

HUMOUR MARKERS AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS IN THE NAIRALAND VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

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Humour in face-to-face communication can be easily deciphered through the non-verbal cues inherent in it. This is not the case in computer mediated communication. Though, emoticons, smileys and pictures are employed to complement the posts, they still cannot decipher the intention for humour. In online interactions, pragmatic factors are the constitutive elements through which a post can be understood as humorous or not. Therefore, this work examines the pragmatic factors that account for the interpretation of a post as being humorous. Data were purposively sampled from the archives of the *Nairaland Virtual Community* and subjected to a qualitative analysis. Humour patterns, pragmatic factors and humour markers are the processing elements in humour interpretation in the *Nairaland Virtual community*. The work concludes that online context alone is not enough to cue humour in computer mediated communication. Contextualising online humour in the real world situation is needed in the interpretation of the conversation as humorous.

Keywords: Nairaland virtual community, humour markers, humour patterns, pragmatic intention, humour interpretation.

INTRODUCTION

Humour has been described as a universal phenomenon which cuts across all human cultures (Berger, 1998; Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1999; Sen, 2012; Buja, 2013). However, what is humorous varies across and within cultures. What is humorous to speaker 'A' may not be funny to speaker 'B'. This means that individual differences play important roles in the perception of humour. People have different attitudes, opinions, values and different senses of humour. Thus, humour does not have a general definition because it is dependent on many variables. However, some scholars have offered some definitions of humour. These are discussed below to draw a common characteristic of it for the purpose of contextualization.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Past works on humour predominantly unfolded the various socio-cultural functions of humour in communication. These can be classified broadly into those relating to CMC and those that do not. In the former class is Baym (1995), who works on the performance of humour in CMC. She examines humour in bulletin boards for soap operas. It is an asynchronous study in CMC. She posits that CMC participants use humour to establish their online identity. She also describes how participants frame their humorous performance online. Danet, Ruedenberg and Rosenbaum-Tamari (1998) is another study on CMC that examines 'play' in Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The authors found out that CMC is 'strikingly playful,'

(Danet et al., 1998: 41) because the ‘medium invites participants to fiddle and to invoke the ‘frame of make-believe’ (Danet et al., 1998: 44). This playfulness is established online from the absence of any nonverbal cues. This absence provides ‘a mask’ (Danet, 1998: 47) or anonymity which helps participants to express themselves freely. Although all these studies discuss humour in CMC, none has discussed humour and humour markers in the Nairaland virtual community, which is the focus of the present study.

In the class of studies based on offline data is Adedimeji (2002), who carries out a pragmatic study of a selection of Nigerian jokes. He identifies jokes as locutionary acts such that when presented with the appropriate illocutionary force, they result in the perlocutionary effect of humour. He emphasizes that adequate pragmatic competence is needed to understand and appreciate jokes. He concludes that the aim of a joke is to create humour or fun. This study uses anecdotal jokes as data; but it is neither computer-mediated based and nor conversational. The present study differs in this way. Though it has an element of an anecdote, its source is computer-mediated conversation not just a compilation of jokes.

Another study, Bello and Bayagbon (2002), studies jokes at drinking centres with the analysis on some sociolinguistic variables and inference which are socio-cultural knowledge, speech situation and context. The authors conclude that it goes beyond a linguistic knowledge to interpret an utterance said by a member of a different social group. The sociolinguistic knowledge is a major parameter to understanding information in a discourse. Though the data for this study feature the imagined ‘beer parlour politics’ of the *Nairaland* forum just like as Bello and Bayagbon’s are on jokes at drinking centres, the present study is on pragmatics.¹

Moreover, Schnurr (2008) examines how humour is used diplomatically in the workplace by female leaders to balance their gender and professional identities. De Koning and Weiss (2002) discuss the important role that humour plays in the formation and functioning of intimate relationships. Maples et al., (2001) investigate the inherent benefits and the risks of using humour as a counselling tool, especially when treating clients from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Ziv (1988) also emphasises the cultural utility of humour analysis by discussing how various societies treat men, women and children differently in terms of humour usage. All these are studies of offline interaction involving humour.

