Lexical Cohesion as a Narrative Force in the Jokes of I Go Die

Destiny Idegbekwe

Cohesion is a texture feature of a language which helps a language user to link what has been-said to what is being said, and what would be said. The functions which cohesion – especially the lexical cohesion – plays in the creation of humour has not been well studied in the context of the Nigerian comedy industry. Hence, the current study investigates lexical connectivity as one of those conditions for the jokes stand-up comedians make to be humorous and meaningful. The major motivation behind this study is the need to unravel the level of interconnectivity of ideas and events in the jokes-of I Go Die, who is one of the most celebrated comedians in Nigeria. This study uses Halliday and Hassan's (1976) theory of cohesion in English as the framework and investigates 6 (six) purposively sampled joke extracts from the popular Nigerian stand-up comedian. The study reveals that the Joke Entry Phrase (JEP) identified in I Go Die's jokes is a lexical cohesive device which aims at getting the attention of the audience and in some instances link the new jokes to the previous ones and the theme. Also, there is a sense of cohesion in using similar concepts and actions which the audience can relate with for jokes. Also, the cohesion in humour creation is enhanced using reiterated instances.

Keywords: lexical cohesion, I Go Die, humour, stand-up comedy, reiteration, collocation, Nigerian stand-comedy

Introduction

Nigerian stand-up comedians are at the forefront of popularizing the comedy genre as a central part of the entertainment industry. Taiwo (2017) opines that, "stand-up comedy, presently, constitutes the most popular type of humour in contemporary Nigeria" (p.223). Also, Ayakoroma (2013) observes that stand-up comedy presents opportunities for employment and wealth generation in modern-day Nigeria. There is no doubt that behind Nollywood (Nollywood is the popularized term referring to the Nigerian film industry, which mirrors Hollywood of the United States of America and Bollywood of India), stand-up comedy has become a key genre in the Nigerian entertainment industry, and a pivotal cultural export as Nigerian stand-up comedians have become known names in the African continent and the world.

As the Nigerian stand-up comedy industry continues to develop, there is a need for theorisation and documentation of the operations and nuances of the humour genre. A good aspect to begin with would be the study of how meaning is created and enhanced in

jokes. This is important because meaning is at the core of what makes people laugh in the sense that if the meaning of the joke is understood by the audience and interpreted as funny, laughter could be created. Cohesion—lexical cohesion in particular—is important for meaning creation in jokes because it gives the jokes the 'stick together effect', which will make it easier for the audience to follow. Lexical cohesion acts like the invisible threads that tie the ideas together. A study of its successful deployment in the jokes of I Go Die can be mirrored by up-coming comedians for better efficiency.

Nigerian stand-up comedians could be likened to storytellers. They tell funny stories to the delight of their audience. In telling the stories, there are certain conditions needed for meaningful comprehension on the part of the audience so they can receive the humour. The current study investigates lexical connectivity as one of those conditions for the jokes stand-up comedians make, to be humorous and meaningful. The major motivation behind this study is the need to unravel the level of interconnectivity of ideas and events in jokes and the creation of laughter.

This study uses I Go Die's stand-up comedy performance at AY Live in Owerri, Nigeria as a case study. AY Live is a popular stand-up comedy show in Nigeria, where many stand-up comedians and artiste gather to thrill the audience. It is held in different cities in Nigeria, in this instance, it was at Owerri in Imo State, South East Nigeria. I Go Die, whose real name is Francis Agoda, is arguably one of the most prolific and prominent among Nigerian comedians. He created the state name I Go Die from a coinage of his surname, Agoda, which shows his ability twist or tweak what seems ordinary to create a humorous effect. He represents what Chuks Nwanne (2013) calls the second generation of Nigerian comedians whose impact has been felt both in Nigeria and abroad as one of the finest exports in the stand-up comedy industry. Also, in the opinion of Ojaide and Ojaruega (2020), I Go Die "performs extemporaneously by taking on subjects and themes from his audience's reactions and feedback and effortlessly crafts fresh jokes from them. He does not hurry over his pre-arranged delivery at a live performance" (p.86). The extemporaneous nature of his jokes makes this study important as there is a need to investigate how the comedian manages to tie his ideas together outside his pre-arranged jokes. I Go Die being one of the mainstream comedians in Nigeria makes his jokes very apt as the data of the current study because his jokes are a great representation of the Nigerian stand-up comedy genre.

As popular as Nigerian stand-up is, the genre has not received considerable-academic investigation. In the literature of stage performances and theatre in Nigeria, a lot of studies covering both the traditional stage and Nollywood productions have been carried out. (cf. Adedeji, 1969; Jeyifo, 1981; Ogunbiyi, 1981; Obafemi, 1996; Dasylva, 2005 & Ogundeji, 2005). However, comic skits (especially, some funny videos by popular comedians usually posted on Instagram and YouTube) and stand-up comedy acts have not received major attention and documentation of the features and style of performances. It is based on the above academic gap that the present study is undertaken.

