

How Powerful Can You Speak? A Study of Female and Male Language in Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examines the gender-related linguistic features and discourse strategies used by female and male stand-up comedians in Nigeria. This is done with a view to investigating the implications of the language differences for power in Nigeria. The data for this study is collected from three comedy shows, downloaded from *YouTube*. These shows are selected based on the critical gender issues prevalent in them. The selected comedy shows were watched and transcribed paying close attention to the linguistic and discourse features found in them. The results show that linguistic features and discourse strategies such as interruptions, resistance, politeness, impoliteness, discourse markers and hedges were employed by the comedians. The study further reveals that, through their language usage, women in control of comedy discourse challenge gender-related cultural values and this attacks the hegemonic power of men. In essence, the study reveals that women have begun to find their voice and maintain their position in the comic scene in Nigeria.

Introduction

Language use is socially and cognitively determined and depends on the goal of the speaker and the context of situation (Bloom & Lanhey 1978). Aitchison (2000)

describes the difference between what is said and what is intended as a difference that exists between using language for information and using language for promotion and maintenance of social contacts.

As such, it can be argued that each time an individual or a group uses language to communicate it reveals the membership of one or more identities – social class, ethnic group, age group, educational background, ideology, and gender. One cannot use language without disclosing some information about one's identity. In other words, establishing identity is embedded in communicating information. Thornborrow (2004) echoes this view as he claims that social groups and communities use language as a means of identifying their members and shaping other people's opinion of whom they are. As a result of this vital link between language and world experience, Pinker (1994) describes the relationship between language and human experience as tightly woven in such a way that life without language seems impossible.

Challenging Issues Relating to Language and Gender

Language as an indicator of gender identity has been of interest to scholars and researchers. Scholars in the field of language and gender argue that language structure and use have been in favour of men to the detriment of women.

Robin Lakoff's (1975) book on *Language and Woman's Place* is often regarded as a landmark publication in the study of language and gender. In her opinion, the differences between men's language and women's language reflect the relative status that each gender holds in the society. Women's marginal and

powerless position is reflected in the language society uses to speak of women, and the ways society expects women to speak. She argues that society has linguistically submerged the personal identity of women as trivial and sexual objects that should depend on men. The society, according to her, describes women linguistic forms as marked while those of men as unmarked. These linguistic treatment of women as “second class” citizen has an overbearing effect on the general well-being of women in the society. She posits that linguistic imbalance should be taken seriously, as they bring about and expose inequalities and imbalance in the real world. In her observation, Women’s lexis (colour terms, inessential qualifiers and evaluative adjectives), syntax (tag questions) and intonation patterns render women’s speech tentative, powerless and trivial which convey the message that women are unfit for positions of authority. Language, in her view, serves as a tool for oppression because this speech is not biological; rather, it is socially imposed on women in order to keep them in “their place” (you need page references).

Her argument led to intensive research and debate among scholars with different interests. Some scholars aim to put her introspective claims into empirical test while others are fascinated by it. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) opine that scholars hold interest in the two key parts of Lakoff’s claim - (1) that women and men talk differently and (2) that differences in women’s and men’s speech are as a result (and support) of male dominance. These two parts are further viewed along two conflicting approaches – *dominance* and *difference* – to the study of gender and language use.

For the *dominance* theorists, women are usually “negotiating their relatively powerless position in interaction with men” (Cameron, 1996: 39). More specifically, interruptions, turn-constructions, verbosity, and floor management in verbal interactions are seen to be less in the grasp of women than men (Cameron 1996; Thomas & Wareing, 1999).

The *difference* theorists, however, hypothesize a contrasting view to the perceived asymmetric power relations between men and women. According to Tannen (1991), the demarcation of women’s and men’s language is traceable to the two sexes’ different socialization processes. To these theorists, “women’s language is not just different, but positively valued” (Litosseliti, 2006: 37).

Cameron (1998: 451) views gender differences in language use as differences in “role, status or power ... that the same person can behave differently depending on whom she or he is talking to, from what position and for what purpose”. To this end, researchers have tried to prove that women ask a lot of questions (Fishman, 1990), are less-assertive in language use (Thomas & Wareing, 1999) and use “gossip” for conversational solidarity (Holmes, 1995).

