

ANALYSIS OF SPEECH ACTS IN SPOUSAL CONFLICTS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN COMEDY SKITS

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Abstract

Beyond the words deployed in conversations are their semantic realisations which determine the actions and inactions of interlocutors. At the base of domestic conflicts in Nigeria is the semantic value attached to the words used in exchanges during such conflicts. It is against this background that this study set out to interrogate the speech acts in selected Nigerian comedy skits spousal violence. To actualise this, four Facebook comedy skits were randomly surfed and subjected to analysis based on insights from J.L. Austin's Speech Act Theory. It was found that Expositives (affirming, postulating, arguing, and challenging), Behabitives (challenging, criticising, and apologising) as well as Exercitives (ordering, warning, affirming) being the preponderant acts in the corpus. The study concludes that the identified speech acts align with the dictates of the discourse genre of domestic (intimate) violence, which the corpus represents. It is hoped that in examining the speech acts in domestic violence as done in this study, ESL and ESP instructors will gain more pedagogical resources which can empower discursive interventions to broker peaceful linguistic deployments among Nigerian couples.

Keywords: Semantics, speech acts, language use, marital violence, Facebook comedy skits

Introduction

Semantic negotiation is an activity that subsists between social actors all through a communicative activity. The implications of such negotiations birth actions and reactions which either align with or drift from a text creator's intentions. Consequent upon the possibility of being misinterpreted, text creators are conscious in their choice of lexicogrammatical realisations to fit certain textual as well as extratextual nuances (like tenor and mode of discourse, among others). To ensure maximum gains from a communicative event, language users access various modes of communication. It is for this reason that humour is sometimes deployed as one of such communicative strategies. Oluremi (2019:66) notes that:

...humour, a natural phenomenon in human society, is as old as the use of language for human communications. In its different forms of verbal and non-verbal expressions, humour has the potential to consciously or unconsciously evoke laughter from an audience.

Arising from the implications of humour for comic purposes, cartoonists and comedians have chosen to use it in communicating serious as well as seemingly unserious issues for the multi-barrelled goals of sustaining/creating amusement, laughter and driving home certain semantic dimensions. It is for this purpose that humour is similarly maximised for satirical communication which aims (predominantly) to correct certain aberrant social practices. Chen and Guiying (2018:62) observe that "...In recent decades, the surging multimodal humour has

paralleled the volume of traditional verbal humour”. They explain multimodal humour to involve the use of “...more than one semiotic code functioning synchronously”.

In order to achieve their aim effectively, comedians leverage contemporary issues of national concern for their satiric outings. It is against this backdrop that Nigerian comedians have consistently used it as a bootstrap in online video clips to express certain gaps in the Nigerian socio-political cum economic milieu. In such semantic negotiations (between the comedians and their target audience), comedians deploy incongruity and certain linguistic discursive resources as strategies for humour generation/creation (Waribo-Naye, 2018). Human interaction, especially in spousal relationships, is made possible by means of language and is key to either fostering peaceful coexistence or otherwise, depending on linguistic deployment as well as pragmatic (contextual) realities. However, in contemporary Nigerian society, there is a surging spate of marital dysfunction which is evidenced in the surge in collapsed marriages, abandoned children, violent outbursts among couples as well as allied societal vices (Tade, 2017; Utoh-Ojemudia and Okeke, 2018).

A lot of literatures abound on marital conflict discourse. In Nigeria, for instance, many scholars have diversely explored the theme of marital conflict discourse within the country (Usoroh, Ekot and Inyang, 2010; Tade, 2017; Utoh-Ojemudia and Okeke, 2018; Isreal and Araoye, 2019; Adenusi and Onifade, 2020; Alabi, 2021). Despite the volume of work on marital conflict discursive practices in the country, little or none has been done on the pragmatic analysis of Nigerian comedy skits on spousal conflict interactions in Nigeria. It is to address this gap in linguistic studies that this study set out by carrying out a pragmatic investigation of selected comedy skits on spousal conflict interactions, paying particular attention to the nature of speech acts preponderant in the corpus as well as the pragmatic implications of the mostly deployed pragmatic (linguistic) resources identified in the corpus. It is hoped that this study, when concluded, will contribute to the body of knowledge for the teaching of English for domestic interactions, especially as it relates to spousal relationships in Nigeria and beyond.