some studies discuss both online and offline data on humour. One of these is Hancock (2004), which studies irony recognition in face-to-face and CMC settings and found that amplifiers, ellipsis and emoticons served as cues for ironic intent. Audrey (2012) also studies the way in which individuals signal humorous intent in text based computer-mediated communication through the use of linguistic markers. The variables tested are forms and frequencies of these markers. These are optional parts of cueing humour in asynchronous CMC. What is left is to establish the ‘constitutive elements’ (Attardo 2000) which are the pragmatic factors in the interpretation of texts as humorous. Attardo (2000: 7) stresses these elements by distinguishing markers (signalling elements) and factors (constitutive elements). Markers are just like modifiers which can be removed without necessarily altering the humorous intent. The removal of the constitutive elements, however, would affect whether or not an utterance is humorous, because the humorous intents are expressed through them. This is the gap the present study hopes to fill, using the Nairaland Forum.

Audrey (2012) and Attardo (2000) are very relevant to this study as they serve as a background to it. While they both show how individuals signal humour through linguistic markers, this study identifies the types and functions of linguistic/humour markers on the Nairaland virtual community. It sets out to unfold how these humorous intents are generated through some key pragmatic factors, the signalling elements (humour markers) involved and the illocutionary acts performed through them.

WHAT IS HUMOR?

Crawford (1994: 57) defines humour as any communication that generates a ‘positive cognitive or affective response from listeners.’ It is also defined by Romero and Cruthirds (2006: 59) ‘as amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organization. This is supported by Gruner (1978:1) that ‘without laughter, everyday living becomes drab and lifeless;

life would seem hardly human at all.’ All these definitions show that humour elicits laughter and makes life worth living. The opening quotation at the beginning of this paper is also an allusion to this fact. These definitions emphasise the interpretational and emotional attributes of humour. These attributes are important in the establishment of humour in communication. They are the feedbacks from humour. The ability to decode meaning from humour through one’s knowledge of the context of culture of the discourse and the emotion exhibited thereafter are what make an utterance humorous. This is why humour is seen as the output of a joke after going through a pragmatic process. Thus, Adedimeji (2002:365) posits that ‘the effect of jokes is humour attained through the understanding of their meanings’. Berger (1998) cited in Adedimeji (2002) defines humour by distinguishing between humour as a ‘quality’ and humour as ‘ability’. To him, it is impossible to refer to humour as a quality, because it is dependent on social variables. But, the ability to deduce humour from objects, events, people, etc. is a universal human trait which does not depend on culture or society (Berger, 1998: 57).

Consequently, the universality in processing humour as an ‘ability’ is an acceptable model of representing humour in conversation; but this paper holds a strong belief that culture and society play a vital role in identifying an action or talk as humorous. The ability to interpret or identify humorous acts depends on one’s cultural knowledge of that particular society. Thus, ability cannot be separated from the culture and society where the humour is generated. To interpret an utterance as humour, it is essential to locate it within a context of situation (Firth, 1962) which is culturally determined. This is supported in Psathas (1995) that ‘the machinery for the production of humour is culturally based, it involves members’ ‘competences’ and is therefore, possibly (and probably) reproducible’ (Psathas 1995: 50). The ‘competences’ of members referred to here is the ‘ability’ of people to deduce humour from objects, events and people (Berger, 1998).

Scholars such as Adedimeji (2002) and Audrey (2012) have identified the following as humour patterns: Satire - a form of humour used to mock human weaknesses or aspects of society; sarcasm - is a form of biting speech which is more ‘brutal’ than satire; (3) parody - is a comic imitation often intended to ridicule a subject; and irony is a kind of humour involving incongruity and discordance with norm, where the intended meaning is opposite, or almost opposite to the literal meaning. Hyperbole is a comic representation marked by extravagant exaggeration and outsized characterization; farce is a comedy based on improbable coincidences and with satirical elements; burlesque ridicules by imitating with exaggerated characterization; rhetorical question is an insincere interrogative speech act; and anecdotes are comic personal stories that may be true or partly true but are embellished (typical of some Nigerian verbal jokes and the compiled Nigerian jokes on Nairaland tagged ‘Akpos jokes’ www.Nairanlad.com).

