



# Unpacking Discursive Strategies of Humour and Social Commentary in Selected Skits of Adigun Alawada

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**Abstract:** Social commentary, the act of using rhetorical means to provide commentary on social, cultural, political, or economic issues in a society conducted through the lens of humour, has received extensive attention from Nigerian academics. Nonetheless, there is a paucity of studies on social commentary and humour capturing multimodal features. The study fills this gap by undertaking a multimodal analysis that explores humour and social commentary in selected skits by Adigun Alawada on Instagram. Henri Bergson's (1900) *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Norris' (2004) multimodal interaction analysis, and multimodal discourse analysis by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) served as the study's theoretical guide. Six excerpts were culled from seven videos through the purposive sampling method and subjected to discursive analysis. Using the approaches, the study deconstructs how Alawada re-signifies mundane objects and practices into potent signs of economic precarity, gendered norms, and public health concerns. The findings demonstrate five principal thematic classifications in Adigun Alawada's skits, including in-group code mimicry, culinary semiotics of marital worth, phonetic punning and gendered critique, semiotic dissonance of labour, and overdetermined signification of rice. This study showcases the contemporary relevance of Henri Bergson's theory while expanding the scope of Norris's multimodal interaction theory applicability. The study recommends that further studies on other humourists using multimodal methods to deepen understanding of social commentary and humour in the digital space should be conducted.

**Keywords:** social commentary, humour, Adigun Alawada, Instagram

## 1. Introduction

Social commentary is the act of using rhetorical means to provide commentary on social, cultural, political, or economic issues in a society. This is often done with the intention of implementing or promoting change by informing the general public about a specific problem and appealing to people's sense of justice (Inthavong, 2023). The study's subject, Adigun Alawada, uses humour to comment on Nigerian social issues on Instagram. This connects with the notion that humour in the Nigerian socio-cultural context is one of the strategic ways Nigerians reflect on the religious, social, political, and cultural realities that define their experience (Ajayi, 2020). Filani and Ajayi (2019) also note that professional Nigerian stand-up comedians use comedy and jokes to represent Nigerian social life. Additionally, Obadare (2016) and Yeku (2016) both note that humour is a phenomenon

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that Nigerians have adopted as a strategic means of coping with the country's social and cultural realities.

There is currently a myriad of studies on humour and social commentary situated in pragmatics and discourse analysis in global and Nigerian contexts. In the global context, studies including Sosa-Abella and Reyes (2015), Julin (2018), and Pinar-Sanz (2020) focus on comparative theoretical and multimodal studies, showcasing how political humour and satire raise awareness using localisation, intertextuality, universality, and visual metaphors. Studies situated in the Nigerian space, focusing on social commentary and humour, demonstrate that in stand-up and skit comedy, comedians employ *Naija* (Nigerian Pidgin), code-switching, multimodal cues, and discourse strategies. These strategies were employed for social commentary, highlighting corruption, inequality, gender roles, and hypocrisy (Adetunji, 2013; Filani, 2015; Akande, Adedeji, and Robbin, 2019; Mark, 2024; Olayemi and Avoaja, 2024). While existing studies such as Akinola (2018), Ude et al. (2025), Badmus (2025), and Mark (2026) explore humour and social commentary in Nigerian stand-up comedy and skit-making from the angle of theories such as Kress and van Leeuwen, not many studies deploy a combination of three theories, which have the possibility of revealing deeper findings. This leaves an unexplored gap in catering to the multimodal features, including audio, visual, and contextual, of videos in the social commentary setting. The study, therefore, aims to analyse social commentary and humour in Adigun Alawada's Instagram skits, using multimodal features and humour strategies.

In furtherance, Henri Bergson's study *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900) and Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction serve as the study's theoretical guides. The chosen theories blend well with the study because Bergson's (1900) theory argues that humour fixes societal issues, which aligns with Alawada's use of satire about Nigerian life. Norris (2004) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) highlight the importance of visual, audio, and body language—key to digging into Instagram skits. Together, these angles illuminate both social commentary and multimodal cues in Adigun Alawada's humorous skits. A qualitative research method employing purposive sampling was used. The purposive sampling method was deployed to elicit representative data that correlates with the study's objectives and uncover the discursive strategies of humour and social commentary in Adigun Alawada's skits.

Adigun Alawada is a Nigerian content creator whose primary language is Yoruba. He has over 140,000 Instagram followers. He employs monologue for social commentary and humour in his videos, a niche he has carved for himself, distinguishing him from his colleagues. The monologue originated from the Greek words *monos* (alone) and *logos* (speech or word). It denotes a discourse delivered by a single person. A monologue is a literary device that is an uninterrupted speech delivered by a single character within a work of literature. Its earliest use is in Greek plays, particularly in comedies and tragedies (Literary Devices, n.d.). Using the classic Greek literary device, Adigun Alawada engages with the viewers, communicating with his wife, *Èlèhàá* (a Muslim wife in the *Niqab*, which denotes religious faith, modesty, or cultural tradition), to comment on Nigeria's social and economic issues. The videos are set in a dining room, where he eats a diverse range of foods as he comments on issues using humorous strategies, including exaggeration, ungrammatical expressions, and mispronunciations of words.

