



## HOW SOYINKA STYLISES SATIRIC HUMOUR IN *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA*

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### **Abstract:**

The paper investigates how Wole Soyinka builds his satire on the foundations of extreme humour, pun and self-deprecation in *Alápatà Àpáta*. Using the theory of incongruity, purposively selected excerpts from the play are subjected to analysis which reveals a style that creatively weaves language together using tools that produce humour in the repudiation of societal ills. Components of incongruity like pun, zeugma, register switch, irony and ironical echo all combine at different linguistic levels to evolve a style that is at once entrenched in comedy and at the same time validates Soyinka's celebrated status in dramatic discourse. The paper concludes that further studies should be done on the importance of humour in the expansion of the frontiers of stylistics as a branch of linguistics study.

**Keywords:** humour, stylistics, incongruity, style, Soyinka

### **1. Introduction**

Scholarly interest in the language of literature led to stylistics as a discipline. Ever since the Classical period, the concept of Rhetoric and the spoken art have been subjects of much curiosity and debate among aesthetic enthusiasts of different ages, (Missikova, 2003). The synoptic categorisation of elements of rhetoric into elocution etc was the hallmark of that initial intellectual engagement with a literary language. This was followed by the contributions of

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Formalist scholars who sought to 'separate' the language of literature from everyday language. Their aim was to isolate the properties of literary language from the conventional one and establish a pattern of style or discourse that is at once literary and at the same time recognisable. This was the beginning of the argument that says that literary language consists of instances where writers defamiliarise the familiar as far as language use is concerned, (Jeffries and McIntyre, 2010). The aim, it was argued, was to use the unusual patterning of language (that is style) to attract the attention of the reader. The view of style as deviation best supports this reasoning, in that readers are often arrested by unique or unconventional words, tropes and compositions. These earlier efforts were corroborated by Structuralists of the Prague School fame who described style within the context of the relationship between content and form.

In all these, however, it is agreed that individual (literary) style exists and that it is remarkable in every linguistic output. Indeed, the linguist Neil Enkvist (1964:12) seminally lays out the study of style from various perspectives thus:

*"style as a shell surrounding pre-existing core of thought; a choice between alternative expression; a set of individual characteristics; a deviation from the norm; a set of collective characteristics; and those relations among linguistic entities that are divisible in terms of wider spans of text than the sentence."*

From the foregoing, it becomes apparent that the concept of style is best situated within a particular precinct of study when engaged in any discourse. This is why the studies of style as choice and as personality have been deemed most suitable for the present study. Stylistic choices are made owing to a variety of reasons. It could range from context, authorial experience, and genre to mood. All these variables determine in what form the text eventually comes out. Again, the personality of the author is reflected in the choices made and the pattern of textual presentation. Therefore, the perspectives of choice and personality are most relevant to the treatise of Soyinka's *Alápatà Àpáta* and how the celebrated writer has used humour as a stylistic tool to achieve the lasting aesthetic effect on the reader.

Stylistics, basically, studies the layers of authorial input in the intersections between textual compositions and the linguistic resources that bring them about. Language users invariably demonstrate their competence and freedom in determining the best lexical items and structures that most suitably carry their sociolinguistic cum artistic intents in particular situations. When we use language, there are options in the vocabulary from which choices are made. These choices constitute the style of that particular linguistic encounter. If they become recurring, habitual or patterned, then a well-established linguistic or literary style would have emerged.

The relationship between stylistics and verbal humour, according to Simpson and Bousfield (2017: 2), lays in the scientific nature of the discipline as a branch of linguistics that accounts for the interpretation of texts through the paradigms of empiricism which can be reproduced, many times and by different practitioners, given the same tools and procedures. In other words, it is not just enough to assume, intuitively or impressionistically, that a novel or play is funny without subjecting the text to methodical scrutiny which inadvertently reveals that 'interpretation' is arrived at, *"on account of linguistic features... and explain why, for the analyst,*

*certain types of humour are possible.*" The argument here is that beyond the residual knowledge and understanding of a specific genre or sub-genre of literature (say comedy, for example) as being humorous, such submissions would serve more academic purposes and intellectual robustness when based on more open, scientific and replicable grounds.

