

# Transitivity, Verbal Humour and the Construction of Identity in Trevor Noah's Narratives

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## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this research paper is to analyze both Son of Patricia's stand-up comedy show and Born a Crime memoir by Trevor Noah to find out how the experience of racial discrimination, identity, social commentary, and personal anecdotes have been manifested in Noah's language choice. This descriptive study uses an eclectic approach combining Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), discourse analysis, and humour studies. The data from both genres were analyzed using Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) Transitivity theory and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). The research combines qualitative and quantitative data. The results highlight the distinct uses of transitivity processes in both excerpts, with the stand-up comedy employing more dynamic verbs, denoting action, while the memoir uses more relational processes. The GTVH analysis revealed that humour in stand-up comedy often challenges racial stereotypes more directly than in the memoir. The discussion pinpointed that Noah's strategic use of language not only constructs his racial identity, but also critiques societal norms. The study concludes that the combination of transitivity and humour effectively unveils deeper layers of identity and societal commentary, suggesting a powerful interplay between language use and personal narrative in Noah's work.*

**Keywords:** *Born a Crime, Discourse Analysis, Identity, Racial Discrimination, Son of Patricia, Transitivity, Trevor Noah, Verbal Humour.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Scope of the Study

Trevor Noah is a South African comedian, television host, actor, and writer. He was born on February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1984, in Johannesburg, South Africa. He is best known for his role as the host of the American satirical program *The Daily Show*. Before his tenure on *The Daily Show*, Noah gained international recognition as a stand-up comedian. His comedy often focuses on race, ethnicity, nationality, and social issues, drawing heavily from his experiences growing up in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. His mixed-race heritage (having a black South African mother and a white European father) provides a unique perspective that he incorporates into his work, using humour to address complex social themes (Levin 2023; Shabrina & Pratama 2023).

The struggle related to establishing an identity has played a significant role in shaping his public image and the material of his comedic performances, both in South Africa and the United States, where he currently lives (Levin 2023). As demonstrated by Noah in his stand-up comedy acts, a hurdle he has faced in defining his identity is reconciling the varying perceptions of how those around him categorize him as he transitions through different racial identities based on his skin colour (Levin 2023). In writing *Born a Crime*, Noah incorporates the themes, conversational style, and humour from his stand-up routines into his narrative. This allows him to use the satirical perspective from his performances to address his American readers' perceptions of race on both a local and global scale (Levin 2023).

This study aims to explore Trevor Noah's racial identity through his discourse in both *Son of Patricia's* stand-up comedy and *Born a Crime* memoir, compare transitivity processes in both excerpts, and analyze verbal humour using the general verbal theory of humour.

## 1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Based on the literature review, an abundance of research has focused solely on humour without transitivity, and other research has fixated on transitivity but not with humour; accordingly, linking both together is of utmost importance (Yuwana et al. 2019).

## 1.3 Aims of the Study

1. To investigate Trevor Noah's identity emanating from his discourse in *Son of Patricia* stand-up comedy and *Born a Crime* memoir.
2. To analyze the verbal humour in stand-up comedy and memoir discourse by implementing the general verbal theory of humour.
3. To compare the transitivity processes and verbal humour used in both genres: stand-up comedy and memoir.

## 1.4 Context of the Study

Trevor Noah comes from South Africa. He is a comedian, television host, and author. He is mostly known for his satirical news program, *The Daily Show*. He was born during the apartheid period in South Africa. His father is white European, and his mother is Black South African. When he was born, his mixed-race heritage was considered a crime under the apartheid laws. He discussed his upbringing and career on numerous occasions, including his memoir, *Born a Crime*, and stand-up comedies, such as *Son of Patricia*. Usually, he addresses race, identity, culture, and societal issues in his works. In this study, an excerpt from his memoir *Born a Crime*, specifically Chapter Two, and another from his stand-up comedy *Son of Patricia* are analyzed using Halliday's transitivity framework and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) to identify how his views about identity, racism, and societal issues are emphasized. A summary of the chosen excerpts, along with a rationale for the choice, are provided in the methodology section.

## 1.5 Research Questions

1. How does the use of transitivity help shape Trevor

Noah's character and identity as presented in his *Son of Patricia* stand-up comedy and the second chapter of *Born a Crime* memoir?

2. What are the implications of verbal humour presented in *Son of Patricia's* stand-up comedy and Chapter Two of *Born a Crime* memoir?
3. What are the differences between the transitivity processes and verbal humour employed in *The Son of Patricia* stand-up comedy and Chapter Two of *Born a Crime* memoir?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Systemic Functional Grammar

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is theorized by Halliday (1978, p. 108), who argued that language is a social semiotic resource that is considered a tool for meaning making in social contexts. SFG encompasses three language metafunctions; namely, interpersonal, ideational, and textual.

Halliday and Matthiessen (2014, p. 85) explicate the three language metafunctions. First, the interpersonal metafunction investigates the language function in social contexts, including the grammatical choices that reflect the individuals' attitudes and stances. They also explain the relationships between the individuals involved in a conversation. The interpersonal metafunction involves analyzing the mood, modality, and evaluative language in a particular conversation. Second, the ideational metafunction involves the experiential aspects and content of language, including expressing processes, participants, and surrounding circumstances. The ideational metafunction comprises two components; i.e. experiential and logical. The experiential metafunction represents events, actions, and state of affairs, while the logical one deals with the logical relationship between events and prepositions, such as time sequence. Third, the textual metafunction is concerned with the text's organization in terms of coherence and relevance to the context being discussed. The textual metafunction includes thematic structures, information focus, and cohesive device usage.

Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) includes a crucial concept called transitivity, which is central to encompassing how language represents the experience of the world (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). Analyzing language using the transitivity framework is a widely used tool among scholars in SFG, focusing on the means through which language is represented in a social context (Radzi et al. 2021).

## 2.2 Transitivity

Transitivity is part of Systemic Functional Grammar and is theorized by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014). Transitivity is defined as

The study of what people are depicted as doing and refers broadly to who does what to whom and how this allows us to reveal who plays an important role in a particular clause and who receives the consequences of that action (Machin & Mayer 2012, p. 104).

