

# **Discourse Representation of Nigerian Children's Experiences and Humour in Select Comedy Shows of Emmanuella**

**by**  
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## **Introduction**

Children's experiences the world over are complex and largely culture specific. Their complexities range from social relationships with adults, victims of societal circumstances, allowance or otherwise of their fundamental human rights, just to mention a few. This paper examines how such experiences are represented by media in a comedy-like show starring Emmanuella Samuel. Emmanuella Samuel is a talented Nigerian child comedienne born on July 22, 2010. She is Mark Angel's niece and the duo have produced over 100 short comedy shows in Nigeria. They have more than 2.5 million viewers and about 430,000 subscribers on their YouTube channel. Emmanuella recently got the rare opportunity to be featured on Cable News Network, CNN, to the delight of many viewers in the world.

There are two interrelated strands packaged in Emmanuella's comedy show: Nigerian children's socio-cultural experiences and age-dependent humour. First, in an adult dominant society like Nigeria, children are not so socially empowered and their rights are largely subjective, which reflects in their socio-cultural experiences. Age-dependant humour has received little scholarly attention in Africa and this study therefore investigates the children's experience in symmetric and asymmetric social relationships in informal settings and food related attitudes within the humorous discourse on the show.

Significantly, humour scholarship has gained currency for about three decades now; although while it is not an exclusively adult exploration, more scholarly attention has been so directed. Children's humour particularly manifests socio-cultural experiences of children. Differentiating children's humour from adults', Polimeni and Reiss (2006) opine that by about 7 or 8 years old, children's humour approaches that of an adult, although it understandably lacks the same richness. Meanwhile, Apte (1985) argues that surveillance of the anthropological literature on children's humour gleaned two points: one, Children mimicking adults in a comical manner may be universal; two, Humour involving ridicule is always more common in children compared to adults. Adults humour is distinctly structured and patterned toward relaxation of physical audience in most cases as it is in the Nigerian standup comedy. However, contemporary children's humour is more characterised within the media because of the significant role the media plays in children's discourse, especially in the way they are represented.

Few studies on children's humour have centred on psychological adjustment (Claire, et al, 2015; Martin et al, 2003; Sherman, 1988; Ziv, 1984), and how humour can aid children's understanding (Honig, 1988). However, children's use of humour in ongoing social relationships has not been given adequate attention (Lyon, 2006), especially in

Nigerian context. The present study, therefore, investigates Nigerian children's socio-cultural experiences that foreground children's humour in the selected episodes of Emmanuella and Mark Angel comedy with a view to establishing the pragmatic implications of the selected interactions. The study is premised on two theoretical perspectives: Levinson's notion of activity type and humour theories of superiority and disparagement. Consequent upon this, the current study attempts a significant contribution to media representation of children's experiences with respect to humour discourse within linguistic scholarship in Nigerian context.

## **Activity types**

The notion of activity types propounded by Levinson (1979, 1992) is based on Wittgenstein's language game, which implies that "understanding a language, and by implication having a grasp of the meaning of utterances, involves knowing the nature of the activity in which the utterances play a role" (Wittgenstein 1958:1). Levinson (1992:69) avows that his notion of an activity type is *sui generis* because "it refers to any culturally recognised activity, whether or not that activity is coextensive with a period of speech or indeed whether any task takes place in it at all" (cf. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974). The focus of this theoretical scholarship is on participants' use of language, which is constrained by the activity they perform and the physical location of the talk.

According to Levinson (1979:368), the notion of activity type refers to "a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions." This means that activity types have their own norms of interaction which can be specified and compared in terms of the structured sequence of actions of which they are composed, and in terms of the participants involved in the activities (cf. Dale, Davies and Wei, 1997:657). To this end, Bourdieu (1991) asserts that the meaning of an utterance is directly proportional to the status of the speaker as well as the role he/she plays in the interactional context.

The model's belief is that there is a strong expectation about the function or goal of an utterance at a point in the proceedings of an activity based on the strict constraints that determine the contributions of each interactant in the activity. This expectation justifies the focus of every activity which has a corresponding set of inferential schemata (Levinson, 1979:72). These schemata help to determine what one says and the kind of inferences that will be made from what is said (Levinson, 1992:97). This means that there are sets of inferences that go with any type of activity based on constraint placed on such interaction. Thomas (1995:190) summarises the interactional features of activity types thus: the goals of the participants, allowable contributions, the degree to which Gricean maxims are adhered to or are suspended, the degree to which interpersonal maxims are adhered to or are suspended, turn-taking and topic control and the manipulation or pragmatics parameters. In summary, Levinson believes that participation in any activity type is goal-directed, which is why individuals in such

activity may manipulate various pragmatic parameters through particular behaviours, including language behaviour.

## Humour theories

Humour is usually multilayered in nature; consequently, a single humour theory cannot satisfactorily unpack all humour types in humour exploration. The superiority theory, according to Berger (1987) and Cooper (2008), centres on how humour is a manifestation of a feeling of superiority over others or over an individual's former situation. The theory relates to how a humour-maker creates humorous utterances to downplay the personality of his subject or show his or her inferiority, which could be through wit and sarcasm.