Sharp (2012) investigates the use of intensifiers by males and females using a modern-day television programme, *Gossip Girls*. In her investigation, she observes that female characters use more intensifiers in their speech than the males and the difference is significant. Her data supports Lakoff’s 1975 view that the intensifier is a form of female speech.

It is evident that differences in language use is perceived more as power and status than biological differences between different sexes. In view of this, West & Zimmerman (1983) observe from their study that 99% of interruptions are made by males. They conclude that men's dominance in conversation via interruption mirrors their dominance in contemporary western culture. Interruption is "a device for exercising power and control in conversation" (West & Zimmerman, 1983: 103). Men typically enjoy greater status and power than women in most societies, and they are more likely than women to assume they are entitled to take over the conversation.

Humour: The Linguistics Perspective

The creative use of language is evident in the entertainment industry ranging from music, drama, to humour and/or comedy. Humour has to do with the communication of multiple and incongruous meanings (Martin 2007) which lead to a positive cognitive or affective response from listeners (Crawford 1994). According to Cahill & Densham (2014), humour is a combination of the verbal (telling a joke or laughing out loud) and the non-verbal (smiling, raising a cynical eyebrow) in communicative events. Humour in daily interaction elicits various responses from different people which may be as a result of differences in experience, gender, ethnicity, context or the ability to present the humour skillfully and appropriately. That is why Malone (1980) sees humour as a "double-edged sword" – what is funny to one individual or group of people may be considered offensive to another.

There is a close connection between stand-up comedy and language use. The nature of their craft

requires comedians to be conscious of language features in order to navigate the various topics they choose to discuss and the different characters, situations and emotions they seek to portray one way or the other. Apart from the basic function of stand-up comedy as a means of entertainment, it is also a crucial means of communicating social realities. Comedians bring forth current issues which affect and are of pivotal interest to the public. Issues relating to class, gender, ethnicity, governance and other social differences and topics, which are to a large extent considered taboo in the public sphere, are some of the favourite topics of comedians. Falk (2010) opines that these topics are very important to discuss and have probably been around for as long as there have been social differences among people. Appropriate humour, in his opinion, will efficiently disarm these tabooed topics in a way that makes them easier to handle and talk about in the public space.

Ajtony (2008) examines verbal humour and irony from a sociolinguistic perspective. She applies the GTVH to conversational narratives and relates them to socio-pragmatic approaches, using one of G.B. Shaw's plays – *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Focusing on the Target as one of the KRs of the GTVH, she analyses the linguistic manifestations of ethnic identity, specifically the verbal means of expressing ethnic humour. She argues that in humour interaction, a common code (i.e. a shared socio-cultural knowledge) exists between the speaker and recipient. Humour, to her, becomes a flexible discourse strategy in constructing certain aspects of social identities, solidarity and in-group identity. Thus, through the choice of Target, the identity of the speaker can be formulated based on their humorous utterances.

Sani, Abdullah, Ali & Abdullah (2012) study the role of humour in the construction of satire in Nigeria political cartoons. With the analysis and interpretation of thirty-five purposefully selected cartoons from the *Vanguard* and the *Daily Trust*, they argue that humour plays vital communicative roles in media discourse especially newspaper cartoons. In their view, Nigerian cartoonists favour the use of aggressive and affiliative humour styles in order to achieve these roles. Sani, Abdullah, Ali & Abdullah (2012: 148) hold that humour in cartoons amuse audiences; “relieve them from stressful situations; persuade them towards making opinion on contemporary issues” of national interest; contributes to clear thought; “constructs criticisms pointed to political leaders and comment on current socio-political issues of the moment in order to initiate social and political reforms”. They submit that “humour serves as an influential communicative tool not only in Nigerian political cartoons, but also in the whole cartooning art” (ibid: 162).

Taiwo, Arilewola & Oshodi (2014) study the discursive forms and functions of humour. Their study of the discursive elements in Nigerian humour through the lens of CDA brought to the fore the relationship between the underlying meanings of the jokes analyzed and the socio-cultural context of their production. They argue further that apart from the surface function of jokes as a form of entertainment and laughter, its underlying functions also serve to address issues of power relations and identity.

Methodology

Three comedies served as the primary sources of this study. These comic acts were purposively selected because of the issues prevalent in them. Since the study intends to examine language in cross-sex conversation, it is essential that the comic acts included both female and male comedians and due to the multicultural composition of Nigeria, an act that includes different cultures will be fairly representative. The comic dialogue was downloaded from *YouTube*. The selected comedy shows were watched and transcribed and in order to be able to perform an in-depth analysis of the various linguistic and discourse features employed in them.

