

Pragmatic analysis of humour strategies and functions in *Jenifa's Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*

Adesina B. Sunday

University of Ibadan, Nigeria
sinadaybuk@gmail.com

Ganiu A. Bamgbose

Lagos State University, Nigeria
ganibamgbose@gmail.com

Abstract

Studies on humour in Nigeria have been extensively carried out from the perspectives of stand-up comedy and computer-mediated communication. There is a dearth of scholarly enquiries on humour in situation comedies (sitcoms). This paper investigates humour in the interactions of characters in Jenifa's Diary and Professor JohnBull, with a view to accounting for the manifestations of humour, the humour strategies deployed and the functions that the humorous utterances serve in the sitcoms. The work is situated in Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory. Eight excerpts from the sitcoms were subjected to pragmatic analysis. Two discourse functions of amusing and castigating are discovered in the data. The former serves the function of facilitating discourse and changing presumed power and status, while the latter serves the function of maintaining one's own space and autonomy, and demanding respect. Allusion, parody, retort, tease, banter and put-down are the humour techniques employed in the sitcoms. The study corroborates the claim of earlier studies that humour in every sphere of language use serves certain functions beyond the interactional need to create amusement.

Keywords: Sitcoms in Nigeria, Jenifa's Diary, Professor JohnBull, humour strategies, humour functions.

1. Introduction

Humour is a human phenomenon which is understood and appreciated by all human beings across cultures. Although the creation and orientation of humour differ from one culture to another, humour is common and appreciated in all human societies. Schwarz (2010) asserts that humour represents a central aspect of everyday conversations and all humans participate in humorous speech and behaviour. The past few decades have witnessed intensive research into

humour within a number of disciplines, such as psychology (Argyle, 1987; Lefcourt, 2001), sociology (Billig, 2005; Davies, 2007), philosophy (Morreal 1987), and medicine (Robinson, 1991; Ziegler 1998). The continuous dehumanisation of the world is making humour one of the few avenues through which people find consolation and escape from the numerous socio-political, economic and security pressure of society. Humour is, therefore, a veritable tool for the pursuit of joy, especially in the face of global economic and security challenges.

Linguistic analysis of humour narrows down its investigation to one of the many possible perspectives of enquiry (cf. Bamgbose, 2019). Humour, which can only take place between people, can have its participants differently stratified based on roles. It can manifest by means of a person rendering funny utterances before a live audience. This is called stand-up comedy. In this, the joke maker or stand-up comedian sometimes involves his or her audience in the performance, but this is just a strategy to sustain and carry the audience along, as the pace and dimension of the performance lie solely in the comedian's hands. There are many popular and successful comedians in Nigeria. These include Ali Baba, Basketmouth, Julius Agwu, Gordons, I Go Die, I Go Save, Lepacious Bose, Ay, Seyi Law, Shakara, Emeka Smith, Helen Paul and Kenny Blaq. Some studies have been carried out on stand-up comedy in and outside Nigeria from the angle of rhetorical argument in stand-up comedy (Greenbaum, 1999), performative techniques in stand-up comedy (Glick, 2007), interactional context of humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy (Adetunji, 2013), evolution of stand-up comedy in Nigeria (Ayakoroma, 2013), discourse types and activity types in stand-up comedy (Filani, 2015; 2016), and cultural reflections in stand-up performances (Sunday & Filani, 2019). Humour has also been investigated from the angle of computer-mediated interactions, with attention given to how societal issues are humorously addressed on social media, as seen in Lamidi (2016), that studied visual-verbal code-pairing in selected comments on Facebook, Odebunmi and Ajiboye (2016), whose focus was the negotiation of wit in Facebook humour, and Olaosun (2016), that analysed communicative content of selected visual construction of humour on Facebook.

Sitcoms, on the contrary, have not been adequately investigated in Nigeria. Existing studies on sitcoms in Nigeria have focused on sitcom as a tool for social change through the analysis of viewers' assessment of *Papa Ajasco* (Azeez & Doghudje, 2015), identity construction in *Jenifa's Diary* (Ologun, 2017), and discursive patterns in *Professor JohnBull* (Palmer, 2019). Studies have also been carried out on the functions or manifestations of humour in different forms of discourse. Hay (2000), for instance, investigates patterns of humour among New Zealand men and women in 18 friendship groups. He reports the use of solidarity-based, power-based and psychological functions in their interactions. Holmes and Marra (2002) also investigate how humour serves as boundary markers in social interaction. Holmes (2006) accounts for humour as an instrument for fostering collegiality. He argues that humour is used for the construction and maintenance of good relations with fellow workers. Despite these existing works and a number of others on the functions of humour, scholarly attention has not been given to the functions of humour in Nigerian situation comedies. Given the dearth of research on how humour plays out in Nigerian sitcoms, this study investigates the manifestation of intentional humour in two Nigerian sitcoms, *Jenifa's Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*, with a view to determining the functions of humorous utterances in the series and the pragmatic strategies deployed in creating humour. Intentional humour is used in this study to mean humour among characters in the series, wherein a character hopes to amuse another or where the denigration of a character engenders humour in other characters.

2. Background information on the selected sitcoms

The two sitcoms chosen for this study are *Jenifa's Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*. They are preferred for this study because they are contemporary, available and relevant to the social realities of Nigeria.