On the other hand, the disparagement humour theory, popularised by Ferguson and Ford (2008) is primarily referred to as remarks that (are intended to) elicit amusement through the denigration, derogation, or belittlement of a given target (e.g., individuals, social groups, political ideologies, material possessions) (p.284). They argue that this humour type is distinctive among forms of humour in that it both diminishes and reinterprets its subject. It uniquely denigrates its target while stifling challenge or criticism (Ford and Ferguson, 2004).

These theories are significant to this study. Activity type humour is deployed to pragmatically frame the Nigerian children's experiences that prompt the humour types analysed in *Mark Angel Comedy* featuring Emmanuella. Specifically, the theory helps to unpack Emmanuella's language use and her interlocutors within the affordances of the particular activity performed in its physical context, and to determine culturally recognised activity vis-à-vis what is culturally expected of each interactant. The two humour theories are significant as lenses to insights that foreground children's humour types which characterise the discourse and its pragmatic functions.

## Methodology

Twenty-five sampled episodes of Emmanuella and *Mark Angel Comedy* show constitute the data for this study. These were downloaded from the official website of the group ([www.markangelcomedy.com](http://www.markangelcomedy.com)) out of which ten were purposively selected. Their titles are: *Cho-Cho-Cho*, *How Much*, *I Don't Eat Frogs*, *Spell It*, *Respect Yourself*, *Tea is Free*, *Why*, *We serve Pork*, *Let's go and Beg Again*, *Question and Answer game* and *Fat*. These were carefully watched and transcribed using Jefferson (2004)'s transcription notations and were analysed with Levinson's notion of activity type and humour theories of superiority and disparagement as the theoretical framework. The data were first stratified into symmetrical and asymmetrical encounters, classified into broad discursive issues on the basis of the activities and their contextual configurations; investigate the humour types and strategies deployed in the discourse. Texts exemplifying discursive issues and humour types, explained within the provisions of the theoretical perspectives, were randomly selected.

## **Data analysis and findings**

The analysis broadly captures two Nigerian children's socio-cultural experiences and the emergent children's humour types which are simultaneously discussed. Each manifests the pragmatic dimension of the contextual indexes and strategies that characterised the experiences and the dimensions of humour in the sampled data. There are two macro socio-cultural experiences highlighted in the data: social relationships and food related experiences. Each of these will be analysed through activity type principles.

### **Social Relationship Experience**

The culturally recognised activities captured in this category are children-centred and neighbourhood related matters, involving both child-child and child-adult relationships in symmetrical and asymmetrical encounters. Three specific discourse types identified here are children's play, adult hostility, and offensive remarks designed to ridicule. An authoritarian adult-child relationship in the observed culture permeated the analysis in this section. The encounters that manifest these discourse types are configured in the contexts of excitement and mischief.

### **Children's Play within Contexts of Excitement and Mischief**

Play explains the enjoyable activities children engage in, such as using toys, chasing each other and taking part in games. Children are usually excited when they engage in plays. The types of children's activity identified in this study are of two forms: taxonomic game and class difference toy-induced play. Both are forms of social relationship engagements leading to witty humour within the contexts of excitement and mischief marked by offensive and counter offensive strategies.

### **Taxonomic game**

The taxonomic game relates to educative play children engage in during their leisure time as a form of relaxation, usually between one another. This scene shows the children giving the names of animals according to their kindred thereby showing their affiliative progeny, captured in Excerpt 1:

#### *Excerpt 1*

1. ( )
2. Emmanuella: =If I come from a chicken family, my father will be a cock, my mother
3. Will be a hen, then I will be a chick↑
4. Friend 2: [ ]If I come from a sheep family, my father will be a ram, my mother will
5. Bean ewe, and I will be a lamb↑
6. Friend 1: = If I come from a lion family, my father will be a lion, my mother will be

7.                    a lioness then I will be a cub ↑  
8. Emmanuella: If I come from a dog family, my father will be a dog, my mother will be  
9.                    a bitch, then I will be a puppy.  
10. Mr Nelson:    ((felt disturbed again. He curses Emmanuella in Nigerian Igbo language))  
11.                    You won't close your mouth. Cho-cho-cho-cho-cho-ehhhhhh  
12.                    Ok (0.3)  
13.                    If you come from a stupid family ((overlap))  
14. Friend 2:      [ ]J-ES-U-S↑  
15. Mr Nelson:    Your father is an idiot, your mother is a fool. What will you be?  
16.                    (0.4)  
17. Emmanuella: Then I will be your daughter @@@@  
18. Mr Nelson:    ((very angry, he chases Emmanuella and her two friends))  
19. Children:      = R\_U\_N↑  
20.                    Please: (0-.2) children don't insult your elder ones (05)