The comedies in the data were labeled GRP1, GRP2, and GRP3 for easy recognition and understanding. The analysis of the data relies basically on a qualitative procedure using the tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA). At this level of analysis, the issue of power as it relates to gender found in the data is discussed. CDA framework was chosen because it gives room to study language beyond mere linguistic form and extends to the societal norms which can make visible salient power display and struggles in discourse.

Van Dijk (2005) observes that CDA primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts. He is of the view that CDA takes a clear position in exposing and resisting social inequality and this position makes it different from other fields of enquiry such as conversation analysis, media analysis, narrative analysis, pragmatics, ethnography, among others.

Van Leeuwen (2009: 277) holds a similar view when he describes CDA as “the idea that text and talk play a key role in maintaining and legitimizing inequality, injustice and oppression in society. CDA approaches to the study of language, to him, cannot be equated or replaced by traditional sociolinguistic and stylistic approaches to the study of language. He maintains that sociolinguistic and stylistic approaches merely describe “patterns of language use and patterns of language change, but they have not explained them”.

This shows that CDA focuses on social issues and addresses external factors – such as ideology, power and inequality – and draws on theories from various fields of study – such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, and philosophy – to analyse and interpret written and spoken texts. This opinion aligns with van Dijk’s description that CDA “chooses and elaborates theories, methods and empirical work as a function of their relevance for the realization of socio-political goals” (1993: 252).

Weiss & Wodak (2003) hold the view that the fundamental interest of CDA lies in analysing opaque, as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. This shows that it is of pivotal interest to CDA analysts to critically examine social inequalities as expressed through the use of language. Their position echoes Habermas’ words that “language is also a medium of domination and social force, which serves to legitimize relations of organized power” (1967: 259)

Data Analysis

Insult/ Politeness

In GRP1, the use of insults is relatively even among the comic characters, the case of the prophet and the interpreter stands out. The prophet who exhibits more power in the comedy over the interpreter is insulted three times in the comedy, while the prophet insults the interpreter only once. The following extract illustrates this point:

- 196. Interpreter:** *<Eje kin ba yin lo palemo>. {Let me help you to pack}*
- 197. Prophet:** *<Kin lo sey e? Oya were ni?> {What is wrong with you? Are you mad?}*
- 198. Interpreter:** *<Egbagbe amure?> {You didn't forget "amure"}*
- 199. Prophet:** *Ehn, young man, I just discover that the woman is not the one with the problem.*
- 200. Interpreter:** *<Ari wipe arabinrin yen ko ni oni isoro> = {We saw that the woman is not the one that has problem =}*
- 201.**
- 202. Boniface:** *=SHUT U! I heard what he said.*
- 203. Prophet:** *Ehm, on that note, I think ehm it is your turn to step into the room and my assistant will follow you to put power inside you.*
- 204.**
- 205. Audience:** *((Laughter)) [applause]*
- 206. Interpreter:** *<Boya emi kemi lonloyin. Ehm, mi gbo nkan tie so ni.> { Maybe you evil spirit is using you. Ehm, I did not hear what you sai.}*
- 207.**

- 208. Audience:** ((Laughter))
- 209. Prophet:** *I SAID TAKE THIS MAN INSIDE AND MAKE SURE POWER ENTERS HIM*
- 210. Interpreter:** *<Nigba ti e wo were.> {When you are not mad}*
- 211. Audience:** ((Laughter))
- 212. Interpreter:** *<Eyin gbe obinrin wole e wani ki emi gbe okunrin wole, egbagbe pe eko la wa ni? E renti fourteen years?> {You took a woman inside, you now ask me to take a man inside, you have forgot we are in Lagos you didn't remember fourteen years}*
- 213.**
- 214.**
- 215.**

In line 197 above, the prophet insults the interpreter questioning his sanity, but he interpreter does not respond to this. However, when the prophet gives him a directive in lines 203 and 204, he insults the prophet. When the prophet repeats the same directive in line 209, he uses the insult the prophet used in line 197 and questions his sanity also. As for Margret and Boniface, Margret feels insulted when Boniface refers to her as “woman”. From her response, calling her woman is derogatory and demeaning and which prompts her to insult him by referring to him as pathetic and at the same time questioning and challenging his masculinity. She further insults and ascribes their inability to produce a child to mean her husband is impotent and incapable.

