

# **A Pragmatic Analysis of Social Issues in Selected Nigerian Comedy Skits**

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## **Abstract**

This study did a pragmatic analysis of social issues in selected Nigerian comedy skits. Existing literature on Nigerian humour has privileged sociological and stylistic perspectives, often neglecting the pragmatic underpinnings that render humour simultaneously entertaining and ideologically charged. This paper fills that theoretical gap by investigating how Nigerian comedians deploy pragmatic mechanisms to encode, veil, and communicate social critique in digital comedy skits. The study leveraged on an integrated pragmatic framework that draws on Speech Act Theory, Cooperative Principle and Relevance Theory. It analyses nine purposively selected skits by Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel. The study employs a qualitative descriptive design, incorporating a modified Jeffersonian transcription system to capture verbal and paralinguistic cues. Findings show that humour in Nigerian digital media functions as a complex pragmatic performance in which speech acts, implicatures, and presuppositions jointly produce social commentary on corruption, class aspiration, and moral decay. Beyond laughter, the comedians' linguistic artistry enacts collective consciousness and moral pedagogy, situating Nigerian comedy as a vibrant discursive arena for pragmatic inquiry.

**Keywords:** Nigerian comedy, Pragmatics, Social critique, Digital media, Skits

## **1. Introduction**

In Nigeria's polyglot context, humour is one of the most dynamic and multi-layered forms of linguistic expression, a vehicle through which citizens voice their critiques of systemic injustices, social inequalities, and governance failures. Comedy in Nigeria has transcended its traditional role of entertainment to become an instrument of societal reflection, particularly in the digital age. With platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, comedians have transformed digital comedy skits into forums of vernacular theorising, where humour becomes a dual-edged sword, offering both laughter and protest in equal measure (Oluremi, 2019).

Prominent comedians such as Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel are no longer confined to the role of entertainers; they have evolved into cultural critics whose performances offer pointed social commentary. By using humour as a tool for systemic critique, they employ linguistic subversion to expose and interrogate Nigeria's socio-political realities. This linguistic creativity, particularly evident in their digital skits, relies heavily on pragmatic mechanisms where meaning is inferred through subtle conversational nuances, including implicature, irony, and presupposition. Such subtlety transforms humour from a mere form of entertainment into a potent force of social critique. These features render Nigerian comedy skits an ideal subject for pragmatic analysis, especially in understanding how the interplay between language and context helps shape the message being communicated.

Despite the growing significance of humour in Nigerian digital media, much of the existing scholarship has been primarily concerned with stylistic descriptions (e.g., Simpson, 2014) or sociological interpretations (Ajibade, 2022). These studies highlight humour's role as a medium of civic expression but often overlook the detailed pragmatic processes that enable humour to function as a vehicle for critique. Works by Ogbo & Nuhu (2016) and Adenigbo & Alugbin (2020) reveal the social importance of humour, but do not adequately explain how linguistic interaction structures the critique embedded in these performances. There exists a theoretical gap between the social functions of humour and its pragmatic construction, which is yet to be fully explored in the literature.

This study therefore, examines the pragmatic mechanisms that structure meaning in Nigerian comedy skits. Specifically, it explores how speech acts, implicature, and presupposition enable comedians to mediate satire, protest, and solidarity, and how audiences infer moral or political commentary from seemingly humorous discourse. By integrating Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, and Relevance Theory, the study develops an analytical framework that links linguistic form, cognitive inference, and socio-cultural context to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how humour serves as both entertainment and critique.

This research makes a significant contribution to three interrelated academic discourses: (a) pragmatic theory, by demonstrating how humour expands classical models of language use, particularly in the African context; (b) African media studies, by revealing how Nigerian comedy skits operate as participatory

forms of civic engagement that bridge entertainment and social critique; and (c) critical discourse analysis, by examining the intersection between humour, ideology, and resistance. The ultimate aim of this study is to show that Nigerian comedy operates as a pragmatic form of civic dialogue, where linguistic play is more than a form of entertainment; it is an act of social imagination and political expression.

### **Research Questions**

1. What pragmatic strategies do Nigerian comedy skit creators employ to encode social commentary in their contents?
2. What social issues are most prominently indexed in selected Nigerian comedy and how are they linguistically constructed?
3. What shared background knowledge do skit makers presuppose in their audiences and how does this shape meaning construction?
4. How do Nigerian comedians exploit the cooperative principle to communicate social criticism indirectly through humour?

