

# **All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought (ANUJAT)**

## **A Multidisciplinary Approach**

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Volume 8/ Number 1

November 2020

Article 1

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### **The Pragmatics of Coronavirus Motivated Humour on the Social Media**

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Recommended Citation:

Ogungbe, E. O. (2020). The Pragmatics of Coronavirus Motivated Humour on the Social Media. *All Nations University Journal of Applied Thought (ANUJAT)*, 8(1): 1-20. All Nations University Press. doi:<http://doi.org/10.47987/OURO2156>  
Available at: <http://anujat.anuc.edu.gh/universityjournal/anujat/Vol8/No1/1.pdf>

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***Abstract***

*Humour, an established means of reducing stress and tension, has attracted scholarly attention over the years. In the Nigerian discourse context, studies on Coronavirus-Motivated Humour (CMH) are relatively new. This paper investigates humour that reflect the social, economic and health challenges in Nigeria shared through the social media in order to identify CMH as a form of humour through which real-life experiences of other people can be understood. Insights are drawn from Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory to analyse a total of seven purposively selected humour on Coronavirus from social media, specifically Whatsapp and Facebook. The study found out that 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 pract of warning to the corrupt and inefficient leaders in Nigeria, particularly on health facilities in the country. Also, the context of CMH construction presents it as a satire of the social, economic and health experiences of the people as it reduces and reinforces status differences as well as strengthens the feeling of connectedness among people. This is achieved through the practs of informing, satirizing and mocking. The paper concludes that humours do not only make people laugh, but also comment on certain societal maladies that finger the minds of Nigerian citizens.*

**Keywords:** *Coronavirus, Humour, Social Media, Pragmatics and Lockdown.*

**Introduction**

Language is an instrument used by humans for the purpose of conveying specific intentions for a targeted audience. Such intentions can range from making idle conversations to injecting humour, within conversations to serious issue like Coronavirus pandemic, reports on certain issues as well as for the purpose of sharing compassion as shown in obituaries. While defining humour as 'something that makes a person laugh or smile', Ross (1998, p.3) asserts that humour is influential

and has a high profile in our society. While humor is ‘a universal phenomenon’, it is also culturally dependent for its specific content on a particular time and place (Andrew, 2012, p.11). Humor is also seen as ‘a way of exercising some control over our anxieties about aging and death, both for the young and the old’ (Andrew, 2012, p.14)

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).

Andrew (2012, p.13) identified the basic functions of humour by stating that humour uses situations, characters, speech, writing or images in creating enjoyment in the form of amusement, improving the audience by making them less pretentious, making them politically and medically aware, reducing the levels of stress hormones, providing physical workout, promoting solidarity, serving as a coping mechanism reducing anxiety or stress stemming from something feared or unpleasant. Hence, humour as 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 cited in Akinola, 2018). According to Ross (1998, p. 2), “humour is capable of creating an atmosphere of relief from anxiety, anger and pain; its profile is high in the society”. Humour performs a lot of roles in human society. Katayama (2009, p.125), posits that ‘humour brings people together under shared laughter’. This indicates that as opposed to being an individualized phenomenon, humour is a collective phenomenon. This means that it functions as a means of uniting people. Besides this, humour also has some sociological roles (Campisano, 2016). Friedman and Kuipers (2013, p.181) submit that ,there is no complete sociological consensus regarding the sociological roles of humour. Be that as it may, humour performs the function of promoting social inclusion and exclusion. It also reduces and reinforces status differences as well as strengthens the feeling of connectedness (Alatalo & Poutiainen, 2016). These aforementioned functions could aptly be seen in the issue of coronavirus pandemic ravaging the world. Despite the seriousness of the pandemic, people still tend to make flavor of humour out of it so as to douse the tension, and perhaps make people to laugh whether conscious or unconsciously.

Roux (2008, p.89) opines that humour is triggered by particular mechanisms, which can be grouped into three main categories; namely the cognitive theory, the superiority theory, and the relief theory. Similar to Roux’s assertion, Campisano (2016) also identifies cognitive, superiority and relief theories of humour. The difference is just that while Roux refers to them as mechanisms

that trigger humour, Campisano calls them the primary sociological theories of humour. The subject has been conceived as a complex multi-faceted phenomenon (Marin- Arrese, 2005)

