Register as a Discursive Strategy of Humour in Casual Interactions among Southwestern Nigerian Undergraduate Students

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Abstract: Studies on humour in Nigeria have largely focused on the manifestation of humour in standup comedies, computer-mediated communication and literary texts. However, the potentiality of humour as a discursive strategy in face-to-face casual interactions has not received sufficient scholarly attention. With data collected from four higher institutions from the southwestern Nigeria through surreptitious recordings of interactions among students on campuses, a total of nine purposively chosen samples were analysed drawing from three humour theories (relief, superiority and incongruity) and pragmatic act theory. The analysis reveals enactment of verbal humour through the use of jargon from academic, political and religious fields of discourse embodied in humour techniques such as punning, teasing, retort, witticism and lexemes. Pragmatic with communicative functions such as avoidance of vulgarity, expression of optimism and mockery are implicitly conveyed in the interactions. **Keywords:** Casual interactions, register, discursive strategy of humour, Nigerian undergraduates, pragmatic acts

Introduction

Language primarily performs transactional and interactional functions with the former being the deployment of language for the transmission of messages and information and the latter serving the purpose of creating and sustaining relationship, cordiality and mutual coexistence among language users. Within the interactional function of language wherein the focus of this paper lies, researchers have focused on casual interactions in quasi-conversations such as chats (Inya, 2016; Otemuyiwa 2017), games (Adetunji 2013; Bamgbose, 2016,) and face-to-face interaction (Enyi and Chukwuokoro 2019). Casual interaction involves a conversation on ordinary routine topics with no specific thematic foci between or among interactants who are co-present either physically or virtually. Levinson

(1983:284), for instance, defines (ordinary) conversation as 'the predominant kind of talk in which two or more participants freely alternate in speaking, which generally occurs outside specific institutional settings.' Casual interaction or ordinary conversation has been argued to be the most fundamental type of talk naturally associated with human beings. Speaking on this kind of language use, Schegloff (1999) submits that:

> what humans grow up with is an ordinary interaction within the family, within peer groups, neighborhoods, communities, etc. In all of these, it appears most likely that the basic medium of 'interactional exchange' is ordinary conversation – in whatever practices it is embodied in those settings (Schegloff, 1999: 413).

More fascinatingly, casual interaction spices up and gets injected into what could be described as serious or institutional talk and serves as escape from the rigid world of seriousness and formality. While institutional talk generally has particular phases (e.g. a recognisable beginning and end), ordinary talk has no such recognisable phases or formal procedures. Turns could be pre-allocated in institutional talk while in everyday talk turns are somewhat locally determined. Haugh (2012) argues that casual interaction involves 'practised patterns of language use' that are constitutive of different communicative activity types or genres, such as intimate talk, family dinner-table conversation, troubles telling (or troubles talk), small talk, negotiation talk, consultation, advice giving and so on. He further holds that while activity types or genres are clearly an important dimension of analysis, there is no principled way of classifying conversational interactions in this way, with such categorisations often being based on commonsense or vernacular terms that inevitably overlap in some respects. The present study argues that the informality of casual interactions does not always deprive it of topicality. In line with this, this paper, therefore, investigates the deployment of known register in the creation of humour with a view to establishing how communicative contents are embedded within interactions characterised by humour. The study will answer the following research questions towards achieving its goal:

i. What are some of the registers deployed by Nigerian undergraduates during casual interactions?
ii. What humour techniques are deployed to create humour in the interactions?
iii. What are the communicative functions of humour techniques deployed in the interactions?

