RUGIPO RESEARCH AND TECHNICAL JOURNAL

COMMUNICATING *EFE* ON STAGE: YERIMA'S TECHNIQUES IN THE LOTTERY TICKET

Authors
Ajimuda, Olufunso Stephen
&
Adetoro, Abiodun
Rufus Giwa Polytechnic, Owo, Ondo State, Nigeria.
ajistephen68@gmail.com

Abstract:
In the development of drama, right from the Classical Period, poets (playwrights) have deplored comedy as a sub-genre. Ahmed Parker Yerima, a Nigerian teacher, theatre practitioner, playwright and critic explored this sub-genre in The Lottery Ticket. The type of comedy Yerima used in this play is the 'New Comedy' popularised by Menander, which deals with aspects of daily life and a more realistic representation of human life; and the sub-strata called humour or efe or awada. Efe is a Yoruba word meaning joke or humour in its broad sense. This type of humour was made popular by the late Nigerian theatre practitioner, Moses Olaiya, popularly known as Baba Sala. The paper examined how Yerima communicates efe in the play. It started by taking a look at the word 'communication'; definition of comedy and the sub-strata known as humour or efe; the techniques Yerima explored in communicating efe, such as the use of Pidgin - English, use of local images, fast paced actions flowing into each other, allusion, innuendo, and incongruity. The theory which drives the work is the Play Theory. The theory, which was popularized by the British psychologist, William Stephenson, sees communication more as play than as work; more for pleasure and entertainment than for information and improvement.

Keywords: Drama, Comedy, Humour, 'Efe', 'Awada'

Introduction

Communication is a dynamic process that takes place around human beings all the time. In fact, we spend 70% of our time receiving and sending messages. Communication is one aspect of human life that many people have taken for granted, yet it is at the heart of all social intercourse. This is so because, many-a-time, we engage in communication without even knowing we are doing so. For instance, a student who is just meeting his colleague on resumption for the semester might first welcome her with a smile (which is a form of communication); then, the verbal communication might follow. Even when they are no longer talking, communication might still continue in the form of holding hands. The smiles and the holding of hands are things some people engage in without knowing they are communicating. Even, at times, human beings communicate while alone, talking to oneself, called intrapersonal communication. This now brings us to the question, what is communication?

Many communication scholars have come out to define communication in different ways. Davies (1967) defines communication as "the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another." *Roger and Shoemaker* (1971) define it as "the process by which messages are transferred from a source to a receiver" while t*he International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems (1977) defines it as* "the broad field of human interaction which takes place through symbols. The symbols may be gestural, pictorial, plastic, verbal, or any other symbols which operate as stimuli to behavior, which would be evoked by the symbol itself in the absence of special conditions of the person who responds."

Defining communication further, *O'Connor* (1981) sees it "as the process of sending and receiving messages to achieve understanding…anytime you speak a sentence, make a gesture, or merely grunt,

you are 'saying' you have some idea in your mind that you wish to transfer to another person." *Little* (1983), defines it as "the process by which information is transferred between individuals and, or organisations by means of previously agreed symbols."
All these definitions can be summarised as the act of exchanging information between the source and the receiver. It is indisputable that it is an essential tool for creating regular relation among people; it maintains and animates life. It can also be said to be the motor and expression of social activities and civilization. It is what gives life a meaning as its absence can ground the world.

Communication is a two-way process involving: a sender, a message, a medium, a channel, a receiver, a response and feedback. However, communication cannot be said to be effective by having just all these elements. There should be understanding and cooperation between the parties involved. Essentially, communication involves the sender/communicator and the receiver who should both share a mutually accepted code. The 'code' is not restricted to only language as it may involve colours, gestures, signs, costumes, among others.

There are various levels in communication such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, Group and Mass Communication. Intrapersonal communication is a type of communication which happens within a single person. For example, a person can communicate interpersonally through pain, thinking, emotion and feelings. Interpersonal communication involves two persons while Group communication involves more than two persons or a small group. As for Mass Communication, this involves the use of interpersonal as well as tools and technology in passing information to a large number of audience. Media like newspaper, radio, television and internet are used for this type of communication.