The Concept of Humour (Comedy)

Humour is a topic that has interested scholars from diverse disciplines for centuries. From Aristotle and his legendary book on comedy (that apparently was destroyed centuries ago and inspired Umberto Eco’s best seller *The Name of the Rose* (1980)), to classic and contemporary philosophers, psychologists, linguists and sociologists, the publications on humour are innumerable (Critchley, 2010). Consequently, there is no ‘final word’ on humour, nor any single scholar who has settled the argument on its meaning. What some scholars call comedy, others call humour; jokes and ‘true jokes’, are also part of this terminology as well as innocent and hostile jokes. Research tends to be located within a given discipline. Psychologists try to understand why we laugh and how this affects our psyche. For sociologists and anthropologists, humour explains who we are and the community we belong to. Linguists approach humour as a language, thus exploring what it communicates. Philosophers reflect on its transcendence as a condition of the human spirit. Thus, their perspectives and ideas will help us construct an understanding of humour, its relevance to society, and why it represents non-conformity, a means of resistance against a political system.

First, it is important to recognise that, because there are many studies of humour, the terminology among them differ. Eco (1998) suggests that the idea of the comical is an ‘umbrella concept’ joining different phenomena, and it is impossible to give it a single, clear definition. What some scholars call comedy, others call humour;

jokes and 'true jokes', are also part of this terminology as well as innocent and hostile jokes. While some refer to laughter as a physical act, others consider it a mental process. And we cannot deny the difference between parody, irony and sarcasm. Raskin (1985) notes this lack of terminological agreement among scholars, pointing out that there is a 'terminological chaos created by an abundance and competition of such similar and adjacent terms'. In accordance with these ideas, we group together insights which refer to humour, laughter, hilarity, jokes, comedy, wit, etc., when they can be understood as having the same aim: to introduce the audience into a 'comedy environment'.

Scholars differentiate between them, but it is not my intention to distract readers in a sea of different terminology. Thus, we will understand all these concepts as 'acts of humour' since they are actions expressed through the language of humour, which benefit from being within this language. Not all acts of humour make us roar with laughter, but recognising when we are inside the language of humour helps us understand 'facts' in a certain way. The important point to note here is that the terms studied refer to acts or moments which turn the environment into a less solemn one, and one in which chaos does not worry us. In fact, it entertains us.

Relationship between Humour (Comedy) and Language

Although not all accounts of (verbal) humour make their assumptions explicit, they all entail or presuppose some view of language and communication. In this section, we discuss some of the existing literature on the linguistics of humour, giving particular attention to a frequent claim that humorous discourse and humorous interpretations are deviant in one way or another.

Psychologically-based pragmatic principles that operate for communication in general can also explain how humorous discourse is understood. The semiotic and the structuralist, traditions linguists who have looked at humour have often called for a distinction between humour based on features external to language, such as cultural assumptions, references to sex, politics, visual stimuli, slapstick and so on, and humour that relies mainly on the manipulation of linguistic forms. Naturally, as a general trend, linguists have focused on the latter. Their studies tend to concentrate on the structural aspects of language, viewed as a code, that may be used to produce a humorous effect. Typically, they describe how phonological, morphological, and syntactic categories are manipulated to produce ambiguities that get exploited in different contextual formats, linguistics and verbal humour such as, for instance, question and answer to generate riddles. Because riddles, jokes, and puns hinge on language-based manipulations of this sort, they have been the most natural candidates for study in approaches oriented this way. A representative example of studies along these lines is Hockett (1977), where a distinction is drawn between prosaic and poetic jokes.

