

Workplace impoliteness as comic style in Fidelis Okoro's *Prof. Zemzi's Last Rehearsal*

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Abstract

Pragmatic concepts and theories have largely explored naturally occurring conversations in varied social-political, cultural, and religious contexts. Yet, not so much has been done to explore ways pragmatics contributes to studying literary works, particularly drama. Hence, this research is an attempt to examine how impoliteness as a pragmatic construct reflects the dual purposes of not only identifying and categorising offensive speech acts but also in performing the aesthetic function of comic-styling, engaging the African play Prof. Zemzi's Last Rehearsal written by Fidelis U. Okoro. The play as a comedy staged in a university setting presents a formal workplace where politeness work and restraint in language use are interactional norms to minimise face loss. Hence, the offensive dialogue between the protagonist, Prof. Zemzi, and other co-workers resulting in Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) and humour are explored, conceptualising (im)politeness in terms of the incongruity theory of humour. The study shows that the frequent use of intensified face threats, demeaning utterances, and ridicule are incongruous speech acts that buttress the humorous discourse style of the play. It argues that humorous dramatic impoliteness is a source of comic catharsis and that for impoliteness to be understood as funny, there is a shared socio-contextual cognition of the discourse as incongruous.

Keywords: workplace, impoliteness, incongruity, comic style, play.

1. Humour and impoliteness: an interface

Humour in impoliteness studies may appear as the juxtaposition of two conflicting phenomena. On the one hand, while impoliteness is intentionally hurtful, eliciting humour in it is a source of comic catharsis in dramatic discourse. Antoniou (2021, p. 1) avers that the function of swear words and insults is cathartic, while Cronin (2018, p. 296) elucidates that there is a notable

relationship between impoliteness, humour, and laughter. It can be inferred that humorous impoliteness not only builds tension in the audience but also triggers the audience's purgation of such emotions via laughter, in response to verbal and non-verbal speech acts, which the audience finds amusing. Impoliteness comprises deliberate, unwarranted, conflictive, and gratuitous face-aggravating acts (Bousfield, 2007, p. 2186; 2008, p. 132). It also constitutes unconventional expressions opposed to the speech context (Terkourafi, 2008, p.70). These paradigms reflect the two domains from which humorous impoliteness may be studied. First, as constituting the use of speech acts that are purposely offensive to a target, even when the target does not trigger any offence; secondly, as involving the intentional use of incongruous face-threatening acts, which do not conform to the context of language use and may be perceived by the hearer to be offensive. Both interpretations are relevant to the current study, as humorous impoliteness is deliberately offensive and interpolates face-aggravating, incongruous speech acts that are embarrassing and at the same time, hurtful to a target.

According to Dynel (2015, p. 330) and Bousfield (2007, pp. 2186-2187), impoliteness is revealed via unmitigated face-threatening acts, in contexts where mitigation is paramount while deploying intensified aggression. Similarly, Culpeper (2005, p. 38), Bousfield (2008, p. 132), and Dynel (2015, p.332) maintain that impoliteness is only accomplished if the speaker is intentionally offensive and the hearer perceives the intended offence. In dramatic discourse, for instance, impoliteness portends two levels of hearers who perceive the offensive speech acts used; the direct target of verbal aggression, usually a character in the drama, and the real-life listening audience who are entertained. Culpeper (2005, p. 45) enumerates four generic factors inherent in entertaining impoliteness relished by the audience in comedy shows: intrinsic pleasure, voyeuristic pleasure, the audience's perception of safety, and superciliousness. While these might be important clues in studying humorous impoliteness, linking impoliteness to amusement implies looking at reasons people laugh over speech acts that appear offensive to a target.

The phenomenon of humorous laughter has been an object of debate among scholars since the times of the ancient Greek philosophers. Humour in impoliteness raises the question 'Why do people laugh when others are intentionally hurt and verbally abused?'. Humorous laughter, as discussed in the writings of some philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes is perceived negatively and linked to mockery, scorn, and ridicule, which they believe are inappropriate for state rulers. Such arguments have informed the three traditional theories of humour: the Relief theory, the Incongruity theory, and the Superiority theory (see, Mulder & Nijholt, 2002, p. 3). The Superiority theory of humour proposes that people laugh at others because they feel superior to them; that laughter is an expression of contempt and ridicule for the lesser object perceived as inferior due to some inadequacies (Lintott, 2016, p. 348; Morreall, 2020, sect.1).

The Superiority theory has been contested by some philosophers like Frances Hutchinson, who argued that the feeling of superiority does not necessarily induce laughter as even such feelings may elicit empathy towards the object (Morreall, 2020, *Ibid.*). With Sigmund Freud's introduction of the Relief theory of humour in 1905, laughter is conceived as a means of venting built-up emotions that have been suppressed over time. It is the escape of psychic tension, which liberates people to express themselves beyond conventional and ethical prohibitions (Kuczok et al., 2020, p. 4). The Relief theory of humour has been challenged on the ground that not all kinds of repressed feelings released through laughter are perceived to be humour-induced; this is because people laugh for various reasons. McDonald (2013), differentiating between laughter and humour, notes that although both relate in some ways, but are strikingly disparate. While laughter may exist without humour and its source may not be comical, humour may not always generate laughter.

The present study is conceptualised on the Incongruity theory of humour and argues that impoliteness-induced humour stems from the audience's perception of incongruity arising from a speech context and the speech acts. The Incongruity theory most credibly explains the reason for humorous reactions to verbal impoliteness. The idea of incongruity in humour discourse proposed by Kant, Hutchinson, and Schopenhauer, among other scholars, stems from the pairing of contradictory, unconventional speech acts, responses, ideas, behaviour, and actions that elicit surprise and amusement, as they fall short of the cognitive expectations of the activity type. Attardo (1994) defines incongruity as the placement of two unrelated phenomena within a context, which rouses its audience's cognition of the contradiction depicted, hence, the incongruity theory may be classified as the theory of cognition (p. 48). Discussing the cognitive structures of incongruity-induced humour, Raskin (1979, pp. 326-329) reveals that decoding the sentential meaning entails interpreting the linguistic properties of a sentence and the knowledge of the extant world: behavioural code of conduct, protocols, and the dynamics of how things are done. These cognitive structures that exist even unconsciously in the minds of the audience are what Raskin designates as 'scripts' (1979, p. 329). Hence, humour occurs when there is an overlap of two incompatible scripts or the juxtaposition of two or more contradictory cognitive structures engendering incongruity, which the audience recognises via a "shared knowledge of the world" (Raskin, 2017, p. 39; also 1979, p. 333).

There are societal expectations and social cognitions on politeness work in formal settings, and bridging such expectations ridiculously, results in incongruity, surprise, and amusement. Situations of verbal impoliteness are hurtful to the recipient of impoliteness but may induce humorous amusement from the audience. Here, the audience does not laugh because they feel superior to the victim of impoliteness as argued by Superiority humour theorists, e.g., Aristotle (*Poetics* 449a); Plato (*Philebus* 49e-50a), but because there exists a continuous, surprising breach in politeness work where it is expected. McIntyre and Culpeper (2010) explain that incongruity in dramatic discourse involves the audience's perception of the activity type and the cognitive activation of the schematic discourse, such that there is a striking disparity between what the audience knows about the activity type and what the characters perform, resulting in incongruity and humour.

