“I don dey crase?” – Code-alternation, Humour and Identity in Barclay Ayakoroma's Dramatic Texts

James Okpiliya, PhD
okpiliyaj@gmail.com
&
Romanus Aboh, PhD
romeaboh@gmail.com
Department of English and Literary Studies
University of Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract
Nigeria's literary context provides ample instances of the multivalent functions to which language is put, indicating an inseparable conjunction between literature and the linguistic identity that produce it. It is against this significant background that we interrogate code alternation as a practical, context-driven linguistic technique deployed by Ayakoroma in the construction of humourous scenes and identities. We purposively selected Barclay Ayakoroma's Castles in the Air and A Chance to Survive and other Plays for interrogation in this article because they provide sufficient examples of how various linguistic expressions are activated for the enunciation of humour and identities. Although the excerpts we analysed were randomly sampled, we focused specifically on dialogues between characters that illustrate the concurrence between hilarious situations and identity formulation. Anchoring our analysis within the analytical provisions ofsocial constructionism, the study reveals that literary characters consciously select certain codes in socio-discursive encounters to construct various forms of identities for themselves and for others. It is also observed that while trying to beamusing, that is, through strategic stylistic choices, identities are also constructed, reconstructed, negotiated and renegotiated by people and for people.

Keywords: Identity, Social constructionism, Code alternation, Nigerian pidginin dramatic literature, Humour

Introduction

The aim of this article is to explore the various linguistic resources that are deployed in the formulation of identities in dramatic literature.Studying the language of literary texts from a social constructionism perspective is yet to gain a global spread. Consequently, the majority of studies on drama texts,

as an aspect of literary communication,have been mainly from stylistics and recently pragmatics and semantics– Odebunmi, Oloyede & Adetunji (2010), Nneji (2013), Modupeola (2014),Aremu (2015), among others. No study, we are conversant with, has examined Ayakoroma's drama texts using the analytic techniques of social constructionism to tease out how humour and identity are co-constructed in the plays. The most common trend (Zabalbeascoa, 2005; Demjen, 2016; Inya, 2016) is to deal with humour separately without accounting for the co-concurrence of humour and identity. Besides being the focus of this study, this is where this article departs from previous studies.

There has been a considerable number of scholarly studies that have indicated that literary texts are ideal locus for the investigation of the interplay between, and interdependence of language-in-use and identity construction (Aboh, 2017; Kehinde, 2009). Since the construction of identity takes place in different contexts of language-in-use (Mbatha, 2016), we are concerned with how discourse participants, relying on the discursive roles of humour, construct and negotiate identities for themselves and for others. Given the importance of how people see themselves and how others think of them in socio-discursive contexts, it is important to explain how characters' humorous effects are linked up with the identities that are enunciated through their linguistic choices in interactive situations. Thus, thisstudy not only opens up an analytic perspective different from the prevalently followed pragmatic approach, it also engages theselectedAyakoroma's drama texts from a more socially-oriented linguistic analysis of literary communication. We are of the opinion that such an engagement will provoke a deeper understanding of the social nature of language in terms of identity construction, as well as concretising the link between language and literature.The drama textswere purposively selected because the author's (more appropriately, the characters') use of language illustrate examples of the relationship between humour and identity construction. The analytical methodology involves isolating randomly instances of how language is used in creating humour as well as identity.

Code Alternation, Humour and Identity Construction

Among the core features of language use in Nigerian literature, as is the case with many multilingual societies, is code alternation. Code alternation is the combination of two or more languages in any form of discourse. Auer (1995, p. 116) defines code alternation as "a relationship of contiguous

juxtaposition of semiotic systems, such that the appropriate recipients of the resulting complex sign are in a position to interpret the juxtaposition as such." He uses the term as a hyponym to replace code-switching (CS). Alternationis used in the literature to refer to instances of one language being replaced by the other halfway through the sentence, and it is mostly, but not always, associated with longer stretches of CS. Code alternation patterns are core features of bilingual/multilingual interactions. Therefore, we adoptAuer's(1995) approach in this articleas a generic term to refer to code-switching.Code-switchinghasbeen "described as a switch from one language to another in the course of speaking with respect to topic, tone, audience, situation, mood, etc." (Lamidi, 2017, p. 30-31). Aboh believes that "code-switching […] describes the simultaneous use of two or more languages in written and spoken situations" (2018, p. 54).