Jenifa's Diary was inspired by an earlier movie produced by a Nigerian actress, Funke Akindele, titled *Jenifa*. Although the sitcom has a somewhat different thematic preoccupation, both the movie and the sitcom revolve around the life of a lady called Jenifa. *Jenifa's Diary* portrays the amusing and amazing lifestyle of Suliati, who prefers to be called Jenifa. She is a secondary school dropout who gets into hairdressing in a town called Aiyetoro. She nurses the ambition of leaving her community in search of a better life. She goes outside her means just to be recognised and associated with. Her desire to measure up with her contemporaries makes her decide to go in search of higher education in the city. She gets inspired to leave her community and pursue her dream of attending a higher institution and becoming a huge success and enhancing her status in Aiyetoro. Jenifa displays the habit of using horrendous grammar, quick wit and misplaced vocabulary. The themes of the series border on love, friendship, family and self-actualisation.

Professor JohnBull is a sitcom sponsored by a telecommunications company in Nigeria called Globacom. It is shown on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the episodes are also made available on YouTube once released. The series is episodic in structure and satiric in aim. It has a cast of 12 regular performers and other regular and irregular cameo appearances by notable artistes from Nigeria and Ghana. The lead character of the series, and from whom it derives its name, is Professor JohnBull. The role is played by a Nollywood actor, Kanayo O. Kanayo. A widower and retired academic, Professor JohnBull lives with his son (Churchill), daughter (Elizabeth) and housemaid (Caro) in a serene neighbourhood in Enugu, in the eastern part of Nigeria, where he, by virtue of his academic and social exposure, becomes a consultant to the other residents in the neighbourhood on all kinds of issues.

3. Review of relevant literature

Sitcoms have attracted attention in global scholarship from different analytical perspectives, such as participation in the creation of humour (Brock, 2015; Dynel, 2011; 2016), translation as a humour technique in sitcoms (Korostenskiene & Pakrosnyte 2019) and humour as perceived by viewers (Wieczorek, 2018). Brock (2015) attempts a reconstruction of the participation frameworks of three TV comedy sub-genres. The study attempts a differentiation of the fictitious characters' communication and the discourse between a comedy's production crew and the television audience, with the conceptualisation of the viewers as ratified empirical recipients. The paper submits that participation frameworks are reconstructed for sitcom, candid camera and stand-up comedy, which differ considerably from one another and are definitive for their respective sub-genre. Brock's study is similar to the present one, as it comments on the manifestation of humour in sitcoms from different layers. It, however, does not focus on the discursive functions of such humorous utterances.

Similarly, working on the participation-based humour, Dynel (2011) accounts for the dyadic model of communication in the context of fictional media discourse. She clarifies the inter-character and the recipient levels of communication. She submits that sitcom humour, devised by the collective sender (the film crew) to be appreciated by the recipient, tends to be based on participation phenomena, which are frequently non-humorous from the perspective of (some or all) fictional participants and illustrated with few humour techniques from the sitcom

Friends. Korostenskiene and Pakrosnyte (2019) investigate the challenges of audiovisual translation (AVT) and also comment on the problems inherent in the translation of humour. They collected data from *Friends* (1994) and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (2013) to illustrate the different types of jokes, their translation and the strategies used to do so. The study also pays attention to the differences in the challenges of translating the humour in the two different sitcoms given the distance in their periods of production. The researchers conclude that translation is based on compromising and that the translator needs to take into consideration what needs to be translated and try to adapt it as best as s/he can to the context, both visual and conversational.

Wieczorek (2018) serves as an addition to the pragmatics of humour, with emphasis on the considerable disparities between different types of recipients, namely metarecipient, fan-recipient and regular recipient, in telecinematic discourse. The paper contributes to humour studies by commenting on the participation framework in televised discourse, explains the types of viewers and attempts a qualitative analysis of three different paths of communication. It submits that the production crew in telecinematic discourse devises dialogues and monologues in such a way to enable the audience to find funniness. These studies have all investigated humour in filmic discourse from different analytical perspectives but none has the same focus as the present study, which is to investigate humour strategies and their functions in Nigerian sitcoms.

In Nigeria, some studies have also investigated situation comedies. Such studies include Azeez and Doghudje (2015), Ologun (2017) and Palmer (2019). Azeez and Doghudje (2015) consider comedy as a discursive exchange for social change, focusing on the social themes of *Papa Ajasco* and its interpretation by the Nigerian audience. The study investigates the discursive process through which *Papa Ajasco* condemns some aspects of social behaviour and signifies them as bad or inappropriate in funny but strong terms. Palmer (2019) investigates the conversational structure and implicature in *Professor JohnBull*, with the aim of determining how cooperative maxims are flouted in the conversational turns of characters in the series. The study submits that the four cooperative maxims are flouted with varying frequencies in the interactions of characters. None of these studies has focused mainly on the generation of humour in sitcoms, with specific focus on strategies and functions.

However, much has generally been done on humour in Nigeria in other forms of discourse, such as stand-up comedy (Adetunji, 2013; Filani, 2015; 2016; Sunday & Filani, 2019), movies (Brown, 2008; Ehiemua, 2008) and computer-mediated communication (Inya 2016; Lamidi 2016; Taiwo 2016). Filani (2015) analyses how Nigerian stand-up comedians manipulate the parameters of an activity type so as to achieve their interactional goals in their performances, while Filani (2016) is interested in discourse types that emanate from the humour performed by stand-up comedians on *Night of a Thousand Laughs*, so as to decipher the two major contexts evoked in the selected performances, namely context of the joke and context in the joke. Sunday and Filani (2019) investigate how cultural assumptions and representations are deployed by Nigerian stand-up comedians in their performances. The study uses Relevance Theory to analyse seven routines from seven Nigerian stand-up comedians. It argues that Nigerian stand-up comedians manipulate shared cultural representations, distort collective knowledge, manipulate stereotypes and project personal beliefs while joking with culture. Ehiemua (2014) examines the iconic, indexical and symbolic signs which provoke laughter in two Nigerian apolitical movie comedies, *NnaaMeen* and *Touch and Follow*. Inya (2016) applies an elaborated pragmatic acts model to humorous interactions in students' text chats in a Nigerian university. The study reports pragmatic acts such as satirising, eliciting laughter, electioneering, teasing and overstating. The author submits that the effective appreciation of any humour act would require a pragmatically and culturally enriched context.