Arguably, dramatic incongruity may manifest as irony; a glaring contrast between what the audience expects and what is performed but incongruity may not always require irony; both are distinct in some sense and invoke humour in particular ways. Gibbs et al (2014) suggest that a mere mention of incongruity does not suffice to be classified as irony: "Incongruity may exist at many levels in a discourse situation without this ultimately resting on the conflict between a speaker's semantic and pragmatic meanings" (p. 586). Incongruity may occur without the use of implicatures. It may evoke humour with the audience's cognition of the speech setting, the context, and the speech act as contrasted to what is known to be the norm in a real-life setting. Simpson and Bousfield's definition of incongruity tends towards the connection to irony. They view incongruity as "a stylistic twist in the pattern of language use or any situations where there is a mismatch between what is asserted and what is meant" (2017, p. 2). From the definition of incongruity given by Simpson and Bousfield, which captures incongruity within the confines of irony and implicatures, this study deviates from this view but aligns more with Couder (2019), who states that incongruity indicates an experience in which a particular phenomenon, events, or action do not correlate with our expectations of them.

Hence, this research focuses on the relationship between (im)politeness as a conduit for incongruity and humour in the play, *Prof. Zemzi's Last Rehearsal*. The work reflects on how extreme impoliteness may be utilised as a form of comic-styling while giving clues on how humorous impoliteness may contribute to the understanding of comic catharsis. The paper is structured into eight parts. First, we explore related literature on literary stylistics and pragmatics (Section 2), elaborate on the theoretical underpinnings of the research; outlining (im)politeness

super strategies and formulae (Section 3), while presenting the methods utilised in the study (Section 4). In the succeeding sections, we delve into aspects, such as the theoretical applications of (im)politeness strategies and formulae to the data under analysis (Section 5), expound on the interplay of impoliteness, incongruity, and humour (Section 6), discuss the findings of the research; stating its significance for literary exegesis (Section 7), and in Section (8), we conclude, giving an overview of the work.

2. Literary stylistics and pragmatics

Although stylistics theories have gained traction in the analysis of literary works in recent times, e.g., (Hardie & van Dorst, 2020; Evans & Hogarth, 2021; Bray, 2023; Jose & Jose, 2024), Warner (2023) observes that the theories have not incorporated contextual clues in investigating language use in literature, which is the focus of this study. Pragmatics connects three related areas; language, language users, and language context (Warner, 2023, p.362). Hence, inquiry into pragmatic discourse in dramaturgy holds illuminative dimensions to the literary text, linking characterization, and speech context to language use, and contributing to the overall textual interpretation. Bousfield (2023, p.119) reveals that pragmatic theories, such as (im)politeness, and speech acts, among others, interface with stylistics in expounding characterization and the narrative structure of a story, specifically, in drama, similar to real-life interactions. Hence, there is a need to interrogate pragmatic concepts such as (im)politeness in literary works. Research on Impoliteness has examined humour in sitcoms, television shows, and films (Toddington, 2015; Dynel, 2016; Cao, 2019). The studies have focused on the reasons impoliteness may trigger laughter and what functions humorous impoliteness performs in the shows, which include: creating asymmetric power relations (Cao, 2019); demonstrating solidarity (Dynel, 2016); for entertainment (Toddington, 2015). In dramatic discourse, impoliteness has been explored in classical literature, unveiling various ways verbal and non-verbal aggressive behaviour enhances a story's characterization and plot (Khafaga, 2023).

Moreover, pragmatic explorations of African literary texts, specifically, the drama genre, are a budding field. While there is sparse literature that has analyzed African plays from the lenses of pragmatics, a few studies have explored aspects such as the reading of proverbs (Odebunmi, 2006; Oluremi & Olugbemi-Gabriel, 2022); speech acts (Odebode & Odesanya, 2015); politeness (Ojukwu & Dike, 2023) in other literary texts. The closest study to the current research examined genre-crossing, comparing the borders of comedy and tragedy in *Prof. Zemzi's Last Rehearsal* (Ugwuanyi & Ekeh, 2015).

Hence, this study fills a gap by studying the African context of workplace (im)politeness in Fidelis Okoro's *Prof. Zemzi's Last Rehearsal*. The objectives of the research are to, identify various (im)politeness super strategies and impoliteness conventionalized formulae in the drama; account for the link between (im)politeness, incongruity, and humour as a comic style in the play, and establish that humorous impoliteness is a source of comic catharsis in dramatic discourse. The theoretical framework is presented in the succeeding section below.

3. Brown and Levinson's politeness model

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model anchors on the notion of *face* in interaction drawn from the earlier work of Goffman (1967), and the English folk understanding of face. They define *face* as "the public self-image every member wants to claim for himself" (1987, p. 311). Therefore, face can be interactionally "lost", "maintained", or "enhanced", thus interactants should hold each other's face in social interactions (p. 311). On the other hand, Goffman (1967) sees *face* as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself

by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (p. 5). The delineation of face by Brown and Levinson differs from that of Goffman. Brown and Levinson define face, taking into cognisance the need for facework among discourse participants, the latter conceives face as the assessment of a person’s conjured-up self-image based on the social traits the person exhibits per interaction.

Brown and Levinson believe that their concept of face is universal, albeit with the cultural variations extant in diverse contexts. They categorise face into negative and positive face. While negative face proposes non-imposition of the actions of others, positive face advocates that the self-image of interactants is accepted, wanted, and approved of (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 312). An important aspect of the theory is the concept of *Face Threatening Acts* (hereafter, FTAs). FTAs are spoken and unspoken acts that attack the face wants of the speaker or listener in interaction. They include acts that threaten a hearer’s negative face, such as orders and requests, reminding a hearer to do an act, among others; acts that threaten a hearer’s positive face include expressions of disapproval, criticism, and contempt (Brown and Levinson, 1987, pp. 313-314). Brown and Levinson note that for an FTA to be mitigated, some super strategies may be applied by a Model Person (MP). These strategies include (a) bald on-record politeness (b) positive politeness (c) negative politeness (d) off-record politeness and (e) don’t do the FTA. The strategies are further discussed below.

3.1. Politeness super strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose five politeness super strategies for mitigating an FTA and fostering good communication. They include:

1. **Don’t do the FTA:** This involves total abstinence from doing an FTA.
2. **Off-record politeness:** A speaker deploys indirect strategies to communicate his intent subtly without necessarily implying a single meaning.
3. **Negative politeness:** The speaker partly redresses a hearer’s face via ‘self-effacement’, ‘formality’, and ‘restraint’ to minimise the FTA done to an addressee. Negative politeness output strategies include: being conventionally indirect, using question hedge, being pessimistic, minimising the imposition, giving deference, apologising, impersonalising speaker and hearer, stating the FTA as a general rule, nominalising; going on record as incurring debt, or as not incurring debt.
4. **Positive politeness strategy:** This involves redressing a hearer’s face by adopting them as in-group members via friendship, respect, and acknowledgment. Positive politeness strategies include: noticing, attending to a hearer’s interest or wants, exaggerating interest, approval or sympathy with a hearer, intensifying interest in a hearer, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, presupposing common ground, joking, asserting or presupposing a speaker’s knowledge of and concern for the hearer’s wants, offering promises, being optimistic, include both speaker and hearer in the activity, giving or asking for reasons, assuming or asserting reciprocity and giving gifts to the hearer.
5. **Bald on record politeness strategy:** Here, an FTA is done directly, in an unambiguous manner in situations where the loss of face is minimal. This implies that the intention of doing the FTA is to the benefit of the hearer (Brown & Levinson, pp. 316-317).