## 2. Stylistics and Humour

Perhaps a definition of the subject matter of this paper, at this point, should suffice. Humour, according to Attardo (1994:4) is described as "*covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny.*" By this, we may refer to humour as art used primarily for entertainment purposes and the mollification of tense situations. Ross (1990: 1) also views the subject as "*something that makes a person laugh or smile*". However, in this particular context, the stylistic relevance of textual humour is paramount. This is where Bally's (1921: 15) description of humour as "*an aesthetic phenomenon*" becomes important. Embedded in every art is an aspect that should ordinarily resonate with human experience and engender a convivial, rather enchanting/delightful ambience. Through humour, people should be able to see human follies and foibles in hilarious ways that can serve as good avenues for the appraisal and critique of such imperfections.

Examples abound of texts that linger on the mind as a result of their humorous content as well as the way and manner of expressing it. This lends credence to the argument of Simpson and Bousfield (Ibid) that such merit stylistic enquiry using any relevant theory. This is premised on the idea that such an enquiry will bring out the underlying meanings of such texts through the methodical investigation of linguistic elements that convey verbal humour in literature. Again, Bally talks of the "*affective effect*" of words that carry a more emotional package in meaning than the "*subjective*" or literal effect of the same. The following examples as given and quoted in Attardo (1994: 232) aptly illustrate this distinction:

- 1) A ten year old girl died;
- 2) A little girl passed away.

In the second example, the use of the descriptive adjective 'little' and the words 'passed away', respectively, replace and emotionally connect the text with the experience of such grief in a way which the first sentence, as expressive as it is, does not.' It is such impact that one feels when texts are properly felt and interpreted by readers that demand such scholarly investigation into their compositions and linguistic make-up.

## 3. Wole Soyinka's Satiric Humour

Although a satirist was once accused of using cultic language and absorbed with revolutionary thought, it would take an undiscerning reader and un-conscientious critic not to have noticed the humorous tropes, characters and plots in many a Wole Soyinka play. A lot of memorable characters in his plays over time have assumed literary immortality by the sheer essence of their hilarious roles in the celebrated thespian's dramatic pieces. This is corroborated by Olusegun (2018: 119) who views humour in Soyinka's art as manifesting "*in situations, characters, language, or a combination of these factors to varying degrees*". These much are reflected in Jero, Chume and

Amope in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (where Soyinka satirises the monetisation of religion and the dubious nature of most clerics), Baroka, Sidi and Lakunle in *The Lion and The Jewel* (whose theme of conflict between the old and modern orders of cultural evolution in Africa still resonates today) and Kamini, Gunema and Kasco in *A Play of Giants* (wherein Soyinka depicts known African despots as nothing but pseudo-democrats engaged in both political and intellectual buffoonery) respectively.

In all these, however, the potency of Soyinka's revolutionary message cannot be submerged by his humorous presentation. Indeed, in the African creative scene, according to Obadare (2009: 248-249), humorous anecdotes and jokes serve as veritable weapons of social awareness and mass resistance, especially in areas of governmental and institutional incompetence. Although told and written with a view to satirising societal ills in an amusing manner, comedic arts may serve as a springboard for the eventual overturn of an existing order in any given society. This is the form in which Soyinka's literary trajectory could be situated- a writer who uses relatable plots, characters and humour to critique societal ills with a view to stirring up the humanity in his readers.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

Quite a number of theories would have sufficed in the attempt to situate the use of humour as a stylistic tool in Soyinka's *Alápatà Àpáta*. Among these are superiority and relief theories which tend to harp their essence on semiotic variables. However, the incongruity theory is deemed appropriate for this present study as it is "based on the mismatch between two ideas in the broadest possible sense", (Attardo 1994: 48). By this, we mean that this theory recognises unusual responses to two equally unusual ideas, tropes and linguistic structures that have been put together to violate expected collocations in the aforementioned instances. This, according to theorists, automatically generates humour as people find amusing curiosity and pleasure in unexpected incongruity.