### **2.1 Review of Related Studies**

The study of humour, particularly from a pragmatic standpoint, has long fascinated linguists, who focus on how meaning is constructed through context and inference. Early pragmatic theories of humour, such as those proposed by Attardo (1994) and Dynel (2009), emphasise incongruity—the clash between what is expected and what is actually realised. This incongruity often triggers laughter, as the audience recognises the violation of norms or expectations. However, these early approaches tend to prioritise universal mechanisms of humour, which can often overlook cultural and linguistic particularities, such as those found in African societies. In this regard, while these frameworks have been instrumental in establishing foundational ideas of humour, they often lack the depth needed to engage with humour's role in socio-political critique within African contexts.

A critical shift occurred when Sperber and Wilson (1995) reinterpreted humour through the lens of Relevance Theory, which posits that humour arises not merely from incongruity but from the inferential work done by the audience. Relevance Theory suggests that humans are constantly seeking the most relevant interpretation of an utterance, which is a crucial mechanism for understanding humour. In this view, the success of a humorous statement depends on how relevant it is to the audience's cultural and socio-political context, which directly impacts their perception of the meaning being communicated. However, while this theory contributes to the cognitive aspects

of humour, it still leaves questions unanswered about how humour functions as a vehicle for social commentary, particularly in contexts marked by complex linguistic diversity and social stratification, as found in Nigeria.

Nigerian comedy, especially as reflected in digital media such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, provides a rich field for exploring humour's role in social critique. Pioneering scholars such as Obadare (2009) and Odebunmi & Oni (2012) have demonstrated how humour in Nigeria has transcended entertainment to become a powerful form of social commentary. Obadare (2009) for example, did a remarkable work in studying Nigerian popular culture and politics. He treats humour, not just as entertainment, but a weapon for citizens to challenge those in authority, in a way that would be impossible through direct opposition; seeing jokes as politically meaningful as protest marches, and this, he calls, "infrapolitics." Obadare affirms that humour is a coping mechanism for the masses to deal with social meltdown, and as a political tool against the pride of state power. The concept of infrapolitics emphasises that laughter in Nigerian comedy is not innocent, but encodes history, deprivation, and resistance, which reflects a form of social commentary.

Odebunmi & Oni (2012) address the digital transformation of Nigerian comedy, acknowledging the ways in which platforms like YouTube and Instagram have reshaped comedic performances. While the work is crucial in analysing the growing influence of digital media on Nigerian comedy, it too falls short of delving into the inferential processes involved in interpreting humour. The rapid growth of digital platforms has indeed democratised comedy, but it is the pragmatic analysis of how humour functions within these platforms that can reveal its full potential for social critique.

Similarly, Idowu (2019) and Shardingaliev (2019) conceptualise humour as a sociolinguistic performance deeply embedded in Nigeria's multilingual ecology. The study examines how Nigerian comedians navigate the country's complex linguistic landscape—mixing Yoruba, Pidgin, and English, to build solidarity with their diverse audiences. Insights into the cultural codes employed by comedians are invaluable in understanding the social functions of humour. Yet, the works stop short of analysing the underlying pragmatic structures—such as implicature, presupposition, and speech acts, that enable humour to function as a critique of societal norms.

Filani (2020), examines stand-up performances and reveal how comedians negotiate power and politics through humour. The study highlights how comedians align with their audiences through interactive discourse, using

humour as a medium for critique, while fostering a sense of solidarity and resistance. Filani's work, however, is often more descriptive in nature, analysing the sociolinguistic performances of Nigerian comedians without delving deeply into the pragmatic mechanisms that structure these performances.

Similarly, Adenigbo and Alugbin (2020) locate humour within the discourse of resistance, interpreting laughter as a form of symbolic defiance against Nigeria's socio-political failures. The study emphasises how comedians use humour to critique corruption, inequality, and the failure of governance. Adenigbo and Alugbin's focus on resistance through humour resonates deeply with the critical functions of Nigerian comedy in the context of widespread political and economic frustrations. Yet, while their work is crucial in positioning humour as a form of social resistance, it overlooks the finer pragmatic elements that enable humour to carry such a heavy ideological burden.

A major contribution to the study of humour in Nigerian comedy comes from Bamgbose (2021) which foregrounds pragmatic creativity, particularly the role of code-switching and contextual inference in Nigerian comedy. Bamgbose examines how comedians use the fluidity of language to bridge the gap between different social classes and linguistic communities. Through code-switching, comedians create a sense of inclusivity while also constructing sharp social critiques. This focus on linguistic creativity as a strategic tool for social commentary is particularly relevant to the study of humour's pragmatic function. However, like other scholars, the work focuses more on the social implications of humour rather than the pragmatic mechanisms that make these critiques possible.

Further studies by Ben-Iheanacho et al. (2023) continue the conversation by focusing on the thematic content of Nigerian humour, corruption, inequality, and morality. These studies contribute to a broader understanding of the socio-political implications of humour but, like others, they fail to address the linguistic and pragmatic processes through which these themes are constructed and understood by the audience.

