

# Pragmatics of Crisis-Motivated Humour in Computer Mediated Platforms in Nigeria

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Humour, an established means of releasing stress and tension, has attracted scholarly attention over the years. In the Nigerian discourse context, studies on Crisis-Motivated Humour (CMH) via CMC platforms are scarce. This paper investigates humour shared through social media that reflects the socioeconomic/political challenges in Nigeria in order to identify CMH as a form of humour through which real-life experiences of other people can be understood. Ethnography of communication and pragmatic act theory provide the theoretical framework. 30 anonymous humorous compositions were randomly selected from *WhatsApp* (15) and *Facebook* (15). CMH is a creative composition of jokes that reflects Nigerian experiences, perceptions, imaginations and assumptions. They are purposefully composed by Nigerians in order to downplay the effects of the crisis and bring temporary relief to the audience. These jokes elicit amusement, high-level wit and satirise the crisis situation(s). CMH are composed mainly in English with a blend of Nigerian Pidgin and a reflection of some Nigerianism. They are replete with verifiable but exaggerated facts, deployed through varying practices. Use of the first person singular pronoun 'I' and second person singular/plural 'you' with the use of simple present tense of verb among other grammatical elements are the norm. These features make some of the jokes believable and also establish CMH as a unique genre of humour with an unlimited audience. CMH are often preserve-able and re-usable and thus serve as a relevant medium through which political leaders can assess the plights of the populace and access first-hand information on the 'real' impacts of the crisis.

**Keywords:** crisis-motivated humour, computer mediated, platforms, Nigeria, pragmatics of communication

Humour, an established means of releasing stress and tension has attracted scholarly attention over the years and has been identified as an effective means of interaction. In teaching and learning, it is an effective way of arousing and stimulating the interest of learners (Aboudan, 2009; Ruggieri, 1999; Sopher, 1981; Southam and Schwartz, 2004). According to Ross (1998), "humour is capable of creating an atmosphere of relief from anxiety, anger and pain. Its profile is high in the society". The subject has been conceived as a complex multi-faceted phenomenon (Marin-Arrese, 2005). Interest in the topic has continued to grow across various disciplines. Many of the existing studies on humour have focused on its principles, form and functions in societies. Examples include Morreall (1997), Mulkay (1989), Hay (2000), Meyer (2000), to name just a few. Scholars like Dziegielewski, Jacinto, Laudadio, & Legg-Rodriguez (2003), Dean & Major (2008), Mora-Ripoll (2010) among others have explored the therapeutic value of humour. Obadare (2009) and

Davies (2014) examined the application of humour in politics with a focus on its various forms and media. Some studies on humour in crisis situations have provided a basis for understanding humour reactions in social media among American, Asian and European users (see Beeston, Urrutia, Halcrow, Xiao, Liu, et al. (2014) and Wise (2016). This study investigates crisis-motivated humour in computer-mediated platforms in Nigeria within the scholarly lens of pragmatics.

Sources and construction of humour vary (Attardo 2017). Depending on the environment, humour can be employed through *satirisation* as seen in texts (especially academic). On the television, it can be regarded as a comedy, constructed in play or before a live audience (e.g. stand-up comedy). In the family, interpersonal or group interactions, humour can be evoked through jokes and sometimes, puns and so on. In all the environments identified, it can be inferred that humour is potentially an effective tool for sustaining the peace, stability and general well-being

of any person or society. Humour can, therefore, be seen as a tool for social interaction (Chapman 1983).

Nigeria, one of the most populated African nations has been recognised among the top-ten happiest people on the continent. According to Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs's (2017) World Happiness Report, the country is the sixth happiest nation in Africa and ninety-fifth in the world (p. 21). In March 2018, the Report sees Nigeria moved from its previous position to fifth in Africa and ninety-first in Africa (p. 24). Some of the variables used in both reports include the Gross Domestic Growth (GDP), social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom to make life choices, generosity, corruption, et cetera. Considering the daily news reports on the print and electronic media in Nigeria and about Nigeria, which in recent times are very unpleasant. It is surprising to discover that Nigeria still ranks fifth among African happiest states. This study, therefore, investigates Crisis-Motivated humour (CMH) in Nigeria and explores its relevance as a potential coping strategy. Specifically, the objectives are to examine the nature of CMH and ideas conveyed through it, identify CMH as a reference of a society's realities, and highlight the pragmatic acts in CMH.

