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Phonological Wordplay and Linguistic Creativity in TikTok Discourse: A Study of Chidera Madu

Chukwuma Livinus Ndububa
The National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria

Creative language use on social media is easily deemed mere entertainment, while related phonological wordplay is often equated with humour. Researchers commonly investigate linguistic items associated with social media users, with limited attention to related sound-based creativity. This study examines Chidera Madu's TikTok discourse to identify and classify his phonological wordplay strategies and determine how they contribute to meaning-making and perform communicative functions. Framed in Carter's Framework of Linguistic Creativity, 47 extracts of Chidera Madu's phonological wordplay are purposively analysed using a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design. Findings reveal four phonological strategies employed in Chidera's TikTok discourse, including resegmentation, homophones, phonemic substitution, and rhyme-based wordplay. The resegmentation occurs as word-to-phrase, phrase-to-word, and phrase-to-phrase, while the rhymes are masculine, feminine, and internal rhymes. The study found that Chidera's wordplays contribute to meaning-making through reinterpreting and shifting meanings, and performs communicative functions by serving various discourse functions, including humour, praise, satire, indirect communication, affirmation, emphasis, and social commentary. The findings are relevant to applied linguists and researchers on digital discourse, linguistic creativity, and Nigerian multilingual communication. The researcher recommends examining informal social-media discourse, such as TikTok, as a resource for linguistic innovation.

Keywords: linguistic creativity, phonemic substitution, phonological resegmentation, phonological wordplay, TikTok discourse

Introduction

Social media have increasingly become platforms for various forms of communication and entertainment, serving as windows to distant worlds and events for users in the privacy of their homes (Bauer & Tian, 2024). TikTok has emerged as particularly popular among social media platforms, with a relatively high number of users, given its casual and distinctive features for promoting content creators. Some of these features include its recommendation algorithm, which TikTok creators, according to Fung (2024), describe as "far better at expanding users' horizons," and its For You page, which makes it far easier to reach new audiences compared to other networks. There is perceived competition among content creators to engage followers, particularly making TikTok a site of innovative language use.

Linguistic creativity is the art of using words in a special manner to enhance the rhetorical quality of the message, and to educate, entertain, or persuade the audience (Ndububa & Ugoala, 2026). Creative language use manipulates word structure, sound properties, and meaning mechanisms, especially in informal digital discourse.

Chukwuma Livinus Ndububa, M.A., Department of Languages, The National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja, Nigeria.

As Utomo, Sugiharto, and Engliana (2026, p. 236) note, "Linguistic creativity often appears through puns, exaggeration, hybrid expressions, playful spelling, hashtags, emojis, and visual-textual combinations." Wordplay is a common type of linguistic creativity, involving deliberate play on words or meaning to create artistic effects. An example is phonological wordplay, which includes manipulating sound structures, such as using similar or contrastive sounds, and repeating or reanalysing sounds. For example, "Ewe is an animal; you are not an animal," or "right before dawn/they were gone."

Phonological wordplay does not centre on drawing similarities between word sounds but combines sound and lexical relationships with context to perform various communicative functions, including humour (Shagita EF, & Sulaeman, 2026), emphasis, persuasion, and audience engagement. TikTok skit makers, such as Chidera Madu, create discourse characterised by distinctive sound-based features. According to TheFamousNaija (2026), Chidera is also a Nollywood actor and internet personality from the south-eastern part of Nigeria. The themes of his skits are drawn from everyday situations, especially those involving urban youths, wealthy young Igbo men's lifestyles, and contemporary social vices. Chidera's discourse is characterised by linguistic and rhetorical features, such as proverbs, puns, and most prominently, various forms of phonological wordplay. He most often interprets roles in English but occasionally blends Nigerian Pidgin and Igbo to achieve stylistic effects while maintaining meaning. In Chidera's discourse, for instance, an expression, such as "... you are serving a God that is not harmful/na why your hand full" plays on the sound pattern of "harmful" and "hand full."