Humour can come in many forms. Appreciating it as humorous depends on individual’s knowledge of the acts in the humour which is dependent on the pragmatic competence of the individual in relation to the situational and cultural contexts of the humour. The nature of the conversation from which the humour for this study emanates is that of an adaptability of the verbal humour in the virtual world with the importation of linguistic markers tagged ‘signaling elements’ (Attardo, 2000) to express emotions. They are referred to as humour markers. This study explores how humour markers are used to signify the presence of humour in texts on the Nairaland Virtual Community.

HUMOUR MARKERS

Humour markers have been identified as clues to pragmatic intention (Attardo, 2000:7). These markers are the codes that signal humour in communication. However, humour interpretation cannot be established only through them. A pragmatic process entrenched in the context or shared knowledge of the decodee and the decoder must be followed to establish any communication or utterance as humorous. This pragmatic process which aids humour interpretation has not been given much scholarly attention. This study therefore carries out a pragmatic study of humour in an asynchronous communication to discover humour markers and the pragmatic elements in the interpretation of an utterance as humorous. This is because the markers can be removed without necessarily altering the humorous intent (Attardo, 2000: 7). They are only complementary to the constitutive elements for interpretation.

In face-to-face communication, paralinguistic codes or nonverbal cues are used to make communication more explicit and aid relational development (which helps in interpreting a message correctly). The absence of these cues in Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) led its users to the adaptation of new ways to represent these non-verbal cues. The adapted non-verbal cues used in creating humour are called humour markers. They are important elements in online conversation. Different codes have been identified as online humour markers: formatting, graphic accents, literal expressions and oral features (Crystal, 2004).

Formatting is carried out by changing the appearance of a text through the use of different fonts, font sizes, capital letter or colour. These are employed to represent intonation, stress, speed, rhythm, pause and tone of voice in CMC since they cannot be used with the absence of the persons. All these features of formatting are used in replacing the non-verbal cues in form of an ‘exaggerated use of spelling and punctuation, and the use of capitals and special symbols for emphasis’ (Crystal, 2004: 34). Shouting can either be expressed by capital letters or – if possible - by a big letter font (Crystal, 2004: 34).

Graphic Accents are identified by Katzman and Witmer (1997) as all kinds of emotional, artistic and directional devices. They make written conversation personal and expressive. Graphic accents are all nonverbal symbols in CMC. Smiley faces are one form of these symbols. They resemble a human face. A colon is used for the eyes, a hyphen for a nose, a parenthesis for a smile or frown. They are read sideways from the right to the left, e. g. ‘:-)’ indicates a smile. Emoticons (e.g. 😊👍) which are small faces also fall under this category.

Literal Expressions are used ‘in an attempt to capture the range of effects and emotions involved’ in CMC when graphic accents cannot be employed by users to express their feelings and intentions (Crystal, 2004:35). Emoticons and formatting can signal only a small range of meanings and are ‘restricted to gross notions such as extra emphasis, surprise, and puzzlement. Less exaggerated nuances are not capable of being handled this way’ (Crystal, 2004: 35). These literal expressions can either be in form of embedded text or explicit statements’ (Jacobson, 1996: 467). Embedded texts and expressive forms are related to graphic accents. Instead of using a smiley that expresses ‘wink,’ one can declare ‘just kidding’ or ‘I’m being serious’. These aid the correct interpretations of the message. Explicit statements are used to make a message more personal by decoding what the writer feels at that very moment. E.g, the acronym, ‘lol’ (laughing out loud) is used to indicate laughter.