Therefore, the form language takes and the function it performs in coronavirus motivated humour is very crucial. This is because it is an avenue for people to perform several acts aimed at having intended perlocutionary effects on the audience, readers or listeners, in a particular context. The branch of language that is concerned with the study of language use in relation to the acts performed, its effect on participants in relation to the context of usage is pragmatics, which is basically the systematic study of language use in relation to context. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that is focused on how words are used to perform various acts, how meaning is negotiated between speaker and hearer, and the pivotal role context plays in the interpretation of an utterance as well as to explain aspects of meaning which cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structures. According to Mey (2007, p. 6), “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society”. Generally, it is concerned with the way we convey meaning in any given social context through the medium of language. This meaning includes verbal as well as non-verbal meanings and it varies depending on the context, the relationship between interlocutors, and many other social factors. This implies that what someone communicates may be different from what the other party will interpret. Thus, both the speaker (and writer) and the listener (or reader) must have a meeting point before meaning will be adequately conveyed pragmatically. Some elements of pragmatics must be present before humour can be successfully created. This explains why it has been asserted that a speaker can only say a joke when s/he is aware that the addressees are aware of the underlying background assumptions that are needed for the interpretation of the joke. These background assumptions include the ‘belief that the addressees will not take the joke at face value, and the belief that the situation of interaction permits her/him to tell a joke’ (Filani, 2016, p.8).

The knowledge of pragmatics helps one to contextualise (situate in the apt context) and interpret the intended meaning inherent in Coronavirus Motivated images. Pragmatics is a linguistic discipline that addresses communicative processes (or language as deployed by its users in specific contexts) and its relation to language form, coupled with the cognitive and socio-cultural study of language use (Dyner, 2011). In other words, pragmatics has a diverse interdisciplinary spectrum of topics capitalising on the interactions of cognitive, social, medical, literary, and cultural phenomena and processes (Verschuere 2009). This has resulted in the emergence of subfields such as sociopragmatics, cultural pragmatics, medical pragmatics, and cognitive pragmatics.

The diversity of pragmatics is also manifest in studies in the pragmatics of humour. The past few decades have witnessed intensive development in research into humour within a number of disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy and even medicine. This study therefore embarks on the pragmatics of Coronavirus Motivated Humour in social media in order to explore how people use humour through language and images to perform several acts, say one thing and mean another and the pivotal role that context plays in meaning explication. This paper

pragmatically analyses seven Coronavirus Motivated Humours on social media. Using Mey's theory of pragmatic acts as its theoretical framework, the paper highlights the strategies used and practs deployed in the Coronavirus Motivated humour's projection of reality in a season of sociological consensus among people.

### **Coronavirus Outbreak and the Pains of Lockdown**

A novel coronavirus, designated as 2019-nCoV, emerged in Wuhan, China, towards the end of 2019. As of January 24, 2020, at least 830 cases had been diagnosed in nine countries: China, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan, Nepal, and the United States. Twenty-six fatalities occurred, mainly in patients who had serious underlying illness. Although many details of the emergence of this virus — such as its origin and its ability to spread among humans — remain unknown, an increasing number of cases appear to have resulted from human-to-human transmission. Given the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV) outbreak in 2002 and the Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) outbreak in 2012, 2019-nCoV is the third coronavirus to emerge in the human population in the past two decades — an emergence that has put global public health institutions on high alert. China responded quickly by informing the World Health Organization (WHO) of the outbreak and sharing sequence information with the international community after discovery of the causative agent. The WHO responded rapidly by coordinating diagnostics development; issuing guidance on patient monitoring, specimen collection, and treatment; and providing up-to-date information on the outbreak. Several countries in the region as well as the United States are screening travelers from Wuhan for fever, aiming to detect 2019-nCoV cases before the virus spreads further. Updates from China, Thailand, Korea, and Japan indicate that the disease associated with 2019-nCoV appears to be relatively mild as compared with SARS and MERS.

Coronaviruses make up a large family of viruses that can infect birds and mammals, including humans, according to world health organisation (WHO). These viruses have been responsible for several outbreaks around the world, including the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) pandemic of 2002-2003 and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) outbreak in South Korea in 2015. Most recently, a novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2, also known as COVID-19) triggered an outbreak in China in December 2019, sparking international concern. While some coronaviruses have caused devastating epidemics, others cause mild to moderate respiratory infections, like the common cold (Shrikrushna, Quazi, Shubham, Suraj, Shreya, Rohit, Sagrule and Biyani, 2020).

