

Pragmatic acts of humour in family discourse in selected Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits

Ayo Osisanwo

University of Ibadan, Nigeria
Leuphana Universität, Germany
ayo.osisanwo@leuphana.de/ayosisdelexus@yahoo.com

Lekan Atoloye

University of Ibadan, Nigeria
lekanatoloye@gmail.com

Seun Akintaro

Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria
osakintaro30@lautech.edu.ng

Abstract

Humour plays a crucial role in family discourse as it fosters emotional connection, diffuses tension, and promotes open communication by providing a light-hearted and relatable atmosphere. Extant studies on family discourse have focused on (im)politeness strategies and pragmatic markers. However, scant attention has been paid to the communicative functions of humour in family discourse. This study was, therefore, designed to investigate humour in Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits, to identify the types, their pragmatic functions, and how they contribute to the overall meaning of the discourse. Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory served as the theoretical framework. Data for the study comprised eight selected Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits, produced in Nigeria. The selection is based on their humorous reflections of family issues and subjected to pragmatic analysis. Findings reveal that pragmatic acts exist in four interlocutory contexts among family members: couple (husband-wife) relationship; sibling(s)-relationship; mother-child relationship; and distant-family relationship. The contexts are indexed by eight pragmatic acts and functions which underpin expressions of humour: warning to threaten the husband, promising to raise hopes, requesting to make a mockery of the elder brother, ordering to deliberately disrespect the elder sister, questioning to persuade and apologise indirectly, scolding to condemn a child's inappropriate actions, exaggerating to boast and show off, speculating to impress the mother and indict the child. Employed with wit to avoid serious conflicts, these humorous acts were largely foregrounded by conversational, psychological and physical acts, and underscored by such contextual factors as inference, reference, relevance, and shared situation knowledge to humorously depict how family issues are variously handled.

Keywords: humour, family discourse, pragmatic acts, comedy skits, Maryam Apaokagi.

1. Introduction

Family discourse is a complex form of communication that involves several participants, including parents, children and extended family members (Blum-Kulka, 2012). According to Fiadotava (2021), the use of humour in family discourse is particularly important as it helps to ease tension and promote family bonding. Humour, which is a vital aspect of human communication, plays an essential role in maintaining social interaction and promoting social relationships (Ge, 2019). Humour can be used in various settings, including family discourse, to lighten up the mood and create a comfortable atmosphere (Baig et al., 2020). Comedians have increasingly utilised their talent to satirise social and political issues, contributing to their popularity as a form of entertainment (Nwankwo, 2019). One of such comedians is Maryam Apaokagi, a Nigerian comedian popularly known as Taaooma. Her comedy skits, which are often family-centric, gain a massive following in social media due to their relatable witty reflections of features (such as using physical punishment to discipline children) peculiar to most Nigerian Yoruba mothers.

Family humour in staged comedy sketches and everyday family settings exhibits distinctions in both narrative strategies and pragmatic functions, despite the portrayal of everyday family realities in staged family comedy (Fiadotava, 2020). Staged family comedy tends to highlight easily performable and universally understandable forms and themes of humour that do not necessarily demand in-depth knowledge about the intimate context of a specific family (Fogel, 2012). In contrast, a significant portion of family humour in daily interactions relies heavily on intimate contextual knowledge (Clancy, 2015). Existing research on family humour has predominantly focused on everyday family interactions from sociological and psychological perspectives (Ziv, 1988; Ziv & Gadish, 1989; Brooks et al., 1999, De Koning & Weiss, 2002; Chiaro, 2009; Saroglou et al., 2010; Alberts, 2013; Campbell & Moroz, 2014). This body of research has explored humour within family dynamics, the statuses and hierarchies of family members, and the permissibility of joking within a particular family. This exploration encompasses factors such as individual tastes, preferences, and taboo topics within the familial context.

The justification for this study lies in the limited research on the linguistic investigation of staged family comedy. While there have been linguistic studies focusing on humour (Bangbose, 2019; Dynel & Poppi, 2019; Ogungbe & Omolabi, 2020; El-Masry, 2021; Yus, 2021; Okhuosi, 2022; Osisanwo & Ilesanmi, 2023; Atoloye, 2023; Osisanwo & Agunbiade, 2024) and family discourse (Blum-Kulka, 1990; Everts, 2003; Johnson, 2007; Carvalho et al., 2017; Akintaro, 2023) independently, scant attention has been given to linguistically investigating humour within family discourse. This study, therefore, aims to examine the pragmatic acts of humour in selected comedy skits by Maryam Apaokagi, using Jacob Mey's pragmatic acts theory, to identify the humour types, pragmatic functions and contribution to the overall meaning of the discourse. Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory (2001) provides a framework for analysing communication acts beyond the literal meaning of words used in the conversation (Odebunmi and Unuabonah, 2014). The theory emphasises that communication is a goal-oriented activity, and the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation play a significant role in the success of the communication act (Tifili, 2023). Thus, the analysis of humour in Taaooma's comedy skits is based on the speaker's intention, the hearer's interpretation, and the communicative functions of humour. The analysis of the pragmatic acts of humour in Taaooma's comedy skits, therefore, sheds light on the role of humour in staged family communication and its effects on family relationships. The significance of the study lies in its contribution to the understanding

of pragmatic functions of humour in family communication. Furthermore, the study will highlight the cultural factors that influence the use of humour in staged family communication and how they contribute to the meaning of the discourse.

2. Humour, family discourse and linguistic exploration

Humour is a universal phenomenon that has been studied extensively in various fields, including psychology, sociology and linguistics (Attardo & Raskin, 2017; Ahmed, 2019; Bamgbose, 2019; Condren, 2023). Linguistic studies on humour focus on how humour is created and understood through language. Using Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, Bamgbose (2019) explores the use of humour in Nigerian hip-hop, noting that Nigerian hip-hop artists use strategies such as comparing, contrasting, and expanding related ideas, distorting commonly accepted knowledge about people, social events, and situations, and manipulating shared cultural concepts to create humour. Applying Attardo and Raskin's General Theory of Verbal Humour, El-Masry (2021) investigates the use of verbal humour in selected Egyptian web memes related to the coronavirus. The study analyses meme creators' humour techniques, finding prevalent script oppositions ("possible/impossible," "normal/abnormal") and frequent use of analogy and exaggeration as logical mechanisms. In a pragmatic study, Yus (2021) examines the discourse of image macros, a specific type of meme in Spanish, and investigates how they generate humorous effects. Yus examines humour creation through text interpretation and the importance of text-image combinations using relevance theory in meme analysis.