### Literature Review

In pragmatics and interrelated disciplines such as discourse, psychology, linguistics, sociolinguistics, anthropology, and medicine, there are numerous studies pertaining to the mechanism and roles of humour in interaction. Some of these include McCreddie & Wiggins (2007), Clarke (2009), Tsakona (2015), Filani (2015), Eleboda (2014), Nneji (2013), Nereus (2012), Dynel (2011), Rowen (2010), Clarke (2009); Ross (1998). Some of these contributions are briefly explored.

Clarke (2009) attempted a description of humour using pattern recognition theory. He argued that humour is effectively an information-processing system which is consequently applicable to any data, whether externally perceived or internally stored. He identified some patterns, which in his estimation give a description of humour. Ross (1998) investigated the relationship between humour and social attitudes – the status of the targets of humour, the joke tellers and the audience – alongside the social aspects of humour. His study serves as a contribution to the debate about 'political correctness' and censorship of humour.

Filani (2016) examined stand-up comedy using discourse theory, which is viewed as having a complementary relationship to the activity type. Both were construed as having a lot in common with "acts" in pragmatics. Relying on Nigerian stand-up comedy as samples, he selected two comedians so as to examine the choice of linguistic code, stereotyping, salutation

among others. He affirmed that these comedians employed discourse type as communicative actions to achieve humorous reactions from their audience. Eleboda (2014) investigated humour in advertising in Nigeria from the psychological point of view. This takes into account the influence which humorous advertising has on consumers' behaviour. The study deployed the use of a questionnaire to identify demographic variables of respondents and to measure the influence. Focusing on the telecommunication companies' humorous advertisements, the scholar averred that humorous advertisement is effective for creation of affection among consumers in Nigeria. He also emphasised that consumers have a positive disposition to products whose advert were humorously packaged. Delving into the aspect of gender, Eleboda claimed that women are more likely persuaded by a humorous advertisement than men.

Further, Nereus (2012) studied jokes that were incongruous with polite everyday interactions. An attempt was made to understand the descriptions and functions of humour through three theories: incongruity, superiority, and relief. He explained the relevance of each to the study, proposing that studies of humour have a lot of potential owing to its human values and aesthetics, and found its widespread use in Nigeria. Nneji (2013) approaches humour research using a semantic and pragmatics lens. His focus was the perception of Nigerian jokes as humour construction. In the study, he examined everyday jokes that Nigerian citizens expressed on *Nairaland*, a social media platform. The identity of the users was left anonymous. Drawing on the incongruity theory, Nneji affirmed that jokes depict the socio-cultural life of the Nigerian people. However, the study does not address the motivations for these jokes.

Tsakona (2015) focused on the social functions of joke telling with an emphasis on the speakers' strategies in conveying political humour and their spontaneous comments. He sought "a more comprehensive approach to the analysis of political (or other) jokes" (2015, p. 287) by examining extracts about the Greek debt crisis. In fact, this study points towards crisis-motivated humour even though the term CMH was not applied in the study. Further, Tsakona construed political jokes as those that serve certain social functions. Among other issues, he highlighted the trends of political jokes deriving from oppressive governments, an emphasis on content, and preference for decontextualized texts from printed collections. In addition, he said:

Nowadays, modern technology and media allow us not only to collect contemporary political (or other jokes), but also to gather evidence on how jokes are disseminated and,

most importantly, on the reasons why they are circulated and on the social functions they serve, as conceptualized by the speakers themselves.

(Tsakona, 2015, p. 292).

The present study draws on these sources in analyzing how jokes function in three dimensions. First, the motivations for the jokes; second, the platforms where they are generated; third, the effects (overt and covert) they have on the audience. In seeking to understand these three dimensions, I investigate social media jokes that are motivated by the socioeconomic, and political realities in Nigeria as a dynamic society as well as a developing democratic nation.

### **CMH as a form of informal humour**

Although most scholars (such as Moalla, 2015; Chapman, 1983; Dynel, 2011; Nereus, 2012; Vivona, 2014) in humour studies are in unison regarding the fact that jokes are generated from incongruous social experiences, many studies on humour focus mainly on the first two of the three possible varieties of humour: formal, non-formal, and informal humour. Humour is perceived as formal in a situation where the occasion is strictly formal and the primary purpose of the event is not just to merely evoke laughter. Examples include audience at national day celebrations, business forums, political meetings, corporate meetings, and many others. Non-formal humour can refer to any gathering organised for the main purpose of being entertained. These include weddings, birthdays, television drama series, home movies, reality shows, comedy shows and many others. Here, the person evoking such humour is conscious of the audience, and he/she is doing this so as to fulfil the overt goal of entertaining the audience. Here, the performer and the audience are limited in terms of the space and time. The motivation for this kind of humour is the remuneration or reward for the entertainer.

