
HUMOUR IN PETER ENAHORO'S *THE COMPLETE NIGERIAN*: A SPEECH ACT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Humour has a high profile in the society and it is influential as a way of establishing friendship. It is evident that humour refers to anything that people say or do and is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh. Humour is a universal phenomenon that is exhibited by most cultures. This paper explores humourous contents in Peter Enahoro's novel, *The Complete Nigerian* through the adoption of J.L Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory with insight from John Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory. The study adopted quantitative and qualitative research method for analysis of data. The data for analysis were extracted from the primary text; *The Complete Nigerian* where ten (10) humorous utterances were used. In line with one of the objectives of the study, frequency count was conducted and the result showed that out of the five classification of speech act by J. Searle only two was accounted for. They are; Representatives and Directives. Representatives accounted for 70% while directives accounted for 30%. The preponderance use of 'representatives in the data analysed is an indication that the author knows who the complete Nigerians are by always making factual utterances and asserting his stance on complete Nigerians. The 'directive' depicts the rhetorical questions the author always throws at his readers to ponder on the happenings in Nigeria.

Keywords: Humour, Peter Enahoro, *The Complete Nigerian* and Speech Act

Introduction

Language is a vital element in communication or as the most important communication tool. Many elements are used in language, one of the important elements is humour. Humour aims to make listeners and readers laugh, but in producing a humour in the language is not easy. Actually, delivery of humour in the language using some linguistic aspects such as the use of figurative language, ambiguity, metaphor, idiom, formal, similarity and linguistic features. Listeners or readers who view or read the speech or graphic patterns of another as unusual or different may laugh at them. Grammatical errors or differences can be the focus of humorous expression (Veatch, 1999 cited in Bassey, 2020, p. 2).

Humour primarily consists of jokes (spoken or written words) and actions which elicit laughter or generate mirth (these actions can be described in words) (Critchley, 2002; Ritchie, 2004). Humour simply can be defined as something that makes a person laugh or smile (Rose, 2005 cited in Bassey, 2020). Humour and laughter have been described as culturally universal. Like other aspects of language, humour is a way in which people show their participation to a group. If someone signals their intention to say something humorous, the listeners or readers are immediately ready to laugh. People often laugh when given this sort of cue, regardless of whether they even get the joke. According to Schwarz (2010), humour represents a central aspect of everyday conversations and all human participate in humorous speech and behaviour, one of humorous speech is stand-up comedy. This paper adopts J.L Austin's Speech Act Theory with insight from J. Searle's classification of Speech Act to interrogate Peter Enahoro's *The Complete Nigerian* with a view to identify the speech act type and frequency in the Humorous contents. The objective of the study is to identify the speech act type and frequency found in the text.

Statement of the Problem

Humour can be seen at different levels, which include textual and verbal means. Humour is a frame of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life. Humour however, gives temporary legitimation to thinking in impractical and illogical ways. Humour becomes outdated as fashion does and it is related to particular cultures. There is a time and a place for humour. Sometimes, it is inappropriate in certain situations and in certain times. The social and physical restrictions which are present at a given time and in a given area are totally different from those restrictions which are present at other times and in other areas. Thus, special expressions of humour that might originate within a certain area can be considered as culture specific for a certain length of time. This explains why the humour of the last decade might no longer be appreciated today and why the humour of a civilization different from ours as a rule does not seem humorous. This study, therefore, looks at the humorous mantras in Peter Enahoro's *The Complete Nigerian*. This study is significant as it will help to give enormous explanation of analyzing humour-related-language from a pragmatic view.

Review of Related Literature

Concepts of Humour

Humour has been studied from philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological and linguistic perspectives. While researchers working within the first four fields may regard humour as one (albeit multifarious) phenomenon, linguists analyzing its semantic, cognitive, sociolinguistic or pragmatic mechanisms must necessarily narrow down the scope of their investigation to its particular manifestations, which are many (Dynel, 2013).