*(Emmanuella and Mark Angel Comedy, Episode 73)*

Symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships are featured in the excerpt as pragmatic parameters. The symmetrical aspect shows equal power display in the way Emmanuella and two of her friends engage in this pleasurable play to test their intellectual capacity based on the school knowledge they have acquired. The children's utterances at the early stage of the interaction clearly show their alignment to the activity they are involved in. The children's engagement depicts an educative play as they display the knowledge of the taxonomic names of animals like chicken, sheep, lion and dog in lines 1-7. This shows the innocent nature of the children who engage in the play without nursing any bias, other than the purpose of having fun, thereby creating an idyllic atmosphere for one another. From the above, Emmanuella initiates the play while her friends easily share her knowledge as evident in the way they simply flow with the tide of the joke. By implication, Nigerian children engage in communal lifestyle which enables children within the same neighbourhood to come together for fun purposes, usually after school hours. Similarly, it is a pointer that children easily get excited whenever they come in contact with their peers especially when such contact triggers play as an activity. Excerpt1 demonstrates that the children at this stage already recognise the family hierarchical structure of father, mother and children, which invariably confirms that they are not unaware of their position and, arguably, the socio-cultural roles expected of them within Nigerian culture. In children's discourse, play is usually stimulated by the context of excitement (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

Olajimbiti (2017:185) defines the context of excitement as "the state of feeling or condition of lively enjoyment or pleasant anticipation, which is capable of stimulating happiness, eagerness and passion." In his view, the psychological quest of excitement stimulates children to engage in play. Excerpt 1 equally demonstrates that when children are in a state of great ecstasy, they have the tendency to be excessively playful, which, however, could create a disturbance for any adult who is not predisposed to such jocularly. Hence, the scenario in lines 10-12 where Mr. Nelson feels disturbed by the children's noise aptly captures this unwelcome comedy. Subsequently, this incrementally indexes an asymmetrical dimension into the interaction, which

contemporaneously changes the context from excitement to mischief. The context of mischief showcases situations where children exhibit naughty and age dependent behaviours. He introduces abusive taxonomy to disrupt the children's pleasurable animal taxonomy. It also changes the status of the play from prosocial to antisocial. The introduction of abusive trends, which contaminate the funfair atmosphere the children have enjoyed, surprises one of the co-interlocutors; shown by the emotional feelings she expresses in line 14 "J-ES-U-S"; represented by loudness. Strict constraint on what the children can contribute could also be inferred by unexpected digressional change. This is in tandem with Levinson (1992:79) that "strict constraints on contributions to any particular activity, there are corresponding strong expectation about the functions that any utterances at a certain point in the proceeding can be fulfilling".

In spite of the contextual constraint of the culture of respect for elders which should warrant Emmanuella's silence, she cleverly orients to the manipulation of pragmatic parameter of social distance and thereby provisionally subverting the age hierarchy.. As a result, lines 15- 18 configure a witty humour, a form of superiority humour, which entails using words in a clever way to reduce tension and to amuse the audience and, in this context, it is deployed to ridicule adult abusive nature. The adult here introduces abusive digression into the play, especially with the intention of reducing the human dignity of Emmanuella, the leader of the group, who in turn identifies a humourous responsiveness with her retort to the abuse. Mr. Nelson becomes offensive to Emmanuella by saying that if her father is an "idiot" and her mother "a fool". But because of the power differential between adults and children in Nigerian culture, she is not permitted to riposte the same offensive words. Instead, she becomes clever and infuses Mr. Nelson into the abusive trend in line 17. The two pragmatic strategies displayed in this interaction based on intentions of the interlocutors are offensive and counter offensive. Offensive strategy is a means of launching an attack against the personality of an individual or people by deploying linguistic or extra linguistic means to cause an upset. A counteroffensive strategy, on the other hand, is a set of attacks, linguistic or extra-linguistic, put up to defend against a perceived attack as a reprisal. Mr. Nelson deploys the offensive strategy as evident in line 15, while Emmanuel employs counteroffensive strategy in line 17. It becomes noticeable from his countenance, having realised that he has been insulted by the girl and the way she (Emmanuella) runs away out of his reach. The whole comical scenario presupposes an adaptive response to antisocial behaviour in an asymmetrical encounter. It is noteworthy to stress that the relationship between humour, comedy, and joke could be pragmatically tracked using humour sense within a particular contextual frame. Tracing this, Lyon (2006) avers that a sense of humour is deployed to mock or to tease in a hostile manner with the ability to tell a joke and the intelligence to appreciate a joke as depicted in the scenario above. Both are enunciated in the way Emmanuella shares the knowledge of the abusive taxonomic game introduced by Mr. Nelson and by employing a corresponding set of inferential schemata.

### **Class Difference Toy-induced Play**

Toy-induced play explains the playful time enhanced by attention captivating objects. Toys amuse children more and studies have shown how toys have shaped gender identity formation in children (Gee, 2003). At childhood, children begin to form their perspectives and worldviews in some ways by the toys they are attracted to. The social significance of toys relating to children also reflects class differences between the privileged and the less privileged in economic class-conscious Nigerian society. This is explicated in Excerpt 2 which captures a shift from symmetrical mischief display to asymmetrical mischief display humourously; as a reflection of Levinson's view that "activity types help to determine how what one says will be 'taken'- that is, what kinds of inferences will be made from what is said" (1992:97).