Theoretical Framework
The theory for driving this work is the Play Theory of Communication. The theory was proposed by the British psychologist, William Stephenson in 1967. The theory explains that people use communication more as play than as work; more for pleasure and entertainment than for information and improvement. This paper explores Yerima's techniques in his quest of using communication for entertainment and pleasure in *The Lottery Ticket.*

Synopsis
Ahmed Parker Yerima, teacher, theatre practitioner, playwright and critic, was once a lecturer in the Department of English and Drama, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, the Director of the National Troupe of Nigeria and currently a lecturer at Redeemers University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. Since Yerima's foray into the art of play writing, he has published about two score plays. He had been listed in Ogunbiyi (1981: 36) as part of the second generation of playwrights along with Wale Ogunyemi, Zulu Sofola, Femi Osofisan, Bode Osanyin, but it was not until the 1990's that he started becoming popular as an established playwright. Some of his published plays are: *The Silent Gods (1996), Kaffir's Last Game (1998), The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen (1998), The Bishop and the Soul (1998), Thank You Lord (1998), Attahiru (1999), The Sisters (2001), Erelu Kuti (2001), Dry Leaves on Ukan Tree (2001), Tafida (2001), Yemoja (2002), Mojagbe (2002), The Lottery Ticket (2002), Otaelo (2003), The Limam (2004), Ade Ire (2004), Idemili (2006), Ameh Oboni (2006), Hard Ground (2006), The Wives (2007), Akuabata (2008), Tuti (2008), The Asylum (2009), The Movement (2009), The Flood (2009), An Inspector Calls (2009), Orisa Ibeji (2011), Abobaku (2015), among others.*

A comprehensive reading of Yerima's plays will reveal that they provide an insight into the politics, ideology, culture, myths and the socio-economic life of his people - Nigerians . According to Adeoti (2007: xi) in his introductory note to *Critical Perspectives on Yerima*, "Yerima's plays can be critically analyzed from diverse perspective of ideology, history, psychology and pragmatics." Adeoti opines further, "Yerima draws broadly from generic elements of tragedy, comedy, tragic-comedy and satire; freely experimenting, in sometimes eclectic manner with the theoretical forms known in theatre history."

Ahmed Yerima's *The Lottery Ticket* (2002) explores greed, especially among Nigerians. In the author's note, he states: "My idea was to write a comedy and exploit that element of man which negates all other religious doctrines, and human relationship – greed."(6) Yerima has placed this theme within the context of the social reality in the Nigerian society where almost every brand name has a lottery attached to it. When this happens, according to Yerima, "there exists a clash with men's dreams and desires against the slim chances of ever winning. It is greed's ability to transform the human in us into the animal we become that fascinates me." (2002:6) The play is "focused on individual survival strategies rather than an elusive utopian society as the one that is presented in the plays of the radical dramatists." (Julius-Adeoye, 2013:145) "It is expected by the playwright that this play might help the reader-audience to come to terms with their everyday reality and also in their realization of the daily struggle for survival." (Acheoah & Ayodapo, 2014:34)

In espousing this theme, Yerima, unlike in most of his plays, explores the comedy sub-genre. Comedy, according to Yerima (2003:54), "is derived from the Greek word 'komos', meaning "a revel, an occasion of merry making which shows that drama was not only made of tragedy but also had a dimension of entertainment to it." He adds that "the playwright must be aware that writing a comedy depends mainly on characterization and dialogue. Acting in comic style, which is usually exaggerated, helps to add humour to a comedy." (2003:55)

Also writing on comedy, Adeyemi (2007) states that

> While evoking laughter in the audience, the writer of comedy examines the social worlds, social values and people as social entities. Characteristically, therefore, as comedy seeks to ridicule human vice, folly and socio-political moral problems, comic pleasure is derived from what Martin Grotjahn (1966:17) describes as a conscious and subtle juxtaposition of the character's obvious imperfection and the audience's perfection. (185)

Osundare (2008) also describes comedy thus:

> From Aristotle, Aristophane, from Freud through Bergson to Koestler, we have learnt that that creative and intriguing absurdity which touches off the bomb of laughter is a function of the shared wit and sensibility of laugh-merchant and buyers. The joke is cracked on trust that it will elicit the expected responses, and a good jokester operates by hints and innuendoes; what he hides is often greater than what he reveals. The audience is then left (or forced) to work out the rest, take the jokesters hint to its logical conclusion and respond accordingly… (6-7)

The type of comedy Yerima used in this play is the 'New Comedy' popularized by Menander (Menandros c.342 – c. 291 BCE). "Rather than mythical plots or political commentary, Menander used aspects of daily life for his plays… he did much to move comedy towards a more realistic representation of human life. (https://www.ancient.literature.com. Retrieved on May, 26, 2020)

Various terminologies have been created for the understanding of the context and structure of varying kinds of comedy, such as farce, jest, wit, absurdity as they evince laughter or subtle humour. Humour or *Efe* or *Awada* which can be classified as a sub-strata of comedy, is explored by Yerima in *The Lottery Ticket*. "Palmer (1994) notes that humour is difficult to describe as

> it is multidimensional, it is part of personality and part of our cognitive and emotional process. It is subject to social rules governing appropriate behaviour, on different occasions. It is part of literary and audio-visual narrative, it is subject

> to moral and
> aesthetic judgement, and it is a rhetorical instrument. (ii)

"Humour is manifest in situations, characters, language, or a combination of these factors to varying degrees" (Olusegun, 2015) and it is usually a cultural affair situated in the culture that produces it. Putting humour in context in the Nigeria environment, Olusegun (2015) opines that:

> …the cultural relatively of humour and language shows that the culture elements, structure, and relationship factors that generate humour differ from culture to culture. Humour belongs to the mix of cultural referents that we use to contextualize art forms. That is, the art of humour is sometimes context-dependent for its meaning to be clear... The theoretical concept of humour has mostly been Western in their origins; the practice, however, is culturally relative and different. The humaneness of humour is expressed in music, songs, arts, theatre, and the culture of derision to correct and express laughter all the folly of humans. The motives of humour is the discovery of the 'not-so-serious' in human nature by means of observation. While the audience is the sympathetic individuals who find such folly a part of themselves, there is a blend of satire in humour to show that the literary artist is not only interested in evoking laughter at the object of derision but also to point out the foolishness of man's actions.(120)
> .

Efe or *Awada* is a Yoruba word meaning joke or humour in its broad sense. This type of humour was popularized by the late Moses Olaiya popularly known with the stage name *Baba Sala* in the Nigerian Theatre industry (Haynes, 1994). Moses Olaiya is described as the father of comedy on the Nigerian stage and his objective was "to arouse laughter and excite interest in the people." (Julius-Adeoye, 2013)

Olusegun (2015:121) opines that "the term humour may cover the various shades of what *Awada* (*Efe*) may mean in Yoruba Language. It encompasses not just literary or conversational discourse but also other aspects such as the demeanour of the participants, mode of dressing, speech patterns, and every design which may elicit either subtle or farcical laughter in the audience." Adeleke (2005) identifies three major characteristics of jokes, humour, and laughter:

> the teller, the victim and the audience allow the performer to have a field day in the willing suspension of disbelief as the audience allow the performer to have a field day in the knowledge that he is acting out the basic human desire for psychological and emotional release. Within a social ambience, a*wada (efe)* is said to occur when the actions of the participants (teller, victim, and audience) are interpreted within the situational assumptions of the moral, cultural, and social circumstances that they share. The victim "may be an individual, an institution or a set of beliefs" while the audience lends support to the humourist by guffawing.(44-45).

This paper intends to explore the techniques used by Yerima in successfully putting *efe* on stage in *The Lottery Ticket* .

Techniques Used in Putting *Efe on* Stage in the *Lottery Ticket.*

The play, *The Lottery Ticket*, as in most Yerima's plays, has one Act and all the actions take place in one location – Mama Lizi's 'Buka'. Yerima is to be praised with the pace at which the actions flow into each other such that one has to wait to catch one's breath. Towards the end of the play, there is a little twist as Baba Tailor wakes up and one tries to figure out what happens at the end.