- 21. Margret:** *= ehn ehen! I have invited a prophet to come and pray for us today.*

22. **Boniface:** A WHAT? A **WHAT**?
23. **Margret:** We must get a child.
24. **Boniface:** A prophet, a pro - het? For **WHAT**?
25. In MY **HOUSE**? It's not going to happen. I would remind you, **WOMAN**, that I am still the **MAN** of this house.
26. **Margret:** ((laughter)) Ha! You are so pathetic,
27. you claim you are a man. OKAY,
28. are we sure that this your GUN [Hits his genitals with her hand] is loaded with LIFE AMMUNITIONS? Ehn? ((hisses))

In a bid to shift the blame of their childlessness to Margret, Boniface calls her an *Albino* and at the same time questions her femininity due to her “poor choice of fashion”. The conversation between Margret and Boniface is mainly impolite. At first, the two of them are impolite in their conversation. However, the woman switches to more polite expressions as soon as the prophet enters. This shows the relative importance of participants in conversation. And with her calm and polite tone with the husband and her use of “please” with the Prophet, she is able to get the approval of her husband and keep the pastor waiting till she gets the approval of her husband. When she fails to uphold the reputation of women polite speech form, she is in trouble, but as soon as she becomes more polite, she is able to influence the decision of her husband.

This reflects the inequalities in face-to-face interactions as a function of the relative status of participants. The stereotypical trait of women as having a status lower than men is at play and when this woman tries to challenge this by maintaining her point of view; she has no headway, until she conforms to the role laid down by the society for her – to be subjugated to the will of the man, to feed his ego and not to stand shoulder to shoulder with him, if you are allowed to stand to begin with. Her dominant or assertive behaviour with her husband was considered less appropriate and the husband hopes to maintain his power and authority over her. He points out as seen above that there is no “us” as used by the wife; rather, it is “my” and “I”.

Akpos stands out from the rest of the comedians in GRP2. This is because he insults the most in the comedy. He insults Chantal, her people, the host and even an actor in the question they are expected to answer. One striking thing about his use of insult is that most of the insults uttered question the intelligent capabilities of others. He goes on to call an actor a “fool” because he does not agree with what he did. He insults Rank, the presenter, because they have different views. He also insults Chantal verbally and threatens to abuse her physically. Chantal, however, counter-attacks him both verbally and physically. Below is the substantiation:

135. Akpos: *Me, watch out now, you are a winch.*

136. Chantal: *A witch?*

- 137. Akpos:** *You hear me. Yes, you are a big winch.*
- 138. Chantal:** *Am not a witch. Your mother is a witch.*
- 139.** *Every cousin that you have and every*
- 140.** *sister that you have are witches. In fact every woman from your village is a WITCH!*
- 141. Akpos:** *[Removes his hat with dismay] you dey curse my people?*
- 142. Chantal:** *Yeah hen hen*
- 143. Akpos:** *Wey you,*
- 144.** *hen I dey warn you hen, if I hear one more insult from you again, you no go believe the slap wey I go =*
- 145. Chantal:** *[slaps him] is that the slap you talking about? Because am going to slap you again!*
- 146.**

Although the male comedian in GRP3 uses insults more often than the female, the two comedians are essentially impolite to each other. From the beginning of their routine, the two have remained impolite, from the female gestures to the male verbal interruption. There is a chain of insults and abuses throughout the performance, which is exemplified below:

- 23. Male:** *Ehm, let me just come in and ehm help*
- 24.** *you there. You see, (2.0) the government*
- 25.** *is a very **stupid** government. Because of - even you that you are saying the government is not supporting Nigeria ehm artist you are a **stupid** person.*

...

83. Female: *If you touch me I will give you a **DRITY SLAP**.*

84. Male: *<Shege dan bura uba.> {A very useless*

85. *bastard} ((laughter)) <Shege dan baza.>*

86. *{A stupid bastards} <Wayyo Allah>*

{wow God}. <Shege>. {bastard}

Somebody I dey come and visit you oh.

...

111. Female: *Our viewer, you see, this **stupid** boy,=*

...

