



A Pragmatic Study of Selected Humorous Discourse by Nigerian Stand-up Comedians

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Abstract. One primary communicative goal in humour is entertainment. Nevertheless, other pragmatic implications result when humourists subconsciously deploy various linguistic strategies, as they entertain their audience through the use of witty sayings crafted in contextualised, real or imaginary scenarios. Following Grice's Cooperative Principle, this study investigates deeper communicative effects achieved by Nigerian stand-up comedians. It pays attention to cases of the flouting of Gricean maxims, and examines the speakers' discursive motives. Five texts sourced from three distinguished Nigerian stand-up humourists are presented for analysis, given their thematic focus on trending national socio-political discourses. Findings show that maxim flouting is fundamental to creating humour, as all four maxims are flouted, with some utterances flouting more than one. The maxim of quality is flouted the most, thus emphasising its pivotal role in creating humour. Evidence for this is provided in the comedians' heavy dependence on hypothetical illustrations, exaggerations and understated realities. In addition, instances of incongruous expressions, narrations and manipulation of news reports serve to contextualise humour. Humourists deploy their art to satirise and challenge the national socio-political status quo, thereby subtly revealing their personal ideologies. The work proves further that irrespective of time, audience or context, comedians use the same linguistic tools to amuse their audience while also advancing claims that humour is an expressive use of language, as a vehicle to canvass for social change.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Humour, Socio-Political Discourse, Maxim, Communication

1. Introduction

Humour, as a field of study is technically inclined towards the creative arts. Tracing the development of stand-up comedy, Imo (2018) describes the art as a necessary replacement for the fast-eroding tradition of live performances in theatre arts. Linguistics provides the medium for humorous expressions, through the

contextual use of language by the speaker, and that falls within the ambit's pragmatics. Previous studies show that humour is created when Grice's Cooperative Principle is flouted (Raskin and Attardo 1991; Pradita 2010; Hassan 2013; Oyebola 2016). As a social practice, humour incorporates the witty manipulation of thoughts for the purpose of evoking laughter in the reader or listener.

An evaluative use of language in humour is relevant in linguistics. Obadare (2009) hints on the potency of humour, by highlighting its prospective capacity to voice resistance against the power elites, interface in the negotiation for social justice and challenge perceived misuse or abuse of political power. Consequently, the innumerable attendees at stand-up comedy shows suggest that beyond entertainment, the events have various communicative effects on the audience. Imo (2018) suggests that the aesthetic appeal, topical issues, dramatic and joke forms deployed in stand-up comedy account for the high turnout of live comedy viewers. This claim accentuates the value of comic discourse in challenging the society on social issues, through the manipulation of news and current affairs, thereby exposing the humourists' ideology on socio-political issues.

1.2 Aim / Objectives

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the use of language in the comic arts of Nigerian comedians. Using the cooperative principle as a guide, the study seeks to:

- highlight the instances of flouting of the cooperative principle in stand-up comic art.
- interrogate comic artists' use of language to re-create negative social reality as jocular discourse
- examine the comic artists' power to speak against social ills

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Previous studies show that humour is created when Grice's Cooperative Principle is flouted (Raskin and Attardo 1991; Pradita 2010; Hassan 2013; Oyebola 2016). Filani (2015, 2016) reports that humour engages several acts which manifest in the use of language and other paralinguistic resources. By combining different aspects of theories in pragmatics, the scholar proposes pragmatic acts as a theoretical basis for interrogating meaning in humour. However, these studies depend largely on stale editions of Opa Williams' *A Night of a Thousand Laughs*. The issues raised and addressed by comic artists of that time are fast losing relevance. Today, with more recognition for humour and stand-up comedy, solo performances and independent shows allow stand-up comedians freedom of expression. This seems to capture more direct and current topical socio-political issues themed in contemporary Nigerian Stand-up comedy.