Code-switching is a wide-spread phenomenon which occurs in speech among bilinguals/multilinguals. This is because when two or more languages come in contact, they lean towards influencing each other. Bilinguals often code-alternate from one language to the other in between conversations, especially while talking to another bilingual/multilingual with a similar linguistic competence or when the languages involved are used in their immediate linguistic environment. Grosjeans avers that when language users are in a bilingual mode, they select from a base language to another in various ways. "They can shift completely to that language for a word, a phrase, or a sentence; in other words, they can code-switch" (2018, p.119). Hence, code alternation is borne out of bilingualism/multilingualism because code alternation occurs among bilinguals, involving speakers switching between languages in the course of a conversation. These bilingual speakers alternate between languages for better communication and emphasis within speeches. In Nigeria's literary culture, writers switch from one language to another in their writings in order to accommodate the diverse linguistic and social identities that make up their characterization schema. In other words, we use literary code-switching in this article to mean a deliberate linguistic means of constructing Nigeria's hybridised or polyphonic identities.

Humour plays a very important role in every sphere of our daily life from whatever perspective we read it. Humour is described as "a tool that can be used to enhance informal communication and relationship among the users" (Anggrain, 2014, p.1).It serves not only as a source of amusement and soothing a sad heart, but also as a way of exposing and criticising society's

unsavoury developments. Humour is subjective because what might be funny tosome might be considered outrageous to others. This makes humour a problematic concept to define because it is a phenomenon that is culture-bound and context-bound; every culture/context has its own peculiar humour. Consequently, the judgement of whether a joke is funny or not depends on many factors and some of these factors are age, culture, personal experience, level of education, and geographical location. AsFelsh (2004, p.3) explains, “humour often varies from one culture to another”. The reason is that humour often relies on a context, and if someone does not understand the context, they will not understand the humour.

Martin (2010) classifies humour that occurs in everyday social interaction into three broad categories: jokes, spontaneous conversational humour and accidental or unintentional humour.

a. Jokes: are pre-packaged humour anecdotes that people memorise and pass on to one another.
b. Spontaneous conversational humour is humour which is created intentionally by individuals during the course of a social interaction, and can be either verbal or non-verbal. For example, irony, satire, understatement and over teasing.
c. Accidental or unintentional humour can be divided into accidental physical humour and accidental linguistic humour. Accidental physical humour includes minor mishaps. Pratfalls and slap stick, accidental linguistic humour arises from misspellings, mispronunciations and errors in logic and the kinds of speaker confusions called malapropism and spoonerism. For example, slipping on a banana peel or spilling a drink on one's shirt. These sorts of events are funny when they occur in a surprising and incongruous manner and when the person experiencing it is not embarrassed.

In the drama texts we selected for analysis, characters use these various forms of humour as a means of enunciating identities.

There is an interwoven relationship between code alternation and identity construction.Code-switching also functions to construct particular identities, extends beyond the physical meaning of texts, creates identities and organises interpersonal relationships. For example, code-switching can be used to avoid small unintentional acts that demonstrate prejudicial views towards marginalised groups.In bilingual/multilingual situations, language

plays multifarious communicative functions; this is not unconnected with the multiple languages a speaker has to select from in their daily socio-discursive encounters. For a language user to be linguistically competent in a multicultural and multilingual society like Nigeria, they not only have to switch from one code to another, but also need to be very strategic as to know when to and when not to switch codes. Achimbe and Janney provide an illuminating function of code-switching:

Code-switching and code-mixing are important conversational tools enabling individuals in postcolonial societies to regulate their interpersonal affairs. They are instruments in marking group alignments, performing social roles, projecting different situational identities. The motivations for switching or mixing codes have been found to include facilitating mutual intelligibility, offering support and expressing solidarity as an expression of identity (2017, p. 108).