120. Male: *<Shege dan bura uba.> {A very useless bastard}*

Interruption in the Comedy

Assertiveness and directness, in terms of interruptions, occur for both genders. Margret, the only female in GRP1, interrupts Boniface three times throughout the comedy. But it is observed that Boniface uses interruption more when the whole conversation is considered:

18. M: *Boniface. What are you going to do?*

19. *What are you going to-, Ehn what are you going to do? [Knocks his chest with her head] what are you, ehn hen ha?*

20. BONIFACE: *Eh. Look here =*

21. M: *= Ehn ehen! I have invited a prophet to come and pray for us today.*

The excerpt above is an instance of Margret's interruption of Boniface and her ability to gain the floor and in fact she achieved her aim. She receives more of the interruption in the comedy, the prophet interrupts her once, the sound of bell once, and Boniface interrupts her four times.

- 46. M:** *[to the audience] Man u? YE-ES, at least they have won some trophies#*
47. *Or maybe Chelsea, ha but I prefer Barca! Barcelona =*
48. BONIFACE: *=Hey! Hey! Hey! Woman did you just call my **arsenal**, Barca? {GRP1}*

This implies that the difference between male and female unfinished sentences in the conversation is not significant because the wife interrupts and gains the floor to continue the conversation as much as the husband. The difference in their quantity of talk is also not significant, so this sample cannot help to conclude who is more talkative. The pastor uses interruption thrice throughout the comic performance. First, when he interrupts Boniface in line 97, second when he interrupts Margret in line 149 and third when he interrupts his interpreter in line 175. The interpreter did not interrupt throughout the comic performance, but he was interrupted by the prophet and Boniface.

Comedians	Interruptions received	Interrupting female comedian	Interrupting male comedian	Total number of interruptions made
Margret F		0	4	4

Boniface M	5	5	2	7
Prophet M	0	1	3	4
Interpreter M	4	0	0	0

Table 1: Frequency of Interruption in GRP1

In the same vein, assertiveness through interruption occurs in GRP2. Chantal interrupts far the most in the comedy. She interrupts Akpos seven times while Akpos interrupts her only once throughout the comic performance. Rank, the presenter, is the only character that neither interrupts nor was interrupted throughout the comedy. With the use of interruption below, Chantal asserts her position and she is quite direct through her direct use of language. Consider the excerpts below:

- 95. Akpos:** *Cool down! You no dey hear how much we don win here so? 40 million, left for me I no like play again self. Near me, near me. no dey = [tries to hug her again]*
- 96.**
- 97.**
- 98. Chantal:** *[pushes him off] =DON'T TOCH ME!*
- 99. Akpos:** *[tries to hug her again] Cool down, now =*
- 100. Chantal:** *= GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!*
- ...
- 112. Akpos:** *(shocked) "eme ta ke no" {I am telling him that ...}*

113. Chantal: *Fi gbo we {Shut up!}*

114. Akpos: *Ma ni e = {No, I am telling him that}*

115. Chantal: *“Ma ni figbo! o ma bi nu we?” {I said shut up what is wrong with you?}*

116. *[Turns to Rank] Rank Fedeno “ko me” {give me}{GRP3}*

Comedi ans	Interrupti ons received	Interrupt ing female comedia n	Interrupt ing male comedia n	Total number of interrupti ons made
Chantel F	3	0	5	5
Akpos M	5	3	0	3
Frank M	0	0	0	0

Table 2: Frequency of Interruption in GRP2

Similarly, in GRP3, the use of assertiveness through interruption is observed. The use of interruption is evenly spread. The male interrupts as much as the female. In the same vein, they both experienced failed bid in the comic performance. Their use of interruption reinforces their assertiveness and directness.

- 31. Female:** *our viewer, =*
- 32. Male:** *= You are stupid.*
- ...
- 63. Female:** *= You are not knowing =*
- 64. Male:** *= to frofagate=*
- 65. Female:** *= Shut up!*
- 66. Audience:** *((laughter and applause))*
- 67. Female:** *Let an elderly person Say it*
- 68. Male:** *Say it.*
- ...
- 80. Male:** *=We are saying – I say =*
- 81. Female:** *= If you touch me again I will give you a
dirty slap. {GRP3}*

In line 32 above, the male interrupts the female in order to be direct and also to assert his position. Similarly, in lines 65 and 81, the female interrupts the male as a means of being assertive. It is worth mentioning that in 63 to 68 above, after the female's failed bid to take over the floor in 63, the male gave way for her to interrupt him in 68 by agreeing that she should "say it".