2. Literature Review

2.1 A Linguistic Perspective of Humour

Humour is essentially regarded as a field of discourse in aesthetics. Philosophers, including Plato and Aristotle, paid close attention to the subject of humour (Edwards, 1967; Attardo, 1994). According to Ferrar (1992), Plato who studied the nature of humour and laughter, believed that the absurd was based on unfortunate lack of self-knowledge. He adds that laughing at ridiculous events in others is evidence of both delight and envy. Ferrar (1992) citing Plato (1861), notes that both pain and pleasure are produced when we laugh at seemingly incongruous experiences. Ferrar (1992) and Attardo (1994) both report that Aristotle considered the nature of humour and ridiculous scenarios as something rather ugly and distorted.

The study of humour cuts across academic disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, literature, medicine, mathematics and linguistics. Three main traditions are favoured when studying humour: the relief theory, the incongruity theory and the superiority theory. Each theory highlights certain specific features of humour. Laughter, as a medium of relief from psychological tension is the main thrust of the relief theory. The incongruity theory addresses itself to the cognitive mechanisms between the different frames of thought in a humorous text. Laughter, as a human function, is perceived as an evolution of triumph over an enemy, consequently a superior force is created when people

are made to laugh. This ideology is the basis for the emergence of the superiority theory.

The foregoing studies of humour show that researchers have explored the field widely. Black (2006) notes that maxims are not always obeyed. Oyebola (2016) concludes that speakers often choose to violate Grice's Cooperative principle to create a communicative effect, thereby, implementing the principles from the other side of the coin. The author cites humour as one of the effects of such a deviation. Hassan (2013) reports a study of humorous placard texts used by Egyptian and American demonstrators and observes that humour serves an expressive function. Applying Grice's principles, the paper observes that the breaching of the maxims is employed for a certain purpose, which explains the contradictions in the texts. The present paper takes its data from different performers across different times under different situations. Though all performers are Nigerians, their individual peculiarities and wide-ranging audience serve to enrich the potential outcome of the paper.

2.2 Pragmatics as a Tool for Studying Humour

Oyebola (2016) reports that Raskin's Semantic Theory founded the comprehensive study of humour in linguistics. Raskin's work is based on Chomsky's grammar, which has been widely criticized for its inadequacy to account for the way language is used. Ferrar (1992) and Oyebola (2016) agree that humour is not a property of sentences, but of utterances, it therefore depends on context for its existence. This submission pitches the linguistic study of humour within the purview of pragmatics, a linguistic field concerned with the interpretation of utterances in the speaker's context. (Leech, 1983; Dairo and Onadeko 2008; Oyebola 2016).

Rasking and Attardo (1991) believe that humour partly involves some degree of violation of cooperative principle and partly a cooperative act too. They opine that humour is informative, spontaneously created, innate and potentially common to everyone. However, it is culturally exclusive in form and context. Humour requires context for it to be framed and found amusing to the audience, who must equally have a certain mutual knowledge, understanding and values in order to comprehend the humour (Walker 1998).

A humorous utterance serves multi-varied functions at once. Humour can be deployed for almost any purpose (Holmes, 2000; Attardo, 1994; Attardo, 2017). Studying workplace humour, Holmes (2000) and Hay (2001) agree that humour creates solidarity, as interlocutors engage in the support of humour through

discursive strategies meant to acknowledge and support humorous turns. Recognition of in-group versus out-group can also initiate support in humour. According to Haugh and Bousfield (2012), jocular mockery creates solidarity by building in-groups of friends. Humour can as well be deployed to challenge authority through its features of retractability. This feature is also known as decommitment (Attardo, 2017).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Pragmatics is concerned the objectives realized from a discourse, rather than with the linguistic or cognitive processes involved in it. The choice of The Cooperative Principle developed by Grice (1975) is hinged on the notion that humour is interpreted on the account that it amuses the audience. Grice assumes that in communication, interlocutors have to cooperate with each other, in order to be heard and understood. Grice's principle is further broken into four basic maxims which interlocutors must obey: the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner. (Dairo and Onadeko, 2008) Though criticized on the grounds of its inadequacy to describe communication universally, the cooperative principle maintains a communicative relevance, given its capacity to prescribe qualities that make a good conversation (Leech, 1983).