As seen in the works reviewed above, the creation and discourse functions of humour emanating in characters' interactions in Nigerian sitcoms have not enjoyed adequate research attention. This necessitated this study, which examines the humour functions and strategies in *Jenifa's Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*.

4. Theoretical framework

This study adopts Culpeper's (1996; 2011) Impoliteness Theory, given the potentiality of impolite utterances to engender humour in interactions and the contextual affordances of the theory. According to Culpeper (2011), impoliteness involves the study of particular communicative behaviours in social interaction. This makes the theory useful in the analysis of characters' interactions in the selected sitcoms. Culpeper et al. (2003) opine that impoliteness and conflictive interactions, far from being anomalous behaviour, are commonplace in a variety of different discourses, one of such being media discourse, in which this study is set. The choice of these two models of impoliteness (1996; 2011) is based on the fact that the strategies of the 1996 model are found useful for the purpose of the analysis, while the 2011 model offers the opportunity to analyse the contexts of the interactions.

According to Culpeper (1996), impoliteness engages in aggressive facework in a particular context to cause social disruption. This could be done in various ways, which include when the speaker intentionally attacks face and when the listener perceives a face that has been attacked. Locher and Bousfield (2008) see impoliteness as behaviour that is face-aggravating in a particular context. This means that the term impoliteness is achieved with a large degree of intentionality. This buttresses Culpeper's (1996) opinion that impoliteness is not rudeness because rudeness is that which is unintentional but impoliteness is intentional. Impoliteness is a multidisciplinary concept, approached from different fields of enquiry, such as social psychology, sociology, conflict studies, media studies, history, and literary studies (Culpeper, 2011). Locher and Bousfield (2008) introduce the terms first order impoliteness (impoliteness1) and second order impoliteness (impoliteness 2). The first order impoliteness concepts are "judgements about behaviour, such as impolite, rude, polite, polished and made by the social actors themselves. They arrive at these judgements according to the norms of their particular discursive practice." The second order approaches "use the concept and consider them on a theoretical level. These theories do not disregard first order notion as, in fact, it is argued that the second order theories are necessarily informed by first order notions" (Locher & Bousfield 2008:58).

Culpeper (1996) divides impoliteness broadly into two: inherent impoliteness and mock impoliteness. While the former is acts that innately threaten one's face regardless of the act, the latter stays on the surface and is not intended to insult anyone. Culpeper (1996) introduces five major impoliteness strategies:

- i) **Bald on record:** The Face Threatening Act (FTA) is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous way. This is an unmitigated intentional face attack.
- ii) **Positive impoliteness:** This is used to damage the addressee's positive face wants. It is attacking the positive face need by not showing you value someone. Examples include criticism, insults, and disagreements.
- iii) **Negative impoliteness:** This is used to damage the addressee's negative face wants, that is attacking the negative face of someone by imposing on that person command, order, threat, and many others.
- iv) **Off-record (indirect).** This is basically using an indirect way, such as sarcasm and banter. It is the act of not being sincere. Off-record is also known as mock politeness.

- v) **Withhold:** This means failing to be polite even when one is expected to be. Culpeper (1996) refers to it as “The absence of politeness where and when it is expected. For example, failing to thank somebody for a present may be taken as deliberate impoliteness”.

The values and norms of a society are crucial to the understanding and interpretation of impoliteness. Impoliteness is considered relevant for the analysis of humour because it coincides with the incongruity condition of humour which foregrounds a clash with expectations, especially at the level of behaviour. Culpeper (2011:15) claims that impoliteness can be considered a kind of attitude schema, comprising certain evaluative beliefs concerning certain behaviours. This helps analyse power relation and status in the characters’ utterances. Culpeper, in the later development of impoliteness, stresses the importance of context in the interpretation of impolite remarks. Following Sperber and Wilson’s (1986: 15) notion of context, Culpeper (2011) also adopts the definition of context as a set of premises used in interpreting an utterance. A context is a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world (Sperber and Wilson 1986).

The impoliteness theory was, therefore, used to account for how characters’ utterances enhance face through amusement and also establish power and distance. The context-driven aspect of the theory was mainly utilised in the analysis of the amusing utterances, while the earlier strategies introduced in the 2006 model proved useful in the analysis of castigating humour.

5. Methodology

The data used for this study were derived from the first five seasons of *Jenifa’s Diary* (JD) and *Professor JohnBull* (PJ) through purposive sampling. Each season of the sitcoms contains twelve to thirteen episodes. The first five seasons were chosen for the study because they provide sufficiently robust data for analysis in line with the aim of the study. The selected seasons were downloaded from YouTube and SceneOne TV. The interactions were transcribed and sometimes glossed where necessary. Gail Jefferson’s (2004) transcription notation was used for the transcription of the conversations. The excerpts analysed were purposively selected across the different episodes of the seasons. A qualitative approach was used for the study and the strategies and humour techniques deployed in the characters’ interactions were analysed.