Humour has a high profile in the society and it is influential as a way of establishing friendships. It is evident that humour refers to anything that people say or do and is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh. Humour is defined by Mindess (2014; p. 41) as a frame of mind, a manner of perceiving and experiencing life. It is a kind of outlook, a peculiar point of view, and one which has great therapeutic power. Ruskin (2015), describes it in the following words. "somebody hears or sees something and laughs. In most cases, this means that the person finds the audial or visual stimulus funny. Funny situations, funny

stories, even funny thoughts occur everyday to virtually everybody” (p.11)

More and more authors’ comments on the importance of humour in everyday life is believed that it is an effective way of establishing social connections with others. Morreall (2016) says that people feel more comfortable with the ideas of others when these are presented with humour. Ziv (2017), opines that a comical speech calms the audience and “enables divergent thinking and effective teamwork all through an extended mental flexibility as humour gives temporary legitimation to thinking in impractical and illogical ways” (p.69). Ross (2018, p. 11) defines humour as “something that makes a person laugh or smile.” The author further emphasizes the strong social aspect of the way people respond to humour. She says that people laugh in company of others. They do not laugh when they are alone even on the same example that makes them laugh in a room full of people and the same joke can work in one context and die in another.

The social context is important for the creation and reception of humour. It is hard to cross boundaries of time and social group. Humour becomes outdated as fashion does and it is related to particular cultures. There is a time and a place for humour. Sometimes, it is inappropriate in certain situations and in certain times. The social and physical restrictions which are present at a given time and in a given areas are totally different from those restrictions which are present at other times and in other areas. Thus, special expressions of humour that might originate within a certain area can be considered as culture specific for a certain length of time. This explains “why the humour of the last decade might no longer be appreciated today and why the humour of a civilization different from ours as a rule does not seem ‘humorous’ (Rosenthal, 2019).

Humour researchers have found that humour has many benefits for individuals and groups. These findings have been applied to many fields such as medicine, business and education. Definitions tend to focus on either speaker intention or audience interpretation. Berger (2020) defines humour as “a specific type of communication that establishes an incongruent relationship or meaning and is presented in a way that causes laughter”. The fact that Berger includes laughter as part of his definition reflects that he holds the audience’s interpretation to be important in the definition of an event Winick (2020) concentrates on

speaker intention. His definition of a joke is any type of communication that has a witty or funny intent that is known in advance by the teller. Unsuccessful attempts at humour would be included in Winick's definition, but not in Berger's.

Definitions focusing on audience response are much easier to apply than those which attempt to establish speaker intention a researcher can never tell from recorded data alone the exact nature of a speaker's intention. It is easier to monitor the audience's reaction, and particularly easy if you maintain, as does Berger, that the incident must be met with laughter. This is, of course, complicated by the fact that laughter can indicate many things of which positive response to humour is only one (Poyatos 1993, cited in Bassey, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

Speech Acts Theory

This research is anchored on J.L Austin's Speech Act Theory. Speech acts is a technical term in linguistics and philosophy of language. It captures an action performed by someone through his words. The British philosopher J. L. Austin (1962) who contributed the term (speech acts) to pragmatics claimed that, by speaking, a person performs an act, or does something (such as state, predict, or warn) and that meaning is found in what an expression does. Simply put, the central aspect of the Speech Act theory is that an utterance is part of an action within the framework of social institution and conventions. Austin proposed three levels of speech acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act.