Under the maxim of quantity, interlocutors are expected to be informative as much as is needed. Too little or too much information is unhelpful. Cutting (2002) suggests that too little information puts hearers at risk of inability to identify the subject of discourse. It does not promote clarity. The other extreme puts the hearers at risk of boredom. The maxim of quality measures the speakers' sincerity and realistic bases for utterances. Consequently, falsehood or baseless claims are discouraged. Relevance of speakers' contributions and their relatedness to the discussion are the main concerns in the maxim of relation, while speakers are required to ensure clarity, brevity and orderliness in the maxim of manner. There may be overlap as regards the length of what one says, between the maxims of quantity and manner. Too little information breaks the maxim of quantity. However, adequate information given in a lengthy dialogue/response breaks the maxim of manner. More than one maxim may as well be broken.

3. Methodology

A key method of analysis suitable for a research of this nature is qualitative description. In this study, downloaded video clips from selected socio-political works of three popular Nigerian comedians: AY, Bovi

and Basketmouth, are transcribed and examined, using Cooperative Principle. Instances of flouting of the maxims are identified and accounted for, in addition to explaining the communicative import in the discourse.

Ayo Makun, whose stage name is AY is a native of Ondo State, South-West Nigeria, but grew up in neighbouring Delta State, where he eventually obtained his first degree in Theatre Arts. His foray into stand-up comedy began in his university days and grew much wider as he served Alleluya Atunyotta Akporobome (Alibaba), as personal assistant. AY hosts a self-sponsored show, AY Live in major cities in Nigeria, Africa and beyond, thematising a diverse range of topical matters. He combines his stand-up with scripting and acting in his sitcom, AY's crib.

Born of Delta parentage, Abovi Ugboma or Bovi spent most of his formative years in Edo State. He holds a degree in Theatre Arts Delta from Delta State University. Popular for his self-sponsored *Bovi Man on Fire*, the artiste also features in official functions, where he expresses his comical prowess by reviewing politics and other social issues through his humour. His venture into stand-up comedy has been extended to acting, script-writing and short comedy skits.

Popularly called Basketmouth, Bright Okpocha hails from Abia State, though he grew up in Ajegunle, Lagos State. The sociologist turned comedian is a graduate of University of Benin. His international shows, *Basketmouth Uncensored* and *Lord of the Ribs* have gained much prominence and stand out among others of its kind, earning him several awards as a leading Nigerian stand-up comedian. Perhaps influenced by his humble background, the comedian often toys with the moral, emotional and financial challenges that come with poverty and life in the slums to craft his humour. His other artistic interests include acting and advertising.

4. Analysis

Grices's Cooperative Principle provides the background for analysing the data. Attention is given to the identification of maxim flouting. The analysis is carried out paying attention to the types of maxims flouted, as well as the medium of flouting them. Thus, the speakers' purpose is highlighted and discussed.

TEXT I

A.Y: Wey Incoming?, where una put Incoming? Show me Incoming now. Na me first show now. Una dey hide am? Incoming is coming, ehen? Where him go? Se o ti lo? Incoming is coming. He came. Make

una clap for Incoming then. He promised me he was going to come and he came. Na good thing. But that man hen, you know comedians don take that man hustle... Na him people dey here so, at least if he no dey here I go talk somethings make una tell am if him still dey come back. That man en, if he enter government all of us, with the way we sight posters everywhere, we suppose arrest or sue Incoming for visual assault. I no know, una eye no pain una? Everywhere, Sanwo-Olu, Snawo-Olu... Inside sleep, u go see am. Inside soup you go see am. My daughter enter fridge, she wan swim again. Incoming abeg make una help me tell am. The way he disturb us...