Prosaic jokes do not involve linguistic manipulation per se, but rather play upon cultural situations, institutions and interactions, and may be translatable. Poetic jokes, by contrast, play upon what Hockett called "accidents in the design of English", and hence, are normally untranslatable. Hockett classified these under two headings: puns and non-puns. So called 'perfect puns' involve homophony, while 'imperfect puns' play on near homophony. In the category of non-puns, Hockett includes certain cases that rely on stress and contiguity. Linguistics and verbal humour Hockett thus provided a taxonomy of linguistic jokes, and thereby contributed a descriptive rather than an explanatory account of verbal humour. Characteristically, they ignore most issues that arise from the child's ability to interpret the sequence and to appreciate the humour in it, presumably regarding those problems as questions for psychology. Instead, analyses along these lines would focus on the phonological similarity of the

sequences/bway+fbr/ and /a+weyfar/, thus concentrating mainly on aspects of the code involved in communication. From such a purely linguistic stance, the concentration on riddles and puns is not surprising. Indeed, it is the manipulation of specific aspects of the grammar of a language that the effect hinges on.

However, even puns and riddles cannot be adequately explained merely by reference to the linguistic code involved in their - production, and a description of how it is exploited. In other words, verbal humour, even of the type Hockett calls "poetic", is a consequence of communication, not of language. The intended pun is not easily detected in the absence of the graphic context in which it occurs: a picture of three girls sideways, two of them with nothing on and the third wearing a pink bath towel around her body. The logo of the trademark LIL-LETS is also present. Without this, the ambiguity of the word 'towel' would most likely go unnoticed.

Pragmatic inference plays a role at quite early stages of processing, when the hearer decides what proposition a punning utterance expresses. The fact that punning is not only about clever manipulation of the accidents in the linguistic code has been acknowledged in recent treatments of puns that attempt to explain the process of interpretation involved in understanding them (Tanaka, 1992; Merino Ferradd, 1993). In general, what binds code-oriented approaches and distinguishes them from more inferentially-oriented views is their shared assumption that verbal communication itself operates much like grammar, in a code-like fashion. Overall, semiotic theories have either not made a principled distinction between the workings of language and the workings of verbal communication, or have assumed that the code-model can be straightforwardly extended from language to verbal communication.

Theoretical Framework: Speech Act Theory

This was the earliest theory of modern pragmatics. It was propounded by the Oxford Philosopher J.L. Austin and developed by Searle and other scholars. The theory holds that utterances are made to perform acts of requesting, denying, accusing, warning, naming, declaring, etc. and that to realise these, people do not need to subject the meaning of their utterances to truth condition of the logical positivists. It challenges the positivists' views on the ground that not all sentences are statements and that much of conversations between people are made of questions, exclamations, commands and expressions of wishes, which cannot be said to be false or true (Saeed, 2017: 223). Examples of the above kinds of expressions include: a. Excuse me! b. Hello. c. Congratulations! d. How much? e. Are you serious?

Based on the logical positivists' view, none of the above sentences can be accounted for because we cannot on hearing them say they are true or false. Yet, they are not meaningless; certain acts are contextually performed through them. For instance, 'excuse me!' Could mean let me pass or keep quiet, which are directive acts of requesting and commanding. 'Are you serious?' could mean 'I doubt you', you are joking, or work hard while 'Hello' could mean 'listen', 'can you hear me?', or wait please! etc. These are some of the examples of what can be performed with the sentences above. Speech act theory aims to tell us when it is that we ask questions but mean orders and requests or when we say one thing with a special (Sarcastic) intonation and mean the opposite (Fromkin and Rodman, 2003: 186).

Levels of Speech Act

Austin divides speech act into different but interconnected types of locution, illocution and perlocution. The locutionary act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance. In other words, it simply represents the physical sounds uttered or written; it is a mere utterance of a statement. This, according to Akmajian *etal* (2003:319)

means that performatives seem to be both saying and doing. Of main interest to the proponents of pragmatics is illocutionary act.

The illocutionary act, also known as performative act, is the communicative force that is intended to be achieved by an utterance. It deals with what the speaker does or what he is understood to have done with his utterance. It is central in pragmatics studies and sometimes used interchangeably with the speech act in general. An illocutionary act is a nonlinguistic act performed through a linguistic (locutionary) means. In other words, it is what is meant but not stated explicitly in a sentence. It can be direct or indirect, intended or unintended, conventional or nonconventional (Lawal, 2003: 155). It includes acts of warning, denying, threatening, vowing, etc. It can be achieved overtly (through the use of performative verbs) or covertly (without the use of performative verbs). For example, the sentences: 'I promise to be there' and 'I will be there' are both illocutionary acts of promising. The only difference between them is just that the first one is explicit because it contains the performative verb 'promise' and the second one is implicit because it does not. The implicit and explicit illocutionary force of an utterance is what preoccupies the speech act theory (Mey, 1993: 96).

