

Humour-Evoking Phonological Features in *Jenifa's Diary* by Funke Akindele

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Abstract

Several studies have been carried out on the linguistic features of humour skits produced by some thespians in Nigeria. Some of these studies concentrated on how the phonological distortions in their utterances have contributed to humour productions. However, the humour-evoking phonological peculiarities of Funke Akindele's brand of spoken English in *Jenifa's Diary* have not been given sufficient attention. *Jenifa's Diary* is a weekly episodic dramatized telecast which foregrounds some social issues in Nigeria. Jenifa, the protagonist of the drama, fondly uses the Yoruba English (YE), a sub-variety of Nigerian English (NE) to construct funniness around these issues. This study analyses the phonological features of this sub-variety of NE as dramatised by Jenifa, discusses how the dramatised speeches evoke humour and relates the speech behaviour of the character to identity and social stereotype. The data were drawn from *Jenifa's Diary* Season 2, Episode 13 and Season 3, Episode 1 downloaded from the YouTube. They were played back severally with VLC player and subjected to perceptual analysis, drawing insights from Incongruity Theory of humour. The analysis revealed that the utterances in the data are over-dramatised and characterized by the Yoruba accent that manifests phonological inappropriateness which produces shifts in the articulatory positions of some English fricatives, word stress placements, voicing and nasalizations. The study also establishes that the identified features overstretch the phonological misrepresentations in the sub-variety of the NE. The study concludes that the hyper-imitation of the speech style gives the thespian a personal brand in the humour industry in Nigeria.

Key words: Humour, phonological incongruity, hyper-imitation, self-branding, articulatory shifts

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I. Introduction

Humour and laughter are universal features of humanity. In spite of their universality, they are culturally constructed. Faley (2016:115) posits that the "sensitivity of human beings to things that can amuse them varies from one social context to another". The humour industry is thriving in Africa because of the existential burdens of life that are becoming unbearable in the continent. Such burdens serve as raw materials for humour creation. Humour has therefore become a discursive practice explored by some ingenious Nigerians in escaping from the tragic trappings of poverty, insecurity, kidnapping, homelessness, bad governance, social unrest and other problems of life. However, it thrives well in the contexts of freedom and liberty where speeches can be expressed with little or no inhibitions.

The new outlook of democratic freedom in Nigeria has opened up a new form of speeches that has contributed greatly to the production of humour. The democratization of broadcasting spaces on TV and social media has provided some thespians the atmosphere to freely crack jokes on the living situations in Nigeria through their episodic drama. Through this enterprise, thespians create, construct and analyse the existential state of the Nigerian state as tools for entertaining the enthusiastic audience via pidgin or the English language. All they do is that they make the people laugh in the face of misery thereby making them to 'escape' from their pains.

Laughter, which is an existential feature, is an elixir to the soul of humans. Expressions, especially the spoken ones, can elicit laughter depending on how they are made. Every human being all over the world looks for opportunities to laugh and escape from the vicissitudes of life. In a second language context like Nigeria, it is very common for thespians like Funke Akindele to stage comic episodic TV shows in English to entertain the viewers in various homes after some hectic hours. Some of these comic shows are replete with different English pronunciation styles that elicit comicality on the part of the audience. Are there relationships between humour and how spoken English words are pronounced? Phonological jokes exist and they can evoke laughter. These are jokes that are products of deliberate 'errors', mimicking and dramatization (Lew, 1997). These 'errors' are

usually manifested as phonological violations in terms of unusual accent, malapropisms, etc (McGraw and Warren 2010). Consequently, this paper explores the nexus between phonology and humour production via the spoken English of Funke Akindele in *Jenifa's Diary*.

Jenifa's Diary is a weekly episodic dramatized skit telecast on some Nigerian TV stations and on YouTube. It focuses on some social issues in Nigeria playing upon the adventures of a typical illiterate Yoruba girl venturing into the city. The character, Jenifa, therefore represents the transformation of a village girl 'aping' the urban life styles of people. Her story denotes the existential challenges of Nigerians battling with hunger, poverty, homelessness and the desire for all the good things of life.