The third form, informal humour, is often spontaneously evoked for the sake of bantering. This will include jokes between friends, husband and wife, parents to their children, teachers to students in a classroom, to name just a few. There is no direct incentive for the person evoking such other than the fulfilled feeling of having lightened the mood of others through the evocation of smiles or laughter. In some other instances, it can be evoked to just release built-up emotions as a result of undesirable social and environmental experiences (Holmes and Marra, 2002).

Apart from the fact that informal humour has been under-researched, there is a dearth of literature especially on one aspect of informal humour, namely

crisis-motivated humour (CMH). CMH, in this study, refers to social or political jokes that are constructed to express the composers' experience of challenging situations in their environments. In other words, CMH is any joke created as a coping strategy for difficult social or political experiences of a people. Such difficulties include any issue that brings about some psychological crisis in the people, and as a means of cushioning the effects, the people experiencing the difficulties resort to humour construction. How this is carried out will be examined alongside the different subjects that convey the experiences.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study is analysis-driven and examines online content. The data analyses were carried out manually. These data were semantically verified according to the researcher's classification of CMH. Further information regarding the sample, research instruments, and research procedures is provided below.

### **Sample**

The samples collected for the study were taken from social media. All of these were purposefully and specifically extracted from two popular social media platforms in Nigeria: *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*. These two platforms were selected due to the high number of Nigerians using them. Across Nigeria, there is hardly anyone with an internet-enabled mobile phone or computer that does not have an account with one of these platforms. Those few who are not users are often fed with stories by their friends, associates, wards or family members about happenings around the nation and the world, based on information derived from one of these social platforms.

From each of the selected platforms, 15 samples rendered in the English language and Nigerian Pidgin were collected. Thus, a total of 30 anonymous humorous compositions (jokes) were randomly collected for analysis in this study. These jokes were those posted on Facebook and WhatsApp between January 2014 and January 2017. Many of the jokes are often recycled and, as a result, their original creators are difficult to identify. The specific age of users on the WhatsApp handle cannot be ascertained. However, according to the Facebook policy on users' age<sup>1</sup>, it can be inferred that the age of users whose jokes were collected for this study ranges between 13 and 45 above. Specifically, through a background check on users' profile, seven of the jokes collected were from

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/help/157793540954833>

female users while the remaining nine were from male on Facebook. All users in the study are literate in Internet-enabled mobile phones/computers.

To achieve the study's objectives, analyses were carried out following the frame of the Ethnography of Communication (EoC) alongside Mey's pragmatic act theory (PAT) (2001). The PAT, on its own, is generally represented with an illustration known as the *pragmeme*<sup>2</sup>. Prior to the analysis, a discussion on the EoC and PAT were carried out to demonstrate how they apply to the study. Further, the data collection procedure was briefly explained. The analysis provided varying topical angles to CMH as exhibited in the Nigerian narratives.

### Instruments

Being a study based on online content analysis, internet-enabled personal computers (PC) and mobile telephones were used. For the corpus from WhatsApp, PC web version 0.2.9737 was used having been paired with GBWhatsApp v6.30 version 2.18.46. This facilitated the copy-and-paste method as well as the storage procedure. Data from Facebook were collected using only the PC. The corpus from the two social media platforms was pasted in a Microsoft-Word document and saved for the purpose of this study.

### Procedures

The data for the study were deliberately selected from social media posts (Facebook and WhatsApp) whenever there was a major crisis in Nigeria. Among these crises were the scarcity of fuel, labour union strikes, economic recession, increase in suicide attempts, national treasury looting, insurgent attacks, poor health facilities, among others. In each instance, this researcher used the copy-and-paste method to save the jokes on a personal computer for later use. To sustain their originality, the collected jokes were left unedited. The selected texts were analysed in line with the SPEAKING acronym propounded in Hymes' Ethnography of Communication while Mey's (2001) PAT (otherwise known as the *pragmeme*) was used to identify the pragmatic acts (practs) and the role of contexts in the selected texts.

### Ethnography of Communication and Pragmemic assumptions of Mey (2001)

Hymes' Ethnography of Communication (EoC) is popularised through the acronym of SPEAKING. The theory emphasizes communicative competence, in