For the postcolonial user of language, switching codes has its identity-formulation imperative. In their study of immigrants' use of language, Achimbe and Janney cite examples of how Africans living abroad switch from the national or official language to a pidgin variety as a means of authenticating a fellow African's nationality or regional origin. It has been trenchantly argued that "code-switching (CS) is not just the mixing or alternation of linguistic codes, but is a source of creation and recreation of different meanings, ideologies, social and ethnic identities" (Shah, Pillai &Sinayah 2020, p. 1).What this suggests is that CS, as a discourse strategy, is ideologically loaded. In this study, therefore, we examine how characters shift from one code to another and how these shifts result in the enunciation of identities.

Theoretical Persuasion

In spite of much research and theories existing on the notion of identity, it remains an especially difficult concept to define because the various ways of theorising identity has led to manifold definitions. To say identity is "who I am" or the way people see themselves and are seen by others will be an inadequate explication since the self hardly exists independently. "[I]dentity can [then] be defined as the perception of a person about themselves in relation to the world around them" (Shah, Pillai &Sinayah 2020, p. 1-2). Since there seems to be no independent self, identity is a relationship between an individual and the social world. The human nature is polyphonic, suggesting that an individual is a combination of multiple identities which

are constructed in various contexts of language use (Aboh, 2017). The underlying meaning of our position is that identity cannot be seen as a pre-given phenomenon; rather,it is a process, more aptly a construction because "someone can perform the temporary role in a particular context" (Shah, Pillai &Sinayah 2020, p.4).In order to meaningfully explore the dynamic complexity of the notion of identity, this article adopts social constructionism as its theoretical anchor.

Social constructionism places great emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their realities (Andrews, 2012). The core of social constructionism is that beliefs and experiences are shared through linguistic reinforcement.Proponents of the social constructivist model argue that the way people see themselves does not often agree with the way others see them (Aboh, 2017). For social constructivists, identity is a discourse practice that continues to emerge, and is negotiated and constructed based on different linguistic resources and contexts. Identity, therefore, is more complex than merely what people think of themselves. It changes as we "gain experience, along with our personal growth" (Windt -val, 2012 p. 275). Also, Perterson (2015, p.119) contends that "[i]dentity is not an essential characteristic but a historical construct that emerges within the particular political, social and ideological contexts". It means that identity is holistic and situationally-driven. Identity is not "who people are" per se, but how they realise themselves in socio-discursive situations.

Social constructionism reflects the interchange of intrinsic (natural) structural processes used in terms of linguistic variation and extrinsic (social) sociocultural factors such as gender, culture and ideologies. From this perspective, social constructionism upholds the idea that identities are shaped by relational networks which are constantly constructed and reconstructed in tune with the historical, cultural and social background in which these relationships are embedded. Central to social constructionism is the notion that discursive events influence the context in which they occur and the context in turn influences the discursive events,emphasising the cultural and historical dimension of meaning-making (Hall, 2000; De Fina, 2003).

This article focuses on how identities are constructed by discourse participants in interactive contexts; it looks at the identity processes and

strategies that are enacted when individuals construct theirs and others' identities, believing that multiple identities can be constructed. Arguably, the application of such an interdisciplinary model in the explication of the link between language and identity construction will illustrate the intricacies of subjective and objective processes and their interface in terms of how Ayakoromauseshisdramatic texts to depict the interface of code alternation, humour and identity construction.

Methodology

The data for this study were sampled from Barclays Ayakoroma's*Castles in the Air* (2003) and *A Chance to Survive and other Plays* (2011). These texts were purposively selected for analysis in this study because they exemplify how humour and identity are co-constructed through language in literarycommunication. The methodology involves a qualitative textual analysis of excerpts taken from the selected dramatic texts. The analysedexcerpts were randomly sampled, focusing specifically on dialogues between characters that illustrate the concurrence between hilarious situations and identity formulation. The focus on conversational exchanges between and among characters is consistent with the argument that "linguistic and conversational choices constitute the speaker's strategic means for constructing identity dimensions relevant at different points in the sequentiality of discourse" (Archakis and Tzanne, 2009, p. 342).But while the article focuses on interactions, it does not take for granted the overall meta-context of the discourse. By following this line of thinking, the essay sees identity as ideational, a discursive process in which people strive to create and recreate identities for themselves and for others.