Social-media language use increasingly evolves into novel forms through creative manipulation of linguistic resources (Szymańska, 2026). Such expressions are easily dismissed as mere jokes, rhymes or informal discourse rather than examined as systematic linguistic creativity. Numerous studies have examined TikTok discourse, including the creation of AI discourse by content creators by Nurrahmawati and Tony (2026), teenagers' language use by Sedhu et al. (2026), and Gen Z lingo by Ugoala (2024). However, none of these studies pay particular attention to phonological wordplay by content creators as a tool for enhancing communicative strategies. Understanding this phenomenon facilitates an examination of the relationship between phonological form and communicative purpose in contemporary social discourse. Thus, the current study attempts to fill this gap with the following objectives:

1. To identify and classify the phonological wordplay strategies employed by Chidera Madu in his TikTok discourse;

2. To examine how phonological wordplay contributes to meaning-making and performs communicative functions in his TikTok discourse.

Literature Review

Forms and Features of Digital Discourse

Digital discourse is the use of language associated with digital technologies or virtual platforms, such as social networks. It may be written, spoken, or visual, using images or icons. Types of digital discourse include emails, text messages, chats, voice notes, memes (Ugoala, 2020), social media posts, reels, skits, podcasts, and so on. Social interactive platforms, such as TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp host many instances of digital discourse.

Digital discourse specifically refers to "discourse according to platform" (Sampietro, 2025), and as such, contains other domains of discourse, such as religious discourse, political discourse, educational discourse, entertainment discourse, and news/media discourse. Each of these domains can be created digitally, and as such,

is embedded in digital discourse. Digital discourse may be contrasted with offline discourse, with each having features associated with its mode of communication.

Digital discourse is characterised by brevity, informality, multimodality, and audience interaction, which encourage creativity (Sha & Brookes, 2026). Brevity is lexical concision in communication and is common in text messages, social media comments, and memes. It may also involve shortened or abbreviated words. Informality is the casual style of interaction without following strict etiquettes or communication rules. Such informality can be shown through emojis, stickers, abbreviated words, memes and jokes. Multimodality involves the use of various modes of communication such as writing, speech, images, and symbols (Simungala, Jimaima, & Nkhata, 2025). Depending on the platform, individuals can type messages, send voice notes, post images or videos, and use stickers.

Audience interaction in digital discourse involves communicative methods and styles for engaging followers (Ndububa & Ugoala, 2026). TikTok influencers and content creators, for instance, continuously strive to put out interesting content and services to sustain their followers. Forms of audience interaction include making quality posts, contributing to trends, starting live interactions, replying to followers' comments, gifting items, and adorning content with linguistic creativity. TikTok is a good instance of a contemporary environment for linguistic creativity. While content may capture common life stories, the use of language in presenting them can make them engaging to followers.

TikTok as a Digital Discourse Environment

TikTok is a prominent discourse environment that provides features for creating various forms of discourse for different personalities, brands, and services. It primarily supports visual discourse forms, containing spoken, written, and semiotic elements (Zappavigna, Wildfeuer, & Djonov, 2025). Singers are also permitted to upload their sound clips for wider dispensation and defined use. Given its ease of use and provision of innovative features, many public figures, influencers, and service providers have homes on TikTok. American users, according to Fung (2024), attest that "TikTok lends itself to community-building in ways that other platforms can't match."

TikTok is home to users from different cultural and academic backgrounds, with users of different ages, talents, and linguistic backgrounds (Ndububa, 2026). While different forms of talents are showcased, they are expressed in creators' distinct discourse. Its inherent algorithm expands users' horizons by helping them to discover new people and services, while the For You page showcases posts from other users and helps to enrich networking. Importantly, monetisation influences content creation practices on TikTok by encouraging "increased content production, audience engagement, and posting consistency for financial rewards" (Ogunbadejo et al., 2026, p. 25).

Evolving forms of discourse emerge from TikTok, ranging from posts, captions, memes, and comments. Researchers, such as Sedhu et al. (2026) and Ugoala (2025), have uncovered newer linguistic trends associated with different groups of TikTok users. TikTok also facilitates identity construction (Annushka, 2026), as different personalities, organisations, and brands use their pages to project their ideologies and promote their causes. Additionally, TikTok is home to different forms of humour, many of which, according to Lubis et al. (2025, p. 685), "arises from exaggeration, playful slang, and self-deprecating jokes." Accordingly, TikTok reels may provide forms of relief to viewers given creators' common inclination to engage audiences through humour.