The coronavirus pandemic has some effects on Nigerians. The national and state orders for lockdown had adverse effects on the economy. Virtually every activity that requires social, official, and religious gatherings were cancelled. Many private organisations including banks, schools, hotels, airline operators, transport companies, etc., laid-off their staff and the few that were retained had their salaries reduced. In addition, the prices of goods, especially essential products like water and food items skyrocketed. Hence, Nigerians groaned in pains: the pains of

job loss, the pains of restriction of movement, the pains of high cost of goods, and above all, the pains of the fear of Covid-19. Therefore, the social media humour became an instrument easing the pains.

### **CMH as a Form of Humour**

The study of humour has traditionally been seen as a subpart of the study of aesthetics, and therefore has been of interest primarily to philosophers (Edwards, 1967). It has been studied from as far back as Plato and Aristotle (Attardo 1994). The first of these two Greek philosophers to have considered the nature of humour and laughter was Plato (Ferrar, 1992). He believed that the absurd was based on an unfortunate lack of self-knowledge, claiming in *Philebus* that when we laugh at what is ridiculous in others, we are experiencing a combination of both delight and envy, that is, we mix together both pain and pleasure (Plato, 1861). Aristotle also considered the nature of Ludicrous in the second part of *Poetics*. It is held that he also believed the ridiculous a something rather ugly and distorted (Ferrar, 1992; Attardo, 1994). The studies of humour range across academic disciplines from psychology, sociology, anthropology, literature, medicine, mathematics and linguistics.

Studies in humour 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 (Akinola, 2018). 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 & 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 socio-economic 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 political or health 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.

### **Theoretical Orientation**

#### **Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory (PAT)**

Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory is an action theory that was 'necessitated by the puncture made in the Speech Act Theory. One of the main criticisms according to Mey (2009) is that the speech act theory concentrates on 'speech' to the exclusion of other phenomena such as writing (and language, as noted earlier, manifests both in the written and spoken forms). Mey is of the opinion that as a result of this critique, some linguists have suggested that the term 'speech act' be replaced by a more 'general' one, such as 'act of language'. Was Mey just interested in mere terminological quibble? No. In fact, he was more interested in seeing language in use manifesting as situation-bound-dependent phenomenon. Thus, he concludes that the typical way of looking at people using language is to see them as performing pragmatic acts.

The progenitor of Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT) is Jacob Lee Mey who in 2001 propounded this theory to fill what he believes to be a lacuna in the speech act theory. He affirms that: "the speech act theory is individual oriented rather than societal-centered" (Mey, 2001: 214). This view is further reiterated by Fairclough who observes that the speech act theory "is thought of atomistically, as wholly emanating from the individual" (Fairclough, 1989, cited in Mey, 2001: 214). In the pragmatic act theory, Mey believes that emphasis should be placed on the importance of the situation, environment and extra-linguistic factors in meaning construction and comprehension (Mey, 2016a). He argues that human activity is not the privilege of the individual; rather the individual is situated in a social context, which means that s/he is empowered, as well as limited, by the conditions of his/her social life.

Therefore, pragmatic acts are situation-derived and situation-constrained. It does not explain human language use by starting from the words uttered by speaker. Instead, it focuses on the interactional situation in which language users realise their aims. The explanatory movement is from the outside in, the focus is on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as on what is actually being said (Mey, 2001, p. 221).

That is, from the environment, rather than from the inside out. Consequently, instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation in which the words fit is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said. The importance of contextual aspects of speech acts was echoed by Short (1996) who said that "we can use this context-boundness to infer important unstated aspects of context, including social relations between characters, when we read literary texts... Most ordinary spoken language behaviour takes place in a firmly grounded

situational context” So instead of speech acting, people using language can be viewed as practicing or performing pragmatic acts.

### **Pragmemes, Practs and Allopract**

Pragmatic acts theory is an attempt to explain the way pragmemes are represented in pragmatic acts in relation to speech situations. Mey (2016c:239) asserts that the ‘pragmatic act’, or ‘pract’, was introduced to capture the need to account for the many ways a situation determines what a speech act really ‘does’ (apart from, and often contrary to, its official ‘canonic’ illocutionary point or intention). The emphasis there is not on rules or verbs of individual speech acts but on characterising a typical, pragmatic act as it is realized in a given situation. Adopting familiar linguistic terminology, Mey (2001) calls this (proto-) type of act a ‘pragmeme.’ Individual pragmatic acts realise a particular pragmeme (e.g., ‘admonishing young couples to patient’); we may call these ‘practs.’ However, since acts will never be completely identical (every situation and expression through which admonishing is given is different from every other), every pract is also an ‘allopract’ – that is, a different realization of a particular pragmeme. According to Mey (2016b:139) pragmeme refers to ‘the embodied realization of all the pragmatic acts (or ‘allopracts’) that can be subsumed under it’.