The third type of speech act is perlocutionary. It has to do with the effect an utterance or illocutionary act has on the hearer or reader. In other words, perlocutionary act is the effect that language has on the hearer/reader which may lead to physical or psychological reaction from the hearer. For example, if a speaker says to his noisy and lively addressee: 'The man with whom you have just had a hand shake has tested ebola positive', the addressee is most likely going to be silent, inactive and disturbed. The addressee's silence and inactiveness resulting from the speaker's statement is the perlocutionary act. In addition, an act of sudden screaming and fleeing that result when speaker X says to listener Y: 'See a snake behind you!' is also a perlocutionary act. This is why Austin defines language as a way of doing and making others to do things with words. Mey (1993) posits that perlocutionary act is the most interesting aspect of speech acting.

In summary, it can be said that while locutionary act is what is said, illocutionary act what is done or meant, the perlocutionary act is the effect of what is done or said. Kempson (1997) puts the distinction between the three speech act types thus: ...speaker utters sentences with a particular meaning (locutionary act) and with a particular force (illocutionary act) in order to achieve a certain effect (perlocutionary act) on the hearer (qtd in Osisanwo, 2017).

Categories of Speech Act

To further explain what language users actually do with their utterances directly or indirectly, Austin classifies illocutionary act into **verdictives** (acts of sentencing, charging, arbitrating, acquitting); **exercitives** (acts of ordering, warning, advising); **behabitives** (acts of apologising, criticising, blessing, and challenging); **commissives** (acts of promising, guaranteeing, betting, opposing); and **expositives** (acts of arguing, postulating, affirming, and conceding, etc. (Courthard, 2018: 25).

However, some scholars have challenged this theory on the ground that it is difficult to assign a single force to an utterance. For example, Leech and Thomas (1990) maintain that it is rarely impossible to say with absolute certainty which illocutionary act has been performed by an utterance. On speech act categorisation, Searle criticises Austin for: operating with overlapping criteria; having incompatible elements within his categories; and for including categories that do not satisfy or meet their definitions. One of the examples to the above criticism is the seeming overlap between Austin's verdictives and exercitives, both of which deal with the right to use power or authority. A rather more general confusion in Austin's work lies between the notion of speech act

and that of speech act verbs. Austin is challenged on the ground that he was not able to neatly differentiate between speech act and speech act verb. However, despite all these shortcomings, Austin must be appreciated for pioneering speech act theory; the importance of his discovery that language is an instrument of action, not just of speaking, has not diminished overtime.

Corpus

The corpus of this research were text-extracts of spousal conflict interactions drawn from five (5) online Nigerian video comedy skits on spousal conflicts, spanning three years (between January, 2021 and March, 2023). The corpora were drawn from Facebook, thus:

Table 1: Showing the Corpus of the Study

Datum	Facebook Account Name	Title of Comedy	Duration of Comedy	Date of Publication
1	Mr. Alloy Comedian	Man demands for his rights	3:25 minutes	March 6, 2023
2	Mr. Alloy Comedian	The decision	3:17 minutes	March 2, 2023
3	Mr. Alloy Comedian	Rich man's daughter	2:27 minutes	February 18, 2023
4	Emma Chinedu Comedy	How to control your anger in a relationship	11:25 minutes	November 29, 2021

Source: The Researcher, 2023.

The criteria used in selection of data for this study is influenced by availability, representativeness, and accessibility (Nwogu, 1990; Sharndama, 2008). Availability here deals with the ease of access to the researcher of the data for carrying out his research. For this study, the data are readily available electronically online on the Facebook handles of comedians.