6. Data analysis and discussion

The pragmatic strategies deployed in the creation of humour and the functions of the utterances are analysed below using the impoliteness theory. The humour techniques used by the characters are also analysed. This study identifies two manifestations of humour in the characters’ interactions, namely amusing and castigating.

6.1. Amusing humorous acts in *Jenifa’s Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*

The excerpts in this segment of the analysis mainly capture humorous acts that are used to achieve harmony, that is avoiding disagreement.

Excerpt 1

Toyosi: Hello o Jenny baby! What’s up?

1

Jenifa: Hello Toyo baby! How is you?

Toyosi: This is unusual o. Today is going to be a good day.

Jenifa: Yes o. Today is a goost day. I will not only **surprise** you,
I will **surbeans** you @

5

Toyosi: Surbeans! me? @@

(JD Season1 Episode 1 11 mins)

This excerpt is an exchange between Jenifa and Toyosi while Jenifa is on board to Lagos, where she hopes to come live with Toyosi in order to pursue her education. Jenifa is the eponymous character around whom the humour in the series revolves. Line 5 shows Jenifa's deliberate attempt to amuse Toyosi, as evident in her (Jenifa's) smile. As seen in the excerpt, the word *surbeans* is a coinage by Jenifa, which is not found in the English vocabulary. This is an instance of embolophrasia (Faleye, 2016), a speech disorder in which meaningless words or sounds are interjected into sentences for humorous effect. Jenifa substitutes the second syllable of the English word *surprise* with another word to enact the semantic field of food, using the humour technique of allusion, which manifests through one of its two types called distortion. Distortion, according to Dynel (2009), makes references to some linguistic units or longer texts, significantly changing the original forms and meanings. The form of the word *surprise* is distorted in the excerpt for the purpose of creating humour. Humour is achieved here through the distortion of the collective knowledge of people, social events and situation. The eponymous character is seen to creatively distort what is the normal process of interpreting an utterance.

The Nigerian culinary habit of preparing rice with beans is contextually made manifest in this excerpt. The eponymous character promises not to only surprise her interlocutor but also *surbeans* her. The humour in this utterance is connected to a play on the pronunciation of the word, *surprise* which has a final /z/ sound that is often replaced with /s/ by many Nigerians, such that the word is wrongly articulated as *surprice*. This is the reason for the contrast with *beans*, which is often eaten along with rice by many Nigerians. The humorous effect of this lexical coinage is attested to by her interlocutor who repeats the coinage with emphasis and laughs afterwards. This excerpt shows the deployment of this humour act by Jenifa for the interactional achievement of harmony, rapport and cordiality, and this is jointly made manifest through the laughter cue emanating from Toyosi, thereby humorously facilitating the ongoing talk.

Excerpt 2

Jenifa: See, I bringst gift. Valantine gift (I brought Valentine gift)

1

Mr. Williams: I appreciate the gift but I must say that you stop all of these advances.

I strongly believe in education but I will not hesitate to stop you from coming here

↑if ↓all of these continues.

Jenifa: : I not hesitate ↑if ↑if.

5

Willy Willy Oloyinbo @@.

Willy the grammar boy@@.

That's why I lof (love) you.

(JD Season 1 Episode 3 12min)

The interaction above is between Jenifa and her adult class teacher whom she has been developing amorous feelings towards and for whom she has decided to get a gift on Valentine's Day. The teacher is seen to be conversing with Jenifa within the serious mode of communication, which is signalled through the raising of voice in the articulation of *if* in line 4. Jenifa activates a humorous key with the intent of amusing her interlocutor. She achieves this humour through parody. Capitalising on verbal and non-verbal means of expression, a parodic act aims to imitate and poke fun at or mock an individual, an event, or another entity. Similar to it is non-parodic

impersonation, which involves the speaker's adoption of a voice (that is a change of accent or mimicry of vocal attributes) and, consequently, the humorous creation of a role. Jenifa mimics her teacher through the repetition of his conditional adverb *if* in the high pitch in which it was originally uttered by the teacher. The accompanying laughter on her face suggests an attempt to amuse the teacher, thereby making the sarcasm an instance of mock-impoliteness, which creates amusement and avoids disagreement rather than being a sincere face threatening act. The distortion of the name Williams as Willy Willy is geared towards evoking humour in the other interlocutor, in this case the lecturer. The phrase 'Willy Willy' achieves its humorous potential based on the shared cultural knowledge of naming among Nigerians, especially the Yoruba of the South-west. Certain concepts and situations are named through reduplication. An example is 'jedijedi' (piles). This linguistic pattern of naming is evoked as a face-enhancing strategy of humour by Jenifa. The unfaithful code translation of the expression 'Oloyinbo' which communicatively means an eloquent speaker of the English language as 'Grammar Boy', makes code switching another humour strategy in the hands of the eponymous character, Jenifa. It is clear in this excerpt too that Jenifa humorously changes the presumed power which is expectedly wielded by a teacher through her mimicry although without the intent to be rude but to achieve cordiality with her teacher.

Excerpt 3

- Jumoke:** Churchill, I don't know sha, if somebody like me wants to go to America, 1
can't you help me out? You know, as a citizen of America by birth?
Is there anything you can do to help?
- Churchill:** Sure I can.
- Jumoke:** Churchill please, help me. I will really like to go to America. 5
- Churchill:** Let's not forget that I will be coming back after obtaining my training at MIT
- Jumoke:** See Churchill, my own is very simple.
Just look for a way to smuggle me to America
Even if it is for me and you to do a small court marriage
before you leave so that I can come over later as your wife. 10
You see, very easy and fast.
Don't worry about me when we get there;
I'll be fine. I will go on my own. Ehn, please.
- Churchill:** I think ehn, I will ponder on it and get back to you okay?
- Jumoke:** Churchill, if it is wedding plan you want to ponder on, 15
Don't worry. I will sponsor everything. In fact, I will pay your groom price @.
You just help me. Please.