The text, a political joke, opens with two successive questions directed at the audience. In the initial lines, the speaker plays on 'come', switching his choice among its derivatives: *Incoming, came, coming*. The butt of the joke is named *Incoming*, and that accounts for its recurring use to achieve several purposes in the text, which includes, describing Babajide Sanwo-Olu, the successor of the then incumbent governor of Lagos State Akinwunmi Ambode. By using the identified derivatives of *come* and repeating six similar questions, the speaker flouts the maxim of quantity. This device is put to good use in the discourse, when the speaker carefully deploys it to evoke laughter, rather than annoyance, thereby agreeing with Dare (2005) that a verbally creative use of language impresses the audience, eliciting pleasure and delight rather than offence. The speaker's unconventional choice excites the interest of his audience, each time the lines are repeated. Albeit, the speaker subconsciously feeds his audience with excessive information and so flouts the maxim of quantity. This style is complemented with a case of little information supplied, since the speaker begins his discourse with *Incoming*, without preparing the audience for it.

Also, an incomplete statement is observed in the last line of the discourse: *the way he disturb us...* The hanging phrase seems to cast a shadow on the incessant display of Babajide Sanwo-Olu's poster and use of other campaign media which flooded the streets and of Lagos and every available medium, during the process that led to the 2019 elections in Nigeria. This inconclusive utterance is grammatically redundant, since a casual listener would make nothing of it. It is a subtle reaction to the party's campaign strategy. The speaker calls it a disturbance, which he and the audience are weary of. AY assumes that what he calls a *visual assault* is equally perceived by the audience as such. Hence, he implies that the audience are in a better position to find a suitable description for the spate of disturbance, since he is unable to find one. The humour is thus crafted against the background of the

speaker's assumption that the audience have a knowledge of the discourse.

Woven in the fabrics of exaggerated utterances, the text is replete with instances of the flouting of the maxims of quality (for its unfounded claims) and relation (for its lack of relatedness of thought to describe his exaggeration). The *visual assault* is surprisingly extended to the *dreams, pots of soup, fridges and private swimming pools* of the residents of Lagos.

This alleged intrusion of the residents' privacy seems to give strength to the joke. Nevertheless, the audience know that the speaker's claim is bereft of any iota of truth. Prior to the unrealistic utterance is a question similar in thought (*una eye no pain una?*), as it is suggestive of contracting an eye defect in the course of viewing the campaign media over and over. In making such a claim, the humourist accuses the butt of the joke of a deliberate attempt to manipulate the electorate's subconscious mind, irrespective of their personal electoral preferences. On one hand, the speaker rebuffs the All Progressive Congress candidate's approach, while also hinting on the plausibility of reconfiguring people's thoughts through the media. The comedian supposes that residents of Lagos were subconsciously manipulated to vote Sanwo-Olu by default. Perhaps, this informs the choice of the appellation *Incoming*, which he uses throughout the text.

Grice's maxim of manner proposes brevity, clarity and orderliness of discourse. Assessing the text on this premise, the initial introduction of *Incoming* as a description for Sanwo-Olu is technically defective in the presentation of clear information. Babajide Sanwo-Olu is not known by any appellation such as the speaker uses. The word is categorized in grammar as an adjective, which functions primarily as a pre-modifier of a noun. In nominalising the adjective, and using it in advance of his introduction of its referent, the speaker aims to mask the target of his joke, while also initiating suspense. Following Oyeleye and Osisanwo (2013), by using the pronominal adjective, the speaker deploys the medium to express his personal ideology evidenced by a voiced anticipation of a Sanwo-Olu-led government in Lagos. To further enhance suspense and maintain the contextual gem, the speaker uses about 24 sentences to express the two basic thoughts in the discourse:

Sanwo-Olu promised to attend the show and he did.
Sanwo-Olu inundated Lagos with numerous campaign media

TEXT II

A.Y.:.. I remember the time when we come this town. Only we kidnap Oyinbo. We dey wait for oil company to come pay ransom. Na we dey call everybody. Pran pran pran, “Chevron, una oyinbo dey lost?” Chevron say “Our oyinbo no dey lost” Ah what kind of stupid oyinbo is this. Na him we call Shell, pram, pram, pram, “Shell, una oyinbo dey lost? Shell say, “All our oyinbo are intact.” What kind of oyinbo is this? Na him we go meet oyinbo, oyinbo what kind of oyinbo are you, we’ve been calling everybody, nobody is coming to claim you. What kind of oyinbo are you? Oyinbo turn, face us “ That is what I have been trying to explain to you people, my name is Ben Murray-Bruce”. We kidnapped our own brother! That time when den dey kidnap for this area. But now, government don change everything. Evans self do.