3.2. Culpeper’s impoliteness model

The Impoliteness theory of Culpeper (1996) provides a parallel framework to Brown and Levinson’s Politeness model (1987). Thereafter, there have been subsequent reviews and expansion of the theory (e.g., Culpeper, 2005- entertaining impoliteness; 2010- conventionalised impoliteness formulae; 2011- explorations on (im)politeness cum the

conventionalised impoliteness formulae; 2016- impoliteness super strategies and the bottom-up approach). For the analysis of the data, this study will engage the Impoliteness super strategies as outlined in Culpeper (2005, p. 42), while further applying the conventionalised impoliteness formulae of Culpeper (2010) which are discussed in detail below.

Impoliteness is defined as communicative strategies that assault the face of a target, resulting in conflict and social disharmony (Culpeper et al., 2003, p. 1546). The strategies may be linguistic or non-linguistic behavioural displays in interaction that are purposively used to attack the face wants an addressee. Culpeper notes that for impoliteness to have occurred in an interaction, both the speaker and the hearer are aware of the intent to hurt (Culpeper, 2005, p. 38). Impoliteness is categorised as *inherent* and *mock* impoliteness. Inherent impoliteness applies to a few acts that call attention to the fact that the doer is engaged in an anti-social habit (Culpeper 1996, p. 351). Instances of inherently impolite activities include ear or nose picking, farting in public, and other similar acts, which impede the face of the doer. Expounding on the application of politeness work to such acts, Culpeper (1996, p. 351) poses the question, “Do you think you could possibly not pick your nose?”. He notes that such a tag is rather face-damaging than face-saving. Moreover, mock impoliteness, otherwise, known as *banter* is the superficial realisation of impoliteness at the peripheral level. The goal is to demonstrate friendship, social affinity, and solidarity. Culpeper explains that mock impoliteness may be linked to Leech’s (1983) banter principles and connotes that ‘the more intimate a relationship, the less necessary and important politeness is’ (1996, p. 352).

3.3. Impoliteness super strategies

- (a) **Bald on-record impoliteness:** The use of bald on-record impoliteness super strategy involves carrying out Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) directly and clearly, without mitigation.
- (b) **Positive impoliteness strategies:** This involves attacking the positive face wants the hearer. These include: ignore, snubbing the other, disassociating from the other, being uninterested, excluding the other from an activity, being unconcerned and unsympathetic, using inappropriate identity markers, using secretive expressions, making the other feel uncomfortable, using taboo language and calling the other names.
- (c) **Negative super strategies:** The use of strategies that attack the negative face wants of the addressee. These include: frightening, condescending, scorning, ridiculing, associating the other with a negative perspective, being contemptuous, invading the other’s space, put the other’s indebtedness on record.
- (d) **Sarcasm or mock politeness:** This is a meta-strategy, which engages insincere politeness work to carry out a face-threatening act on a hearer. According to Culpeper (2005, p. 42), the strategy adapts to Leech’s (1983) concept of irony.
- (e) **Withhold politeness:** This involves the abstinence from all forms of politeness, where it is expected as in the case of not showing gratitude for a gift (Culpeper, 2005, p. 42).

3.4. Conventionalised impoliteness formulae

The conventionalised impoliteness formulae are explored in Culpeper (2010; 2011; 2016). Culpeper (2011) states that one of the major differences between politeness and impoliteness is that impoliteness has its own set of conventionalised formulae: a set of linguistic cum behavioural markers of attitude embedded in the impoliteness strategies speakers use (p. 29). A specific hallmark of the conventionalised formulae is that it is challenged by the hearer (Culpeper, 2016, p. 436). According to Culpeper (2010, p. 3242), people react to impolite utterances in particular ways, including through emotional responses. Impoliteness targets display verbal and non-verbal cognitions that they understand the offensive intentionality

embedded in impolite utterances. This is indicated via co-texts, which usually are a metapragmatic or metadiscoursal acknowledgment of the scathing remarks, e.g., ‘that was bloody rude’, said in response to an impolite statement or actions such as looking downwards or biting one’s lip (Culpeper, 2010, p. 3242). A formula is considered conventionalised based on the regularity of usage in a specific context (Culpeper, 2016 p. 436). Hence, the conventionalised impoliteness formulae include: insults realised as personalised negative vocatives, e.g., ‘you fucking moron’ or ‘you rotten dickhead’; personalised negative assertions, e.g., ‘you are such a shit’ or ‘You can’t do anything right’; personalised references, e.g., ‘your stinking mouth’ or ‘your little trap’; personalised third-person negative reference said in the hearing of the target, e.g., ‘the daft bimbo’ or ‘She’s nutz’. Other impoliteness formulae include, the use of dismissals e.g., ‘get lost’; silencers e.g., ‘shut your fucking mouth’; threats e.g., ‘I’ll smash your face’; pointed criticisms e.g., ‘that is absolutely horrible’; challenging/unpalatable questions e.g., ‘you want to go to jail?’; use of condescension e.g., ‘that your little mouth’; message enforcers e.g., ‘do you understand me?’; negative expressive -curses/ill-wishes e.g., ‘go to hell’, and non-supportive intrusion (Culpeper, 2010, pp. 3242-3243; 2011, p. 419-420; 2016, pp. 436-437).

4. Methods

The work engages the descriptive research design and qualitative data analysis to account for the use of (im)politeness, incongruity and humour in Fidelis Okoro’s play, *Prof. Zemzi’s Last Rehearsal* (2002). The descriptive cum qualitative approach to the data provides a detailed explanation of how the interface between impoliteness and politeness super strategies reveals incongruity as a major humorous hallmark of the play. The politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), Culpeper’s impoliteness super strategies (2005), and the conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2010) were used to analyse the data. The choice of these (im)politeness models is to aid a holistic interpretation of the metadiscoursal and metapragmatic features, which unveils incongruity and humour in the play.

The pages analysed include Canto 1, pages 30-57, which cover the three basic impolite encounters between the main character, Zemzi and his colleagues. The pages were purposively selected for analysis because they embody the peak of interpersonal conflict in the drama. Hence, the data is grouped into three excerpts. Excerpt 1 contains twenty lines between the protagonist Prof. Zemzi and Prof. Frederick, a colleague. Excerpt 2 has fifteen lines between Prof. Zemzi and Prof. Kadem. Excerpt 3 contains sixteen lines between Zemzi and Mrs. Pompeli, a non-academic staff, making it a total of fifty-one lines analysed. In the first lap of the analysis, emphasis has been placed on identifying the linguistic evidence that categorises various (im)politeness super strategies and the conventionalised impoliteness formulae used. The pie chart in Figure 1 shows the (im)politeness super strategies discovered and the number of occurrences in the data. In doing this, the data was analysed and the strategies were identified, collated manually, and entered into a spreadsheet creating the representative chart in MS Word. A total of sixty-five strategies were discovered in fifty-one (51) turns examined. This is because some lines contain more than one (im)politeness super strategy, resulting in an overlap. The second phase of the analysis sought to conceptualise the interplay of impoliteness, incongruity, and humour. Hence, Figure 2 shows the relationship among the trio and how humorous impoliteness might give rise to comic catharsis.