Persuasion is a substantial aspect of TikTok discourse and an efficient tool for creators. As a content quality and creator's attribute, persuasion is essential for passing along messages. Khalifatunnisa et al. (2026, p. 160) note that persuasive meanings are conveyed through "motivational statements, analogies, and reflective expressions." Preachers, influencers, marketers, and various other users who seek followership, support, or endorsement also obtain an ideal environment for persuasion in "algorithm-driven engagement, short-form content, and interactive features of TikTok" (Mahat, Aziz, & Ismail, 2025). Given the need to engage or interact with users from different worldviews, strategic persuasion becomes an essential communication tool on TikTok. Posts and pages may attract opposing views, while adverts and calls for engagement may be misinterpreted. However, with detailed rational information and humour (Oktavia, Sari, & Endang, 2025), persuasion may be achieved.

Linguistic Creativity and Phonological Wordplay

Linguistic creativity entails the use of linguistic resources in newer ways to create new meanings (Fiorentya & Wijana, 2025). This may involve altering the pronunciation of a word, combining words in ways they are not commonly combined, using words of similar sounds in a playful way, using an established expression in another context, spelling words or applying punctuation and capitalisation unusually, and mixing languages or dialects impressively. Linguistic creativity is common among some TikTok content creators, and each creator has their own peculiar style. Specifically, wordplay is a form of linguistic creativity at the word level. At the phonological level, it involves the deliberate manipulation of sounds for artistic effects.

Phonological wordplay demonstrates the creative manipulation of speech sounds and requires the listener's judgement to obtain meaning (Fiorentya & Wijana, 2025). This could be achieved through homophones, punning, phoneme substitution, phoneme deletion or addition, sound blending, rhyming, repetition, or deliberate mispronunciation for comic effect. Homophones are differently spelled words with the same pronunciation, such as ewe and you, and ewes and use. A pun is a play on words, especially words with the same or similar sounds (Palmann & Miller, 2025). For instance, "two-tired" may also suggest "too tired" as in "the bicycle cannot stand on its own because it is two-tired." Another instance is, "I told the player that I wan-a watch and he bought me a watch instead." In this expression, the speaker wants to watch the player and does not need to be bought a watch. Hence, the pun is on "wan-a" (a variant of "wanna") and "want a."

Phoneme substitution is the replacement of a unit of sound with another, as in saying "I am feeling wine" instead of "I am feeling fine" when someone who has had enough drink is asked how they feel. Other instances include "frosh" for "fresh" and "dorling" for "darling." Phoneme substitution may also be realised in the deliberate mimicry of speakers who say "shopping" instead of "chopping" or "chip" rather than "ship." Phoneme deletion is the deletion of a sound unit in an established pronunciation, as in "ouse" for "house" or "eat" for "heat," especially when mimicking speakers whose dialects delete the aitch in certain words. It also occurs in "hooks" for "hook-up" (slang for call girl) to censor meaning. Phoneme addition is the addition of a sound unit to a word, such as in "worstest" or "importanter," correctly rendered as "worst" or "important," respectively (Fiorentya & Wijana, 2025). Also, phoneme addition may be used to achieve censoring, such as in "segz" or "seks" for "sex."

Sound blending is the creative formation of new words by combining parts of two or more words, especially for coining names, as in "Uchechukwu Elendu" for "Uchendu" or "Carl Lever" for "Carver." Rhyming is the deliberate use of words with similar sounds, such as in "If you hear my story/you will give God the glory," where "story" and "glory" rhyme; and "if you want to marry my first daughter/consider a hundred cows to slaughter,"

where “daughter” and “slaughter” rhyme. Repetition constitutes wordplay when sounds or words are repeated in one or successive expressions (Al-Muslimawi, 2024). It commonly occurs as the repetition of consonant sounds, as in “tell Thomas to take Thomson’s tablet,” or the repetition of words, as in “the father that fathered the father.” Deliberate mispronunciation, especially for comic effect, is another form of wordplay, as in “I need your love and infection,” whereby “affection” is mispronounced “infection;” “town king” for “counting,” whereby there is a reversal of the consonants /k/ and /t/; or “cerfiticate” for “certificate,” whereby /f/ and /t/ interchange.

Phonological Wordplay and the Construction of Meaning in Digital Discourse

Phonological wordplay is usually not just about achieving sound effects; it may convey humorous, double, satirical, ironic, playful, or social/identity meanings (Palmann & Miller, 2025). In “My friend Lawrence wants to study law but given his learning speed I will call him Slowrence,” there is a play on “Lawrence” and “Slowrence” to create humour about the subject’s chosen course of study, Law. Humour may also be derived when “egg-cellent” is used to appreciate an egg or something egg-like. Shagita et al. (2026) note that prosodic features also produce humour by triggering “ambiguity, reinterpretation, and surprise through wordplay” (p. 505). Such wordplays draw attention to expressions and make them memorable.