A particular pragmeme can be substantiated and realised through individual pragmatic acts. For Mey it is the activity (interactants) and the textual part (co(n)text) of the pragmeme that defines a pragmatic act. Pragmemes, to be more precise, represent situational prototypes to which there may be several pragmatic access routes (practs). For instance, the pragmeme of requesting a pen can be realised through the following practs:

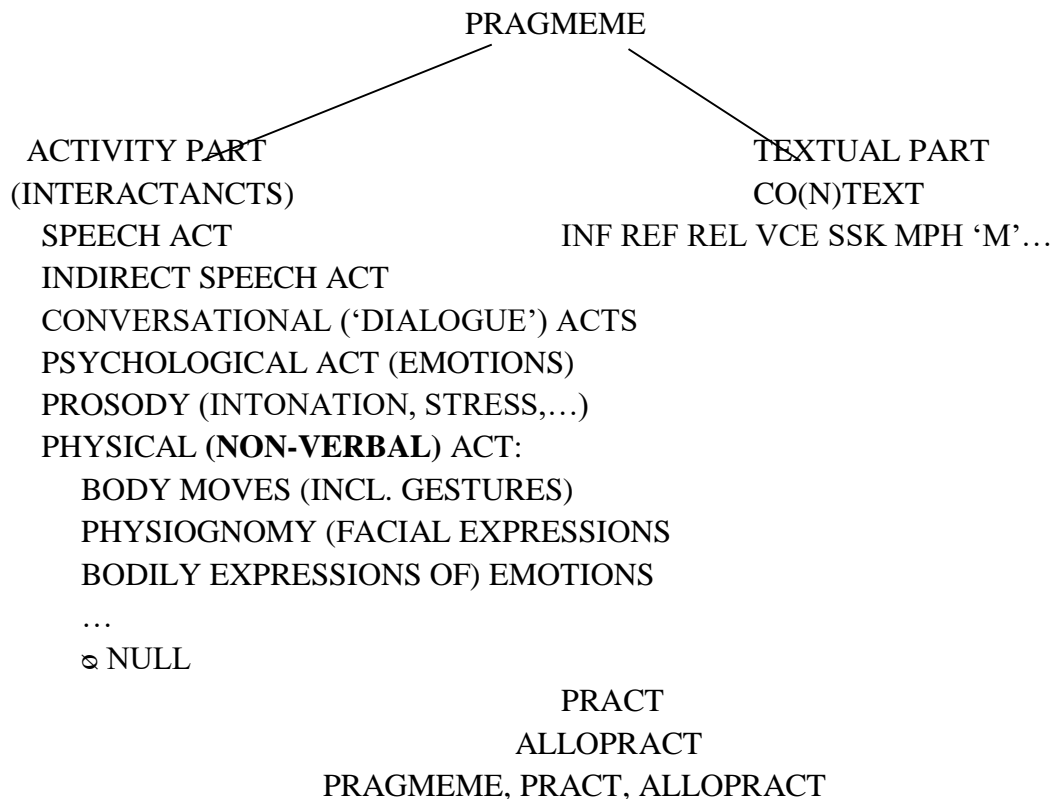
- (1) Can you loan me your pen?
- (2) Please my pen is bad, kindly lend me yours.
- (3) I don’t suppose you’ll be able to do this, but could you lend me your pen, please?

etc. These are some of the kind of practs through which this pragmeme can be realised.

So **pract** refers to a particular pragmeme in its realisations. When we study practs or ipras(short form of instantiated pragmatic acts), we aren’t concerned with matters of grammatical correctness or the strict observance of rules (Mey, 2001). What counts as a pract is determined exclusively by the understanding of the given context? Hence, a pragmatic act is instantiated through a pract which realises a pragmeme. Just like a variant of a particular phoneme is an allophone, every pract is at the same time an **allopract**, that is, a concrete instantiation of a particular pragmeme (Mey, 2001). Since no acts ever will be completely identical, every pract is also an ‘allopract’ – that is, a different realisation of a particular pragmeme.



