including speech-gesture connections and

socio-cultural analysis of gestures to make the analysis of multimodal resources more productive and flexible. Kendon's (2004) and McNeill's (2006, 1992) ideas of speech-gestures connections help to account for paralinguistic elements (such as the gestures, gaze, movements, postures, etc.).

4.2. Data presentation

The study is mainly qualitative and the videoed data used consist of four volumes. Table 1 presents the features observed in them:

Table 1. The Observable Features in the Videoed Data

NTL Vols.	Comedians	Singers	Dancers	Comic actors	Time frame
Vol. 3	5	3	1	1	01:03:56
Vol. 5	8	-	2	-	01:04:03
Vol. 8	3	1	-	-	00:27:28
Vol.24	5	2	-	-	00:57:36
Total	21	6	3	1	03:55:05

A total of 21 comedians, 6 singers, 3 dancers, and a set of comic actors feature in the data. The time duration of the four NTL volumes is 3 hours, 55 minutes, and 5 seconds. The comedians, singers, dancers, and the comic actors entertain the audience. However, the present study focuses on the comedians and one of the singers who is also a comedian but tells jokes in the form of songs. The comedians appear in their stage names. They include AliBaba, Basket Mouth, I Go Die, Omobaba, Gandoki, Basket Mouth (singer), Klint De Drunk, and Funnybone. Each comedian is given an average of ten minutes to perform.

5. Analysis

In this section, we analyse multimodal resources and the semiotic choices of stage and camera movements, gestures and gazes, speech mannerisms, and the moves structures (including the sub-moves).

5.1. Stage and camera movements in NSC

The physical movements of comedians and activities of stage camera complement the cognitive linguistic move structures of the joke texts and the overall goals of the comedians. The camera activities are at the background and comedians are hardly aware of them, but they serve the purposes of the production crew and complement that of the comedians. The communication is mostly between the crew and the viewing audience. Tan (2005: 178; 2009: 45) provides some useful linguistic interpretations of various camera angles, movements and frames. The elements of involvements, dialogism, or addressivity (Adetunji 2016) in stand-up comedy are mediated by the camera as captured in the visual frames showing the body postures of the comedians.

The identifiable frames include close-up (showing the head and details of the comedian) used to establish the fact of given information about the comedian as in stage frame 3 (see Figure 1 below), long short (showing the full view of the comedian and the stage background) as in the stage frame 1, where MC BasketMouth is seen standing. The intention

here is to introduce the comedian to the viewing audience especially when a comedian with the same stage name has already performed. Others include medium long shot (from the knees up), medium short (from the waist up) as in frame stages 5 and 6, and extreme long short (showing only the audience).
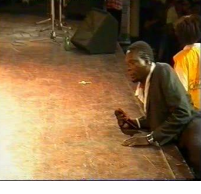
Frame 1	Frame 2	Frame 3	Frame 4	Frame 5	Frame 6
Rectangular stage	Elevated stage	Elevated stage	Alibaba with the audience	FunnyBone at back stage	Sitting at back

Figure 1. The stage frames.

Source: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.

As shown in Figure 2 below, stand-up comedy takes place in a hall with regulated lightings. The light beams bright on the comedians. The stage is positioned directly opposite the audience who sit facing the staged comedians. Both parties occupy different spaces on the stage. The stage is rectangular as represented in the diagram below. It has two openings for entrance (E1) and exit (E2). A section of it is used by the DJ (point D) and other music artistes (point G).
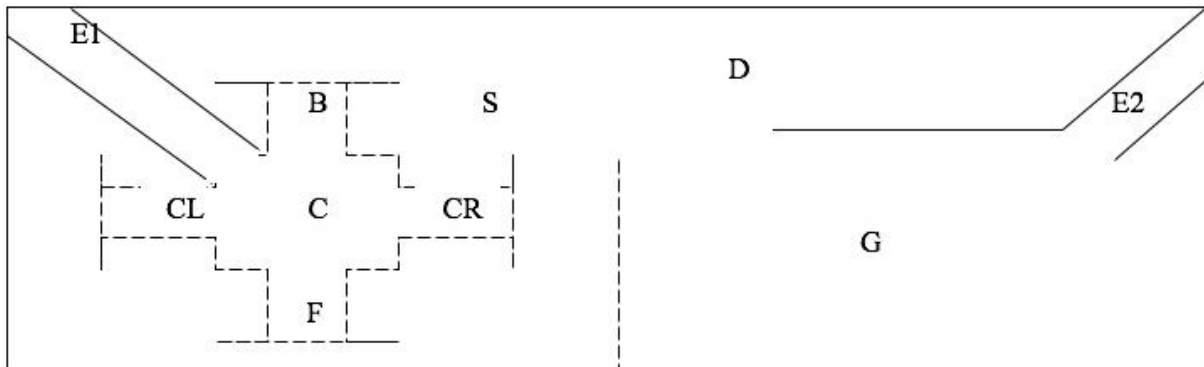

Figure 2. A graphic design of the stage.

Although recent stand-up comedy shows have a square, boxing-ring stage (in stand up Naija by Bunmi Davies 2017) with one opening for entrance and exit, the type observed in the NTL is the typical stage for stand-up comedy in Nigeria, as it recurs in almost all the staged comedy shows. Meanwhile, the place labelled S is the main point for the stand-up comedians. It is made up of wings CL (left of the centre), CR (right of the centre), C (centre), F (front), and B (back of the stage).