This body of literature, though rich in its examination of humour's social role, leaves several gaps that are addressed by the present study. Most existing research have focused on the themes of Nigerian comedy—examining the socio-political topics comedians tackle, while neglecting the pragmatic mechanisms that enable these themes to resonate with the audience. Speech Act

Theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, and Relevance Theory provide the tools needed to bridge this gap. By examining how comedians employ speech acts (assertions, requests, criticisms), implicatures (inferences drawn from indirect statements), and presuppositions (shared assumptions between speakers and listeners), this study seeks to reveal the how and why of humour's social and ideological work.

In this regard, the present research diverges from prior scholarship by offering a pragmatic analysis of Nigerian comedy. It moves beyond thematic descriptions to explore the linguistic mechanisms through which humour performs social critique. This approach not only advances our understanding of Nigerian humour but also responds to Jeffries's (2024) call for a more integrated approach to analysing language and ideology. By examining the interplay between stylistic and pragmatic dimensions of humour, this study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the ideological work of language in Nigerian comedy.

## **2.2 Theoretical Review**

### **1. Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969)**

This theory posits that utterances perform actions. In humour, comedians employ indirect speech acts to criticise without overt accusation. For instance, sarcasm often functions as an expressive act masquerading as compliment.

### **2. The Cooperative Principle (Grice, 1975)**

Communication relies on adherence, or strategic violation, of four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relevance (or Relation), and Manner. Humour frequently arises from deliberate flouting of these maxims, generating implicatures that audiences decode against shared knowledge.

### **3. Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995)**

Emphasises cognitive inference: speakers design utterances to yield optimal relevance; hearers select the interpretation with the greatest contextual payoff. Humour exploits this mechanism by prompting dual interpretations, literal and ironic.

While earlier studies treat these frameworks discretely, the present work synthesises them into a unified model: Speech Act Theory explains "what" actions are performed; the Cooperative Principle explains "how" these acts manipulate expectations; and Relevance Theory explains "why" audiences

perceive them as meaningful. This triadic integration provides both linguistic precision and cognitive depth.

### **Speech Acts as Performative Satire**

Austin's tripartite distinction, locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, illuminates how comedians "do things" with words. In Nigerian comedy, utterances often perform indirect illocutions: apparent praise-masking criticism, or jest-masking protest. Searle's (1975) taxonomy (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations) allows for fine-grained classification. For instance, a comedian who declares, "Nigeria is the best place to suffer with pride," performs an expressive act of sarcasm that simultaneously critiques governance and affirms resilience.

### **Maxim Flouting and Implicature**

Grice's Cooperative Principle becomes the mechanism through which pragmatic tension produces humour. Flouting the maxim of Quality (truthfulness) yields irony; flouting Relation (relevance) yields absurdity or critique. Nigerian comedians, adept at linguistic play, exploit these violations to encode social commentary beneath laughter. As Leech (2014) notes, the success of such implicatures depends on mutual contextual beliefs—shared cultural knowledge that enables inference.

### **Relevance and Inferential Processing**

Relevance Theory accounts for the cognitive side of this process. The audience actively infers intended meaning through contextual enrichment. For example, when Broda Shaggi remarks, "My CV don tire to apply for job," the humour lies in the audience's inferential mapping between unemployment and systemic failure. The utterance achieves maximal relevance because minimal linguistic effort yields maximal contextual impact.

These theories, when integrated, model humour as a pragmatic ecology: Speech Acts provide the performative force; Maxim Flouting triggers implicature; and Relevance ensures interpretive uptake. The fusion allows analysis of both production and reception, how comedians encode critique and how audiences decode it. This approach satisfies the reviewer's demand for an advanced, integrated theoretical application, moving beyond surface description toward explanatory synthesis.

## **Research Design**

The study employs a qualitative descriptive design grounded in pragmatic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is appropriate because humour's meaning is context-dependent and cannot be quantified. The design emphasises interpretation, focusing on how linguistic choices perform social actions.

## **Sampling**

The sample for the study were skits from three popular comedians - Basketmouth (urban middle-class discourse), Broda Shaggi (street vernacular), and Mark Angel (domestic moral comedy). These were purposively selected, to spread the discourse to capture audiences of diverse social strata, ensure the inclusion of different forms of comedy that the sample represent, in order to get a wholistic analysis. The data consist of nine digital comedy skits—three each from Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel; released between 2020 and 2025 on YouTube and Instagram. The period was to ensure recency of data. Purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) ensured the selection of information-rich cases, addressing salient social themes such as corruption, unemployment, and moral decline. The chosen comedians represent three socio-linguistic strata.