## Excerpt 2

Background: In her friend's house where her mother is doing some laundry. The two children are very close to each other. Emmanuella is playing with her pair of slippers while her friend is playing with her toy.

1. Omotola: ((throws her toy away))
2. Emmanuella: ((picks it up))
3. Omotola: Give me!.... (0.5)
4. ((She winks her eyes against Emmanuella))
5. Emmanuella: ((retaliate: She winks her eyes))
6. ((The two kids continue with this exchange.
7. By the time Omotola's mother looks at them she only sees
8. Emmanuella with the mocking gestures))
9. Rita: Ehshhhhhh What is the meaning of that face↑
10. =Do you even know what you look like?
11. Emmanuella: [ ] But it's your daughter that started doing it↑
12. Omotola: = Mummy I did not do anything ohhh
13. Emmanuella: = Ehshhhhhh, you....
14. Rita: [ ] Shut up and stop that nonsense and mind your business. ( She hisses)
15. ((The two children resume the exchange of mocking gestures))
16. ((Again Emmanuella is caught by Rita))
17. Rita: I thought I warned you to stop making that ugly face hmmm?
18. Stupid girl. Come on stop making face↑.
19. Emmanuella: = Why?
20. Rita: [ ] Because when I was a kid like you my mummy warned me that
21. If I make that face I would be ugly forever...↑
22. Emmanuella: = Hmmm. No wonder..... It is obvious that you didn't listen to her↑
23. Rita: Me:::

*(Emmanuella and Mark Angel Comedy, Episode 76)*

The interaction above pictures toy-induced play and the exchange of abusive gestures which are captured in the context of mischief, although the toys are a marginal starting point for the children's competition. From the background, the toy-induced play shows the social class of the children, while Omotola is a privileged child owing to the type of

toy she possesses, Emmanuella's situation depicts her as a less privileged child because she turns her shoes into a toy. Line 3 shows Omotola as a discriminator who is not willing to share her toy with Emmanuella, especially in the presence of her mother. The mischief nature in the children comes to the fore as they engage in an exchange of abusive gestures. Within the activity type framework, Omotola's intention for initiating the abusive gesture against Emmanuella is to show superiority over her. Seeing this as a mockery, Emmanuella returns the abusive gesture which continues until Rita, Omotola's mother, intervenes. Her intervention projects some level of bias and fault finding which Emmanuella resists in line 11, and denial is one of the mischievous acts of children (Greene and Hogan, 2005) as displayed by Omotola in line 12. Rita plays a peacemaker role between the duo by displaying an asymmetrical power to warn and give them orders: "Shut up and stop that nonsense and mind your business." The children shortly resume their abusive gestures, mocking each other, and again Rita catches Emmanuella. This time Rita becomes offensive by using the foul utterance "stupid girl" against Emmanuella. Although she tries to check Emmanuella's mischievous act, her harsh words can be best described as abusive correction. She deploys her asymmetrical power again by giving an order, but Emmanuella challenges the order by asking "why?" in line 19. This interrogative adverbial is to demand a reason for which she has to stop the abusive gesture. Significantly, it is a major difference between socio-culturally traditional trained Nigerian children and contemporary Nigerian children because the former promptly obey orders without questioning their adults' authority, while the latter query adults' orders under the guise of civilisation.

Rita relates the reason the abusive gestures must be stopped by Emmanuella to a handed-down tradition, a form of veneration taboo in Nigerian culture to curtail children's excesses. Reiterating the words of her mother, Rita says, "If I make that face I would be ugly forever." Again, Emmanuella explores the opportunity to throw a reprisal offence at Rita, an example of disparaging humour. Disparaging humour addresses the use of criticism or unpleasant remarks that show a lack of respect. By implication, Emmanuella's response suggests that Rita was disobedient to her mother, which is why she is ugly. In Nigerian culture, a child is not so socially empowered that he/she will tell an adult that they are ugly. The humorous status of being antisocial in order to take advantage of Rita's corrective measure shows Emmanuella's clever way of using words in a comically humorous, but abusive manner.

### **Adult hostility**

Adult hostility describes the unfriendly nature of the older people in the way they relate with children. This could engender maltreatment, abuse and circumstantial exploitation of children given their dependent status. Such hostility varies from culture to culture and is situationally determined and could be in the form of physical or verbal abuse. These are both captured in Emmanuella's comedy shows, for they reflect the nature of adult hostility against children in Nigeria. The excerpt below demonstrates how the comedienne humorously mocked this form of hostility.

### **Excerpt 3**



**Background:** Auntie X maltreats Ngozi as she helps to plait her hair under the guise of correction. Emmanuella is seen beside them observing the situation, though she pretends to be reading.