<sup>2</sup> Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics, an introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, p. 222

reaction to Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance (see Hymes, 1976). The assumption is that the EoC is capable of analysing a communicative event within the wider context of the social and cultural practices and beliefs of the members of a particular culture or speech community. Cameron (2001) maintains that EOC accounts for communicative form, which may include but is not limited to spoken language and its function within the given culture. In the acronym, the S refers to the setting, which indicates the appropriateness of time. The next letter in the acronym, P stands for the relationship that exists between the interactants. E which stands for Ends is a reference to the important goals to be achieved in the communicative event, which can be planned or unplanned. I presume that the goals can both be overt and covert within the context of CMH and some other types of humour. Letter A indicates the acts sequence and K for Key. The former involves what is said, where and how. The latter has to do with the speakers' extra-linguistic features (understood through the mental posture, tone) and manner of presentation of the jokes presented. These two, acts and keys, have a complimentary relevance to the pragmemic assumption in pragmatics. PAT advances the notion of the speech act theory propounded by John Austin and John Searle (Mey, 2001, p. 219). Here, the context in which linguistic items are deployed with regards to the speaker (or writer), the participants (or target audience) and on what occasion are important to the understanding of meanings in the communicative event. In another sense, the specific communicative situation and the adopted attitudes inform how the intended message is understood.

Mey's pragmatic act notion, which is conveyed diagrammatically and referred to as the *pragmeme*, exemplifies "the various choices that the language user has at his or her disposal in communicating" (Mey, 2001, p. 222). The emphasis in pragmatics is, therefore, based on the notion of context. Odeunmi defines context as "the condition that constrains the determination of the propositions of an utterance or the understanding of an event or discourse" (Odeunmi, 2016, p. 13). Context is identified from the cognitive, linguistic, situational, and social perspectives. All these are relevant to the CMH texts. The cognitive context points towards the state of mind of the participants in a discussion. The basis for the linguistic context has to do with the interrelatedness of text, or co-texts. The situational context has to do with the location where language is used, while the social context refers to the constraints imposed on meaning and understanding of events by communicative encounters (Odeunmi, 2016, pp. 14-16).

Furthermore, the I of the EoC acronym, which stands for instrumentalities, is concerned with the channels

through which communication is impacted. This can be in the form of writing, speaking and the adoption of signs and symbols. In this study, the identified channel is social media with specific attention to *Facebook* and *WhatsApp*. Norms, represented by the acronym N, refer to the attitudes of participants according to the given situation and setting. This accounts for mannerism and the allowance of the use of certain expressions including linguistic code-mixing in communication. Norms, therefore, have a close link with the culture of the situation in which certain linguistic behaviours are exhibited. The last letter of the acronym is the G for genre. This points to the fact that utterances can be categorised into different types or classes.

## Results and Discussion

Analyses of data for the study are structured according to the study's objectives, namely: nature of CMH and ideas conveyed through it, CMH as a reference of a society's realities, and pragmatic acts in CMH construction. One of the adopted theories, EoC, is applied to the data and is broken down into two parts: the SPEA and KING parts of the EoC SPEAKING acronym. The SPEA part of the EoC is combined with the pragmemic analysis with the corresponding titles. The other part of the analysis is presented in an abridged version of the EoC and pragmatic act application. However, the pragmatic imports of these jokes were outlined so as to understand their functions.

### CMH on (Un)employment

Employment is a very important aspect of every society, most especially concerning youth. This topic features prominently in the Nigerian construction of CMH. An example is given below.

#### Extract 1

Teacher: who is the president of Nigeria?  
Children: Nnamdi Azikiwe  
Teacher: good!!  
Who is the minister of defence?  
Children: Bukola Saraki  
Teacher: correct!!  
What is the capital city of Nigeria?  
Children: Benin City  
Teacher: very good!!  
Who composed the national anthem?  
Children: Timaya  
Teacher: Excellent!!  
If the people from Nigeria are called Nigerians,  
How will you call the people from Moscow?  
Children: Mosquitoes

Teacher: Wow!!  
Then, 2+5 will give you wat?  
Children: 25  
Teacher: perfect!!  
You will remain stupid like  
this until your government increases my salary.  
Don't spoil the fun, send it to ur friends.☺☺☺

The extract above within the tradition of EoC (from the S to A parts of the SPEAKING acronym, others will be collectively discussed in subsequent analysis) implies that the setting is Nigeria, based on the initial question posed by the teacher. Here, it is assumed the students should be able to provide the answer. However, they fail and provide another name, one who was actually a President in the historical past of the nation. The pragmatic import of this presupposes that the pupils are lagging behind with regards to knowledge acquisition. Note that the responses were collectively allocated to the character as children rather than as individual pupils with identifiable names. The reason for this is revealed in the concluding part of the joke where the teacher implicitly requests and demands an increase in her/his remuneration from her employers. As a result, the pract of requesting and demanding is demonstrated. Although this is construed as a joke, it indicates that the teachers in the nation are poorly paid. The movement for a pay rise is, in fact, a recurring topic. The joke thus covertly paints a picture of the state of education in the country.