Analysis and Discussion

An examination of the data found a preponderance of three speech acts: Expositives, Bahabitives and Exercitives. In analysing these acts, attention has been given to demonstrate how each of the identified features was deployed in the corpus, thus:

Expositives

In his seminal study on speech acts, JL Austin describes Expositives as acts of exposition involving the expounding of views, the conducting of arguments and the clarifying of usages and of references. These are realised in speech acts as affirming, postulating, arguing, challenging, etc. In the corpus, some of these acts were expressed, thus:

Affirming

Datum 4

Husband: Warn her.-Exercitive (ordering) Warn her to choose how to talk to me.- Exercitive (ordering) A woman will use her arsenal on a man and the whole world will expect the man not to react.- Expositive (postulating) Bianca, are you shouting at me?

– Bahabitive (challenging) Eh! I am talking to you.-**Expositive (affirming)** Are you shouting at me?- Behabitive (challenging)

Wife: Shut up and listen good. -Exercitive (ordering) You need to put yourself in check. -**Expositive (affirming)** The next time you try this nonsense with me, you will get it really hot with me. - Behabitive (challenging)

Husband: What’s your problem? - Behabitive (challenging) You are insulting me. - Exercitive (affirming)

Wife: (reporting to her mother) It was just a simple argument and before I could say a word, my husband – **Expositive (affirming)**(*Begins to cry*)

Datum 3

Wife: You are the new secretary- **Expositive (affirming)** (*ushering a man into the office*)

Husband: What’s going on here?- Behavitive (challenging)

Wife: This your secretary just got fired.- **Expositive (affirming)**

Secretary: (*looking at her Boss*) Sir, what did I do?- Behabitive (challenging)

Husband: (*looking at his wife*) By who?- Behabitive (challenging)

Wife: By me!- **Expositive (affirming)** From now henceforth, this is your new secretary.- **Expositive (affirming)** His name is Alloy.- **Expositive (affirming)**

Husband: Sandra, do you know you’re really mad?- Behabitive (challenging) Do you think you can decide who works here and who does not work here?- Behabitive (challenging) This is my office.- **Expositive (affirming)**

In the above instances, assertive utterances are deployed by certain characters in the corpus, as have been highlighted in the bold prints. Datum 4 shows the husband affirmatively calling his wife’s attention by declaring that, “Eh! I am talking to you”. In the course of their exchange, the wife calls her husband’s attention by instructing him to “...put yourself in check”. This assertion was on the heels of an expression from her husband which implied that she was being bullied into admitting a perspective she wasn’t comfortable with. Following a banter, between the spouses, there was an exchange of fists which left the woman injured on her left eye. As a consequence, the woman’s mother pays a visit of intervention. It is in reaction to her mother’s inquiry that the beaten woman affirms, “It was just a simple argument”. Similarly, in Datum 3, expositives are used in the conflict situation between a woman and her husband in the later’s office. Here, the wife is seen to impose a secretary on her husband after firing the previous one. The man, who is bewildered at the act, insists that “this is my office” implying that his wife was over stepping her bounds. In the two examples above, expositives (affirming) have been deployed to indicate insistence of a speaker’s perspective on an issue, which results in a conflict situation when the other partner thinks otherwise.

Postulating

Datum 1

Wife: Honey, you are sitting here (*bending to pick the man’s shoes and suit from the floor*)-Expositive (affirming). I’m so tired-Expositive (affirming). I need to go freshen up and hit the bed- Expositive (affirming). See you in bed- Expositive (affirming).

Husband: What bed are you talking about? –Behabitive (challenging) Woman, don’t you know that I have not had dinner? –Behabitive (challenging) Go inside that kitchen and prepare my dinner- Behabitive (challenging).

Wife: Excuse you!- Behabitive (challenging) I’m not going into that kitchen this night- Behabitive (challenging). Never!- Behabitive (challenging)

Husband: Honey, I am hungry –**Expositive (postulating)**. I want you to go inside there and I will prefer porridge yam- Exercitive (ordering). Put a little bit of vegetable and don't make it too spicy- Exercitive (ordering).