(PJ Season 4 Episode 11 13mins)

The interaction above takes place between Churchill, Professor JohnBull's son, and Jumoke. The peak of the humour in the excerpt is seen in Jumoke's last line where, in a bid to travel abroad, she volunteers to sponsor her marriage with Churchill and, more ridiculously, pay the "groom's price". This exemplifies self-oriented humour. This type of humour encompasses instances where the target/butt of the humorous utterance is the speaker himself/herself, but it is projected in a manner that makes it interpretable by the recipient as being within a joking frame (Haugh, 2011). The phrase 'groom price' is an instance of jocular irony, given the distortion of the knowledge of who pays the customary marital price in marriage among Africans. Although not all instances of irony are humorous, humour is activated when there is a mismatch between the contextual factors and the proposition. The humour strategy deployed in the excerpt is distortion of shared cultural knowledge, as it is atypical of a woman to pay the marital price in the Nigerian socio-cultural world view. This aligns with the submission of Holmes (2000; 2006) that humour can be used to challenge presumed power and status structures. The laughter which

follows Jumoke's utterance reveals that her self-deprecating humour is targeted at consolidating a relationship rather than an attempt at ridiculing herself. This is in line with Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) assertion that humour in the form of teasing, banter and jocular abuse generally only arises in "joking relationships" where people are familiar with each other. Excerpt 3 also shows the negotiation of status and power which are customarily willed by men in Nigeria. This plays out through the culturally strange proposition by Jumoke to pay Churchill's 'groom price', as opposed to her bride price being paid. This cultural anomaly is, however, to achieve the facilitating function of humour by serving as a means of amusing Churchill in order to get her request granted.

Excerpt 4

Professor: Etuk, Abasi, Nsor, Nyang 1
Let me start by welcoming you back to the country
from your first ever trip to the United Kingdom.
Let me also felicitate with you and commend you for not getting lost in London.
How is your sister? 5
Udoh Etuk: @@ She is dey. By the time I match make my sister with you,
You speak high class English and my sister speak medium class English
and you combine am, common na, you will born dictionary...@@

(PJ Season Episode 2 6mins)

Etuk, in this scene, has just returned to Nigeria and has come to visit the professor. The interaction above ensues between them during their exchange of pleasantries. The seventh and eighth lines of the excerpt show a deliberate attempt by Etuk to arouse laughter in the other characters present in the scene, Professor JohnBull and Olaniyi. The preceding and concluding instances of laughter in Udoh's turn makes explicit his communicative intent to amuse the other characters with the utterance. The utterance tries to tease Professor JohnBull through the absurdity embedded in the possibility of two human beings giving birth to a dictionary. The incongruity of this absurd utterance is resolved for humorous effect by the other characters' and the viewers' shared knowledge of Professor JohnBull's verbosity and use of elevated diction, which suggest that his marriage to another person with a wide vocabulary will result in giving birth to a dictionary. This is sarcastic mock-impoliteness, as it subtly pokes fun at the professor for his platitudinous style of talking. However, it does not threaten the professor's face; it merely tries to facilitate the ongoing discourse. This is in line with the submission of Bamgbose (2016), that mock-impoliteness could serve as discourse-facilitating strategies during interactions. It is the case that Udoh's tease only threatens the connection face for the purpose of enlivening the interaction.

6.2 Castigating humorous acts in *Jenifa's Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*

At some other times in characters' interactions in the selected sitcoms, humour is conveyed through banter that carry no humorous effect for the butt but for the other characters and, perhaps, the viewers. These represent disaffiliative or aggressive humour. Instances are seen in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 5

Passenger: (Jenifer is singing just beside him on the same sit) Excuse me. 1
Excuse me, madam
Jenifa: What it is (sic)?
Passenger: Can you stop singing aloud? You are disturbing the peace of this journey.

Jenifa: It is why you are shouting on me? (clapping in amazement). Abeg (please) make I ask you one question, What is the name of this transporting? Is it not public? If you don't want person to sing, <i>Caro o</i> , go and enter private transporting.	5
Passenger: I can see you are rude. Jenifer: Hnnnnnn (covering her nose and mouth like to say there is an offensive odour).	10
Aaaaaaah, uncle wait I beg you. No talk again o. You want to kill people in this bus? Passenger: It is you that want to kill people with your bad English. Jenifer: Fuuuun (demonstrating the perception of a bad smell). Enu Lee, awo Banga Lee eyanti Bruce Lee. Uncle, your mouth is smelling. You are carry toilet or pit latrine in your mouth? Ah enu yin run (few other passengers are shown laughing). Passenger: Watch your tongue! Watch your tongue! (pointing at Jenifa)	15

(JD Season 1 E1 9min)