To further buttress this model, Mey proposed the schema below:



A Model of Pragmatic Acts (Mey 2001: 222), (the emphasis in bold is the researcher's)

From the model above, a pragmeme comprises two parts: activity and the textual parts. The activity part is meant for interactants i.e. participants in a discourse, while the textual part describes the context within which the pragmeme operates. Therefore, in an interaction between two or more persons, the interactants draw on such speech act types direct or indirect speech acts, conversational ('dialogue') acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts and physical acts which consists of all forms of non-verbal language. These are engaged in contexts, which include INF representing "inference"; REF for "reference"; REL for "relevance"; VCE for "voice"; SSK for "shared situation knowledge"; MPH for "metaphor"; and M "metapragmatic joker". The interactions between the activity part and the textual part of a pragmeme results in a pract or an allopract. Thus, they are synergised (not necessarily all) to project the intended meaning of the language user.

## Methodology

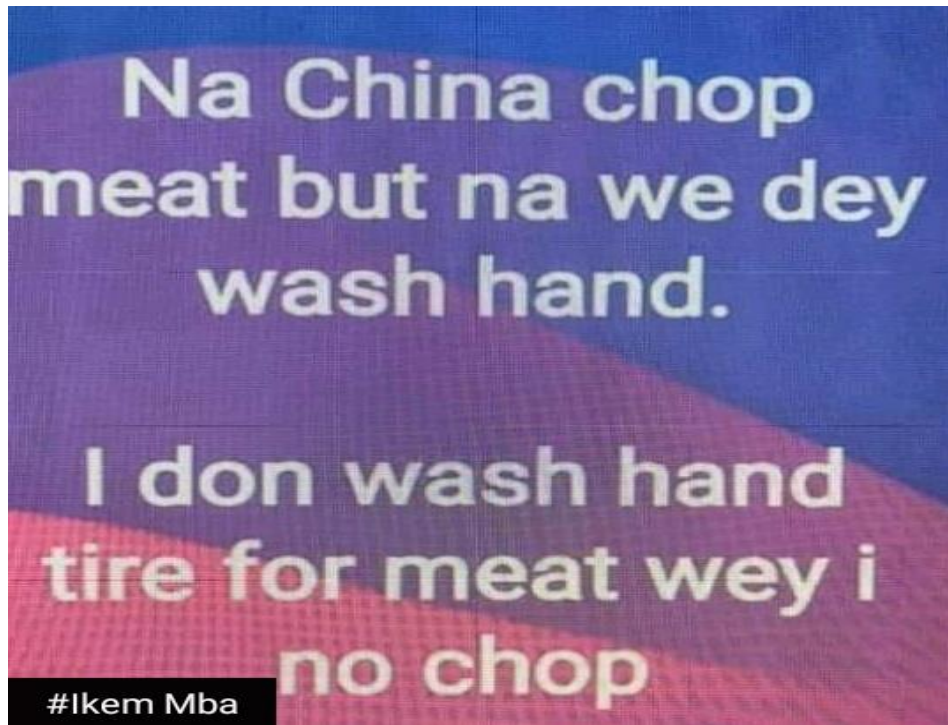
This study is a pragmatic act analysis of selected Coronavirus Motivated Humour in the alternative media basically Facebook and Whatsapp. The study collected a corpus of data and analysed seven (7) using a purposive sampling technique. The data analysed are a creative composition of jokes that reflect 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 humours depict the importance of human lives, health

facilities, economic effects, corruption and extortion, political leaders' responsibilities, religious satire, among others. To sustain their originality, the collected jokes were left unedited. The texts were analysed in line with the 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.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

#### Text 1:

#### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on the Importance of Human Lives



**Pract 1:** Na China chop meat but na we dey wash hand.

I don't wash hand tire for meat wey I no chop

#### **Pract 2:** Visual Act

**Analysis:** The above practs: caption and visual, is a coronavirus motivated humour undergirded within the context of the importance of human lives and with the incongruous allopract of informing and satirising. On the one hand, the practs inform the reader about the undesirable prevailing situation of regular hand wash in Nigeria since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic. On the other hand, the practs are also used to satirise the progenitor of the virus which is China. China created the virus but other countries, such as Nigeria, are bearing the brunt of the monster they invented. Though the practs preach safety, they also condemn and lament in a mocking-tone the cumbersome and tiresome exercise of washing hands regularly.