Review of Literature

Studies have largely concentrated on casual interactions within different discourse settings. Enyi and Chukwuokoro (2019) identify the common features of conversation in educated Nigerian English in relation to the marked linguistic features of informal conversations in English. The researchers drew data from a surreptitiously recorded spontaneous conversation between two graduating students of Ebonyi State University after their final examination. Their study, which has implication for Nigerian English, reports that Nigerian English conversation has the features of inexplicitness of expressions, randomness of subject matter, general lack of planning, normal non-fluency or gap-fillers, the use of in-group slang and

abbreviations only known to the participants due to shared background knowledge and extreme informality of expressions. Bamgbose and Ajayi (2019) investigate the nature of interactions in pubs, using register and common ground as theoretical framework. They analyse a total of nine excerpts from a pool of data collected from different pubs in three southwestern states of Nigeria. The study reports that women/ladies, football and politics are the three common topics in the discourse in southwestern pubs and the researchers conclude that language use in pubs has its peculiarity and uniqueness and therefore deserves linguistic enquiry. Haugh (2012) presents a conceptual clarification on conversational interaction especially in terms of how it differs from institutional talk. He exemplifies the interactional mechanisms of turn taking and sequence organisation deployed in conversations, drawing his data from both face-to-face interaction and conversations conducted through an online messaging service. In line with the submission of Schegloff (1997, 2007), Haugh (2012) also holds that one of the key findings in conversation analysis is that sequences, whether with respect to adjacency pairs or the overall structural organisation of interaction, are for the most part organised around actions rather than topics (Schegloff 1997, 2007). These studies are similar with the present study in that they analyse some basic features of casual interactions. None, however, considered casual interaction from the angle of humour.

In another study which centres on students' interactions, Melefa, Chukwumezie and Adighibe (2017) investigate the construction of identities in the interaction of undergraduate students in a Nigerian university through a careful examination of the discursive patterns that are evident in the sampled interactions, with a view to gaining insights into how students use language to construct their social relations in different social contexts. The study

applies discourse analysis framework and social identity theory. A total of twelve excerpts derived from conversations of fifty undergraduate students of University of Nigeria were subjected to a linguistic analysis. The study found that students construct their individual and collective identities consciously or unconsciously in their discursive practices through certain discursive patterns like code mixing/switching, the use of Nigerian Pidgin, and peculiar lexical items, such as religious terms. They conclude that there is the idea of the superiority of self, based on the in-group belief system and the inferiority of the other based on their out-group belief system, which usually results in conflict. The research, on the one hand, shares similarity with the present one as both studies examine students' interactions in higher institution(s). On the other hand, they differ in their primary focus because this present study analyses humour in students' interaction while Melefa, Chukwumezie and Adighibe concentrate on identity construction.

Most similar to this study is Inya (2016) that applies pragmatic act to analyse humorous interactions in students' text chats in a Nigerian university. The model draws insights from Giora's Graded Salience Hypothesis (GSH), Mey's Pragmatic Act theory and incorporates current issues in pragmatic theorising such as the dialectics between a priori and co-constructed, emergent intention. The data for the study was obtained from three departmental chat room interactions in Federal University of Technology, Akure. The study analyses four humour types namely canned jokes, punning/wordplay, question and answer jokes, and hyperbole/overstatement. The pragmatic acts found in the different humorous types are: satirising, eliciting laughter, electioneering, teasing and overstating. The author concludes that the effective appreciation of any humour act would require a pragmatically and culturally

enriched context. Although Inya pays attention to the manifestation of humour in quasi-conversation, still, it is different from the present study given that the study does not investigate real life interactions and does not consider the deployment of different registers as discursive tools for the creation of humour in face-to-face interaction.

The works reviewed above are suggestive of the availability of literature on students' interactions, on the one hand, and humour, on the other hand. A study of humour in students' interactions using the linguistic resources afforded by different registers is, however, a vacuum in existing literature; hence, the contribution that this study hopes to add to linguistic scholarship.