Regarding the participants, the overt participants are the imaginary teacher and her/his students. In the covert consideration, the participants will include every Nigerian from the middle-class downward whose child is enrolled in any government-run schools. It should be noted that the complaint of the teacher in the context is the lack of salary increments, hence her/his nonchalance to their errors. Again, within the pragmatic act tradition, the pract of abandoning was evoked. Here, the students were abandoned in their ignorance without recourse to their future. Recall that the E letter indicates the ends of the communicative event. In the text above, although the overt end is an evocation of humour, the covert end is a form of protest. In this sense, the protesting pract is deployed.

In Extract 1 above, some of the acts include those of requesting, abandoning and protesting. Through the co-texts, inference is found in relation to the repetitive reference to Nigeria. The voice points to that of an oppressed worker who is now oppressing others as a result of an unpleasant work situation. The second extract shares some similarities.

#### Extract 2

U R G E N T  
Do you know any GRADUATE with 1st Class, 2.1 or

2.2 in any of the following fields:

Geography, Geology, Geophysics, Physics,  
Medicine, Health Sciences, Computer Science,  
Tailoring Technology, Engineering Sciences,  
Agriculture Sciences, Geography Education,  
Law, Mass Communication,  
Political Science, Sociology,  
History or any other Arts courses?

\*Can they speak English fluently? \*Can they write well?

\*Are they willing to relocate to Canada? \*Do they have computer skills?

Alright. Please, greet them for me. Happy Easter.

Going through the texts above, the setting in the meta-linguistic context is a job advertisement. In the pseudo advert, one is taken through the details of a job vacancy, which virtually every educated person (participants) would be qualified to apply for. However, the composer reveals the real intention (end) only at the end, which is to satirize the challenge of unemployment in the country and the attendant rat-race that follows it. Through this composition, practs of arousing (interest and hope), of mocking, and of equating were exhibited. The introductory part of the text arouses the readers but later mocks them towards the end. It suggests that everyone is desirous of a good-paying job and elicits the fantasy of travel abroad resonant among citizens.

Both of the above extracts and the ensuing analysis point to the fact that employment and unemployment are recurring subjects in the Nigeria public discourse. This conveys the idea that it is a common practice for the employed to seek pay rises why the unemployed dream of a well-paid position. The composers of these jokes use the current situation in Nigeria for a humorous communication that conveys a socio-political message.

### **CMH on premium placed on human lives**

Nigeria has a communal-based society and much value is placed on the well-being of each member; in other words, citizens share in each other's joy and sorrow. However, with the advent of modern technologies, communal-living is fast fading and people are now more socially isolated. One consequence of this, in the recent years, has been an increase in cases of suicide. Although, technologies like mobile phones and the virtual worlds of the internet and the social media cannot be wholly held responsible, they do encourage a 'mind your own business' mindset. Turbulent economic situations in Nigeria are also a contributing factor is the rise in suicide rates. Social media is replete with references to this situation and, in some cases, mobilizes humour as a way of coping

with the social problem. Consider the extract below.

### **Extract 3**

Na wa oo<sup>3</sup> person no go make calls again near bridges?

I just parked my car near 3rd mainland bridge to answer an urgent call and over 100 vehicles parked and the occupants begging me not to do it! That they will help me with whatever problems I have!

They thought I wanted to jump and commit suicide! As a sharp<sup>4</sup> person, I quickly told them I'm owing somebody 20m!<sup>5</sup>

Come see alert for my phone as them gather money to stop me from jumping

Chie<sup>6</sup> this one na good business oo it's better than MMM<sup>7</sup> wey they give help. I will go to another bridge tomorrow. Laugh the stress of the day away.

From the joke, the usual Nigerianness of the setting is introduced. This time through the utilisation of the Pidgin English: "Na wa oo person no go make calls again near bridges". The participants are imaginary readers of the text. The narrative style is employed to sustain and arouse the readers' curiosity. Here, the readers' shared situation knowledge (in Mey's pragmeme) comes to bear. The reader can easily relate with the co-texts such as "near 3rd mainland bridge" etc. The humorous dimension is introduced by the imaginary and exaggerated "100 vehicles" and their "occupants" who were begging "not to do it". Here the expression "not to do it" is a pragmatic reference to the act "suicide". The further explanation about the "help" "with whatever problems I have" in the extract reveals the covert end as well as the overt. While the overt is just to amuse through the pract of telling or amusing, the other is a reminder that the general situation in the country still makes others assume someone might attempt suicide. The overt end is enhanced more as a result of the fabricated donations made by the passersby. Extract 3 is replete with practs of exaggeration and suggestion (to the readers to consider the prank). The covert end foregrounds the suicide attempt as well as expresses the premium place on the lives of others by fellow citizens.