## 2. Literature Review

The research reviews studies on social commentary and humour in global and Nigerian contexts. Studies in global contexts emphasise the cultural mediation of satire and employ multimodal and semiotic approaches to visual political humour, among others. The studies in Nigerian contexts

centre on pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and skit making, as well as netnographic studies (Adetunji, 2013; Filani, 2015; Filani and Ajayi, 2020; Mark, 2024).

Adetunji (2013) examines the interactional context of stand-up comedy in the Nigerian context, drawing on pragmatics and interactional humour. The study, which adopts close analyses of recorded tapes, showcases how comedians and audiences co-construct humour through code-switching between English and Naija (Nigerian Pidgin), shared cultural backgrounds, stereotyping, and formulaic routines. Adetunji's analysis demonstrates humour as an interactional and corrective social practice. The study, however, is limited due to its relatively small sample size and its emphasis on interactional and verbal features, rather than multimodal features, including staging and gesture. Filani (2015) distinguishes between the context of the joke (stable communal beliefs) and the context within the joke (dynamic story-level enactments) in Nigerian stand-up comedy routines. The study, grounded in discourse theory, demonstrates that comedians embed discourse types, including reporting, greeting, and denigration, with humour strategies for social critique. Filani's strong point lies in its theorising of stand-up comedy as a layered speech situation, while its weakness stems from its limited data, which focuses on two comedians. It is also lacking because it does not include engagement with online and skit-making. Akande, Adedeji and Robbin (2019) employ a sociolinguistic and pragmatic approach to examining how Naija (Nigerian Pidgin) serves as a resource for social critique and humour. Drawing data from seven popular comedians, the study demonstrates that Naija is used alongside vulgar expressions to reach broad audiences, index authenticity, and deliver biting social commentary on moral failings, corruption, and hypocrisy. The analysis, however, is limited by its preoccupation with verbal focus; it fails to capture gestures, camera angles, and editing.

Filani and Ajayi (2020) also analyse the ideologies in selected Nigerian stand-up comedy routines (NSC) using Fairclough and Wodak's notions of ideology in discourse. The analysis identifies two categories of ideologies based on the collected data. The first relates to comedy performance, whereby the comedian projects stand-up comedy as a "dignified" profession. Conversely, the second relates to the country's socio-cultural status, commenting on socio-cultural ideologies that centre on ethnicity, gender, and political class. Mark (2024) redirects focus from stand-up comedy to social media skits, centring on skit makers such as Mark Angel, Sabinus, Bello Galadanchi, and Taaooma. The study employed post-colonial theory and netnography to demonstrate that skits on social media platforms fuse performative, visual, and textual resources to address corruption, religious hypocrisy, gender roles, and inequality. Olayemi and Avoaja (2024) test Gricean maxims in stand-up and skit discourse using textual analysis of selected comedians and skit makers for the study. The findings note that comedians and skit makers deliberately flout the maxims of quality and quantity frequently for social critique, exaggeration, and irony. Nonetheless, the study's major drawback is due to its small sample size and limited multimodal perspective.

In the global context, Sosa-Abella and Reyes (2015) conduct a comparative study, focusing on comic-strip political humour, between Quino's relative universality and Lat's localised references, which employ incongruity, release, and superiority in addition to sociocultural views. The analysis demonstrates that both Quino's relative universality and Lat's localised references predominantly raise awareness instead of directly mobilising change. The study's limitation is that its focus is on two major cartoonists, which may affect its generalisability. Julin (2018) takes a Bakhtinian approach to transnational satire, arguing for frameworks that assess satire's reception across cultures. It is a theoretical paper that urges sensitivity to cultural calibration in the effects of satire. The study is flawed because it is primarily conceptual rather than empirical.

Pinar-Sanz (2020) conducts a multimodal analysis of Steve Bell's political cartoons, illustrating how intertextuality, visual metaphors, and repeated motifs operate rhetorically to effect pointed political and social critique. The study illustrates how visual and semiotic resources convey social commentary, a technique directly linked to skit analysis. While the study employs a strong multimodal approach, it is flawed due to its limited methodological scope, which consists of only twelve cartoons. Based on the studies reviewed, the present analysis highlights a critical gap in the literature: most Nigerian humour research today only looks at one angle, neglecting things like camera shots, sounds, and outfits. This study will make up for it by using a three-part multimodal method. The study, therefore, aims to analyse social commentary and humour in Adigun Alawada's Instagram skits, using multimodal features and humour strategies.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Henri Bergson's study *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900), Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction, and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal discourse constitute the theoretical anchor for the study. Bergson's approach is pertinent to the current study as it highlights how Adigun Alawada deploys humour as a corrective strategy. It institutes a vital nexus between humour and social commentary, the research's primary aim. Norris's approach, on the other hand, is imperative for the study as it captures multimodal cues, including camera angle, sound, lighting, and dressing used in the skits. Additionally, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal discourse, applied using a multimodal social semiotic approach, depicts how meaning arises not from language alone but from the integrated use of diverse modes in the study, complementing Norris's approach.