A speaker conveys double meanings through deliberate sound manipulation, such as in “I am a baker but cannot make enough dough.” Here, “dough” refers to “both baked pastry and money.” Double meaning also manifests in “Do you want it in peace or in pieces?” These sorts of double meanings achieved through phonological wordplay are facilitated by similarly pronounced words with different meanings, as in “That is a great site” (Wieczorek, 2025). Their linguistic functions include attracting attention and making meaning clearer.

Words are phonologically manipulated to produce satire, such as in “demo-crazy” for “democracy,” “Commander-in-Thief” for “Commander-in-Chief,” and “Pro-fool-sor” for “Professor” (Fiorentya & Wijana, 2025). Ironic wordplay can occur when word sounds create a contrast between an expression and its intended or contextual meaning, such as in “a mechanic named Wheeler who cannot fix car wheels properly.” Ironic wordplays enhance communication by creating humour, allowing indirect communication, and softening serious or sensitive messages.

Playful meaning is created in expressions, such as “Do not worry about coke; fanta is fanta-bulous,” “It is Fri-yay!” to express excitement about the weekend, or “Moan-day is here again” to express dislike for the resumption of work in the week system by Monday. Such playful phonological wordplays create humour, make messages memorable, and build social connection.

Social meanings are created through phonological wordplay when a speaker reveals their identity or background (Wang et al., 2024). Specific wordplays are associated with specific groups of people, such as “Fri-yay” by workers, or “Moan-day” by students who resume classes on Mondays after resting on the weekend. In the expression, “Enjoy your to-may-to, and leave me with my to-mah-to,” there is a wordplay showing an association with British or American English. Bagus and Imawan (2026) note that brands also act “as key players in shaping community identity” (p. 1). Such forms of wordplay help build social connection and express emotions.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Carter’s (2004) Framework of Linguistic Creativity. It posits that creativity can be identified in people’s everyday expressions, and not just in formal grammar or literature, such as poetry or textbooks. Carter’s account of Linguistic Creativity was formulated against the view that creative language use is found in “high art” (novels and poems) by highly talented writers or public speakers.

Carter (2004) identifies two types of linguistic creativity, namely, pattern-forming creativity and pattern-reforming creativity. Pattern-forming creativity refers to "the creative use of existing linguistic resources in language," such as through repetition, rhyme or playing with rhythm, while pattern-reforming creativity involves the manipulation of existing linguistic patterns to generate new structures or meanings.

The ideas of these types of linguistic creativity guide this study to identify areas where Chidera Madu forms or reforms linguistic patterns and how such patterns perform communicative functions in his TikTok discourse.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design to analyse 47 instances of phonological wordplay in selected TikTok discourse by Chidera Madu. The 47 extracts were purposively selected from Chidera's TikTok clips posted between September 2025 and August 2026.

All videos posted within the aforementioned time period were screened, and instances of phonological wordplay were manually written out, guided by the researcher's phonological competence. Words are spelled as heard, while pauses, laughter, and other non-lexical material are omitted. The extracts are deemed wordplays because of the manipulation of sounds or phonological processes to perform communicative functions. Wordplays that are not relevant to the study objectives are excluded. The wordplays are predominantly in English but include instances of Nigerian Pidgin and Igbo. The wordplays are grouped into four broad tabular categories, namely, phonological resegmentation, homophones/near-homophones, minimal phonemic substitution, and rhyme-based wordplays.

Wordplay extracts categorised as resegmentation involve the reinterpretation of word boundaries; homophones and near-homophones involve expressions with identical or similar pronunciations; minimal phonemic substitution manifests in wordplays where there are slight changes in the sound units; the rhyme-based category contains wordplays with phonological similarity based on rhyming sounds. Some of the extracts belong to two or more categories, but each appears in one table according to its primary wordplay feature. Data analysis follows the study objectives and Carter's (2004) Framework of Linguistic Creativity to investigate meaning-making and communicative functions in Chidera's TikTok discourse.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The wordplay extracts presented in the tables are arranged in order of their dates, with the earlier dates first. The column labelled ID denotes "Identification" and runs according to the data presentation from one table to another. The ID label "E" denotes "Extract;" as such, E01 means Extract 01. However, within the discussion of the tables, the IDs are written in full, such as "Extract 01" instead of E01. The date format is Day-Month-Year.