Brief Synopsis of the Plays

A satirical comedy, *Castles in the Air,* is an adaptation of KuldipSondh's*With Strings* but from the point of view of the Izon cultural milieu, dramatising the traditional prejudices about inter-tribal marriages between various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The play represents characters who build their own castles in the air. A Muslim couple desire their son, Aminu, to marry and become responsible instead of flirting with different women. They fail to succeed with their plan until they received a letter from their brother-in-law offering 10 million naira to the family with conditions that Aminu must marry and father a son within a year. To Alhaji, Aminu's father, Aminu had to be married before it was too late; to Hajia, Aminu's mother, the money should be forgotten; and to Aminu, it was an opportunity

to quickly marry his heartthrob, Stella. Unfortunately, his choice does not meet the approval of his parents and Chief Emotari. With each tribe pretending to love one another, the play, through different comic acts (with Santana, the prime mover of actions), depicts how self-centredness, greed, tribalism and other ills have continued to tear the nation apart. The play shows how the personal interests of Alhaji, which could be likened to Nigeria's leaders – political, religious and tribal – would be a hindrance to their son's happiness.

The Rejected Ones is a satirical comment on the prison inmates themselves. In the play, both Peterson and Benneth are victims of injustice as the rejected ones, and their experiences in the police cell mirror a decaying society that frustrates the youth. These prisoners make such rules as only Commander (their head prisoner) is allowed to read newspapers or sit in a particular seat that is clean. They engage in mock trials and mete out punishment of what is obtainable in the larger society, which they condemn.

Data Analysis

Castles in the Air (hereafter *Castles*) depicts how a non-educated character, Santana, Alhaji's domestic staff, uses Nigerian Pidgin (hereafter NP)and other expressions in his interactions. His stylistic variations are significant to explicating the various forms of identities he creates for himself and those created for him by others. For instance, when Aminu told Santana about the date he has in mind, Santana wonders who the lady is given that Aminu has multiple girlfriends, hence multiple identities. In this specific linguistic encounter, Santana confuses the polysemy in date that is, seeing a woman with the intention of wooing her with calendric date. This elicits laughter:

AMINU: Well, if they come out, tell them I've gone out. I've a date.
SANT: Date? You mean today date?
AMINU: Fool! I have to meet my girlfriend!
SANT: Sorry, small oga. Na dat one you for talk now. De Owigirina de tall yellow one or de short fat one?
AMINU: What is that?
SANT: I mean de baby now. Person no fit remember all of dem now. Abinadat one weydey like… (*Castles*, p.13)

By the use of the NP expression "small oga", we are exophoriaclly hinted of the existence of a "big oga". Similarly, the use of "small oga" and "big oga",

to grade "ogas" (bosses), the speaker creates humour in that he makes a distinction between "small" and "big". It presupposesthat there is a "big oga". This linguistic partitioning draws binary lines as well as asymmetrical power relations in terms of identity construction.Extrapolated from the speakers'macro-discourse context,Santana, the house help, tells his readers that he lives in a world of conflicting identities where he is answerable to many "ogas". While the readers are humoured, their understanding of thislinguistic linearization of identities is dependent on the interplay between the micro- and macro-levels of language use. In other words,it is in the interactive context of language use we are made to understand that Aminu is a smaller boss, and there is a bigger boss to whom Santana is answerable. Through humour, our psychology is provoked and we come to the realisation thatAminu has multiple girlfriends, and Aminu showcases different layers of himself each time he interacts with each of the girls.Also, when Santana asksAminu which of the girls he is going out to see, the elliptical construction tells us that the referent who isknown only to Aminu and Santana is framed with a "demeaning" identity. Therefore, the use of the elliptical strategy discursively formulates a questionable identity for the referent. Also, the power differential that holds between the discussants makes Santana to swallow his words. Critically, the varieties language (NP and "Standard English") are used here to showcase the educational level of the characters. Santana is revealed as an individual with a poor educational background and this is why he finds it difficult to understand the English used by Aminu. Besides, NP is used to create status for the characters; while Aminu occupies the +high status, Santana occupies the –high status.