The primary assumption of Bergson's (1900) approach rests on the notion that laughter serves as a tool of social correction. Bergson's approach remains a relevant theory in the contemporary world despite being propounded at the beginning of the last century. It theorises that humour is not purely for entertainment, noting that it is society's way of handling socially undesirable, rigid, and foolish behaviours. The study contends that laughter is inherently social, requiring a shared cultural context to uphold shared values. Bergson's view is enshrined in the notion that comedy emerges when rigid behaviours are corrected by means of laughter, fostering social norms. Bergson's notion about humour is supported by Morreall (1994), Attardo (1994), and Adetunji (2013), demonstrating that the theory highlights humour's communal function in critiquing power and reinforcing ethics. Critics of the approach argue that it reduces humour to correction, overlooking topics such as pleasure, identity, and resistance. Bergson's emphasis on rigidity as the source of humour does not account for irony and wordplay (Morreall, 2009). Nonetheless, despite the approach's criticisms, the theory is valuable for the current study because Adigun Alawada's skits utilise humour as a corrective device. It provides a pivotal nexus between humour as satire and social commentary, which is the study's integral theme. It also helps unpack how humour strategies, such as misinformation, exaggeration, and deliberate mispronunciation of names, correlate with Bergson's (1900) concept of comedy as the ridicule of rigid behaviours. It also illustrates how humour serves to critique systemic flaws, social absurdities, and comment on daily Nigerian trends.

Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction analysis, the study's second theoretical guide, blends verbal and non-verbal attributes into objects and the immediate environment. The study benefits significantly from multimodal interaction analysis because it enables the exploration of verbal and non-verbal features, including facial expressions, speech, audiovisual elements, gestures, and text overlays employed by Adigun Alawada in his social commentary and humour videos, which comment on Nigerian socio-cultural issues. The theory is an organised technique that examines how

diverse communicative modes, including speech, gaze, gestures, spatial positioning, and digital interfaces, contribute to meaning-making in interactions. It derives its fundamental beliefs from conversation analysis, semiotics, ethnomethodology, and sociocultural perspectives to comprehend how people organise multiple modes of communication.

It is an extension of Kress's (2000) multimodal theory, emphasising that communication extends beyond language. It argues that communication integrates multiple modes such as images, gestures, and spatial design. The belief was grounded in multimodal discourse, which argues that cultural and technological contexts govern meaning-making. It denotes that each mode provides distinct affordances, which impact how messages are organised, interpreted, and comprehended (Kress, 2010). Norris's (2004) multimodal interactional analysis is influenced by conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, particularly in the analysis of embodied interaction, turn-taking, and gaze coordination (Goodwin, 2000).

Bergson's (1900) social corrective theory of humour and Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction analysis complement each other, providing complementary methodologies for this study. Bergson's macro-level methodology analyses humour in terms of social devices for criticising and regulating undesirable behaviour, thereby enabling the research to explicate strategies such as exaggeration, misinformation, and mispronunciation as satirical performances. Norris provides a micro-level account of how these are performed through speech, gesture, facial display, spatial deployment, and audiovisual modality. The convergence of these unites the social functions of humour, theorised by Bergson, with its multimodal performance, explained by Norris.

For multimodal discourse, it enables the study to look at meaning-making as a social practice mediated by culturally available semiotic resources (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). In this view, communication is inherently multimodal; meaning does not come from language alone but from the integrated use of diverse modes (e.g., images, gestures, sounds, spatial arrangements), each with different affordances and cultural histories (Jewitt, 2016). Multimodal discourse directs attention to the ways people select and combine these resources to realise interests, construct identities, and negotiate power within context. This lens is uniquely suited to analysing digital skits, which are intrinsically multimodal performances for social commentary.

The tri-theoretical strategy advances the analysis from content to performance, providing an integrated account of explaining how the humour of Adigun Alawada entertains and satirises Nigerian socio-cultural reality.

#### **4. Methodology**

Seven skits from Adigun Alawada's Instagram page constitute the study's data. The study employs a qualitative research method whereby the data were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling whereby the units to be observed are selected based on the researcher's judgement, which centres on which units will be the most representative or useful (Babbie, 2013). The study deployed a purposive sampling method to obtain representative data that correlates with the study's objectives. The selected data were chosen based on their recency. It collected seven videos from his most recent videos from September to October 2025 to unpack the discursive strategies of humour and social commentary in Adigun Alawada's skits.

The researcher accessed Adigun Alawada's Instagram page. The videos, purposively chosen for the analysis, were obtained on Instagram and subsequently downloaded using Vidmate, a video downloading application. The study utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic

analysis to classify the videos into themes for analysis. The thematic process involves familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The downloaded videos were watched repeatedly to observe their themes for thematic classification. Additionally, the videos whose content is principally in the Yoruba language were meticulously translated into English using the dynamic equivalence translation method.

Six excerpts were taken from the seven videos. The excerpts drawn from the videos were subjected to discursive analysis using the tenets of Henri Bergson's (1900) theory of humour, Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction, and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic. The rationale for the choice of Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* hinges on its ability to explain humour's social corrective function, while Norris's multimodal interaction explains multimodal features and performance strategies. Additionally, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic allows the study to uncover meaning-making as a social practice mediated by culturally available semiotic resources. These theories reveal how Adigun Alawada critiques Nigerian society through visual cues, gestures, camera angles, language, and humour.

## 5. Data Analysis and Discussion

The section presents and discusses the themes discovered in the study. The thematic classifications are Nigerians performing religion for survival, marrying right, maternal credit in success narratives, laziness and work ethics, and advocating for healthy living.

### 5.1. In-group Code Mimicry

Excerpts 1 and 2 present Adigun Alawada's social commentary and humour aimed at disclosing Nigeria's grim economic conditions through Nigerians performing religion to survive.