Meanwhile, given that to grasp the intended meaning inherent in a humour makes a lot of demand on the psyche, this instantiated pragmatic acts of coronavirus motivated humour on the importance

of human lives are psychological act, which interacts with contextual features such as reference (REF), metaphor (MPH), inference (INF) shared situational knowledge (SSK) and relevance (REL) to produce allopracts of informing and satirising. Specific **reference** is made to China—a country in East Asia, the largest in the world by population and the third largest by area. The reference to China is imperative because the coronavirus outbreak originated from China in November 2019. Another ostentatious reference was made to steak. This reference is as a result of the popular belief that the Chinese consume “unclean” meats such as bat, which are the purported carriers of the virus. These two references are synecdochical: China as a country is used to represent inhabitants of China, while meat is used to represent bat (the whole). The **inference** drawn from this humour is rationalised under the shared situational knowledge and world knowledge about the coronavirus pandemic. All these are complemented by the **relevance** of the humour which is a topical event affecting the entire universe of mankind. Hence, this humour was driven by the exigencies of the coronavirus pandemic, and as such the reader can relate to it seamlessly. The reader is thus—given all these contextual factors—able to draw appropriate inferences.

Elsewhere, on the metapragmatic level, a noticeable integral characteristic of humour is observed in the use of **chiasmus**: a rhetorical construction in which the order of the words in the second of two paired statements is the reverse of the order in the first. For instance, the second statement:

*I don't wash hand tire for meat wey I no chop*

*is loosely the reverse of the order of the first:*

*Na China chop meat but na we dey wash hand.*

This is used for witty effect. Similarly, another pragmatic strategy adopted for witty effect is the use of PidginPidgin English: a PidginPidgin based loose-English muddled with local colour which is a lingua franca in Nigeria. The use of Pidgin makes the humour catchy, witty and widely intelligible in the Nigerian context. Apart from these, there is also the use of dysphemism: the deliberate substitution of an offensive expression for a neutral one. The word “meat” is “dysphemistically” substituted for the relatively more offensive word bat. Bat is not eaten in Nigeria; most Nigerians see bat meat as a disgusting taboo that is not meant to be touched. So using a neutral word like meat in lieu of bat is an attempt to cushion the intended perlocutionary effect on the mind of the reader.

Text 2:

### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Health Facilities

Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Bida  
Niger state.  
Are really prepared for Covid 19.  
Kudos to my Nupe people 🤔🤔🤔



**Pract 1:** Federal Medical Centre (FMC) Bida Niger State. Are really prepared for Covid-19.  
Kudos to my Nupe people

**Pract 2:** Visual act

**Analysis:** The pragmeme of this coronavirus motivated humour on health facilities is undergirded by instantiated pragmatic acts with the **assertive** allopract of satirising. This CMH is intended to make mockery of the state of health facilities of Niger state in particular but Nigeria in general. The incongruity in the pract as well as the pictorial caption to back it up is a subtle way of not just making mockery of the dilapidated state of medical facilities in the country but also to inform the reader that Nigeria is not ready to battle the Covid-19 pandemic.

The **relevancy** of the coronavirus motivated humour on health facilities is driven by the exigencies of the coronavirus pandemic which is currently a topical issue in both Nigeria and the world at large, while the **shared situational knowledge**: background knowledge on the effect of the virus in Nigeria and world knowledge of how the virus is ravaging the entire world serve as the basis for making the proper analogical deduction (inference) on the incongruousness of the caption and the visual act. The reader can infer that the image above together with its inherent caption is intended to induce laughter. Laughter is the best medicine— medical experts as well as psychologists have recommended laughter to be effective and wise, with therapeutic effect. The humour is achieved because the mental picture the image triggered is farfetched and it is not obtainable in any medical centre in the country. However, the humour is intended to amuse the reader and mitigate the tension instigated by the coronavirus pandemic.

Meanwhile, since every coronavirus motivated humour must have a referent to make it comprehensible, this caption contains some nominal **referents** which are “Bida”, Niger state and



Nupe. Niger or Niger state is a state in Central Nigeria and the largest in the country in terms of land mass. The state capital is Minna, but Bida is a local government and also one of the major cities in the state. Nupe people are one of the indigenous people in Niger, and they speak Nupe language. Knowledge of these referents makes it seamlessly possible not just to comprehend the coronavirus motivated humour but also to situate the caption in the proper context. Metapragmatic makers in the caption can be observed in the use of laughter emoticon to foreground the intended humorous effect. Also, the caption is complemented with a parody image of a caricature doctor and a patient. Both the doctor, the patient and the supposed hospital equipment are parodies of what is obtainable in ideal situations. The pictorial evidence complements the pract to generate humour.

### Text 3:

#### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Economic Effects



Pract 1: Covid-19 lockdown: 14 days after.