Oral Features are features peculiar to written language like ‘elaborated and expanded frequent use of relative clauses, adverbial clauses, and subordination’ (Ferrara, Brunner and Whittemore, 1984: 22). However, there are oral features like informal discourse particles (e.g. *sorry, sure, okay, now*) and colloquial usage (*how about...*) (Ferrara et al., 1984:23); ‘*I wanna- I want to, I am gonna do it – I am going to do it*; comment clauses (like *you know, you see*, and reaction signals like *mhn, yeah, and Uh-hun* add softness, sympathy and friendliness to a conversation’ (Crystal, 2004:40). These humour markers are the working tools which will lead us into discovering the pattern of humour in the *Nairaland* virtual community.

THE NAIRALAND VIRTUAL COMMUNITY (NVC)

The *Nairaland Forum*, founded by Seun Osewa in 2005, is an example of a Multi-User Dimension/Domain (MUD). It is a virtual community based in Nigeria, and Nigerians, both at home and abroad as well as other Africans and non-Africans largely constitute its Netizens. The cyberspace is open to both males and females. There are different sections in the forum and they cover all aspects of human existence. Topics are classified under three headings, and under these are sub-units, which are further expansions of the headings. These include Politics, Crime, Romance, , Investment, Autos, Culture and Agriculture (General); Jokes, Celebrities, Fashion, Sports and Literature (Entertainment); and Programming, Computers, Phones, Art, Graphics and Video (Science/Technology). Participants post their various contributions on chosen topics, using nicknames or pseudonyms. The forum serves as a means of

establishing interpersonal relationship among its members (Osewa, 2008). Some members of the forum serve as moderators to assist the administrator in enforcing discipline on the forum.

THE CURRENT STUDY

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars have established the importance of shared context among the participants in any form of communication. It is more of an 'ethically laden concept' (Lafillette & Shanks, 1993). Humour as a mode of communication is also best interpreted through its context of use because of the deep interpretation it requires. Pragmatists like Austin (1962), Searle (1969) and Grice (1975) are of the opinion that the situation of an utterance is important in the understanding of the linguistic signs employed by the speaker. There are several definitions of pragmatics which are all emphasizing the importance of the mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs), intention, world knowledge, presupposition, implicatures, inference and/or context (whether sociological, psychological, linguistic or socio-cultural). Pragmatics is a 'theory of meaning' (Adedimeji, 2002: 364) which Blackmore (1982:18) sees as 'the ability to interpret utterances in context'. Lyons (1995:265) emphasizes that 'context determines meaning'. Odebunmi (2006: 22) also sees context as 'the spine of meaning'. Context here is a two-way knowledge which the participants in a speech event must share to bring about mutual understanding of what is said and heard. This mutual understanding is coined by Bach and Harnish (1979) as the Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs). It is explained in their Speech Act Schemata (SAS). They see this concept as the major requirement participants need in the interpretation of what is said and the sense behind the utterance. They are of the opinion that in any speech situation, speaker(S) has an intention and the listener or hearer (H) will make some inferences, where they will base their role on specific facts shared by them. These facts are fundamental to the understanding and interpretation of the message(s). The pragmatic theory of Bach and Harnish lend credence to inference and intention. They contend that for speakers to perform illocutionary acts, their hearers must understand what such acts mean, whether the acts are within or without the boundary of 'literalness'. They also argued that mutual contextual beliefs between S (speaker) and H (hearer) with their world knowledge facilitate the inferential process. This is established through one's understanding of what is implied (implicature) and what brings about the utterance (presupposition). Pragmatic success or the ability to decode the sense and intention of an utterance is attained through implicature and presupposition which are the semantic determinants of the context of use. This is expressed in Lawal et al., (1995:639) thus:

The concept of 'implicature' and 'presupposition' are important in analyzing the meaning of language in use. Implicature is the midway between what is said and what is implied but not entailed or stated overtly... presupposition on the other hand, is the explicit assumption about the real world which speakers make and on which the meaning of an utterance largely depends.