The comedians' movements take place within these wings of the main stage. All the comedians except Klint de Drunk enter from E1. For instance, at the entrance of the comedians, the camera drifts away from the stage to capture the audience who are clapping,

jumping, and dancing to the theme music *Who let the dogs out*. There is a sense of transitivity in that the camera mediates the goals of the comedians and the comedy show, in which case the audience is engaged. AliBaba, for example, enters from E1, dances in (to the music playing at the background) through CL, and gradually to point C, the centre. But at the time he gets to the front (F) of the stage, the audience releases loud roars, laughter, clapping, and some join in the dance. At this point, the live audience is expectant. Again, the frontal position signals involvement with the audience. AliBaba, still in the front stage, drops his first one-liner punch-line:

TEXT 1: ALIBABA
1. ALIBABA: Na this crowd na im good to mess↓ [trans: it is a crowd like this one can fart]
2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH, ROAR, CLAP.

Frame 1 Centre	Frame 2 Front	Frame 3 Audience	Frame 4 Centre	Frame 5 Leans to the front	Frame 6 Centre	Frame 7

Figure 3. AliBaba's body postures and movements.

Source 1: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.
Source 2: www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo.

In the above frames, Alibaba leans forward to engage the audience. His body postures complement the jokes. This continues throughout the routines. Some of these noticeable movements are captured in Figure 3. For instance, he produces another storyline at the centre of the stage (the drum story). Before the punch-line, he moves to the front (F) and leans forward. Again, in Figure 3 (frame 3), the camera drifts to show the audience involvement: jumping, laughing, clapping, and dancing. While they laugh, AliBaba paces the stage from point CR to CL, and when the laughter subsides, he settles at the centre and presents yet another storyline. In fact, the stage and the camera movements, the timing, the spoken texts, and the audience perform striking, identifiable semiotic functions which provide some form of dramatic unity and aesthetic appeal that characterise NSC.

Stage frames 5 and 6 in Figure 1 show I Go Die and Funnybone at the back of the stage demonstrating and dancing to support their story. The point to note here is that the comedians purposefully exploit all the angles of the stage: the centre for introducing the storyline, the back for illustrations and mimicking, and the front for the punch line. It may be said that the opening sub-move 1 goes with the movement from points E1 and E2, storyline sub-move 2 with points B and C, punch-line sub-move 3 with point F, and sub-moves 4 and 5 with CR, CL, and C. It is usually at the point the comedians step to the front that one hears intensified laughter, clapping, and roaring, and it is at that point the comedians pause, observe, and join in the laughter.

The deliberate movement of the camera in different directions serves to establish some communication between the comedians and the audience. It also portrays the power relationship between them. For instance, the stage is shown as an elevated podium. In frame 3 (Figure 1) Klint de Drunk is seen trying to climb the podium:

TEXT 2: KLINT DE DRUNK
1. KLINT DE DRUNK: I'm not on the same level (.) just watch (*climbing the stage*)
2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH
3. KLINT DE DRUNK: I'll soon be on a higher level (*referring to the podium*). Can you help me push my ego (*talking to a couple sitting close while trying to climb the podium*) just, just [you know] elevate my status (.)

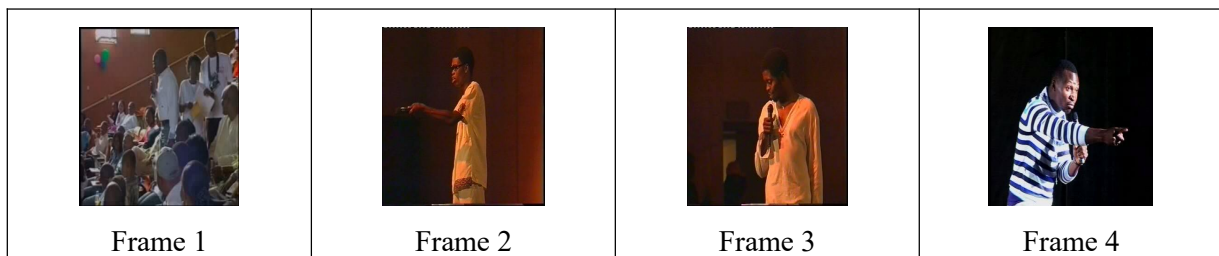| Frame 1 | Frame 2 | Frame 3 | Frame 4 |

Figure 4. Comedians communicating with the audience.

Source 1: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.
Source 2: www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo.