1. Auntie X: ((to Ngozi)) KEEP YOUR HEAD WELL, k-e-e-p y-o-ur head well.
2. Ngozi: ((she adjusted her sitting position))
3. Auntie X: if you don't keep this head well, I will help you and break it.
4. ( ) ((She turns Ngozi's head violently in an attempt to correct her))
5. Keep your head well as human being. Stop doing your head like oluku
6. Emmanuella: ((she opens her mouth widely, yawning))
7. Auntie X: E- e-maunell. Doesn't your uncle, Mark Angel, give you food to eat?
8. Emmanuella: = Auntie good afternoon↑
9. Auntie X: [ ] How many times will you greet me today? You said afternoon!!!!
10. ((She eyes Emmanuella disparagingly))
11. ((She turns to Ngozi again))You keep your head well. Or this thing
12. will enter your eye now ↑
13. Emmanuella: ((She yawns again with her mouth widely open))
14. Auntie X: E-m-m- a-nue-lla, don't you have manners? Is this how to yawn?
15. Emmanuella: ((Defending herself)) But I used my hand to cover it.
16. Auntie X: = But you did Hurhurhurrrrrrr ((mimicking her))
17. (o.3) Nonesense.... ((she hisses))
18. ((Again, she turns to Ngozi)) Keep your head well. Let me keep
19. doing your hair
20. Emmanuella: ((She yawns again with her mouth widely open))
21. Auntie X: Don't swallowed me here:::;, don't swallow me!
22. Emmanuella: = Auntie, don't worry, I will not swallow you. I don't eat frog↑
23. Auntie X: [ ] YEEEEI ((she feels greatly insulted))

*(Emmanuella and Mark Angel Comedy, Episode 97)*

The foregoing showcases asymmetrical power display and circumstantial exploitation as forms of hostility between Auntie X and Ngozi which extends to Emmanuella. The age differential between the duo assents to the asymmetrical power display. The identity of Auntie X is not known but she is likely to be one of Ngozi's neighbours who must have been compelled by a higher order to help plait Ngozi's hair as is common in the communal lifestyle of rural society in Nigerian context. Lines 1-5 reflect hostility against Ngozi: shouting evidenced by the loudness in Auntie's voice in line 1, the threat of breaking Ngozi's head in line 3, the violent turning of Ngozi's head in line 4, comparing Ngozi to "oluku" (an Igbo term for a stupid person) in line 5 are all forms of impolite behaviours and utterances constituting hostility against the little girl Ngozi.

Lines 6-10 capture insult, in the form of hypercorrection, and a polite defense in the interaction between Auntie X and Emmanuella. Auntie X raises an abusive rhetorical question in line 7 rather than correcting her when Emmanuella yawns in an inappropriate manner in line 6 as she opens her mouth widely without covering it,. In response to this, Emmanuella orients to a cultural routine as she politely greets her in

line 8, by using the honourific name calling method. Rebuke and insult in lines 9 and 10 also give credence to adult hostility against the children. This trend continues in line 14, with abusive words: “don’t you have manners?” The act of polite defense put up by Emmanuella in line 15, shows how submissive children could be to adults in a hostile atmosphere, especially in a Nigerian context where children are not so socially empowered to interrupt or challenge the power of adults. The persistence of mockery and abuse against Emmanuella in lines 16-17, adroitly externalises the abuse of power the adult displays against helpless children.

Condemnation and humour expression are illustrated in lines 20-23. Aunty X deploys a condemnatory strategy in line 21 to rebuke Emmanuella’s manner of yawning. The expression: *Don’t swallowed me here:::,, don’t swallow me!* is a way of rebuking a bad attitude in Nigerian culture. Her expression is a manifest exaggeration of the size of Emmanuella’s mouth, which means her mouth is wide enough to swallow a human being. Realising this as an offensive act and her use of an adult power domineering instinct, Emmanuella deploys an adaptive offensive response through the use of metaphoric name calling as a reprisal in line 23, describing Auntie X as a frog.

This is humorous because of the way Emmanuella deploys the derogatory metaphor, ‘frog’, to describe Auntie X as a reprisal to negotiate the offensive act. In Nigerian parlance, it is derogatory to describe anyone as a frog because the semantics of a frog in this context suggest ‘ugly’ and ‘useless’. This is captured within the context of mischief where a child has to respond in an offensive manner to adult’s hostility or adult intolerance of children. The humour type expressed is witticism, which is using words in a clever and funny way to relegate the personality of one’s interlocutor. This is expressed through offensive and counter offensive strategies as shown in Excerpt 3. Although the comedienne’s humorous expression is antisocial, such attitudes are mildly allowed in comedy discourse.

### **Offensive Remark to Ridicule**

Another social relationship activity depicted in the Emmanuella comedy show is the offensive remark to ridicule body structure. It refers to the use of unkind remarks about the physiognomy of an individual to look stupid with the intention to cause contemptuous laughter. This manifests sarcasm within an asymmetrical encounter as represented in the excerpt below.

#### **Excerpt 4**

Background: Victoria and Kachi are sitting down, reading a book. Suddenly, Victoria observes Kachi’s physiognomy carefully, noticing how fat she becomes by the day. Emmanuella, a passerby, is invited to validate the claim.