AY’s drift into self-deprecation is occasioned by an attempt to tease *white-skinned* Nigerians, in this case, Ben Murray-Bruce, while voicing his disapproval for the crime abduction for ransom, one of Nigeria’s security challenges. His subtle and unannounced condemnation of the crime breaches the maxim of manner, as he narrates a frustrated attempt at abducting a white expatriate with the hope of receiving a huge ransom, since their host companies pay heavily to rescue them from the claws of their abductors. Other indicators include a reference to the efforts of the Nigerian government at curbing the menace, consequently leading to the arrest of Evans, a notorious kidnapper.

The maxim of quality is breached as the humour is well-crafted within these untruths: the comedian was never part of a criminal syndicate of abductors, Ben Murray-Bruce was never kidnapped and the discussion so described never manifested. The utterance is purely an ingenious comedy founded on an obvious national distress, suggesting that the audience can catch their fun off the social issues staring them in the face.

Attention is drawn to the phrase *pram pram pram*, which occurs twice in the text. It is an onomatopoeic description of a mobile phone’s caller’s tune. Since the speaker hinted the audience that calls were made, the phrase is redundant, thereby breaching the maxim of quantity. In spite of its grammatical redundancy, the phrase finds a usefulness in its capacity to initiate and sustain the suspense in the joke, thus ensuring that the audience are in a pensive mood, awaiting the conversation between the speaker and the company.

The question *which kind of oyinbo is this?* is found four times in the text. The speaker flouts the maxim of quantity by repeating it so often but deploys it to elicit

and sustain suspense. In the narration, the audience are subtly tasked to figure out the type of white abducted while the speaker simultaneously spites the butt of the joke for the colour of his skin. It is interesting to note that the answer to the question unravels the mystery in the joke.

A flouting of the maxim of relation is observed in the hypothetical fabrics that characterize the joke, including the attribution of Pidgin English to the identified multinational companies and the unconventional procedure for the calls. Another instance of the flouting of the maxim of relation is the manner in which the speaker reveals the victim’s identity. Ben Murray-Bruce is well-known for his short TV presentations, in which he claims he just wants to make common sense. In using the expression, *My name is Ben Murray-Bruce* the humourist seems to allude to the way Ben describes himself on the show. AY teases Ben by also mimicking his near-British accent. The strategy is deployed to further persuade the audience to believe his story, as they easily relate to the accent. Filani (2016) believes that comedians deploy mimicry by drawing from the collective belief they share with the audience. The researcher adds that humour is generated from the audience’s background assumptions when the speaker manipulates the collective representation of the butt and could be used for accentuating voice in humorous performances. It is glaring that the speaker’s intention is to play on the butt of this joke, otherwise it is illogical to maintain a British accent in the face of imminent danger, especially as the supposed abductors are particularly interested in a white expatriate.

Again, the text is a demonstration that context is relevant in the build up to a good comedy. The speaker chooses to narrate the story rather than leave his audience with an abridged version such as: *I was involved in gang that abducted Ben Murray-Bruce, because we thought he was a white expatriate in an oil company.*

TEXT III

BOVI: Good evening, I am here to present the award for animal of the year. The nominees are: Snake, 36 million, rat president’s office, monkey, 70 million. Who can guess who the winner is? Monkey right? The monkeys.