Other instances of identities that are socially constructed can be seen in Santana's narration of his account with Hajia, which on another critical layer of analysis provides a comic relief in the play. This is when Hajia scolds him for not cleaning up the house. In this context, Santana is seen speaking to the audience concerning the kind of insults rained on him by "small oga", "big oga" and "madam"; he draws his audience's attention to the various vituperations he has come under."Madam" tells him he is "incorrigible" for being unable to keep the house clean. Owing to Santana's linguistic ineptitude, he does not understand what *incorrigible* means and takes it to mean "rigible". That he does not understand what *incorrigible* means is humourous. However, it should be noted that what is said does not invoke laughter in its own right. We only get to the stratagem of the humour because of the paralinguistic acts performed by Santana in his conceptualisation of

"rigible". But much more it constructs an illiterate identity for him.Language gives us an identity, so our inability to "work" within linguistic calibration of ideas makes it difficult for us to identify with things and situations. Similarly, our inability to comprehend things defines who we are in the situational context we find ourselves. Through language, identities can be assigned to us; this is the case with Santana. Despite the fact that Santana's linguistic incompetence creates humour, a critical analysis of the overall macro-discourse situation illuminates the construction of two forms of locally situated identities emerging dynamically from the context: literate (Hajia) and illiterate (Santana). The point is that by not using NP, the language Santana is conversant with, Hajia dissociates herself from Santana who is merely a house help. Filani explains, "Specifically, Nigerian stand-ups use Nigerian Pidgin (NP) as an affiliative resource to speak with, not to, their audience" (2015, p. 45).Although Filani is concerned with stand-ups, his position applies tenably to the present context, as it explains what we mentioned earlier that identities are formulated in socio-discursive use of language. Expressed differently, NP is a language variety that performs an affiliative role among discourse participants. Thus, Hajia's use of "Standard English" indicates that she distances herself from Santana, her employee, someone of a "lesser" identity than herself. It is not as though she does not speak NP, but understanding that "Standard English" gives her power over Santana, she does not hesitate in deploying it to project her literate identity. Critically, the linguistic choice constructs an *insignificant* identity for Santana and positions him as a sheer servant. Interestingly, each of them is involved in a linguistic struggle to construct, negotiate as well as renegotiate the identities on offer.

Moreover, Santana's choice of the expression "curry add to rigible" (*Castles*, p. 28) when corrected by Alhaji resonates perfectly well with his *illiterate* identity, as mentioned earlier. In identity discourse, scholars have drawn attention to how the variety of language used by a speaker is tied to the speaker's identity. Santana does not seem to have any problem referring to "curry" because, as a house help who does the cooking, he is familiar with the culinary lexicon. We can see how identities that are hidden in the seams of language emerge significantly in interactive situations. In most instances, we get to know who people are by critically examining the way they use language.

Perhaps it is not out of place to argue that in *Castles*, Ayakoroma positions

Santana to performs humourous acts. This characterisation schema involves the construction of a comical identity for Santana. It then suggests that the entertaining character formulated for him is what he is expected to *do*: people *do* identity (De Fina, 2003). Moreover, beyond the comic role constructed for Santana, there are efforts he makes to establish himself as an individual, an entity who exists along others in his world. Another hilarious encounter is captured in Santana's description of an "owigiri" (a pidgin slang that describes a young lady). Also explained are the different names and significations of an "owigiri":

ALH: Aminu went to jam whom?
SANT: Na owigiri now. Him say dis one special. (swearing by touching his tongue with his forefinger and raising it up) True to God!
ALH: What is awigiri?
SANT: Oga! (Laughing) So you no know owigiri? Na baby wey breast never fall now.
ALH: So yanrinyan is called awigiri?
SANT: Yes o! or fit call am blanket, handbag or excess luggage.
ALH: (Laughing) Who taught you all that nonsense?
SANT: Oga, no be nonsense o! Infact, if you go for road for night, dem go dress like dis with short cross-no-gutter, come knack high heel, come deywaka like dis. Wen dem see man, dem go come do like dis! "Good evening Sir… can I come in? You care for a night?" Before you open your mouth, dem don jump enter motor.
(He kisses Alhaji, who reacts angrily.)
ALH: Wayo Allah! I don't kiss you? I don deycrase?
I dey kiss am for yanrinyan?
SANT: Sorry Sir.
ALH: I don deycrase, I hear? My friend, bring my tea… I have heard enough (*Castles,* p.19).