Lack of the knowledge to interpret utterances as humorous results in pragmatic failure which is described by Thomas (1983) as the inability to understand 'what is meant by what is said'. This is why when some people look surprised at what is funny in a humorous event, others react by laughing. Pragmatics is described by Watson and Hill (1993: 146) as '...the study of language from the view point of the user, especially the choices he/she makes, the constraints he/she meets in employing language in social situations and the effects the use of this language has upon others. Pridham (2001: 92) says 'pragmatics has to do with what the speaker is doing or intends with the words, the speaker meaning in context as opposed to the linguistic surface meaning of the utterance.' These definitions emphasise how the participants ignore the surface meaning, and instead, explore the underlying meaning to interpret humour through the context of language use, presupposition and implicature.

Thus, we shall employ mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs), presupposition and implicature which are three relevant concepts in the analysis of our data. The three work together in the interpretation of the utterances made in communication. Presuppositions have to do with the background assumptions and shared

knowledge (world view) through which utterances in conversation make sense while the additional non-literal but contextually relevant inferred portion of meaning in a conversation is implicature.

Therefore, the understanding of what a text presupposes or implicates with the contextual knowledge involved in understanding are apposite in the understanding and interpretation of humour in conversation.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data for this study consists of naturally occurring asynchronous ‘computer-mediated conversation, from the *Nairaland* forum archives. Data collection was in two stages. First, Family and Politics sections were purposively selected from the archives of the *Nairaland* forum because they contain discussions of different issues, many of which exude humour. In addition, the sections are lively and participants often contribute to them. In the process, they often discuss serious issues, poke fun at each other, quareel and do a host of other things which make it similar to face-to-face interaction. The sections were then scrutinized for the presence of humour markers, the types and the effect they have on discourse containing humour.

A total of 40 web pages were purposively selected from topics discussed. These were subjected to pragmatic analysis to find out the pragmatic factors in interpreting humorous intents in the posts. The various humour markers enumerated in the last section are the yardsticks used in identifying the peculiar illocutionary acts of humour in the *Nairaland* forum. Pragmatic analysis of the data is done because the socio-cultural and contextual meanings of the humour can be best interpreted through them. They bring out the underlying meaning (intent) communicated by the posters so as to distinguish a post as humorous or otherwise in computer-mediated conversation.

Data were not selected from the ‘jokes’ section because the study is to find out humour in a natural conversation (conversational jokes) not one established basically to make posters laugh (canned jokes). Also, humour and jokes are not the same. Humour features within the context of the discourse while jokes elicit responses from listeners. Hence, data were collected from a section tagged *The Beer Parlour* which is a chat room politics to see how *Nairalanders* relax while discussing Nigeria politics. It represents a typical beer parlour in real life where a high level of humour is exhibited. The analysis is done in two parts. The first is the counting and coding of the data to find out the frequency of humour markers used in expressing humorous intents in the posts. The second part of the analysis is a qualitative one where the constitutive pragmatic elements (mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs), presupposition and implicature) are analysed to find out the element often needed in interpreting the post as humour.

SIGNALLING ELEMENTS

This section of the analysis constitutes the examination of the signalling elements used in expressing the intention for humour in the data. These elements are also called humour markers. They are the indicators of humour in the data. The four elements or humour markers are: oral features, graphic accents, literal expressions and formatting.

The analysis is done by coding the humour markers in the data and counting them to establish their frequency of use. This is represented in the table 1.

FIGURE 1: HUMOUR MARKERS

Humour markers	Frequency	Percentage
Oral features (OFs)	11	24%
Graphic accents (GAs)	13	29%
Literal expressions (LEs)	17	38%
Formatting (FT)	4	9%

From the representation above, Literal expressions (LEs) have the highest frequency of 38% because of their expressive feature. They express all paralinguistic codes through phrases and acronyms (which make the emotion more personal) that represent the emotions accompanying the intention for humour. Graphic accents (GAs) are the next in the frequency of use. They represent 29% of the frequency. They are also expressive because their usage makes the expression of emotion real. Smiley faces and emoticons are used to represent the emotions. Oral features (OFs) constitute 24% of the frequency while formatting (FT) represents 9%. They are the various transcriptions of laughter and the use of the various font sizes to signal emotions. Formatting is so used because of its effort in signalling only a small range of meaning.