The play is written in Pidgin-English which has become the Lingua Franca amongst the uneducated and semi literate ones in the Nigeria society due to the multi- lingual nature of the country. The use of Pidgin-

English is apt to the play because most of the characters are illiterates in society. Even Sajent, a policeman, shows that he is not literate enough when he says " if not say book don spoil we country, I for don be ASP or DSP..."(46). For comic effect, Yerima spices the Pidgin spoken by the characters with the local flavour of Nigerian languages. An example can be seen in Baba Tailor's description of how Lasisi was beaten by Danger's boys. In his words, "Dem panel beat dat boy no be small"(25). A technique greatly used in the play is humour. In Yerima's use of humour, he captures and recreates the stereotype vices and foibles of Nigerians. He tries to create laughter through the use of extended language and the pre-fabricated roles of the characters. Acting in comic style, which is usually exaggerated, helps to add humour to a comedy. An example of the use of humour can be seen in the exposure of the greed of Nigerians and their trait of looking for quick avenues to get rich. An instance can be seen in this conversation:

> MAMA LIZI: Dis Tuba Cola people no go kill us. Every where wey person go na Tuba Cola. Dey wise well well for the thing.
> LIZI: See how people drink all the one wey we buy finish. People nodey even chop again. Once you ask wetin they want, one ponmo and Tuba Cola.
> MAMA LIZI:One man come here yesterday say he want one spoon of beans and two bottles of Tuba Cola (10).

Lizi's description of the church scene is also an example of wit and humour. It exposes the hypocrisy of some so-called Christians. According to Lizi:

> For Sunday wey I go church. Na him spirit carry one girl as we dey sing *"Me I no go suffer. I no go beg for food. God of miracle, Na my papa o. God of plentiful Na my papa o.* " As we begin sing, na him dis girl fall for ground. Her eyes white. One kind cold con dey for church. She begin call number. I think say na the lottery number. Even including the Pastor, we all think say na the lottery number. Everybody hold him Bible, open with pencil for hand, ready to write. Church just quiet. No body breathe. Pin self fit drop you go hear am. Then she come say the number finish, say who get the moto, make he be careful accident dey come (20).

The humorous effect of this story is heightened by the reactions of Landlord, Baba Tailor and Mama Lizi:

> LANDLORD:Nonsense!
> BABA TAILOR:Wetin na do am?
> LIZI: One prayer warrior just carry de whole bowl wey Holy Water dey troway for him body de spirit commot him body straight (20).

Yerima also makes use of local images, most of which have to do with Lagos, the spatial setting. Examples are "Agege bread"(a type of bread popular in the Agege area of Lagos); "Agbada (free flowing gown commonly associated with the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria); "Koboko" (horse-whip); "Bonga fish" (dried fish); "gbajue" (swindler); "akara" (bean cake); etc. These images give the play some kind of 'local colouring'.

There is the use of a lot of allusions in the play – both spatial and temporal. In the spatial allusions, one can comprehend that the setting is Lagos with the allusion to places like Ajegunle, Iponri bridge, Obalende, Ebute-Meta. The temporal allusion shows vividly that the actions in the play took place during the military era, especially between 1996 and 1998 when Brigadier Buba Marwa was the governor of Lagos State. Instances of such allusions can be seen in Mama Lizi's statement :

> The water clean well well. Since new Governor come everything done dey work for Lagos. Him and PTF just dey pach our jagajaga road. Dem don carry all our dirty wey full Lagos finish. Even dem Landlord don suffer for him hand. He don cut all dem longer throat. Na God go bless him

> Mama womb. And the man fine well well for him Soja uniform. Na proper action Governor, make he just no go tire (15).