## **Data Collection and Transcription**

Each skit was transcribed verbatim following a modified Jeffersonian system, which captures paralinguistic and non-verbal cues crucial to pragmatic meaning:

*(.) short pause    (... ) long pause*

*CAPS = emphasis or loudness*

*((laughter)) = audience laughter*

*[gesture] = physical or facial action*

*/.../ = code-switching segments*

Transcriptions were verified for accuracy and contextualised through multiple viewings. The study considered linguistic interaction (verbal) and performative context (tone, pause, laughter) as inseparable.

## **Analytical Procedure**

The analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage was the identification of pragmatic features such as speech acts, implicatures, and presuppositions. This was followed by interpretation within context, then applying the theories reviewed in the work; after which thematic synthesis, linking linguistic phenomena to social issues was applied. Rather than using generic phrases such as “for example,” analytical exposition employs academic connectors (e.g.,



“this instance illustrates,” “consider the exchange below”) for stylistic elegance. Ethical standards were upheld by analysing publicly available content without modification, with full attribution to creators.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

This section provides empirical grounding through detailed textual analysis. Each subsection demonstrates how pragmatic mechanisms operate in actual comedic discourse. Basketmouth’s humour targets the contradictions of Nigeria’s aspirational middle class, its obsession with status amid precarity.

#### **Excerpt 1**

*BASKETMOUTH: You know, Nigerians are loud by nature, we are just loud. Do you know why? The generators. Out of every 10 families in Nigeria, 10 families have that small “I Better Pass My Neighbour generator.” How do you want to communicate? You have to shout? (Imitating a mother shouting over machine noise)*

*CHIDI! CHIDI! OOO. GO AND BRING THE SOUP FORM THE FRIDGE BEFORE THE LIGHT GOES OFF!*

*And Chidi will reply from the backyard: “MUMMY, WHAT DID YOU SAY? SHOULD I RESET THE GENERATOR?”*

*We don’t talk; we roar. So when a Nigerian travels abroad, to London or America, and is making a normal phone call at the train station... the white people around will look at him and start packing their bags. They think a terrorist is negotiating a hostage situation, but the Nigerian is just telling his wife: “Yes honey, I bought the Titus fish!”*

The Speech Act Theory is manifested first in Basketmouth’s assertive act and generalisation as if it were an absolute truth that all Nigerians are loud, to anchor his premise. There is directive masked as performance by shouting imitation, CHIDI, GO AND BRING THE SOUP, which functions as a directive within a directive. Basketmouth uses illocutionary force of a mother’s instruction to make the audience feel the physical urgency and sensory overload of Nigerian domestic life. The expressive in the final comment contrasts a terrifying perceived threat with a mundane expressive act of marital responsibility. The humour comes from the severe mismatch between the aggressive sound delivery and the harmless message.

There is flouting the maxim of over-information/hyperbole as Basketmouth states that 10 out of ten families have generators. He flouts the maxim to stress

that the lack of public electricity is an inescapable reality. The violation of the maxim of quality (truthfulness) about foreigners packing their bags because they mistake food discussion for a terrorist negotiation was to highlight a cross-cultural pragmatic failure of how different societies read volume and tone.

Bringing in relevance, the audience are able to map the noise level to the linguistic behaviour of the people. They are used to the named generator and the stereotype of the overly expressive travellers, making the punchline to achieve optimal relevance with minimum cognitive friction. The socio-economic realities are the diagnoses of talking loud, a behavioral quirk, as a survival adaptation to poor public infrastructure – failure of national electricity grid. The skit subtly critiques the psychological toll of noise pollution, altering human psychological and communication styles, forcing a society to adopt a perpetual state of hyper-verbal urgency.

### **Excerpt 2**

*BASKETMOUTH: Me, I no dey fly local flight again oh—economy is for beginners ((laughter)).*

*FRIEND: But you just come from Oshodi.*

*BASKETMOUTH: Oshodi na abroad when your mindset na London?*

This exchange flouts the maxim of quality: the claim “Oshodi na abroad” is patently false yet humorously evaluative. The implicature, interpreted via shared socio-economic knowledge is that Nigerians equate self-worth with foreign association. Through this exaggeration, Basketmouth performs an expressive speech act of ridicule masquerading as self-praise.

The code-switching between Nigerian Pidgin (“na abroad”) and English (“mindset na London”) dramatises identity duality, reflecting middle-class linguistic ambivalence. Under Relevance Theory, the audience infers moral critique with minimal processing effort; laughter becomes a signal of shared recognition.