Investigating RoastMe, a widespread humorous practice on social media platforms, Dynel and Poppi (2019) examine the socio-pragmatic aspect of humour and (im)politeness and consider the point of view of the RoastMe community of practice. RoastMe, seen as an online version of traditional roasts, involves humorous insults within a comedic context, promoting amusement and solidarity. Offence cannot be entirely ruled out despite perceived harmlessness. Drawing insights from Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory, Ogungbe and Omolabi (2020) investigate the pragmatics of Coronavirus-Motivated Humour (CMH) on social media platforms in Nigeria. The study recognises CMH as a type of humour that aids in understanding real-life experiences and analyses COVID-19 humour on social media, emphasising its social functions and satirical critique of the Nigerian healthcare system. Okhuosi (2022) explores phonological aspects of humour in Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits, using Distinctive Features and Benign Violation Theory, to identify phonological strategies, and emphasise certain socio-cultural themes. Though both Okhuosi (2022) and the present study examine humour in Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits, they differ in approach. While Okhuosi's is a phonological examination, the current study is a pragmatic investigation, examining the pragmatic functions and role of humour in family interaction within the skits.

Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits are largely premised on a typical Nigerian family discourse. As an extension, her skits encapsulate interactions mostly found among nuclear and extended family members. Blum-Kulka (1990) examines parental politeness in family discourse, highlights asymmetrical power dynamics and parents' use of directives, and concludes that family discourse is polite and driven by cultural perceptions and the nature of the speech event. Johnson's (2007) study on family discourse reveals patterned interactions and role construction based on gender and family position, with mothers focused on home management and fathers as authoritative figures. This claim aligns with Ochs and Taylor's (2001) argument that mothers, as the introducers of topics, are often criticised by fathers. Johnson's study focuses on role construction through language but overlooks humour triggers in family discourse. Parental discipline in family discourse is studied by Carvalho et al. (2017), showing fathers as the main users of physical acts, primarily targeting male children. These findings tally with

Calvete et al.'s (2010) observations on discipline strategies based on age. Contradicting Khoury-Kassabri and Straus (2011), Carvalho et al. (2017) find fathers as the main users of physical acts in the discipline. Although data for these studies are not drawn from Maryam Apaokagi's skits, nonetheless, their findings reflect relevant cultural and ideological-based family issues which are preponderant in Apaokagi's skits.

Within the Nigerian family settings, Akintaro (2023) examines how family conflict is triggered through the contextual use of language without paying much attention to conflicts necessitated by humour in family interactions. In other words, the study does not address the pragmatic functions of humour in family discourse. The foregoing therefore indicates that previous studies on Nigerian family discourse have neglected the role of humour in family interactions, indicating a need for further investigation. The present study, therefore, explores how humour is realised in the Nigerian family context, using Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits.

3. Pragmatic Acts Theory

Jacob Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Acts Theory is a theory of pragmatics that builds on J. L. Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory (SAT). Mey argues that while Austin's theory focuses on reference, context is more than just reference, as it determines what can and cannot be said. Thus, Mey proposes the Pragmatic Acts Theory as a theory of action that situates speech acts in their appropriate socio-cultural contexts. According to Mey, speech acts rely on and actively create the situation in which they are realised, and individual pragmatic acts adapt to the context while also adapting the context to themselves. Mey's theory emphasises the general situational prototype (pragmeme) rather than rules for individual speech acts, and a particular pragmeme can be realised through individual pragmatic acts. Mey's model of pragmatic acts is represented graphically in Figure 1.

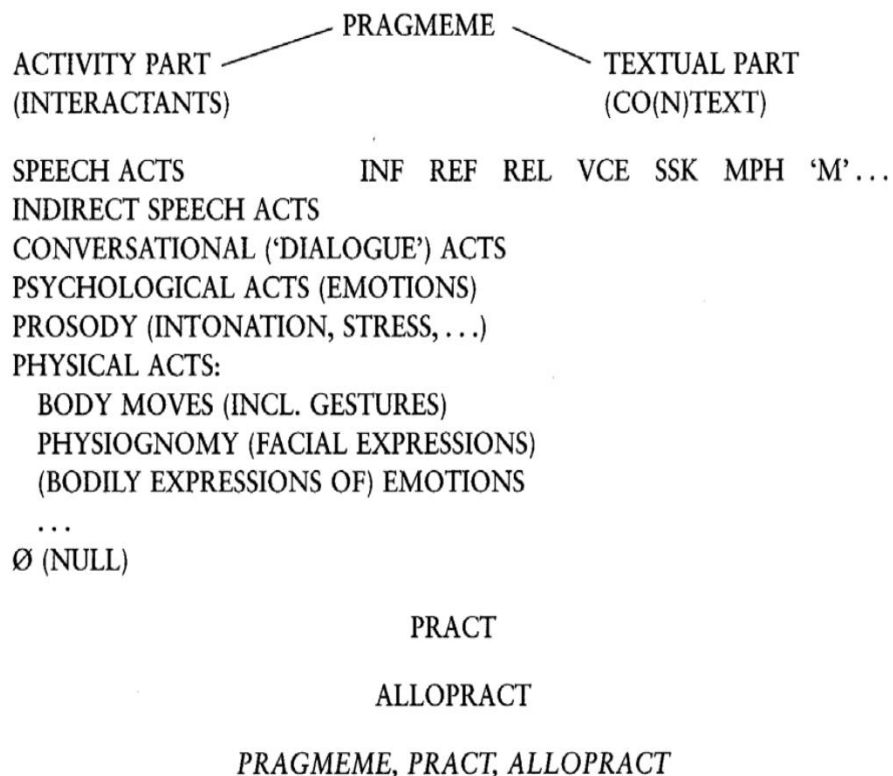


Figure 1: Mey's model of pragmeme. Source: Mey (2001: 222)

Mey's (2001) model of pragmeme has two parts: activity and textual. The activity part pertains to acts that can be performed by communication interactants and consists of a list of optional components. It is possible to have only one of these components and not the other(s). On the other hand, the textual part - Inference (INF), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), Voice (VCE), Shared Situation Knowledge (SSK), Metaphor (MPH) and Metapragmatics ('M') comprises components that create the context or co-text of the communication. While the activity part covers speech acts, indirect speech acts, conversational ("dialogue") acts, psychological acts, prosodic acts, and physical acts, the textual part pertains to contextual factors.

Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory is a valuable tool for analysing humour in Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits. The theory emphasises the importance of contextual factors and the variety of communicative acts used. By examining different acts, such as indirect, conversational, psychological, prosodic, and physical acts, it is possible to reveal the context of humour in the comedy skits. Mey's model of pragmatic acts also provides a visual representation of communication components, which helps in identifying the elements that contribute to the comedic effects.

4. Methodology

Data for the study comprised eight purposively selected Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits available on YouTube. A purposive sampling method was employed in the study based on specific characteristics and criteria related to the content of the skits. The skits were chosen because they humorously reflect family issues, which is a central theme in Maryam Apaokagi's comedic repertoire. This criterion ensured that the selected skits were relevant to the research focus on family dynamics and interactions.

To ensure that the sample was representative, several steps were taken. First, a review of available skits was conducted to identify those that focus on family issues. Second, the selection purposively focused on skits that depicted diverse aspects of family life and interactions. Additionally, objective criteria, such as the relevance of the skits to the subject of the research, were prioritised.

Maryam Adedoyin Apaokagi, known by her stage name Taaooma, is a Nigerian digital creator, cinematographer, and influential figure on social media. Her skits predominantly revolve around crafting comedic skits centred on a fictional family unit comprised of five distinct characters: Kunle (the father), Ronke (the mother), Tayo (the eldest child), Tao (the second child), and Teni (the youngest). Notably, Apaokagi assumes the roles of all five family members, showcasing her versatility as an entertainer. One of the defining elements of Taaooma's content is the recurring theme of Ronke, the mother figure, administering humorous yet exaggerated slaps to Tao as a form of discipline whenever the latter exhibits misbehaviour. This recurring comedic trope humorously mirrors the stereotype of strict and disciplinarian African mothers, reflecting on the cultural aspect of parental upbringing. Her engaging and relatable content is widely accessible on her YouTube channel and various other social media platforms, allowing for easy viewing and sharing among her ever-growing audience. Hailing from Ilorin, Kwara State, Taaooma is a twenty-three-year-old Nigerian whose creative prowess has earned her recognition in the form of multiple awards, along with numerous prestigious nominations, showcasing her influence and impact within the entertainment industry.

The study employs a descriptive research design and conducts a pragmatic analysis of the selected eight skits to extract various pragmatic acts from diverse scenes and conversational turns. Data were transcribed to account for both verbal and non-verbal acts (para-textuals – physiognomies and durations) embedded in the skits.

5. Data analysis

The family examined here consists of the father (Kunle), the mother (Mama Tao), the children (Tayo, Tao and Teni) and Uncle Laolu. Findings reveal that practs exist in four interlocutory contexts among family members: couple (husband-wife) relationship; sibling(s)-relationship; mother-child relationship; and distant-family relationship. The four interlocutory contexts are indexed by eight pragmatic acts which underpin expressions of humour: warning to threaten the husband, promising to raise hopes, requesting to make a mockery of the elder brother, ordering to deliberately disrespect the elder sister, questioning to persuade and apologise indirectly, scolding to condemn a child's inappropriate actions, exaggerating to boast and show off, speculating to impress the mother and indict the child. Requesting, ordering, and warning are primarily employed to establish equity within the family. Conversely, questioning and scolding serve to uphold African sociocultural values. Promising, exaggerating, and speculating are deployed to evoke emotions. Humour creation and display are linguistically encoded in these practs as exemplified in the following excerpts and discussions.

5.1. Practs in couple (husband-wife) relationship

Arguably, the pattern and style of relationship that exist between husband and wife vary from one culture/religion to another (Christensen et al., 2006). In the African culture, high esteem is given to a family dominantly controlled by men (patriarchal family) (Nzegwu, 2012). However, the impacts of Western and feminist ideology have been a major regulator vis- à-vis the present-day couple (husband-wife) relationship (Dibia, 2020). In the present-day couple relationship, the ideas of gender equity, marital rights and patriarchic principles co-exist. Incidentally, the interplay between these regulating factors often triggers the manifestation of humour as the wife's (in)actions at some points are embodiments of marital equity; and at another point, her subservience is surprisingly foregrounded at the point when she needs her husband's affection. Therefore, the wife uses warning pract to threaten her husband (in certain situations when she feels cheated on and then warrant a reminder of her marital equity) while the husband deploys promising pract to give (false) hope as proof that he remains the highest decision-maker in the family.

5.1.1. Warning to threaten the husband

In family discourse, an act of warning is usually deployed by the family member considered to be older (Chodorow, 2018). However, in the case of the family considered in this study, the mother (Mama Tao) is the preponderant user of the warning act; she humorously uses this act without minding the status of the family member being addressed. Excerpt 1 complements this:

Excerpt 1:

Background: Kunle (the husband) comes out from the bedroom and surprisingly meets his wife (Ronke, also known as Mama Tao) watching an action film.

1. KUNLE: ah ah...you and all these action films these days. I don't understand why you are watching them so much. I don't understand. I hope everything is fine.
2. RONKE: (hysterically) In case you mess up (0.8) I will need that particular skill. Very useful!
3. Kunle: (synergises Ronke's statement with the action in the film; this makes Kunle terrified and pretends to be innocent as seen in plate 1 below).



Plate 1: Ronke humorously threatens Kunle who pretends to be innocent and at the same time terrified.