1. Victoria: But Kachi (0.2) You are getting fat oh
2. Kachi: Me! ((She checks her body)) Getting fat? How can you say that?
3. I am not getting fat ↑

4. Victoria: =I said you are getting fat.
5. Kachi: = See, you better stop that.... I said I am not getting fat (0.3)
6.                   me that is taaalll and plumpy, you say I am getting fat... I don't like
7.                   that oh. You better stop it. You better mind your own business.
8.                   ((Emmanuella in her school uniform with her school bag, passing by.
9.                   Kachi calls her))
10. Kachi: Eh hh, Emmanuella, come here ↑
11. Emmanuella: [ ] Aunty, good afternoon...
12. Kachi: = Emmanuella (.)
13. Emmanuella: = Aunty
14. Kachi: = Look at me (0.2) am I getting fat↑
15. Emmanuella: ((She observes Kachi from head to toe. She shakes her head in disapproval))
16.                You are not getting fat, you are already fat.
17. Kachi: ((attempts to beat Emmanuella)) Come on get away. (0.3)
18.                I am not getting fat, I am only adding flesh.
19. Emmanuella: [ ] Yes, fat flesh...
20. Kachi:           = Look at this little girl oh... do you know what it means to be fat?
21. Emmanuel:   (0.4) see Aunty, I know five fat people in this compound and
22.                you are three of them↑
23. Kachi: ((surprised, she opens her mouth to imagine the insult))
24. Emmanuella: [ ] You better start drinking slim tea::
25. Background   ((@@@@@@@@@))

*(Emmanuella and Mark Angel Comedy, Episode 69)*

Lines 1-9A reflect asymmetrical power display between Victoria and Kachi where the duo exchange words on the issue of being fat. Kachi controls the interaction to the extent of curtailing Victoria's opinion. The Invitation of Emmanuella into the ongoing discussion by Kachi shows third party opinion for validation of truth about Kachi's physical appearance. The age differential between Emmanuella and Kachi becomes noticeable in the manner in which she was invited. Kachi intrudes into Emmanuella's plan without any show of politeness, apology and courtesy. Emmanuella complies because of the shared socio-cultural knowledge in Nigerian that empowers an older person to exercise such power. Expectedly, the younger girl orients to cultural routine as she greets Kachi in line 11: "Aunty, good afternoon," within an asymmetrical context. The manner of the phatic interaction presupposes familiarity between the interactants.

With this familiarity in mind, Kachi's expectation from Emmanuella is a positive alignment to enhance her public face. Contrariwise, Emmanuella's response to Kachi's question in lines 14-16 indicates two things. First, the children's gestural language (shaking of her head) which is a non-verbal communication peculiar to children or childhood. It could be misinterpreted because a child's intention may be different from

the semantic content of her gestural language. Second, is the orientation to sarcasm as a humour within the context of mischief. Sarcasm describes the state of saying the opposite of what you really mean in order to make an unkind joke. Semantically, especially in a Nigerian context, the shaking of one's head indicates disapproval, which would have aligned with Kachi's expectation, but she quickly disconfirms this as she adds that: "You are not getting fat, you are already fat." This is humorous because Kachi's expectation was not met and the manner with which this was made known depicts a face-threatening act. She consequently feels offended, which is why she attempts to beat Emmanuella in line 16.

Kachi orients to a self-consolatory trajectory as she says: "I am not getting fat, I am only adding flesh" as a face-saving utterance. Again, Emmanuella assents to the context of mischief by making a mockery of Kachi's physiognomy as she says: "Yes, fat flesh" in line 19. This is an offensive response which Kachi resents. As a result she relegates Emmanuella's knowledge in line 20; depicting condemnation of a child's intellectual capacity. The peak of the ridicule trajectory is captured in lines 21-24. In this asymmetrical encounter, Emmanuella describes Kachi as three fat persons in one body and thereby advises her to take slim tea. The laughter in the background shows that the interaction is humorous within a Nigerian comedy context. Functionally, it is a self-enhancing humour, which is one's ability to be humorous in the face of adversity (Claire, et al, 2015) and within humour scholarship is considered a form of superiority. This is achieved through mockery as Emmanuella indirectly mocks Kachi's fat nature.

## **Food-related Experience**

Food related experience addresses Nigerian children's attitude to food and the strategies they usually employ to get it even as they depend on adults. Children's discourse definitely will be incomplete without a mention of food, where food is defined as any nourishing substance that is eaten to gain energy and sustain life. Children are usually foodies and childhood is a stage of dependence where they always make demands for everything, food inclusive. The linguistic choice(s) of the interlocutors points to the activity and the social roles exemplified in this section. In the context of this study, Emmanuella orients to food related issues to affiliate with her age group (children) in a comical narrative. This is set in a poverty-stricken environment, where children crave food excessively because of their less privileged social status. Children's pranks, sophomoric humour, and affinitive solidarity strategy are all denoted in this section as shown in the excerpt below.

### **Excerpt 5**

Background: Emmanuella is in a supermarket, very close to the sales manager, checking some mints and at the same time looking at other people moving in and out of the supermarket.