Table 1 shows Chidera's wordplay involving pairs of words or expressions with phonological resegmentation, that is, the reinterpretation of a sound sequence through a change in its perceived word boundaries. Some extracts show word-to-phrase resegmentation, whereby the sequence of sounds of a particular word is distributed across a sequence of words. For instance, in Extract 01, "sincere" is reinterpreted as "since here." Extract 04 (shawarma/shower ma), Extract 06 (sister/see star), and Extract 09 (key holder/hold her), among others, also evince instances of word-to-phrase resegmentation.

The resegmentation also occurs in the reverse direction, whereby a sequence of words is reinterpreted as a single word. Examples include Extract 08 (Christ is/crisis) and Extract 10 (for give/forgive). Extract 11 (Auntie, later/antenatal) also involves a similar sound-based reinterpretation, although the correspondence depends on

Chidera's pronunciation. Extract 14 (assist her/a sister) demonstrates the relocation of a word boundary within a phrase, producing a different lexical structure. In some instances, the sound sequence of a word is reproduced in an alternative phrase with a different lexical structure. Examples include Extract 03 (harmful/hand full), Extract 12 (PalmPay/hand pay), and Extract 13 (Funmi/fool me).

Table 1

Phonological Resegmentation in Chidera Madu's TikTok Discourse

ID	**Date**	**Wordplay**	**Meaning-making**	**Communicative functions**
E01	29-Jul-26	I must be sincere/I don dey since here	Linking sincerity (sincere) with continued presence (since here)	Affirmation and reassurance
E02	07-Jun-26	I will buy you small ice cream/so that you will give me high scream	Shifting a food reference (ice cream) to a vocal reaction (high scream)	Promise based on expectation
E03	24-Apr-26	Indeed, you are serving a God that is not harmful/na why your hand full	Reinterprets "harmful" as "hand full"; linking God's harmlessness with a full hand	Acknowledgement of God's bounty
E04	24-Mar-26	You don chop shawarma/go and shower ma	Transforming a food reference (shawarma) into an imperative (shower, Ma!)	Coaxing backed by a prior gesture
E05	27-Dec-25	Na this kind temptation hit Adam/to resist hard am	Reinterprets "Adam" through "hard am", linking temptation with Adam's inability to resist	Admission of influence through sexual innuendo
E06	27-Dec-25	As I see that her sister/na once I see star/Can I assist her?	Reanalyses "sister" and "assist her" through the sound sequence "see star"	Praise giving way to a request
E07	25-Dec-25	Make I pursue treasure/keep you wey be pressure	Contrasting desire (treasure) with burden (pressure)	Contrast of alternatives
E08	17-Dec-25	Where Christ is/We no dey get crisis	Creating a phonological link between "Christ is" and "crisis"	Reassurance in faith
E09	13-Dec-25	The keys to my heart dey your sister key holder/na why I go hold her	Recasts "key holder" through "hold her"; linking possession of keys with holding a person	Emphasising consequence
E10	13-Dec-25	No vex, I no get; I for give you/as I no give, forgive me	Exploits the sound relationship between "for give" and "forgive" to create a lexical contrast	A plea for understanding
E11	20-Nov-25	Auntie, later…/na my house you wan take do antenatal?	Linking postponement (later) with pregnancy care (antenatal)	An instruction to leave
E12	05-Nov-25	I for just transfer something now through my palmpay/or put hand for my pocket use my hand pay	Contrasting electronic transfer (PalmPay) with physical payment (hand pay)	Juxtaposition of options
E13	11-Sept-25	na so Fumni/take fool me	Associating a name (Fumni) with deception (fool me)	Realisation
E14	09-Sept-25	I will assist her/She's not my sister	Linking assistance (assist her) with kinship (a sister)	Emphasis on non-familial relations

The extracts also show phrase-to-phrase resegmentation, as in Extract 02 (ice cream/high scream), where the sound sequence of one phrase is reinterpreted as another phrase with a different meaning. A notable feature of these wordplays is that the intended phonological correspondence sometimes depends on pronunciation that differs from standard English pronunciation. This enables Chidera to establish sound relationships between expressions that would not necessarily correspond closely under standard pronunciation.