Source: *Forewarned is Forearmed*. Time: 00:04-00:30

In excerpt 1, the wife, Ronke can achieve her intention of warning and threatening her husband even without directly using speech acts of warning and threatening. When she is asked the reason for her frequent obsession with action films, the only reply she could give is ‘In case you mess up (0.8) I will need that particular skill...very useful’ (turn 2). Through the pragmatic entailment of Ronke’s reply, complemented by a hysteric physiognomic act; the husband can infer (INF) acts of warning and threatening due to the shared knowledge that exists between the wife and the husband that the latter is a womaniser. Hence, should the husband misbehave, the wife will do to him what is shown in the action film. Kunle’s humorous perlocutionary acts (as seen in plate 1) reflect how terrified many Nigerian husbands (in legal marriage) could be when they are being challenged of extramarital affairs.

5.1.2. *Promising to raise hopes*

A promising pract is such that is often used to give assurance and raise hope. A humorous act is however realised through this pract when the discourse recipient(s) fails to decode sarcasm and ingenuity in the speaker’s use of the promising pract, as explicated in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2:

Background: Tao comes in to notify her dad (Kunle) that Otedola (a popular Nigerian business tycoon) has just bought a Ferrari car for his daughter. By implication, Tao’s dad should do the same.

1. TAO: It is Ferrari that Otedola bought for his daughters; THREE daughters.
2. MAMA TAO: (making fun of her husband) It’s their daddy that *buy* them Ferrari o; THREE FERRARI. You, every time you are changing Bitcoin up and down; we didn’t see anything.
3. KUNLE: (feels mocked) Stand up, let us go; we will buy Ferrari (promising).
4. MAMA TAO: Are you serious, Kunle?
5. KUNLE: I wanted them to deliver it here, but let’s go and get it (assuring).
6. MAMA TAO AND TAO: (excited) *oya oya*, let’s go. One is okay o. just buy one for us (Tao opens the door while her mum follows)
7. KUNLE: (shuts the door and locks it from behind)
8. MAMA TAO AND TAO: (surprised) ah ah, Kunle...Daddy
9. KUNLE: *shebi* (means ‘don’t’) you want Ferrari? You will see it outside (making a mockery of them)
10. MAMA TAO: where should we now go?

11.KUNLE: GO AND MEET OTEDOLA. He is looking for a new wife and new *schild* ('Child' is pronounced as 'Schild' here to enhance sarcasm).

Source: *Ask and it shall be given*. Time: 00:39-00:56

In family discourse, the members of the family are usually excited anytime the head of the family promises to get something for the family (Bossard, 2016). The case however seems to be one with mixed feelings of excitement and disappointment in the family examined here. Kunle, in turn 3, makes a promising pract out of the fact that he infers being mocked in turns 1 and 2, where Tao and Mama Tao reiterate through an emphatic stress on 'three Ferrari'. The pragmatic implicature here is that, if a man could get a Ferrari car for each of his three daughters, then, nothing should stop Kunle from buying at least one. As a way of giving a counter mockery, Kunle makes a false promise but Tao and Mama Tao are unaware of this. The humour therefore comes in when Kunle locks the door and makes a sarcastic counter action in turns 9 and 11 – 'shebi (don't) you want Ferrari? You will see it outside' and 'GO AND MEET OTEDOLA. HE IS LOOKING FOR A NEW WIFE AND NEW *SCHILD* (*CHILD*)'. Here, Kunle refers (REF) to Otedola because Kunle and his family members already have an established shared situation knowledge (SSK) about Otedola as one of the top ten richest men in Nigeria. Kunle comically implies that buying a Ferrari each for Mama Tao and Tao will not be a herculean task for Otedola as it would be for him.

5.2. Practs in sibling(s)-relationship

In family discourse, sibling(s)-relationship is usually patterned concerning age and gender differences (Gulløv & Winther, 2021). Within the African cultural context, the younger sibling is constrained to show politeness and respect to the older one(s) (Simpfiwe, 2010). Failure to accord respect to the elder one(s) could attract punishment on the part of the younger one (Wojtowicz, 2021). Human nature, however, is not always comfortable with being subservient in all cases; the younger one(s) at times humorously engages the older one(s) in diatribes to prove that age difference is not a major determinant to showing respect. In the data, the younger one intentionally requests to make a mockery of the older one. In addition to this, the younger one makes deliberate ordering acts to foreground the insatiable human nature of being always subservient. To avoid a serious counterattack, the younger one does these with wits. This is corroborated in Excerpts 3 and 4.

5.2.1. Requesting to make a mockery of elder brother

An act of mockery encapsulates the use of contemptuous expression (verbal or non-verbal) by an individual towards a fellow discourse participant. In family discourse, as depicted in Apaokagi's skits, the mocker finds this act exciting and hilarious while the family member that is (being) mocked infers a face-damaging act as explicated in excerpt 1 below:

Excerpt 3:

Background: Teni (the last child/daughter of the family) asks his elder brother, Tayo, for money to buy a biscuit. Before the conversation, Teni has put a call through to her classmate, who does not believe that Brother Tayo is a miser. Teni's intention is therefore to mock her brother and prove her classmate wrong. This intention is, however, unknown to Tayo.

1. TENI: (in emotionally persuasive tone) Brother Tayo, Brother Tayo...
2. TAYO: Yes, what's your problem?
3. TENI: Please, come and give me small money, I want to use it to buy biscuit.

4. TAYO: Who should give you money? Am I your daddy? (complemented by a face-threatening act)
5. TENI: ...Please, Brother Tayo, God will bless.
6. TAYO: I don't have money, so get out!
7. TENI: (takes her phone out of her pocket) Hello, Shemilore, did you hear that?...that he doesn't have money. (in a louder voice and mocking tone) I TOLD YOU THAT HE WILL NOT HAVE MONEY! HE NEVER HAS MONEY, VERY *STINGYKOKO* (a miser) LIKE THIS. HACKAGON! (unwilling giver)
8. TAYO: (Feeling uneasy and ashamed).
9. TENI: (Feels excited because her intention is achieved; she funnily leaves the sitting room).