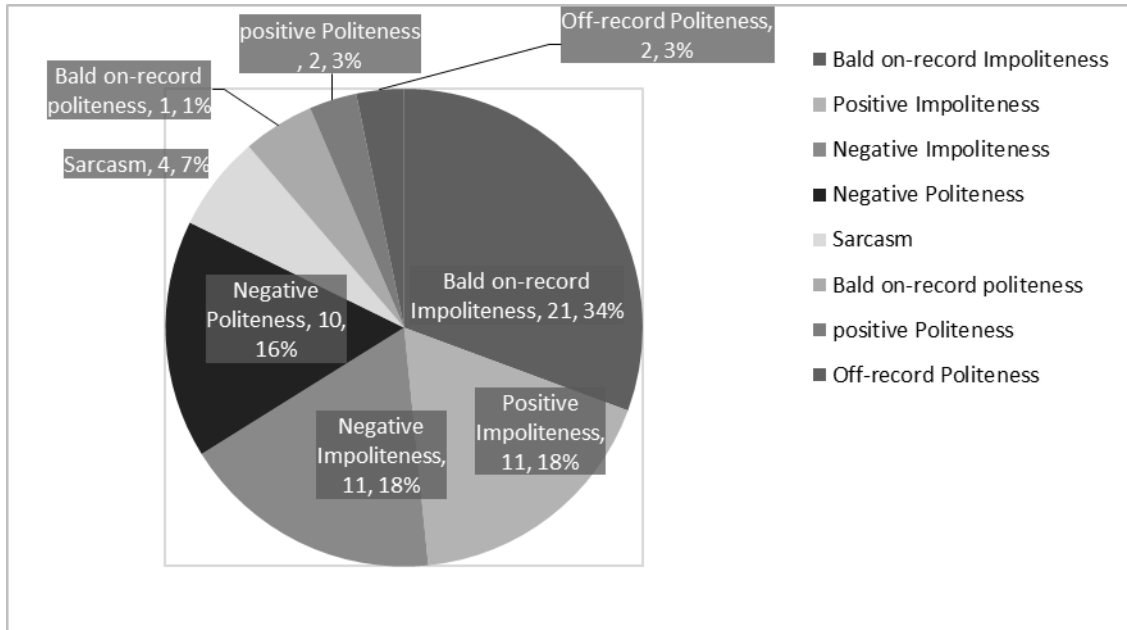


Figure 1. (Im)politeness super strategies in the play. Source: Authors

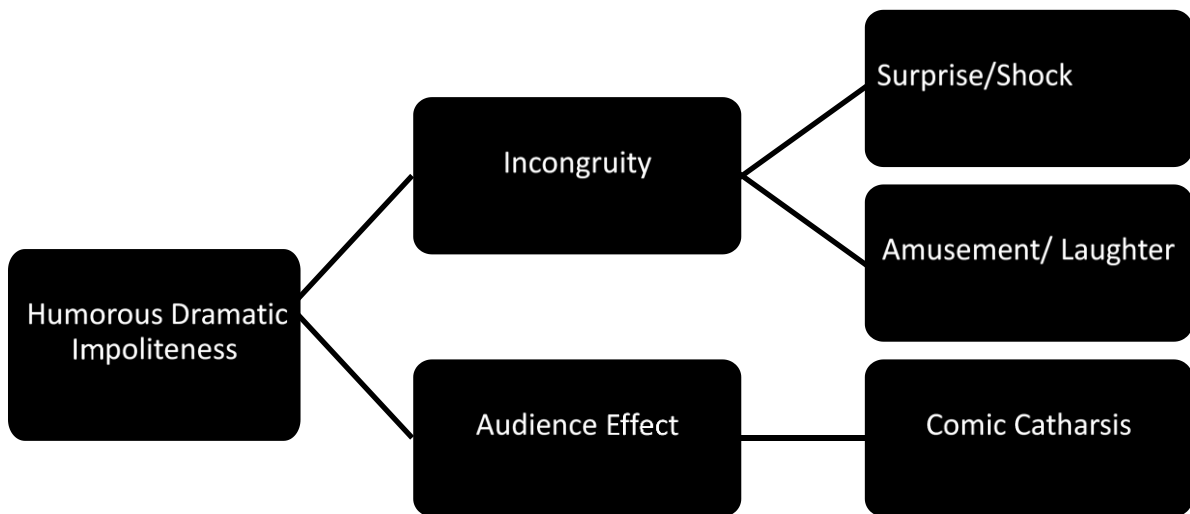


Figure 2. Diagram illustrating humorous impoliteness as a source of comic catharsis. Source: Authors

5. Results and discussion

The scene captures Prof. Zemzi having a rehearsal at the department’s central lobby with his students, which his department had previously warned him not to use because of the noise pollution affecting other ongoing lectures. In the analysis, the (im)politeness super strategies are

outlined and further expounded, using the conventionalised impoliteness formulae as discussed under the theoretical framework. It is also pertinent to emphasise that the categorisations were dialogical rather than sentential. In some instances, a line may contain several sentences with an overlap of (im)politeness super strategies.

5.1. Excerpt 1

[Key: PROF. FR = PROFESSOR FREDERICK, PROF. ZE = PROFESSOR ZEMZI]

- (As the noise rises, PROF FREDERICK rushes out onto the balcony and shouts down at them).
1. PROF FR: Get out of there, you noisy fools! Get out of there. Don't you know you are disturbing lectures?
 2. PROF ZE: (Turning sideways and speaking to him) Frederick, are you blind? Can't you see my rehearsal is on?
 3. PROF FR: Oh! I'm sorry! I didn't see you; you aren't wearing your green coat.
 4. PROF ZE: What! What are you insinuating? That I have only one coat?
 5. PROF FR: No, no, no. Not at all. (Turns to go, then stops.) But excuse me, Professor Zemzi, didn't we at the last board meeting say the lobby would no longer be used for rehearsals?
 6. PROF ZE: You decided. You! You decided! So I'm to take orders from you, a boy employed here when I was already a professor?
 7. PROF FR: But I wasn't the one who decided even if my orders were too insignificant to be adhered to.
 8. PROF ZE: Adhered to. Adhered to. Hear his pronunciation. Adhered to. You think English is Usambana, which you speak with reckless abandon. Adhered to.
 9. PROF. FR: (Fuming). Excuse me Prof Zemzi, I have no time for your nonsense this morning. I have no time. O.K.
 10. Prof ZE: (Taking a step to the left.) Of course, you wouldn't have time to learn anything worthwhile. But you would have a lot of time for womanising and drinking and chasing research grants. You are an expert in such matters.
 11. PROF FR: (Stunned. Then coming down the left steps biting his lips). Professor Raymond Zemzi, can you tell me why you are picking on me this morning? Can you tell me why you are making me the object of your scathing tongue today?
 12. PROF ZE: Come down and do your worst if you are a man.
 13. PROF FR: I'm not coming down to do my worst. I just want you to explain to me the big deal in asking you to adhere to the rule set out by the Departmental Board
 14. PROF ZE: Shut up there you little boy. Shut up. What do you know? Is it drama or grammar? Or is it because you bribed your way to professorship that terrible year I went on sabbatical? So if I stand as a professor, you too would stand! Ha ha! A confirmed buffoon like you? You decided. You decided that Professor Raymond Desmond Zemzi should scout for a classroom to do his rehearsal while you scout for a research grant and petticoat.
 15. PROF FR: Professor Zemzi...
 16. PROF ZE: Shut up there! (Turning to the students). I'm yet to see a hen as desirous of maize as he is of research grant. Research grant is as sweet in his palate as democracy is in the ears of Americans. And that is not to say that he is a researcher, you know. Last year he got 150,000 zambi from the Senate Research Grant Committee. The following morning he headed for a bicycle shop and bought five chopper bicycles for his five children. Every day you will see them running about the campus (He raises one leg then the other as he demonstrates with both hands and legs the riding of a bicycle.) Research (Leg up) grants (Leg down) Research (Leg up) grants (Leg down)
 17. PROF FR: (Between his teeth.) Oh my God!