Transitivity explores how multiple processes, such as actions and events, are encoded in language and helps reveal not only the actions but also the social dynamics (Machin & Mayer 2012, p. 105). There are three core elements of a transitivity analysis, i.e. participants, circumstances, and processes (Machin & Mayer 2012, p. 105). Machin and Mayer (2012) explain these three core elements. First, the participants are the entities that take part in the action. To elaborate, they correspond to the subjects and objects in a sentence. Second, circumstances are the surrounding or additional elements that provide context to the action, such as manner, time, place, cause, and space. Third, there are six processes, i.e. material, mental, behavioral, verbal, relational, and existential (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014, p. 214), which will be explicated in the theoretical framework section.

### 2.2.1. Transitivity and Identity

Human identity is defined as

A continual work in progress, constructed and altered by the totality of life experience. While much of the work in support of this belief concentrates on the larger aspects of identity – especially gender, ethnicity, and sexual preferences – in fact, human identity involves many other categories. Identity is constructed in complex ways, more or less consciously and overtly. (Lakoff 2006, p. 142)

An identity is considered fixed and continuous (Bassiouney 2012). Moreover, an identity is manifested and expressed through language use (Bassiouney 2020; Walters 2011). Albirini (2016) explains that identities are continuously evolving constructs that are shaped by social constituents. Identity has several definitions, one of which being “the social positioning of self and other” (Bucholtz & Hall 2005, p. 586). Hussain et al. (2023) emphasize that transitivity uncovers identities and ideologies by analyzing the linguistic participants of individuals.

The grammar of a language is “a system of ‘options’ from which the speakers and writers choose according to social circumstance” (Machin & Mayer 2012, p. 104). The authors assert that participants’ choice of words has a role in meaning-making. This statement implies that some language choices and stances might be loaded ideologically. They also add that transitivity helps in analyzing not only what is in the text, but also what is missing from it. Matu (2008) explains that transitivity participates in shaping public opinion as well as reflecting broader ideological stances within the media. Different scholars explain that individuals employ specific linguistic choices to convey specific meanings consciously or unconsciously, yet they highlight ideologies and identities; it is how people “compose” themselves (Johnstone 2007; Kiesling 2022).

Haque and Janjua (2023) analyze the language employed by Markle (2021) during her interviews on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. This study aims to investigate and interpret how experiences are represented through language. The data from the interview are analyzed using Halliday’s transitivity framework, focusing on different processes; namely, material, mental, behavioral, relational, existential, and verbal. The results of this study show her experiences of racism, which reflected her identity as a Black American. Her reflected experiences varied, including her unborn child facing offensive comments about his complexion. She also faced inequality within the Royal family in terms of security, title, and status. Moreover, she was bullied internationally through the media. The dominant processes in her language were mental and verbal, demonstrating her internal reactions to racism and verbal interactions that contributed to these experiences. Employing Halliday’s approach not only underscores racism and prejudice, but also accentuates societal and cultural consequences.

Larbaoui and Guerroudj (2021) apply Halliday’s transitivity analysis to a section from *Heart of Darkness* (1902) by Joseph Conrad. The aim is to identify Conrad’s ideology toward imperialism and racism in Africa by analyzing the employed language. The authors use the transitivity material, mental, behavioral, relational, existential, and verbal processes to analyze the text. While the article does not provide a frequency analysis of these processes, it gave an overview of the interpretations of these articles. The results uncover the implicit ideologies in Conrad’s writings, which sympathize with the suffering of colonized people. Conrad does not provide a mere story or a narrative; he adds a historical and cultural context to it.

### 2.3 Humour

Humour does not merely occur in discourse for the sake of amusing the participant but rather as a means of communication and the construction of identity (Archakis & Tsakona 2005). Shared humour is essential for the “in-group vs out-group boundary marker” (Holmes 2000, p. 159). One of the aims of humour is the construction of in-group identity and solidarity, which are the sense of belonging to a specific group (Archakis & Tsakona 2005; Holmes 2000).

Archakis and Tsakona (2005) aim to apply the GTVH (1991) to conversational narratives to explore how humour constructs social identities among young Greek males. The objective is to examine the target of adolescents’ humour to find out what precisely the humour is about. The results show that humour, when targeting participants from the outside group, criticizes their behavior, portraying these behaviours as undesirable and deviant from the social norms. However, when the target is members from the in-group, it serves as a covert correction mechanism and is more subtle. Humour in this study strengthens the bonds among group members. It acts as an evaluation of social interactions, which allows group members to express their opinions and judgments about specific behaviours subtly and collectively.

Archakis and Tsakona (2006) also aim to explore the role of humour in constructing the social identity of young Greeks. The study applies GTVH to the conversational data of 29 individuals aged between 17 and 20 years. The data are from 13-hour taped conversations collected over two months. The analysis shows three results. First, when humour targets the outside social group, it is to criticize behaviours perceived as external or other. Second, when the target is within the inside group, humour serves as a covert mechanism to correct the in-group behaviour. Third, humour aims at oneself indicates that individuals employ humour as a tool to construct a positive self-image. The study illustrates that humour serves as a means to reinforce social norms, bonds, and values.

### 2.4 Theoretical Framework

Both the theory of Transitivity by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (1991) are used to explore the cultural and social themes in Noah’s comedy, such as race, politics, and the immigrant experience. Analyzing Noah’s performances and writings can reveal how he uses humour to comment on these themes and engage with his audience.

#### 2.4.1. Transitivity Framework

Halliday’s transitivity system, a powerful tool for analyzing how language is used to represent experiences, is applied to gain insights into how Noah uses language to convey his experiences and observations and how these contribute to the humour in his performances and writings. This theory involves understanding the semantic roles of words in sentences and how they work together to convey a particular meaning. As discussed, the transitivity framework is theorized by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) and includes six processes, as seen in Figure 1.