Source: *Sapa Bien Merci*. Time: 00:06-00:38

In excerpt 3, an inference of mockery is realised within the expressive act of making a request. Teni wittingly complements her intention to mock her elder brother through her voice shift between turns 1 and 7, shared situational knowledge (SSK) and metaphor (MPH). The contextual belief within a Nigerian family setting is that the youngest member of the family can get their request approved anytime s/he is being emotional while making the request. This, therefore, makes Teni start the conversation with an emotionally persuasive tone, which is believed to be the foremost criterion for getting a request answered. Unfortunately, Tayo is not moved by this persuasive strategy. By implication, Teni thinks that her elder brother is a stack miser; this she substantiates with metaphors – ‘stingykoko’ and ‘hackagon’ (turn 7) which mean a miser and an unwilling giver. Tayo has background knowledge of what the metaphors mean. The two metaphors are often used to emphasise how parsimonious one could be. Tayo however takes these verbal wits to be highly demeaning, hence, his perlocutionary act in turn 8. Teni, on the other hand, leaves the sitting room with funny physiognomic acts.

5.2.2. Ordering to disrespect elder sister deliberately

In family discourse, it is expected of the older ones to give instructions which could come in the form of command in some cases (Wojtowicz, 2021). In other words, the African culture does not condemn an ordering practice provided it is not used by a subordinate family member. This is so because an inference of disrespect will be made by the older one, and this could result in family conflict. In addition, the younger one could get punished for this act. The case is however different in one of Apaokagi's comedy skits. Excerpt 4 buttresses this.

Excerpt 4:

Background: Tao (the second child of the family) is in the living room, studying. Not long after, Teni (the last child of the family) joins Tao in the living room to interrupt her reading.

1. TENI: (stands akimbo) Auntie Tao, Mummy said I should tell you that you should drop everything that you are doing **now now and hold your ear and come and give me food (ordering)**.
2. TAO: Who are you talking to like that? (brief pause) My friend, get out of here. Are you mad? What's that rubbish?
3. TENI: (feeling uneasy) MUMMY, AUNTIE TAO SAID THAT YOU ARE MAD
4. TAO: (rushes to the kitchen to get Teni her food)

Source: *A short story*. Time: 00:01-00:18



Plate 2: Teni stands akimbo as she orders her elder sister to serve her food

In excerpt 4, Tao makes an inference of disrespect and rudeness from her sister's conversational acts. This is so because Teni's conversational acts are highly dominated by ordering practs – 'drop everything that you are doing now now and hold your ear and come and give me food' (turn 1). Coupled with this, Teni foregrounds this pract with her physical act (standing akimbo), which is also considered disrespectful in the African cultural context. In turn 2, Tao thinks Teni will apologise (which is the reason for the brief pause) but Teni remains unapologetic. Hence, Tao self-selects and gets mad at Teni because the younger family member is not expected to make an order. A situational humour therefore becomes manifested when Teni makes an awkward report with a louder voice 'MUMMY, AUNTY TAO SAID THAT YOU ARE MAD' (turn 3). Tao, knowing the implication of what her younger sister has said, quickly rushes to the kitchen to get her sister her food. The perlocutionary act displayed by the elder sister in turn 4 contradicts her verbal act and intention in turn 2, "Who are you talking to like that? My friend, get out of here. Are you mad? What's that rubbish", which prompts a hilarious (re)action to rush to the kitchen to get Teni her food.

5.3. Practs in a mother-child relationship

The mother-child relationship is a close emotional bond between mother and children (Devi et al., 2018). Precisely, the goal of the mother is to ensure that her child is well-trained in all ramifications (Glenn, 2016). This training and development process is usually challenging for both mother and child as it often involves an interplay of cautioning, questioning, scolding, criticising, accusing, request-making, conflicting, apologising, and other family issues. In all, the mother, through her (in)actions, has a lot to do in regulating the (African) sociocultural values at home. In the case of Mama Tao, she does this with a blend of humour, sarcasm and an exaggerated physical form of punishment.

5.3.1. Questioning to persuade and apologise indirectly

In family discourse, every member of the family is bound to make mistake(s), as no member of the family is perfect. Largely, the children are the ones who suffer most when things are not properly done at home (Eekelaar, 2017). In the data garnered, it is common for the mother

(Mama Tao) to misjudge her children (most especially Tao) when anything gets missing in the house. In this situation, the wrongly accused child feels his or her face has been damaged and therefore feels unhappy, thereby, leading to family discord. At the point where the wrongly accused child has been vindicated, the accuser (the mother) finds all means to humorously pacify the accused without needing to say 'sorry'. Excerpt 5 below corroborates this.

Excerpt 5:

Background: Mama Tao comes out from the kitchen only to meet Tao with a tray of sweets and a few junk foods which she eats energetically.

1. MAMA TAO: (surprised to see her daughter eat varieties of junk food) TAO, WHERE DID YOU SEE THE MONEY TO BUY ALL THESE SWEETS?
2. TAO: (silence (0.3)) (tries to avoid a physical form of abuse from her mother)
3. MAMA TAO: no wonder...I am always looking for ₦200 today, ₦500 tomorrow. So it is you that have been stealing my money (**indicting**).
4. TAO: me? Steal your money? I did not steal your money o...
5. MAMA TAO: you didn't steal money; from where did you now see the money?
6. TAO: it's the 30k gift card I won from Zenith Beta Life promo (A raffle draw promo launched by Zenith Bank, Nigeria).
7. MAMA TAO: (trying to pacify Tao in a subtle voice) But even though, even though, why did you not come to give me the money that I should help keep it for you? (**Being indirectly apologetic without saying 'sorry'**).
8. TAO: (realising she has been vindicated, grudgingly leaves the sitting room with her tray of junk food)
9. 9a. MAMA TAO: (Wanting to say sorry) ok, sor...(she feels it would be too condescending to tell her daughter 'sorry' as seen in plate 3)...
- 9b. MAMA TAO: (after a few minutes) Okay, Aunty, are you not going to eat today? Your food is inside the kitchen and I PUT TWO MEATS.
10. TAO: It's not as if I am hungry but it is okay.