Datum 2

Husband: Honey, you need to forget about work today.- Exercitive (ordering) Mama is sick in the village.- Expositive (affirming) You need to go and take care of her or bring her down to the city for proper medical attention.- **Expositive (postulating)**

Wife: You said? – Behabitive (challenging)

Husband: Mama is sick.- Expositive (affirming) You need to go and take care of her.- Exercitive (ordering)

Wife: No, no, I heard that part.- Expositive (affirming) The part I don't understand is I have to travel to the village.- Expositive (arguing) I don't understand.- Expositive (arguing)

Husband: Meaning? - Behabitive (challenging) You want Mama to die? - Behabitive (challenging)

Postulations are expressions which form the basis of an argument, in this case, a spousal conflict. In the above examples, it is evident that conflicts between (sane) spouses do not spring from a baseless stance; there are dissensions which trigger conflict. In Datum 1, the husband informs his wife that "Honey, I am hungry". In the previous text, the wife's view is expressed that she was too tired to make a dish for her husband; having been exhausted at her work place. The exchange of words after the postulation, "I am hungry", eventually result in a conflict situation between the couples. Same as in Datum 2, where the husband informs his wife on the need to "...go and take care of her (his mother) or bring her down to the city for proper medical attention". In retaliation, the wife reminds the husband of her indisposition owing to demands of her workplace and schedule. In both instances, the postulations are made by the husbands as an assertion of their authority as the stronger party in the union whose views must be held as superior and respected. Unfortunately, this authority is questioned and challenged. It is to reinforce the authority in the midst of a countering perspective from the wives that makes a conflict situation to spark off between the couples.

Arguing

Datum 1

Wife: I am not- Behabitive (challenging). I am tired for heaven sake- **Expositive (arguing)**. You and I work in the same office- **Expositive (arguing)**. We leave this house at the same time- **Expositive (arguing)**. Do our stressful jobs- **Expositive (arguing)**. You know how stressful and strenuous our jobs can be- **Expositive (arguing)**. We come back at the same time- **Expositive (arguing)**. This is past 11pm – **Expositive (arguing)**. What do you always do?- Behabitive (challenging) Its either you are lying down on this couch or you are in the bedroom – Behabitive (challenging). I go into the kitchen, prepare your meal; go to the bathroom, warm your hot water and what do you do?- Expositive (challenging) Nothing!- Expositive (challenging)

Husband: I hope you remember your role in this house as a wife? –**Expositive (arguing)**

Wife: My role does not include me enslaving myself.- **Expositive (arguing)**

Husband: When has cooking become enslaving yourself?- **Expositive (arguing)** Look, my mother never complained about being a slave to my father.- Behabitive (challenging) So, why are you complaining?- Behabitive (challenging)

Datum 2

Wife: No, no, I heard that part.- Expositive (affirming) The part I don't understand is I have to travel to the village.- **Expositive (arguing)** I don't understand.- **Expositive (arguing)**

Husband: Meaning?- Behabitive (challenging) You want Mama to die?- Behabitive (challenging)

Wife: How can you say such a thing?- Behabitive (challenging) I do not want your mother to die.- Expositive (affirming) But what happens to your sister, Chioma?- Behabitive (challenging) Shouldn't she go and take care of her mother or better still bring her down?- Behabitive (challenging)

Husband: She is married.- Expositive (affirming) Her husband will not permit her.- **Expositive (arguing)**

Wife: Of course she is my mother too.- Expositive (affirming) But I need you to understand something too, Honey.- Expositive (affirming) It is my responsibility as a daughter to take care of my mother.- Expositive (affirming) If my sister-in-law decides to do it, I would appreciate but I will not mandate them.- **Expositive (arguing)** It is my choice.- **Expositive (arguing)** It should be my choice.- **Expositive (arguing)** The essence of having a daughter is to take care of her mother when the need arises and not to be coerced into doing it.- **Expositive (arguing)** I work in the bank, Sweetheart, and you don't expect me to get up one day and tell them, "Oh! Please, I'm not going to lose my job for anyone.- Behabitive (challenging)

Arguments are discursive activities that present occasions for contrary views from an interlocutor. At the core of an argumentative stance is the urge to contend a posture with the aim of either winning over the other party or challenging the views of the other. In the above instances on Expositives (arguing), it is observed that, in Datum 2, the wife argues "I don't understand is I have to travel to the village". This is in retaliation to her husband's opinion that she forgoes her work (that period) to tend his mother who needs medical attention. Rather, the wife suggests that the husband's sister should be invited to perform the role of looking after the sick mother. To this, the husband argues, "her husband will not permit her". This is resisted by the wife who argues that it should be her choice to assist and "...not be coerced into doing it".