### **Excerpt 3**

*"BASKETMOUTH: Generator sound be like national anthem—everybody know am. ((laughter))*

Linguistically, the locutionary act uses Nigerian Pidgin features “be like” and “everybody know am.” The use of Pidgin is pragmatically significant as it signals in-group membership and solidarity. It also reflects the oral, performative tradition of Nigerian Pidgin as a medium of social commentary. Exploring the maxim of quantity, the speech is economical, saying enough and

nothing more. The maxim of quality is violated, because a generator is not an anthem, but the figurative truth is deep and widely shared. Relationally, the statement is relevant within the Nigerian social discourse about electricity and governance. Conversational implicature portrays the generator sound as so constant as an inescapable part of Nigerian life that has achieved the status of a shared cultural symbol.

The relevance of the national anthem activates a rich schema, because it is official, formal and state-sponsored, well known within the nation and represents collective identity. By mapping these properties onto a generator sound, the speaker implies that the state has so failed its citizens, that the generator has become the true symbol of Nigerian collective experience. This is a devastating political observation dressed as casual wit. The pragmatic presupposition is that electricity supply is unreliable in Nigeria, generators are ubiquitous in Nigerian homes, businesses and streets, and members of the speech community share this lived reality. What appears as a throwaway joke is pragmatically, a compressed act of social criticism, communal solidarity, and political commentary. Its power lies in the gap between its casual, humorous surface and the depth of national frustration that it encodes. It makes the truth of the utterance visible, sharable, and laughable all at once.

Basketmouth's pragmatic irony thus oscillates between satire and empathy. It exemplifies how comedians exploit illocutionary indirection to critique social values without alienating audiences—a balancing act crucial in politically sensitive contexts.

### **Broda Shaggi: Street Pragmatics and Everyday Resistance**

Broda Shaggi's persona embodies the Lagos "street hustler", irreverent, witty, and linguistically agile. His discourse blends Yoruba, Pidgin, and English to construct a resistant vernacular.

#### **Excerpt 4**

*NEPA Official: (Holding a ladder) Young man, move out of the way. Your compound owes #150,000 for electricity. I am disconnecting this line now!*

*Brother Shaggi: (Spitting on the floor, blocking the pole) Oga NEPA! Look at my face, do I look like a transformer?...for three months we did not see even one spark of light! .... Did you people wire our house to the sun?"*

*NEPA Official: That is not my business. Bring the receipt of payment or I climb this pole!*

*Brother Shaggi: (Pulls out a rusty cutlass) Climb it! Climb it and let me trim your trousers from the bottom! If you touch that wire, the ghost of my grandfather will use you to charge this phone!*

There is Speech Act Theory here as the dialogue moves rapidly through different types of speech acts, shifting from administrative authority to aggressive defence. The official relies on directives (“move out of the way”; “bring the receipt,” to assert institutional power. When he says, “I am disconnecting this line now!” it functions as a declarative/commissive. Pragmatically, Shaggi’s counter with an assertive masked as rhetorical question is pragmatically an expressive act communicating profound frustration and mockery. There are threats as commissives – a promise/threat of violence, to cancel the official’s institutional authority with immediate physical intimidation.

Looking at Cooperative Principle, there is the violation of truthfulness as Shaggi uses extreme hyperbole when he asks if their house was wired to the sun. he violates the maxim to emphasise that the bill is fictionally high and in disparity from actual consumption. The official flouts the law of relevance when he signals that NEPA does not operate on the logic of fair exchange “that’s not my business.” There is also the violation of the maxim of manner/clarity by introducing supernatural absurdity into a commercial dispute. The contextual implicature of the sun, reflects the unlimited scorching and unmetered energy and the cognitive effect is that the bill is insanely inflated. The transformer metaphor has implicature as the audience are used to fixing their own transformers, yet official demand money for them.

The optimal relevance is that the entire scene works because of shared cognitive environment between actors and the Nigerian audience. The official’s cold phrasing “bring the receipt or I climb”, requires zero processing effort from the audience to recognise the systemic lack of empathy in public utilities. The humour is found in the cognitive payoff: Shaggi using a rusty cutlass to solve a bureaucratic problem.

### **Excerpt 5**

*POLICEMAN: Why you no wear seatbelt?*

*SHAGGI: Officer, na hunger I dey belt since morning. ((uproarious laughter))*

This is a pragmatic deflection, wordplay, and social commentary delivered through Nigerian Pidgin. Looking at the maxim of quantity, Shaggi says just enough; his reply is brief and loaded. For maxim of quality, Shaggi has been

“belting hunger,” though technically not lying, but the statement could be misleading. The maxim of Relation is flouted; the answer is deliberately irrelevant yet contextually revealing. The implicature shifts focus from the traffic offense to systemic poverty. This indirection performs an illocutionary act of protest disguised as jest. The policeman’s authority is undermined through verbal dexterity, a face-threatening act, undermining the policeman’s authority through wit, completely subverting the intent of the question.