HUMOUR INTERPRETATION

The analysis here is the nucleus of humour intent. This aspect is germane to the understanding of the communication as humorous. The humour markers are not meaningful without them. The three basic ones identified in our data are: mutual contextual beliefs, implicature and presupposition. They are all contextual variables which help in the identification of the humour patterns in NVC. Four humour patterns are identified in NVC humour through them. These are: amuse, ridicule, exaggerate and teasing.

AMUSE

To amuse means to make someone laugh or smile through one's action or speech. The pragmatic analysis of humour in NVC features greatly the illocutionary act of amusing. It is the frequently used strategy to mark humour in NVC, e.g.:

POST 1:

...Please note; whatever you do keep the rules: No personal and ethnic insults. That you broke the rules while drunk will not be an acceptable excuse, so drink responsibly.

The statement; *that you broke the rules while drunk will not be an acceptable excuse, so drink responsibly* initiates the humour in the opening post. The intention behind this expression is to amuse. The sense of being in the beer parlour presupposes the likelihood of getting drunk. Being drunken implicates not conscious of one's action which can be an excuse for breaking the rule.

Post 2

CFCfan: 🥳*dancing azonto* 🥳

This post is the perlocutionary act which echoes the humour with the 'azonto' dance and the laughter that accompanies it. Azonto is a kind of funny dance in the Nigerian hip hop world of music. The background or the contextual interpretation of this helps in identifying the humour here.

Post 3

Garrithe1st: Ok bros.... I dey feel you... Two suggestions...

1. When you wan enter d place try to enter through back door.
2. As a two-star general once in a while you can administer a "two-finger salute" to clear road...

For more info talk to Madam Waitress, she be Prof for d matter 🥳... 🥳

Words like *otobo*, *poke*, *entering through the back door*, *a two finger salute* are the indirect expressions, slang or euphemisms for sex. The interpretation of these humour acts is established through the mutual contextual knowledge of the posters. The description euphemized here together with the humour used, brings about the force of being amusing.

RIDICULE

This is an act of making fun of someone or something in a cruel or harsh way. Ridicule as an illocutionary act is a way humour is created in NVC. Netizens use this without creating a threat to the face of the postee because of the mutual contextual beliefs that exist among them. The following are examples:

Post4

hohohoho 🤪🤪

I hope una no go dey break bottle o. 🤪

This post is introduced with an oral feature where laughter is transcribed and a graphic accent of two emoticons which show that the poster is laughing. It ridicules the entire imagined beer parlour. The literal expression 'I hope una no go dey break bottle o' and the graphic accents used are the codes used in this act of ridicule. The associated physical fights in a beer parlour presuppose the breaking of bottles.

Post 5

ighoosagie: *S-stay*

T- together

A- and

R- romance.

So sad my dad's funeral is already past, I'd av invite u 2 help us pick d empty bottles, n lata meet u needs

U no every na.

D gods re wise

This post ridicules by bringing the poster being addressed to the level of a common service boy to pick bottles at the poster's father's funeral.

Exaggerate

This is an illocutionary force which describes something as larger or greater than it really is to create humour.

Post 6

it will be an everyday affair. I suggest we should have on plastic drinks 🤪

The literal expression above; *It will be an everyday affair* is an exaggeration of the actions that accompany the act of drinking at beer parlours (breaking of bottles to harm others). Though this happens in beer parlours, it does not occur regularly to be tagged 'an everyday affair.' The linguistic presumption here is that bottles are broken in beer parlours which presupposes that people fight when drunk. The implicature here is that with plastic drinks, violence would be avoided. A graphic accent which has the tongue out presumes the literalness in the post. It is an indication that the poster is sarcastic through the exaggeration.