Process Types	Category Meaning	Participants, directly involved	Participants, obliquely involved
<b>Material</b> • Action • Event	‘doing’ • ‘Doing’ • ‘Happening’	Actor, Goal	Recipient, Beneficiary, Client; Scope; Initiator; Attribute
<b>Behavioural</b>	‘behaving’	Behaver	Behaviour
<b>Mental</b> • Perception • Affection • Cognition	‘sensing’ • ‘Seeing’ • ‘Feeling’ • ‘Thinking’	Senser, Phenomenon	Inducer
<b>Verbal</b>	‘saying’	Sayer, Target	Receiver; Verbiage
<b>Relational</b> • Attribution • Identification	‘being’ • ‘Attributing’ • ‘Identifying’	Carrier, Attribute Identified, Identifier; Token, Value	Attributor; Beneficiary Assigner
<b>Existential</b>	‘existing’	Existent	-

Figure 1: Transitivity process types and their meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 311)

The six transitivity processes act as a powerful tool to analyze different contexts. First, the *material processes* represent physical actions and events. For example, *the dog chased the cat across the yard*. The actor is *the dog*, and the goal is *the cat*. In this sentence, the physical action is chasing, in which the dog initiates the action, and the cat is affected. Second, the *mental processes* portray cognitive and perceptual actions. For instance, *she understood the problem quickly*. The sensor is *she*, and the phenomenon is *the problem*. This sentence indicates a mental process of understanding, where she is processing her comprehension of the problem. Third, *relational processes* relate to the status of being or having something. They identify (equate one thing to another) or attribute (assign a quality to something) two entities together. For example, *the car is blue*. *The car* is the carrier, and *blue* is the attribute. Another example: *Malak is a musician*. Here, *Malak* is the token, and *a musician* is the value. Fourth, the *verbal processes* relate to the act of saying and involve a sayer, a receiver, and the verbiage. For instance, *John told Mary the news*. *John* is the sayer, *Mary* is the receiver, and *the news* is the verbiage. Fifth, *behavioral processes* involve psychological or physiological behaviors that are neither purely internal nor external. For example, *the kid smiled at his mother*.

Here, *the kid* is the behavior, and the behavior is *smiling*, which is directed at his mother. Lastly, *the existential processes* include the status of something happening or existing. For instance, *there is a cat under the table*. The existent is *the cat*. The statement asserts the presence of a cat in a specific location: *under the table*.

#### 2.4.2. The General Theory of Verbal Humour

The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH) (1991) is a progression and an expansion of the first formal semantic theory of jokes, the Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) (Raskin 1985, as cited in Ruch et al. 1993). GTVH is theorized by Attardo and Raskin (1991). This theory provides a comprehensive framework for the analysis of verbal humour. Verbal humour includes many forms, such as "sarcasm, mockery, irony, puns, and other rhetorical skills" in a specific context (Mulyadi et al. 2021, p. 2).

The General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH), which provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing verbal humour, will be used to dissect the linguistic structure of Noah's jokes, understand the source of humour, and identify the elements that make his comedy effective. This theory, deeply rooted in semantics, is based on the idea that a text can be humorous if it is compatible with two different semantic scripts or contexts that are in opposition. This involves a deep understanding of the meanings of words and phrases and how they can be interpreted in different contexts to create humour.

**The SSTH proposes two essential conditions for a text to be considered humorous:**

1. Each joke should have two intersecting scripts, meaning the joke can be interpreted, wholly or partially, according to two different scripts.
2. These two scripts should be in opposition, i.e., they should negate each other, at least within the context of a specific text. This opposition is based on a set of fundamental contrasts, such as real/unreal, possible/impossible, and so on.

First, the *Script Opposition* identifies two scripts – semantic structures – that are opposing each other but are present in the exact text. Second, the *Logical Mechanism* links the two scripts in the joke. Third, the *Situation* is the place where the joke took place, which includes the setting and participants. Fourth, the *Target* is the entity against which the humour is directed. Fifth, the *Narrative Strategy* includes how the joke was told. Lastly, the *Language* involves the language choices and features that influence the joke's delivery and interpretation.

The Semantic Script Theory of Humour (SSTH) suggests that a text can be humorous if it contains two scripts that overlap and contradict each other. Here, scripts refer to substantial semantic information related to a word and triggered by it, along with a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker. These scripts go beyond the lexical definition of the word, encompassing the speaker's comprehensive knowledge and experiences related to the concept in their personal world. It is essential to note that the application of the GTVH is not limited to jokes. It can also be applied to other forms of text, including short stories and poems. Essentially, the GTVH provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing and understanding the complexity of verbal humour, making it a valuable tool in humour studies (Attardo 2017, pp. 5-6).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The present study investigates Trevor Noah's racial identity, which emanates from his discourse in *Son of Patricia's* stand-up comedy and Chapter Two, titled *Born a Crime* from *Born a Crime* memoir. This section discusses research design, data collection, procedures, and data summary.

#### 3.1 Research Design

This exploratory and descriptive study employs a mixed-method design and considers qualitative and quantitative data. The research study's nature is primarily descriptive, as its aim is to provide a detailed account of racial identity, social commentary, and personal narratives. First, *Son of Patricia* and *Born a Crime* were analyzed using the transitivity framework and general theory of verbal humour (GTVH). Second, both excerpts were compared to identify the differences between the two genres.

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Procedures

The data are chosen based on different reasons. First, both researchers are interested in Trevor Noah's topics in his TV show, *Daily Shows*. Data are collected online through YouTube and from his book. Afterwards, the data are transferred to a Word document, where the researchers identify the processes used in an Excel sheet. Subsequently, they record the frequency of each process. Lastly, the data are analyzed qualitatively, and the two genres are compared. The rationale behind choosing Chapter Two of his memoir and the segment titled *The Love of Jesus*, from Noah's stand-up comedy, *Son of Patricia*, is the similarities in the themes addressed in both excerpts. It is intriguing to explore how his linguistic choices could signify his

inherent racial identity. Moreover, the rationale for this approach is rooted in the understanding of the linguistic mechanisms that underpin the representation of experiences in language and humour.

### 3.3 Data Summary

#### 3.3.1. Son of Patricia

In a segment titled *The Love of Jesus*, from Trevor Noah's stand-up comedy, *Son of Patricia*, Noah shared his anecdotes about growing up in South Africa during the apartheid era. He explicated the racial laws in which his family lived. He described his family's living situation as illegal and complex. His story showed his mother's resilience, wisdom, and unconventional methods of handling racism at that time. He recalled an incident when a man shouted racist comments at them, and his mother urged him to respond to racism with *The Love of Jesus*. He shared another experience in Chicago where he encountered another racist incident and handled it with humour, which confused the racist individual and diffused the situation.

#### 3.3.2. Born a Crime, Chapter Two

In the second chapter of Trevor Noah's memoir, titled *Born a Crime*, he narrated his experience growing up as a child of mixed-race during apartheid in South Africa. He explained that his mother is black, while his father was a white Swiss/German individual, which was considered unlawful during the era of apartheid. He depicted that his mother was fearless, rebellious, and determined. She opposed the norms by taking secretarial courses, which secured a job for her that was usually reserved for white people. His narrative portrays social injustice, racism, and segregation.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Frequency of the Transitivity Processes

Both excerpts are analyzed qualitatively using Halliday's Transitivity framework. Firstly, a frequency count of the processes identified in each excerpt will be presented, followed by an interpretation of these findings.