A locutionary act is the actual utterance and its ostensible meaning, comprising phonic, phatic and rhetic acts actually correspond to the verbal, syntactic and semantic aspects of any meaningful utterance. A phonic act produces an utterance-inscription. It is concerned with physical act of producing a certain sequence of vocal sounds (in the case of spoken language), or a set of written symbols (in the case of written language). A phatic act is an act of composing a particular linguistic expression in a particular language. It is the act of constructing a well formed string of sounds/symbols (a word, phrase, or sentence in a particular language). Rhetic act is an act of contextualising the utterance-inscription (Austin 1962). It is responsible for tasks such as assigning reference, resolving deixis, and disambiguating the

utterance-inscription lexically and grammatically. By the idea of illocutionary act, Austin believes that saying is doing. Therefore, "by saying something, we do something else." For instance when someone orders someone else to come by saying "Come!", or when a minister joins two people in marriage saying, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." An interesting type of illocutionary act is that performed in the utterance of what Austin calls performatives. Typical instances of these are "I demand an apology", "I ensure you there will be a change." In these rather explicit cases of performative sentences, the action that the sentences describe (demanding, ensuring) are performed by the utterance of the sentences themselves.

Furthermore, Austin explains that perlocutionary acts entail the consequences or effects of utterances on the audience in a linguistic encounter; such consequences or effects being special to the circumstances of utterance. Its actual effect, such as persuading, convincing, scaring, enlightening, inspiring, or otherwise getting someone to do or realize something, whether intended or not (Austin, 1962). For instance, the locution 'See a snake behind you' has an illocutionary act of informing or warning. The perlocutionary act will be manifested in the addressee who either runs or screams. Locution, illocution and perlocutionary features from J. L. Austin's Speech Acts theory are used in the analysis. Insight from J. Searle's classification of speech acts such as 'representatives, directives, commissives, expressive and declaratives' are also used for the analysis of the data.

4.1 Data presentation in table

Table 1: Data presentation

S/N	Locution	Illocution	Perlocution
1	They could have chosen to call our country Hifekiniyetu (p. 1)	Directive (suggesting)	The speaker wants his listeners/readers to ponder on his suggestion, if it is actually right to change Nigeria to Hifekiniyetu.

2	A Nigerian could grumble all day long and still have the energy to get some urgent work done two days late (p23)	Representative (stating)	to show that Nigerians prefer grumbling to taking actions.
3	If a complete Nigerian invites you for a dinner by 8pm, do not disgrace yourself by getting there promptly at 8pm. Such behaviour gives him the impression that you have nothing better to do. Or you are not a rich man (p.32)	Directive (advising)	Advising Nigerians not to be at a venue at the said time.
4	It is good manners not to be carrying sharp appetite when invited to dinner. Therefore, refuse everything at the first offer (p.33)	Directive (advising)	Advising a complete Nigerian not to appear too hungry even if they are when invited for a dinner.
5	The complete Nigerian likes to be addressed as Alhaji Senator Chief (Mass) Princess (Dr.) Major General (rtd) Engr. Ama Too much (p. 42)	Representative (stating)	The writer wants the readers to know that Nigerians like to be addressed with all their titles.
6	You say to a complete Nigerian; keep an eye on the dial of a machine, he will	Representative: Indirect (asserting)	To show that Nigerians do not keep to given

	attend to your instruction with a devotion approaching fanaticism. Then, soon enough, he will fall in love with the machine and grow to question your lack of faith in such a reliable machine (p. 62)		instruction.
7	The complete Nigerian counting on his charm to see him through. He believes he can burst into Germany without a Visa (p. 107)	Representative: Indirect (asserting)	Making and asserting that the complete Nigerians believed in their charms, that it could take them to anywhere without the use of a Visa.
8.	The complete Nigerian in the market charged five naira extra from his buyer who is well dressed (p.60)	Representative (making claim)	To show that the complete Nigerian is corrupt.
9.	The complete Nigerian tendering a contract ask the following question; “who are the members of the contract award committee? How can they be reached? How can they be influenced? Who are the friends fronting for them in their secret businesses? Who are their relatives? Is there a political authority to overrule the committee? Who are the wives, the committee members sleep	Representative (making statement)	That readers should know that before a contract is awarded one needs to grease the palm of the contract award committee members. Also to know that members are corrupt.

	with when they give their mistress a rest? Are they important? Everyman has his price. Who is that everyman in the committee? What is his price? Who stands to benefit from the scheme in order that Joe Public may have it all? (p. 60-61).		
10	Chinese would have called Songhai Chonkai if Nigeria were to be called Songhai (p.1)	Representative (giving a suggestion of how the Chinese would have pronounced 'Songhai')	To show how awful the Chinese could be when it comes to pronunciation of words not related to their nation.