18. PROF. ZE: Why they haven't scrapped that phony committee is what I cannot tell. Just use a big word in your research proposal and they get deceived. Just say "psychoanalytic gbagbagba" 200,000 zambi "Ethnographicoanalyticas kpakotokotokoto" 500,000. Let them venture and make me the chairman of the Committee tomorrow. I will monitor every stage of the search before I give anyone a flickom.
19. PROF FR: (*Sanctimonious*) I'm a man of policy. I believe in policy. And policies can change. And when policies change, those who laugh cry, and those who cry laugh (*he turns to go.*)
20. PROF ZE: What policy? Womanizing policies? You sleep with a woman, you give her a BA. You sleep with a woman, you give her an MA. And if I were not here you would have been sleeping with them and giving them PhDs. Is that the policy? (*turning to the students.*) You know the other day he organised a PhD defence by 5.30 in the evening when he thought I would have gone. As soon as I heard a noise in the Faculty Board Room, I ran down quickly. Just one question and the woman fainted. That day I swore never to leave my office till twelve midnight daily. Man of policy.

5.2. Analysis of impoliteness strategies in Excerpt 1: bald on record, negative and positive impoliteness strategies

The scene above captures the lines between the main character, Prof. ZE, and Prof. FR. ZE, a self-proclaimed 'Professor of Dramaturgy' holds a drama rehearsal at the central lobby of his department, apparently disrupting other ongoing lectures. Such an act itself is against work ethics in formal work settings. What is obvious in the turns analysed is the co-occurrence of several impoliteness super strategies in a line. Culpeper et al. (2003) reveal that impoliteness super strategies typically do not occur in isolation. The analysis states the (im)politeness super strategies and the underlying conventionalised impoliteness formulae as the case may be. In excerpt 1 above, the Bald on Record Impoliteness strategy of direct command is used by FR to warn the students, 'Get out of there!', engaging a demeaning adjective-metaphor '...You noisy fools!' as a negative vocative of insult. This is further exacerbated by the unpalatable question suggesting that the students are a nuisance to the ongoing classes. In 2, ZE engages Bald on Record Impoliteness via the direct use of identity markers, such as the noun, 'Frederick', and the personalised negative reference, '...are you blind?' are used as an insult to attack FR verbally. Also, the demeaning question tags used by ZE contain a Negative Impoliteness super strategy of 'being contemptuous' and 'belittling the other'.

In 3, FR deploys the Negative Politeness strategy of repeated apology to minimise the initial FTA done in 1 by engaging in exclamatory expressions of sincere regret, such as 'oh!', 'I'm sorry!', with further explanation of why the initial face threat in 1 ever happened. Notwithstanding the apology, ZE in 4 uses Positive Impoliteness of 'making the other uncomfortable' through the recurring use of face-impeding question tags and the exclamation, 'What!' 'What are you insinuating?' 'That I have only one coat?'. The repeated questions are unpalatable and heighten the tone of the verbal aggression, showing a blatant rejection of Prof. FR's apology. Moreover, FR in 5, uses the Positive Politeness strategy of 'avoiding disagreement', via the engagement of negative determiners, such as 'no' and 'not at all'. He further employs the question tag to 'seek agreement' with ZE by presupposing a common ground that Prof. ZE, his colleague was part of the decision not to use the lobby. In 6, the Positive Impoliteness super strategy of 'disassociating from the other' via the repetitions of the clause 'you decided' and the use of 'inappropriate identity markers are engaged via the third-person negative demeaning reference to Prof. FR as 'a boy employed here when I was already a professor?', which is an insult. In 7, FR uses the Negative Politeness strategy of giving 'deference' 'But I wasn't the one who decided', to maintain the face of ZE. While in 8, ZE

deploys the Negative Impoliteness of ‘being contemptuous’ and ‘ridicule’ by engaging the repetition of the prepositional verb, ‘adhered to’ and the use of insult as personalised negative assertion via the adjectival phrase, ‘...reckless abandon’ as a blatant mockery of Prof. FR’s manner of pronunciation. As stated earlier in the theoretical section, a major attribute of the conventionalised impoliteness formulae of Culpeper is that it is challenged by the hearer (2016, p. 436). This means that the target of impoliteness should react to impolite attacks in specific ways (Culpeper, 2010, p. 3242). In the lines above, FR reacts to the impoliteness utterances of ZE in a defensive manner, engaging politeness strategies to ameliorate the FTAs done by ZE.

Excerpt 9 contains Bald on Record Politeness of direct rebuke, ‘fuming’, FR replies, ‘Excuse me Prof Zemzi, I have no time for your nonsense this morning’. It is obvious that FR is visibly agitated by the impoliteness ZE metes out to him and would not want to exacerbate the tense situation, hence he engages in this politeness strategy, since there is little face at stake. Nonetheless, the Negative impoliteness of ‘scorn’ and ‘ridicule’ is further deployed by ZE in 10, via the use of personalised negative assertions that a Professor like FR engages only in trivial ventures, such as womanising, drinking, and chasing research grants, without carrying out any meaningful academic research. In 11, the Negative politeness strategy of ‘restraint’ as shown in the non-verbal reaction of FR being stunned and biting his tongue, followed by the question, ‘Can you tell me why you are making me the object of your scathing tongue today?’ indicate that FR perceives ZE’s actions all along as being offensive. This gives credence to scholars of impoliteness (Culpeper, 2005, p. 38; Bousfield, 2008, p.132; Dynel, 2015, p. 332) that impoliteness is accomplished when the speaker is deliberately offensive and the target perceives the offense dished.

Notwithstanding, in 12, ZE uses the Negative Impoliteness strategy of ‘challenging’ and ‘invading the other’s space’ via the deployment of the provocative conditional clause, ‘...if you are a man’ to rouse the anger of FR., showing his deliberation to offend him. Moreover, in 13, the Negative Politeness of ‘restraint’ and ‘self-effacement’ by the use of the negation, ‘I’m not...’ and the adjectival clause, ‘I just want you to...’ is used by FR to deescalate the tension between him and ZE. Further, there is an overlap of three impoliteness super strategies in 14. First, Bald On-record Impoliteness of direct insults using the silencer and command, ‘Shut up there!’ and the metaphorical condescension ‘you little boy’, are followed by three face aggravating question tags, challenging FR. In addition, the Positive Impoliteness of ‘calling the other names’, using a third-person negative metaphorical reference; ‘a confirmed buffoon’ and a Negative Impoliteness super strategy of ‘scorn’ and ‘ridicule’ via the use of the oxymoron, comparing ZE ‘scouting for a classroom...’ as a devoted academic and FR, ‘...scouting for research grant and petticoat’, as an unserious academic are placed side by side to ‘scorn’ and ‘ridicule’ FR.