Theoretical Framework

Register, beyond its broad understanding as jargon of a particular field, is 'a sort of social genre of linguistic usage" (Stockwell, 2002, p. 7). Register is in this regard understood as sociolect meaning the use of language among a community of people who may be bound by profession, interest or group identity. In a more encompassing definition, Odebunmi (2007:1) views register as "a broad concept that covers all forms and kinds of communication in terms of the linguistic forms used, the activities performed, the participants and their roles in the communication, the medium of communication, and the interconnectivity between one linguistic form and another". The discussion of register as an analytical concept within linguistics involves three major concepts of field, mode and tenor. Field, according to Halliday (1978) involves the "on-going activity and the particular purpose that the use of language is serving within the context of that activity" (Halliday, 1978, p. 62). The field of discourse leads the readers or listeners to the kind of activity being carried out, the field where such is being carried out and the

participants involved in the activity through the lexical choices made. Mode is the role language is made to play in an interaction. Mode concerns "what it is that the participants (of a transaction) are expecting language to do for them in that situation" (Halliday and Hassan, 1985:12) and also concerned with the medium of communication, whether spoken or written. Tenor deals with who are taking part in the transaction as well as the nature of the participants, their status and roles (Halliday and Hassan, 1985:12: 12). It deals with the role and status relationships between interlocutors in a situation. There are three angles to the assessment of tenor which are: power, affective involvement, and contact (Odebunmi 2006). Power deals with the distribution of influence between the interactants. It can be symmetrical or asymmetrical. Affective involvement is concerned with whether the interactants have high or low emotional involvement and commitment in a situation. Contact refers to whether the role being played by the interactants causes them to have frequent contacts or not (Eggins 1994). The three elements of register (field, mode and tenor) shall be accounted for in the analysis below.

'Pragmatic acts' was proposed by Mey (2001) as a contextual advancement to speech acts theory which does not give sufficient attention to extra linguistic features that characterise meaning generation in human interaction. In the words of Mey (2001: 221), the pragmatic act theory focuses on 'the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said'. The contextual realisation of meaning based on what is said or inferred in a language environment is technically called 'pragmeme' in pragmatic acts theory, and a 'pract' is said to be determined by the knowledge of interactional situation. The theory has two analytical aspects; namely:

the activity part and the textual part. The former accounts for the nature of language used which could be indirect speech acts, conversational ('dialogue') acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts and physical acts. The second part enlists the contextual variables, which include INF representing "inference"; REF, "relevance"; VCE, "voice"; SSK, "shared situation knowledge"; MPH, "metaphor"; and M "metapragramatic joker", Mey (2001). The analysis in this study will benefit from the activity and textual elements of the Meyan pragmatics to foreground the role of context in the interpretation of data.

Scholars in the field of humour have identified three major theories of humour that can be complementarily applied in the interpretation of the manifestation of humour in interaction. The three theories are the relief, the superiority and the incongruity theories of humour. These are known as the conventional theories of humour. The superiority theory conceives of humour as a sharp divide of two ends where the person(s) at one end derives a feeling of pleasure or amusement from the perceived misfortune of the person(s) in the other end. Gruner (1997) expatiates on this theory by identifying the following components of the superiority theory of humour, namely: all humorous situations demonstrate winners and losers; there is incongruity in all humours; surprise is integral to humour; the concept of superiority constitutes a first part of a humour thesis. The relief theory of humour, which developed mainly within the work of Sigmund Freud, conceives of humour as an outburst which is connected to the discharge of tension. This discharge of tension involves some energy and results in laughter. Humour is, therefore, interpreted as a physiological process within this humour theory. The most linguistically connected and pragmatically relevant theory of humour is the incongruity theory of humour. Kant (1911) interprets this

theory as a situation where a concept initially connected to two objects becomes applicable to only one of them in the progression of a joke. This sudden diversion to just one meaning, which in the first place is the less envisaged interpretation, results in laughter. Humour is, therefore, conceived of in this theory as a mismatch of two manifest interpretations of a scenario wherein one is a bonafide interpretation and the other which gets eventually foregrounded is meant to induce laughter. These three theories of humour shall be brought into the analysis in this study as they simultaneously surface in the creation and interpretation of humour in casual interactions among university students.