Discussion of data

Sample i: Hifekiniyetu (p. 1)

The background to this instance of humour is that our country Nigeria should not have been called Nigeria. He is trying to portray to the readers that the name of our country was not gotten from a good source. Therefore, he disagrees with the name of the country. He considers that maybe that is why the country keeps exhibiting all bad traits that are detestable and not worthy of imitation. In addition to this, we see that our country's name is gotten from Lady Mary Lugard, who once worked for Fredrick Lugard as secretary, from where a relationship started. In Enahoro's facetious expression, she just rose from behind her desk one morning and gave the name to Fredrick Lugard, that the name of our country should be called Nigeria. The author said 'what nonsense' after she had a depressed night full of anger with her husband since her husband did not give her the level of attention she needed because the husband did not have a genuine love for her. The author in his view said why should it be called Nigeria? What does Nigeria signify? Is it tribe or ethnic groups or states or languages spoken by the people or what? If

it is not from any of these sources why did she name it Nigeria? What is the meaning of Nigeria? And the worst of it from a bad mood. They could have chosen to call our country HIFEKINIYETU which is an acronym derived from the initial letters of all the major ethnic groups or tribes. Hausa Ibo Fulani Edo Kanuri Itsekiri Nupe Ijaw Yoruba Efik Tiv Urhobo. Why not this? According to the author it should have been more preferable to name our country the above name. this is purely humorous.

Sample ii: The act of Grumbling (p.23)

Here the author waxes lyrical on the behaviour of Nigerians how they grumble boastfully about everything but act less decisively. He said thus; Ours was once a nation of excellent grumblers, we grumbled in anger; we grumbled in mirth. We grumbled about nothing at all, and we grumbled just about everything. It was ridiculous. We were terrible grumblers. Nigerian grumbling was a bizzare eccentricity which others tried to emulate without success. Nigerians were so good at grumbling, foreign employers said in admiration that a Nigerian could grumble all day long and still have the energy to get some urgent work done two days late. British imperialist especially appreciated this strength of character. They said it took plenty of grit to engage in marathon political grumbles about your colonial master and then have the decency at the end of the day not to burn down his house. For years the British Press described Nigerians as level-headed. That explained why British colonialism did not hasten out of Nigeria.

Sample iii: The Nigerian Character Hurry Up! Dinner Is At Eight!

This has to do with the behavior of people in our society. Here we have what we call 'Nigerian time' which has no respect for manmade homological devices. The Nigerian time is embedded in the subconscious of the Complete Nigerian. This nature had been around since time began. The fact is that no sense of accuracy is observed by individual whims and ego. If a Complete Nigerian invites you for dinner by 8pm, do not disgrace yourself by getting there promptly at 8pm. Such behaviour tells the Complete Nigerian that you are not a man to be reckoned with; or as we say in Nigeria, that you are not a big man! After all you do not give your host the impression that you have nothing better to do. Your would-be-host may be upset but he will appreciate you more

as a man whose time is valuable. Nigerians looks at those who keep to time as underprivileged ones. This is humorous.

Sample iv: The Complete Nigerian Claiming to be Rich

The Complete Nigerian refuses everything he's offered at any occasion, because he is claiming to be big rich man even at his dead point of hunger mostly at the first offer. For instance, will you have a drink? The reply by a Complete Nigerian will be ' I don't care for that.' After a while the host will still be pleading take something at least now please; the Complete Nigerian will reply, ok let me have a taste of it. Give him a few seconds the Complete Nigerian will empty the whole plate for you. This is purely humorous.