### **CMH on education, government policies and corruption**

<sup>3</sup> Nigerian slangy expression used as an exclamation when one is in a bad or pathetic situation. When divided into two separate words, "Na" means "It is" and "Wao" could directly imply "woe".

<sup>4</sup> Smart person

<sup>5</sup> Million in Nigerian currency called Naira

<sup>6</sup> Exclamation

<sup>7</sup> A money doubling scheme that has no legal backing in the country's banking system

Politics and policies are like the Siamese twins. They are hardly separable. Consequently, people's perception of policies is usually linked with the policymakers. In Nigeria, some policies of the government are popularised through the comic dimension introduced by the people. It is also a reflection of how such is viewed. Take the extract below for example.

**Extract 4**

Admission! Admission!! Admission!!!

I am pleased to announce the launch of our inaugural Whistle Blowing certificate programmes listed below: EFCC<sup>8</sup>

- 6-month Diploma in Whistle Blowing (DWB): This crash-course programme will equip you with the ability to spot suspected houses where stolen funds are kept. With this degree, you will be able to spot Naira stashes kept behind walls.

- 3-year Bachelor of Science (B.Sc) Degree in Whistle Blowing: Smart people don't keep stolen funds in Naira. So why should you go about looking for Naira loot? This programme equips you with the aided ability to spot all looted foreign currencies.

- 18-month M.Sc Degree in Whistle Blowing: The looters have become masters, and that is why you also need to be a master at whistle blowing. Take your whistle-blowing ability to the next level with our M.Sc. Spot looted local and foreign currencies in Houses (Mud or Modern) Safes (Fire or Water proof), Wells (Wet or Dry) Caskets (Cemetery or Burial Ground).

- 3-year Doctor of Philosophy in Whistle Blowing: Looters understand the importance of leaving no trails, and have now employed digital currencies in looting. With this degree, you will be able to decipher owners of Bitcoin wallets with looted funds. You don't even have to leave your house scouting for houses like a real estate agent, or burial grounds like an undertaker. Simply sit behind a computer like a Yahoo Yahoo boy and earn whistle blowing \$\$\$ easily.

Signed,  
Director of Recruitment,  
Oju Ole<sup>9</sup> University

The extract above is patterned on a tertiary education enrolment notice, with the speaker taking on the pragmatic voice of authority, like that of the

<sup>8</sup> A body established by the Nigerian government to prosecute offenders of economic and financial crimes. In full, it means the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.

<sup>9</sup> *Oju Ole* literally means "the face of the thief"

Registrar. The overt intention is to call for potential university students to apply for officially non-existing courses. In the Nigerian situation, demand for higher education outweighs its supply. This joke makes use of that reality to produce humour. As a result, the pract of providing is used as the overt end. In between the lines of texts at the covert level, the joke satirizes the newly introduced "whistle-blower policy", a policy that promises a cash reward to anyone who helps the government expose stashed money as a result of corruption. This also assists in the aspect of awareness-raising with regards to the policy; thus, the pract of informing is also enacted. The dimension of CMH in this text is that it helps to identify corruption as one of the major challenges facing Nigeria.

Again, the complexity of the anti-corruption struggle is creatively construed in the joke. An analysis of the text shows that there are different categories for the advertisement: it ranges from enrollment in the diploma programme, to a bachelor degree, up to the doctoral degree certification.

The reference to "Director of Recruitment, Oju Ole University" is a recognition of the widespread hatred for corruption. "Oju Ole" here literally means the face of (a) thief University and connotatively implies a university that trains students on how to catch the corrupt ones. This is also a pragmatic inference that corruption is the enemy of the nation's development. The composer of the joke displays a good and appreciable understanding of the technology-based corruption, which requires solutions that are technology-driven. The co-texts with reference to "Yahoo-Yahoo boy" who "simply sit(s) behind a computer" are references to other cases of corruption found in the country. Through this, corruption can be implicitly construed as a crisis that impacts on societal politics and its policies. It is a popular topic of social discourse among Nigerian citizens, and fighting corruption requires some level of skill and temerity.

**CMH on security and health**

Security is an important aspect of every society. A safe society will likely be considered a healthy society. The subjects of security and health are considered important in Nigeria. These are expressed in the daily discourse of Nigerians and are, therefore, one of the topics for joke telling. Consider the following extract which displays humour related to public security:

**Extract 5**

A local FM Radio station was running a contest, and I phoned up.

The Radio presenter said, "Congratulations on being our first caller, all you have to do is answer the following question correctly, to win

our grand prize.”