One noticeable feature of Jenifa's performance is her hilarious 'violation' of the standard norms of spoken English. Her peculiar pronunciation has become the tool for her trade and identity construction. As a Yoruba woman, her style of spoken English is a blend of British English (BE), Yoruba Nigerian English (YNE) and Pidgin with a dramatized form of the Oyo Yoruba accent. Her unique pronunciation of certain segmental and prosodic aspects of English has attracted the attention of this author to establishing how her own phonological jokes are being created from such deliberate but productive 'violations' of the pronunciation norms in English. While not underestimating the thematic concerns of this thespian, this paper focuses on the deliberate over-dramatization of the spoken variety of Yoruba English by Funke Akindele in *Jenifa's Diary*. The paper analyses the phonological features of this sub-variety of NE as dramatized by Jenifa; discusses how the dramatized speeches evoke humour; and relates the speech behaviour of the artist to identity and social stereotype.

II. Literature Review

Humour comes with normative breaches (McGraw and Warren 2010) and with the perceived violations of the norm which elicits laughter and amusement. Attardo (2011:135) describes it as anything that is "funny, amusing or laughable". It also refers to the way in which particular cognitive experiences provoke laughter and provide funniness (Faleye, 2016). Some of these cognitive experiences are usually cultural and contextual across ages and climes.

There are some inherent benefits derivable from humour and humour related activities. Humour helps people to cope with anxiety, grief, embarrassment and physical pain (Gervais & Wilson, 2005, Martin, 2007). It also reduces conflicts between people with different points of view.

Several scholars have engaged humour from various disciplines like psychology, sociology, literature, linguistics, etc. Findings from such studies have shown its relevance to stress management, understanding cultural differences in humour creation and power of language as a tool for humour creation (Sen, 2012). Specifically, from linguistics, it has been studied from the point of view of syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse. Through these aspects of language, it is not unlikely that comic actors have the capacity to deploy the 'lexis, orthography, syntax, phonology and pragmatics of any language in their humour productions (Servaite 2005; Knight 2008; Filani, 2013). Faleye (2016) examines the language performance of an alcoholic jester with a view to identifying the linguistic characteristics of simulated alcoholic utterances. In that paper, the author establishes that such utterances manifest lingual distortions at all levels of language which subsequently leads to humour productions. Phonologically, Atardo et al (2013) focus on the prosodic irony as it affects intonation of utterances. In his own contribution to establishing the nexus between humour and phonology, Adesoye (2018) explores how the phonological processes contribute to humour productions in Folarin Falana's comedy skits. However, much work has not been carried out on phonological characteristics of *Jenifa's Diary* by Funke Akindele. Although Kansom (2018) focuses on how the deliberate manipulation of the segmental features by dramatists can create phonological jokes, her work specifically centres on how the realizations of labio-dental fricatives contribute to funniness in *Jenifa's Diary* to the exclusion of other phonological features. Understanding how phonology contributes to humour elicitation in *Jenifa's Diary* will entail going beyond the segmental features alone to exploring how segments and prosodic features contribute to humour production and identity construction in *Jenifa's Diary*.

Identity and Social Stereotype

The concept of identity is multivariate in meaning. Park (2007: 341) cited in Barnawi (2009: 65) describes it as "an inherently social product that is jointly created by interactants, rather than as a pre-determined, psychological construct that is lodged within each individual's mind". Faleye and Adegoju (2012) argue that since people belong to different social groups, there can be a shift from personal to social identity that underlies the behavioural shift from interpersonal to intergroup behaviour. Val and Vinogradova (2010:1) opine that identity is "dynamic and socially constructed". This identity, according to them, can be negotiated in discourse using the tool of language. Language, especially the spoken one, acts as a mediating tool for "constructing and deconstructing individual and social identities" (Barnawi, 2009: 66). The style and choice of a language that a speaker uses can point out the identity of such a speaker.