Methodology

An ethnographic method of data collection, involving participant and non-participant participation was adopted for this study. The data were drawn from a total number of 15 recordings of about 15 to 30 minutes each in four Nigerian southwest higher institutions: University of Ibadan, Ibadan; The Ibadan Polytechnic, Ibadan; Lagos State University, Lagos and Lagos State Polytechnic, Lagos. The data were collected between July and December 2019. The choice of these institutions was based on three considerations: firstly, the representativeness of the participants as a reflection of the southwestern student base; given population and diversification. Population means that the selected schools are among the populous in the region and diversification means that their student base cuts across indigenes from different areas of the region. Secondly, the schools are all within the researcher's territorial axis, which enabled him to collect data and to also monitor the research assistants who also helped with this data collection process. The data were surreptitiously collected in different gatherings of students where they gathered for random chats outside the classrooms such as cafeterias,

sports complexes and other school premises. The data extracted for the analysis were mainly in pidgin and Yoruba, largely owing to the former as the lingua franca in the country and the latter being the indigenous language of the region. Afterwards, a total of nine excerpts which reflect the dominant register deployed in the interactions across the schools were purposively extracted for analysis. The names of the participants are given as 'Speakers' and shortened as 'S'; labelled as 1, 2, 3 and so on.

Data analysis

The analysis below is broadly segmented along the major registers that are deployed in the students' interaction towards the creation of humour, which are: academic, political and religious registers. The researcher teases out the major humour techniques deployed in poking fun/humour in each excerpt and the pragmatic and communicative import is foregrounded through the analytical tools of pragmatic acts. However, it should be mentioned that humorous expressions do not necessarily always evoke laughter; it could be an internal feeling of amusement generated by a speaker's unusual use of language that help facilitate an ongoing interaction.

Academic Register as Humour Strategy

Perhaps owing to the school environment of the recorded interactions and the status of the discourse participants as students, one finds the deployment of academic register as discursive strategies in their casual interactions. Academic register is here taken as terminologies depicting the activities and individuals within higher institutions of learning. Below are excerpts from the data.

Sample 1

S1: Guy come how far that your babe na?
                                1

(Excuse me guy, how is it coming with that girlfriend of yours?)

S2: The core course abi the elective?
                                2

(Do you mean the core course or the elective?)

S1: That one wey cook beans come for you for hostel last week?   3
(The one that brought beans for you in your hostel last week)
S2: Ah, na Ronke be that. She dey o. Na my main main be that.   4

(Oh, that's Ronke. She is fine. That's my main).
Na 7-unit course be that o. If I carry am *lasan,* na die.   5

(That's a 7-unit course. If I should carry it over, it's death).
S1: (laughs out) you go fear student of womanology.   6
(laughing) (I fear this student of womanology)

The excerpt achieves its humour and messaging through academic register. The field of academics is suggested by lexical items such as *core* and *elective courses, hostel, 7 unit* and *womanology.* The swift change from the script of relationship as evident in line 1 with the use of *babe* which is a slangy term for girlfriend to the script of academics as foregrounded through the interrogative sentence in line 2 presents two opposing and supposedly unrelated scenarios which though are co-constructed by the participants and do not at first evoke any humorous reaction in them. The legitimisation of speaker two's enacted register which is confirmed by speaker one's mutually intelligible response in line 3 which suggests that he correctly infers the terms *core* and *elective* as being the real girlfriend and the other one(s) respectively shows that the power relation between the speakers is symmetrical and their relationship is cordial. The collocation of a

7-unit course and a carryover, which any student will forbid, metaphorically refers to the lady being asked about as the real girlfriend; hence, the core course. The ingenuity of these academic terms in talking about a romantic relationship is a manifestation of the opposing scripts of education and love which present an initial logical mismatch. The prominence of the non-bonafide interpretation of the academic terms results in a humorous feeling in speaker 1 as evident in line 6. This is in line with the incongruity theory of humour which proposes that laughter is born out of a person's discovery of the mismatch in two simultaneously activated situations. The non-bonafide interpretation is deciphered by speaker 1 through the shared situation and cultural knowledge of the ongoing talk. The participants-in-talk are mindful of the cultural aberration of acts such as immorality and two-timing within the Yoruba culture; hence, the linguistic coding of their conversation through the deployment of academic register. The expressions carrying the register terms are, therefore, instances of psychological acts which make a mental demand on the interlocutors to arrive at the target meaning.