#### Excerpt 1

È kú ilé Èlẹ̀hàá ó, Alhamdulillah Robilalamin. Wàláhì tó bá jẹ pé o tẹ̀lé mi wàláhì kò bá ju bá yí ló o. Wàláhì, mi ò lọ laming (naming ceremony) àwọn şẹ̀lé (CCC) rí o. Şẹ̀lé ni òrẹ̀ mi tó şe laming omo rẹ̀. Iyìólá Dàmólá. Ó bè mí, ó bè mí, mo ní kò sí wàhàlà, tó bá jẹ naming ti é, a ó wọ church. Èmi incoming Alhaji, seven hours ni wón kó lò nínú church, mo sò fún un pé mo ní usher (ulcer) o. À sé home àti away wà nínú óúnjẹ tí wón dá yẹ̀n. Kán tètè bí imí ì ká tún lọ jẹun.

*Hello, my wife. Alhamdulillah Robilalamin. I swear to God, we would have returned with more food if you had followed me to the party. I swear to God that I have never attended a naming ceremony of Celestial Church of Christ members until today. My friend, whose child's naming ceremony I attended, is a member of the Celestial Church of Christ. He pleaded with me to attend the church service for the naming ceremony, which I obliged to despite the fact that I am a Muslim who will soon become an Alhaji. We spent seven hours in the church; as a result, I informed him that I have an ulcer (in order to collect food). There were varieties of food at the event. I hope that they give birth to another child soon so that we can attend the naming ceremony for the child.*



Figure 1. Adigun Alawada returning from a christening ceremony with a take-away meal (Excerpt 1).

### Excerpt 2

Erínwo yà, Èlèhàá erínwo yà ni àwọn aláwo ma n ló. Àboyè bọ síṣe ni àwọn onífá, Salaam aleikum ni f'omọ Mùsùlúmí. Alelúyà ni fáwọn ṣèlẹ́. Tórí t'èéyàn ó bá lọ party ijọ mî ni o. Alelúyà tí a ké ká tó gba Rice, yó tò ó 700. Tí o bá wà l'ágbo Mùsùlúmí, tí o ò bá le ṣe bisimilah, Salaam aleikum, wón lè má fún ẹ l'óúnjé. Àboyè bọ síṣe kí èkuru le kàn ẹ.

*My wife, the occult greet one another with Erínwo yà. Ifá worshippers use àboyè bọ síṣe, Muslims use Salaam Aleikum, while Celestial Church of Christ members shout hallelujah. I am saying this in case you attend an event in the future. We shouted about 700 hallelujahs before they served us food. If you are in the midst of Muslims and you cannot say Bismillah, Salaam Aleikum, they may not give you food. You must say àboyè bọ síṣe to receive èkuru.*



**Figure 2.** Adigun Alawada demonstrating in-group greeting codes at ceremonies (Excerpt 2).

Excerpts 1 and 2 capture Adigun Alawada's commentary on Nigeria's economic constraints. The commentary reveals the measures some Nigerians take to survive in response to the harsh economic conditions. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports in August 2025 that inflation, particularly on food items and essential goods, remains high in Nigeria. Adigun Alawada, therefore, humorously comments on one of the coping mechanisms adopted by Nigerians in the face of the grim economic woe. He demonstrates in the excerpts that some Nigerians gate-crash ceremonies in order to receive free meals in take-away containers for themselves and their families. In Excerpt 1, he enters the dining room with a pink polythene bag, which contains a plastic container with jollof rice and a carbonated drink. He wears a native long robe, a black hat, and a sunshade depicting a person who has just arrived from an event. This excerpt demonstrates how the subject interacts with his wife after a successful outing at the christening ceremony of his friend's child. Adigun Alawada comically reveals that if his wife, whom he refers to as *Ẹlẹhàá*, had accompanied him to the event, they would have gotten more food. An *Ẹlẹhàá* is a Muslim woman who wears a *Niqab*, an apparel that covers the entire body and leaves only the eyes visible. It is worn by women in the Islamic faith as a sign of modesty, cultural tradition, and personal conviction.

Concerning Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic, the preceding analysis indicates a sophisticated semiotic orchestration in which multiple signs intersect to make a statement on economic hardship. The pink polythene bag is used here not just as a prop but as a culturally influential signifier; almost immediately within the Nigerian context, it signifies the informal economy, "packaging culture," and successful acquisition of resources. The bright colour against the domestic backdrop makes it visually salient, and its material affordance as a transport container makes it an efficient sign of resourcefulness.

The excerpt further illustrates that Adigun Alawada performed a religious act in order to obtain food at the event, as he disclosed that he attended the christening ceremony in response to his friend's plea. He states that he has never attended a christening ceremony of members of the Celestial Church of Christ (CCC), as he will soon become an Alhaji. The CCC is a Nigerian church renowned for its members wearing white robes, a tradition that also includes not wearing shoes inside the church. The line of thought presented above depicts that the subject avoids Christian religious gatherings due to his faith. Nonetheless, due to Nigeria's socio-economic hardship, he makes an exception. He attends the ceremony because of the free food, which he collects and takes an extra plate home. He ends Excerpt 1 with a humorous prayer that the couple should have another child soon, so they can attend the christening ceremony, hopefully with his wife, to receive the free food that will be offered.