Research aim and objectives

This study is aimed at investigating the lexical cohesion in the selected jokes of I Go Die with the following objectives:
    a. to investigate the use of reiteration in the selected jokes of I Go Die;
    b. to investigate the use of lexical collocation in the selected joke;
    c. to investigate the role related themes and events play in developing meaning in the selected jokes.

Research Questions

The research questions designed for this study are:

    a. to what extent is reiteration used in the selected jokes of I Go Die?

    b. to what extent is lexical collocation deployed in the selected jokes?

    c. what is the role of related themes and events in meaning creation and cohesion in the selected jokes?

Literature Review

This section is divided into three sub-units representing the broad classification of earlier studies related to the present. The first sub-unit discusses works that highlight the historical background of Nigerian stand-up comedy. The second sub-unit presents studies that focus on the linguistic features of stand-up comedy in Nigeria while the last sub-unit is on studies that examine gender and other socio-political areas of the Nigerian stand-up comedy industry.

History of Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

Studies have been carried out in the past on the development and evolvement of the Nigerian stand-up comedy. In all, these studies do not capture the argument of the present study. The present study argues that reiteration and collocation enforced using the Joke Entry Phrase (JEP) and the repetition of familiar themes and context, are elements of meaning creation through lexical connectivity. In terms of the history behind the Nigerian stand-up comedy, Bamidele (2001), exposes that the emergence of Moses Olaiya (alias Baba Sala) on the Nigerian stage gave rise to comic drama groups in Nigeria. Prior to his coming into comedy, the theatres of Hubert Ogunde, DuroLadipo and Kola Ogunmola had popularized drama on the Nigeria stage with mythical, historical, political plays as well as social plays that had to deal with issues of contemporary concern. However, they did not focus on comedy as it is done now – especially stand- up comedy (cf.Oyewo, 2006; Maduakor, 1991; Awodiya, 1995). While it would be good to study the history behind the Nigerian Stand-up comedy acts, these studies do not highlight the technical detail such as the use of lexical cohesion in the creation of jokes.

In another study, Taiwo (2017), diachronically studies comic acts from the days of Jaguar to Alibaba and finds out that there is a flourishing comedy industry in Nigeria. Taiwo (2017) is of the view that the industry is the next big thing after Nollywood. The study relies on data from interviews and other social media sources to argue that with the present situation, humour is an enormously lucrative business in Nigeria. The present study aligns to the fact that humour is prominent in Nigeria and deserves a lot of study for proper theorisation and improvement. Earlier on, it was noted that a good point to begin the theorisation of Nigerian Stand-up comedy would be a study of the cohesion techniques as an important aspect in the creation of meaning in the jokes which can also extend to the creation of laughter. That is, meaning is important and should be a veritable avenue to begin the theorisation of stand-up comedy. By theorisation, the attention is on the documentation of the operations and acts of the comedians.

Another aspect or account of the emergence of the Nigerian stand-up comedy is the account that relates the emergence of the comedy genre to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the Babangida's administration in Nigeria in the early 80s. According to Haynes (1995), the programmed, which was intended to uplift Nigerians economically ended up impoverishing many Nigerians. It got worst to the point where many young Nigerians could not get meaningful jobs and were forced into different fields as a means of 'survival'. One of such 'survival' means was the entertainment industry, especially the

stand-up comedy. According to Ebenezer (2010), lately, the entertainment economy has experienced a surge in the population of stand-up comedians, most of whom are recent university graduates who have been turned down for conventional jobs. According to him, some of these comedians are: 'Chimamkpam Anyamkpa, Okey Bakassi, 'Basket Mouth,' Ali Baba, Henry Ndubuisi, Osaghiato Okunoghae (Talk Talk), Julius Agwu (De Genius), Klint da Drunk Abagana, Emmanuel Adigwe (D'Lectura),'Holy Mallam,' Gandoki, 'I go Die,' and Dammy Adekoya' (p. 96).

- **The Linguistic Features of the Language of Nigerian Stand-up Comedy**

The nature of the language used by Nigerian stand-up comedians has been studied from different linguistic perspectives which again is far from the tenet of the present study in investigating lexical cohesion as a thought-connecting language device deployed by Nigerian comedians, especially I Go Die. Adetunji (2013), studies the use of formulaic expressions by stand-up comedians. The study observes that 'Nigerian comedians use signature tunes to begin their monologues and as boundary markers to signal the start and end of a joke (p. 18). Also, just like any other conversation, stand-up performance aims at achieving certain goals. Adetunji (2013) notes that achieving humour through monologues is a conversation goal for stand-up comedians, hence, the need for funny signature tunes. The argument canvassed in the present study is related to the findings in Adetunji (2013) in the area of formulaic beginnings. The first part of I Go Die's jokes usually has what the present study calls the Joke Entry Phrase (JEP) which helps in getting the attention of the audience and linking the new joke to the previous joke, or the context if it is the first joke. An example is the use of the phrase *'Area o* or *Omo'* before presenting the next joke. This is important for humour creation because the JEP which is an integral part of lexical cohesion as used by the comedians enables meaning creation as the jokes would first need to make 'sense' to the audience for it to achieve the elicitation of laughter and humour.