Among the audience, looking at the sitting arrangement, there seems to be features of equality, as there is no perceptible demarcation between those that pay higher fees and those that pay less. However, where such demarcation exists especially in recent stand-up shows, it is hardly noticed by the viewing audience. Meanwhile, there are instances, as frame 3 (in Figure 3) reveals, where the comedians try to bridge the power gap, for example, by extending the microphone to the audience, by stepping down from the podium to meet the audience, talking directly with the audience, or asking them questions. This provides the opportunity for the audience to react or respond to the jokes, and thus creates some interaction with the comedians. Again, at the point the audience is temporarily using the microphone, there is a negotiation of discourse roles between the comedians and the audience. For instance, in the text below, the audience asks Omobaba a question to which he provides an answer. This answer becomes a joke text for Omobaba:

TEXT 3: OMOBABA:
1. OMOBABA: HO:LD ON ho:ld on I have a problem. I don't know who can solve it for me.
2. AUDIENCE: What's the PROBLEM? ◄
3. OMOBABA: I love football but our Nigerian commentators dem dey fuck up:: [trans: Nigerian commentators act foolishly]
4.OMOBABA: Don't forget my commandment, thou shall no::t↑ (EXT.).
5.AUDIENCE: LAU::::GH
6.OMOBABA: Mumuni Alao and Akinloye Oyebande(.)
7.AUDIENCE: laughing and shouting.

8.OMOBABA: Now listen to [os(.) simple thing, una no know book, thou shall no:::t↑ (EXT.) [trans: you don't know anything]
9. AUDIENCE: LA:::UGH

In the above joke text, OmoBaba has already given his audience some orientation indicating when and how they should take a turn and from time to time he extends the microphone to them. Figure 4 shows this extension in which the audience questions or completes the line for him. Again, extending the microphone makes the audience form part of the chorus of the comedians' jokes. This makes the routines interactive and entertaining, as the audience happily echoes "Laugh" to complete OMOBABA's line: "thou shall not laugh".

The lighting effect and camera rotation also strengthen the performance. The light is usually bright on the comedians and dim on the live audience. The light falling on the audience tends to blur the physical identity of the live audience. The camera zooms in on the comedians and zooms out on the audience, so that the faces of the audience seem very distant even when the comedians talk directly to them. In this case the comedian is detached from the participation.

Frame 1	Frame 2	Frame 3

Figure 5. The camera zooms out on the audience.

Source 1: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.
Source 2: www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo.

This perhaps indicates that the comedians cannot be held accountable for any jokes about the audience. The camera strategically rules out issues of individual stereotyping, as the joke is not directed at a particular individual in the audience. Hence, the relationship between the live audience and the viewing audience is distant since the viewing audience (the primary target of the camera) cannot pick out any familiar face from the audience.

5.2. The semiotics of the gestures in the contexts of the joke texts

Gestures are co-expressive and, most of the time, complement speech (McNeill 2006). In the contexts of the jokes of Nigerian stand-up comedians, gestures constitute unique rhetorical strategies for realising the joke-telling move and for making the audience laugh. Emblematic, metaphoric, iconic, and deictic gestures have been identified and analysed along with jokes. As observed in AliBaba's and Basket Mouth's routines, the way the comedians use gestures is also comic, for it makes the audience laugh. For example, Basket Mouth in the gestural frame 1 (in Figure 5 below) uses the gestures to support his jokes. In gesture 1, his two arms are held in a pyramid angle while the palms are parallel, as he pushes back a little. This looks more like what McNeill (2006) calls *emblem gesture* which is a conventionalised sign that can be translated or quoted easily as representing what a speaker is saying or describing. In this frame, Basket Mouth uses this gesture to describe the short time he has on the stage. The excerpt below is the accompanying joke text:

Frame 1/Gesture 1 "Because of <u>time</u>"	Frame 2/Gesture 2 "for the rest of <u>your life</u>"	Frame 3/Gesture 3 "but <u>now</u>"	Frame 4/Gesture 6 "seriously"
Frame 5/Gesture 7 "seriously it's messed up"	Frame 6/Gesture 4 "those days"	Frame 7/Gesture 5 "that was"	

Figure 5. Basket Mouth's gestural frame 1.

Source 1: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.
Source 2: www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo.

TEXT 5: BASKET MOUTH:
1. BASKET MOUTH: Seriously (*gesture 6*) and basically some 'tins wey I wan yan because of (*gesture 1*) time you know and [trans: there are things I'd have told you but there is no time] (hey arrange yourself↑ how much you pay, one five↑ (>you know how many< [trans: hey behave yourselves. How much did you pay? Just one thousand five hundred naira])
2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH::::::::::::::::

Because the gesture stroke falls on time, Basket Mouth may be playing on the notion of time as inherently short, judging from the little gap between his palms and the movement of his body backwards. This again, combining with the punch line: [hey arrange yourself↑ how much you pay, one five↑ (>you know how many...<)], makes the audience burst into laughter. Gestures 2 and 3 are iconic as Basket Mouth uses them to represent the concept of life and time. In gesture 2, for instance, his hand is actually whirling from the back and it gets to the stroke at the point he says "of your life". The gesture covers the scope of the audience (from the left angle to the right). This suggests inclusion of the lives of all people, especially, couples present. The context of gesture 2 is the joke about troubles in marriages and how sometimes marriages can be frustrating. Basket Mouth starts with a description of the so-called marriage.