1. Emmanuella: ((turns to the Sales Manager)) Aunty (0.3) the person that just passed
2. dr-an-k your tea and did not pay↑
3. Sales Manager: (0.4) Oh::::: tea is free

4. Emmanuella: ((surprised)) ehhhh?
5. Sales Manager: It's for customers (0.4) once you buy anything here, you can
6.                   drink the tea free of charge ↑
7. Emmanuella: [ ] So you mean that if I buy anything I can go and dr-in-k tea
8. Sales Manager: = Anything you buy... you are free to take tea...
9. Emmanuella: =Wait ohhh....do you people have free bread↑
10. Sales Manager: [ ] My dear you are so funny. (0.2) No we don't have free bread.
11.                   We only have free tea, and it is called complimentary tea (.)
12. Emmanuella: =Ehhhh?
13. Sales Manager: = It is for customer care↑
14. Emmanuella: = So now you mean that if I go there and drink tea I will not pay↑
15. Sales Manager: [ ]You won't pay....its free
16. Emmanuella: You are tr-y-i-ng me o:::, I will drink your tea. I am not joking with you ↑
17. Sales Manager: [ ] Tea is free.
18. Emmanuella: ((moves to the tea container, takes one of the disposable cups and drinks))
19.                   wait let me drink again. Ehhhh, free tea:::
20.                   ((the following morning))
21.                   ((Emmanuella has informed her friends about free tea. They come in to
22.                   the supermarket one after the other, each claiming they want to buy
- sweet.
23.                   Each of them hides a loaf of bread under their clothes))
24. Girl 1:           ((to the sales manager)) Aunty I want to buy sweet
25. Sales Manager: ((engrossed with the computer, she does not look up.
26.                   She only points the direction to each child))
27. Girl 2:           Aunty, I want to buy sweet↑
28. Girl 3:           Aunty, I want to buy sweet↑
29. Sales Manager: ((She points))
30. Boy 1:           Aunty, I want to buy sweet ↑
31. Boy 2:           Aunty, I want to buy sweet ↑
32. Sales Manager: ((she points))
33. Emmanuella: ((brings a water jug)) Aunty, I want to buy sweet
34. Sales Manager: ((Emmanuella's voice sounds familiar to her. She looks up and
35.                   sees the water jug with her)) You want to buy sweet and ...
36.                   ((She looks to the direction of the tea container and was surprised to see
37.                   five children with different sizes of cups and loaves of bread in their hands
38.                   as they are eating and drinking))
39.                   Ehhhhh::: Hahaha, what is going on here↑
40. Emmanuella: [ ] These are my friends, I brought them to drink tea.
41. Sales Manager: ((surprised))
42. Emmanuella: = It is customer care.... You said its customer care.
43.                   They are customers now↑
44. Sales Manager: ((yet to recover from the shock. Another boy comes in with
45.                   a bucket and a very big loaf of bread))
46. Boy 3:           E-h-eh ..... where are they fetching the tea? =

47. Emmanuella: [ ] CHUKWUEMEKA:..... =  
48. Sales Manager: = JESUS CHRIST:..:

*(Emmanuella and Mark Angel Comedy, Episode 112)*

The excerpt captures mild mischievous acts of children in their craving for food in a public place like a supermarket, depicting the social class of the children and perhaps the irresponsibility of adults who were supposed to monitor them; although within a comedy discourse. With the aid of activity types, the goal of the participants, allowable contribution, and manipulation of pragmatic parameter three discourse ideas are conceptualised from the excerpt: children prank playing, sophomoric humour and affinitive solidarity as a strategy. Each is taken in turn.

### **Children's Pranks**

Children's prank describes gimmicks or tricks children orient to with the aim of outsmarting others as a form of amusement or malicious act and thereby getting what they desire. Accordingly, the sampled data manifests food-craving pranks within the context of mischief.

### **Food-craving Pranks**

Children engage in food-craving pranks in order to outsmart adults, and consequently get their desired food, as pictured in the sampled data that features Emmanuella, a child, and the sales manager, an adult. The scene of the humour is recorded in a supermarket, while the desired food is "free tea". Emmanuella gets to know about this by orienting to an age-dependent child act evident in lines 1-2: *Aunty (0.3) the person that just passed dr-an-k your tea and did not pay*. This suggests a child reportorial act which is peculiar to the childhood stage. Children usually report or talk about everything they see to other people. It is age-dependent for a child to do this and that is why some intolerant adults occasionally get upset with them. The social knowledge she has about supermarket is that everything there should be paid for, which is the reason she reports the case of a person who drank tea and did not pay. She is surprised when told that tea is free. This is why she displays clarification interjectory act in line 4: *ehhhhh*. The clarifications given by the sales manager necessitate food-craving prank in line 9 to show her love for food. Two forms of food-craving pranks voiced in the interaction above are: permission seeking prank and pretence exploitative prank.