Also, Chikogu and Efobi (2019), investigate the deployment of Nigerian Pidgin by Nigerian stand-up comedians in opposition to the official English language. The investigation notes that comedians deploy Pidgin with the aim of reaching their audience. Though it could be argued that most of the members of the audience are literate and should understand English, the comedians often perform in Pidgin. This is because the informal language is the most widely used and understood variety in Nigeria's multilingual society; it is perceived to be uniquely informal and can easily lend itself to comic adaptations (p. 30). The current study recognises the humorous implications of using Nigerian pidgin for jokes. Hence, it shuns the need of translating jokes into Standard English as the comedic effects could be lost. Also, the present study unravels how the lexical cohesion of reiteration and collocation in the form of JEP and related themes aid the creation of meaning and humour. These lexical devices studied currently are got from the Nigerian Pidgin used by I Go Die in his performances.

In another study, Filani (2016), studies the humour strategies and acts in Nigerian stand-up comedy with a focus on the data that was purposively collected from video compact disc recordings of 28 routine comedy shows in Nigeria. The data included 16 male and three female Nigerian stand-up comedians. The study reveals that humour strategies adopted by the comedians include: the manipulation of cultural assumptions, the creation and zooming of stereotypes, representations, corresponding concepts and projecting personal beliefs. In another study, Filani (2016), investigates the humourous meaning in I Go Die's jokes. Analysis from the study shows that I Go Dye adopts exaggeration, naming and labelling, self-praising, self-denigrating, and retorts as strategies for expressing humorous meanings. The present study is related to Filani (2016) as it seeks to underscore lexical cohesion as a humour strategy among Nigerian stand-up comedians and as a strategy aimed at making jokes more meaningful to the audience with a focus on I Go Die. The meeting ground for both studies is the creation and organisation of the language of humour.

In another study, Ekpang and Bassey (2014), examine an aspect of stand-up comedy in Nigeria, which focuses on how comedy misrepresents some metaphors, social and cultural concerns of the people satirically thereby eliciting audience reaction. The study which focuses on jokes related to Calabar (Calabar is a town in South-South Nigeria, where the spoken English language is greatly influenced by Efik, which is their first language. Comedians usually play on this influence for humorous effects) words and names reveals that 'the comic presentation of the Calabar man in Nigerian stand-up comedy is either misplaced or theatrical and does not have a true representation of the Calabar people' (p. 14). If there is a literary trope which Nigerian stand-up comedians deploy, it is the use of exaggeration. The speech stereotype of Calabar men is usually heightened and zoomed on for humorous effects by many Nigerian comedians (cf. Idegbekwe, 2010). While the present study recognises the importance of metaphors, exaggerations, and theoretical acts in the creation of jokes, it argues that lexical connectivity is needed to make the exaggeration and other literary tropes more relatable to the audience to achieve meaning and humour.

- **Gender, Ideological and Sociological Studies of Nigerian Stand-up Comedy**

In another study, Bello (2016), examines the gender-related linguistic features and discourse strategies used by female and male stand-up comedians in Nigeria. The study relies on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to compare the identified features of each gender. The findings from the study show that the differences observed in the language usage of female and male comedians did not make women's speech powerless; rather, the women studied were independent and confrontational. Some of the language resources identified in the comedies support the stereotypical view about the use of language by women and men, while others did not align with previous research and are non-stereotypical. This shows that women are not only represented in number in terms of female comedians, but the language use does also not dehumanise women. Still on the gender perspectives, an earlier study by Idegbekwe (2010), investigates the stereotypes of women in the performances of Basket Mouth and I Go Die where it was discovered that Nigerian women are portrayed as beggars, hungry and greedy individuals in their jokes. However, Bello, (2016) and Idegbekwe, (2010) did not uncover how the strands of ideas are interconnected in the jokes investigated. The present study attempts an uncovering of the lexical linking or connecting strategies which I Go Die uses in his jokes.

Using Fairclough and Wodak's theories on ideologies, Filani and Ajayi (2019) investigated the nature of ideologies communicated by Nigerian stand-up comedians. The study investigated different comedy routines from the popular *Night of a Thousand Laugh* shows. At the end, the study proved that the ideology communicated in the jokes are motivated by the nation's sociocultural and political realities, which include the comedians' ideological predispositions on gender.