TEXT 6: BASKET MOUTH
 1. BASKET MOUTH: Seriously (gesture 4), its [hard] marriage is like (.....) having cables with just one channel
 2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH and CHUCKLE
 3. BASKET MOUTH: You have options but you can't watch more than one film for the (gesture 2) rest of your life (....) *(he pauses and moves to the centre of the stage)*
 4. AUDIENCE: LAUGH
 5. BASKET MOUTH: You have to be ready

In Gesture 3, his first finger is pointing down with the other fingers turned down at the point he says "now". The context is very much different from that of gesture 2 in that he seems to be making a contrast between two-time frames: the past and the present, pointing out the prevalence of moral decadence in the latter as propelled by joblessness and cigarette smoking among youths despite the factory warning. The youth seem to smoke more in the present time even when the warning on the pack of the cigarette is more severe than what it used to be.

TEXT 7: BASKET MOUTH
1. BASKET MOUTH: Seriously, (gesture 6) it's messed up
2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH
3. BASKET MOUTH: I know >everything de bad< everybody wan die now(.) so those days (*gesture 4*) B.A.T [...] they were like, (*looking down to something, almost distracted*) B.A.T they were like, (*distracted now*) (....*laughing....*) [trans: I know everything is bad and everybody wants to die]
4. AUDIENCE: LAUGHING........
5. BASKET MOUTH: they were like, "the Federal Ministry of Health warns that (...) ehmm ehmm tobacco smoking is dangerous >to health< those (gesture 5) days (.) people no de smoke de way dem de smoke now, wey dem don change am no:w (gesture 3) na Federal Ministry Health warns that smokers are liable to die young(.) come see where guys de smoke: "o boy give me cigar dere;" dem go look am >smoking is dangerous to health< no give me de one dem de die young abeg (*smoking now*) "I don ti:::re o:boy this life don tire [give me four more, four more"(.) [Trans: calm down, there's distraction now. They were like, "the Federal Ministry of Health warns that (...) ehmm ehmm tobacco smoking is dangerous >to health<"; those (gesture 5) days (.) People were not smoking as much as they do now that they have changed it to "Federal Ministry Health warns that smokers are liable to die young(.)" Notice the rate at which young men smoke now: "O boy, give me cigar there;" they will look at the label >smoking is dangerous to health<, "no, please, give me the one with 'die young,' (*smoking now*) "I'm ti:::red. O:: boy, I'm tired of this life [give me four more, four more"(.)]
6. AUDIENCE: LAUGH
7. BASKET MOUTH: Them don tire, everybody is tired. [trans: they are tired, everybody is tired
8. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

The time reference tends to be emphasised by the deictic gestures 4 and 5 used to point to the past times. Observe that Basket Mouth's hand rises and stretches to the audience with his palm opened up (as if begging alms). It is possible to view gesture 4 as recalling activities in the past and also soliciting the solidarity of members of the audience that can remember the moment in history which he speaks about. In making gesture 5, he makes reference to past, forgotten activities; he raises his hand up but this time he arcs it back and bends his body back.

Gestures 6 and 7 in the gestural frame are metaphorical gestures in that both represent abstract concepts. They occur in the context of describing a failed country; one messed up by corrupt practices. Meanwhile, gesture 6 (seriously) made by pointing the first finger at the audience where other fingers point back to the speaker (Basket Mouth), is the transitional marker in the jokes of Basket Mouth. He uses it to end and begin new jokes. Gesture 7 is made with the hand stretched to the direction of the audience and the first finger pointing at the audience. However, the difference between this and gesture 6 is that Basket Mouth's head is pushed back showing facial expression of disgusts, resentment, and irritation. This accentuates the fact that the country is "messed up":

TEXT 8: BASKET MOUTH

1. BASKET MOUTH: >seri(*gesture 7*)ously< its messed up, the country [you know what I de talk am, every now and then the way [na all of us de cause am; na na our hand everything de [trans: I've always said this; we are the cause of all of these]
2. BASKET MOUTH: Seriously (*gesture 4*) and basically some 'tins wey I wan yan because of (*gesture 1*) time you know [Trans: there are things I'd have told you, but there is no time] and... [hey arrange yourself↑ how much you pay, one five↑ (>you know how many<) [trans: hey behave yourselves. How much did you pay? Just one thousand five hundred naira])
 3. AUDIENCE: LAUGH::::::::::::::::