Alhaji asks Santana of the whereabouts of Aminu, we probably observe the various acts of code alternations in the interactional exchange. First to be noticed is the variation in pronunciation of "owigiri". For Santana, the inventor of the neologism, it is "owigiri", but for Alhaji, it is "awigiri". This difference in pronunciation not only marks dialectical variation, but also points to the origin of the speakers: Santana is Ijaw and Alhaji, Hausa.Second, Santana code switches from NP to a slang expression. His stylistic shift is not simply situational reflexes, but one of his strategic means

for "activating meaning potential and constructing identity" (Archakis &Tzanne, 2009, p. 342). The various slang expressions *blanket*, *handbag*and*excess luggage* he deploys to describe commercial sex workers illuminates the fact that, though he is not competent in "Standard English", he is very familiar with the lexicon of the street. Santana's use of different slangy expressions also indexes the idea that he has encountered the ladies on the street. Perhaps it has been noticed how through discursive use of language Santana creates an identity for himself, his proximity with the events on the street. This is quite compelling because in the preceding scenes one sees Santana as an illiterate, one whose linguistic ineptness echoes his illiteracy. However, in this instance, the reader is made to come face-to-face with a different Santana who is literate in the matters of sex and sexuality. Language, then, performs multiple functions, for it "can be manipulated, it can also be used as a means to express, reinterpret, redefine and revolt against a static unitary notion of identity and the social world" (Cole, 2011, p. 78). Though he might not be well informed about other matters, for example not good in "Standard English", he is aware of certain sexual realities Alhaji, his boss, is unaware of and incompetent in their deployment. In this way, Santana succeeds in gaining an upper hand in the discourse of sex and sexuality over Alhaji.

Alhaji's question "So yanrinyan is called awigiri?" (So, you mean a young lady is called *awigiri*? "Yanrinya" is a Hausa word for a young lady), symptomizes his ignorance in the topic under discourse. The implication is that someone other than Alhaji, who belongs to Santana's group, will not need to be told whatan *owigiri* means. But again, language has the capacity to manipulate its speakers. Forgetting, better still, downplaying his "house-help"identity, and also oblivious of the context of discourse, Santana attempts to kiss Alhaji, his boss. Alhaji's use of the Hausa exclamation word, "Wayo" indexes his bewilderment at Santana's attempt to kiss him. Alhaji's bafflement at Santana's attempt to kiss him has its metapragmatic undertone. It draws significantly from Nigeria's tough stand on same-sex affairs. Many Nigerians exhibit a more intolerant view of people with alternative gender ideologies, sexual orientation or masculinities outside the dominant heterosexual culture. The Nigerian same-sex marriage prohibition Act of 2014 prescribes 14 years imprisonment for anyone found guilty of homosexuality. The said law criminalises homosexuality in Nigeria in order to reduce its practice to private shame and public invisibility (Dean, 2013). Given this prohibition, the practitioners of homosexuality can only operate

underground because Nigeria has a "culture that is poisonously patriarchal and deeply homophobic"(Akuson, 2019, p. 1).

On his own part and in the game of identity construction and reconstruction, Alhaji's character formulation must align with his polyphonic identities. As Santana's boss/employer, Alhaji shifts codes. He uses NP to enable Santana to understand him. In this very specific linguistic encounter, the code-switching (from NP to Standard English) as seen in Alhaji's last utterance signposts and ties in with a shift in voice and perspective of identities – from a friend to a boss. These identities (friend and boss)are built sequentially and carefully through the linguistic signals of code-switching. Besides, the fact that this encounter echoes our position about multiple identities, the interactive/contextualised construction of identities makes the entire encounter amusing. Alhaji's expression, "I have heard enough" is not only humourous, but the code-switch delineates the identities involved – a boss and his domestic staff. Alhaji indexes prior knowledge by explicitly taking us back to the fact that Santana is in the habit of saying more than required. Therefore, to call off the interaction, Alhaji has to use a code that indexes his superior identity.

The event where Alhaji receives a mail from a courier thrives on code alternation:

ALH: That is alright; I will sign for it (Goes to sign for the letter). There you are! Make I go well o. Make I don dey look road o, make motor no kill me o! (Courier exits. Looks at the letter) Oh, it is from Alhaji Usman Gana, your uncle (*Castles*, p.22).