Lastly, Saheed Raheem (2018), investigates the level of social-political activism and non-violence resistance in the performance of Nigerian stand-up comedians. Using extracts from six randomly selected volumes of *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*, Raheem (2018) unravels the linguistic and discourse strategies deployed by comedians in their performances for civic protest and willingness to engage the government on serious national issues. Hence, Raheem (2018) concludes that 'beyond its relaxation function, stand-up comedy is a viable platform for raising socio-political consciousness' (p. 75).

From the studies investigated above, no researcher has examined the nature of cohesion and the devices which help in improving the arrangement of materials for the stand-up comedians. There is a need to unravel the functions which reiteration and collocational usages play in jokes.

Lexical Cohesion

Lexical cohesion covers the interconnectivity of text that is implemented by lexical means. If there is an aspect to zoom in on in the study of stand-up comedy, it would be the linguistic aspect. This is because language is at the core of what comedians perform on stage. This is not reflected in the reviewed literature-as earlier studies focused on the literary aspects of stand-up comedy. This is not to say that the literary aspect is not important or is exclusive of linguistic features but that the conclusion is geared towards aesthetics. The creation of meaning is important for the comedian to be humorous. This is because the audience needs to comprehend the joke in order to digest its humour.

Achieving cohesion in the rendition of jokes is important for comedians. Cohesion refers to the internal connectivity in a language which enables language users to join different strands of utterances to communicate or to make meaning. Cohesion aids the language users to tie what has been said to what is being said and makes what would be said relevant. According to Kunz and Lapshinova-Koltunski (2015), the earliest study of cohesion in English was conducted by Roman Jakobson, who analysed the syntactic structures and parallelism in literary texts with reference to poetry (p. 21).

In 1964, it was Michael Halliday who first divided cohesion into grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion. Later, Hasan made a detailed exploration into grammatical cohesion. Before the publication of Michael Halliday and Ruquiyatu Hasan's *Cohesion in English* in 1976, several other relevant cohesion studies became available. The method by which cohesion works in English are well exposed (cf. Halliday and Hassan (1976); Widdowson (1978), Carrel (1982), Fulcher (1989), Emezue (1999), Ballard (2001), Yeh (2004), Taskanen (2006), Idegbekwe (2014) and (2019).Halliday and Hassan (1976), identified five resources with which language users cohere their speech. These resources include reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and the lexical cohesion.

Lexical cohesion is the last resource identified by Halliday and Hasan (1976). They recognize mainly two broad types of lexical cohesion: reiteration and collocation. Reiteration occurs when in a text, a word is repeated, a synonym or a near synonym, a subordinate or a general word is used to replace a word already mentioned in the text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976, p. 281). The lexical cohesion of reiteration makes use of the open class items mainly. This makes it very different from the use of reference which focuses on the use of prenominal items. For collocation, it occurs in a text if some words that appear or are used in the same field are used together. Collocation is close to registers and language according to domain and field. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976, p. 285):

> There is always the possibility of cohesion between any pair of lexical items which are in some ways associated with each other in the language and the cohesive effect of such pairs depends not so much on any systematic and semantic relationship as on their tendency to share the same lexical environment to occur in collocation with another.

Methodology

This study is mainly qualitative as the lexical cohesive features of I Go Die's jokes are examined. This is justified because qualitative research seeks to the features and characteristics of a concept or an entity. The study employed the purposive sampling technique to select 6 (six) relevant extracts which were then translated retaining the Nigerian Pidgin form with which it was delivered. This is done to retain the humorous elements as they may be lost if translated to Standard English. In the analysis of the data, each of the extracts is examined from the perspective of how the lexical cohesive device of reiteration, collocation and synonym are deployed.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Joke 1

Area!
Oboy, no be small thing oh
Na all these eh… of of the kings of comedy, dem AY take dey put person for work. Time now na to two. Peopledey crack jokes since, people don laugh tire. All the jaws don dey pain people. una wan come bring me come make I perform now, if people no laugh, una go say I Go Die no funny whereas all of una don shout say he is the king of comedy, the prince of comedy, the wizard of comedy, one of the warriors of comedy (audience laughs)…The problem for this country be say we too dey hail too much…. For this country everybody get name when them take dey hail them. If them hail you for this country, your money go finish…. my sir, my politician, my senator.