Identities at times are created from stereotypic behaviours or beliefs about a set of people. Stereotypes exist in every human society. A stereotype is an over-generalized belief about a certain class of people. It is an expectation that is associated with a particular group of people. Take for example, there are certain stereotypes about the spoken English of incipient Yoruba speakers of English with Oyo accent, especially in the pronunciation of some English sounds such as the voiceless palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/, voiceless dental fricative /θ/ and voiced labiodental fricative /v/, etc.

Oyo-Yoruba Dialect and Yoruba English

The Yoruba speech community is a large one with several dialectal sub-groups (Dairo, 2008). Yoruba language is spoken predominantly in southwestern Nigeria, as well as in countries such as Togo, Benin, the Republic of Benin and Sierra Leone in Africa, and in Cuba, Brazil and many other non-African countries (Fabunmi 2013). The Oyo dialect was the basis of Yoruba standardisation (Fabunmi 2013: 1), but the present-day Standard Yoruba (SY) has deviated so much from the Oyo dialect which is now viewed as different. These dialects come with changeable degrees of mutual intelligibility. There are about twenty dialects of Yoruba spoken in places such as Oyo, Ondo, Owo, Ilesha, Abeokuta, Ijebu and Ife. These distinct varieties can be classified into five major dialect areas: Northwest, Northeast, Central, Southwest and Southeast (Adetugbo, 1982) characterized by major differences in pronunciation, and, to a lesser degree, in grammar and vocabulary. However, the Oyo dialect which is the basis for the SY is often deployed in *Jenifa's Diary* by Funke Akindele.

The contact of English with Yoruba has created the variety called Yoruba English, a sub-variety of Nigerian English. This contact has left significant imprints on the texture of English at all levels, especially at the level of phonology. Several indigenous languages and spoken Nigerian English with its pidgin counterparts are usually deployed as tools for creating and unveiling different humorous ideas in various Nigerian contexts. Most importantly, different strands of spoken Nigerian English serve as instruments for creating conflicts, restoring peace and capturing societal realities as often seen in some TV drama in English. In Nigeria, these TV realities can be tragic or comic experiences of life depending on how the issues raised therein are resolved either as comedy, tragedy or tragicomedy. It is this texture of English that Funke Akindele showcases in *Jenifa's Diary*.

III. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The study adopted a descriptive design. The data were sourced from *Jenifa's Diary* Seasons 2 Episode 13 and 3 Episode 1, downloaded from the *YouTube* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B8kKDNSB_58 Jenifa's diary season 2 episode 13 – SHADOW and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBPCBe1Q1MU> Jenifa's diary Season 3 Episode 1 – ABANDONED). The two selected episodes were chosen because they provided the researcher with the typical segmental and prosodic features that are representative of the tokens that are associated with Jenifa. Also, the two episodes captured some of the thematic concerns that are of relevance to the existential challenges Nigerians are faced with. The downloaded episodes were played back several times with VLC video player and subjected to perceptual analysis with insights drawn from Benign Violation Theory (BVT) as modeled by Veatch Tom.

BVT holds the view that the elicitation of humour is a function of these three conditions: (i) violation of the situational norms; (ii) this violation must be harmless /benign; and (iii) options (i) and (ii) must occur simultaneously. In this first condition, what is regarded as normal or the norm is violated or breached. Violation occurs when there is a departure from what 'ought' to be. This might be in form of a violation of a linguistic norm, convention and rules vis a vis orthography, pronunciation or syntax of a language. The second condition explains that whatever is threatening to one's sense of the norm will evoke humour. However, the threat should be harmless. The third condition explains that the violation of the norm and the benign nature of the threat will occur simultaneously before humour can be elicited. Insights from this theory will be adopted in analyzing the data from *Jenifa's Diary*.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Data studied for this paper are presented in this section. Jenifa's speech styles are labeled as *JSS* and presented simultaneously with the standard English forms *SE*. By so doing, readers will easily come to terms with the variations in the phonological distortions in the *JSS* form. The data manifest the occurrence of some phonological distortions and violations of some English rules in creating humour which include shifts in articulatory positions, vowel strengthening, monophthongisation of the diphthongs or diphthongization of monophthongs, nasalization, voicing, deletion, stress shifts and coinages. These distorted phonological features are identified below:

Shifts in Articulatory Positions

In describing consonant sounds, one of the important parameters used is the place of articulation. To achieve correct production of consonants, specific places of articulation are associated with each consonant. In consonance with Olumuyiwa's (1997: 31) view that "Yoruba speakers of English substitute some English sounds like /z/, /z/ and /tʃ/ which do not occur in Yoruba language with /y/, /s/ and /ʃ/", it was observed that Jenifa made deliberate shifts in articulatory positions in her pronunciation of some consonant sounds in the skits thereby leading to the substitutions of some English consonants. In the data, Jenifa apes the seeming inability of Yoruba speakers of English to articulate some problematic English consonants by dramatizing and exaggerating the articulatory shift from palato-alveolar to alveolar position in some of the words in 1-8 below. This shift led to the realization of voiceless palato-alveolar fricatives as voiceless alveolar fricatives in the texts listed in 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 and from voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ as voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in 7 and 8 below.

i. Palato-Alveolar to Alveolar

/ʃ/or /tʃ/ → [s]

The shift from palato-alveolar articulatory position to alveolar is noticeable in the pronunciation of the following utterances:

1. JSS-Sia [sia] (problem *sia* (shared) is problem *sia* (shared))
SE- Share /ʃeə/
2. JSS-Social worker [sosial] (No. *Sosial* (social) worker I will use to frighten her)
SE-Social worker /səʊʃl/
3. JSS- Same [sem] (*Same* (shame) on you woman)
SE- Shame /ʃeɪm/
4. JSS-Wasing her [wɔsɪŋ] (I am *wasing* (watching) her)
SE-watching her /wɔtʃɪŋ/
5. JSS-Suo [suɔ] (I am *suo* (sure))
SE- sure /ʃʊ:/
- a. JSS- Accomodasion [akɔmə'desən] (I come and meet you for *accomodasion* (accommodation))
SE- Accommodation /əkɔmə'deɪʃn/

Equally noticeable is the substitution of voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ with voiceless alveolar fricative/s/ as seen below:

- ii. /tʃ/ → /s/
6. JSS- said [said/ (*said* (child) is a gift from God)
SE- child /tʃaɪld/
7. JSS-snas [snas] (until that girl come and *snas* (snatch) koitomer (customer) boyfriend)
SE-snatch / snætʃ/

The realisations of *child* and *snatch* as [said] and [snas] come with a lot of distortions at the onset and coda positions in *child* and *snatch* respectively. Such distortions are deliberately made to create some funniness to the audience.

Also, the subject's realization of (9) *iPad* as [aɪkpad] instead of /'aɪpæd/ was due to the articulatory shift from bilabial /p/ to labio-velar [kp] position.

iii. /p/ → [kp]

8. JSS-iPkad [aɪkpad] (you can download it on (iKPAD) ipad.
SE- iPad /'aɪpæd/

Hence, a voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ was realized as voiceless labio-velar plosive which is absent in English. This incongruity is known because Yoruba has the phoneme /kp/ and hence the laughter at the swapping of the two dissimilar sounds.

The consequence of these distortions in the articulatory positions of these sounds creates some strange accents and strange words that can affect mutual intelligibility and ultimately create laughter on the part of the audience who can easily relate with the deviation from the standard pronunciation of the sounds.