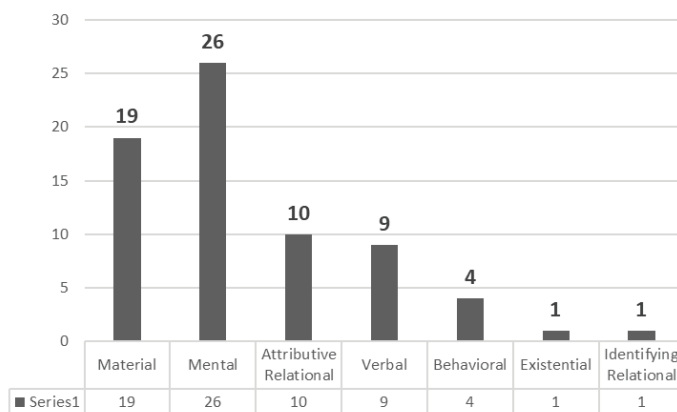


Figure 2: Frequency of the processes in *The Love of Jesus* from *Son of Patricia*

Figure 2 demonstrates that in the first excerpt, mental processes are the most frequently used process, appearing 26 times. Material processes follow with 19 instances. Attributive relational processes occur ten times. Next, verbal processes are noted four times. Finally, existential and identifying relational processes are employed only once.

The mental processes have the highest number, which highlights the reflective nature of Noah's narrative. This conclusion highly emphasizes the internal psychological responses of the characters to their experiences, whether Noah or the racist person. Though the material processes are employed less than the mental ones, they are crucial in describing the actions that caused a significant impact on Noah and the racist guy. The heavy reliance on attributive relational processes indicates a strong focus on status and qualities. This conclusion shows that Noah's narrative is heavily reliant on the characters' internal status, relationships, and descriptions rather than simple actions. As for the verbal processes, they were central in conveying the dialogues that were crucial to understanding the interactions between both characters.

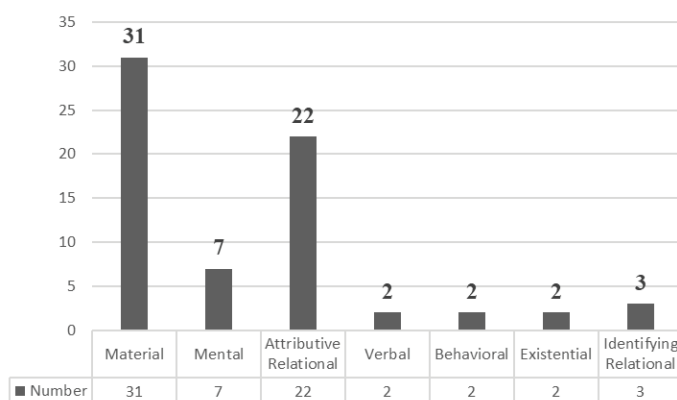


Figure 3: Frequency of the processes in *Born a Crime, Chapter Two*

According to Figure 3, in the second excerpt, the number of material processes used is the highest, with 31 occurrences. It is followed by the attributive relational ones 22 times. Then, there are seven mental processes. This is followed by three identifying relational processes. Lastly, the behavioral, existential, and verbal processes are each employed twice.

Since the use of material processes is the highest, this indicates the focus on the actions and events of the narrative. This fits with the memoir genre, as it is a description of a series of events. The second highest occurrences are the attributive relational processes, which are used extensively to highlight the identity and characteristics of the individuals. Furthermore, the use of mental processes is less frequent; however, it provides an understanding of Noah's psychological and internal feelings while describing his mother's life. The two instances of verbal processes are only to report quotations. The rest of the processes are not central to the narrative.

## 4.2 Analysis of the Transitivity Processes

This section analyzes some remarks made by Noah in his stand-up routine, *Son of Patricia*, and Chapter Two of *Born a Crime*.

### 4.2.1. Transitivity in *The Love of Jesus* segment in *Son of Patricia*

(1) *I grew up in this family (Material), and we couldn't live together. (Attributive Relational) I could live with my mom (Attributive Relational), but my dad couldn't live with us (Attributive Relational); it was illegal (Attributive Relational). And, and... people would be racist to us all the time (Behavioral).*

The verb *grew up* describes the physical and developmental action of maturing or aging within the family context. There is a change over time, which is associated with gaining experience and maturity. The second clause is an attributive relational process. It describes the condition of not being able to live together, not equating *we* or *my dad* with something else. Using modal verbs here indicates the possibility or potentiality. Saying *it was illegal* asserts a particular action. The verb "*was*" links the pronoun *it* to its attribute, *illegal*. The last sentence highlights how individuals are engaged in the act of racism and that racism is an ongoing and continuous action.

(2) *Oh my God! And this man. This man was so offended by what I had done (Mental)*

Here, the contrast between what Noah mentioned and what this man is feeling is contradicting and absurd.

(3) *That he drove his truck around me, rolled the window down, looked me dead in the eye, (Material)*

Here, the material processes analysis indicates the aggressor's intention to harm. Besides, the use of the adjective *dead* indicates threat and aggression.

(4) *And he was like, "Get out of the road, n i g g e r."*

The verbal assault is vivid. Noah stated this word for the third time. However, while saying the n-word, he spelled it out in a funny way, again to cope with racism.

(5) *Oh, you could see he wanted to hurt me.*

Using the verb *see* indicates an apparent threat towards Noah from his oppressor. Using the modal verb "*could*" indicates intent to hurt because it is evident that a bystander can see it.

(6) *We locked eyes (Behavioral), and I could see in that moment (Mental) he was waiting for me to be like [slow motion "No"] [mock gunshot sound] (Verbal). What that man didn't know was where I was from (Mental).*

The humour in these statements is vivid in the exaggerated, cinematic, and dramatic portrayal of a gunshot. By using slow motion and the mocking sound, Noah transforms the tense moment into a light one. He also mocks the racist person and shows his absurdity. The final remark is a reference to the profound impact his mother had on him as a child in dealing with complex issues, such as racism.

(7) *He looked at his hands like they'd somehow magically turned black (Material).*

Using *looked* involves the physical action of directing his gaze toward his hands. Using *magically turned black* emphasizes the surprise and disbelief humourously. This reflects the racist man's identity and how he cannot stand black people.