#### Pract 2: Visual act (Pictorial sketch)

**Analysis:** The pract as well as the complementary pictorial sketch above is an instantiated pragmatic on coronavirus motivated humour on economic effect. The pract has an **assertive** allopract of warning. The pract is used, though triggering laughter, to warn the reader the implication of the lockdown, especially in the long run. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, the humourist, banking the on the shared situational knowledge of the reader, uses a pictorial sketch to accentuate the point being made. There are two images in the sketch the first depicts a beautiful coloured home stocked with food items and a big refrigerator. There are three people in the sketch: a man, a woman and young man. From their resemblance (between the man and the

boy) and from their carriage, one can deduce that they are family: the man is the husband, the woman is the wife, while the young man is their son. They look plump, robust, well-fed and well-dressed. The husband is holding them in a proud assertive manner. There is a caption on the top left of the sketch with the word: “up town”. Meanwhile, on the second sketch, the same sets of people are depicted after a time span of about 14 days. This time, they look lean, scrawny, hungry and poorly dressed. Their home is no longer regaled with colour, rather it looks dilapidated. The refrigerator and the stocked food items have disappeared, and in its stead, there is an open window. The man is no longer holding them assertively; rather, he is holding them dejectedly. This time, the caption on the top right says “down town”. This pictorial sketch as well as the complementary caption is used to depict **Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Economic Effects** on families across the country.

The reader can seamlessly infer the point being made as well as the referent (that is a family) in the sketch. The reader can also deduce that things may get pretty worse before they can get better. And from the caption and pictorial sketch, it can also be inferred that we should hope for the best but expect the worse during the lockdown. The relevancy of this Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Economic Effects is predisposed to the fact that the humour was created when it became imperative for the country to be on lockdown in order to curtail the spread of the virus. Meanwhile, metapragmatic joker can be observed in the use of oxymoronic-metaphor: two images of the same family are juxtaposed in comparison, to show the aftermath effect of the lockdown on them. This is really important because readers will then be able to comprehend the physical, economical and mental long term effect of the lockdown.

#### Text 4

#### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on the Importance of Human Lives

**One sneeze 🤧 from this man we are finished 🤧**





**Pract 1:** “One sneeze (emoji) from this man (sic) we are finished.

**Pract 2:** Visual act

**Analysis:** This coronavirus motivated humour on the importance of human lives is an **assertive** allopract of warning. The pract together with the visual act is used to warn the reader about the potential danger involved in sneezing during the covid-19 pandemic. To foreground the point being made, the pictorial sketch contains a man (who is the referent) whose nose is somewhat distorted by the humourist. The nose was flattened and enlarged to make it look extraordinarily weird: this is intended to strike fear in the mind of the reader. This pragmatic of this humour is activated by a perceived mismatch of his facial outlook. So the humour mechanism here requires the bypassing of the conventional instantiated pragmatic act status to the incongruous visual act.

This coronavirus motivated humour on the importance of human lives is catchy and relevant at this material time because it was published during the time of the pandemic and reader, banking on background and world knowledge on the Covid-19 pandemic can seamlessly relate to it and make the appropriate inference.

**Text 5:**

### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Corruption and Extortion



**Pract 1:** Anti-Corona Virus Natural Medicine

**Pract 2:** Visual Act

**Analysis:** The above data is an instantiated pragmatic act with the allopract of informing and advertising. However, image above is a good example of coronavirus motivated humour on corruption and extortion. The advertised product is said to be an “anti-coronavirus natural remedy” but it is obvious that the product is a sham that was manufactured to make people part with their hard earned money. The World Health Organisation (WHO) is yet to neither approve nor discover

any medication that is certified for the treatment of coronavirus. Some Nigerians, in typical fashion, are taking advantage for the pandemic to extort money from people.

Though image is not depicted in a humorous fashion but people who are enlightened or in the know can effortlessly deduce that the product is fake. The poorly designed and fixed label and container go a long way to project the how phony the product is. What makes the image relevant is because it was circulated during the Covid-19 pandemic: people will only be interested in it during this period. Based on background knowledge of some Nigerians always taking advantage of ugly situations and every situation to hoodwink people and make money, the reader can seamlessly infer that the product is fake.

#### Text 6:

#### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Political Leaders' Responsibilities and Dilapidated State of Health Facilities



**Pract 1:** I promise...(sic) as soon as this is over I will buy for myself a private hospital

**Pract 2:** Visual act

**Analysis:** The caption above is an instantiated pragmatic act with the **commissive** allopract of promising. These practs: the caption and the visual act, indict political leaders who neglected the health facilities in the country, there making many hospitals across the country to be redundant and on the verge of collapse. The practs portrays their regret and in the same way trigger them to promise to focus on improving the standard of healthcare facilities across the country.