Furthermore, line 6 shows the use of the humour technique called lexeme by speaker 1. Lexeme is the term for humour technique involving the humorous use of neologism. Dynel (2009) holds that the humorous potential of lexemes and phrasemes resides in their novelty, unprecedented juxtapositions (incongruity) of their constituents and the new semantic meaning they carry. The word *womanology,* which again is coined to sound like academic courses such as criminology, phonology, sociology and so on, corroborates the academic register and is deployed to poke fun at speaker 2 as a flirt. Generally, the exchange reveals the pragmatic act of veiling. The register words used by the interlocutors which, most certainly, can only be understood by one who is familiar with the terrain of higher institution shows

that speaker 2 tries to cover his communicative intent, given the immorality and cultural unacceptability of two-timing and fornicating.

Sample 2

Speaker 1: Guy give me your 301 note.

1
Speaker 2: Wetin make me I read?
(What do I read?)

Speaker 3: You travel when the lecturer dey class?
(Did you travel when the lecturer came to class)
Speaker 1: Una don plan to face me before abi? No wahala.

5
(Have you guys planned attacking me before now? No problem.)

E be like say una wan comot for this school abi?
(It seems you both wish to leave this school)
Speaker 3: Oya, set awon VC. Chairman Governing Council
(waoh, VC's contemporary).
Speakers 1 and 2: (laugh out)

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Sample 2 also contains technical jargon words that foreground it as an exchange within academic register. The use of the lexical items, *VC* and *Chairman Governing Council* to refer to speaker 1 shows the field of academics in the exchange. Beyond this, the indirect speech acts chosen by speakers 2 and 3 in lines two and three are instances of witticism which though are not explicit but are mainly deployed to ridicule speaker 1 as one who would rather beg for notes than be in class to take note for himself. Witticism is said to be a clever and humorous textual unit interwoven into a conversational exchange, not necessarily of humorous nature (Norrick, 2003); thus

similar to non-humorous sayings or proverbs in the sense that they are communicative entities comprehensible even in isolation, but they are usually produced relevantly to (recurrent) conversational contexts (Dynel, 2009). Lines 2 and 3 are witty because they are subtle decline to speaker one's request and also a mockery, especially line 3 which ridiculously inquires if speaker 1 had travelled when the note was given. Speaker 1, however, has a shared situation knowledge which enables him draw the inferences in lines 2 and 3 as mockery; hence, his inquiry in line 4 about the other interlocutors' plan to attack him verbally. Line 5 shows that speaker 1 still constructs the insinuated attack jocularly with his empty threatening inquiry of getting speakers 2 and 3 to leave the school. To this, speaker 3 enacts two lexical items within academic register to refer to speaker 1. The pragmatic import of the institutional titles used for speaker 1 is to ridiculously refer to him as the highest decision-making members of a university as a form of teasing. Teasing, which is an expression whose meaning is not to be treated as truth-oriented and which invariably carries humorous force to be appreciated by both interlocutors (Dynel 2009), is seen at play with the eventual laughter of speaker 2 and even speaker 1 who is the butt of the teasing. The pragmatic act of mocking, therefore, generally plays out in the excerpt with evidence of the superiority theory of humour which is reflected in speaker two's and speaker three's subtle depiction of speaker 1 as one who is not serious.

Sample 3

Speaker 1: Guy naso I dream see say I get First Class o.   1
(So guys I dreamt that I made a First Class)
Speaker 2: Nothing person no fit become for dream; even emeritus

(One can become anything in one's dream; even emeritus (professor))
Speaker 1: Na for your eye I go get am, get PhD join
(You shall be alive to see me bag that and bag a PhD too)
Speaker 2: You fit still get DBN, AIT, MITV and HIV join.
(You can also bag DBN, AIT, MITV and HIV too).
Speaker 1: (laughing) na your pa go get HIV
              5
(It's your father who will bag HIV)