We have provoked the animal kingdom, ladies and gentlemen. Remember when a dog was named Buhari, they arrested the owner and the dog. So the animals started feeling important, that “whao”. Remember

when rats took over the president's office, the animals started to take note that they were that important. There were things they could do. They had no idea they could do. We must be careful. It is like fiction but its happening.... The president of the NFF is here, I don't want to hear that, the money for the super eagles, the eagle ate it. Let's just change their name to the super players of Nigeria.

Go to any zoo in Nigeria now, throw banana at the monkeys. They will be looking at you like it seems you don't know us and what we are capable of. They are not taking it anymore.

This text is essentially a political satire, created through sarcastic manipulations of some political events that played out during the year under review. Bovi, a comedian is called up to spice up an award night but he begins by claiming that he was mandated to present the award for the animal of the year. This initial claim flouts the maxims of quantity and quality, being a deliberate attempt to make a caricature of some incredible socio-political events that challenged the political sanity of Nigerian office holders. He seems to remind the audience that the roll call of major players in the politics of Nigeria is incomplete without the names of some animals. He sarcastically names the prospective awardees as: "...Snake, 36 million, rat, president's office, monkey, 70 million", thereby seeming to provide real evidence for his claim. Interestingly, these animals made it to the frontpage of newspapers, as they were astonishingly named responsible for one action or the other, during the year under review.

Two questions and an answer follow animals' credentials: *Who can guess who the winner is? Monkey right? The monkeys.* Both questions are technically rhetorical and deployed only for their humorous effects. Weighing them on the balance of the maxim of quantity, the speaker's choice seems defective, and so much more is the speaker's answer, which only serves to strengthen sarcastic satire in the humour. Harping on the politician-audience's knowledge, the comedian draws them away from his original purpose only to leave them laughing at their incredibility.

Again, the maxims of quality and relation are compromised, when the speaker makes a claim that all monkeys in Nigerian zoos now reject bananas, their favourite food. The speaker seems to highlight the greed and obsession that humans have developed for money. According to the text, monkeys have now developed the same obsession man exhibits for money, at the expense of bananas. The speaker

technically draws this parallel to decry the unsatisfactory nature of humans, since they are no longer content with the basic needs of food, shelter and clothing.

The import of Bovi's joke is clearer as he proceeds to blame Nigerians for *provoking* the kingdom of animals. This claim again is evidenced in: *they arrested the owner and the dog...when rats took over the President's office...* It is clear that this humour is deployed to attack a fast-paced impunity and callousness that has found its way into politics in Nigeria. The speaker subtly calls out his politician-audience for extending their highhandedness and greed, such that animals' consciousness to function in the capacity of humans is now aroused. So doing, Bovi incidentally pitches his art within the work of Obadare (2009), who claims that humour is an inestimable tool in the hands of the lower class, used to caricature those in power, subvert authority, and, in some instances, empower themselves. While the evidence provided in the text is true, their strength in establishing a plausible basis for the animal's hypothetical thoughts and prospective actions is universally defective.

Assessing the maxim of manner in the text, the speaker guides his audience from known to unknown, founding the humour on shared experiences with them. The joke draws on real situations to predict incongruity. Three instances are cited in the text: *...So the animals started feeling important, that "whao".... I don't want to hear that, the money for the super eagles, the eagle ate it; Go to any zoo in Nigeria now, throw banana at the monkeys. They will be looking at you like it seems you don't know us and what we are capable of.* These predictions are universally impossible, and so do not appeal to reasoning. Notwithstanding the humourist plays on the follies of the political elites and charges them on the need to avoid such internationally embarrassing explanations for their actions. According to Adegoju and Oyeboade (2015), the potency of humour in initiating a positive political change is weak, as they claim that political critiques are toothless bulldogs, given the extensive elements of playful harmlessness which characterizes comic works. This claim is further strengthened by Attardo (2017) who notes that humourists use decommitment, as a medium to escape future responsibilities for their utterances.