The reasoning above is better captured in the definition given by McGhee's (1979: 6-7):

*"The notion of congruity and incongruity refer to the relationships between components of an object, event, idea, social expectation, and so forth. When the arrangement of the constituent elements of an event is incompatible with the normal or expected pattern, the event is perceived as incongruous."*

Essentially thus, metaphors, puns, witticism, misplaced registerial terms and all other unexpected lexical occurrences are all elements of incongruity. The shock effect of such unfamiliar pairings and realisations should not, however, be confused with stylistic deviation which simply refers to the "subversion of writing conventions at all strata of linguistic realisation" (Bamigboye; 2016: 31) and is equally labelled as "concomitant with deautomatisation" by Ayeomoni (2012:102). On the other hand, the theory of incongruity concerns itself with "a pattern of language or any situation where there is a mismatch between what is asserted and what is meant", (Simpson and Bousfield; 2017: 2).

Going forward, the incongruity theory shall be used in analysing *Alápatà Àpáta* to showcase how Soyinka has been able to cultivate an endearing story-telling style premised on stylo-dramatic humour.

## 5. Methodology

A selection of relevant data purposively chosen from the text shall be subjected to theoretical hermeneutics based on incongruity theory. Specifically, we shall employ the incongruity model of Simpson and Bousfield (2017) who used the parameters of pun (where an element of linguistic construction concurrently coalesces two disparate meanings), *Zeugma* (a rhetorical tool wherein a single leading verb connects two nominal entities: one stating a noble ideal and the other a rather absurd one), register-switch (where characters torpedo expectations concerning the suitability of certain registers in context), irony (which is domiciled in the interaction between what is said and what is actually meant) and ironic-echo (which is where a text becomes part of a new discourse context so it no longer has the interpretative status it once had in its original context of use) to analyse the text.

## 6. Data Analysis

- a. **Pun:** there are a number of instances in the play where punning occurs in comical ways. We shall present and elaborate on some of these instances.
  - i. Prospector: *"Right now he knows nothing. By the time he knows that we know, that we've always known, and we continue to know before he knows, he will know it's not about what you know but who you know, how you know and when you know... Sooner or later he will have to choose between those who are in the know and those who think they know..."* (10)

The word 'know' is punned in this extract involving a prospector and a potential investor in a bogus solid mineral deal. The deliberate repetition of the word becomes significantly funny especially when understood against the backdrop of the businessman's ignorance that he is about to be swindled of his hard-earned money.

- ii. 2<sup>nd</sup>Woman: *"He could produce slices anyway you wanted...see-through slices, so thin you could see through it, like glass..."*  
1<sup>st</sup>Woman: *"(Grimaces) See-through slices? I place that kind of meat before my husband and he'll see me through the marital door, bag baggage."* (31-32)

This exchange's unexpected turn comically changes the perception of the understanding of slices of meat which are delicately cut to that of a husband sending his wife packing owing to perceived culinary tackiness. The words 'see-through' thus provide a comical stylistic shift which is occasioned by a pun.

- iii. Teacher: *we can all bear witness daily witness to you working assiduously, industriously, methodically and conscientiously at doing...?*  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Thinking..."  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Producing..."  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Initiating"  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Contemplating"  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Enabling"  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Formulating"  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Formulating"  
Àlàbá: "Nothing"  
Teacher: "Proving yourself capable, summatively of..."  
Àlàbá: "Nothing. Nothing. Nothing." (38-39)

Typical of Soyinka, he engages his audience on the unprofitability of appropriating national resources to political office holders who just sit idle and do nothing despite the humongous monies allocated to them. The unusual deployment of 'Nothing' as ready conclusions to *Teacher's* statements brings to a comical length the satiric implications of this particular dialogue.