Sample v: The Etiquette

The Complete Nigerian like tittles. If you really want to get something from the Complete Nigerian sharply, start it by hailing the person in question with all the tittles you have ever known. No tittle, however, hold a greater aura for the Complete Nigerian than an honorary doctorate degree awarded by a roadside American University. Be careful when you address this man, for your entire relationship with him could stand or fall on whether or not you remember to call him 'doctor.' He may struggle to spell 'doctor' but it means music to his ears. For instance, we use a woman called Ama Too-Much; she is married; she has made the holy pilgrimage to Mecca; she hold an honorary doctorate degree in science; she is an engineer by profession; she is a princess by birth and a chief to boot; she retired from the army engineers corps with the rank of major general and has been elected to the senate. This is the way she would like you to address her 'Alhaji Senator Chief (Mass) Princess (Dr.) Major General (rtd) Engr. Ama Too-Much.' Honestly, if she is a Complete Nigerian after regarding her this way she will never resist you, she will keep smiling and give attentive attention to your request. This is humorous.

Sample vi; The Complete Nigerian Ignores Instruction; The Machine Good, Na Japanese Product (p.62)

Here the Complete Nigerian is easily in thrall by machines. Be careful, therefore before you put him in charge of delicate scientific machinery or combustible` equipment, bear in mind that his heart may be in the

right place, but that his respect for engineering apparatus is conditioned by the Nigerian factor. You say to the Complete Nigerian ‘Your job is to keep an eye on this dial. If the needle falls below the figure ‘8’ it means the machine is not performing properly. If on the other hand the needle should rise above the ‘15’ it would also mean that there is something wrong. In either circumstances, you must turn off the equipment forthwith and summon me to the emergency. At first your conscientious Complete Nigerian will attend to your instructions with a devotion approaching fanaticism. Every hour of every working during the next fortnight, he will sit diligently before the apparatus, his diligence glued resolutely to the appliance. Then soon enough, he will fall in love with the machine. He will grow to question your lack of faith in such a reliable machine. That needle you asked him to watch on the dial has never dropped below ‘8’ nor has it risen above ‘15.’ Whatever made you think it might? He will compliment you for making the choice (Japanese Machine). Three weeks after his little speech, however, a tremendous bang will signal to you that the roof of your factory has gone up in flames. Such is the power of the Nigerian factor.

Sample vii: ‘The Blind Charm’ (p.110)

What strikes the humour here is when the Complete Nigerian that believes in charm wanted to travel to Germany without a visa. He is seriously counting on his charm to see him through. They had given him the assurance that he can burst into Germany as long as they are done with their incantations. By the time he arrived at the border guard point, they studied his passport with the briefest peep into its pages and told him coldly ‘no visa,’ you cannot come into Germany!

Sample viii: The Nigerian Factor (p.60)

The Complete Nigerian is a born philosopher not many people know this. Never underestimate the Nigerian factor. It is the basic truth by which the Complete Nigerian dominates his environment. For instance, it instructs his business acumen. This can be seen where two men came to buy suya barbecue from a Mallam who has been influenced by what is known as the Nigerian factor. One of the men was well dressed while the other was not properly dressed. The well-dressed man was charged five naira extra for the suya barbecue while the other who was not properly dressed was sold for at a normal rate. This is because the well-

dressed man seemed to the Mallam a man who could afford five naira more than the other man who is not properly dressed.