The excerpt above is a display of superiority in verbal altercation between two passengers. The first person has a genuine intention to correct Jenifa about singing aloud while wearing her earpiece. This confrontation threatens the relational separation face which Jenifa feels she deserves. Relational separateness involves a sense of one's own "space", a territory that should not be entered into without the (tacit) consent of the individual or group concerned, as well as a sense of self-respect in regard to one's own competence (Haugh, 2010: 2113). This sincere act by the other commuter who corrects Jenifa about singing aloud is interpreted as space invasion by Jenifa, which engenders face attacks between them. These altercations, though not humorously co-constructed by the interactants, are potentially humorous for other ratified hearers in the scene who are shown laughing to the exchange of the speakers. In playing out the attack, Jenifa begins, in lines 11 and 12, with the use of the negative impoliteness sub-strategy of belittling the other. She does this by sarcastically advising the other interlocutor not to talk again, so as not to kill the other passengers. This indirectly suggests that he has got a bad breath. The target of this disparagement gets the offensive intent of Jenifa's turn and quickly attacks her too based on her bad English. The consequence of this last turn is that the other person gets it harder from Jenifa who now, in a conventional joking manner, through the distortion of a shared cultural knowledge of the Chinese onomastic system, uses obscure or secretive language to suggest that the other person's mouth stinks. This is what she pragmatically means by the label Enu Lee, from Chinese names like Bruce Lee; 'enu' is a Yoruba word for mouth.

The banter finally reaches its peak when Jenifa now adopts bald on record impoliteness, which is an instance of an FTA performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way, by saying that the other person has a toilet or 'latrine' in his mouth. This utterance, which seriously threatens the face of the other character and makes him warn Jenifa in the imperative, makes other characters on the bus laugh at the ridicule of the butt of Jenifa's face attack. This clearly is a put-down for the other character, being remarks that are truly abusive and disparaging, usually carrying no humour to be appreciated by the butt.

Excerpt 6

Classmate: Abeg go sit down jare. Leave Mr Williams alone. He say he no do love. Na by force? (Mr William said he is not in love with you. Must you force him?)	1
Jenifa: Abeg, mummy wey get windows for teeth, the space wey dey your teeth, go and block it before you talk to me. I talk to you?	5
Clasmate: Na me you dey talk to?	

Jenifa: Hnn hnn (no) na your shildren for house.

Classmate: If I slap you you go dey see stars. I be your mate?

(JD Season 1 Episode 3 12mins)

Excerpt 6 is another instance of castigating humour between two interactants in *Jenifa's Diary*. The setting is the adult class that Jenifa attends and she is called out by the teacher to read a letter she submitted to the teacher in his office earlier in the day, unknown to the teacher that it was a love letter. Jenifa summons up the courage to read out the letter wherein she professes her love for her teacher and even attempts to kiss the tutor in the class. Another member of the class cautions Jenifa for the act, as seen in the first line of the excerpt. Then, Jenifa, in her first turn, utilises the negative impoliteness sub-strategy of inappropriate identity markers by comparing the woman's diastema to a window. This face threatening utterance is an attempt to establish the relational separateness suggestive of an unwanted intrusion into Jenifa's space by the other woman. The other interlocutor evidently finds this remark offensive and that prompts her to ask Jenifa if she was actually referring to her. To this, Jenifa adopts the humour technique of retort, a quick and witty response to a preceding turn with which it forms an adjacency pair, by sarcastically saying she has not referred to her but to her children. This is also a derogatory remark which threatens the face of the other interlocutor but which is considered humorous by the other characters. The last line by the other character asking if she was Jenifa's age reveals that disparaging humour sometimes manifests in the form of a distortion to cultural knowledge or expectation, as she implies that Jenifa flouts the cultural expectation of being respectful to elders.

Excerpt 7

Dija: Yes, these are the best you can get here. 1

These are the leafy green vegetables.

It takes out metals from your body and revitalises your body. 2

Udoh Etuk: It looks to me that you are a digital native doctor.

You see, nowadays, shrine, you won't see red cloth and all those fetish things. 5

You will see them like this. Like you are a proper shrine attendant...

Please this thing wey you dey drink so, na him do am make you lean like this?

Dija: (nodding in concurrence) vitalise my body every day.

Udoh Etuk: Please watch it. Because the way you are going and you are drinking this thing, very soon, I dey see person dey talk but them no dey see the person. 10

Na only voice and sound dem go dey hear.

Will I be like you?

Dija: You will be amazing. Even better.

Udoh Etuk: Me I don't want to be like straw.

(PJ Season 4 Episode 3 10mins)

This scene comes up after a morning jugging by Professor JohnBull, his family and other neighbours. Dija, a health and fitness therapist, is also with them and has come with fitness tea, which she is serving to everyone and concurrently talking about the importance of such good drink for the health. In the first line by Etuk, he expresses his feelings as to the likeliness of Dija being a 'digital native doctor'. This noun phrase 'a digital native doctor' is oxymoronic. Native doctors are conventionally known to maintain their reserved lifestyle, with no sophistication. The shared socio-cultural knowledge of native doctors makes Dija's description as a digital native doctor incongruous. Etuk intensifies his attempt to amuse the other characters by deploying the positive impoliteness sub-strategy of name calling to refer to Dija as 'a proper shrine attendant', since this task, according to him, in modern times, does not come with fetish indications that will make one know that Dija is one.

Etuk, while trying to further tease Dija, wonders if the tea therapy was responsible for her slimness. To this, Dija delightfully responds in the affirmative, oblivious of Etuk's intention for asking the question. Etuk again teases her with the positive impoliteness sub-strategy of obscure language, with which he implies that Dija would soon be invisible if she continues her fitness therapy. He wonders if he too could look like Dija someday and she expresses her optimism on this by saying he could even be amazingly better. And again in reaction, Etuk associates Dija with a negative aspect by saying he would not want to be like straw, implying that Dija is as slim as a straw. Given the contrived nature of sitcoms, there is the evidence of relational connection with other characters to amuse them and relational separation with the butt of the impolite utterances.

