Preface

Analysing Language and Humour in Online Communication brings together a group of articles which address the current and important issue of humour in online platforms. Its motivation derives not only from the relaxant effects humour generates in the virtual communities, but also from the progressive transactional significance humour is gaining in a multitude of global cyber settings.

There are 15 chapters in the book, written by scholars from America and Africa. Their thematic engagement scope transcends their geographical spaces, courtesy of the Internet which has collapsed world boundaries and shrunk dispersed societal differences. This translates into cross-boundary humour sharing, a clear feature of the digital age, which of necessity, gets tracked and accounted for in a number of the chapters.

The jokes in the volume are sourced from Facebook, blogs, YouTube, chat rooms, emails, Yahoo messenger, Short Message Service (SMS) and online video distribution programmes which typify the virtual space. Twenty contributors, some of whom are co-authors, develop the central theme of humour from several experiential and theoretic perspectives. These give the chapters a taste of variegation and appeal, dwelling on issues from a number of American, Nigerian, and Cameroonian socio-cyber encounters.

In Chapter 1, Jeffrey Demsky in the article “Searching for Humour in Dehumanization: American Sitcoms, the Internet, and the Globalization of Holocaust Parodies” focuses on the humourous depiction of Nazism and Holocaust by selected American sitcom writers. His search in and analysis of South Park, Family Guy, and Robot Chicken shows demonstrate the comic writers’ construction of absurd historical realities, how this enhances disremembering, and how Hulu and YouTube have globalised the accounts. Akin Odebunmi and Simeon Ajiboye handle the use of wits in selected Facebook jokes (tagged Akpos Jokes) largely shared within, but obviously not restricted to, Nigerian virtual communities. Their analysis, conducted with a number of theoretic traditions, shows that characters in the jokes orient to a priori or emergent common ground and intention to recontextualise particular Nigerian social and cultural experiences such as fraud, materialism and mischief.

In Chapter 3, “More Than a Joking Matter: Humour and Political Engagement in Ogas at the Top,” Funmi Olubode-Sawe discusses the generation of humour in a puppet political satire programme, tagged Oga at the Top series (OATT), which feature prominent personalities in the Nigerian political space. Olubode-Sawe notes the deployment of such humour creation mechanisms as the use of puppet doubles of national leaders, re-interpretation of contemporary happenings, musical parody, verbal humour, inter-textuality and physical humour in the contextualisation of puppetry and corruption in the series. She points out the humorous and satirical dimensions to the series and comments on the societal and academic value of online distribution of videos. In a study of the language of blogs, Bimbola Idowu-Faith conducts a stylistic exploration of the nature and mode humourous conversations in selected blogs.
She reports on the way humour is initiated and created, and how the humourist constrains the responses of the audience in a symmetrically discursive manner, which strengthens social bonds, by sustaining entertainment and motivating blog users.

Ibrahim Esan Olaosun studies the social and communicative content of selected visual constructions of humour on Facebook from a visual semiotic perspective. His findings indicate that constructed visual humour embeds and interrogates religion, education, morals, love, health, politics and a number of other social phenomena. In another contribution on visual humour, Wincharles Coker and Stephen Kwame Dadugblor examine a rhetoric of online visual humour premised on interpretive netnography. They develop a framework for the exploration of rhetorical functions of humour in virtual spaces. Arguing from a function-loaded perspective on humour, they identify four basic rhetorical arguments or rhetographs: gubernatorial, institutional, cultural, and grotesque.

Chapter 7 examines the linguistic features of Klint Da Drunk’s ‘Alcoholic’ Talk Show (ATS) sourced from Youtube. The features include lingual distortions, speech dysfluencies and gestural patterns, observed to characterise stupor-tainted utterances that generate humour and laughter. In Chapter Eight, “Language and Humour in Cameroon Social Media”, Camilla Arundie Tabe investigates the forms of linguistic humour in Cameroon e-mail, Facebook, Yahoo Messenger and mobile telephone SMS. The author, using the incongruity and the incongruity-resolution theory of humour perception, shows that humour in the sampled data flouts Gricean maxims, and displays variation in spelling and sound devices. His findings also indicate three discourse functions of Cameroonian online humour: pleasure, intimacy and maintenance of cultural values, achieved through the use of markers of humour such as emoticons, special repetition of letters and punctuation marks, real-life anecdotes and oral naming patterns with peculiar connection to Cameroon.

In Chapter 9, the contribution, “Can I Get in on the Joke, Too?” Analysing Racial Humour within the Public/Private Realm of the Internet investigates the strategic management of online race-sensitive jokes. The author, Fredrick Gooding, interrogates the uncensored public broadcast of humour based on racial prejudices. In Chapter 10, “Discursive Representation of Power in Humour in Naijaboutooksfjokes.com,” Rotimi Taiwo is concerned with the way power is exercised in humour in an online discursive context. He argues that humour in Naijaboutooksfjokes.com contests social and symbolic order among the subscribers to the site, thus demonstrating power through stereotyping and display of Otherness. The next contribution, by Inya Onwu, addresses the pragmatics of humour in a Nigerian university’s departmental chat rooms. With a mix of theoretical insights, Onwu identifies four humour types - canned jokes, punning/wordplay, question and answer jokes, and hyperbole/overstatement. He connects these humour types with four pragmatic acts: eliciting laughter, electioneering, teasing, and overstating.

In Chapter 12, Akin Adetunji analyses the properties of addressivity in Joan Rivers stand-up comedy. He identifies markers such as repetition, disfluencies, formulaicity, paralanguage, parenthetical expressions, figurative language, direct address, discourse markers as theoretic descriptions of the comic events. The distinction of the rhetorical voice is marked off by the ubiquitous use of parenthetical expressions. He argues that Rivers’ overt audience interaction and her thematic preoccupation with social, biographical and autobiographical issues, which are macro acts of addressivity, foreground the complex intersection of the speaker (comedian), the listener (present audience), and the third person/superaddressee (non-present audience/previous discourses). Tayo Lamidi, in Chapter 13, “Humour in Visual-Verbal Code-Pairing in Selected Comments on the Facebook Forum,” explores the potential of interpreting visual verbal texts from the perspective of multimodality and intertextuality. He investigates how visual-verbal code pairing in the texts becomes humorous within specific contexts and the role of
incongruity as a major ingredient of humour. He presents the view that the two parts to the visual-verbal humour have the tendency to constitute a composite whole, forming the unexpected portion, while the background to the joke serves as the expected.

In “Socio-semiotics of Humour in Ebola Awareness Discourse on Facebook,” Chimuanya Lilly and Ajiboye Esther examine humorous graphics, texts and memes posted on Facebook during the heat of the Ebola virus epidemic that was experienced in parts of West Africa in 2014. Using Kress and Leeuwén’s approach to multimodal discourse analysis, the authors argue that the posts both indexicate humour and informal awareness campaign cues. The contribution on contextual beliefs and pragmatic strategies of humour in Akpos Jokes by Oluwatomi Adeoti and Ibukun Filani identifies shared knowledge of language and knowledge of situation and events in Nigeria as the assumptions upon which humour in the jokes are based. It also picks out the use implicature and stereotyping of the character of Akpos as strategies for the achievement of humorous effects in the jokes.

The methodologies and analytical approaches employed by the contributors generate a clear alignment with humour research procedures and genre expectations in the discipline. These place the book, *Analysing Language and Humour in Online Communication*, on a competitive pedestal, and readily recommend it to readers who are interested in how online humour gets lexicalised and unpacked in a professionally incisive and impressive manner.

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