Some words play key roles in the narration of the joke above. I Go Die enters the stage, there is a loud ovation with shouts and clapping of hands. He quickly calms the audience with a popular Joke Entry Phrase (JEP): *Area! Oboy, no be small thing oh.* Area in Nigerian Pidgin does not mean area (an environment) in the sense in which it is meant in English. Rather, *Area* is a rallying word that could also be used for greetings and social pleasantries. The use of *Area* prompts the audience to be attentive that a joke is about to be rendered. Based on cohesion, the JEP is of importance because it connects the audience's attention to the imminent action. Now, what is to come is in direct link with the way the comedian was introduced on stage. He was introduced as *the king, warrior and leader of Nigerian comedy*. This is an introduction which he uses to link the first joke and the subsequent ones. By reiterating the idea of the praise names showered on him, he is able to connect with his audience because they understand what he means as it was played out before them some moments ago and it is common in the Nigerian discourse to have people introduced with titles and epithets beyond them. I Go Die reiterates the praise by using a common name for such a phenomenon in Nigerian Pidgin which is the idea of '*hailing.*' The use of hailing reiterates the praises and the continuous emphasis on some popular means with which Nigerians praise people is a form of semantic collocation with similar structures. Hence, *the king of comedy, the prince of comedy, the wizard of comedy, one of the warriors of comedy, my sir, my politician,* and *my senator* are collocational items which the audience can clearly relate with. It also drives home the message through a repeated use of the praise words.

Joke 2

Area!
You see this election when dey come so, if you see the Presidential candidates, them reach 50. Many of them believe say them go win oooh- na people for their street dey hail them-Oga, you don win, no need for posters na…Them go dey hail, our President, our governor, the people's man-hailing, if them hail you eh… if some just see me, them go just shout Ambassador-no name and title them no dey give me, my warrior. All na to make you drop money.

After I Go Die presents Joke 1, the audience is engulfed in loud laughter and clapping of hands. Again, to bring them back to the present performance, he uses the Joke Entry Phrase (JEP). This time around, he uses only *area* which brings the laughter down and another increased level of concentration from the audience. This is a cohesion device because the audience needs to be quiet and attentive to follow the message in the joke which, as we have seen earlier, is built up in the narrative modes.

In the joke, I Go Die narrates a story connected to the number of presidential candidates for the 2019 Nigerian election cycle. Following the earlier established frame of praises (*hailings*), the comedian links the high number of candidates to the continuous and

unrealistic praise singing most Nigerians get especially from the poor to the rich. Hence, it is easy to overrate oneself. This presents an extension to the idea of *hailings*which he had earlier established.

There is a sense of reiteration in repeated structures like: *na people for their street dey hail them-Oga, you don win, no need for posters na..Them go dey hail, our President, our governor, the people's man-hailing, if them hail you eh…* The reliance of exotic titles is suiting qualifying adjectives for Joke 2 and similar to Joke 1 as they collocate for praise names and expletives in the Nigerian social cultural context.

Joke 3

One guy hail me, I make up my mind say I no go give am money; no be small hailing o- the man just dey say my warrior, my king… I dey try shook hand for pocket to bring out money, the man continue to dey hail; e come start dey talk things like: my wizard, my wintch, my ogbanje, papi water. I change my mind.

The joke above does not have the typical JEP we have identified earlier. However, the comedian creatively accounts for that by linking the present joke with the earlier one with the running word *hail* in:*One guy hail me.* This helps the audience understand that the present joke is in some ways similar to the previous ones on the same subject matter. The repeated use of the word *hail* in the joke also helps in making the joke better understood by the audience.

The main argument of the present study is that there is an inner link or connection which is ensured when words are repeated or when phrases of similar structures are used in a joke. It helps the language user (in this case, the comedian connects thoughts easily with the audience. Though Joke 3 seems to be the negative form of praise taken overboard as the individual, I Go Die, is praised in derogatory terms (perhaps, the individual lacks better words to use after exhausting all in his vocabulary), it is still related to the general theme of unnecessary praise as a running idea in the performance.

In terms of structural reiteration and repetition*, my wizard, my witch, my ogbanje, papi water* as used in the joke are related and they collocate because they all connote negative ideas. For example, a wizard is only the male form of the witch, while *ogbanje* in the Igbo folk tradition connotes a demonized child that comes to trouble the parents and the society. The Igbo term *ogbanje,* literally means one who comes and goes back (form of birth and rebirth), it traditionally reflects a form of inconsistency in life and shorter life span afterwards. Also, *papi water* is a Nigerian neologism or coinage of the male version of mermaid popularly known in the Nigerian linguistic context as *mami water.* So, in terms of collocation, there is an inner thread of connection and resemblance which implicitly tie the ideas for the audience to better understand the joke. The ability of the audience to comprehend the jokes is a necessary condition exuding laughter or humour. In another sense, *papi water* is popularly believed by many Nigerians to be creators of wealth. This becomes relevant for meaning interpretation based on the fact that the individual presenting these praises needs money and sees I Go Die as a source at that material time. Hence, he is a *papi water.*