Post 7

Yinkagbo: *Naijasinglegirl-----I couldn't even speak to chickens like I usually do for fear that I might make an offensive joke and they will just withdraw somewhere to commit suicide.*

🤪 🤪

This post is a form of quotation anaphoric reference (Lamidi, 2014) in which the current poster quotes out the humorous part of the opening post he is reacting to and follows it with his own post. Speaking to chickens, fear of making them angry and their withdrawing to commit suicide are all attributes of human beings which are transformed to the chickens. All these presuppose the herculean task running of a poultry is which is represented in the topic for this thread; *How do you run a poultry without running mad?* This makes the post laughable. The exaggerated tone of this post makes it humorous. **Yinkagbo** expresses this with graphic accents represented as two emoticons which represent his emotional reaction and marking the post as humorous.

Teasing

This is a playful way of criticizing someone. The illocutionary act of teasing is carried out through ironic insincere speech act without element of aggression.

Post 8

Deschyko: *Lwkmd.. Crazy! Crazy!! Crazy!!*

If you had spoken more often to then, I'm sure they'll always see the reason to hang around, at least for your hilarious outbursts... (Except for the 'adding weight on the feathers' part..#suicidal)....

Humour is indicated here with the use of oral features in the post. This post also supports the humour in the opening post with laughter expressed in the acronym 'Lwkmd' and the repetition of the word 'crazy'. The exclamation marks representing formatting used with the word show the height of the humour. Teasing is the illocutionary act exhibited in this data. It is interpreted through implicature of the establishment of the loss of the birds despite all efforts to keep them alive.

Post 9

AnOnimus: *Lmao at the Lucozade boost part 🍷*

Poultry business looks easier from the outside but the thing dey like rocket science. My cousin recently lost all his chickens before this Christmas season. Over hundred of them. Had to console him. Seriously one can run mad when that happens.

An incongruity in the opening post is identified by **AnOnimus** in his post which makes him laugh. The incongruity is the author's father's reaction to save a dying bird by asking for some 'Lucozade Boost' drink to be given to the bird to revive it. It is an irony to give a bird the drink meant for human consumption when weak from an illness expecting the drink to serve the same need in the bird's system. The composition of the drink is for human not birds. The communicative presumption is that the poster teasing the father of the author of this thread is a literal action to exhibit humour.

Post 10

Nobody: *u know if I don't otobo her very well dis period, it cud block her ovodus licrudus n might lead 2 CS . CS cost a lot n dats gonna affect ur ministry, hence u ll b served garri n monkey tail instead of Star n gulder. D gods re wise.*

The linguistic presumption of the posters makes this post understandable despite the use of loan words in the post. The poster teases by regarding the postee as a glutton that would only render help when offered good drink. Delivery through cs (caesarian section) implies spending more compared to the normal deliveries which would make the poster bankrupt and would not be able to entertain guests lavishly on the naming day. The climax of the humour is reached in the next subpost where **Garrithelst** persuasively gives his suggestions so as not to be served garri and monkey tail instead of Gulder and Star on the naming day.

Post 11

Garrithelst: *Bros you well so??*

Abi na d monkey tail dey confuse you like this...abeg take am easy ooo...

Wetin concern me and how you wan take "otobo" ya woman??

Abi wetin concern fowl with toothpick??

I say when she born inform me so that I go show base on beer matter you dey ask about style. If you like "shook" walking stick inside you hear...

Pidgin is used here as a hedge to lessen the effect of the sentence that follows. Other posters are able to interpret this post through their shared background knowledge and the world views they share. We believe a fowl does not have teeth. This implies it does not need any tooth pick because there is no tooth to pick. The option of a walk stick as a way out is another humour support in the post. It is a form of ridicule.

The overall representation of our data is represented in Figure II.