Comedi ans	Interrupti ons received	Interrupt ing female comedia n	Interrupt ing male comedia n	Total number of interrupti ons made
Princess F	11	0	12	12
M	12	11	0	11

Table 3: Frequency of Interruption in GRP3

Resistance

In this study, certain linguistic behaviors have been classified as resistance. Instances when comedians argue, disagree with and threaten each other have been included in this category. In GRP1, despite the fact that there are instances where men disagree and question each other, the language of the male comedians does not display nearly as much opposition as that of the female. Not only does Margret clearly state her opinions, she also threatens others when they act in a manner which does not please her. One example is when she challenges Boniface in lines 18 and 19 below, another is when she challenges the stereotypical notion that woman and man should be classified based on social construct exemplified below:

- 15. BONIFACE:** *[Stands up and point a warning finger, walk forth and back]* MAGGI,
16. *MAGGI. YOU HAVE STARTED again.
You have STARTED!*
17. Audience: *((Laughter))*

- 18. M:** *Boniface. What are you going to do?*
19. *What are you going to-, Ehn what are you going to do? [Knocks his chest with her head] what are you, ehn ehn ha?*

...

- 24. BONIFACE:** *A prophet, a pro- het? For WHAT? In MY HOUSE? It's not going to happen. I would remind you, **woman**, that I am still the **man** of this house.*
26. M: *((Laughter)) you are so pathetic. You claim you are a man? OK. Are we sure that this your GUN [Hits his genitals with her hand] is loaded with LIFE AMMUNITIONS? Ehn?*
27.
28. *((Hisses)) {GRP1}*

It is observed that instances of interrogative mood above do not only seek to ask question but also have some ideological stance which could signal threat and challenge. Chantal, in GRP2, displays the highest form of resistance out of all the groups considered through her language and her actions.

- 92. Rank:** *You just won yourself 40 million naira.*
93. Akpos: *Hey ((Laughter)) [hug]*
94. Chantal: *[she pushes him]*
95. Akpos: *Cool down! You no dey hear how much we don win here so? 40 million? Left for me I no like play again self. Near me, near me. No dey = [tries to hug her*
96.

97. *again]*

98. Chantal: *[pushes him off] =DON'T TOCH ME!*

99. Akpos: *[tries to hug her again] Cool down, now
=*

100. Chantal: *= GET YOUR HANDS OFF ME!*

Chantal resists the societal belief that women can be tossed around once money is involved, she resist her husband despite the huge amount of money won in the game. He tries to manipulate her with the money but she was not swayed by that until he accepts to do what she expects of him. So also in the instance below, her resistance to him makes him to call her a “witch”. A label she vehemently rejected and in return she labels his people despite the fact that they are on air and it is expected that her husband’s people will view the transmission.

135. Akpos: *Me, watch out now. You are a winch.*

136. Chantal: *A witch?*

137. Akpos: *You hear me, yes you are a big winch.*

138. Chantal: *Am not a witch. Your mother is a witch.*

139. *Every cousin that you have and every*

140. *sister that you have are witches. In fact
every woman from your village is a
WITCH!*

Chantal displays the ultimate resistance to patriarchy by slapping Akpos. Akpos threatens to slap her in line 144 below which reflects the physical and verbal violence that a woman who refuses to accept her “place” in the society could experience in relationships. Contrarily, Chantal did not subject herself to such an experience; she displays courage and readiness to challenge the “man”.

- 143. Akpos:** *Wey you hen I dey warn you hen, if I*
144. *hear one more insult from you again,*
you no go believe the slap wey I go ...
145. Chantal: *[slaps him] is that the slap you talking*
146. *about? Because am going to slap you*
again!

In GRP3, the two were not at par from the beginning till the end of the comedy. They argue on everything from “name” (1.2) when the female refers to the male as her “assistance” to the rule of grammar. Resisting and challenging scenarios dominate the entire performance. Not only does the female challenge the male, she also threatens him. She constantly displays resistance, challenge and confidence despite her gender.

- 80. Male:** *=We are saying – I say =*
81. Female: *= If you touch me again I will give you a*
dirty slap.
82. Male: *((laughter)) Shege dan bura uba {a very*
useless bastard}
83. Female: *If you touch me I will give you a DRITY*
SLAP.