In Excerpt 2, the subject has pulled off the native long gown. He is wearing a white singlet and a black hat. The excerpt highlights Adigun Alawada's commentary on performing religion for survival by demonstrating that there are some in-group expressions that a gate-crasher at a ceremony must know in order to receive free food. He informs his wife, *Ẹlẹhàá*, that in a ceremony hosted by traditional worshippers, expressions such as *Erínwo yà* and *àbọyè bọ síṣe*—the in-group greetings of Yoruba traditional worshippers—must be used in greeting attendees in order to blend into the event. He notes further that *Salaam alaikum*, the Arabic expression for "peace be unto you," used in greetings in Islam, must be used in Muslim ceremonies, while *Hallelujah*, a Hebrew word meaning "praise the Lord," must be used in Christian gatherings. He also demonstrates that if a party gate-crasher fails to use the in-group greeting code in Yoruba traditional religion, such an individual may not be served *ẹkuru*, a Yoruba meal served at festivals, cultural gatherings, and personal spiritual offerings. The comical monologue depicts the grim economic condition of Nigeria, whereby hosts

do not serve out-group members food at their events because the food is presumably insufficient, necessitating gate-crashers to blend in using in-group codes.

The idea in this excerpt is reinforced for the audience through inter-semiotic reinforcement with Alawada's dress, following Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic. The native long robe, agbada, and the hat are sartorial signs indicating the wearer's attendance at a formal ceremony, thus creating the visible syntax of respectability. The semiotic dissonance created by the respectful dress being juxtaposed with the meaning of gate-crashing for food provides the basis for the humour.

Building on existing studies on humour as a social commentary tool, the study aligns with Obialo (2021), which demonstrates that Nigerians employ humour as a coping mechanism to overcome economic hardship. Henri Bergson's (1900) approach aligns with this, portraying how Adigun Alawada's humorous skits mirror Nigerian society, enabling people to cope with hardship while criticising Nigeria's economy. Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction analysis brings the settings of the excerpts into the spotlight.

## 5.2. Culinary Semiotics of Marital Worth

Adigun Alawada comments on the significance of marrying the right partner in the excerpt. He comically anchors the commentary on marital bliss, such as delicious meals, as marital worth.

### Excerpt 3

*He starts weeping after seeing sweet potato pottage on the table.*

Èlèhàá, kí n mo ẹ gan tí mo fi deserving rẹ? Kí n mo ẹ gan? Ẹ iwà mi ló dá a t'Ọlórún fi yò ọ dà rẹ fún mi? N tí mo fi lálàá sùn lo tún gbé wá. A! x8. Ẹ ní bá sì yàn ò mà r'áyé wá. Ó yé kí ẹ ní bá sì yàn ó lọ p'okùn sọ ni o. Kí ni mo ẹ tí mo fi deserving iyàwó mi o? Àsàró, sweet pòrerò, sweet pòrerò. Ó tún ní pònmo pomz.

*My wife, what did I do to deserve you? What did I do exactly? Did God reward me for my good behaviour? You have given me what I dreamt about. A! x8. Anyone who marries wrongly has failed; such a person should commit suicide. What did I do to deserve my wife? Sweet potato pottage, sweet potato pottage with pònmo.*



**Figure 3.** Adigun Alawada reacting with feigned tears upon seeing sweet potato pottage (Excerpt 3).

This excerpt unpacks Adigun Alawada's social commentary on the significance of marrying the right partner. Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction analysis illustrates the multimodal features in the skit, such as the dining table setting, Adigun Alawada's dressing, and the meal in depicting the skit's integral theme. The skit is set at a dining table where the subject of the study arrives with his food already placed on the table. He arrives at the dining table while brushing his hair with a hairbrush, wearing a white singlet, indicating that he has just finished having his bath and is getting ready to go out. The skit showcases that he opens the food and finds that he has been served sweet potato pottage, a food he has been craving. Therefore, he feigns tears, calling and asking his wife, Èlèhàà, why he deserves her. He asks a rhetorical question about whether he is being rewarded by God for his good behaviour. He premises his argument on the notion that good partners are God's rewards for good behaviour.

He further continues the monologue, revealing that his wife served him the food he craved in his dream. For comic effect, he shouts "A!" eight times to exaggerate for comic purposes in order to underline the significance of being married to the right partner. In the course of the monologue, he states that anyone who marries wrongly should commit suicide. This assertion is not meant to be taken literally. It serves a figurative meaning, demonstrating that anyone who fails to marry right endures the union rather than enjoys it, a plight that frustrates such a person. He continues by comically shouting sweet potato, although he erroneously pronounces it as sweet pòrerò. This exaggeration and deliberate mispronunciation by Adigun Alawada illustrate Henri Bergson's notion in his 1900 theory, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, that humour arises from repetitive and mechanical human behaviour used to entertain and critique cultural standards. He also comically remarks that the food has pònmo. Pònmo is the Yoruba word for a Nigerian delicacy made from cow skin. It is boiled, cleaned, and cooked for consumption. It is served with a variety of Nigerian meals and is particularly loved by the Yoruba people, to whom Adigun Alawada belongs. He, therefore, comically reveals his love for pònmo with the remark, demonstrating that his wife served him his craving alongside a delicacy he cherishes. His wife's culinary skills suggest that marriage can be a blissful experience, where people, particularly Nigerians who culturally place importance on marriage, must choose the right partner to enjoy its benefits, predominantly sumptuous meals.