Excerpt 8

Mallam Medoya: Samson	1
Samson: Ehn (Yes?)	
Mallam Medoya: Na true say I don discover oil for my papa land? (Is it true that oil has been discovered in your home town?)	
Samson: Do like this (asking Medoya to clean his mouth). Clean the other side.	5
Mallam Medoya: Watin dey my mouth (what's in my mouth)	
Samson: Something dey your mouth. You no see am? Because watin you talk now now ehn, he just be like say you no even think before you talk. Your papa land? How dem go discover oil for your papa land?	
Mallam Medoya: Samson I dey crasefaa. (Samson you are crazy)	10
Samson: You don dey crase.	
Mallam Medoya: Samson you I no dey go school faa. (Samson, you didn't go to school). No be the thing wey I talk be that one?	
Samson: No. You say your papa land. Na my papa land, me Samo, Original.	

(PJ Season 2 Episode 5 12min)

This excerpt, which involves impolite utterances from the two interactants, is rich in humour potential, based on its shared cultural knowledge of linguistic distortion manifesting in the form of linguistic interference. The less-educated among the Hausa of Nigeria are known to use the first person plural in place of the third person when they speak the English language; this linguistic habit serves as a source of amusement to many Nigerians from other parts. The habit is deployed as a humour strategy in the series through the banter which ensues between the two characters. Medoya, who hopes to ask Sam if truly an oil well has been discovered in his (Samson's) hometown, uses the pronouns 'I' and 'my', instead of 'you' and 'your', respectively. Samson feigns ignorance of Medoya's intent, thereby deploying the positive impoliteness strategy of seeking disagreement. This is a manifestation of relational separateness, as Samson conceives of Medoya as invading his space. He warns Medoya against claiming what does not belong to him and also scorns him by saying he doubts that Medoya thinks. The producer's humour intent gets intensified when Medoya, oblivious of his tribal linguistic idiosyncrasy, ignorantly argues with Samson over his intention, which contradicts his lexical choices. A feeling of incongruity also plays out when the illiterate Medoya accuses the other interlocutor of not having been to school when in truth this indication of illiteracy applies to him. The excerpt shows a judicious use of humorous dramatic irony wherein a character or comic ignorantly self-deprecates himself/herself.

7. Conclusion

This paper accounts for the strategies and functions of humour in two Nigerian situation comedies. Since sitcoms are contrived through producers' manipulation of characters to create humour, the paper accounts for the pragmatic strategies used in teasing out humour in the interactions of characters in *Jenifa's Diary* and *Professor JohnBull*. The two manifestations of humour in the sitcoms are amusing humorous acts and castigating humorous acts. The former serves the functions of facilitating discourse and changing presumed power and status, while the latter serves the function of maintaining one's own space and demanding sense of respect. The study deploys Culpeper's politeness theory to account for the contextual features and the impoliteness strategies that help evoke humour in the characters' utterances. The humour manifestations are revealed through humour techniques which include allusion, parody, banter, teasing and retort, and humour strategies such as distorting collective knowledge of people and distorting shared cultural knowledge.

References

- Adetunji, A. (2013). 'The interactional context of humour in Nigerian stand-up comedy'. *Pragmatics* 23 (1), pp. 1-22.
- Argyle, M. (1987). *The Psychology of Happiness*. London: Methuen.
- Ayakoroma, B. F. (2013). 'The rise of stand-up comedy genre in Nigeria: from nothing to something in artistic entertainment'. Paper presented at the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists Annual Conference, Benue State University, Makurdi, 4-8 June. Retrieved February 14, 2014 from <http://www.nico.gov.ng/index.php/features/91-the-rise-of-stand-up-comedy-genre-in-nigeria>.
- Azeez, L. & Doghudge, R. (2015). 'Comedy as a discursive exchange for social change: A study of the social themes of *Papa Ajasco* and its interpretation by Nigerian'. *EJOTMAS: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 5 (1), pp. 253-262.
- Bamgbose, G. A. (2016). 'Mock-impoliteness as a discursive practice in draught playing'. *Ife Studies in English Language (ISEL)* 12 (2), pp. 91-103.
- Bamgbose, G. A. (2019). 'Beyond rhythm and lyrics: Pragmatic strategies of verbal humour in Nigerian hip-hop'. *The European Journal of Humour Research* 7 (4), pp. 16-31.
- Billig, M. (2001). 'Humour and hatred: The racist jokes of the Ku Klux Klan'. *Discourse and Society* 12, pp. 267-89.
- Brock, A. (2015). 'Participation frameworks and participation in televised sitcom, candid camera and stand-up comedy', in Dynel, M. & Chovanec, J. (eds.), *Participation in Public and Social Media Interactions*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 27-47.
- Brown, M. (2008). 'Osuofia don enter discourse: Global Nollywood and African identity politics'. *IJOTA (Ibadan Journal of Theatre Arts)* 2 (4), pp. 56-72.
- Chang, W. & Haugh, M. (2011). 'Strategic embarrassment and face threatening in business interactions'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43 (12), pp. 2948-2963.
- Culpeper, J. (1996). 'Towards an anatomy of impoliteness'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 25, pp. 349-367.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Culpeper, J., Derek, B. & Wichmann, A. (2003). 'Impoliteness revisited: With special reference to dynamic and prosodic aspects'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 35, pp. 1545-1579.