96. Female: *I cannot **FEAR**. Am an elderly person, I cannot fearing small =*

Power Struggle and Language Interplay through Comedy

This section of the analysis focuses on the implications of these differences in terms of power struggles in language use of female and male comedians. People, in a general sense, establish a sense of uniqueness and distinctiveness in relation to others. The choice of languages may be conscious or unconscious but it does not happen in a vacuum, rather language operates in a context, which is situated in a speech community or society in which the user of language is socialised. A critical analysis of the various strategies adopted by the comedians and the context under which comedians use these varied features show that every time people use language, they are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are, how they want to be seen, and how they want to relate to the social world. Through language use, women in comic discourse construct and negotiate their identity and display imbalance and struggle for power distribution.

Results regarding politeness are not entirely consistent in all the comedies studied across gender. According to Holmes (1995), women apologise for mild offences while men preserve their apology for a serious one. Their speech is filled with aggression, both in tone and content. And the females in mixed-sex group display polite speech towards some and impolite speech towards other. And on some occasions, the same comic character will address another politely or impolitely based on what is being discussed or the participants in the discourse.

For example, Margret was mainly impolite to Boniface before the pastor and the interpreter joined them but suddenly, she became polite in the presence of the interpreter. This signals the importance of participants in interactions and also it has some cultural underlying. The woman is expected to respect her husband even if there is a discord between them in the presence of an outsider and at all time. Her behavior is hypocritical as she vehemently opposes her husband in private and all of a sudden seeks his approval in public. This shows that women are silently struggling for the reign of power from men. While observing what is expected of them in public domain, they fight against the domination of men in private spaces.

Correspondingly, women rather than men are responsible for the majority of opposition and disagreement. In the data, resistance is evenly spread among the female comedians. What they have in common, is that women assert and express their opinions. It is also important to keep in mind that in all of the mixed-sex comedies, men try to control the activities of the women, there are instances of linguistic aspects that show evidence of attempted repression of women by men however, women's language displays intense resistance in response to men attempted to control over them. Women, rather than men, have more reason than men to express it. Margret in GRP1 challenges her husband when he disagrees with her, the female comedian in GRP2 challenges the male, while in GRP3 Chantal displays the highest form of resistance to male control both verbally and physically. These varied groups in one way or the other display what females go through in the African society and what is expected of

them. But these women will not have that; they vehemently challenge the traditional notion of men. These women do not give men the autonomy to exercise power over them. Through their comic performance, females challenge the notion of gender and where society places them. They are able to voice out and express their opinion.

Humour, which has been historically constructed as a masculine discourse, provides ample opportunities for the comedians to be aggressive and dominant, despite the fact that a successful performance depends on the audience's approval of the script. Hence, the mere fact that a woman stands in that position is threatening and affecting the domain of power from male as women will also be afforded this opportunity to display aggressive behavior and dominate the audience which will otherwise be regarded as impossible without the mediation of humour. Accordingly, Nielsen (1993:289) argues that "when a person tells a joke [they] are in a position of control; but when [they] hears a joke, it is the other person who is in control".

This in turn supports the claim by feminist writers such as Barreca (1988; 1991), Little (1983) and Apte (1985), that women comedians are potentially threatening to the patriarchal *status quo*. In their view, joke performance is empowering as it gives the power to comment on societal norms; thus, giving the marginalised and oppressed a voice.

Women's speech, in this study, is far from powerless as Lakoff (1975) suggests; rather, they are independent and confrontational which is not in tune with the long held belief that they have less roles in the

society. They have broken free of the chauvinistic view that female should be limited to the home. Women in control of comedy discourse challenge cultural relations of gender, and this attack the hegemonic power of men. This shows that women have significant potentials to improve female access to power, status and material resources.

Conclusion

Based on the findings from the data for this study, we can conclude that differences in the language usage of female and male comedians support certain aspects of the findings by previous researchers. Some aspects on the use of profanity and obscene language corresponds well with previous findings that men use more obscene language than women. With respect to discourse markers, lexical hedges, and politeness similarities rather than differences were found. More importantly, women resist when they are exposed to male domination and oppression. Women in the audience are thus provided with models on how to deal with oppression, while men are sent a clear message – “you can’t get away with either linguistic or physical oppression”. This shows that the comedians studied underscore the equal value of men and women.

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