Further, in excerpt 16, Bald on Record Impoliteness is deployed via the silencer and command, ‘Shut up there!’ Moreover, the Negative Impoliteness of ‘condescend’, ‘scorn’, and ‘ridicule’ are engaged through the use of simile, comparing Prof. FR to a hungry ‘hen’ and the sweetness of research grant to his palate ‘as democracy in the ears of Americans.’ ZE relapses into an absurd mockery of FR, engaging the negation, ‘...that is not to say he is a researcher’, as he further reels off a hyperbolic description of how FR squandered his research grant on the purchase of bicycles for his children. In 17, the Negative Politeness strategy of self-restraint; FR. clinching his teeth and the exclamatory sentence, ‘Oh my God!’ are used as co-texts to express FR’s shock at ZE’s allegations. In 18, ZE continues to deploy Negative Impoliteness strategies of ‘scorn’ and ‘ridicule’ to mock the university’s authority via the adjective, ‘phony committee’ and other self-invented bombasts, trivializing the research proposal screening committee. In 19, FR engages in Off-record politeness of implicature to state that times will turn for ZE. This strategy is achieved, by engaging the repetition of the phrases, ‘policy’ and ‘policies’, while on the other hand, placing side by side two contradictory statements, ‘...those

who laugh cry and those who cry laugh’, which is an oxymoron. In excerpt 20, ZE continues with the face aggravation, using a Negative Impoliteness strategy of ‘being contemptuous’, ‘scorn’, and ‘ridicule’. This strategy is achieved by the use of recurring face-threatening question tags presupposing that FR is a sex-for-grade lecturer, who flirts with his students. There is also an overlap of Sarcasm, an impoliteness strategy that adopts insincere politeness to unleash face attacks on the hearer. This is achieved using the ironical phrase, ‘Man of policy’, derisively implying that FR is immoral.

5.3. Excerpt 2

[Key: PROF. KA = PROFESSOR KANDEM, PROF. ZE = PROFESSOR ZEMZI]

21. PROF. KA: (*Approaching PROF ZEMZI. He is annoyed but he manages to speak calmly.*) Prof Zemzi, eeh, please you have to get an empty classroom to rehearse in. Rehearsing in the lobby disturbs lecturers and disturbs passers-by. Besides, people are not supposed to see a play until it is presented on stage. Rehearsing in an open place like this goes against the etiquette of the theatre.
22. PROF ZE: (*Bemused.*) Ha ha. Ha ha ha! Wonders! Wonders! Wonders shall never end. So Prof. Zemzi, Prof Raymond Desmond Zemzi will learn theatre etiquette from you! The first African professor of dramaturgy is to learn theatre etiquette from an American backyard University dropout! This is the height of insults!
23. PROF KA: Hello, before you start your madness...
24. PROF. ZE: My...
25. PROF KA: Your infinite madness, I say. Your madness. (*Fuming as he bounds towards PROF ZEMZI.*) Your madness, we decided at the Board. (*He turns the table upside down, gives the chair a kick.*) Get out of here, you fowls!
26. PROF ZE: (*Bemused*) What’s happening here? What the hell is he doing?
27. PROF KA: (*Bounding towards the students.*) Get out of here quickly. (*They begin to go.*)
28. PROF ZE: Stand your ground (*They stand, trembling.*) Are you taking orders from a world-acclaimed buffoon? This Eternal Professor of Pancake and Powder? This Monumental Professor of Pamphlets and Handouts? (*He breathes hard, fists clenched.*)
29. PROF KA: (*Breathing hard.*) Raymond Zemzi, you are a demon. A demon. Your place is in hell not here. Not here Terrorist. Academic terrorists. But I will show you in this university. I will show you. We need our peace in this place for goodness’ sake. We need our peace. And there can’t be peace when a demon is around. Pushing you out is a job that must be done.
30. PROF ZE: (*Turning and approaching him with each sentence.*) How can a demonised demon like you call me a demon? You? It’s on record that you had a third-class degree at a ninth-grade backyard university in New York City. It’s on record that you impregnated a girl in your first year in that University and sent shivers down the spine of concerned mothers throughout and beyond America. CNN relayed it for three full days. It’s on record that you sew new suits every week in order to please international prostitutes and Miss Campuses like Antonia Ziogu with whom you are seen in every nook and cranny of the planet
31. PROF KA: Everything in its own time.
32. PROF ZE: Empty fellow like you! I’m a core academic, with 25 books in 25 years, and articles in journals all over the planet. And you? 25 bottles in 25 hours, illegitimate children all over the place
33. PROF KA: Lies will dig your grave and slanders will bury you.
34. PROF ZE: You’ve slept with a dog.

35. PROF ZE: (*At the top of his voice*). You've slept with a cow, a pig and a pigeon. (*The two turn and begin to climb the stairs. PROF. ZEMZI hurls the words at them.*) Frederick come here. It's on record that you pronounced epilogue "epilogwe" in a conference of theatre artists ten years ago. (*Nearly up the balcony. The two stop but do not turn.*). A man who claimed to have studied dramatic arts for four years. Two years you claimed you studied choreography but you never met the word epilogue before. You pronounced it "epilogwe." (*Painfully.*) Oh! (*Then smiling mirthlessly.*) that is to say "prologwe," "Monologwe," "Dialogwe." *Eem, eem "trilogwe."* Ha ha. Professor Research Grant.

5.4. Analysis of impoliteness strategies in Excerpt 2: positive politeness, negative, and bald-on record impoliteness

Excerpt 2 comprises the lines between Prof. ZE and a second Prof., KA. KA is attracted by the quarrels between ZE and FR, as he approaches the lobby to speak to ZE. Excerpt 21 contains a Negative Politeness strategy of self-restraint and formality, as KA deploys an apology, 'Prof Zemzi, eeh, please you have to get an empty classroom to rehearse in' to sway ZE to find a classroom for his rehearsal. He further minimises the imposition by giving reasons why the rehearsal should not take place in the lobby. In response, ZE uses the Negative Impoliteness strategy of 'scorn' and 'ridicule' in 22, engaging laughter and repeated exclamations of 'wonders', while emphasising his identity as the most relevant scholar. He derides KA using a third-person negative metaphorical reference, 'American backyard University dropout', as face attack. The verbal attacks by ZE buttresses Bousfield's view of impoliteness as unwarranted, conflictive, face-aggravating acts (2007, p. 2186; 2008, p. 132). From the analysis above, ZE's outburst towards KA is not warranted in any way. In 23 and 25, KA, who is already angry resorts to Bald On-record Impoliteness repeatedly, via counter-insults as personalised negative vocatives, 'your madness', 'your infinite madness', and the Negative impoliteness of name-calling, using the demeaning metaphor, 'fowls' for the students. In 26, ZE uses Sarcasm via the tags and irony, 'What's happening here? What the hell is he doing?'. ZE behaves as though he has not been the aggressor himself.