Alhaji's code alternation is pragmatically revealing. We see clearly how multiple social identities are discursively constructed through the distinct uses of codes. Alhaji uses "Standard English" when he signs to receive the mail from the courier and when he speaks to his son. The "Standard English" personifies his "rich" identity, a wealthy and educated man. And as he negotiates another identity type for himself, no longer the educated wealthy man, his code shifts to NP. Importantly, the variety of the NP he uses points to his origin, a Hausa man. Alhaji's code alternation not only interfaces with the various constructed identities, but also creates social meanings and humourous effects. As we are drawn to the scenic humour occasioned by the NP variety Alhaji adopts, we are also made aware of the literate and illiterate identities that are simultaneously enacted in the discourse. The identities

displayed underscore the constructivist postulate that identity is something people *do* in social activities, not something they are. Thus, within an interactive context, Alhaji exhibits the following identities: rich man, playful person, a Hausa man and a father. All these are woven in and given expression through code shifts.

In relation to humour drawn from mockery and teasing, an example can be seen where Santana narrates the incidents between Aminu and Stella and between Alhaji and Emotari:

SANTANA: Something dey o! The first rackisna between big oga and small oga. De second one na between small oga and im fine owigiri. Chei! Manpickin don suffer. See as the babe just land ogadat kind dirty slap. Him just open mouth like mumudey look am anyanya. After now im come dey beg am. Me, I no go be woman wrappa like dat o. If I give am back hand, she go feel like say na trailer jam am. But dey one wey funny pass na de katakata between big oga and Chief, im friend. You know dat one weydey talk "Are we joking?" Today, "are we joking" dry for him mouth (*Castles*, p.53).

Aminu who wants to marry his heartthrob, Stella, apart from the prize at stake – that if he marries and fathers a son within twelve months his family will be given ten million naira – truly loves and wants to marry her. But Stella – a graduate from an unnamed foreign university and someone who is particular about women's rights – is not comfortable with the price tag; she argues that she is not a breeding machine who can guarantee producing a child for Aminu within twelve months, not to think of a son. Insisting, Aminu tries to convince Stella to accept the proposal, considering the money involved but Stella reacts by slapping him. The act of slapping Aminu is considered weird because in the macro-African culture, with particular reference to Nigeria, it is usually not acceptable for a woman to be the first to raise her hand against a man. Santana tells his listeners that he will not be a "woman wrappa". A "woman wrappa", as used in Nigeria, describes a man who is controlled by a woman. The concept of "woman wrappa" and Santana's refusal to be taken as one is tied to the patriarchal ideology of some Nigerian communities that the man is in total control of his wife and family. Stella devalues Aminuas a man, and a "tigress" identity is constructed for her. It is to this kind of depersonalisation that Santana is opposed. Critically, while "a gentleman" identity is formulated for Aminu, Santana is the reverse. These acts of

identities further explain how identity is something that is realised in context. For example, while Santana, given the master-servant relation, will not dare to slap Aminu, he will not hesitate to do soto Stella. He says "If I give am back hand, she go feel like say na trailer jam am". That is, I will slap her with the back of my palm such that she will feel as though she was hit by a moving trailer. Obviously, he will not countenance such a treatment from a woman.The socio-discourse practice in which Santana is socialised backgrounds his utterance as well as his perception of Stella's behaviour as a taboo. Importantly, it is clear that the various identities articulated by Santana are tied to the code employed, a language that enables him to express himself expediently.

In the play, *Chance,* with particular reference to *The Rejected Ones,*there are some expressions that evokehumourous responses as well as formulate identities:

PETERSON: But you can't leave me here to be skinned alive by them! There ought to be thorough discipline in this cell! (The others laugh. He looks at them embarrassed and afraid.) Please take me out of here! I am begging you.

PC: Sorry-o, my friend. No be me bring you come for here o. After dis your stay here, when you see something wey bad for road, you go turn your head commot becos our country don spoil kpatakpata. Na good people dey suffer always while de yeye people dey enjoy yanfuyanfu (*Chance,* p.73).