- iv. Àlàbá: "All this akisis, and akiset, is simply asking for akisident. No wonder the whole world is all asikiwu." (70)

Axis, accent, accident and askew are all humorously punned in this extract. The author's slapstick revolves around a world where ordinary misplacement of accents can set off a chain of accidents which inadvertently torpedoes a skewed world off its axis. The deliberate use of this particular pun tells the author's frustrations about the feeble and somewhat disastrous effect of attempts by the puritan to correct the ills of the world that is naturally lopsided. From attempting to straighten the atlas globe in his principal's office which was bent, to the innocuous misplacement of tonal marls on *Alápata*, genuine existentialist questions are asked on how to navigate an uneven world.

- v. Dàaniḡḡḡḡḡḡ: "By your own fetish you shall perish. I will make your knuckles buckle, turn your belly to jelly, make meat-pies of your eyes, turn your liver to sùyà, drain out your brain, make kindling of your kidney, your heart will fart, your lung turns to dung, your spine is already mine, your bone marrow sucked hollow..." (143)

Here, Soyinka succeeds in using the vocabulary of an abattoir to surmise, rather jocularly, the defenestration process of the state and its citizens by the corrupt political class. The rhythmic punning of animal anatomy and the different phases of its consumption by a rapacious and greedy society is metaphorised by the Governor, *Dàaniḡlẹ̀bọ's* will to dispossess the butcher of the rumoured resources hidden under/on the rock.

**b. Zeugma:** Statements that comically carry two different ideas in weight and value but expressed by one verb are aesthetically referred to as zeugmas. Examples of such in Soyinka's *Alápatà Àpáta* are:

- i. Pastor: *"He says he's retired but we know the truth- he retired from the butchering of flesh to that of souls."* (6)

The incongruous decision of the protagonist *Àlàbá* to sit all day on a rock is described in an equally incongruent fashion by the cleric. He tries to portray the butcher as someone who has degenerated from a rather noble cause to that of perdition. The unexpected appendage at the latter part of the sentence is certain to elicit laughter from the average audience or reader.

- ii. Prospector: *"Settle him you mean? That's the expression we use here. Don't worry, its either we settle him or (we settle) his arse. He has only two choices."* (10)

According to the land prospector in the excerpt above, his team and the potential buyers of the land harbouring the bogus *Tinanuranium X* will either appease the custodian *Àlàbá* into vacating the premises or remove him. In the second sentence of the data above, the jocular dimension of the butcher as an affront to the successful execution of 'a billion dollar project' is not lost on the reader.

- iii. *Àlàbá: "I hate to see people in trouble, even half-and-half people like children."* (77)

One theme that runs through the play is the protagonist's penchant to see and measure human beings through the objects of his trade: animals. In this particular instance, the seriousness of *Àlàbá's* sincere care for the welfare of others is comically doused by the reference to children as a dairy product in the second part of the sentence.

- iv. Friend: *"Watch your mouth, mister man."*  
Teacher: *"Mind your beans and beads and I my p's and q's."* (105)

The incongruous manner of presenting this particular zeugma tells of the author's penchant for the strange artistic effect in text. Soyinka reverses the usual appearance of this aesthetic tool in *Teacher's* reaction to the semi-literate trader and her friend who choose to denigrate his art. Therefore, the light-hearted part introduces the sentence while the more one ends it. The stylistic effect of such is significant in terms of the humour it conveys.

- v. Dàaníḗḗḗḗḗḗ: *“Like you, he pretends to be retired, but he keeps changing from military to civilian and back to military, to monetary and bribery and chicanery.”* (135-136)

The political trajectory of a character in the play (*General*) is described at a pace that shows its shady descent into the abyss. The fluidity with which *General* changes from military to civilian attributes depending on what is at stake with regards to personal gains eventually accentuates his plunge into massive corruption and sophistry.