In 27, Bald on record impoliteness is used by KA, engaging the dismissals, 'Get out of here!' to pursue the students out of the lobby. In 29, KA uses the Positive Impoliteness strategy of name-calling, engaging insults as personalized negative metaphors and vocatives, 'a demon', 'terrorist', 'academic terrorist', and further deploying Bald On-record of sharp rebuke to counterattack ZE. Moreover, there are two impoliteness strategies used by ZE in excerpt 30 above. First, is the Positive Impoliteness strategy of name-calling, using an insulting third-person negative metaphorical reference, 'demonised demon' on KA. Again, the Negative Impoliteness strategy of 'condescend', 'ridicule', and 'scorn' are used by ZE, through exaggerations, accusations, and pointed criticisms, using the insulting personalised negative assertions as indicated by the pronouns 'you' and 'your'. In 31, the Negative Politeness strategy of self-restraint is used by KA to minimize the face attack by ZE, 'Everything in its own time.' In 32, the Negative Impoliteness strategy of 'scorn' and 'ridicule', via the use of personalised negative vocative, 'Empty fellow...', which is a demeaning adjective-metaphor is used by ZE. ZE further employs antithesis to draw a striking superiority difference between himself as a core academic, with several publications in scholarly journals, while KA is a terrific drunk and womaniser, with many illegitimate children all over the world. KA reacts in 33, deploying Bald On-record Impoliteness with a direct attack on ZE, 'Lies will dig your grave and slanders will bury you', using the pronoun 'you' and 'your', while engaging personification in which abstract nouns like 'lies' and 'slanders' are humanized as a conduit for impoliteness. In excerpts 34 and 35, ZE uses Negative Impoliteness of 'condescend', 'scorn', and 'ridicule' via false accusations, and exaggerations as personalised negative assertions that KA commits bestiality. On the other

hand, mocking FR for the mispronunciation of words, using the pronoun 'you' and the noun clause 'A man who claimed...' as referents for the verbal attacks.

5.5. Excerpt 3

[Key: MRS. PO = MRS. POMPELI, PROF ZE = PROFESSOR ZEMZI, PROF. FR = PROFESSOR FREDERICK]

Mrs. Pompeli, a non-academic staff is attracted by the noise and comes to the stairs to see what is going on. Prof. Zemzi hurls a book at her and other students who come out. The following dialogues ensue.

36. MRS PO: (Stone-faced now). Thank your stars those things didn't touch me. Just thank your stars.
37. PROF ZE: (*Good humoredly*) And if they did? What in the living hell are you going to do, you horrible and horrendous woman.
38. MRS PO: Till they touch me. Just try it.
39. PROF ZE: Actually, I should be in no hurry to. I know you're just a few inches away from your grave. I wouldn't like you to die and say I killed you.
40. MRS. PO: Look at the chattering chaff saying I'm next to my grave. Look at him. Who is nearer the grave than the other? Is it I in at the prime of my life or you wizened old bagging of fattened and weary bones with no bed softer than your office desk? Is it me that eats whatever I like or you who eat nothing better than banana and groundnuts with roasted yam dug up from the driest part of Ogbodingbolo river.
41. PROF ZE: Why shouldn't you eat what you like? (*Turning to the actors.*) This is a woman who has married six husbands, divorced two, killed three and now is about to kill another. But woe betides you the day that helpless old man dies. I will lead the mob that would lynch you. I will.
42. MRS PO: (*Stupefied*) Raymond Zemzi, Raymond Zemzi. This is the third time you are saying I killed my husbands. This is the third time. And this time you can't go scot-free. Never. I'd definitely charge you to court and claim damages. Everybody in this university knows that John died of a heart attack and Benson of high fever.
43. PROF ZE: And what are you but heart attack incarnate and yellow fever made flesh? Answer me. What are you? Any time I see you, I see a heart attack and high fever.
44. MRS PO: Just wait till I have spoken to my attorney. I will definitely get you into jail. I have all the connections.
45. PROF ZE: I have no doubt about that. For how else could somebody employed here as a cleaner become a senior executive officer? Where else has it happened? All this happened that most terrible year I went on sabbatical. I came back and found two illiterate senior lecturers and five popcorn professors, and you a clerk. And I asked: do they have the position of clerk in the cadre of cleaners? They said no, and before long information started flying in from here and there. You slept with Professor Dabano when he was Dean. You slept with Baldwin Kandem when he was HOD. You slept with Mr. Izmond the registrar, the shortest registrar in the annals of this university. And before they knew what was happening you had slept your way to the position of clerk with a Volvo car when some professors don't even have a bicycle. After which heart attack will not kill Benson and John. Madam Heart Attack
46. MRS PO: Only God will answer for me (*Tearfully.*) Only God will answer for me.
47. PROF ZE: Don't call God into this case or he will kill you right away.
48. MRS PO: I used my brain. And you said I slept my way through because you and your ilk don't believe a woman can do it with her brain. Do you think you are more intelligent than

- me? I could have become a professor myself if my father were not wise enough in his own eyes to send only his male children to higher schools. Are some of you lecturers here better than me? Lo and behold! I speak better English than some professors in this Department
49. PROF ZE: (*Jumping up.*) This one is true. (*To the students.*) You see, I believe the truth even if it were uttered by my enemies. This is true. You speak better English than some so-called professors in this Department. (*PROF FREDERICK enters and hurries up the steps.*) This one here, for instance. You speak better English than he does. You are quite right there. No single doubt about that.
50. PROF FR: (*Nodding at MRS POMPELI as he meets her at the top of the balcony.*) You speak better English than I Mrs Pompeli? (His voice is cold in its slowness.)
51. PROF ZE: Yes she does. She does, you Everlasting Professor of Grammatical Blunders.

5.6. Analysis of impoliteness strategies in Excerpt 3: Sarcasm, Bald on-record and Positive (im)politeness strategies

Excerpt 3 captures the lines between ZE and a female colleague, who is attracted by the altercation in the lobby. Mrs. PO engages Off-record Politeness by way of implicature in 36, as she avoids a direct verbal attack on ZE, while politely implying via euphemism that she is displeased with the book ZE hurles at her. ZE in the first two lines of 37 deploys the Bald On-record Impoliteness strategy using two challenging question tags, which are confrontational. He further deploys a Positive Impoliteness strategy of name-calling, by using insults as personalized negative references, 'horrible and horrendous woman', which are also metaphors. PO responds in 38, via Negative politeness of 'restraint' 'Till they touch me'. In 39, ZE uses Sarcasm as an impoliteness strategy to negatively assert via euphemism that Mrs. PO is about to die and ZE would not want to have a hand in her death, which is a face-aggravating insult. In response to ZE in 39, PO defends herself, using Bald on record Impoliteness of open confrontation and Positive Impoliteness of name-calling, such as: 'chattering chaff', 'wizeden old bagging of fattened and weary bones', which are also negative metaphorical references. PO draws a comparison between herself and ZE, using antithesis to juxtapose self-eulogy while counter-attacking ZE. In 41, ZE engages Bald On-record Impoliteness of direct accusation and threat, using the negative assertion that PO is a murderer. This is achieved via the use of the demonstrative adjective-clause 'This is a woman who has married six husbands, divorced two, killed three...'. Hence, Zemzi threatens to lynch PO, if the remaining husband dies.