The written text (caption) combines with the pictorial strip to project intended meaning: they are both bearers of meaning. For a text to be humorous, it must exhibit (at least) some sort of pragmatic incongruity: either through the use of irony, pun or satire. The text, I promise...(sic) as soon as this is over I will buy for myself a private hospital, together with the pictorial strip, generates humour in a satirical manner. This is because the caption is an indictment on the Nigerian ruling class for their failure to invest in the healthcare sector of the country, thereby leaving the few healthcare facilities available dilapidated and outdated. This satirical text is understood as a statement which is inextricably bound up with context of situation: the coronavirus pandemic, with readers drawing

from the shared situational knowledge of the spread of the virus to make the appropriate analytical deduction.

For this humour to be read as a text, the humourist had to create coherence within the story. This is achieved by forming a chain of **reference**. The characters in the pictorial strip are recognisable based on their outfits and demeanours. Top right, deducing from his regalia and poise, is a top notch Nigerian politician. Beside him is a middle class woman straddling a baby in her arms. She is followed by two middle class looking men who are stooping. Then there is a policeman with a rifle, and on uniform. After the police is another politician straddling a sack loaded with cash. Beside him is a criminal, half-hooded and with a weapon bigger than the policeman's. The last man on a French suit, grey shirt and red tie looks a business man or a contractor. All of them cowered in fear of the coronavirus, leaving the health care worker above to battle with the virus, alone. This chain of reference creates a **shared situational knowledge** which will enable the reader to situate the humour in the proper context and **infer** intended meaning. It also reinforces the fact that everyone is susceptible to the virus, whether rich or poor, young or old, strong or weak etc.

The pictorial strip is coloured which thus enhances the emotional impact of the caption as well as the intended meaning being projected. The coronavirus is coloured green and yellow and they are depicted in a background of sky blue which is an indication that the entire universe infested with the covid-19 virus. The healthcare worker, solely battling with the virus with big syringe and needle, is putting on white (the regular uniform for healthcare workers). The other characters in the pictorial strip are dressed to reflect their societal status. This particular humour is driven by the exigencies of the coronavirus pandemic which undergirds its relevance as the reader can seamlessly relate to it.

#### Text 7:

#### Coronavirus Motivated Humour on Religious Satire



**Pract 1:** a. Satan: With Covid-19, I closed your churches!

b. God: On the contrary, I just opened one in every home!

**Pract 2:** Conversational-visual act

Pract 1a is an instantiated pragmatic act with the **expressive** allopract of mocking, while pract1b is an instantiated pragmatic act with the **assertive** allopract of informing. The visual pragmatic act is conversational: between Satan and God, presented in an incongruous religious satirical manner. The incongruity here is rooted in the ironic response that God gave Satan to restate that something good can come out of bad situations.

The references in this humour are Satan and God. Since Satan is the first speaker, he is depicted first on the left, while God is on the right. The captions: “Satan” and “God” are used to identify them—though readers can seamlessly deduce who they were by their looks. Satan is portrayed in a stereotypically manner: with red outfit and a black goatee. These symbolise evil and danger and wickedness. On the other hand, God is portrayed as “white” with white attractive beards which is symbol of purity and wisdom. He also puts on a grey outfit which is a symbol of love and sacrifice. The devil’s hand is pressed on the map of the world: this implies that the devil was the one that sent the coronavirus plague to oppress and to torment the world. On the other hand, God’s hands are outstretched and wide open: this symbolises safety and salvation. The devil is further portrayed with a grim-sarcastic laughter, while God is depicted with a friendly warm-welcoming laughter. The two references and the manner in which they are depicted undergird the shared situational knowledge of the reader and enables him or her to make the necessary appropriate inference from the text within the context of the coronavirus pandemic.

This text is relevant because the humour portrayed in this text is germane and imperative. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, people were warned to desist from congregating and maintain social distance; as a result, they could not go to church worship God. Hence, the text is a discernible way of telling people that they can worship God in spirit and in truth in their various homes. Thus, the constrained caused by the coronavirus pandemic that made people not to go to churches or mosques is defeated.

## Conclusion

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 informing, stating (implicit) satirising, warning, advertising, promising, mocking 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 inept attitudes of government towards Covid-19 pandemic. 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, particularly on health facilities in the country.

The context of CMH construction presents it as a satire of the social, economic and health 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., Therefore, CMH is 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 during the Coronavirus pandemic. 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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