Throughout Basket Mouth's routines, one notices elements of incongruity, as one cannot reconcile how smoking, ugly looking, and stressful marriage constitute "messing up" the country. However, they can be the result of such a failed country. Basket Mouth does not seem to criticise the country at 54 directly, but points out the effects on people and activities in the country. In this way, he does not appear as a social critic on stage.
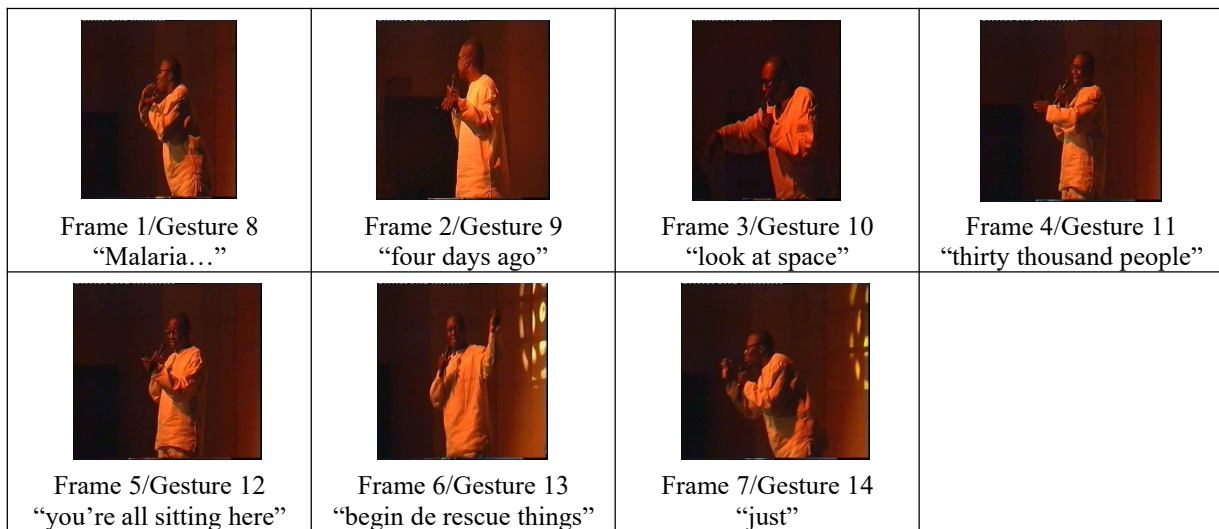

Frame 1/Gesture 8 "Malaria…"	Frame 2/Gesture 9 "four days ago"	Frame 3/Gesture 10 "look at space"	Frame 4/Gesture 11 "thirty thousand people"
Frame 5/Gesture 12 "you're all sitting here"	Frame 6/Gesture 13 "begin de rescue things"	Frame 7/Gesture 14 "just"	

Figure 6. AliBaba's gestural frame 2.

Source 1: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.
Source 2: www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo.

Figure 6 shows almost the same sets of gestures as in Figure 2. The difference is largely in the contexts of performance and the comedians involved. Gesture 8, for example, is what McNeill (2006: 299) describes as *speech-framed gestures*, which form part of the speech. AliBaba uses this gesture to complete the punch line of his joke about "Noah and Malaria". He ends the speech at the point he mentions malaria and makes a sweeping gesture with his right hand almost at his collar level. The hand sweeps from the collar down to the ground. Thus, the gesture represents abolition, extermination, killing, total destruction, etc. In this joke, this would have been the result of Noah killing two mosquitoes, a male and a female one, which he did not do. The following excerpt supports this gesture:

TEXT 9: ALIBABA
 1. ALIBABA: Now (.) for those of you who live in Lekky (...) and its environs (.) I'd advise you that as you are buying cars, buy one canoe, just put it at the back yard[[

2. AUDIENCE (A female voice from the audience shouts): IN CASE

3. ALIBABA: The other day I didn't know (Adebola si) lives towards that side(.) when rain fell I drove to his house(.) I went to spy just in case the man was building canoe, because na so Noah do he own wey we nor know, wey he kill all our grandfathers finish. [Trans: because, that's how Noah did his own; we didn't know when he killed all our grandfathers]

4. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

5. ALIBABA: Do you know that Noah guy is the guy, he's the main reason for malaria

6. AUDIENCE: HOW?

7. ALIBABA: You know if he had killed just (*gesture 9*) two mosquitoes: male and female, malarial (*completed by gesture 8*).

8. AUDIENCE: LAUGH, CLAP, SHOUT

Gestures 12 and 8 seem the same in terms of context but different in movement. Gestures 12 and 14 are iconic as they are co-expressive with the speech: "thirty thousand people died" and "begin de rescue things" in text 12 below. Gesture 9 is emblematic as it describes "just two" as shown in Figure 6. AliBaba shows the 'just' by squatting and leaning forward, reducing his height a bit, and placing his forefinger almost at the tips of his first and second fingers close together.

TEXT 10: ALIBABA

1. ALIBABA: You know (.) you know, one funny thing is that we are all sitting here(.) I don't know [the they] in America they'd say something happened and thirty (*gesture 12*) thousand people died (.) as all of una de here (*gesture 13*)

2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

3. ALIBABA: All this na wood o (...) (*he starts looking about at the frames of the hall and then shakes his head*)

4. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

5. ALIBABA: When fire start no:w, *Kp:::uoh↑* you go hear one Nigerian guy say "nna open that place (it should open) >open it<

AliBaba in all his routines uses more deictic gestures, probably because his joke texts are mainly based on the imitation of characters that use such gestures. In Figure 3, this is captured as Gestures 10 and 11 used to refer to the concept of time (four days ago) and place (look at attachment). Gesture 11 is about place reference: the hand is out-stretched more than in gesture 10 which is about time reference. Ali Baba uses gesture 11 to mimic an Igbo business man in the following excerpt:

TEXT 11: ALIBABA

1. ALIBABA: hhmm(.) you kno:w if na Ibo man de organise dis show, you go hear am se (*mimics an Igbo accent*): mna (see plenty people wey no get cha::ir::) mna why:::↑ see atta:chment (.) (*gesture 11*)

2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

3. ALIBABA: This middle can take 1 2 3 4 (...) mna bring cha::ir or jus putu: one long bench them sidon na style [Trans: my friend, place one bench here, they will sit with style]

4. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

Lastly, Gesture 14 is metaphorical in the context it appears. AliBaba makes this gesture with his left-hand paddling. He describes a fire accident scene in which people try to rescue

things from the fire. The gesture seems to represent the rescue activities, making it look more concrete. This is complemented byGgesture 15 below, representing *kataflame* 'catch fire':

TEXT 12: ALIBABA
1. ALIBABA: Hhm: you know(.) in Warri, they say one man's house[as the Jamaican would say, it (*gesture 15*) *kataflame*(..) the house catch fire. They begin de rescue things (*gesture 14*), de rescue things, de rescue things: "hey drop the TV here, hey drop this one there, drop the radio there"(.) Na he see one guy de rescue him pot of soup (*demonstrating the way the man acted at the scene*) [Trans: they began to rescue things: hey drop the TV set here, drop this, drop that radio there. Then he saw a man rescuing the pot of soup]
2. AUDIENCE: LAUGH
3. ALIBABA: He say: "O'boy no rush, no rush, waka (...), nor let the soup troway(.) I no go take am easy with you o" [Trans: boy, gently, don't run, walk. Don't let the soup pour out. If it does, I won't take it lightly with you]
4. AUDIENCE: LAUGH
5. ALIBABA: If na so, you kukuma leave am for de fire make he warm(.) [Trans: should it be the case, leave it in the fire to warm]
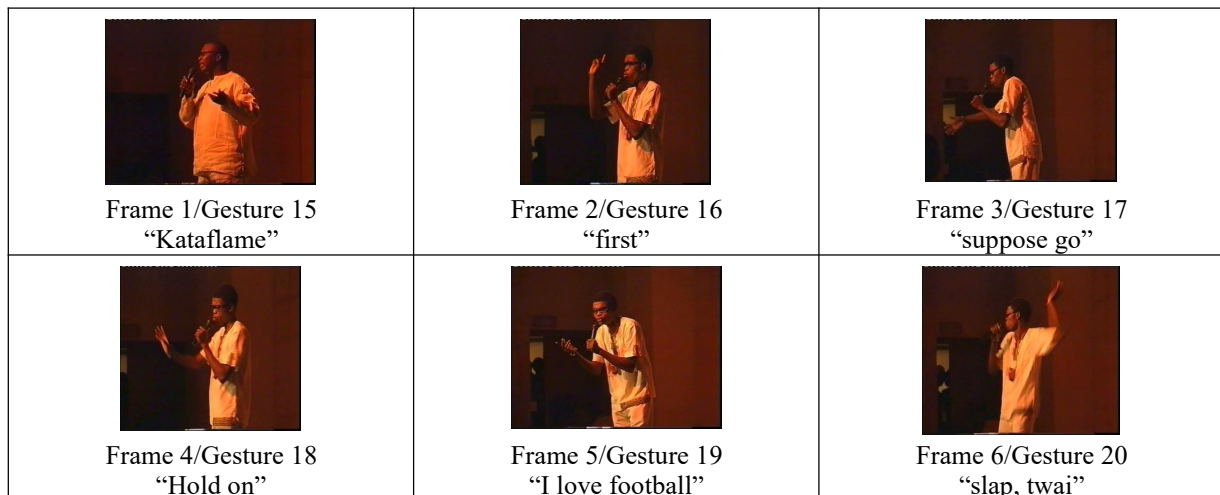6. AUDIENCE: LAUGH

Frame 1/Gesture 15 "Kataflame"	Frame 2/Gesture 16 "first"	Frame 3/Gesture 17 "suppose go"
Frame 4/Gesture 18 "Hold on"	Frame 5/Gesture 19 "I love football"	Frame 6/Gesture 20 "slap, twai"

Figure 7. AliBaba's and Omobaba's gestural frames.

Source 1: www.video.onlinenigeria.com/Drams/adHL.asp?blurb=387#comments.
Source 2: www.youtu.be/GKDwmh25doo. & www.youtu.be/ApBu2b1nWG0.

OmoBaba uses Gestures 16 and 18 iconically as he raises the first finger up and closes down the other fingers. This represents the word *first* in Gesture 16. Gesture 18 represents a caution sign for *stop* as OmoBaba's palm is raised towards the audience who are still laughing at the time. He uses the gesture to halt the laughter. Gesture 19 is more intimate and it is used to express a passion in *I love football.* His first finger points at the audience as he himself leans forwards. Gesture 20 is a speech-framed gesture. OmoBaba uses it to demonstrate the aggression of a Hausa Mobile Police Officer (MOPO) who has used slaps to open the ears of a supposedly deaf and dump passenger at a checkpoint. The gesture mimics the aggressive mood of the MOPO and the situation. Gestures, therefore, are part of the semiotic resources deployed on the stage to illuminate and maximise the effects of the spoken texts, and at the same time orchestrate the actions inherent in the performance.