TEXT IV

BOVI: ...Nigeria is a very difficult country to manage, make no mistake about it. Our leaders, some of them

are trying their best. We can see they are pulling their weight to succeed. But the frustration gets to them. If there is anything we can appreciate my governor for is that he doesn't allow that frustration build to the point when him go just vex, just misyan.

It happened to the Governor of Edo State. New road wey him do, one woman go shade for the road. Out of anger, he seized her things she says "Sir sir sir I am a widow". "You are a widow, go and die". And the press descended on him. Oshiomole is a very kind man. It's just that if him dey vex, wetin in dey talk na go and die. He fit look this table and say, "Who leave this paper here. You leave this paper here. Go and die." So, he didn't know when he said it outside. But the good thing about it is that he apologized, he used the words "I am sorry" and he gave the woman two million naira.

When all the widows for Delta state hear, say one widow for Edo State, then give am two million because she shades goods for centre of road, the next morning, Uduaghan wake up dey drive, them don shade goods for centre of road, leave market. Na so Uduaghan come out say "what is going on here, what is going on here?". Them just say, "We are widows, we are widows. You are a widow, go and ... go and ... go and sin no more." He save the two million sharp guy.

Retelling the story of Adams Oshiomole his own way, Bovi exploits the former governor of Edo's moment of loose temper to identify his Achilles' heel. Attention is drawn to the use of *go and die*, which occurs thrice in a short sequence. In deploying this repetition, the speaker seems to substantiate his claim that the former governor is fond of using the cliché each time he is angry. This style lacks both the qualitative and quantitative values of communication, as proposed by Grice. Already, the audience are informed in the text that the undoing of the former governor is his careless use of the expression.

The same effect is created when the speaker uses the biblical allusion...*go and sin no more*. Attention is also drawn to the repetition of ...*go and...*, which occurs three times. By this repetition of the biblical allusion, the speaker flouts the maxim of quantity. The allusion credited to the then governor of Delta State, Emmanuel Uduaghan describes him as a compassionate and forgiving leader, who pardoned the errant widows, as the adulterous woman in the biblical story was forgiven, in spite of her guilt. So aptly crafted is the joke that it simulates the original scenario that birthed the quotation. Ironically, this act of kindness is quickly tainted with a subtle motive to avoid public criticism and possible payment of compensation for an unguarded temper. Thus, the humourist covertly reveals that Uduaghan was more

interested in conserving state funds and protecting his ego than his open show of mercy for the poor widows. To accentuate the quality of Uduaghan's character and emotional intelligence in the face of crisis, the speaker describes him as ...*sharp guy*, a compliment missing in his narration of Oshiomole's perceived ordeal. This comparison is illogical and based on hypothetical narrative

The joke is crafted in an intertwining web of untruths and an exaggeration, when the humourist declares... *When all the widows for Delta state hear...* The speaker makes his audience believe that all the widows unanimously agreed to display their wares on the road, and strategically too on the governor's route. Creating this hypothetical scenario deliberately breaches the maxim of quality.

By choosing widows as the tool for his humour, Bovi unconsciously highlights the social perceptions ascribed to widows. *Widow* appears at least six times in the text. The context suggests that widows are poor, inept and vulnerable. The speaker proposes in both instances that widows require a fair treatment and flexibility in the administration of law and justice. The humourist harps on the loophole created by the society to create his art so subtly that he achieves his purpose of comedy through the manipulation of an obvious lacuna. While castigating one governor for his initial insensitivity, he creates a conjectural situation in which the other is praised for being homely to the weak and vulnerable. This strengthens the claim in Obadare (2009) that humour possesses the power to influence social behavior, given its capability to articulate the discontinuities in the social system.