“That’s fantastic!” I shouted in delight.

“Feel confident?” she asked. “It’s a maths question.”

“Well, I am an Engineer and have been teaching and practicing maths for almost 10 years, “ I proudly replied.

“Ok then, to win our grand prize of 2 return tickets for an adventurous trip to Sambisa<sup>10</sup> forest and an opportunity to meet Shekau and the chibok Girls Face to Face, What is 2+2?”

I replied, “7”.

Among some of the jokes selected, the above is unique for its wit through the composer’s combination of dialogue and narrative. It conveys the excitement of “winning” in the first instance, here the caller employs the pract of rejecting when told about the nature of the prize he would get: “a trip to Sambisa” “to meet Shekau and the chibok Girls Face to Face”, upon correct answer to the question. At the other end of the imaginary “radio presenter”, the intention was to get the “caller” scared owing to the reality of the dreaded Sambisa forest, a forest in the northeastern part of Nigeria which was allegedly previously held by an insurgent group led by Shekau. The joke above conveys the idea of multiple role-playing in jokes. Although the overt end achieves humour, the covert end evokes the pract of scaring. This is revealed by the deliberate refusal of the “caller” to give the correct answer. Here the avoidance strategy employed implies a trip to the “forest” is equally avoided. It thus conveys a desire of the citizens to have a secure nation irrespective of the location.

On the understanding of Nigerian citizen’s perception of health, the following extract provides some insight.

#### Extract 6

Nigerian nurses make Pregnancy look like a criminal offense, and the worse thing is that they are everywhere, both in Private and Government Hospitals.

For Instance, when a woman who is in labour is being brought to the Hospital, they will throw her into the so-called “Labour Room” and lock her up like a criminal awaiting trial and they will go to the reception and gossip or go into the Doctor’s Office until the woman begins to scream like the world is coming to an end.

And when they go to meet her, it is not to help her, but to insult her: “You go dey hear things like”

<sup>10</sup> Name of the forest in Nigeria in which the insurgent group Boko Haram were believed to be hiding and planning their attacks against the country.

Na me do you?

When e dey sweet you, I dey there?

The man wey do u nor dey here o!

Madam push o!

Abeg open your leg joor!

Abi you wan kill ur pinkin?

You better push now or else I go leave you here o!

The understanding of the setting of the subject in the EoC tradition is made clear in the opening sentence. Here, the narrative technique is employed to describe the “Labour Room”. The author of the joke did not exhibit a direct involvement in the story, but rather she/he simply conveys the assumed situation reported in a typical hospital’s delivery room, in “both Private and Government Hospitals”. While the overt intention remains the same as in other similar cases, to evoke humour, the covert intention is to satirize the typical disposition of health workers in Nigeria by conveying the lack of sophistication on the part of the healthcare attendants during the delivery of a child. In order to make the joke believable, the author switches codes into pidgin English and assumes the role of the imaginary nurses. Through this, the pract of telling was employed. The telling pract also conveys the face-threatening act on the part of the imaginary nurse or doctor in dealing with the imaginary woman in the “Labour Room”. Seen from another perspective, the joke can also be seen to connote through the author’s utilisation of the shared situation knowledge to emphasise her/his message that the childbearing process (and by extension other activities) is difficult for citizens.

#### CMH on leaders and the economy

“A joke is often at the expense of another person whose weakness is being foregrounded” (Nereus 2012: 3). In this vein, CMH is a veritable tool for understanding and expressing citizens’ perception of their leaders, as illustrated in the example below.

#### Extract 7

..... Some former leaders died and went to hell. The British leader asks the devil to allow him to make a phone call to London to know the welfare of his people. He spends five minutes. Satan bills him \$5000. The United States leader makes his call for eight minutes and Satan bills him \$8000. The Nigerian leader calls Abuja and spends two hours. He is briefed about the fuel trouble, Boko Haram, kidnapping, budget brouhaha and the anti-corruption war.

“After his call, he asks Satan, ‘How much is my bill?’ Satan replies: ‘Your bill is \$1.’



Surprised, the Nigerian leader says: ‘How come my own call is cheaper than the other two leaders?’ I stayed longest on the phone.’

Satan, smiling, replies: “What’s the difference? Calling hell from hell is not expensive; it’s a local call.”