Phonological resegmentation in Chidera's TikTok discourse contributes to meaning-making by connecting expressions that have different lexical and semantic structures. For instance, Extracts 02, 11, and 14 create new interpretations by connecting otherwise unrelated expressions, while Extracts 07 and 12 establish contrasts between alternatives. The alternative interpretations also produce different communicative functions. For example, Extracts 09 and 14 emphasise particular relationships, while Extracts 01 and 08 provide reassurance. Other communicative functions, including humour, persuasion, clarification, and indirect communication, are presented in the "Communicative Functions" column.

Chidera's use of phonological resegmentation demonstrates Carter's (2004) concept of linguistic creativity through the manipulation of existing linguistic patterns to produce alternative structures and meanings.

Table 2

Homophonic and Near-Homophonic Wordplay in Chidera Madu's TikTok Discourse

ID	**Date**	**Wordplay**	**Meaning-making**	**Communicative functions**
E15	05-Aug-26	This is American honey/I ńuchaa ya, gi dituru m horny	Creating a playful meaning by linking "honey" with "horny"	Offer framed in amorous intent
E16	07-Jun-26	Where we will go and do small dinner/anyi bata, anyi e dinaa	Linking eating (dinner) with sleeping together (dinaa)	Suggestive indirect communication
E17	24-Apr-26	As Adam/I go need my own Eve, na why you add am	Playing on being an Adam linked to receiving an Eve	Humour and justification
E18	24-Apr-26	Bread dey fridge-ooh, with Titus/Make una go, una presence dey tight us	Linking the food reference (Titus) with the discomfort caused by their presence	Indirectly requesting departure
E19	20-Mar-26	Na why we men/dey avoid some women	Reinterpreting male identity (we men) through female identity (women)	Stressing cause and consequence
E20	20-Mar-26	Asset/wey her ass set	Shifting a property reference (asset) to a body-related meaning (ass set).	Amorous humour
E21	06-Mar-26	For your sake I dey climb high pole /You go drink hypo/no be hype-ohhh	Creating a link between a disinfectant (hypo) and an exclamation of praise (hype-oh)	Expressing emotion, promise, and assurance
E22	24-Feb-26	Indeed God is creative/as He create you finish, He create Eve	Linking creativity with the creation of Eve	Expressing praise through humour
E23	25-Dec-25	You never carried any weight/Wait!/ You think it's by waiting	Linking physical burden (weight) with delay (wait) and expectation (waiting)	Making a humorous correction memorable
E24	25-Oct-25	You can't be this attractive/and be standing here, you wan attract Eve?	Linking physical appeal (attractive) with attracting Eve	Evaluating beauty
E25	04-Oct-25	Make I come hear how your plan be/wey make you get plan B	Linking a general plan with an alternative plan	Creating humour and memorability
E26	11-Sept-25	My perfume don dey smell like Camphor/…wetin you come for?	Reinterpreting "camphor" as "come for," linking the smell with questioning the purpose of the visit	Seeking clarification

Table 2 presents data on instances of Chidera's exploitation of similarity in pronunciation. The strong unambiguous homophone in the table is Extract 23 (weight/wait). Other pairs achieve close phonological correspondence through Chidera's pronunciation, such as Extract 15, where he reinterprets "honey" as "horny," Extract 17, where he reinterprets "Adam" as "add am," Extract 18, where he reinterprets "Titus" as "tight us," Extract 22, where he reinterprets "creative" as "create Eve," and Extract 24, where he reproduces "attractive" as "attract Eve."

Some of the pairs are near-homophones given Chidera's stress placement on the syllables. Thus, in Extract 16 (dinner/dinaa), Extract 20 (asset/ass set), and Extract 25 (plan be/plan B), the stress is on the first syllable of the first expression and on the second syllable of the second expression, sometimes extending the stress to create rising intonation. In Extract 26, the distinction between both expressions (camphor/come for) is clarified by the different realisation of their first vowels.

Chidera's pronunciation manipulation, following Carter's (2004) pattern-reforming creativity, shapes meaning-making by establishing phonological links between expressions. Through the wordplays, Chidera also shifts meanings, such as in Extract 20, and constructs identity through pronunciation manipulation, as in Extract 19. In addition to meaning-making, the homophonic wordplays perform different communicative functions, including creating humour and memorability, attracting attention, and expressing emotion, promise, assurance and praise, among others.