Vowel Modifications

In English vowel sounds, some are short, weak and long. The short English vowels are seven in number. Roach, (2000: 13) identifies them as /ɪ, e, æ, ʌ, ʊ, ə, ʊ/. These vowels are only relatively short depending on their contexts. They are normally without the length symbol [:] unlike their long counterparts which tend to be longer than the short vowels in similar contexts (p16). Examples are /ɪ:, ɑ:, ɔ:, ɜ:, u:/. This length differentiation is however absent in Yoruba language. It should be stressed that schwa /ə/, a very weak vowel in English and the unrounded open front vowel /æ/ in English are missing in Yoruba. In the data, *Jenifa* exaggerated and foregrounded the moraic components of some of the syllables by outright substitutions, or through the monophthongisation of the diphthongs or vice versa.

i. Substitution of Monophthongs

/æ/ → [a]

For example, *snatch* /snætʃ/ is realized as [snas]. The unrounded open front vowel /æ/ is realized as [a]. Also, the schwa /ə/ is realized as either [ɔ] or [a] by the thespian.

/ə/ → [ɔ] or [a]

For example, the schwa /ə/ in the initial and pre-penultimate syllables in (7) *accommodation* /əkɒmə'deɪʃn/ is substituted with [a] and [ɔ] respectively in [akɒmə'desan]. The replacements of /ə/ with either /ɔ/ or /a/ respectively assist greatly in marking out the texture of *Jenifa*'s spoken variety of English in the data which elicits laughter from the audience.

ii. Monophthongization of Diphthongs

Studies have shown that diphthongs are absent in the phonological inventory of Yoruba language. The phonological distortion through the modification of the diphthongs to the phonological vowel structures of Yoruba language is noticeable in the spoken utterances of the character thus:

/eɪ/ → [e]

/əʊ/ → [o]

For example, the closing diphthongs /eɪ/ in the penultimate syllable in (7) *accommodation* /əkɒmə'deɪʃn/ and /əʊ/ in the initial syllable of (2) *social* /səʊʃl/ are realized as unrounded mid close front [e] and rounded mid close back [o] vowels respectively.

iii. Diphthongization of monophthongs

The data equally show that diphthongization of monophthongs occurred in the utterances of the dramatic persona, *Jenifa*. In (5), *sure* /ʃʊ:/ was realized as [suɔ].

/ɔ:/ → [u] or [ɔ]

The single moraic nature of the syllable /ɔ:/ was reconfigured as [u] and [ɔ] respectively thereby changing a monosyllabic word *sure* (CV) to a bisyllabic word [suɔ] (CVV) in her utterance. All these modifications of the moraic component in *sure* depict an incipient Yoruba-English bilingual speaker of English; one who appears to be sophisticated but local in her spoken English. The more she tries to approximate the sophisticated life styles of elites, the more her spoken English gives her out as a local/village lady. This revelation about her 'competence' elicits laughter in the audience.

iv. Voicing

Voicing is an important parameter in the three-term description of sounds, especially consonants but all English vowels are voiced; it is a redundant factor in vowel description. There are voiced and voiceless consonants in Yoruba and English languages. However, there is a deliberate distortion of this linguistic phenomenon in the data.

a. [-voice] → [+voice]

In the data, voiceless consonants are realized as voiced. The following examples in (10) *Jenifa* and (11) *gossip* aptly illustrate this claim.

9. JSS-*Jenifa* [Jeniva] (it is me your girl *Jeniva*)

SE-*Jenifa*/dʒenɪfə/

10. JSS- *Gossip* [gɔzɪp] (if me I *gozip*, what is you?)

SE - *Gossip* /gɒsɪp/

Jennifer /dʒenɪfə/ adapted as (10) *Jenifa* [dʒenɪfa] in the text, the character deliberately pronounces the onset of the final syllable [f] voiceless labiodental fricative as [v] voiced labiodental fricative [dʒenɪva]. Similarly, the

onset of the final syllable in (11) *gossip* /gɒsɪp/ voiceless alveolar fricative was realized as [gɒzɪp] voiced alveolar fricative.