The joke above addresses the issues of leadership and the economy. In the opening part, it presupposes that “some former leaders died and went to hell”, which presents the pract of affirming. Hell is believed (among many religious adherents) to be a place of torment for sinners. In the Nigerian narrative, corruption is a sin. In the light of this, the message being conveyed is that “some of the former leaders” who “died” have gone “to hell”. However, these (Nigerian) leaders were not isolated to be the only category of people in Hell. Hence “the British leader” and “United States leader” were also occupying a spot in Hell. Through these co-texts, the pract of identifying and associating are implied. Based on the narration, when it gets to the turn of the Nigerian leader to make a call, he spends more time on the phone. Here, this narrative was informed by the intention of the author to relay the numerous “troubles” plaguing the country, including “Boko Haram, kidnapping, budget brouhaha and the anti-corruption war”. Within this strategy, the covert end of the joke is overtly enhanced. To provide a more dramatic exposure of the country’s assumed reality, the author equates the nation to Hell through the reply given by “Satan” to the Nigerian leader: “What’s the difference? Calling hell from hell is not expensive; it’s a local call.” From the perspective of the composer, Nigeria is no different from Hell, a place of torment for sinners. This view is likely to be widespread given the humour it elicits. In Extract 6, some of the other identifiable practs include informing, condemning, mocking, and mimicking.

### CMH and the KING of EoC

Recall that most of the analysed data represented the S to the A (SPEA) parts of the EoC acronym. The remaining parts (KING) are summarized below.

K- In the context of the CMH analysed, the key is English (official language) with a blend of pidgin and some Nigerianisms. This is to enhance the dissemination of the jokes. Examples are *Labour Room*, *Yahoo-Yahoo*, *EFCC*, *pinkin*, *joor*.

I- The social media serves as the major channel for disseminating these jokes. The channel is regarded as the instrument in the EoC context.

N- Refers to the norm observable in the data. Here, they are replete with the use of first-person personal pronouns “I”. This is to enforce the truthfulness of the jokes and also to exaggerate. The norm in the CMH

also includes the peculiar use of certain expressions through pidginization and Nigerianism.

Another feature noticeable in the “norm” consideration of CMH among Nigerians is grammatical errors, including the omission or insertion of definite or indefinite articles, spelling errors and incorrect use of adjectives. See extracts 2 and 5, among others.

G- In the genre consideration, the CMH is construed as a form of humour that belongs to the informal type. The table below summarizes these in the tradition of the EoC and the pragmatic references or functions.

## Conclusion

The study examined CMH as a genre of humour. The nature of jokes in CMH is mainly a combination of informal and non-formal categories of humour. On WhatsApp, when CMH is shared with a fellow user, it takes on the nature of the informal category because of the intention to amuse the reader. However, when it is shared in a WhatsApp group or as a Facebook timeline update, it quickly reaches a larger and wider audience, and takes on an entertaining intention on these platforms. As a result, CMH can also be categorized as a non-formal humour. Hence, by nature, it is an informal-non-formal genre of humour. However, it is not and cannot be categorised under the formal humour genres.

The pragmatic function of CMH included the use of the textual part and the psychological act of the pragmemic activity. All these produced various practs such as amusing, narrating, informing, (implicit) lamenting, satirizing, and relieving (of tension). The pragmatic implication is that at the covert level, the jokes serve as a coping strategy, providing a pragmemic voice of invective, approval, support and/or protest against government policies. The pragmatic relevance of CMH is embedded in its social functions as it serves as an indicator of the sense of citizens’ freedom and a note of warning to the corrupt and inefficient leaders in Nigeria.

The context of CMH construction presents it as a satire of the social, economic and political experiences of the people. In essence, it reveals the socioeconomic and political realities in a particular historical period of the nation, unveiling perceptions through the “fingers and minds” of Nigerian citizens. CMH, therefore, refers to a genre of humour that is specifically meant to offer relief from tension, help deal with difficult and challenging situations, and to soften the impact of difficulties experienced in everyday life. In other words, CMH serves as a reference to social realities and, as such, is a compilation of jokes that are potentially psychologically beneficial. The understanding of

CMH as a humorous reaction to Nigerian realities is, therefore, invaluable to the understanding of humour, humour studies and their relevance in the social discourse of contemporary Nigeria.

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## Appendix

### EoC and the pragmatic references/functions in the studied CMH

Eo C	Features	References/functions
S	Nigeria	Adults across all ethnic groups
P	Nigerians	Bridges the gap between the poor and the wealthy
E	Humour	Overt and Covert, to entertain and reflect the social, economic, and political realities
A	Pragmatic acts	amusing, narrating, informing, (implicit) lamenting, satirizing, relieving (tension)
K	Jokes	anonymous and creatively constructed
I	Social media	<i>Facebook and Whatsapp</i>
N	Nigerianisms, pidginization, grammatical errors	in the communicative principle tradition of pragmatics
G	CMH	For entertainment, protest, invective, etc