In 42, PO deploys Bald On-record impoliteness to threaten ZE of her intent to charge him to court, using the pronoun, 'you' to directly confront ZE. On the other hand, ZE uses the Positive Impoliteness strategy of name-calling in 43, engaging the negative metaphorical reference, 'heart attack incarnate' and 'yellow fever made flesh' to verbally insult PO. Furthermore, Bald On-record impoliteness of using direct threat via the pronouns, 'I' and 'you', and the adverb of manner, 'definitely' is used by PO to threaten ZE of her determination to jail him. In 45, ZE deploys Sarcasm, implying that PO got promotions through prostitution and that illiterate members of staff were employed because of his absence. The negative metaphorical nominations, 'Madam Heart Attack', 'popcorn professors', and the paradox 'illiterate professors' are under the Positive Impoliteness strategy of name-calling, which ZE engages to demean his colleagues. In 46, the Negative Politeness strategy of 'restraint' is used by PO via a repeated invocation of God to vindicate her. Further in 47, ZE uses Bald On-record Impoliteness strategy of threats via negative expression of curses, that God will kill PO. In 48, PO uses Positive Impoliteness as she seeks agreement with ZE giving reasons for the delay in her education. Two impoliteness strategies are used in 49; the first strategy is engaged to target PO, while the second strategy is used to attack FR who is passing by the staircase. ZE uses Sarcasm to address PO, 'You see, I believe the truth even if it were uttered by my enemies...', implying

that PO is his enemy. Moreover, ZE uses Bald On-record impoliteness, directly accusing FR of being a poor English speaker, comparing PO and FR via the pronouns, 'you' and 'he'. In 50, FR is embarrassed and uses Negative Politeness of self-restraint in the question tag he addresses to PO, 'You speak better English than I, Mrs Pompeli?' ZE, while enjoying the outcome of the conflict between PO and FR, emanating from his innuendo, intensifies the verbal attacks via Bald On-record Impoliteness of a direct attack on FR. ZE uses Positive Impoliteness of name-calling, in the insulting negative metaphorical reference, 'Professor of Grammatical Blunders'.

6. Interplay of (im)politeness, incongruity, and humour in the excerpts

Attardo (1994, p. 48) defines incongruity as the placement of two unrelated phenomena within a context, which rouses its audience's cognition of the contradiction depicted. From the lines analysed, incongruity manifests at two main levels; characterization and speech acts; context and language use. The drama achieves incongruity mainly via the character of Prof. ZE, who is the comic protagonist. The real-life expectations we hold of a *Professor* as an educated, polite, dignified person with a gentlemanly demeanour are contrasted with the brash, clownish, uncouth, and impolite character of Prof. ZE that is presented in the play. ZE is depicted in the drama as an absurdist character, who enjoys conflicts with his colleagues. From Excerpts 1 -3, he engages in an open ridicule of his co-workers in the presence of the students, which heightens the face aggravation. First, he attacks Prof. FR., insulting and calling him names, then, Prof. KA, whom he clashes with, and then, Mrs. PO, without any offence triggered.

Secondly, incongruity is typified by the use of impoliteness against politeness in a formal workplace, which ethically demands that colleagues respect one another's space and privacy. What is noticeable in the drama is the juxtaposition of politeness super strategies engaged by other characters with impoliteness super strategies utilised by ZE, recurrent in most of the excerpts, which project Prof. ZE's speech acts as incongruous, face aggravating, shocking, and amusing. For instance, in Excerpt 1, FR's face redress strategy to apologise to ZE is rebuffed. What is striking is that amidst the apology and face redress by FR, ZE remains brazenly impolite, offensive, and ridiculous, revealing a major hallmark of the text as incongruity, which is surprising and humorous, given the fact that politeness is a norm characterising a formal workplace, most importantly, in symmetric power relations where the interactants are of equal status. In Excerpt 2, ZE relapses into an absurd mockery of Prof. KA and in 3, exaggerates about PO's marriage in a derisive manner. Pfetsch (2011) notes that a balanced comity relationship characterises a symmetric relationship. This, in essence, implies that impoliteness in symmetric power relations, as typified in collegial interactions in the play reveals incongruity and triggers humour. In all the excerpts, ZE eulogises himself as a superior scholar, while condescending to mock his colleagues. Holmes et al., (2000) note that humour in impoliteness indicates a polarisation between the offender and the target. Attardo (2017) argues that such polarisations underlie humour in impoliteness, which is captured in the play.

From the foregoing, such violence and irrational verbal attacks are incongruous not only in a formal workplace but also with the personality traits of an academic, specifically, one who may be reckoned, as a 'professor'. To the reader, the response to such incongruous speech acts is surprise, shock, and amusement. Throughout the scenes explored in the analysis, humour is achieved by what Raskin (1979, p. 333; 2017, p. 39) designates as an 'overlap' of two or more 'incompatible scripts'; the juxtaposition of contradictory cognitive structures. There is an obvious contradiction between the audience's expectation of ZE's personality label as a 'professor' and the eventual nasty behaviour he exhibits. There is also incongruity in the 'formal' workplace context of the play and the eventual contradictory speech acts used, resulting in humour.

7. Discussion

So far, this research has explored the use of (im)politeness super strategies cum the conventionalised impoliteness formulae in the African drama *Prof. Zemzi's Last Rehearsal* to examine the interface between impoliteness and incongruity resulting in humour. The application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies, Culpeper's impoliteness super strategies (2005), and the conventionalised impoliteness formulae (Culpeper, 2010) unveils a salient pattern of engaging impoliteness for comic styling in the play. The analysis shows a preponderance of some conventionalised impoliteness formulae, such as insults, pointed criticism, unpalatable questions, condescension, silencers, threats, and negative expressive embedded in the impoliteness super strategies used, as contrasted with the politeness strategies engaged for face redress, resulting in incongruity and humour. Culpeper (2016, p. 436) states that a formula is conventionalised depending on how frequently it is used in a given context. Hence, the conventionalisation of impoliteness strategies and formulae in the drama reveals that they are engaged to emphasise the comic or humorous function of the impoliteness used. The play mainly draws its humour from the extravagant deployment of unmitigated, intensified face threats in a formal context, in which face work is paramount. Impoliteness signals incongruity at two levels in the play: context/language use incongruity, where the language use and speech acts performed do not correlate with the formal context of workplace interaction, e.g., the use of extreme impoliteness instead of politeness. Secondly, characterisation/language use incongruity where a disparity exists between the expected personality traits of the characters and how they eventually behave in the play, resulting in humour. Also, the engagement of impoliteness super strategies and formulae give rise to interpersonal conflicts among the characters in the play, aiding the plot's progression. This view aligns with Culpeper (2005, p. 46) who avers that conflict is an integral element of plot and characterisation. Finally, the use of pervasive impoliteness super strategies cum formulae in the play builds tension in the audience, serving as a conduit for *dialogicity*; a network of emotional interaction with the events in the drama which is purged via comic catharsis. Seizer (2017, p. 3) links *dialogicity* to the idea of Aristotle's catharsis in stand-up comedy and avers that theatrical catharsis implies the effect a comedy or tragedy has on an audience, helping them release repressed feelings of fear and anxiety through tears or laughter. In the study, laughter or amusement is elicited.

8. Conclusion

The research has demonstrated the intrinsic relationship between (im)politeness and incongruity eliciting humour. An important aspect of the finding reveals the function of the parentheticals in the drama as meta-discourse and metapragmatic markers of impoliteness highlighting incongruity. The *parenthetical* is an integral part of a drama script, usually a brief description of characters' actions, attitudes, and speech tone written in parentheses as extra-linguistic clues to foreground certain messages the author wants to communicate. In the play analysed, the parentheticals are used to buttress the speaker's (im)polite attitude and the addressee's emotional response. The parenthetical engaged in the drama include verbs, adverbs, and adjectives that explain how the offensive speech acts are performed and how they are received by the target, which aids the interpretation of the text. The study reveals that impoliteness, beyond face aggravation, embarrassment, and causing face loss to the target, performs a pragma-stylistic function. While bald on-record impoliteness ranks highest in the data with 34%, negative and positive impoliteness follows with 18%, each, with negative politeness strategy at 16%, among other less significantly used strategies.

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