5.3. The semiotic choices of linguistic devices in joke texts

The observable linguistic devices used in the joke texts include intonation, stress patterns (as indicated by downward and upward arrows, and uppercases, and underlining in the analysed texts), speech overlaps, transpositions, formulaic expressions, and repetition. These are used to enhance delivery and get the attention of the audience and for audience participation. For example, Omobaba in Text 4 uses the rising tone at the end of *thou shall no::t* to invite the audience to complete the line. The audience shouts "laugh". Again, the comedians use such formulaic expressions as *you know*, *seriously*, *well*, in Alibaba's or Basket Mouth's jokes, for example. They are repeated throughout the joke texts. Spoonerisms, overlaps, and transpositions are also noticeable in the jokes, such as expressions in square brackets in: *I don't know [the they] in America..., I used to [you know those] you travel in some countries…* This is indicative of the fact that the jokes are composed on the spot.

5.4. The generic structure of the NSC and the comedy joke texts

The Nigerian comedy in NTL shows is structured to reflect the communicative purposes (entertainment) of NSC. In the analysed NTL VCD, we observe the following stages or moves: mounting move → joke-telling move → closing move → exit move.

5.4.1. The mounting move

At this point the comedians mount the stage. This is marked by applauses, shouting, clapping, and the echoing of the theme music: *Who let the dogs out?* The audience joins in shouting the dog-barking chorus *wowo* of the music. When compared to the observations of Rutter (2001), we find that there is no formal introduction by a compère of comedians in the Nigerian stand-up comedy data analysed. This may be a feature in the recent development of the comedy show series, especially in "the stand-up Naija" by Bunmi Davies (2017), where Helen Paul (a female comedian) comes up to introduce a fellow comedian before performance. The role of a compère is not properly defined even in the show series. It can be said that the comedian only shows up, makes jokes of things and people around him and then leaves. It may be argued, however, that the music *Who let the dogs out?* does the introduction, in which case we may venture to analyse the music metaphorically in relation to the comedians who are compared to the *dogs*. The comedians' jokes of or from anything they see around is like dogs barking at anything strange. In one of Alibaba's routines, for example, the drum on the stage serves as an object of the joke. In nearly all the comedy shows, the music serves as a strategy to mark the entrance and exit of the comedians.

5.4.2. The joke-telling move

This move is the most significant in the show. It is richly supported by gestural moves and stage movements, as the comedians not only tell but dramatise the jokes. The comedians also draw on Nigeria's cultural and social contexts, and the performances are essentially narrative. In the joke-telling move, we observe some sub-moves which tend to explain the communicative purpose of the move. These include the sub-moves of opening, storyline, punch-line, laughter, and pause.

5.4.2.1. The opening move

Each joke contains statements that look like a preface to the story that follows. In most cases, as in Alibaba's, Gandoki's, and Basket Mouth's routines, the opening leads to the subject matter and it can be funny as the audience laughs.

TEXT 13: ALIBABA
ALIBABA's opening 1: Hhmm (.) you kno:w, if na Ibo man dey organise this show.
ALIBABA's opening 2: Do you know, this thing can be tempting sometimes↑ (*gestures with a drumming stick in his left hand pointing it to the audience and then looks down at something and attempts to play a drum*)

The comedians open the jokes with expressions *do you know...? You know? Seriously, thou shall not laugh*, *hold on*, etc., as discussed above.

5.4.2.2. Storyline

This is the main joke text of the stand-up comedy and it connects several contexts presented in a somewhat familiar way to the audience. The events and characters and their expressions in the story are comic, thus making the audience to interject laughter, shouting, and clapping into the story as in Gandoki's routines. For this reason, the storyline seems to be intertwined with the punch line, the point at which the audience increases the laughter.

TEXT 14: ALIBABA
ALIBABA'S storyline 1: You go hear am say (*mimics an Igbo accent*): mna [see plenty people wey no get cha::ir::]] nna why::↑ see atta:chment (.) (*gestures to indicate free spaces*) this middle can take 1, 2, 3, 4
ALIBABA's storyline 2: I used to [you know those] you travel in some countries and see a very beautifully made drum and you buy it(.) I bought one like that and hung it in my living room(.) one day like dat wey meat no dey to cook for de dogs

While some storylines are easily discernible as a result of such expressions as *four days ago*, *e get one Benin boy*, *I used to...*, others are not, as the comedians use gestures and other body postures to demonstrate what they think the audience knows to ordinarily happen in the contexts already created in the opening. In these particular cases, the comedians use mimicry character footing (Rutter 2000) and self-teasing.

5.4.2.3. Punch-line

This is the funniest moment in which the laughing and clapping of the audience are highest. Here laughter seems to be intensified, because the story at this point vividly shows elements of incongruity, ridicule, or punning, and because the outcome of the story violates the expectations of the audience.

5.4.2.4. Laughter

Both the comedians and the audience make this move. The audience laughs more as they interject laughter into the joke story. The point of highest laughter follows the punch line and both the comedian and the audience join in the laughter. The pause that follows enables the comedians to negotiate (with the audience) a moment for another joke.

5.4.3. The closing and exit moves

After the comedians have stayed the time allotted to them, they formally sign off by saying *thank you very much*. This is followed by the theme music *Who let the dogs out?*, laughter and clapping from the audience as the comedians exit the stage.

6. Discussion

NSC reveals important movements and arrangements that seem to capture the tenor of the joke-texts and the comedy in terms of the social relationship between the comedians and the audience. Although the comedians and the audience are co-authors of the comedy, the comedians control the discourse. The posture of both parties is also significant and illustrative, especially in terms of the level of formality it connotes. The comedians stand to present their routines and this emphasises the formality and temporary nature of the contact. While the comedians change routines, the audience remains permanent in the sitting position.