- Davies, C. (2007). 'Humour and protest: Jokes under communism'. *International Review of Social History* 25, pp. 291-305.
- Dynel, M. (2009). 'Beyond a joke: Types of conversational humour'. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 3, pp. 1284-1299.
- Dynel, M. (2011). 'I'll be there for you: on participation-based sitcom humour', in Dynel, M. (ed.), *The Pragmatics of Humour across Discourse Domains*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 311-333.
- Dynel, M. (2016). 'With or without intentions: Accountability and (un)intentional humour in film talk'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 95, pp. 67-78.
- Ehiemua, K. I. (2008). The semiotics of laughter in two Nigerian apolitical movie-comedies. Retrieved June 13 2017 from <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ejotmas/article/viewFile/121000/110427>.
- Faley, O. (2016). 'A linguistic analysis of Clint Da Drunk's "Alcoholic" Talk Show', in Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, A. & Adetunji, A. (eds.), *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Communication*, Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, pp. 115-131.
- Filani, I. (2015). 'Stand-up comedy as an activity type'. *Israeli Journal of Humor Research* 4 (1), pp.73-97.
- Filani, I. (2016). 'Discourse types in stand-up comedy performances: An example of Nigerian stand-up comedy'. *The European Journal of Humour Research* 3 (1), pp. 41-60.
- Glick, D. J. (2007). 'Some performative techniques of standup comedy: An exercise in the textuality of temporalisation'. *Language and Communication* 27, pp. 291-306.
- Goddard, C. (2006). 'Lift your game, Martina!' – Deadpan jocular irony and the ethnopragmatics of Australian English', in Goddard C. (ed.), *Ethnopragmatics: Understanding Discourse in Cultural Context*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 65-97.
- Greenbaum, A. (1999). 'Stand-up comedy as rhetorical argument: an investigation of comic culture'. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 12 (1), pp. 33-46.
- Hay, J. (2000). 'Functions of humor in the conversations of men and women'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32, pp. 709-742.
- Haugh, M. (2010). 'Jocular mockery, (dis)affiliation and face'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42 (8), pp. 2106-2119.
- Haugh, M. (2011). 'Humour, face and im/politeness in getting acquainted' in Davies, B. L., Haugh, M. & Merrison, A. J. (eds.), *Situated Politeness*, Continuum: London, pp. 165-184.
- Holmes, J. (2000). 'Politeness, power and provocation: How humour functions in the workplace'. *Discourse Studies* 2, pp. 159-185.
- Holmes, J. (2006). 'Sharing a laugh: pragmatic aspects of humor and gender in the workplace'. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38, pp. 26-50.
- Holmes, J. & Marra, M. (2002). 'Humour as a discursive boundary marker in social interactions', in Duszak, A. (ed.), *Us and Others: Social Identities across Languages, Discourses and Cultures*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp. 377-400.
- Inya, O. (2016). 'Pragmatics of humour in a Nigerian university's departmental chat rooms', in Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, A. & Adetunji, A. (eds.), *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Communication*. Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, pp. 190-206.
- Jefferson, G. (2004). 'Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction', in Lerner, G. (ed.), *Conversation Analysis: Studies from the First Generation*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 13-23.
- Korostenskiene, J. & Pakrosnyte, M. (2019). 'Analysis of humour in TV series *Friends* and its translation into Lithuanian'. *Sustainable Multilingualism*, pp. 155-178, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/sm2017-0017>.

- Lamidi, M. T. (2016). 'Humour in visual-verbal code-pairing in selected comments on the Facebook forum', in Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, A. & Adetunji, A. (eds.), *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Communication*. Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, pp. 228-251.
- Lefcourt, H. (2001). *Humor: The Psychology of Living Buoyantly*. New York: Kluwe Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- Locher, M. A. & Bousfield, D. (2008). 'Introduction: impoliteness and power in language', in Bousfield, D. & Locher, M. A. (eds.), *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice (Language, Power and Social Process 21)*, Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 1-13.
- Odebunmi A. & Ajiboye, S. (2016). 'Negotiation of wit in Facebook humour', in Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, A. & Adetunji, A. (eds.), *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Communication*, Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, pp. 20-37.
- Olaosun, I. E. (2016). 'Communicative content of selected visual construction of humour on Facebook: A visual social semiotic perspective', in Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, A. & Adetunji, A. (eds.), *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Communication*. Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, pp. 115-131.
- Ologun, O. (2017). 'Linguistic representations of social actions and ideology in *Jenifa's Diary*'. M.A. Project, Dept. of English, University of Ibadan.
- Palmer, J. (2019). 'Conversational structure and implicature in *Professor JohnBull*'. M.A. Project, Dept. of English, University of Ibadan.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A. (1952). *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. New York: The Free Press.
- Robinson, V. M. (1991). *Humor and the Health Professions*. Thorofare, NJ: Slack.
- Schwarz, J. (2010). 'Linguistic aspects of verbal humour in Stand-up Comedy', PhD dissertation, Saarland: University of Saarland.
- Sperber, D. & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Sunday, A. B. & Filani, I. (2019). 'Playing with culture: Nigerian stand-up comedians joking with cultural beliefs and representations'. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 32 (1), pp. 97-124.
- Taiwo, R. (2016). 'Discursive power relations in Naijabookofjokes.com', in Taiwo, R., Odebunmi, A. & Adetunji, A. (eds.), *Analyzing Language and Humor in Online Communication*, Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, pp. 177-189.
- Wieczorek, M. (2018). 'Different shades of viewership: a pragmatic analysis of viewership in sitcom discourse', *Forum* 3, pp. 101-117.
- Ziegler J. B. (1998). 'Use of humour in medical teaching'. *Medical Teacher* 20, pp. 341-348.