(8) *Like I had cursed him with a n i g g e r bomb (Mental).*

This phrase involves a racial curse by the victim. Noah used this expression as a form of ironic or retaliatory commentary against the racism he experienced. Noah attempted to reclaim power over a situation while he might have felt marginalized. It is a form of linguistic resistance against the perpetrator.

(9) *Oh... I actually felt bad for him, man (Mental).*

The use of the mental process *felt bad* indicates that Noah is experiencing sympathy or empathy towards *him*. This statement shows a connection or concern for the other person's well-being, indicating an emotional depth.

**(10) *Because I've been called that word before (Material), but that was his first time.***

This statement shows that Noah experienced racism, discrimination, and verbal abuse multiple times during his life.

**(11) *I didn't realize how right my mother was until decades later, which I feel is what always happens with your parents, right? (Mental)***

Here, there is an elaboration of his mother being wise. He explains his cognitive and emotional journey. Using the rhetorical question *right?* invites the listeners to think about his words, which shows that this is a universal experience, not just personal.

**(12) *He didn't realize that that was the son of Patricia stepping into the road.***

Referring to his mother again is quite strong. He acknowledges her strength, resilience, and wisdom, further showing her strong effect on him and his life, especially when dealing with complex issues like racism.

#### 4.2.2. *Transitivity in Born a Crime*

**(13) *I grew up in South Africa during apartheid (Material), which was awkward (Attributive Relational) because I was raised in a mixed family, with me being the mixed one in the family (Attributive Relational).***

By using a material process in the first part of the sentence, the focus is placed on the action of growing up, which introduces the reader to the narrator's life journey. It sets a dynamic starting point for the narrative, grounded in a specific socio-political context.

**(14) *My mother, Patricia Nombuyiselo Noah, is black (Attributive Relational). My father, Robert, is white (Attributive Relational).***

Noah labels his mother as black to emphasize her racial identity. Using attributive relational processes provides unambiguous information. He also highlights his father's identity as a white male.

**(15) *During apartheid, one of the worst crimes you could commit was having sexual relations with a person of another race (Attributive***

***Relational).***

By using an attributive relational process, the sentence emphasizes the classification of an action (having sexual relations with a person of another race) as a severe crime within the apartheid context. It not only states that the action was criminal but underscores its severity by labeling it one of the *worst* crimes, thereby highlighting the strict and oppressive racial laws of apartheid.

**(16) *Race-mixing proves that races can mix— (Mental) and, in a lot of cases, want to mix (Material).***

Using *proves* highlights that race-mixing serves as a reality for racial integration, which challenges the assumptions about racial boundaries. Using "*want to mix*" introduces a behavioral aspect, which depicts the natural desire and inclination of races to interact together.

**(17) *Because a mixed person embodies that rebuke to the logic of the system (Attributive Relational), race-mixing becomes a crime worse than treason (Identifying Relational).***

In the first clause, the attributive relational process is used to portray the qualities of a mixed-race person. In the second clause, identifying the relational process is used to categorize race-mixing as a specific type of crime, intensifying its perceived severity. This statement shows the severity of the radical views on race during the apartheid era.

**(18) *Unlike in America, where anyone with one drop of black blood automatically became black, in South Africa, mixed people came to be classified as their own separate group, neither black nor white but what we call "coloured" (Identifying Relational).***

The process of "*became black*" is identifying relational. It defines the identity of *anyone with one drop of black blood* as *black*. This process does not attribute a quality but instead identifies the subject with a new classification. As for the second segment, it explicitly redefines or names the identity of the mixed people in terms of a new social category. However, the phrase *what we call 'coloured'* is attributive. It provides a label that describes their racial classification within a social context.

**(19) *Coloured people, black people, white people, and Indian people were forced to register their race with the government (Material).***



Using the passive voice indicates that the action was not voluntary but instead imposed under the pressure of the law. Such a statement reflects sociopolitical implications on society. Moreover, he emphasized the identity of each category of oppressed individuals.

**(20) Indian areas were segregated from coloured areas, which were segregated from black areas—all of them segregated from white areas and separated from one another by buffer zones of empty land (Material).**

The sentence reflects a systemic approach to segregation, where different racial groups are not only kept apart from each other but are also separated by physical barriers. This statement included a repetition of the word segregation three times, which indicates the insistence and intent of segregation policies.

**(21) The police would kick down the door, drag the people out, beat them, and arrest them (Material).**

These sentences vividly illustrate a sequence of violent actions by the police, signifying force, aggression, and misconduct. Such aggressive tactics would likely have led to strained relations between the police and the community, fostering fear, resentment, and possibly resistance among the population.

**(22) She wanted to do something (Mental), figured out a way to do it (Attributive Relational), and then she did it (Material).**

The combination of mental, attributive relational, and material processes portrays a logical flow from thought to action. They also depict Patricia's capability, resilience, and strength.

**(23) The ultimate goal of apartheid was to make South Africa a white country, with every black person stripped of his or her citizenship and relocated to live in the homelands, the Bantustans, semi-sovereign black territories that were, in reality, puppet states of the government in Pretoria (Material).**

This excerpt highlights the control mechanisms of black people during the apartheid era. Using *otherwise* introduces the severe consequences of not adhering to the rules.

### 4.3 Frequency in GTVH

The four tables below provide a detailed breakdown of Logical Mechanisms, Target, Language, and Situation Knowledge Resources (KRs).

Table 1. Logical Mechanisms (KR) Count

Logical Mechanism	Count
Absurd Interpretation	11
Absurd Neologism	1
Fallacious Reasoning	6
Twisting Homonymy	4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 1 lists various logical mechanisms used, with 'Absurd Interpretation' being the most common, recorded 11 times, indicating it may be a prevalent technique in creating humour. 'Fallacious Reasoning' appears six times, suggesting a moderate reliance on flawed logic to achieve comedic effects. 'Twisting Homonymy' is noted four times, showing it played a smaller role in humour generation. 'Absurd Neologism' is the least frequent, occurring only once, which might imply it is a less effective or less commonly used strategy. The total of 22 instances across these categories highlights the diverse approaches in employing logical mechanisms for humour. Table 2 highlights the Target KRs.