Peterson's call for orderliness in a prison is quite satiric, prompting other inmates to scorn him. Perhaps the inmates are implying that one does not need any form of organisation in a prison. Of importance, we see how identities are delineated through strategic uses of codes. For example, there is the calculated use of the distal pronominal element, *them,* in Peterson's speech. The pronoun functions as a linguistic tool of *othering*. It points to the antagonistic other, the other inmates who brutalise him. Besides, through self-analysis, Peterson instantiates a superior identity for himself as evident in the code he selects.Thus, while Peterson, the educated one chooses"Standard English", a marker of his *literate* identity, the PC uses NP which signposts his identity as an *ordinary* man. This is an indication that

oscillating from one identity form to another becomes realisable within the paradigm of linguistic variations. Placing the drama textagainst the backdrop of its socio-cultural context, it can be argued that the police officer's language is an unofficial representation of the Nigeria Police Force's proclivity forrecruiting people with poor education and who lack the ability to communicate in “Standard English”.Moreover,in an ironic twist of things, the police officer advices Peterson to learn to mind his business. The PC clarifies to Peterson that whenever he sees something, he should endeavour to keep it to himself because the country is corrupt and it is only good people who end up suffering. The police man's reply is satiric since one who is authorised to fight crime considers himself incapable of fighting crime owing to the peculiar situation of his Nigerian society.

In another rib-cracking situation, Peterson wonders how his wife would survive given his incarceration, and Buster's reply is humorously painful. Buster says “She go find another man service am now” (*Rejected ones*, p.79), meaning Peterson's wife will look for someone else to sleep with.“Service am” in this context is an obscene pidginised expression that means to have sex. Buster's reply to Peterson does not answer Peterson's question; it is however relevant to the overall macro-discourse context. Despite the fact that his response aggravates Peterson, it helps in reducing the tension that is already building up. This kind of humour finds relevance within Veatch's (1998) theory of humour. He explains that a humourous situation must involve a perceiver simultaneously having in mind one view of a situation that seems normal, and one view where there is violation of the moral and natural order.In terms of identity construction, the pidginised slang expression illuminates our understanding of who Buster is, a depraved inmate.But more to it, he tells us that women are not to be trusted, and once a woman's man is away, she finds another with whom she sleeps with. Beyond the micro-analytic layer, Buster tells us that Peterson's wife is an unfaithful woman. In so doing, he extends his claim to construct an “infidelity” identity for other women.

Humour created out of polite insult can be seen when Buster calls Bennet an "ewu” – an Igbo word for a goat. When someone is called a goat, it means the person is a jerk or an idiot. This is what Buster calls Bennet when he sits in Commander's executive chair. In the cell, it is forbidden for an *ordinary* inmate, someone with a lesser identity, to takethe place reserved for Commander. Buster remarks:“Come on, commot for dere! Ewu!” (*Rejected*

ones, p.91) is a joke with anunderlying pragmatisation. The context does not indicate any humour, for Buster means what he said. But to call someone an "ewu" after he has been thoroughly beaten creates some form of hilarity. Therefore, the funniness is not in the expression itself but generated from the overall macro discourse of Bennet'storture. This act of identity construction aligns with our earlier position that identity is not necessarily what people think of themselves, but also what others think of them. While Bennet sees himself as an older inmate who ought to enjoy certain privileges, Buster takes him for a goat.Beyond that,such linguistic calibrationindicates thateven in the prison, identities are constructed along asymmetrical lines. There is, for example, Commander who is the head of the cell. His lieutenants, Thunder and Buster, carry out his biddings without reservations. There is also the insignificant *other* – Peterson, who is taken as an "ewu" and has to go through a baptismal process, a psychological socialisation (torture)to qualify as a member of the in-group.

Conclusion

This study has contributed to extant literature in the field of identity discourse by furthering the social constructionism thesis – identity is neither fixed nor pre-given; rather,it is socially constructed and this can manifest in the interactive process of language-in-use. The stylistic choices of the discourse participants define their ability to assume multiple identities by alternating from one linguistic code to another.The prevalent linguistic codes the fictionalised characters deploy include "Standard Nigerian English", Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa variant of Nigerian Pidgin and Igbo. Significantly, the playwright, through his characters' use of language,not only accentuates the claim that code alternation is adominant narrative technique of Nigerian literature, but also a core linguistic feature of bilinguals. This essayhas also demonstrated that it is not only the "lowly" placed of society such as Santana and the prison inmates who use NP, rich and highly placed Nigerians such as Alhaji, Aminu and Stella also use NP to meet their daily communicative needs.

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