Sample ix: Nigerian factor (pp 60-61)

Here, the complete Nigerian and an ordinary Nigerian are tendering for a contract, while the ordinary Nigerian concerns himself with the financial and technical requirements of the contract as published in the newspaper announcement. The complete Nigerian, his rival was deep in philosophy trying to discover the Nigerian factor in the contract. Unlike the ordinary Nigerian he knows that the Nigerian factor will direct the outcome of the contract tender. For instance, the complete Nigerian ask the following questions; “who are the members of the contract award committee? how can they be reached? how can they be influenced? Who are the friends fronting for them in their secret businesses? Who are their relatives? Is there a political authority to overrule the committee? Who are the wives, the committee members sleep with when they give their mistress a rest? Are they important? Everyman has his price. Who is that everyman in the committee? What is his price? Who stands to benefit from the scheme in order that Joe Public may have it all? These questions are the determinant factor.

On the appointed day, all the competing tender are ceremonially opened in the presence of assembled press photographers. But behind the scenes and in conformity with the Nigerian factor, the complete Nigerian knows he has won the contract long before that public display of impartiality.

Sample x: Chongkai (p1).

The background to this humorous sentence is that our country should not have been called Nigeria, instead it should have been called Songhai. Even the Chinese would have difficulty pronouncing. According to the author you will hear them say “you Chonkai?” even so history would have been on our side.

Discussion of Findings

The data for this study are the comments made by the author in the primary text; *The Complete Nigerian*. The selected utterances were analysed using linguistic framework of speech act theory by Austin (1962) and J. Searle, (1969). A total number of (10) humorous

utterances were purposively selected and subjected to illocutionary act analysis. The perlocutionary act effects of the locutions on the reader(s) were also measured from the illocutionary force of each utterance and on the mutual contextual beliefs shared by the interlocutors. Efforts were made to calculate the percentage of each speech act type based on its frequency so as to make the interpretation of the table clear and empirical thus we have:

$$\frac{\text{Frequency of speech act}}{\text{Total number of speech act}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

Table 2: frequency distribution of speech acts type

Speech act type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Directives	3	30%
Commissives	0	0%
Declaratives	0	0%
Expressives	0	0%
Representative	7	70%
Total	10	100%

The illocutionary acts of the utterances have both direct and indirect intentions. Out of the ten (10) speech acts performed, seven (7) of them are under category of representatives. In other words, the percentage of representative acts stand at 70%, directives take 30% with a total of three (3) performed. Commissives, declaratives and expressives were at zero percentage, meaning the author of *The Complete Nigerian* did not make any utterance on them. The utterances analysed performed both direct and indirect acts. This reveals that most of the expressions exhibit powerful illocutionary force by revealing the actual intention of the speaker at the indirect level. From the foregoing, the study probes into the language conditions that made the utterances qualify as humorous statements.

Conclusion

The study primarily focused on the humorous Language in the *Complete Nigerian*. The study was informed by the nature of language and behaviour exhibited by the humorous content of the author (Peter

Enahoro). The language is characterized with utterances aimed at expressing the mind (intention or illocution) of the writer but at times readers find it difficult to interpret what is conveyed by the writer. The study therefore, discussed the author's humorous utterances and their interpretation/effects on readers under locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. Data for the study comprised ten (10) humorous utterances in the primary text; *The Complete Nigerian*. These were analysed based on some pragmatic tools; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, classes of speech act (representatives, directives, declaratives, commissives and expressives). Only representatives and directives were discovered in the writer's language use.

Theoretically, the study adopted J. L. Austin's Speech Acts Theory because of its emphasis on how people do things with words. Austin argues that words are in themselves actions. That when an individual uses language (words), he does three basic things; he says something, shows or indicates how he intends his listeners or readers to interpret what he said and the effect on the readers. The study examined these three things in the context of the topic.

Furthermore, in line with one of the objectives of the study, frequency count was conducted and the result showed that out of the five classification of speech act by J. Searle only two was accounted for. They are; Representatives and Directives. Representatives accounted for 70% while directives accounted for 30%. The preponderance use of 'representatives in the data analysed is an indication that the author knows who the complete Nigerians are by always making factual utterances and asserting his stance on complete Nigerians. The 'directives' depicts the rhetorical questions the author always throws at his readers to ponder on the happenings in Nigeria.

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