Table 2. Target (KR) Count

Target Type	Count
Behavior	4
Group of People	1
Individual	14
Institution	1
Societal Norm	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>21</b>

Table 2 classifies the Target Knowledge Resource, with 'Individual' being the category that is most often cited, occurring 14 times. This suggests a focus on personal attributes or actions as central elements in the humour. 'Behavior' follows four times, indicating that specific actions are also a significant target. The single occurrences of 'Group of People,' 'Institution,' and 'Societal Norm' suggest these are less frequently used as targets, possibly implying their limited role or specific context in the humor being analyzed. The total of 21 instances underscores the varied focus on different targets within the material. Table 3 displays the language KRs.

Table 3. Language (KR) Count

Language Type	Count
Argumentative Language	1
Descriptive Language	3
Dialogue	2
Expository Language	7
Narrative Language	9
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 3 presents a classification of Language (KR) used, with 'Narrative Language' being the most prevalent, appearing nine times. This suggests a strong reliance on storytelling to convey ideas. 'Expository Language' follows with seven occurrences, indicating a focus on explaining or informing within the content. 'Descriptive Language' appears three times, highlighting its role in painting vivid images. 'Dialogue' is recorded twice, suggesting limited use of conversational elements. 'Argumentative Language' appears once, implying a minimal emphasis on persuasion. The total of 22 instances reflects the varied linguistic approaches employed in the material. Table 4 demonstrates the situation KRs.

Table 4. Situation (KR) Count

Situation Type	Count
Absurd	7
Concern	2
Confusing	1
Curious	2
Hoping	1
Misunderstanding	1
Scary	4
Surprise	4
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>22</b>

Table 4 categorizes the Situation (KR), highlighting 'Absurd' as the most frequent, with seven occurrences suggesting a strong emphasis on illogical or nonsensical scenarios to engage the audience. 'Scary' and 'Surprise' each appear four times, reflecting their importance in creating tension or unexpected outcomes. 'Concern' and 'Curious' are mentioned twice, indicating a moderate presence in the material.

The single occurrences of 'Confusing,' 'Hoping,' and 'Misunderstanding' suggest these situations are used sparingly, possibly to add specific nuances. The total of 22 instances illustrates the diversity of situational contexts within the content.

#### 4.4 Analysis of the GTVH

This section analyzes the application of GTVH on remarks made by Noah in his stand-up comedy *Son of Patricia* and Chapter Two of *Born a Crime*. Noah's comedic works are rich in examples of semantic mechanisms that underpin humour. In his stand-up comedy show *Son of Patricia*, Noah frequently introduces two conflicting scripts or contexts that generate humour. A case in point is his humorous commentary on the absurdity of racial classifications in South Africa, where he states, "I was never black enough, I was never white enough." The humour in this instance stems from the incongruity between the expectations of the black and white communities and Noah's own mixed-race identity.

Noah's comedy also often involves the humorous resolution of incongruities, a concept known as the Logical Mechanism in GTVH. For instance, in *Born a Crime*, he narrates how his mother pretended to be his maid to circumvent the stringent racial laws of apartheid-era South Africa. The humour in this scenario arises from the unexpected resolution of the incongruity between his mother's actual role and the role she feigned.

Noah's works also exemplify the use of language to represent experiences, a concept central to Halliday's Transitivity theory. In *Son of Patricia*, he employs language to articulate his experiences and observations on subjects such as race, politics, and the immigrant experience. His choice of words, sentence structure, and the way he describes these experiences all contribute to the humour in his performances. His jokes cleverly use transitivity to navigate the sensitive topic of interracial relationships during apartheid, using humour to challenge and subvert racial stereotypes. This also highlights Noah's ability to use his mixed-race identity to navigate and joke about sensitive racial topics.

##### 4.4.1. GTVH in *Son of Patricia*

The segment provides a rich exploration of the Script Opposition Knowledge Resource (KR) from GTVH. This KR involves the juxtaposition of two opposing scripts or scenarios to create humour. Examples of Script Opposition in this particular segment are outlined in Table 5, which displays the script oppositions KRs.

Table 5. Script Oppositions KRs

Script Opposition	Example from Text
Vehicle (Pickup Truck/Prius)	<i>Mostly because he was driving a pickup truck. Yeah, I just feel like that was an unnecessary stereotype that he didn't need to perpetuate. You know... I feel like if you're going to be racist, do something different. Think outside the box. Drive a Prius.</i>
Colour Perception (See/Don't See)	<i>I was crossing the road and then the light turned red for me, but I decided to walk anyways, because I don't see colour.</i>
Identity (Known/Unknown)	<i>What that man didn't know was where I was from. More importantly, who he didn't know was my mother.</i>
Reaction (Planned/Spontaneous)	<i>And let me tell you something, LA, it was so beautiful, because I didn't plan it. I didn't think about it.</i>

Table 5 presents the Logical Mechanism (LM), another key component of the GTVH, which is predominantly utilized in the segment. This involves the use of absurd interpretations, fallacious reasoning, and twisting homonymy to generate humour. For example, Noah's family dynamics, his encounters with racism, and his mother's counsel are all humourously depicted through absurd interpretations. Noah's jaywalking is humourously presented as a significant factor in the man's racist insult through fallacious reasoning. The phrase *I don't see colour* is humourously used to refer to Noah's disregard for traffic lights and then to his attitude towards race.

Humour often emerges from the semantic incongruity or opposition between different interpretations of a situation or phrase. For instance, the term *crazy* is humourously used to refer to Noah's mother's unusual advice and then to her wisdom, creating humour through the semantic twist. The GTVH enables us to dissect the humourous elements and comprehend the cognitive processes involved in perceiving and appreciating humour. The Logical Mechanism in this particular segment is outlined in Table 6, which demonstrates the logical mechanisms KRs.

Table 6. Logical Mechanisms KRs

Text Segment	Logical Mechanism
<i>I grew up in this family, and we couldn't live together. I could live with my mom, but my dad couldn't live with us; it was illegal.</i>	<b>Absurd Interpretation.</b> The text humourously presents Noah's family situation as a simple inconvenience, rather than a result of oppressive laws.
<i>I remember one day, in particular, walking through the streets together. And some guy across the road shouted something really mean at us.</i>	<b>Fallacious Reasoning.</b> The text humourously presents the man's racist shout as simply "something really mean," rather than a manifestation of racism.
<i>And I was like, "What?" I was like, "This lady's crazy." She was crazy, but she was also right.</i>	<b>Twisting Homonymy.</b> The text plays with the word "crazy," using it first to refer to Noah's mother's unusual advice and then to her wisdom.