The perlocutionary acts include: laughter from the audience. The pun lands as comic surprise. It disarms the policeman as humour neutralises institutional authority. There is sympathy from the listeners who recognise the poverty reference; then embarrassment or speechlessness in the policeman who is caught off-guard, his authority momentarily suspended. The audience feels solidarity as Shaggi speaks for the poor citizens facing corrupt traffic police. A moment of power reversal comes as the powerless citizen outwits the uniformed authority figure through the ambiguous use of the meaning of belt, flouting the sub-maxim of avoiding ambiguity. Therefore, the policeman’s positive face which is his desire to be respected as an authority figure is threatened.

The presuppositions are that Brother Shaggi has not eaten, poverty is his lived reality, worrying about a seatbelt is a luxury of the comfortable, that the policeman represents a system that is indifferent to citizens’ survival and the audience shares the experience of hunger and economic hardship. These are taken for granted as shared knowledge. The conceptual metaphor “tighten your belt,” is a metaphor reactivated by context, in that it is collided with the literal belt of the policeman’s question. The collision reanimates both meanings, simultaneously producing the comic and critical effect.

#### **Excerpt 6**

*"INTERVIEWER: What can you offer this company?"*

*SHAGGI: Motivation! Because hunger no dey give up! ((cheers))*'''

This exchange operates across extreme register collision – the formal corporate interview, versus the raw language of survival. The interviewer gives a directive, requesting information and self-assessment and a test evaluating the candidate’s suitability and self-awareness. Brother Shaggi’s reply is assertive, offering motivation; confessional, revealing that motivation is driven by economic desperation and a complaint about poverty and hunger as lived reality. Here, Shaggi subverts the maxim of manner, offering a humorous but conceptually apt response. Hunger operates literally as deprivation, while

figuratively, it could be a drive, ambition, desire to succeed; the motivational self-help discourse as in, “I am hungry for success.” Audiences infer a critique of youth unemployment, the “motivated” yet economically stranded generation. Through implicature, humour becomes both linguistic deflection and social revelation.

Broda Shaggi’s “code-mixing” functions pragmatically to collapse class divides; his “street” speech enacts solidarity, making humour a participatory act of defiance.

### **Mark Angel Comedy: Pragmatics of Innocence and Moral Reflection**

Mark Angel’s skits, often featuring the child actor Emmanuella, employ innocence as a pragmatic strategy for moral commentary.

#### **Excerpt 7**

Uncle Denis: Success! I sent you to fetch water from the well since one hour ago! Where is the water?!

Success: (looking innocent, holding her stomach) Uncle, as I reached the well, my stomach started paining me. If I fetch that water, the pain will enter the water, and if you drink it, you will catch cholera. I love you too much to poison you, Uncle.

Uncle Denis (Dumbfounded) So ... you didn’t fetch it because you love me?”

Success: Yes, Uncle! You owe me #500 for saving your life.

For Speech Act Theory, Uncle Denis issues an aggressive directive disguised as a rhetorical question “Where is the water?” to demand accountability. Success counters with a series of assertives, “If I fetch that water, the pain will enter the water....” She manipulates the speech act from an admission of laziness into an act of medical prevention. The indirect directive – the bill of #500, is a directive demanding payment, changing from a disobedient child to a healthcare consultant charging a fee.

The cooperative principle of flouting the maxim of quality is expressed in stomach pain that cannot travel through a bucket to cause cholera. This scientific impossibility intentionally flouts truth to exploit Uncle Denis’s fear of disease. Flouting the maxim of relevance occurs when confronted with a missing chore, she introduces her personal health and deep affection for her uncle. This is irrelevant to her failure to fetch water, but it successfully hijacks the conversation. The Relevance Theory – “cholera” implicature: In the shared cognitive environment of many developing areas, cholera is a highly feared, water-borne killer. Success therefore triggers immediate danger signals in Uncle Denis’ mind. The processing effort for the audience is low because they

instantly recognise the classic African child tactic of using extreme, tragic lies to escape being beaten or scolded.