Following Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic, the skit introduces a semiotic equation which signifies marital satisfaction via culinary signs. "Sweet potato pottage" is thus a complex signifier for domestic nurture and marital worth. Alawada's embodied semiotics, such as his feigned tears, rapt facial expressions, or rhythmic repetition of "sweet pòrerò," heighten the significance of the culinary sign through modal intensity. Also, using semiotic transformation, "Pòrerò," being the deliberate mispronunciation of "potato," is an example of phonetic resignification—a ludic manipulation of semiotic signs, a performance rather than a literal description.

### 5.3. Phonetic Punning and Gendered Critique

Adigun Alawada discusses the societal phenomenon whereby children, particularly those of the male gender, credit their success to their mothers at the expense of their fathers through phonetic punning.

#### Excerpt 4

Á dà á dà ilé ayé, Ọlórún má jẹ kí á ẹ̀ ẹ̀ àgbákò ikú. Ẹ̀ ọ̀mọ ọ̀kúnrin tí ẹ̀ wá ẹ̀ Ọlórún ní? Ẹ̀ ọ̀mọ ọ̀kúnrin ò tí ẹ̀ r'áyé wá ní? Ẹ̀wo kí ní Balon d'Or yẹn tí yamine yàmàlà (Lamine Yamal) àti Dembele, ìyá rẹ̀ ní sà ñ pariwo. T'ọ̀kúnrin bá dàgbà tán, t'òbìnrin bá dàgbà tán, ọ̀kọ àti ìyàwó, ìyàwó ní yó sẹ̀sẹ̀ má a k'ọ̀mọ pé kó ẹ̀ fún bàbá rẹ̀. Bàbá sì ñ jiyà lójóójúmọ̀. Bàbá is a suffer every day. What is a benefit of a marriage for a man now?

*I pray that we do not lose our lives in our pursuit of success. What is the offence of the male gender against God? Is the male gender inconsequential? The Ballon d'Or tussle between Lamine Yamal and Ousmane Dembélé: Dembélé kept on talking about his mother. When the male and female children come of age, it is the wife of the male child who will remind him to provide for his father, despite the fact that the father suffered daily for the child. The father suffers daily. What, then, is the benefit of marriage for a man?*



**Figure 4.** Adigun Alawada removing his hat in frustration while commenting on fathers going unrecognised (Excerpt 4).

Adigun Alawada comments on the social phenomenon of children, particularly those of the male gender, attributing their success to their mothers. What seems like a Nigerian phenomenon astonishes the study's subject after the current male Ballon d'Or winner (an award organised by France Football in recognition of the best male and female players in the world), Ousmane Dembélé, a French footballer, praised his mother repeatedly after being declared the winner of the prestigious award, while failing to mention his father. Adigun Alawada, being a man, questions the social phenomenon, commenting that fathers often go unrecognised despite making sacrifices for their children, sacrifices that involve working hard to provide for the family's needs. He passes the commentary in his typical fashion, sitting on a chair in the dining area of his house while eating rice and beans with meat. He wears a white polo shirt and a black hat. At a point, to show his frustration at the unfair treatment of men, he angrily removes his hat. Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction analysis enables the study to bring the skit's settings to the forefront of the analysis.

For comic purposes, the subject refers to Barcelona Football Club and Spain national football star Lamine Yamal, the runner-up at the Ballon d'Or 2025 ceremony, as Yamine Yàmàlà. The deliberate mispronunciation of the star's surname, Yamal, is linked to the popular Yoruba food Àmàlà. Àmàlà is a swallow meal made from either yam or cassava flour. It is a subtle phonetic pun whereby he plays on the pronunciation of Yamal and Àmàlà to engage his viewers for comic purposes and bolster

the skit's acceptability. Adigun Alawada's effort to humorously engage his viewers connects with Henri Bergson's (1900) theory of laughter. The mispronunciation of Yamal as Yàmàlà illustrates Bergson's theory, utilising the concept of linguistic incongruity and social and cultural resonance, as the mispronunciation resonates with Yoruba speakers. He playfully contrasts global celebrity with local culture to bolster communal identity and enhance shared amusement. Additionally, Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic is demonstrated in the excerpt. The angry removal of the hat is a significant gestural sign that marks a moment of frustration, reaching a peak in modal density and emphasising the seriousness behind the joke. It also includes linguistic semiotics, demonstrated through code-mixing: "Bàbá is a suffer every day" marks semiotic border-crossing, integrating the English code inside the Yoruba code. Furthermore, it involves phonetic semiotics whereby Lamine Yamal is pronounced as Yamine Yàmàlà, providing native intertextuality and interdiscursivity to the text through intertextual semiotic play between the global soccer player and the native 'àmàlà' delicacy.

The findings also connect with Filani (2015), who asserts that Nigerian stand-up comedians use pun as a humour tactic to engage audiences and comment on socio-cultural issues.

#### 5.4. Semiotic Dissonance of Labour

The World Bank notes that Nigeria accounts for 15% of the poorest people in the world; it also denotes that Nigeria's economic growth has declined from 2015 to 2023 (Adigun, 2025). Despite the grim economic situation, Adigun Alawada comments on laziness among certain Nigerians, demonstrating that some are poor by choice, failing to make efforts to lift themselves out of poverty.