Joke 4

This country nahailings o…
You see, this country, everybody na 419 (repeated) you go here things like, do you know who I am?Just come outside, everybody dey claim to be something. Do you know who I am? You are talking to me like that? Do you know who you are talking to? Motor get accident, you go dey see persondey say do you know who I am?Na so one drive Prado one day, all these people when dey drive keke, them no get respect oh-somebody dey drive prado, one guy just jam am- I shock-the guy wey get the Prado, big man, na once demdey know them, the guy just come down, look im motor like this (demonstrates). im just deylaff from laff, imkneel down start dey cry dey shout, you don kill me oo. Even me surprise come dey ask wetindey do this

guy until one guy tell say the man wen dey inside the Prado Jeep no get money na motor wen dem take send am message. Just imagine the forming before.

Again Joke 4 has its own JEP which is: *This country nahailings o…* This is a carryover from the previous jokes. As we have earlier observed, the JEP helps in eliciting the audience's attention for the new joke and introduces the new joke as somewhat like the previous. This study argues that it is deliberately done by IGo Die for effective delivery of the jokes and for better comprehension by the audience. In most cases, the JEP is said by the comedian and he waits for a few moment for the audience to follow through for the new act.

There is link between Joke 4 and the previous jokes on 'deceitful praises.' The comedian sees the act of praising people unnecessarily by Nigerians as a form of deceit. Hence, he says in the new jokes after the JEP *You see, this country, everybody na 419 (repeated).* A *419,* in the Nigerian context is a fraud because that is the section of the constitution that covers the punishment for economic frauds and other forms of deceits. Calling individuals titles which do not belong to them or ascribing titles that are unmerited in order to gain favour from the individual is a form of fraud. That makes most people culpable because the Nigerian society thrives on that.

In the context of Joke 4, the fraud is not only in calling names but individuals ascribing a sense of importance to them. This is reiterated in the use of: *do you know who I am? Just come outside, everybody dey claim to be something. Do you know who I am? You are talking to me like that? Do you know who you are talking to?* In this case, it is not about other Nigerians praising someone else for monetary gains it is about individuals trying to gain a sense of importance and reverence to themselves to appear significant to the society. It is a form of deceit; hence, it is related to the idea of praise singing and connects well with it. These questions which I Go Die uses here are common among Nigerians as most of the people may have used them in the past or heard someone use them in similar situations as the ones captured by the comedian. The invisible connection between the current created situation and the one the audience knew before is linked to the creation of humour and the comprehension of the jokes.

In terms of collocation, Joke 4 is built on recurring structures of interrogative constructions which reinforces the image of personal importance which Nigerians attach to themselves to deceive others. The repetition of popular phrases like the ones highlighted can make the message more emphatic to the audience. Also, the creation of humour is linked with the abundance of images created through reiterations and instances of collocations. This is also reinforced with a story that shows that most Nigerians using exotic cars on the roads are just showing off as the cars belong to other persons.

Joke 5

Everybody dey form whereas no money… See many young men wen suppose don marry but lack of government planning-people no dey fit marry- ven those when marry self, don divorce e no reach one year because money no dey. Na money dey sustain relationship-without money, marriage cannot work. Somebody go dey shout money is not everything-who tell you, who tell you, money is the foundation, get am first before you marry. No money, behave yourself- see our youth dem ready marry but no money. People are stranded-the country is confused, the President is confused, everything is confused. But politicians go still dey package…

In the joke extract above, the earlier theme of vain praises and deceit is modified to accommodate a similar idea. In this case, the use of synonym as cohesive marker plays the role linking the previous theme and easing it to the current. The sentence: *Everybody dey form whereas no money* as the first statement introducing the new joke has the Nigerian Pidgin word *form* which also means to deceive, to pretend. Recall that in the previous joke, I Go Die says all Nigerians are 419 (fraudulent) because they can eulogize an individual by calling

him/her names and titles that they have not been earned, all in an attempt to make the person being deceitfully praised to feel important. In the present joke, the deceit is on how many Nigerians pretend to be rich whereas they are not. The act of making jokes from similar concepts and actions which the audience can easily relate with has a sense of cohesion which can build a kind of texture for the text for overall coherence.

Also criticizing the lack of money in the nation and among the citizens, the comedian relies on the use of repetition of phrases such as: *no money* (used 4 times), *money* (used 7 times) which help to ensure a reiteration of the idea and creates an inner link. The lack of money brings negative effects which are also evident in the reiterated cohesion force enforced by the consistent use of negative phrases such as: *No money, dem ready marry but no money. People are stranded; the country is confused; the President is confused, everything is confused.* The continuous use of the words which suggest negative effects helps to emphasise the message that the nation is not rich though the people and the politicians would wish to pretend.