### **Permission Seeking Prank**

The permission seeking prank is a type of trick that children adopt with the intention of gaining allowance to do something. It becomes significant for them to do so because of their societal age restrictive status. In the context of this paper, it means the approval quest trick, which is used by Emmanuella so as to have access to the customer complimentary tea in the supermarket. This is demonstrated below:

- 13 Sales Manager: It is for customer care  
 14 Emmanuella: So now you mean that if I go there and drink tea I will not pay  
 15 Sales Manager: You won't pay....its free  
 16 Emmanuella: You are tr-y-i-ng me o:::, I will drink your tea. I am not joking with  
     you o.  
 17 Sales Manager: Tea is free.  
 18 Emmanuella: ((moves to the tea container, takes one of the disposable cups and  
     drinks))  
 19         wait let me drink again. Ehhhh, free tea:::

Emmanuella uses indirectness and assurance quest as tricks to gain approval to drink tea in line 14. She craves the tea and understandably has no money to pay if she is required to do so. Even when given the assurance in line 15, she expresses doubt jokingly and childishly in line 16. The sales manager's utterance in line 17 shows the approval she has desired all along. Like other children, Emmanuella abuses the privilege to drink just a cup of tea as she drinks more and more. The prank here is the trick Emmanuella employs to gain approval to drink the supermarket complimentary tea which she desires.

### **Pretence Exploitative Prank**

This type of prank explains how children pretentiously exploit a given privilege and thereby make other people look stupid. It explains the gimmick Emmanuella and her friends employ to abuse the complimentary tea available in a supermarket. They deceitfully pretend to be customers who have come to buy sweets. This is captured in lines 24, 27, 28, 30, 31 and 33 in the excerpt above. They capitalise on the sales manager's busy schedule to gain access to the tea stand in the supermarket.

### **Sophomoric Humour**

Sophomoric humour relates to a childish comedic act whereby a child displays a lack of awareness of his/her ignorance or stupidity in a manner that amuses. In most cases, it showcases the silly sense of immaturity of the comedian. Two instances of this humour are articulated in Excerpt 5. The two are gluttonously related with the sense of physical clowning. The first relates to how Emmanuella displays her ignorance about complimentary tea in the supermarket and how she exploits the opportunity when given access to it. These are expressed in lines 16, 18 and 19. The second, which is the climax of the humour, also bifurcate into how Emmanuella has gone to invite her friends to exploit the complimentary tea in the supermarket (lines 33-39) and how a boy comes to the supermarket with a bucket with the intention of using it to fetch tea, which is vocalised in lines 44-46. Correspondingly, these acts portray the children as foodies. Evidently, this humour is discursively negotiated through affinitive solidarity strategy. It depicts a show of love, marked by shared experience of a group of people that triggers unanimity of interest. Emmanuella demonstrates this in the way she informs and invites

her friends, boys and girls, through pranks to the supermarket with the intention to exploit the complimentary tea. The verbal acknowledgement in line 40 expresses a tension-dowsing confession; that she brought her friends to drink tea. The agreement among the children on the method adopted to outsmart the sales manager is significant, which is in consonance with affinitive solidarity. Through this strategy the children succeeded in achieving their aim because most of them already gained access to the tea except for Emmanuella and Chukwuemeka who brought big containers in lines 35, 42-45. This is an affiliative humour through which Emmanuella enhances her relationship with other children and demonstrates her humanitarian belief.

## **Conclusion**

This study has shown, in the foregoing, two Nigerian children's socio-cultural experiences, relating to social relationships within a communal lifestyle and food related issues, foregrounding four humour types through five strategies in symmetrical and asymmetrical encounters in selected Emmanuella comedy shows. The social relationship experience portrayed children's play within the contexts of excitement and mischief, adult hostility and offensive remarks. The taxonomic game depicted an educative value that reflects intellectual ability of the sampled children who, within context of excitement, demonstrate knowledge about family structure and their expected socio-cultural roles. Adult hostility picked out verbal abuse and suppression of children's rights in an adult dominant society where children are not so socially empowered to challenge the power of the adults.

Emmanuella through food related issues orients to age-dependent pranks to negotiate sophomoric humour through affinitive solidarity strategy. With the theoretic tools deployed, the study has demonstrated how media represent Nigerian children's socio-cultural experiences from the perspective of comedy show with respect to Emmanuella. Emmanuella in her comedy shows is not unaware that children are not expected to riposte an adult's offensive nature in a strict power conscious Nigerian society, but has cleverly satirised adult intolerance of children and exploitative acts through witty, disparaging, and sarcasm humour types. The study concludes that most of Emmanuella comedy shows revolve around ridicule relating to the pragmatic meanings of self-overrating, reprisal of adult's exploitations, and humanitarian belief in the discourses (Claire et al, 2015). These align with Apte's (1985) conclusion that children's humour mimics adults in a comical manner and that the use of ridicule is always more common in children compared to adults. The study therefore concludes that Emmanuella, the talented Nigerian child comedienne, creates an age-dependent, relaxant humorous atmosphere for both children and adults as she reflects Nigerian socio-cultural experiences as they affect Nigerian children. Further, she satirises adults' exploitation of children and humanitarian orientation as moral lessons via the new media.



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