This sample generally expresses the pragmatic function of hoping with speaker one's optimism of graduating with a *First Class.* Other jargon words indicating the academic register are *emeritus* and *PhD.* Speaker one's optimism which is expressed in his first line meets with teasing that plays out as a retort, a quick and witty response to a preceding turn with which it forms an *adjacency pair,* in speaker two's first turn. Speaker two teases speaker one in line two by saying that he (speaker two) would not only get a first class but also the highest academic position in a university which is the position of an emeritus professor. Speaker one understands this as a tease and strengthens his statement of hope by saying the other interlocutor will live to see him achieve his desired grade including a PhD. To this, speaker two activates a humorous turn through the deployment of the humour technique called pun; a humorous verbalisation that has (prototypically) two interpretations couched in purposeful ambiguity of a word or a string of words (Dynel 2009). In the use of pun as seen in sample 4, a particular substring appears in line 5, *PhD*, which is related to some other strings with which it shares rhyme pattern as listed in speaker two's second turn. The opposing scripts of a degree as expressed in *PhD* contrasted with media sources such as *DBN, AIT* and *MITV* create a garden path of a humorous move that is finally completed by the third script of disease as reflected in

the word *HIV*. This punning achieves its humorous effect as seen in Speaker one's reaction in the last line.

Political Register as Humour Strategy

Lexical choices depicting politics, political actors and political concepts are also brought to bear in enacting humour in casual interactions among undergraduate students. Sampled excerpts are provided below:

Sample 4

Speaker 1: You go gast arrange yourself well if you wan catch that babe o
(You will have to prepare well to woo that lady)
Speaker 2: That kind make I write manifesto or send bill go National Assembly abi?
Because I wan become Minister for Women Affair. You no well.
(Such that I prepare a manifesto right or send a bill to the National Assembly, right?
Because I want to become the Minister for Women affairs. You are unwell).

What plays out in sample 4 is a subtle attempt by speaker two to mock speaker one or frown on his suggestion through the use of lexical items drawn from the political field of discourse. As an implicit disagreement to speaker, one's suggestion that speaker 2 should prepare well before meeting a mutually known lady in order to woo her, speaker enacts a swift response by asking if he has to write a manifesto as politicians do or send a bill to the law-making body of the country in the name of wanting to woo a lady. He wonders in the second sentence of his turn why he would need to prepare well when he is not seeking office as a minister for Women Affairs. The use of the title "minister for women affair" in the excerpt is metaphorically used to wonder and tease the other interlocutor as

to whether the preparation he talked about will eventually put him in charge of all the girls. The use of the noun phrase, 'minister for women affair,' gives the source domain of politics which is mapped on the target domain of relationship/immorality to poke fun at the other interlocutor in form of teasing. Within the activity element of pragmatic act, this excerpt can be said to be a psychological act given the demand it makes on both the ratified listener (the other interlocutor) and the unratified listener to decipher the political terms as mockery. The teasing is evident in speaker two's last statement where he describes speaker 1 as unwell (for his suggestion). Although speaker two's turn might carry no humour to be appreciated by speaker one, it falls finely within the purview of the superiority humour with the potential of speaker two's putdown to not only be offensive to speaker 1 but also to arouse humorous feelings in unratified hearers, including the researcher who witnessed the scene.

Sample 5

Speaker 1: Guy this babe no bad o. See as she set like national assembly mace
        1
(Guy this lady is beautiful. See how well carved she is like the mace in the national assembly)
Speaker 2: Me don dey reason her matter since self but I hear say na Margaret Thatcher.
Na correct military System of government you dey see so
        4
(I have my eyes on her too but I gathered she is a Margaret Thatcher.
She is really a military system of government)

Sample 5 apparently does not generate any evident humorous reaction between the interlocutors. However, there are linguistic and pragmatic indications of deliberate attempt at implicitly constructing a discourse which does not only enliven the

interaction between the participants but also capable of evoking a humorous reaction in any unratified listener. Anyone with shared situation knowledge of the deliberate deployment of the political register (mace) in depicting the 'babe' in question is likely going to infer the subtle humorous implication of the name. Phrases and names such as National Assembly mace, Margaret Thatcher, military system of government belong to the political field of discourse. The lexical choices are used to metaphorically refer to a lady who is being praised and butted simultaneously. Her comparison to a 'national assembly mace' is a positive representation of the lady in terms of beauty. Beyond beauty, there is also the symbolic representation of women as possessing authority and power.