Source: *Mothers when they know they're wrong*. Time: 00:07-01:02

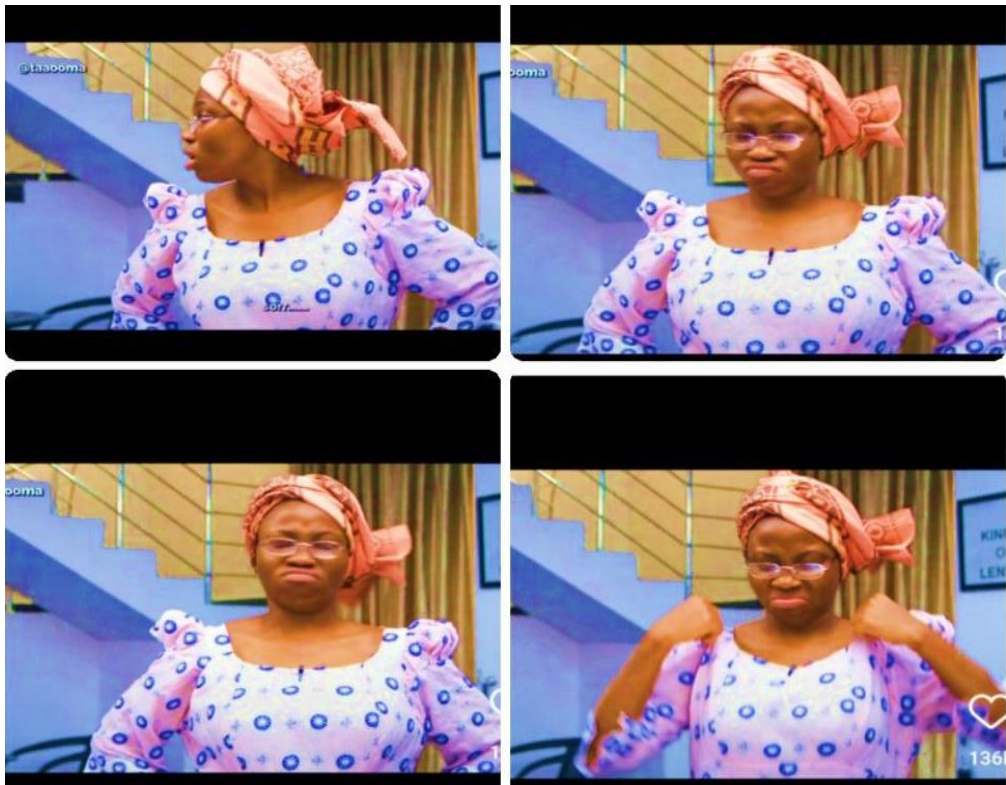


Plate 3: Egoistic Mama Tao, creating humour through body moves

In family discourse, mothers are quite funny when they make speculations through accusative expressions (Oman, 2016). Since Mama Tao does not believe her daughter to be buoyant enough to afford a large quantity of junk food, she assumes and speculates that her daughter must have got the money to buy junk food by stealing from her purse; this prompts the accusing pract in turn 3. Incidentally, Tao counters her mother's accusation by telling her mother how she got the money. Mama Tao, knowing well that her daughter has been vindicated, is left with no other choice but to apologise for the wrongful accusation. Mama Tao will, however, not apologise directly by saying 'sorry', as such may be considered culturally demeaning; still, she has to pacify her daughter. This, therefore, paves the way for the manifestation of a physical comic action as seen in plate 3 and a self-deprecating act of humour by calling her daughter 'Aunty' in turn 9b. Ordinarily, an African mother will not use an honorific noun to address her child, but Mama Tao does not see this as too demeaning as compared to directly telling her daughter 'sorry'. To stress this further, situational humour is well created in turn 9a when she almost says 'sorry.' She had to quickly make a redress by making contemptuous facial expressions and by pulling her shoulders up, as seen in Plate 3. In the long run, the discord between the mother and the daughter is settled through the mother's deployment of questioning practs in turns 7 and 9b (complemented by expressions of humour) to perform a pragmatic function of apologising. This, therefore, implies that expressions of humour are good remedies for solving family discord, as seen in Tao's response in turn 10 – 'It's not as if I am hungry but it is okay'.

5.3.2. Scolding to condemn a child's inappropriate actions

Scolding involves an overt action of remonstrating, rebuking or reprimanding angrily. As an extension, scolding, within the family context involves both overt and covert actions, as some parents scold by mere physiognomic (facial expression), emotional (laughter in the form of sarcasm), verbal and physical acts. The manifestation of humour within a scolding pract, to an extent, may however seem almost impossible because the act of scolding is expected to show seriousness and not laughter. In Apaokagi's comedy skit, Mama Tao's scolding pract is pragmatically enriched with triggers of humour.

Excerpt 6:

Background: Tao tries to explain to her mum (Mama Tao) that she (Tao) did not take any money from Mama Tao's purse:

1. MAMA TAO: (furious) CAN'T I JUST PUT MY PURSE IN ONE PLACE AND EVERYBODY WILL JUST BE CARRYING ONE-ONE THOUSAND NAIRA; every day, IN THIS NIGERIA.
2. TAO: I saw daddy carry five hundred naira from your purse...
3. MAMA TAO: Ehn ehn, five hundred...
4. TAO: Hmm...mummy, but you said you are looking for one thousand naira.
5. MAMA TAO: (verbal scolding) And you could not quickly open your mouth that 'ah/, ah/, it is not me o, it is not me o\; you are looking at me like *it is you that carry it*'. You had better be careful, lest, you are misjudged!
6. TAO: (apologising) Sorry...
7. MAMA TAO: ah/\ ah, why are you saying 'sorry' for something you did not do? Don't be apologising for something you did not do. You are not guilty now. Don't let people think you are guilty.
8. TAO: okay, sorry...
9. MAMA TAO: (see plate 4)