Challenging

Datum 1

Wife: I am not- Behabitive (challenging). I am tired for heaven sake- Expositive (arguing). You and I work in the same office- Expositive (arguing). We leave this house at the same time- Expositive (arguing). Do our stressful jobs- Expositive (arguing). You know how stressful and strenuous our jobs can be- Expositive (arguing). We come back at the same time- Expositive (arguing). This is past 11pm – Expositive (arguing). What do you always do?- Behabitive (challenging) Its either you are lying down on this couch or you are in the bedroom – Behabitive (challenging). I go into the kitchen, prepare your meal; go to the bathroom, warm your hot water and what do you do?- **Expositive (challenging)** Nothing!- **Expositive (challenging)**

Wife: Well, I am not a sit-at-home house wife.- Behabitive (challenging) I am a working class lady.- Expositive (arguing) You met me.- Expositive (arguing) Where exactly did you meet me?- Expositive (arguing) In this same office and I was fully employed.- **Expositive (challenging)** A senior staff for that matter before you were employed.- **Expositive (challenging)**

Expositives (challenging) are expressions made with the intent of opposing someone. In the above excerpt from Datum 1, the wife is seen challenging her husband

that she goes "... into the kitchen, prepare your meal; go to the bathroom, warm your hot water and what do you do? Nothing!". The tone of this challenge is anchored on the uncomfortable posture of the wife about the skewed (unfairly distributed) roles of spouses in a marital relationship. She seems to be saying she performs more roles than the man, who in her view idles away his time at the detriment of her personal concerns. She adds that she works in "same office" as her husband as a "senior staff"; yet, her seniority and status does not seem to be of any significance to her husband who prefers to boss her around the house mindless of her tiring schedule at work.

Bahabitives (Challenging)

These are speech acts which, in Austin's view, represent reactions to other people's behaviour, fortunes and attitudes. In marital conflict, as is being studied, it is common to find one of the parties involved in the exchange react to the views of the other. In the corpus, Bahabitives were deployed, especially that of challenging, thus:

Datum 1

Husband: What bed are you talking about? –**Behabitive (challenging)** Woman, don't you know that I have not had dinner? –**Behabitive (challenging)** Go inside that kitchen and prepare my dinner- **Behabitive (challenging)**.

Wife: Excuse you!- **Behabitive (challenging)** I'm not going into that kitchen this night- **Behabitive (challenging)**. Never!- **Behabitive (challenging)**

Husband: Honey, I am hungry –Expositive (postulating). I want you to go inside there and I will prefer porridge yam- Exercitive (ordering). Put a little bit of vegetable and don't make it too spicy- Exercitive (ordering).

Wife: I am not- **Behabitive (challenging)**. I am tired for heaven sake- Expositive (arguing). You and I work in the same office- Expositive (arguing). We leave this house at the same time- Expositive (arguing). Do our stressful jobs- Expositive (arguing). You know how stressful and strenuous our jobs can be- Expositive (arguing). We come back at the same time- Expositive (arguing). This is past 11pm – Expositive (arguing). What do you always do?- **Behabitive (challenging)** Its either you are lying down on this couch or you are in the bedroom – **Behabitive (challenging)**. I go into the kitchen, prepare your meal; go to the bathroom, warm your hot water and what do you do?- Expositive (challenging) Nothing!- Expositive (challenging)

Datum 2

Husband: Honey, you need to forget about work today.- Exercitive (ordering) Mama is sick in the village.- Expositive (affirming) You need to go and take care of her or bring her down to the city for proper medical attention.- Expositive (postulating)

Wife: You said? – **Behabitive (challenging)**

Husband: Mama is sick.- Expositive (affirming) You need to go and take care of her.- Exercitive (ordering)

Wife: No, no, I heard that part.- Expositive (affirming) The part I don't understand is I have to travel to the village.- Expositive (arguing) I don't understand.- Expositive (arguing)

Husband: Meaning?- **Behabitive (challenging)** You want Mama to die?- **Behabitive (challenging)**

Wife: How can you say such a thing?- **Behabitive (challenging)** I do not want your mother to die.- Expositive (affirming) But what happens to your sister, Chioma?-