##### Excerpt 5

Èmi ò fẹ̀ iṣẹ̀ se. Àwọn iṣẹ̀ fàájì yẹn ló má n wù mí ṣe láyè èmi. Kí n má a tẹ̀lè àwọn olórin. Kí n má a lu drum shet (drum set). Kí n má a lu gbogbo kíní yẹn. Iṣẹ̀ fàájì èyàn ó ma mu ọ́tí láti áárò tíí d'alẹ̀ ní.

*I do not want to work. I love stress-free work, such as being a crew member for musicians. I also love being a drummer. With stress-free work, I can drink alcoholic beverages from morning till evening.*



**Figure 5.** Adigun Alawada describing his preference for stress-free work while eating èkó with vegetable soup (Excerpt 5).

The excerpt presents Adigun Alawada in one of his monologues with his wife, Èlèhàá, as he informs her of his dream work. The monologue mimics the several excuses men who are unwilling to work give in defence of their joblessness. He comically notes that he detests stress-filled occupations, asserting that he prefers to be a crew member for musicians as a drummer. At first glance, one would surmise that he is comically advocating for hard work, given that being a drummer is hard work. However, upon closer examination, he bases the thought on the notion that traditional musicians with such a cast and crew do not perform regularly. He, therefore, taps into the cultural expectation of the Yoruba people that musicians are beggars who seldom have occasions to perform. He further demonstrates, though comically, that working as a drummer for a musician sets him up for drinking alcoholic beverages throughout the day, enjoying himself without going through stress. His position correlates with Henri Bergson's view, in which humour in the skit serves as a subtle social corrective tool, targeting rigidity to enforce social norms.

Using multimodal interaction analysis, he is seen wearing a light brown polo shirt while eating èkó (a Nigerian food made from corn) with vegetable soup, meat, and pòmó (see Excerpt 3). The Norris (2004) approach demonstrates how Adigun Alawada conceptualises a lazy man's lifestyle, showcasing that he would rather sit and eat without working for his sustenance.

For Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic, this is displayed in the excerpt through semiotics of contradiction. Alawada's posture (relaxed and eating) and facial expression (content) while talking about a physically demanding activity (drumming) result in a multimodal dissonance, which is a contradiction. Furthermore, cultural semiotics is discussed in the excerpt: the narrative about the life of a musician engages with cultural semiotics related to musicians, illustrating how some occupations are semiotically coded as less "work" when physical labour is involved.

Additionally, the excerpt's analysis ridiculing laziness relates to Adetunji (2013), who contends that beyond humour and entertainment, Nigerian stand-up comedians use it to unmask laziness, gender roles, and corruption.

### 5.5. Overdetermined Signification of Rice

Adigun Alawada advocates healthy living by choosing a balanced diet rather than repeating meals high in carbohydrates, such as rice, Nigeria's staple food, which can negatively impact one's health.

#### Excerpt 6

È má sọ ọkankàn, ẹ má sọ ọkankàn sẹ è. È má sọ ọkankàn. Ráísì (rice) la jẹ lánàá. Òhun la jẹ ní íjẹta. Nígba mo complain lánàá, n ò jẹun ọsán, kó dà n tún ún jẹun alẹ. Àsáró, porrage (pottage) òun ló n wù mi jẹ. Oun tó bá wù wón ni wón n ẹ. Nígba tí kò s'ówó.

*Do not say anything; we have been eating rice for the past two days. After I complained yesterday, my wife did not give me food in the afternoon or at night. I am craving pottage. My wife serves me whatever pleases her because I do not have much money.*

#### Excerpt 7

I'm see it coming. I thought as much. Rice, rice, rice. Wàláhì tí ọkankàn bá fi le se mí l'ágò ọ ara, wàláhì rice ló fà á. Kílódé Èlèhàá? Rice, rice, rice. Rice àti vegetables, kílódé? If you wanna eat, rice, rice, rice. If you don't have anything to eat, rice, rice, rice. Sẹ eléyì wá jẹ balanced diet ni? Carbohydrate ti pòjù now.

*I anticipated it, I thought as much. We always eat rice. I swear to God, if I fall sick, it is because of rice. Èlèhàá, why? We always eat rice. Why rice and vegetables? Whether I have an appetite or not, you give me rice. Is this a balanced diet? We eat too many carbohydrates.*



**Figure 6.** Adigun Alawada discovering rice on his plate after complaining about overconsumption (Excerpt 6).



**Figure 7.** Adigun Alawada expressing frustration at being served rice repeatedly (Excerpt 7).

Nigerians are at risk of diabetes and other diseases related to heavy intake of high-carbohydrate meals and lack of physical exercise (Adeloye et al., 2022; Olatona et al., 2018). Adigun Alawada touches on healthy living in Excerpts 6 and 7. He situates the commentary on Nigeria's staple food, rice. Nigeria is one of the world's largest consumers of rice and the continent's highest consumer. In Excerpt 6, he presents the case of the average Nigerian home, noting that he has been eating rice for two days. He comically demonstrates that this is a sequel to his complaint about the incessant eating of rice the previous day, as his wife failed to give him lunch and dinner. This is presumably because there was no alternative to rice in the house. He continues with the monologue, demonstrating that

he craves pottage, but his wife has failed to prepare it because he failed to purchase sweet potatoes, a key ingredient in preparing pottage. He comically notes in the skit, using Norris's multimodal interaction analysis, the face of a helpless man being fed what he detests due to financial incapacity. This aligns with Henri Bergson's (1900) perspective, as it employs humour through exaggeration and ungrammatical sentences to comment on societal rigidity in the Nigerian context, specifically in relation to rice being a staple food. The study extends beyond entertainment to comment on the urgent need to reflect on the adverse effects that overdependence on rice has on Nigerians' health.