- c. **Register Switch:** Humour is presented in the form of a swift change in vocabulary that precipitates owing to its suddenness. Purposively selected instances of such in the play are:

- i. Pastor: *“He said to the Lord, Master, I am lonely. Now, that is human. So, God put Adam to sleep, opened up his rib-cage, took out a rib, and fashioned him a partner. The first open-heart surgery ever performed on mortal being...”* (7)

In the extract above, the way *Pastor* comically injects *open-heart surgery* into a biblical discourse is funny. This is unexpected and thus, humorously situates a medical register in a religious context. The concept of incongruity is, therefore, achieved as a result of this contextual unusualness.

- ii. Prospector: *“We all need partners. This is going to be a gargantuan operation. After this, we can tell those Delta trouble-makers to go drink their petroleum.”* (7)

The sudden switch from a business transaction to petroleum matters is abrupt in its presentation and incongruous in its essence. This is perhaps to reflect *Prospector’s* state of mind and amid the singular aim of fleecing the investor of his hard-earned money. Again, labelling freedom fighters as trouble-makers by a member of the gluttonous elite smirks at the hypocrisy that is expressed in scornful pride. The humorous thing about this, however, is that the audience and reader are aware of authorial intent.

- iii. 1st Farmer: *“(points) Now tell me I’m a liar.”*  
2nd Farmer: *“I take it all back. I take back everything I said.”*  
1st Farmer: *“Everyday, right from daybreak.”*  
2nd Farmer: *“If it is not ÈsuLáàlu, then I no longer know male yam from cocoyam.”*  
1st Farmer: *“(Startled) Èsu? No-o, I had nothing like that on my mind.”* (21)

The sudden escalation of thought and the appearance of the unexpected register of a Yoruba god are rather surprising and hilarious. From the conversation between the two farmers, the labelling of *Àlábá* as the Yoruba god of trickery and mischief is incongruous to the situational context of that particular scene. The shock effect of this will most likely result in an entertaining guffaw.



- iv. Cleric: *"A salaam ailekum."*  
Àlàbá: *"Ailekum a salaam. (Under his breath...) And peace too be upon my calabash of palm wine- hypocrite!"* (27)

Here, the irreverent protagonist humorously violates a sacred practice by religious people in their mode of greetings. Àlàbá's persona exhibits a certain incompatibility with societal hypocrisy that is variously reflected in his diction, mannerism and love for candour. Since most religions forbid the sale and consumption of alcohol, the author's cheeky riposte becomes comically satirical when put in context against the more familiar responses to such religious compliments.

- v. Office Worker: *"E kuijoko o, baba. (Well done, Baba)"*  
Àlàbá: *"E ma ku irin o. S'alafia n'ile wa?(How's home?)"*  
Office Worker: *"A dupe."*  
Àlàbá: *"Se ise ijoba nto? (How's work?)"*  
Office Worker: *"A ntii (We're trying our best) (Exit)"*  
Àlàbá: *"Not much meat on that one. One wouldn't even know where to start carving her up."* (29)

Unexpectedly, the idle chatter between Àlàbá and a civil servant shifts to the partitioning of venison in the most incongruous manner. This kind of a shock switch in vocabulary and register present opportunities for periodic comical relief in the play.

**d. Irony:** Irony in the dramatic text could mean saying what is not meant or characters finding themselves in unexpected situations. Both contexts may trigger laughter as could be seen in the following excerpts from the play under study:

- i. 2nd Mech: *"A-ah, now I understand why all those agitators are in business."*  
1stMech: *"Which kin' agitators?"*  
2nd Mech: *"Dose ones all dem media dey call Voice of the Voiceless."* (5)

The mention of pseudo-activists and turncoats of the mass struggles against class tyranny in Nigeria re-echoes in the excerpt above. The irony here is that most of them are as corrupt as the people they pretend to fight and are beneficiaries of the skewed capitalist system as well. This is noticeable in the 2nd Mech's submission that he understands why the activists who are supposed to serve and act as the conscience of the nation 'are in business'.