Joke 6

Even the package don reach for our girls…. dem go package bobby wen be like pimples, girls go just put all the foam wen dey this world, -carry bobby, bobby go reach neck. Some girls no get yarnsh, e go wear yansh. yarnsh go come be like this (demonstrating). You go see yarnsh, the person don cross, yarnsh still dey road. Person go short go package herself wear high heel. This country everybody na 419.

In Joke 6, the attention shifts slightly to the deceitful attitudes of some Nigerian girls. This is also linked in many ways to the running theme in the earlier jokes. To make this link more concrete, I Go Die uses a synonym of deceit in Nigerian parlance (*package*) as a key word in the JEP. *Packaging* in the context of Nigerian English usage, is a form of deceit; trying to create the impression of a 'thing' or a concept that is not exactly true. The word *package* is then used three times with a synonym in the last statement which is: *This country everybody na 419.* The idea of fraud in the statement is closely related to the idea of *packaging.* This points to the fact that if words which are closely related are used or there is a case of direct repetition, there is usually a cohesive force in such usages. The humour has to be made clear to the audience and proven beyond all reasonable doubt that it exists. The inner connectivity is needed to achieve such level of clarity. A joke is no joke if it cannot be understood by the audience because of the context.

In this joke, the deceit is in the ways many Nigerian ladies fraudulently deceive men by wearing enhancing pads on their boobs and buts to make them look attractive momentarily. The humour in the joke is extended through acts of exaggeration where the comedian says the boobs will be so high, close to the neck while the buts would be so massive that it takes time to move across the road. However, beyond the use of other literary devices for the creation of humour, the joke is made more comprehensible because it is an extension of what has been espoused by the comedian in the previous joke and the key words deployed are either same with the previous or synonyms of the previous which help in creating a cohesive tie. Apart from that such acts of deceit by many Nigerian ladies abound and they are common in public discourse in the nation. So, it is not something too new to the audience.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis, the study notes that the Joke Entry Phrase (JEP) identified in I Go Die's jokes is a lexical cohesive device aimed at eliciting the attention of the audience and in some instances link the new jokes to the previous ones and the theme. This validates the findings of Adetunji (2013) which investigates the formulaic nature of Nigerian stand-up comedian jokes where it was discovered that such formulas like the JEP are aimed at achieving conversational goals and humour creation. Also, there is a sense of cohesion in

using similar concepts and actions which the audience can relate with for jokes. This cohesion is enhanced using reiteration of instances. This also goes far in validating one of the arguments in this study which is that there is an inner link or connection which is ensured when words are repeated or when phrases of similar structures are used in a joke.

The ability to create jokes out of situations that the audience can mentally link with the immediate events and the preceding jokes is a cohesion strategy. These instances of cohesion use may not be part of those recognised by Halliday and Hassan (1976) and may not be intentionally deployed by the comedian. This means that like other language users, I Go Die may not be aware that he is using a cohesive device; but, naturally, as a language user, the task is to find the best possible means to be communicative. However, from the analysis above, it is obvious that it works. In the opinion of I Go Die (the case study), the spontaneous approach which he adopts in most of his performances 'allows a steady flow of issues and a simple disposition… So, that keeps the audience to easily get in touch with the issues surrounding the jokes' (Onikoyi, 2016 qtd in Ojaideand Ojaruega, 2020, p. 86). This also follows an earlier finding that I Go Die's spontaneity which connects with the audience and the event context creates a strong rapport with his audience (Ojaide and Ojaruega, 2020).

Conclusion

The invisible thread of cohesion ties different contexts for language utterances to be meaningful. These contexts in the instance of Nigerian stand-up comedy would include the time, the cognitive and the physical contexts of the audience in relation to the jokes. The comedian's ability to cleverly bring the contexts into play in jokes can go a long way in making the jokes more relatable, humorous, and meaningful to the audience. The current study reveals that lexical cohesion is a key element in the creation of humour and the audience's comprehension of the jokes. The lexical cohesion in this instance acts as the imaginary line or thread that ties the dangling parts of a joke. As the audience laughs, the comedian looks for another related idea in context to continue the performance. Anything contrary may create a disconnection between the audience, the comedian and the joke.

References

Adetunji, A. (2013). The interactional context of humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy. *Pragmatics*, vol. 23, no. 1: pp.1-22.

Awodiya, M. (1995). *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.

Ayakoroma, B. (2013). The rise of stand-up comedy genre in Nigeria: From nothing to something in artistic entertainment. Being a Paper Delivered at the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONATA) Annual Conference with the Theme: *Quality Assurance: Theatre, Drama & Film*, held at Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, from 4-8 June, 2013.

Ballard, K. (2001). *The Framework of English*. Manchester: Palgrave.

Bamidele, O. (2001). *Comedy: Essays and Studies*. Ife: Stirling-Horden.