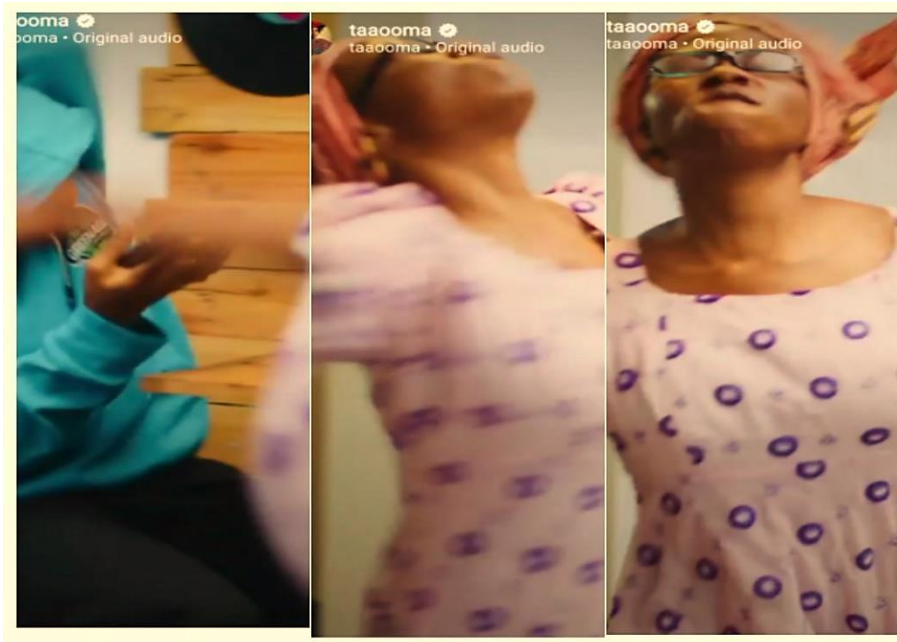


Plate 4: Mama Tao hyper scolding Tao through a physical act
Source: *Don't Apologise*. Time: 00:03-0050

The conversation in excerpt 6 depicts the extent to which some Nigerian mothers rarely apologise (directly) to their child(ren) when they wrongly accuse or misjudge their child(ren). Instead, they rather apologise in the form of scolding (Last, 2000), as seen in turn 5. In turn 5, Mama Tao funnily scolds Tao for not giving proof of her innocence; this contradicts a logical reaction and renders the scolding pract irrelevant, while an apologising pract would have been considered much more relevant (REL). If not so, the REL of Tao's expression 'sorry' in turn 6 would have been considered appropriate by Mama Tao between turns 6 and 8. These contradicting inferences coupled with the exaggerated physical act of scolding Tao in plate 4 trigger the humour in Mama Tao's style of scolding her child(ren).

5.4. Practs in distant-family relationship

The relationship that exists outside the nuclear family is often determined by the genetic structure shared among members of the nuclear family and that of the extended family (Sear, 2016). By implication, it is not surprising to have a display of diverse relationship traits/acts within a nuclear family that accommodates distant family members (from both paternal and maternal relations). By and large, one of the preponderant relationship traits in such a family setting is an exaggerating act, which is mostly deployed to boast in the presence of other distant family member(s). In addition, as a way of seeking receptive gestures from other family member(s) who are well-to-do, distant family member(s) at times makes hypocritical speculations about (trivial) issues to attract the positive attention of the well-to-do family member. Excerpts 7-8 buttress this.

5.4.1. Exaggerating to boast and show off

In Apaokagi's skits, the exaggerating pract is one of the predominant actions mostly found in family discourse. This is so because each member of the family usually desires the affection for other family member(s) or visitor(s) to get fascinated with whatever topic is being discussed. In the process of exaggerating what is being said, humour is created. Not only this, but a more hilarious scene is also created when such an exaggerated topic or incident is eventually found to be false. The discourse participants find it funny and make a mockery of the current speaker while the latter feels ashamed or disappointed. Excerpt 7 below complements this.

Excerpt 7:

Background: Mama Tao and her elder sister are talking in the living room. Not long, Teni (Mama Tao's last born) comes in. Meanwhile, Tao is somewhere not too far from the two discussants.

1. TENI: (greeting the visitor) Hello ma, welcome to our house (bends a bit to show respect)
2. ELDER SISTER: (amazed)
3. TENI: God bless you, Amen.
4. MAO TAO: (feeling proud of her daughter for showing courtesy) That's my baby daughter
5. ELDER SISTER: (astonished) She is so smart!
6. MAMA TAO: In fact, all my kids, all my children, they are smart. I don't allow anyone to be lazy. As small as she is, she speaks fluent English. Erm, Teni, go and get the remote to watch TV...
7. TENI: Okay mummy, I am coming. (she goes to the other living room to get the remote)
8. MAMA TAO: (feeling excited about her little daughter's level of intelligence)
9. TENI: (comes back) **Mummy, the remote, she is where?**
10. Tao and the elder sister burst into laughter while Mama Tao feels disappointed.

Source: *African mums bragging about their kids*. Time: 00:04-00:49

Humour is realised in this excerpt through the emotive behaviour of laughter (Tao and the visitor) and disappointment (Mama Tao) as triggered by Mama Tao's exaggerated claims about Teni. It is common among parents to boast of how intelligent and well-trained their children are (Okello, 2023). It, however, becomes hilarious when there is a contradiction between what is being exaggeratedly said and the real action demonstrated. Ordinarily, Teni's grammatical blunder in turn 9 would have been overlooked had the mother not overstated how 'smart' and 'intellectual' her baby daughter is. The grammatical blunder, coupled with Tao and the sister's reaction, makes the conversation more hilarious.

5.4.2. Speculating to impress the mother and indict the child

In family discourse, giving an account of an incident out of speculation is one of the ways to get attention from other family members, especially when what happens is said in a way that jettisons the other perspective (Scharp & Thomas, 2016). From the data garnered, Uncle Laolu hypothetically performs this act effectively to impress Mama Tao (with the hope of using that as a pretence to get his wants from her).

Excerpt 8:

Background: Uncle Laolu, while going on a visit to Mama Tao's house, saw Tao from afar, heading to a pharmaceutical store. Without further investigation, he assumes Tao has gone to the chemist to get contraceptives. Before Tao's arrival, Uncle Laolu informed Mama Tao that he saw Tao buy contraceptives at a chemist.