Another one can be seen in the reference to 'Operation Sweep', the security outfit set up to combat crime in Lagos state when Brigadier Marwa was at the helm of affairs. This can be seen in Danger's statement that, "…gbajue. If not for operation sweep and de way wey I hear say dem kill de boys I for don join" (26). There is also the issue of killer beans which filled the rumour mill in Lagos during this period, hence Governor Marwa had to eat bean cake in public to restore the confidence of the people of the State in beans. Mama Lizi alludes to this when she says: "Oga sajent I don dey cook beans since Governor chop *akara* for television and he no die. I no poison am with beans "(45).

Yerima also alludes to the spate of ritual killing which is rampant in the country, especially Lagos, when Danger orders Mama Lizi thus:

> Mama Lizi, give me the ticket or I go cut your neck. Take your head do spare part for the person wey dey take person head do business (41).

This malaise is captured by Christopher Oji. He writes:

> Recent statistics indicate that no fewer than 60 persons were declared missing between last August and October. A breakdown of the figure shows that an average of 15 – 20 persons get missing in Lagos every month. According to the State Police Command, Ikeja, the number of missing persons has sky-rocketed . . . Most people are kidnapped in buses . . . which are notorious avenues of operation of ritualists. (Sunday Sun, February 4, 2007. p.30)

This wave of human sacrifice in Nigeria got to a head in August 2004. Nigerians were shocked to the marrow when many corpses were discovered in a shrine in Okija, a rustic town in Anambra State: This incident is described thus by Stan Okeke:

> In the beginning, Okija was just another rustic, agrarian town in Ihiala local government area of Anambra State . . . But in August 2004, a sudden storm burst in the town as the police invaded the grooves of the dreaded Ogwugwu Akpu and Ogwugwu Isi Ura shrines and exposed gory spectacles that can only match the type you see in Hammer House of Horror, a classic horror box office buster shown in the 1970's and 1980's. At virtually every nook and crany of the groove, police discovered corpses in different stages of decomposition, either lying in ant-infested coffins or funeral shrouds on hare top-soil . . . This discovery put Nigeria once again on the front burner and subsequent investigations were to open a can of worms. Few days later, Tafa Balogun, the then Inspector General of Police, IGP, stormed the shrine, again with his crack team from Abuja, and made more horrible discoveries. Investigations were ordered to determine if human sacrifices were being carried out in the shrines as rumoured . . . (*Sunday Sun,* March 4, 2007. p.33).

Despite the promise of an investigation into this gory discovery in Okija by the Federal Government, nothing has been heard of it since then. Rather, the shrine is now back in operation. According to Okeke, "While the Ogwugwu Usi Ura has suspended its activities, Ogwugwu Akpu still holds court" (*Sunday Sun,* March 4, 2007. p.33).

Another technique explored by Yerima is the use of innuendo to indirectly attack characters and the society. In his quest to say that the artificial life and high taste of the well-to-do is a major cause of

hypertension, Landlord says, "The wealthy man chop woman leg, wash am with odeku" (17). 'Chop woman leg' is a sexual innuendo while 'odeku' is a reference to a big bottle of Guiness Stout. Mama Lizi also makes use of sexual innuendo in assessing herself:

> MAMA LIZI: I say I no be old woman. See my chasis, see better for my body. Na only one pikin I born. I no be old woman you hear? (12).

Here, Mama Lizi is promoting her youthfulness and sexuality and that having a child does not rob her of this. This use of sexual innuendo by Yerima is to guard against what can be described as obscene words but their meaning is not lost on the audience or the reader. The use of humour in subtly passing a message is decribed thus by Olusegun (2015):

> *Awada* (*efe*) in the Nigerian context significantly serves as a veritable source of facts/truth in situations where it is difficult to speak the truth gravely. Very serious situations are rendered in a jocular manner in order to minimize frictions. For example, the socio-cultural awareness of truth-telling in joke situations is couched in the proverb; *idi awada ni ati' n mo otito* 'it is from jokes that we derive the facts/truth'.Through subtle reference, and the presuppositions among the participants, the *alawada* (the humourist) can aim a dig at the folly of anyone including those in authority. Though the mutual understanding of the referents and occasions may elicit laughter, the participants usually realize the truth in humorous situations for their own edification. (121)