There is equally a cautious distortion of the voicing feature of voiced labiodental fricative /v/ [+voice] which is realized as voiceless fricative [s]. The voicing of the voiceless fricative as [-voice] is an attempt to reverse what exists in the literature that incipient Yoruba speakers of English are unable to articulate some voiced English fricatives in their expressions. Examples in 12-15 succinctly capture the violation of the voicing rule:

[+voice] → [-voice]

11. JSS-Drifer [draɪfa] (where is the *drifer* (driver)?
SE- Driver /draɪvə/
12. JSS-Affoidance [afɔɪdɑns] (...it is *affoidance* (avoidance) you give her)
SE- Avoidance /əvɔɪdɪnts/
13. JSS- Mufi [mufi] (...our latest *mufi* (movie) for scene I (*prodosion*) production)
SE- Movie /mu:vi/
14. JSS- Efening ['ɪfɪnɪŋ] (Good *efening* Toyoy)
SE-Evening /'i:vniŋ/

The devoicing of /v/ in [draɪfa], [afɔɪdɑns], [mufi], and ['ɪfɪnɪŋ] for (12) *driver*, (13) *avoidance*, (14) *movie* and (15) *evening* respectively was a ploy to dramatise and achieve the stereotype that there exists the absence of voicing in the elicitation of voiced fricatives by some Yoruba speakers. The distortion of voicing rule in the data is a deliberate attempt at deviating from the standard rules guiding English consonant pronunciations.

v. Nasalisation

Nasalization is a process whereby non-nasal sounds are articulated like the nasals. Jenifa distorts this phonological process deliberately by nasalizing and substituting the unrounded open front vowel /æ/ in (16) *man* and (17) *manager* as [ɔ] in [mɔ̃n] and [mɔ̃nɪdʒə]. The substitution of unrounded front vowel /æ/ with rounded back vowel [ɔ] within the phonological context of pre nasal final context creates a seemingly nasalized realisation of the vowel.

15. JSS- mon [mɔ̃n] (Who is this *mon* (man)?
SE- man/mæn/
16. JSS- Moniger [mɔ̃nɪdʒə] (when she *cas* (catch) her inside *moniger* (manager) office
SE- Manager/mænɪdʒə/

The nasalization cum vowel shift from /æ/ to [ɔ] in the two words depicts an example of over dramatization and identity creation by Jenifa to poking fun at the Yoruba speakers of English.

vi. Declusterisation/Consonant Deletion

Phonotactics refers to the system of arrangement of sounds and sound sequence (Yavas 2011:131). The sequence of sounds differs from one language to another. The permissible sound sequence in Yoruba is different from that of English. Soneye and Faleye (2015: 256) posit that “speakers of English as a second language (ESL) generally, resort to cluster reduction through several ways, as a means of simplification...”. This cluster reduction is “relatively prevalent in the English of less educated in Ghana” (Huber, 2004:861). One simplification process noticed in the data is cluster reduction. Jenifa imitates this set of less educated speakers of English in creating her funniness in the data. For example, in (18), the syllable structure in the initial syllable in item (18) *section* /sekʃən/ CVC is reduced to CV with the deletion of the coda, to produce CV and ultimately CVCV [sesn]. Also, in 19, *taxi* /tæksi/ is realised as two syllables reconfigured as [ta] + [si] - CV + CV structure with the deletion of the coda in the initial syllable. Consequently, the initial syllable in *taxi* /tæksi/ <tæk> with the syllable structure of CVC was reconfigured as [ta.si] with CV.CV structure.

19. JSS-Tasi[tasi] CV. CV (...go find *tasi* (taxi)
SE-Taxi/tæks/ CVC.CV
20. JSS- Eye[ai] V
SE-eyes/aɪz/ VC..
21. JSS- prodosion [prɔdɔsn] CV for the medial syllable (...for scene 1 *prodosion* (production).
SE- production /prɔdɔkʃən/ CVC

Also, the coda elements in *eyes/aɪz/* VC and in the medial syllable in (21) *production* /dʌk/ CVC were deleted to be left with [aɪ] V and [dɔ] CV syllable structures respectively. The dominant V and CV patterns are in tandem with Yoruba syllable structure.

vii. Stress Shift

Yoruba is a tonal language while English is a stress-timed language. In line with Atoye (1990) and Simo Bobda's (1995) position that NE manifests progressive shift in primary stress placement from the initial in standard English to the final syllable in disyllabic words and final nodes in compound words, the data present some examples of these stress shifts. The shift of primary stress from initial syllables to final ones in disyllabic words in 22, 25, 26 and 27 or to the final nodes in compound words in 23 and 24 respectively creates a different texture of English with variant rhythm to create funniness.