Excerpt 7 demonstrates how Adigun Alawada continues to comment on the dangers of having rice as a staple Nigerian food. He comically constructs an ungrammatical English sentence, which is supposed to be "I saw it coming," as "I'm see it coming." The ungrammatical statement evokes humour using Bergson's (1900) view on humour and society. Nevertheless, the humour in the skit unlocks a societal critique, showcasing that having rice as a staple food, irrespective of its combination with vegetables, constitutes a meal without a balanced diet. He also notes that its continuous consumption can lead to illness. Norris's (2004) multimodal interaction analysis reveals the skit's setting, in which he wears a white t-shirt at the dining table. He opens the plate to discover that he has been served rice again. Also, the approach discloses his state of mind, capturing his angry facial expression. However, the anger does not deter him from consuming the food after complaining about how unhealthy it is. The action unlocks the humour in the skit, noting that Nigerians consume rice despite its unhealthy side effects because they lack alternatives.

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic is demonstrated in the excerpts. Through these skits, 'rice' is made to be an 'overdetermined signifier' that signifies 'food', 'tedium', 'economic conditions', as well as 'health', 'illness', or 'disease'. Furthermore, linguistic semiotics is presented in the excerpt through the ungrammatical 'I'm see it coming', an example of deliberate 'breaking' in semiotics, with a considerable deviation from Standard English to imply frustration and resignation.

Also, facial semiotics is displayed through the resigned expression; the unwrapping of the package to expose rice again produces another visual punchline—the confirmation of the expected semiotic message (rice) produces the comedic effect. Using Kress and van Leeuwen's (2001) multimodal social semiotic, Adigun Alawada projects cultural semiotics in the excerpt, providing the semiotics of Nigerian food culture in that rice is so emblematic of "food" that other offerings are rendered marginal.

## **6. Findings**

This study has conducted a social semiotic analysis of humour and social commentary in Adigun Alawada's Instagram skits, demonstrating that these skits employ sophisticated semiotic practices. This observation demonstrates that humour in these skits is composed of sophisticated semiotic practices, such as the way mundane things, like a simple polythene bag, are semiotically signified as symbols of economic hustle, among others. Furthermore, humour in these skits arises from semiotically arranging oppositions within culturally coded signs to produce meaning.

To do justice to this complexity, the present study relied on an integrative theoretical framework. Multimodal discourse provided the background theory for the construction of meaning from a social perspective. Multimodal discourse analysis provided the toolbox for analysing the intersection among the visual, linguistic, and audio modalities. Theories of humour provided the background for interpreting humour's hidden mechanisms. This integrative theoretical approach has enabled the production of results that shed significant light on contemporary research. In this research, the

present study demonstrates how Instagram's online environment has become a productive space for novel forms of semiotic creation. Moreover, this research shows how the mundane semiotics of life—that is, the meanings embedded in food, clothing, and other everyday items—are strategically deployed to produce sophisticated sociocultural commentary.

## 7. Conclusion

The study investigated social commentary and humour in selected skits of Adigun Alawada on Instagram. The study is grounded in the notion that, while numerous studies in the Nigerian context have explored social commentary and humour, such as Adetunji (2013), Filani (2015), Akande, Adedeji, and Robbin (2019), Mark (2024), and Olayemi and Avoaja (2024), these studies demonstrate that comedians deploy Naija (Nigerian Pidgin), code-switching, multimodal cues, and discourse strategies in stand-up and skit comedy. These methods were employed for social commentary, highlighting corruption, inequality, gender roles, and hypocrisy. The current study, based on the paucity of research on social commentary and humour that captures multimodal features, explored humour and social commentary in selected skits by Adigun Alawada on Instagram. The study's findings demonstrate five principal thematic classifications in Adigun Alawada's skits, including in-group code mimicry, culinary semiotics of marital worth, phonetic punning and gendered critique, semiotic dissonance of labour, and overdetermined signification of rice.

These themes, as demonstrated in the study, reflect the socio-economic and socio-cultural realities of Nigeria. They highlight issues such as economic hardship, social resilience, and shifting family dynamics. The study further demonstrates that Adigun Alawada comments on social issues using humour strategies, such as deliberate mispronunciation of words, deliberate ungrammatical expressions, and exaggeration, to communicate his commentary effectively and bolster audience engagement. It therefore recommends that further studies on other humourists using multimodal methods to deepen understanding of social commentary and humour in online discourse should be conducted. The current study also proposes that future research using this semiotic-pragmatic framework be conducted on the output of other online humour writers across different cultural milieus. This would go a long way towards providing a more thorough cartography of the semiotics of social critique in the age of social media. It would be fascinating to see how different cultural milieus shape the very semiotic resources available for humour writing in the first place, and how different online milieus have their own semiotic practices.

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