Bello, R. (2016). Gender differences in language usage in stand-up comedy in Nigeria. Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Southwest Nigeria. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation.

Carrel, P. (1982). Cohesion is not coherence. *TESOL Quarterly,* vol. 16, pp. 479-488.

Chikogu, R. and Dilichukwu, E. (2019). Transition, religion, and humour: Interrogating the cognitive boundaries of the humorous. *Israeli Journal of Humour Research*, vol. 8, no. 1: pp. 29-50.

Dasylva, A. (2005). Cross-cultural influences and correspondences in contemporary Nigerian drama. In Ademola Ayaji ed. *African Culture & Civilization*, Ibadan: Atlantis Books, pp. 23-32.

Ebenezer, O. (2010). State of Travesty: Jokes and the Logic of Socio-Cultural Improvisation in Africa. *Critical African Studies*, 2:4, 92-112, DOI: 10.1080/20407211.2010.10530759

Ekpang, J. and Bassey, V. (2014). Calabar Humaphors: An analysis of selected jokes in Nigerian stand-up comedy. *Lwati: A Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol. 11, no. 2: pp. 45-59.

Emezue, C. (1999). *Understanding Discourse Analysis*. Owerri: Creative Educational Management.

Filani, I. (2016). Humorous meaning strategies in Nigerian stand-up comedy: an example of I Go Dye performances. *Papers in English and Linguistics*, 17, 193-220.

Filani, I. (2016). Humour strategies and acts in Nigerian stand-up comedy. An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan.

Filani, I. & Ajayi, T. (2019). Ideologies in Nigerian stand-up comedy. *Linguistik Online*, 100 (7/19); 141-158. http://dx.doi.org/10.13092/lo.100.6023.

Fulcher, M. (1989). Cohesion and coherence in theory and reading research. *Journal of Research in Reading,* vol. 2, no.2: pp. 146-163.

Halliday, M. and Hassan, R. (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

Idegbekwe, D. (2010). *Stereotypical Depiction of Women in the comedy of Basket Mouth and I Go Dye*. An Unpublished B.A Research Project Submitted to the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin.

Idegbekwe, D. (2014). *Lexical and Grammatical Cohesion in Barack Obama's Speeches*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. English Studies Department, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Idegbekwe, D. (2019). Grammatical and Lexical Cohesion in the English and Ika Languages. Unpublished PhD Dissertation. English Studies Department, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria, 2019.

Haynes, J. (1995). Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustments. *Research in African Literatures*, *26*(3), 97–119. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820141

Jeyifo, B. (1981). Literary drama and the search for a popular theatre in Nigeria. In: Yemi Ogunbiyi ed. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, Lagos: Nigerian Magazine, pp.171-188.

Kerstin K and Ekaterina, L. (2015) Cross-linguistic analysis of discourse variation across registers. *Nordic Journal of English Studies,* vol. 14, no. 1: pp. 258-288.

Maduakor, O. (1991). *Wole Soyinka: An Introduction to his Writing.* Ibadan: Heinemann.

Nwanne, C. (2013). Ali Baba yesterday, today and 20 years after. Retrieved on the 28 April, 2020 from:http://theguardianlifemagazine.blogspot.com/2010/01/ali-baba-yesterday-today-and-20-years.html>. Web.

Obafemi, O. (2011). *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision*. Lagos: CBAAC.

Ogundeji, A. (2005). Functions and forms of "traditional" theatre practice in Nigeria. *African Culture & Civilization.* Ibadan*:* Atlantis Books*,* pp. 49-56.

Ojaide, T. & Ojaruega, E. (2020). Tradition and subjectivities: Warri-related comedians and their art. *TydskrifVirLetterkunde,* vol. 57, no. 2: pp. 81-91.

Onikoyi, A. (2016). 20 years as a comedian: How my grandma showed me the path to follow—I Go Dye. *Vanguard.* 26 Mar. 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/03/20-years-comedian-grandma-showed-path-follow-go-dye/.

Oyewo, S. (2006). The theatre in the administration of cultural diplomacy in Nigeria. *An Encyclopaedia of Arts*, vol. 2, pp. 174-181.

Raheem, S. (2018). A Sociolinguistic study of social-political activism and non-violent resistance in stand-up comedy performances in Nigeria. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.12, no.6: pp. 75-92.

Taiwo, O. (2017). From Jagua to Ali Baba: Humour in contemporary Nigeria. *Agogo: Journal of Humanities*, vol. 3, pp. 25-35.

Taskanen, S. (2006). *Collaborating towards Coherence: Lexical Cohesion in English Discourse.* London: Benjamins.

Widdowson, H. (1978). *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yeh, C. (2004). The relationship of cohesion and coherence: a contrastive study of English and Chinese. *Journal of Research in Reading,* vol.2, no. 14: pp. 146-163.