22. JSS- saLON (we go meet in *saLON* tomorrow)
SE- SALon

23. JSS-passWORD (I think she go lie about *passWORD*)
SE-PASSword

24. JSS-locker ROOM (See I no *cas* (catch) you for lockerROOM)
SE- LOCKer room

25. JSS- iPAD (you can download it in your *iPKAD*)
SE- Ipad

26. JSS- iPHONE (you can download it in your *iPHONE*)
SE-Iphone

27. JSS- anDROID (you can download it in your *anDROID*)
SE- ANdroid

The general stress pattern changes from strong weak (SW) in Standard English to weak strong (WS) rhythm in the data. This presents a different rhythm entirely from the Standard English.

Coinages of Words

The artist dramatises a medical condition called embolophrasia- a speech disorder in which meaningless words or sounds are injected into sentences in her utterances. Jenifa makes use of deliberate coinages that are meant to disobey the phonotactic principles of English words. She dramatises these utterances like kids whose utterances are interlaced with some phonological deformities. Some of the coinages include (28) *koitomer*, (29) *familik*, and (30) *contiquence*. She makes use of some of these meaningless words which are arbitrary coinages that are not part of English vocabulary. What exists in English lexicon are *customer*, *family*, and *consequence*. The dramatized utterances give her the latitude to further unleash assault on the lexis of English language. One of the consequences of this novel creation is that it evokes laughter from the audience whose minds had been rigidly or mechanically constricted to the usage of *customer*, *family*, and *consequence* to accepting *koitomer*, *familik*, and *contiquence* as replacements or synonyms. These utterances paint a picture of a typical village lady though in borrowed sophisticated appearance with very poor/incipient spoken English.

28. JSS-Koitomer- she go (sic) *snas*(snatch) *koitomer* (customer's) boyfriend
SE- Customer

29. JSS-Familik- (God will bless your *familik*)
SE-Family

30. JSS-Contiquence (you will face the *contiquence* (consequence))
SE-Consequence

The assault on English structure continues with some of her premeditated utterances. Her use of English is an attempt to further assault the English language. For example, Jenifa made this statement in her exchange with Toyo. She boldly and confidently says (31) *Toyo- make I explanasion*. In other words, *Toyo, let me explain*. Instead of using the verb form (*explain*) in that chain, she replaces it with the noun form (*explanation*). Equally her utterance in (32), *I want to go and saw monager*, breaks the rule of syntactic parallelism. The infinitive *to+go* will take *see* after the coordinating conjunction *and*. Rather than using the vowel sound /i:/ in *see*, she makes use of /ɔ:/ in *saw*. The substitution of /ɔ:/ for /i:/ leads to the creation of entirely different lexical items

see vs *saw*. The viewers are aware of this break down in this linguistic rule, hence their laughter. Similarly, in 32 *I can squatter with you*, she uses the noun form *squatter* instead of the verb form *squat*. The modal auxiliary verb *can* cannot function as an auxiliary to the noun *squatter* but can only go with the verb form *squat*. Furthermore, in item (31) **How is you?** there is no concord between the verb *is* and the subject *you*. Instead, the character decides to break the subject and verb agreement rule guiding the standard sentence *How are you?* The distortion is a violation of the subject verb agreement meant to deliberately assault the orderliness in English and create chaos to elicit laughter in her audience?