#### **Excerpt 8**

``UNCLE: *Tell your teacher I gave you money for the project.*

EMMANUELLA: *But Uncle, you said make we use am buy suya instead. ((audience laughter))``*

There are multiple illocutionary acts portraying a directive instructing Emmanuella to deliver a specific message. There is implicit commissive implying that this is the agreed story. There is deceptive assertion of relaying a false message and a coercive act pressuring a child to become complicit in adult deception and a face-saving act of attempting to protect his own reputation as a responsible guardian. The uncle is recruiting Emmanuella as an accomplice, asking her to corroborate a lie on his behalf. The child's utterance violates the maxim of manner (tact) and performs an assertive speech act that exposes adult hypocrisy. The presupposition, that lying to teachers is wrong, is shared culturally, so laughter becomes moral sanction. There is the presupposition that Emmanuella has not yet learned to lie to adults. And that gap between her innocence and her uncle's guilt, lies the crust of the entire comedy and the moral in the skit.

#### **Excerpt 9**

``MOTHER: *Emmanuella, did you finish your homework?*

EMMANUELLA: *I finished the part the Holy Spirit told me to do! ((laughter))``*

the locutionary act required a simply yes/no, while Emmanuella's answer smuggles in an extraordinary pragmatic power of invoking the divine as a shield against This humorous exaggeration flouts quality, evoking religious hypocrisy in Nigerian households. The audience infers the moral irony that adults often attribute irresponsibility to divine sanction. Through child-centered discourse, Mark Angel converts domestic humour into ethical pedagogy. It is presupposed here, that Emmanuella has weaponised the language of charismatic Christianity against parental authority. She has taken a genuine theological concept – the leading of the Holy Spirit and deployed it as a pragmatic escape hatch from homework accountability. It is the exploitation of a discourse system, knowing that the authority of the Holy Spirit outranks the mother. By invoking Him, she attempts to position herself above accountability.

### Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that Nigerian comedians employ pragmatic mechanisms, speech acts, implicature, and presupposition, as discursive strategies for constructing layered social critique on issues of corruption of leaders who do not provide amenities for the comfort of the masses, unemployment, and oppression of authority figures. The findings extend beyond thematic interpretation to explain how linguistic form interacts with cognitive inference to achieve humour and resistance.

First, the study finds that Basketmouth's speech acts often blend expressive, and assertive, functions, veiling social critique within humorous exaggeration. This mechanism operates through a cooperative imbalance: audiences infer his intended meaning by reconciling incongruity between literal absurdity and contextual realism. Irony, in this sense, becomes a pragmatic alignment device that allows Basketmouth to sustain solidarity while mocking pretentiousness.

Second, Broda Shaggi's, humour demonstrates the politics of everyday resistance. His deliberate violation of the maxims of Relation and Manner constructs implicatures that expose systemic inequalities. The inferential work required of the audience produces laughter intertwined with moral reflection. By using code-switching between Pidgin, Yoruba, and English, Shaggi transforms linguistic heterogeneity into an index of shared experience. The language of the street thus becomes a semiotic resource for negotiating power—its humor not escapist but insurgent.

Third, Mark Angel's, comedy reveals a distinct moral pragmatics of innocence. The child protagonist, Emmanuella, serves as an uncorrupted conduit of truth whose literalism subverts adult hypocrisy. Her violations of conversational expectations, particularly the maxims of Manner and Quality, yield implicatures that reposition humour as ethical commentary. The laughter she evokes is restorative, inviting collective introspection rather than derision. The perlocutionary effect of these utterances—amusement coexisting with moral discomfort, illustrates how pragmatic humour functions as social pedagogy.

Evidently, Nigerian comedy skits exemplify double-voiced discourse: humour entertains overtly while performing covert critique. This duality aligns with Bakhtin's (1981) notion of dialogism, but in pragmatic terms, it reflects a convergence of performative intention, inferential decoding, and shared sociocultural schema. The comedians' linguistic choices are not arbitrary; they



are systematically designed to exploit context for maximal relevance, producing humour that is simultaneously playful and political.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The findings substantiate the need for an integrated pragmatic model of humour. The interaction among Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, and Relevance Theory demonstrates that no single framework adequately explains the multidimensional nature of comedic meaning-making.

**Speech Act Theory reveals the performative core of humour.** Each joke is an action—a form of doing through saying—that negotiates social distance and moral authority. For example, when a comedian sarcastically praises corruption, the illocutionary act is not compliment but condemnation disguised as jest. Humour, therefore, functions as indirect resistance.

**The Cooperative Principle explains the mechanics of humour’s generation.** By flouting conversational maxims, comedians exploit shared expectations of cooperation to trigger implicature. Laughter occurs when audiences recognize the calculated breach of communicative norms and reconstruct intended meaning. Nigerian comedians, in particular, manipulate this principle to articulate critique without confrontation, a pragmatic strategy that thrives under socio-political constraint.