According to Table 6, 'Situation Type' is the third component of the six Knowledge Resources (KRs) that are essential for joke creation. It refers to the specific context or scenario in which the humour occurs. This could be a real or imagined event, a particular setting,

or a specific emotional context. The situation type provides the backdrop against which the joke unfolds and plays a crucial role in shaping the humour. Table 7 demonstrates the situation KRs.

Table 7. Situation KRs

Situation Type	Text Segment
<b>Curious.</b> Noah's unusual family situation due to legal restrictions.	<i>I grew up in this family, and we couldn't live together. I could live with my mom, but my dad couldn't live with us; it was illegal.</i>
<b>Concern.</b> Noah's concern about the frequent racism they experienced.	<i>And, and... people would be racist to us all the time.</i>
<b>Surprise.</b> Noah's surprise at his mother's resilience and toughness.	<i>But I was really lucky growing up, because my mom is probably the most gangster human being you'll ever meet in your life. Nothing got to her. -Nothing fazed her.</i>
<b>Absurd.</b> Noah's perception of his mother's advice as absurd, yet correct.	<i>And I was like, "What?" I was like, "This lady's crazy." She was crazy, but she was also right.</i>

Table 7 displays that 'Target' is the fourth KR and refers to the person, group, behaviour, or societal norm that the humour is directed at. The target can be an individual, a group of people, a behaviour, an institution, or a societal norm. The humour often arises from the incongruity or absurdity associated with the target.

The laws that prevented Noah's mixed-race family from living together are humorously presented as a curious situation. Additionally, the people who were racist towards Noah and his family are humorously portrayed as a concern. Meanwhile, Noah's mother, who is resilient and unfazed by racism, is humorously depicted as a surprise. Similarly, the man who shouted something mean at Noah and his mother is humorously presented as an individual target. Furthermore, the behavior of being racist, which Noah's mother suggests should be countered with love, is humorously portrayed as a confusing situation. Noah's behavior of jaywalking, which he presents as a relevant factor in the man's racist slur, and his behavior of ignoring traffic lights, which he humorously justifies by saying he doesn't see color, are also humorously presented as behavior targets. Finally, the stereotype of racists driving pickup trucks, which Noah finds unnecessary, is humorously presented as an absurd situation.

The Narrative Strategy, which is the fifth KR in the GTVH, refers to the specific techniques or methods used to deliver the joke. In the context of Trevor Noah's *Son of Patricia*, the narrative strategy is characterized by several key elements:

Noah uses personal anecdotes, particularly his experiences growing up in South Africa and his encounters with racism. These anecdotes serve as the foundation for his jokes, providing a relatable and engaging narrative for the audience. Additionally, Noah brings his stories to life through vivid characterization, particularly his mother, who is portrayed as a resilient and wise figure. This characterization adds depth to his jokes, making them more memorable. Furthermore, many of Noah's jokes involve absurd situations or reactions, such as his mother's unconventional advice on dealing with racism or his humorous disappointment at a racist's choice of vehicle. This element of absurdity enhances the humor. Moreover, underlying many jokes is sharp social commentary on issues

like racism, stereotypes, and societal norms, adding a layer of depth and making it thought-provoking. Finally, Noah frequently engages with his audience, reacting to their laughter and involving them in his stories, sometimes even incorporating their responses into his jokes. Together, these elements form the narrative strategy of Trevor Noah's *Son of Patricia*, making it not just a comedy show but a rich, engaging, and thought-provoking narrative experience.

The sixth and final Knowledge Resource in the GTVH is Language. This refers to the specific linguistic techniques used to deliver the humour, such as descriptive, expository, narrative, dialogue, and argumentative language. Here are some examples from the text:

Noah uses descriptive language to paint a vivid picture of his upbringing and his mother's resilience. Additionally, he employs expository language to provide factual information about the racism they experienced, his mother's advice, his decision to jaywalk, and the man's ignorance of his background and his mother. Furthermore, Noah uses narrative language to recount specific incidents of racism, the moment that led him to fully understand his mother's advice, his spontaneous physical reaction to the man's racist slur, and the man's shock at his response. Moreover, he uses dialogue to recount conversations with his mother about dealing with racism, expressing his initial confusion and eventual understanding of her advice. Finally, Noah uses argumentative language to suggest a different approach for racists.

#### 4.4.2. GTVH in *Born a Crime*

In the GTVH, 'Script Opposition' is a key Knowledge Resource (KR) that refers to the juxtaposition of two opposing scripts or scenarios to create humour. In the context of Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime*, various forms of script opposition are employed, each representing a different facet of societal norms and personal experiences. These oppositions range from racial classifications and societal norms to personal actions and expectations. The following table provides examples of these script oppositions from the text, offering a deeper insight into how humour is generated through the interplay of contrasting scripts. Table 8 presents the script oppositions KRs.

Table 8. Script Oppositions KRs

Script Opposition	Example from Text
Race (Black/White)	<i>My mother, Patricia Nombuyiselo Noah, is black. My father, Robert, is white.</i>
Law (Legal/Illegal)	<i>During apartheid, one of the worst crimes you could commit was having sexual relations with a person of another race.</i>
Society (Normal/Abnormal)	<i>In any society built on institutionalized racism, race-mixing doesn't merely challenge the system as unjust; it reveals the system as unsustainable and incoherent.</i>
Classification (Black/Coloured/White)	<i>In South Africa, mixed people came to be classified as their own separate group, neither black nor white, but what we call "coloured."</i>
Expectation (Possible/Impossible)	<i>At the time, a black woman learning how to type was like a blind person learning how to drive.</i>

According to Table 8, Logical Mechanism is used to create humour through various techniques such as absurd interpretations, twisting homonymy, and fallacious reasoning. The following are some examples from the text:

Noah humorously presents his unique upbringing, the illegality of black people living in downtown Johannesburg, and the laborer status as privileges or minor inconveniences rather than serious issues through absurd interpretation. Additionally, he highlights fallacious reasoning by illustrating the absurdity of considering a relationship between two consenting adults as a crime, portraying his mother's unconventional career choice as a logical consequence of her nature, and depicting the requirement to carry a pass as a reasonable condition for leaving the township.