Table 3

Minimal Phonemic Substitution in Chidera Madu's TikTok Discourse

ID	Date	Wordplay	Meaning-making	Communicative functions
E27	06-Jul-26	Nwata maa mma ka Mary/anyi na ezu ya ka anyi wu Deri	Reproducing "Mary" as "Deri," contrasting a virtuous woman with a notorious taker	Expressing a stance through a proverb
E28	03-Jun-26	No be for man wey challant/I gallant	Creating an ironic meaning by linking "challant" with "gallant"	Creating humour through contrast
E29	06-Mar-26	You get mind come plain/dey complain	Shifting openness (plain) to expression of dissatisfaction (complain)	Asserting disappointment
E30	06-Mar-26	Indeed, God created you in his own image/no damage/your beauty I pay homage	Creating a playful meaning by linking "image," "damage," and "homage" through sound similarity	Admiration and memorability
E31	05-Mar-26	I don't want you to cheer up/because you don't want to tear up	Linking emotional encouragement (cheer up) with emotional distress (tear up)	Indirectly expressing concern
E32	27-Dec-25	I no wan vess/I don invest	Associating refusal or displeasure with investment	Creating humour and emphasis
E33	25-Dec-25	She never laid a single brick/you just dey collect prick	Shifting a construction reference (brick) to a body-related meaning (prick)	Emphasising benefit without labour

Table 3 presents wordplays involving slight substitution of phonemes with others to create sound similarities. This substitution occurs in the initial parts of expressions, such as in Extract 27 (Mary/Deri), Extract 28 (challant/ gallant), Extract 31 (cheer up/tear up), and Extract 33 (brick/prick). Extracts 27 and 28, however, may not produce identical pronunciations in standard English; Chidera phonologically blends a part of each pair into the other.

Another form of phonemic substitution occurs in Extract 29, where Chidera stresses the first syllable of "come plain" and the second syllable of "complain," thus producing the STRUT vowel /ʌ/ in the phrase and a schwa /ə/ in the single word. Extract 32 (wan vess/invest) shows strong initial phoneme substitution and medial phoneme insertion in the reinterpreted expression.

Through these wordplay strategies, Chidera creates ironic meaning, as in Extract 28, links forms of emotion, as in Extract 31, and shifts references, as in Extract 33. The wordplays also perform communicative functions by creating humour, memorability and emphasis, as well as expressing emotions and concerns. Through this form of phonological wordplay, Chidera creates new linguistic patterns and meanings according to Carter's (2004) pattern-reforming creativity.

Table 4 presents wordplays that are generally rhyme-based, although some of the examples may involve other phonological strategies. Chidera uses rhyme relationships to create different meanings and perform different communicative functions. Among the clearer rhyme-based examples are masculine rhymes, which occur on the final stressed syllables, such as in Extract 34 (this side/inside) and Extract 36 (price/surprise). The rhyme-based wordplays also include feminine rhymes, where the rhyming syllables extend beyond the final stressed syllable, such as in Extract 35 (agwụ ike/zuru ike), Extract 41 (investing/impressing), Extract 45 (impress you/him press you), and Extract 46 (Did I mention/the dimension).

Some extracts show internal rhyme, such as in Extract 39 (country…built/contribute), while others show less regular rhyme patterns, such as in Extract 38 (liabilities/rely…beauties). Chidera also achieves rhyme-based wordplay through repeated sound sequences, as in Extract 37 (ma I sara ahu/ma I saro ahu/...anọsara ahu) and Extract 44 (set rules for/break rules for). Some of these examples also involve other phonological strategies. For instance, Extract 45 (impress you/him press you) involves resegmentation, while Extract 46 (Did I mention/the dimension) involves phonological similarity and resegmentation.