Yerima also made use of a comic device known as incongruity, which is one of the characteristics of comedy, in the play. Adeyemi (2007: 194) describes incongruity as "the discrepancy between what is normally expected and what the writer gives his audience". An example of this technique can be found in Baba Tailor's reversal of fortune from the poorest out of the characters, to the winner of the raffle. He is the last to get a lottery ticket as he cannot even afford ten naira to buy a bottle of Tuba Cola until Landlord assists him. While those who have more than one ticket did not win, Baba Tailor is declared the winner. The unexpected also happens at the end when Baba Tailor, who is presumed to have died, 'resurrects' to the consternation of the other characters as well as the audience.

Conclusion

This paper looks at how, in the development of drama from the Classical Period, poets (playwrights) have deplored the sub-genre of comedy. Ahmed Parker Yerima, a Nigerian playwright and critic, explores this sub-genre in *The Lottery Ticket.* The type of comedy Yerima used in this play is the 'New Comedy' popularised by Menander, which deals with aspects of daily life and a more realistic representation of human life; and the sub- strata called humour or *efe* or *awada*. The paper also examines how Yerima communicates *efe* in the play through techniques such as the use of Pidgin-English, use of local images, fast paced actions flowing into each other, allusion, innuendo, incongruity.

While entertaining in *The Lottery Ticket*, Yerima takes a swipe at the greedy nature of Nigerians and their inordinate desire to get rich at all cost. He also brings into focus some of the malaise in the Nigerian society such as thuggery, greed, hypocrisy, lack of trust, advanced fee fraud, corruption, armed robbery and bad leadership; which have turned Nigeria to a dystopian society.

References

Adeleke, D. (2005). Ethos of laughter among the Yoruba. *Ihafa: Journal of African Studies*, 5(2), 43-63.

Adeoti, G. (2007). *Muse and Mimesis; Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Plays*. Spectrum Books.

Adeyemi, T. (2007). Yerima's comic dramaturgy in *The Lottery Ticket.* In G. Adeoti (Ed.) *Muse and*

mimesis: A critical perspective on Ahmed Yerima's drama. (pp.185 – 196) . Spectrum Books.

Daramola, I. (1997). *Mass communication: Theory and practice*. Alabi Eyo Publishers..

Emike, A.J. & Ayodabo, S..J. (2014). Communicative strategies in contemporary Nigerian drama: A stylistic analysis of Ahmed Yerima's *The Lottery Ticket.* In *Scholars Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2 (1), 32-36.

Folarin, B. (2002). *Theories of mass communication*: *An introductory text*. Stirling. Horden.

Haynes, J. (1994). Structural adjustment of Nigerian comedy: Baba Sala. *Passages 8,*

Julius-Adeoye, R. J. (2013). *The drama of Ahmed Yerima: Studies in Nigeria theatre*. (Unpublished Ph. D Thesis). Leiden University.

Little, P. (1983). *Communication in business*. Petler Book Ltd.

Menander-AncientGreece- Classical Literature. https://www.ancient.literature.com.

Palmer, J. (1994). *Taking humour seriously*. Routledge.

O'Connor, J. R. (1981). *Speech: Exploring communication*. Prentice-Hall.

Oji, C. (2007, February 4). Missing and counting. *The Sunday Sun*, 30.

Okeke, S. (2007, March 4). Okija bounces back. *The Sunday Sun*, 33.

Olusegun, A.E. (2015). The awada phenomenon: Exploring humour in Wole Soyinka's *Alapata Apata* . *European Journal of Humour Research*, 6 (4), 118-132.

Sarbaugh, L. E. (1987). *Intercultural communication.* New Brunswick Press.

Stephenson, W. (1988). *The play theory of mass communication*. University of Chicago Press (First published in 1967).

Osundare, N. (2008). Style *and literary communication in African prose fiction in English.* Hope Publication.

Yerima, A. (2002). *The lottery ticket*. Kraft Books …… (2003) *Fragmented Thoughts and Specifics: Essays in Dramatic Literature.* Lagos: Books Plus.