In *Born a Crime*, the Situation Type is used to create humour through various emotional contexts or reactions. Each situation type represents a different emotional context that contributes to the humour in the text. The following are some examples from the text:

Noah's unique family situation in the context of apartheid South Africa piques interest, and the fact that Noah's mother did not consider the ramifications of having a mixed child is also presented as a curious situation. Additionally, the absurdity of considering a relationship between two consenting adults as a crime under apartheid, along with laws prohibiting sex between racial groups and the comparison of a black woman learning to type to a blind person learning to drive, all contribute to the humor. Furthermore, the hopeful determination of Noah's mother to act despite challenges, her fearless portrayal, and the message that considering ramifications can prevent action all add to the humor in the text.

'Target' is a key KR in the GTVH. It refers to the person, group, behavior, or societal norm that the

humour is directed at. The target can be an individual, a group of people, an institution, or a societal norm. The humour often arises from the incongruity or absurdity associated with the target. The following examples illustrate how the Target KR is employed to generate humour in Chapter 2 of *Born a Crime*, providing a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes involved in perceiving and appreciating humour.

The apartheid system, which is criticized and challenged by the existence of mixed-race individuals; the racial classification system in South Africa, which is different from that in America and creates a separate category for mixed-race individuals; the government, which enforced racial registration and segregation, the apartheid system which enforced strict racial segregation and separation, the legal system which passed and enforced laws prohibiting interracial relationships, the government which went to extreme lengths to enforce the apartheid laws, the legal system which imposed severe penalties for breaking the apartheid laws, the legal system which enforced racial discrimination in job opportunities, the South African government which is criticized for making only minor reforms in response to international protest, and the employment system which is criticized for only token hiring of black workers in low-level white-collar jobs. Furthermore, the societal norm of racial segregation under apartheid was the societal norm or expectation that black women would not learn skills like typing.

In Trevor Noah's *Born a Crime*, the Language, a key KR in the GTVH, is used to create humour through various linguistic techniques. These techniques include descriptive, expository, narrative, dialogue, and argumentative language. Each type of language serves a different purpose in conveying information, telling a story, presenting a viewpoint, or creating a dialogue. The following examples illustrate how the Language KR is employed to generate humour in Chapter 2 of *Born a Crime*, providing a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes involved in perceiving and appreciating humour.

Noah uses descriptive language to provide background information about his upbringing. Moreover, he employs expository language to provide factual information about his parents, race-mixing, racial classifications in America and South Africa, racial registration under apartheid, laws prohibiting interracial relationships under apartheid, the penalties for breaking the apartheid laws, and the absurdity of a black woman learning to type under apartheid. Additionally, Noah uses narrative language to tell stories about his parents' relationship, human attraction, mixed-race children in South Africa, the exploitation of native women, the government's efforts to enforce apartheid laws, the absurdity of police enforcement, severe consequences for interracial couples, racial bias, his mother's determination, and the risks and luck his family faced to evade the apartheid system. Moreover, Noah uses dialogue to recount a conversation between someone asking his mother a question and her response. Finally, Noah uses argumentative language to present a viewpoint on race-mixing and institutionalized racism and the societal implications of being a mixed-race individual.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis, three common themes have emerged. In both the stand-up comedy and the memoir, Noah stressed the profound influence of his mother, Patricia, on his life. He described her as strong, wise, unique, and resilient. In both excerpts, she taught him how to handle racism with grace when he was young. The second theme is racism and cultural identity. Both excerpts delve deep into racism and Noah's cultural identity. In the stand-up comedy, he explained that he faced direct racism in the United States, and he used humour to deal with the issue. Similarly, he narrated his difficulties while growing up as a mixed-race child during the apartheid era in South Africa in his memoir. The third theme depicted in both excerpts is using humour as a coping mechanism. This method lightened the mood and communicated his cultural identity, as well as discrediting racist people. Moreover, Noah typically employs humour in his dealings with serious life subjects such as societal issues, identity, and racism.

In both excerpts, the analysis of the transitivity processes revealed distinct narrative focus and thematic emphasis, which reflected different aspects of Noah's storytelling style and content.

In *Son of Patricia*, the dominant use of mental processes underscored the reflective nature of the narrative. This conclusion suggests that this stand-up comedy is centered around the psychological status

and responses of the characters. It also focuses on how they perceive and react to their circumstances. Furthermore, the significant occurrence of attributive relational processes draws attention to the conditions and inherent attributes of the characters. Although the Material processes were less frequent, they still played a huge role in depicting the actions that impacted the characters, which added a dynamic element to the reflective narrative.

On the other hand, Chapter Two of *Born a Crime* exhibits a higher frequency of material processes, which places a strong emphasis on actions and events. This aligns with the memoir genre, where the recounting of events and actions forms the backbone of the narrative. The prominence of the attributive relational processes also pinpoints the prominence of identity and the characteristics of the participants, which are also crucial in constituting any memoir, as they deal with personal and historical realities such as apartheid. Although the mental processes were fewer, they enriched the narrative by providing insights into Noah's feelings and reactions, which added depth to the physical and social actions.

In both excerpts, the focus is more on action, reflection, and description, which are more effectively conveyed through material, mental, and relational processes. While *Son of Patricia* focuses more on the psychological and reflective aspects through the use of mental processes, *Born a Crime* leans towards a more action-oriented narrative with its predominant use of material processes. Both styles effectively cater to the different thematic needs of a stand-up comedy routine and a memoir, respectively, showcasing Noah's versatility as a storyteller who adeptly uses linguistic processes to shape his narratives.

Both excerpts utilized the GTVH to explore and highlight the absurdities of societal norms and personal experiences through various logical mechanisms. *Son of Patricia* employed techniques like absurd interpretations and twisting homonymy to create humour from serious topics such as racial prejudices and the complexities of family dynamics under apartheid laws.

In *Born a Crime*, it is apparent that Noah continues to use similar comedic strategies to critique the harsh realities of apartheid. The humour in *Born a Crime* likely stemmed from a juxtaposition of Noah's difficult childhood experiences against broader societal expectations, using absurdity and exaggerated logic to provide insight and commentary on South Africa's socio-political landscape. Both texts show how Noah leverages humour to tackle and reflect on deeply ingrained racial and cultural issues.

In summary, Noah's adept use of GTVH in both *Son of Patricia* and *Born a Crime* not only entertains but also educates his audience, making complex societal issues accessible and engaging. By contrasting personal anecdotes with societal norms, Noah highlighted the

absurdities and injustices in a profoundly humorous manner. This approach not only enhances audience engagement but also highlights the potency of humour as a tool for social critique and personal reflection.

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