- ii. Prospector: *"Wish others were as careful us. We call their scam- 419. They're all over internet. Tarnishing the nation's image with their spurious e-mails. Sickening stuff."*  
Investor: *"I read about the bank they ruined in Brazil."*  
Prospector: *"That tells you. Greed! It's universal."* (13)

In the extensive dialogue between a member of a fraud syndicate and a simple-minded businessman from which the excerpt above is culled, the irony of a swindler calling others in his trade scammers is not lost on the discerning audience/reader. This is reinforced by the fact that the reader/audience is aware that the investor is being taken for a ride without his own cognisance. This barefaced hypocrisy has a surprising effect with its concomitant comic value.

- iii. Investor: *"Oh yes, your central bank. I must say I was impressed by your chairman. At first, I thought he seemed rather too young to be heading such a pivotal institution."*  
Prospector: *"Our president believes in talent, not gerontocracy. That man you called young- he's a financial wizard. Even the World Bank and the IMF stand in awe of him."*  
(12)

The *Prospector's* take on the issues of talent, meritocracy and youth in politics and political appointments is in direct contrast to what actually holds sway in the Nigerian political situation. The irony of this statement is embedded, funnily, in the celebration of gerontocracy at every level of political participation. Youths in Nigeria have constantly criticised the lack of opportunities given to them by an old politician who has been in control of affairs in the country for a long time.

- iv. Major: *"intelligence assessments indicate that he is a fanatic. Worse than Maitasine and Boko Haram... He thinks he can fool us with appearances, but we are not deceived."*  
General: *"Oh yes, appearances can be deceptive."*  
Major: *"(Salutes. Pleased) Thank you sir."*  
General: *"Appearances are very deceptive. Take you for instance; anyone looking at you would think you an intelligent officer. Well, I mustn't exaggerate. Let's just say a soldier with sense. Common sense. Training. Judgement. Observation. Assessment. Wouldn't you say so?"* (94)

When the junior military officer (*Major*) misses the exact location of the mineral deposits his *General* earlier told him about, he becomes an object of ridicule. Funnily, however, he glows in the sarcastic praise of his boss who is mortified by the unedifying spectacle. The irony of the situation, the demeanour of the *General*, his choice of words and the description of the *Major* as an ineffectual but obsequious military officer all add to the comical strength of the scene.

- v. Àlàbá: *"If you will only let me explain. It was none of my doing..."*  
1<sup>st</sup> Student: *"This is no time for modesty. The king, the bastion of reactionary collaboration with the enemy has taken the lead. We cannot be seen to lag behind. We must go beyond being mere witnesses to, and become the protagonists of history."*  
Àlàbá: *"Teacher, help me explain. Tell them the truth."*  
Teacher: *"There are times, my dear Butcherus Emeritus, when silence is golden."* (175)

Like the proverbial rejected stone, the much-maligned and ridiculed *Àlàbá* is now celebrated by all and sundry as a result of a chain of events that are inadvertently triggered by a

mistake in the tonal marks of the protagonist's signboard. Ironically, however, the peace, tranquilly, space and solitude he so craves eventually eludes him in the end owing to his new status as a super celebrity.

e. **Ironic Echo:** Instances of linguistic elements taking on different comical meanings from their earlier contextual usages in the text are as follows:

i. *1st Mech: "Sah... my friend and me, we just dey wonder if to say you done notice ting wey begin dey happen for dis place since..."*

*Pastor: "Let me guess- Him! Yes, indeed, who could fail to notice? Four weeks going and no end in sight. Last Sunday, I made him the subject of my sermon. My congregation was sufficiently moved to embark on an all-night vigil on him. Soon, we shall all move here, hold the vigil right in front of the Rock. We shall put the devil to flight." (6)*

*Pastor: (Reading) "'On this rock shall I found my church'. (Shakes his rod at the sleeping man, teeth clenched) Obviously this is it. So? You think the revelation is yours? The likes of you? A common butcher? We'll see about that. Finding is much easier than keeping. We'll run you out of town if it's the last thing we do. The vigil continues. God has taken charge." (9)*