NSC is generally non-scripted. The jokes are composed on the spot, perhaps as a result of the limited time the comedians are given to perform on stage. The comedians do not have to regurgitate all they have memorised. Hence, they make jokes of the events around them in order to maintain a firm authority on stage. The comedians may be pressed by the need to tell new jokes rather than repeating old ones. The test of a stand-up comedian in Nigeria is the ability to tell new jokes and be funny. This may explain the prominent use of self-deprecation, stereotyping, and mimicry in NSC. The comedians stand up while the audience sit down with their gaze held up to the comedians. This sitting pattern is not egalitarian, just like in a classroom setting in which the pupils sit opposite the teacher, who does the talking. This sitting arrangement affords the audience the privilege of contributing to the discourse by clapping, laughing, looking, snapping, and asking questions.

The study also shows that NSC involves kinetic mechanisms which complement the generic structure of the comedy and the joke texts. This consists of strategic movements by the comedians on stage. The stage is the primary domain of the comedians and they try to manage the space in it. The audience occupy a plane lower than the stage. The stage as described is rectangular and elevated. It has two outlets: one for entrance and the other for exit (the parts labelled E1 and E2 in Figure 2). The comedians explore all the angles of the stage when performing. For instance, they explore the centre of the stage to initiate a storyline and the front of the stage for the punch line. The comedy is structured into three moves: mounting, joke-telling, and closing moves. Within the joke-telling move which is the crust of the comedy, there are five sub-moves such as opening, storyline, punch-line, laughter, and pause. Thus, comedians present the opening and the storyline at the centre of the stage, the punch-line at the front and illustrations at the back of the stage.

The discourse structure and roles of stand-up comedy are highly interactive and negotiated. The comedians and the audience co-produce the entertainment in NSC. Although the comedians stand on an elevated stage far above the audience and hold on to the microphone, the audience shout through the sound of the microphone to tease and ask the comedians questions. And sometimes they happily complete the lines for the comedians. The comedians also oftentimes assign some roles to the audience, such as allowing them to shout the chorus of the jokes. This is done by extending the microphone, talking to the audience directly, and stepping down to meet the audience. In this case, the discourse power relationship between comedians and the audience becomes rather close. Again, the camera plays important role in the NSC. It connects the viewing audience to the comedy. The camera zooms in on the comedians and zooms out on the audience. The light also brightens on comedians and dims on the audience. By centralising comedians and relegating the audience, comedians become the centre of attention. Finally, the study also demonstrates that Nigerian comedians employ distinct gestural resources to enrich their performance and entertain their audiences. The comedians are meant not only to tell jokes but also to display by means of appropriate gestures the character of their jokes for the pleasure of the audience. The meanings of the gestures are derived from the socio-cultural, political, and economic situations peculiar

to Nigeria as the situations in the joke texts are usually about individuals with Nigerian cultural sensibilities.

7. Concluding remarks

The main thrust of this study has been the operational mechanisms by which Nigerian stand-up is brought to life through the interplay of diverse but well-integrated multimodal semiotic resources. First, by the mediation of technology, the comic stage has become an emblematic space for individual and collective acts of personal renewal, socio-cultural awareness, and even rhetorical engagement through the instrumentality of humour and laughter, which are the products of stand-up comedy. As a result, everything in and around the stage counts – sounds, music, lighting, the spatial arrangement of iconic objects, images conjured through deliberate acts, kinetics, and the interaction of all of this with the spoken texts (Jewitt & Jones 2008). We have also seen that appropriate gestures play important roles in the performance. They shape and reinforce the spoken texts which, at the same time, have their own systematic generic-move structures that coalesce with the above elements of stage artistry to produce desired effects.

Many comedians compose their jokes on the spot by drawing from the immediate situational context. Sometimes this is done rather laboriously leading to undue repetitions, and even incomprehensible verbal illocutions. For Nigerian stand-up comedians to fully exploit the full potential of the stage, linguistic appropriateness, and kinetics, there is need for proper training. This has become necessary in view of the fact that many comedians enter into the entertainment industry fortuitously. Very few, if any, actually plan or train for what would become a life-long career. Yet, the comic discourse community, like other discourse communities, is expected to possess reasonable degree of content and discoursal expertise, which can be achieved only through proper training. We have not been able within the space of this paper to state how this should be done or how the expertise could be attained. Therefore, there is a need for further research in this respect.

Appendix

Key
( )   bracket enclosing inaudible or unclear expressions
(.)   a pause equivalent to a period
(...)   a pause longer than the usual period
[ ]   the beginning and ending of an overlap
CAP.   expressions in capital letters indicate loudness or shouting
> <   expressions said with speed
:   expressions extended
::::   multiple colons show extended shouting especially from the audience
.....   extended pause
↑   indicating rising tune
↓   indicating falling tune
°   indicating expressions said with soft tune
EXT   indicating the sharing of the microphone usually when the comedians stretch the microphone to the audience
[Trans:]   translation of Nigerian Pidgin to Standard English
" "   quotation of the comic characters
◄   indicating the focus in a particular text

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