Table 4

Rhyme-Based Wordplay in Chidera Madu's TikTok Discourse

ID	Date	Wordplay	Meaning-making	Communicative functions
E34	06-Jul-26	We dey see some kind things for this side/unless our mind no dey inside	Linking the location reference (this side) with mental awareness (inside)	Emphasising awareness
E35	07-Jun-26	Mu abia were ihe na agwu ike/ zuru ike	Creating an antithesis between tiredness (agwụ ike) and resting (zuru ike)	Suggesting pleasure
E36	26-Apr-26	Why you dey tell me price?/ It was meant to be a surprise	Contrasting revealing a price with preserving a surprise	Emphasising unmet expectation
E37	09-Apr-26	ma I sara ahu/ma I sara ahu/gi na anọsara ahu	Creating a playful meaning by linking bathing (sara ahu) and not bathing (sarọ ahu) with feeling homely (anọsara ahu)	Expressing admiration and hospitality
E38	20-Mar-26	Unlike some liabilities/ wey dey rely on their beauties	Contrasting financial dependants (liabilities) with their dependence on beauty	Weaving humour and satire
E39	06-Mar-26	She understands the way the country is built/na why she dey contribute	Linking the country's development (built) with active contribution	Encouraging social responsibility
E40	24-Feb-26	listen to me/this is the least thing to me	Reinterpreting "listen" as "least thing" to emphasise a principle	Drawing attention and creating memorability
E41	31-Dec-25	Going broke after investing/is better that going broke after impressing	Contrasting investing with impressing as causes of financial loss	Proverbially advising wise spending
E42	13-Dec-25	Na every aboki man with him kettle/that death wey kill Abel, na im kill Cain too	Linking "kettle" with "Cain too" through sound similarity	Creating humour through analogy
E43	28-Nov-25	You come carry me reach Toronto/ Where I will not have anywhere to run to	Reinterpreting "Toronto" as "to run to," linking a destination with the absence of escape	Creating humour and emphasis
E44	05-Nov-25	na who no get money una dey set rules for/but who get money una dey break rules for	Contrasting rule-setting for people without money with rule-breaking for those with money	Criticising social inequality
E45	13-Oct-25	As him house impress you/ him press you?	Reinterpreting "impress" as "him press," linking admiration with physical intimacy	Creating humorous suspicion
E46	04-Oct-25	Did I mention/the dimension you're going now?	Playing on the question "did I mention" and its object "dimension"	Seeking clarification
E47	09-Sept-25	Instead of you to be my enemy/better be my mini me	Shifting opposition (enemy) to oneness (mini me)	Creating humour and social connection

Rhyme contributes to meaning-making in Chidera's TikTok discourse by linking ideas and creating playful meanings. It also draws contrasts between concepts, such as in Extracts 36, 38, 41, and 44. The communicative functions include creating humour, emphasis and memorability, as well as drawing attention to meaning. Through his rhyme-based wordplay, Chidera's use of already existing linguistic patterns reflects Carter's (2004) pattern-forming creativity, while the creation of new structures and meanings reflects Carter's pattern-reforming creativity.

Findings

The study reveals that Chidera Madu's phonological wordplay is systematic. The wordplay strategies identified in his TikTok discourse include phonological resegmentation, which accounts for 29.79% of the dataset; homophones and near-homophones, which account for 25.53%; minimal phonemic substitution, which accounts for 14.89%; and rhyme-based wordplay, which accounts for 29.79% of the extracts.

Phonological resegmentation and rhyme-based wordplay are therefore the most frequent strategies, while minimal phonemic substitution is the least frequent. The former occurs as word-to-phrase, phrase-to-word, and phrase-to-phrase resegmentation, while the latter includes masculine, feminine, and internal rhymes.

Homophonic and near-homophonic wordplays involve identical or similar pronunciations, while minimal phonemic substitution involves slight changes in sound units.

These wordplay strategies facilitate meaning-making in Chidera's discourse by linking, reinterpreting, and shifting meanings. They perform various communicative functions, including affirmation and reassurance, praise and admiration, humour and satire, persuasion and indirect communication, contrast and emphasis, emotional expression and evaluation, and requests, advice, and social commentary.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Chidera Madu's phonological wordplay goes beyond merely playing with words or creating sound similarities. The study reveals that Chidera's creative sound manipulation is an important resource for meaning-making and communicative functions. From the lens of Carter's (2004) Framework of Linguistic Creativity, Chidera's TikTok discourse reveals that creativity can be identified in people's everyday expressions, and not just in formal grammar or literature. The study therefore shows that phonological creativity can lie at the centre of linguistic forms, meaning, and communication in contemporary digital discourse.

This study is relevant to applied linguists, and researchers on digital discourse, linguistic creativity, and Nigerian multilingual communication. This researcher recommends examining informal social-media discourse, such as TikTok, as a resource for linguistic innovation. Future studies may investigate other TikTok content to determine whether the patterns identified in this study extend beyond Chidera Madu's discourse. Researchers may also examine the effect of phonological wordplay on audience engagement and understanding.

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