In the first instance of its occurrence in the text on page six, the word *Rock* refers to the particular rock *Àlàbásits* idly on which has now become an object of the Pastor's covetous predilection. Conversely, the biblical reference is introduced in the second occurrence on page nine- this time meaning the promised abode of the saints. The contextual difference between the two uses makes for a curious interpretation that border on incongruity for the reader. Although the word re-echoes, however, the latter knowledge that *Àlàbá*, the object of constant mockery, probably sits on a prized religious legacy stupefies even the casual reader. It evokes a certain level of

ii. *"Alápatà tìn f'erandàrà" (33)*

The above phrase, which loosely translates as 'one who does magic with meat' is repeated in the text on pages 44, 45, 77, 171 respectively. In all these instances, the culinary skills and dexterity of *Àlàbá* are celebrated by *Teacher* and other characters. It, however, echoes a negative interpretation (which means to commit a crime) when *Àlàbá* refers to himself as *Alápatà tìn f'erandàrànon* on page 171 after unwittingly drawing the ire of the *Kabiyesi* and his chiefs. Although they both sound alike, the way *Àlàbá* laments his fortune by changing *dàrà* to *dàrànon* to the laughter of other characters attests to the greatness of Soyinka's creative humour and style.

Having analysed the selected data sourced from the text with regards to their comical values in style, it then becomes expedient to discuss the findings of this paper.

## 7. Discussion of Findings

The synoptic analysis of data through the itemised variables of pun, zeugma, register switch, irony and ironic echo in Soyinka's *Alápatà Àpáta* has showcased the inherent comical quality of the play and the manner/style of presentation by the writer. These elements of incongruity have been shown to coalesce with the stylistic effects of the writer's language in the rendition of a sarcastic commentary on the foibles and fumbles of human nature in the most comical way.

Going through the data and the text itself, one would agree with Owoeye and Bamigboye (2014) who argue that Soyinka's style has evolved from the rigid esotericism of the 1960s and 70s to a more penetrable yet profound diction which, however, still breathes the fire of revolutionary ethics in public discourse. The language of the play is easy to identify with and the breezy style of the characters' delivery attests to this noticeable change in artistic orientation. The comical effect of the switches from English to Pidgin and then Yoruba language is stylistically significant. This is because it reinforces the setting as a semi-urban metropolis with intersecting peoples and interests that range from cultural and commercial to political.

More importantly, though, the very conflict of the play is based on a certain incongruity—the funny idea of a man who sits all day on a rock! From the testimonies of both the protagonist and other characters, *Àlàbá* has always been known for displaying traits that border on the unusual. These traits include a collection of the weird and unusual wardrobe (middle *aged man in a waist wrapper and loose buba...2; finally jettisons trousers, having put on his Agbada... 159*) an exaggerated worth of self-importance, the use of witty cum sensual retorts and a generally contrarian worldview constitute the hallmark of comical figures in films and plays, (Attardo; 1994).

Again, the hilarious 'havoc' wrecked by the misplacement of the tonal signs/accents on particular syllables of the eponymous character cannot be overemphasised. Indeed, it is a major source of conflict and entertainment in the play. When *Painter/Young Picasso* makes a mistake on *Alápatà* which turns it into *Alápata*, the torrent of incidents that are directly related to it account for many remarkably humorous scenes in the play. This aligns with Olusegun (2018) where he avers that instances of 'misuse of accent in relation to the meaning component of the Yoruba language, and characters' misinterpretation of situations' should be seen as typical of incongruity (strangeness) in humour studies.

Finally, the comedic dexterity of the author notwithstanding, the play teaches some didactic thoughts on the communality of human existence and the aberration of selfish living in the African sense and setting. This argument favours Obadare's (2018) position that comedy at an underlying level is used to pass more critical messages across to audiences in ways that may not be overtly abrasive yet delivers on its essence.

## 8. Conclusion

Having done an analysis of humour which is occasioned by both phonological and lexical incongruities in Soyinka's *Alápatà Àpáta*, we conclude this piece by submitting that more critical works still need to be carried out on humour as a source of entertainment as well as a veritable stylistic tool in the expression of art.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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