1. MAMA TAO: so, you, you can enter this house, TAO?
2. TAO: (surprised to get verbally attacked)
3. MAMA TAO: it is only AK 47 remaining for you to be shooting up and down
4. TAO: (innocently) Mummy, I don't understand what you are talking about o
5. MAMA TAO: YOU WENT TO BUY CONTRACEPTIVES!
6. TAO: contraceptives? I don't understand. Mummy, who is telling you all that?
7. MAMA TAO: YOUR UNCLE LAOLU DID NOT SEE YOU?
Tao looks at Uncle Laolu for a confirmation, while Uncle Laolu pretentiously looks away (see plate 5).
8. MAMA TAO: He saw you with his korokoro (two) eyes. Even if you get pregnant, can't you inform me? You now want to murder somebody
9. TAO: ah, uncle Laolu
10. UNCLE LAOLU: why are you looking at me like that? As if I am lying. I AM A 57 YEAR OLD MAN. I SAW YOU. SHE WENT INTO THE PHARMACY AND SHE GOT THE CONTRACEPTIVES. And she gulped it in her throat (indicting).
11. MAMA TAO: (getting impressed with Uncle Laolu's narration) so, YOU ARE NO LONGER A VIRGIN. Am I not doing my best for you as a mother?
12. UNCLE LAOLU: (supporting Mama Tao to further get her impressed) of course, I agree with you. You are a good mother
13. TAO: Uncle Laolu, how are you even sure that you saw me?
14. UNLCE LAOLU: (stands to defend himself) YES, I SAW YOU
15. TAO: okay, and so what? What if I bought and used contraceptives?

Mama Tao amazingly creates humorous counter reaction through her physical acts; she stands to slap Tao but Uncle Laolu gets heavily hit instead. See plate 6 below.



Plate 5: Uncle Laolu pretentiously looks away as Tao looks at him to confirm the allegation



Plate 6: Uncle Laolu gets hit by Mama Tao as Tao dodges her mother's slap
Source: *Lukaku the c(r)ook*. Time: 00:03-00:56

Based on the conversation in excerpt 8, the obvious hypocritical intention of Uncle Laolu to impress Mama Tao and indict Tao is made known through his non-verbal action when Tao looks at Uncle Laolu in plate 5. Oftentimes, African mothers are not patient enough to filter whatever information they get about their immediate family member(s). From another perspective, the actions of Mama Tao towards her daughter imply that there is a prior situational knowledge (SSK) that Mama Tao must have had on issues relating to this. Hence, she believes Uncle Laolu's narratives about Tao without doing further investigations. Unknown to Mama Tao, Uncle Laolu has only speculated to gain Mama's affection. He believes Mama Tao would appreciate him for looking after Tao. Funnily, while trying to interrogate and reprimand Tao (for an offence she did not commit), humour is created through Uncle Laolu and Mama Tao's physical acts in plates 5 and 6 respectively. In addition to this, humour is made manifest in the latter part of the conversation when Uncle Laolu gets the punishment he deserves for raising a false alarm.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study sheds light on the pragmatic functions of humour in family discourse, particularly within the context of Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits. The investigation identifies four interlocutory contexts among family members: couple (husband-wife) relationship, sibling(s)-relationship, mother-child relationship, and distant-family relationship, which are indexed by eight pragmatic acts and functions which underpin expressions of humour. The eight acts are warning to threaten the husband, promising to raise hopes, requesting to make a mockery of the elder brother, ordering to deliberately disrespect the elder sister, questioning to persuade and apologise indirectly, scolding to condemn a child's inappropriate actions, exaggerating to boast and show off, speculating to impress the mother and indict the child. These functions were primarily conveyed through conversational, psychological, and physical acts, and were underscored by contextual factors such as inference, reference, relevance, and shared situation knowledge.

By affirming the presence of humour within familial interactions, this study reinforces the notion that humour serves as a fundamental aspect of human communication across diverse settings. Consequently, this finding contributes to a growing body of evidence that underscores the ubiquitous nature of humour in various interpersonal domains, highlighting its significance as a universal feature of human interaction. The finding provides further support for the assertions made by Attardo and Raskin (2017), corroborated by Condren (2023), regarding the universality of humour as a communicative phenomenon. Sequel to Attardo and Raskin's (2017) findings, this research demonstrates that humour is not confined solely to broader societal or cultural contexts, but also permeates staged family discourse. Significantly, the current investigation pragmatically establishes that humour in staged family discourse thrives on the shared knowledge of situational circumstances. This is consistent with the assertion put forth by Bamgbose (2019) regarding the role of contextual factors in the creation of humour. In addition, the study establishes that humour serves as a tool for enhancing understanding of real-life experiences, emphasising its social functions and satirical critique of the social system, confirming Ogungbe and Omolabi's (2020) perspectives. Okhuosi (2022) hinted also at the fact that humour within Mariam Apaokagi's comedy skits is influenced by Nigeria's sociocultural and economic contexts but could not comprehensively address it because of the theoretical focus of the investigation.

This study affirms that within humorous contexts, the established patterns of interaction and role allocation based on gender and family hierarchy are not steadfast, as mothers may also assume positions of authority, and siblings may deviate from the traditional lines of authority

dictated by family position. This claim validates Blum-Kulka's (1990) assertion that power dynamics and cultural perceptions shape family discourse. However, it deviates from Blum-Kulka's (1990) notion that family discourse is predominantly polite, as the analysis of the data reveals some instances of impoliteness and face-threatening/damaging acts. The findings of the study also reveal that staged family interactions exhibit discernible patterns and role allocations based on gender and family hierarchy. Mothers primarily focus on household management, while fathers tend to assume authoritative roles within the family structure in Nigeria. This observation is consistent with Johnson's (2007) claim regarding the delineation of roles and responsibilities within familial dynamics. The identified patterns underscore the significance of understanding the influence of gender and hierarchical structures in shaping (staged) family interactions and roles.

Contributing to the existing literature on family discourse, this study addresses a significant gap in knowledge regarding the communicative functions of humour within this context. While prior research has predominantly focused on (im)politeness strategies and pragmatic markers, this investigation delves into the specific humour types deployed in Maryam Apaokagi's comedy skits, their pragmatic functions, and contribution to the overall meaning of the discourse, employing Jacob Mey's Pragmatic Acts Theory as a theoretical framework. By humorously portraying the handling of family issues, these pragmatic functions of humour play a pivotal role in fostering emotional connection, diffusing tension, and promoting open communication within the intricate dynamics of the familial realm. This study not only underscores the crucial significance of humour in staged family discourse, but also paves the way for further investigations to deepen our understanding of its nuanced impact on familial relationships and interactions.

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