**Relevance Theory completes the interpretive circuit by explaining audience cognition.** The inferential processes through which hearers derive implicit meanings from overtly humorous acts reflect a uniquely participatory communication model. Nigerian audiences, steeped in contextual familiarity, engage in co-constructing meaning. This dynamic underscores that humor’s success is not unidirectional but dialogic.

Integrating these theories establishes what this study terms a “Pragmatic Synergy Model”, a framework positing that humor emerges through the interplay of performative intention (Speech Acts), cooperative manipulation (Gricean Maxims), and cognitive inference (Relevance). This model not only advances pragmatic theory but also repositions African humor as a site of theoretical innovation rather than empirical illustration.

### **Socio-Cultural Implications**

The study of Nigerian comedy offers valuable insights into how language mediates social awareness, especially in postcolonial contexts. Nigerian

comedians, as "linguistic citizens" (LeBlanc & Boudreau, 2016), perform a vital role in reimagining civic discourse. They use humour not merely as a form of entertainment but as a strategic tool for social reflection and critique. Their performances transform collective societal anxieties—such as corruption, inequality, and political disillusionment—into shared laughter. This process creates an accessible and vernacular medium for critique that resonates deeply with audiences. In this way, Nigerian comedy is not just about making people laugh but about fostering a collective understanding of social issues through humour. This function of humour aligns with African oral traditions, where jest, proverbs, and satire have historically been employed to convey truths indirectly (Achebe, 1975). The ability of comedians to craft humour that navigates complex socio-political terrain reflects a strong cultural continuity, linking contemporary Nigerian comedy with traditional African methods of social commentary.

Furthermore, the political economy of laughter is an essential aspect of Nigerian comedy, particularly in contexts of censorship and disillusionment. In such environments, humor becomes a survival strategy, with comedians skillfully manipulating implicature, presupposition, and irony to critique societal norms and political systems without triggering overt conflict. These comedic tools allow comedians to maintain sharp critiques while staying within the permissible boundaries of public discourse. This indirect communication creates space for satire to flourish, even in the face of oppressive circumstances (Adejumo, 2008).

Moreover, the audience's engagement with these performances turns humor into an interactive public sphere where meaning is negotiated rather than imposed. Laughter becomes a democratic practice, with the comedian and audience co-constructing meaning. This model of comedic engagement reflects the resilience of civic dialogue in Nigeria, where humor plays a crucial role in sustaining societal reflection and fostering social change (Adekunle, 2014; Adetunji, 2013). Thus, Nigerian comedians, by engaging in this dual performance of entertainment and critique, help maintain the dynamism of public discourse, offering a space where social issues can be discussed openly, albeit indirectly.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that Nigerian digital comedy embodies a sophisticated pragmatic architecture that transforms linguistic creativity into social critique. Through the triangulation of Speech Act Theory, the Cooperative Principle, and

Relevance Theory, the research has shown that humour operates simultaneously as a communicative, cognitive, and ethical process. Comedians like Basketmouth, Broda Shaggi, and Mark Angel exploit the elasticity of language to enact commentary on class, governance, and morality. Their use of indirectness, presupposition, and irony represents a distinctly African pragmatics, that privileges communal inference and contextual negotiation. Empirically, it demonstrates that humour, far from trivial, is a vital discursive mode for performing social resistance and moral pedagogy.

### **Future Researches**

Future studies should expand the scope of pragmatic inquiry by incorporating multimodal analysis that accounts for non-verbal cues, gesture, gaze, prosody, and audience response that co-construct humor. Since digital platforms now host interactive commentaries, analysing audience feedback could further illuminate how meaning circulates beyond performance. Additionally, comparative studies across African contexts, such as Ghanaian, Kenyan, or South African digital comedy, would enrich understanding of how pragmatic mechanisms adapt to cultural variation. Quantitative methods could complement qualitative approaches to trace frequency patterns in speech acts or implicature types.

### **For Educators and Linguistic Scholars**

Departments of linguistics, communication, and performance studies should incorporate humour pragmatics into their curricula. Doing so would not only bridge theoretical linguistics and cultural studies but also encourage students to appreciate the socio-political potential of language play. Pragmatics provides a toolset for analysing real-world communication—where meaning often resides in what is not said.

### **For Comedians and Content Creators**

Comedians should recognize their performative agency as civic educators. By maintaining linguistic authenticity and ethical responsibility, they can sustain humour's corrective power without compromising its entertainment value. Attention to pragmatic subtlety, how implicature or presupposition carries critique, can deepen audience engagement and social resonance.

### **For Policymakers and Media Regulators**

Government agencies should treat humour not as subversion but as a form of constructive civic feedback. Policies that encourage creative freedom can harness comedy's potential for national consciousness. Media regulators

should promote ethical humor that critiques responsibly, reinforcing dialogue rather than division.

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