FIGURE II: A Summary of the Analysis of Data

Humour Patterns	Pragmatic Factors	Humour Markers
Amuse	Presupposition, implicature	GA, LE
Ridicule	Presupposition	OF, GA
Exaggerate	Presupposition	GA
Amuse	Presupposition	LE
Amuse	MCBs	FT
Teasing	Implicature	FT, LE, GA
Teasing	Presupposition, implicature	OF, GA
Ridicule	MCBs, implicature	GA
Ridicule	Presupposition	GA
Amuse	Presupposition	OF, GA, LE
Amuse	Presupposition	OF, GA
Amuse	Implicature	GA, LE
Ridicule	Implicature	OF, LE
Amuse	Presupposition, implicature	OF, GA
Ridicule	Implicature, MCBs	LE
Teasing	MCBs, implicature	OF, GA
Ridicule	Presupposition, MCBs	OF, GA
Amuse	Presupposition, implicature	LE, GA
Amuse	Presupposition	LE, GA
Teasing	Implicature	GA, LE
Exaggerate	Presupposition	FT, LE
Teasing	MCBs	LE, GA
Amuse	Presupposition	OF, LE
Amuse	Presupposition	LE, FT
Ridicule	Presupposition	OF, LE
Amuse	Presupposition	OF, LE
Exaggerate	Presupposition	GA
Teasing	Presupposition	LE, OF, FT

Amuse- 43%, ridicule-25%, exaggerate- 11%, teasing- 21%
Presupposition – 53%, implicature – 30%, MCBs- 6%

FIGURE II: Keys to Abbreviations

- OF – Oral Feature
- GA – Graphic Accents
- LE – Literal Expression
- FT – Formatting

DISCUSSION

There is no particular humour marker used mainly with a specific humour pattern since the posters' intention for humour can be expressed through any of these markers. The humour marker(s) used with these humour patterns depend on the posters' style. However, literal expression and graphic accents mark a greater part of the data because of their expressive nature. They express a high range of effects and emotions in the data.

Amuse, ridicule, teasing and exaggeration are the humour patterns in our data. The pragmatic factors in the interpretation of the data are: presupposition, implicature and mutual contextual beliefs while the humour indicators are formatting, oral features, graphic accents and literal expressions. All these work together in cueing humorous intents in NVC. Amusing features prominently with 43% occurrence,

ridicule follows with 25%, teasing is next with 21% and exaggeration constitutes 11% of the data. *exaggerate* and *amuse* as illocutionary acts, have presupposition as a compulsory pragmatic element for interpretation. It is the only pragmatic element featuring in most cases in the data because of the link it has with the mutual contextual beliefs. The illocutionary acts of *ridicule* and *teasing* are interpreted through implicature. Presupposition as a pragmatic element is used across the four humour patterns identified in our study with 50% occurrence. This emphasizes the role of the mutual contextual beliefs in humour interpretation; presupposition is a backgrounded pragmatic element which constitutes a proposition which is already known to the hearer so as to make the speaker's assertion to be appropriate in the context.

CONCLUSION

Literal expression, graphic accent, oral feature and formatting are the humour markers used in the *Nairaland* forum to indicate humour intents. They are listed above according to the frequency of their usage in *Nairaland*. The literal expression is mostly used to give a vivid representation of events and emotions. Posters resort to this when graphic accents cannot be employed to express their feelings and intentions. Graphic accents are made use of to make the conversation personal and expressive. Oral features are employed to inject softness, sympathy and friendliness to the conversation. Pidgin is a tool used here to establish these social acts. Formatting, the least used humour marker helps in emphasizing a poster's idea and direction for humour intents. Humour intents are established with the interpretation of the conversation through the various pragmatic elements and culturally guided by the context of situation shared by the posters refer to as Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs). Humour interpretation cannot be established within the online context. It must be contextualized in the real world situation to decode intention and the interpretation of the conversation as humorous.

NOTES

1. The most useful and easily discernible works that can give readers unfamiliar with pragmatics an good command of the subject are those of Allan and Salmani Nodoushan (2015), Capone and Salmani Nodoushan (2014), Salmani Nodoushan (1995, 2006a,b, 2007a,b,c, 2008a,b, 2012, 2012, 2013a,b,c, 2014a,b,c, 2015a,b, 2016a,b,c, 2017a,b), and Salmani Nodoushan and Allami (2011).

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