The mace is usually a well-carved wood used by lawmakers without which there can be a legislative meeting. The comparison of a human to a wood especially with a positive representation is communicatively absurd and incongruous. The deployment of the metaphor is, therefore, not just a communication enhancer between the participants but also a possible humorous ignition to other listeners. The two other politically related lexical items (Margaret Thatcher and military system of government) in the conversation situate the exchange within the superiority ambit of humour given their referential meaning to negatively construct the lady. Margaret Thatcher, who was a former British Prime Minister, is often associated with strictness in terms of policy and governance. A military system of government is not constitutional. These two labels therefore depict the lady as a strict person who would not likely give anyone, a man in this case, a chance of a relationship. The excerpt generally portrays the pragmatic function of veiling as the lexical choices co-constructed by the interlocutors serve as implicit denigration for the absent target of the interaction.

Sample 6

Speaker 1: Omo make God just do am make I go get A for that 401

      1

(Dude, wish God could just let me bag an A in that course, 401)

Speaker 2: A go do you? Na A plus you fo get.

(Will A be good for you? You should have prayed for A plus)

Speaker 1: No wahala, naso una doubt Obama until he become president.

        5

(There is no problem. You all doubted Obama until he became the president)

Speaker 2: (Laughs out) oya set awon Obama.

(laughs out) Obama's contemporary.

Speakers 1 and 2: (Laughs)

Sample 6 shows the pragmatic function of hoping or optimism which is reflected in line 5 through the use of the name Obama. The excerpt can be said to be an instance of political register given that Barrack Obama whose name was mentioned is a politician. Speaker one expresses his wish to achieve a distinction in a particular course and speaker two mocks his plan by asking if he would be contented with an A or would want an A+. To this, speaker two activates a political script which is shared by anyone with a little knowledge of American politics, especially regarding the emergence of Barrack Obama, as American president. By the reference to Obama, speaker 1 implies that just as a whole lot of people were shocked by the emergence of Obama, his friend too would be shocked when he gets a distinction. The metonymy sounds larger than life; hence, the hyperbolic effect of speaker one's comparison of himself to Obama aroused a humorous feeling in speaker 2 who eventually teases him by sarcastically referring to him as Obama's contemporary resulting in the outburst of laughter in both of them, thereby making manifest the

release theory of humour in casual interactions.

Religious Register as Humour Strategy

The recorded data also revealed religious allusions as a humour strategy in casual conversations among undergraduate students in southwest Nigeria. The extracted samples feature the use of names and terms in Christian theology as seen below.

Sample 7

Speaker 1: who go lead us for prayer now? Maybe Kunle.
Speaker 2: which one be Kunle every time. You no fit call me?
Guy I be born again o.
Speaker 3: That one no mean anything. Judas been be born again
Speakers 1, 2, 3: (all laughed)

The words 'prayer' and 'born again', and the name 'Judas' foreground the conversation as belonging to the field of religion. The interaction took place at a restaurant when a group of three friends were going to eat together. Speaker one after wondering to himself who could lead them in prayer before eating, called on speaker three whose name was mentioned as Kunle. Speaker two jokingly asked why the first speaker was in the habit of calling Kunle to pray always, stating that he too was a 'born again' - an insinuation that he could lead a prayer. Speaker three renders the humorous line of the interaction by stating that Judas, the disciple, who betrayed Jesus, was a Christian. This reference to speaker 1 as a Judas is an instance of a quotation allusion. Verbal humour has been argued to sometimes rely on already existing material, i.e., on allusions (cf. Nash 1985; Norrick 1987, Dynel 2009) incorporating distortions and quotations. The shared situation knowledge of Judas as a betrayal despite being one of Jesus' disciples is a quotation which enacts

a contrary perspective to speaker two's self-acclaimed religiosity through the biblical evidence of a supposedly religious traitor. The outburst of laughter that follows from all of them shows the perception of humour by the participants and the humorous intention of the speaker. The excerpt therefore reveals the pragmatic function of mocking with speaker two as the jocularly constructed humour of the casual interaction.