Social issues raised

In addition to the humorous contents of *Jenifa's Diary*, Funke Akindele is able to foreground some serious societal issues like homelessness, poverty, unwanted pregnancies, dishonesty and other problems that are affecting the everyday lives of ordinary Nigerians in the comedy. In the data, the plight of young ladies in the cities looking for accommodation is vividly portrayed in the life of Jenifa who is squatting with her friend, Toyo, who later decides to eject her. This leads to her request *I can squatter with you*. Behind this distorted grammar is the distorted life of a young woman who is too poor to get a decent accommodation near her place of work in Lekki but has to squat in Sango-Ota. Consequently, the search continues for whom to squat with to mitigate her pain of homelessness and poverty. Her quest for accommodation desperately makes Segun to offer her to squat with him so that *they can be rolling together*. The outcome of this rolling together can lead to unwanted pregnancy as seen in the life of Cordelia. This shows how vulnerable women can be in a poverty-ridden nation. The thespian in *Jenifa's Diary* is showing the interconnectedness between poverty, homelessness and unwarranted pregnancies in the life of young ladies in the cities.

The traffic challenge in the chaotic city of Lagos is equally foregrounded.

Toyo: *Your food is in the microwave*

Jenifa: *I am not hungry but I tire. If you see the traffic...All the danfo doing **gbagba**.*

The rickety nature of danfos (buses) on Lagos roads is captured in the onomatopoeic Yoruba word *gbagba* describing how uncomfortable the buses are as means of transportation in Lagos. This rickety bus has a side effect on the health status of the citizens: **"I am hungry but I tire** (fatigued). The scenario being painted is characteristic of underdeveloped countries without modern means of transportation. In spite of the poor nature of the people, the inherent dishonest nature of humans is brought to the fore. Adaku's dishonesty is aptly captured in her bid to evoke pity from the customer over the health status of her son.

Adaku: *I don suffer o. I don tire to be carrying my son up and down*

Costumer: *Please be careful (interruptions)*

Adaku: *Aunty, I was saying e remain small money (100, 000 naira) to add to the small one I get.*

Customer: *I will refer you to the pediatrics free. I think I can foot the bill*

Adaku: *(aside) person de find money, she dey talk of pediatrics.*

The excerpts bring to the fore the dishonesty on the part of Adaku to exploit the costumer to part with her N100, 000. Her son was not sick at all but she was looking for a means of extorting the customer. The promise by the customer to take the son to the pediatrics destroys her motive of using the plight of her son to solicit money from undiscerning members of the public. This tendency is a reoccurring feature in the society.

V. Conclusion

The deployments of various phonological distortions through articulatory shifts, voicing and devoicing features of sounds, coinages and incipient Yoruba English accent by Funke Akindele are ways of creating a brand in the film industry which marked her out from others. She latches on certain stereotypes about the inability of some incipient Yoruba English bilinguals to create her own brand of identity in the Nigerian film industry through deliberate exaggeration of these aspects of phonology of language to create funniness. These deliberate exaggerated phonological distortions and the creation of the typical accent of a Yoruba village girl have contributed greatly to the creation of funniness in *Jenifa's Diary*. The dramatized utterances of Jenifa in *Jenifa's Diary* have shown that hyper-imitation and grossness of the pronunciation modes of incipient Yoruba English bilinguals have given the thespian a personal brand in the humour industry. The incongruity in her spoken expressions has created a lot of phonological violations or normative breaches with the goal of creating cognitive experiences that provoke laughter and provide funniness to the viewers. The insights drawn from Benign Violation Theory assisted in the analysis and the discussion of the data on how phonological distortions and violations of some English rules through shifts in articulatory positions, vowel strengthening, monophthongisation of the diphthongs or vice versa, nasalization, voicing, deletion, stress shifts and coinages create humour and laughter in the audience. This position is in tandem with Elugbe and Omamor(1991: 66) that

it is possible for speakers to “deliberately exaggerate aspects of the phonology” of language for comic effect. This is exactly what Funke Akindele has done in her *Jenifa's Diary*.

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