Behabitive (challenging) Shouldn't she go and take care of her mother or better still bring her down? - **Behabitive (challenging)**

Husband: She is married. - Expositive (affirming) Her husband will not permit her. - Expositive (arguing)

Wife: So a daughter is not permitted by her husband to go to the village and take care of her mother but a daughter-in-law is being forced by her husband to do same. -

Behabitive (challenging) Wow! - **Behabitive (challenging)**

In conflict discourse, a very common trend which often results in inflammation of emotions, is the nature and extent of reaction expressed as interpretation to the semantic imports of words used by the other party. In Datum 1, the husband is seen reacting his wife's view that he should go the bed, despite his hunger. The man retorts that it won't be possible for him to sleep without eating a particular dish: porridge yam ... a little bit of vegetable and not too spicy. This does not seat well with the wife who holds that it is too late for her to go into the kitchen and cook being that she is exhausted from the demands of her tiring responsibilities at work. On the same plain, Datum 2 contains instances of the deployment of Behabitives (challenging) wherein the wife is seen opposing her husband's stance that she should temporarily forego her job and take up the responsibility of tending his mother who needs medical attention. The husband is opposed to his wife's view because he thinks that it is his wife's responsibility as someone married to him to sacrifice her comfort and career goals to ensure that members of his family, in this case his mother, are well catered to. Of course, this conflict of interests results in conflict between the couples, with the husband's family members possibly in support of their son.

Exercitives (Ordering and warning)

When words are used in interlocution, there are some called exercitives which serve to giving decisions in favour of or against certain courses of action. In the corpus, there were instances of exercitives, especially of ordering and warning, thus:

Datum 1

Husband: Honey, I am hungry - Expositive (postulating). I want you to go inside there and I will prefer porridge yam- **Exercitive (ordering)**. Put a little bit of vegetable and don't make it too spicy- **Exercitive (ordering)**.

Wife: Babes, I am not going inside the kitchen to cook anything. - Behabitive (challenging) If you want to cook, use your hands and make your yourself some meal. - Behabitive (challenging) (*walking away*).

Husband: Come back here. - Behabitive (challenging) Look, you have to prepare my meals. - **Exercitive (ordering)** You're not going anywhere. - **Exercitive (ordering)** (*holding his wife by her wrist*)

Wife: If I were you, I won't dare this. - Behabitive (challenging) Don't start what you can't finish. - **Exercitive (warning)** Take your suit yourself. - **Exercitive (ordering)** Bring your shoes yourself- **Exercitive (ordering)** (*she throws them away as she mounts the staircase*)

Husband: See, come here. - **Exercitive (ordering)** Honey! Honey! I'm talking to you - Expositive (affirming).

Wife: Don't dare me. - Behabitive (challenging) (*speaking as she climbs higher the staircase*)

In a typical Nigerian home, the men (or husbands, in the case of marital relationships between spouses) assume the posture of the lords of the home, owing to the patriarchal disposition of the country. This mindset affords men to the leverage to be quick in using exercitives as have been found in the corpus, as demonstrated in the

excerpt above. The husband orders his wife to prepare him food to eat and is particular about what he craves for- yam porridge with well spiced vegetable sauce. His wife, who does not share the view that women should be subjugated and ordered around, calls his bluff by walking away. The man does not admit this and dishes out more orders insisting that should make his meal and not walk away from him. To this, she instead keeps in her strides and orders him to “take your suit yourself”; warning the man not to “... start what you can’t finish”.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the speech acts deployed in selected Nigerian comedy skits on spousal violence. It was found that the predominant speech acts in the corpus were those which had defensive properties and questioned an existing status quo of patriarchy which constitutes the background upon which most Nigerian marital relationships are built. In this light, it was realised that Expositives, Behabitives and Exercitives were highly patronised in the corpus. While the findings are popular with the expectations of the nature of violence genre which constitutes the corpus, it is disturbing that the semantic underpinnings of marital conflicts have the propensity to disintegrate marital unions. Consequently, it is hoped that the results of this study will serve as resource materials to linguists, especially ESL and ESP specialists, who are likely to find information on the linguistic dynamics of marital discourse on violence useful pedagogical content.

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