Sample 8

Speaker 1: Chai! I dey fear this afternoon paper no be small.
(Chai! I am really scared of this afternoon's paper)
Speaker 2: Guy cool down. Naso Daniel been fear when dem wan throw am give lion,
las las lion loyal
(Guy be calm. Daniel was also scared when he was going to be thrown into the lion den, in the end they became loyal)
Speaker 1: (laugh) that's my Man of God
Speaker 2: Remember to pay your tithe
Speakers 1 and 2: (laugh out loud)

The sample is a humorously constructed exchange which carries the pragmatic import of hope and optimism. Speaker 2 comforts speaker 1 over his fear about an examination paper that was to be written on that day. The allusion to the biblical Daniel is a way of raising the hope of speaker 1 and also a pointer to the presence of religious register. The humour plays out when speaker 1 in his second line commends speaker two for his message of optimism, referring to him as a man of God and the latter in a swift response demand 'tithe', a tenth part of someone's produce or income that they give or pay as a tax to the church. The humorous feeling invoked in both of them ultimately builds on the shared situation knowledge of the importance paid on tithe by Nigerians. This, therefore, also slightly conveys a mockery of the Nigerian religious practices where many are

considered religious yet immoral and irresponsible as the teachings of their religions do not reflect in their lives.

Sample 9

Speaker 1: Make una no reason me. As I dey so, 30 minutes, I still dey minister.
Speaker 2: (three other interlocutors laughed) Mr. Samson the powerful man. Sha no kill person pikin.
Speaker 3: No, no! the rod of God does not kill (all laughed).

Sample 9 is an implicit discussion on sex and is grounded in religious register with words such as *minister, Samson* and the idiomatic *rod of God* as a paradigmatic punning of the word of God. The use of these words linguistically pokes humour especially to the unratified listeners who are not directly part of the interaction while also enhancing the discursive flow among the interlocutors. Pragmatically, the deployment of the religious register is mainly used to show the pragmatic function of veiling as they chose to rather code a sexual discourse often considered taboo in Africa at large and Nigeria specifically. The word *minister* which is used as an action word in the context is metaphorically used to mean sexual act. Speaker 1 implies that he can sustain a sexual intercourse for 30 minutes. After the engendered humorous reaction from the other interlocutors due to the opposing scripts of religion and sex, speaker two sustains the religious frame of the sexual discourse by likening speaker 1 to the biblical Samson who was powerful. Speaker 2 moves further to unravel the coded discourse by saying that speaker 1 should not kill someone's child; implying that long sex may be injurious for the other party who may not be strong enough for it. To this, speaker 3 implicitly suggests that a man's organ will not kill a woman through the punning of *word of God* and *rod of language* premised on the religious clue that like the words of God do not kill, a man's organ too will not kill. The overall

pragmatic and communicative function of the lexical items of religious register in the excerpt is to veil the interaction.

Conclusion

The study analyses interactions among Nigerian undergraduate students in two of the southwest states of the country with a view to unraveling the use of registers of different fields as humour strategies in such conversations. The study also considers the pragmatic and communicative intents of such casual interactions. The analysis reveals the dominance of three fields of discourse in the recorded interactions which are academic, political and religious registers. Grounded within three theories of humour namely release, superiority and incongruity theories, the lexical items from the respective fields of discourse foregrounded or poke fun within the interlocutors and other unratified learners through the humour techniques of punning, allusion, teasing, lexemes and putdown.

The pragmatic analysis of the interactions reveals that beneath the casual interactions, communicative functions such as the need to veil some forms of discussion such as sexual chat, expression of optimism and deliberate mockery are inherent in the interactions. The study also shows the potentiality of humour in addressing societal issues such as tithing in the Nigerian society.

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