TEXT V

BASKETMOUTH: ... The ajepako people, you know when we were young it was always very hard for us to ... like buying Christmas cloth was very hard, the rich people, when they go shopping, for Christmas is around 18th or 20th of December, when its very expensive. Those days, if you want to buy Christmas clothes for us, my father used to buy it around January or February when its cheap, before Christmas, e don jump. Buying chicken was hard also we always dey cry, "Mummy, You never buy chicken, you never buy chicken." We were disturbing her. "Mummy you never buy chicken." 21st of December, chicken never come, 22nd, "Mummy, you never buy chicken." And all our neighbours don buy chicken. My mum was frustrated. So she prepared jolof rice for us, that we should eat, when we finish eating, she would take us to the market to buy chicken and our clothes. We did not know that she put valium five. We ate and woke

up on the 15th of January. Since that day, we no complain again.

To bring his message to the fore, Basketmouth begins on a self-deprecatory note, observing how hard living was for him as a child. He pitches his childhood days against the world of the rich whom he envied then. The speaker draws attention to the extravagant lifestyle of the rich, when he notes: *the rich people, when they go shopping, for Christmas is around 18th or 20th of December, when its very expensive*. He humorously castigates them for being insensitive to the plight of the poor. Basketmouth suggests that the rich throw frugality to the wind while shopping for festivities. Unconsciously borrowing from Cameron (2015), the humourist aligns with the submission that humour can be an ethical and effective way of attracting and sustaining public engagements in the struggle for global justice and issues of poverty. Basketmouth, however, covertly warns that things could turn around positively for the poor, as evidenced by his rise to fame, in spite of his background.

Buy chicken/buying chicken appears seven times in the text and so reflects the significance attached to chicken while celebrating Christmas. The speaker notes that he and his siblings often disturbed their mother so much that she was frustrated. In repeating the identified clause, the speaker breaches the maxim of quantity. On the flip side, the device serves to emphasise the extent of disturbance his mother was subjected to. The humour is didactic. It cautions children against the desire to be like the joneses and admonishes them on contentment.

The maxim of relation is flouted through the instrumentality of incredibility in the story. It is unreasonable to think that the children could have slept for three weeks! Taken figuratively, the speaker implies that frustrated parents can go any length to escape responsibility, by wielding their weapon of wisdom against the incessant and inconsiderate demands of their children.

The text flouts the maxim of quality, since it is developed around a false claim. The speaker ingeniously crafts the joke to challenge people's extreme reactions to frustrations. To initiate and sustain suspense while contextualizing the joke, the speaker flouts the maxim of manner by narrating a story, rather simply saying: *My mother once induced my siblings and I to sleep for three weeks, as she had no money to buy a chicken for Christmas*.

5. Conclusion

Humour is essentially the product of a conscious or unconscious flouting the maxims of communication, as proposed by Grice. In each text, all the maxims in cooperative principle are flouted to create humorous effects via satire, exaggeration, understatement, teasing, incoherent juxtapositions and incomplete information. Observations show that some utterances flouted more than one maxim, while the flouting of the maxim of quality seems to be more prominent, as humour heavily relies on untruths and doctored renditions of live accounts. The findings agree with Pradita (2010) on the pivotal role of untruths, hyperboles, sarcasm and satire in the crafting of humour.

Some incoherent utterances are observed in the text, thereby reflecting the flouting of the maxim of relation, as speakers made humanly unreasonable claims in their humour. Baker (1992) suggests that good communication requires coherence in discourse. In the texts however, coherent conversations are achieved based on a mutual understanding of the contextual inclinations between the speakers and the audience. Hassan (2013) supposes that participants always connect utterances to establish a continuity of sense. This claim is strengthened in the study, as the audience effortlessly interpret the discourse, in spite of their incoherence. Creating and sustaining suspense is essential in humour. To achieve this, humourists depend largely on their choice of words, order of communication and lengthy narrations, which fall within the scope of the maxim of manner. Each humorous utterance served to excite the audience, while also baring the ideology of the speakers.

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Youtube links

- TEXT I <https://youtu.be/jMq9-dM5vs0>
 TEXT II <https://youtu.be/Wsqurzeld6U>
 TEXT III <https://youtu.be/TzCdXUzckJI>
 TEXT IV <https://youtu.be/WC1J2tlqX-w>
 TEXT V <https://youtu.be/-hweZsZqxwc>