http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjl.v10i1.4

# A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF HUMOUR IN *KOOKUROKOO* MORNING SHOW

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**Abstract**
Humour is central to language use and form, as well as human communication generally; and yet there is a dearth of linguistic research in Ghana on this important facet of human communication. This paper, therefore, contributes to filling the gap by providing a pragmatic analysis of humour in an Akan radio programme - the *Kookurokoo Morning Show* on Peace FM (a popular Akan radio station in Ghana). Attention is paid to the types of humour employed, their functions, and the (para)linguistic strategies used. Data was sourced from newspaper review and the general discussion sections of the programme and analysed with reference to the incongruity theory. Findings indicate that the show is mainly characterized by teasing (jocular mockery in particular), with a few retorts. It was also observed that humour signals solidarity, playful mitigation of threatening propositional meaning and an indication of 'moral transgression'. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the issues discussed, humour is used as a form of indirection strategy, which manifests itself through devices such as innuendoes, idiomatic and apologetic expressions, proverbs, and wordplay. The paper concludes that invoking a humorous/play frame in this context reduces tension and creates a cordial atmosphere for solidarity building, while at the same time conveying *serious meaning*.

**Keywords**: Conversational humour, jocular mockery, teasing, indirection, media, radio show, incongruity.

## 1. Introduction

Humour, which is considered a universal phenomenon, is an important aspect of human behaviour and communication because it demonstrates the artistic and innovative use of human language (Hassaine 2014, Wu 2013). It has been defined by O'ring (1992)

"as a message which comprises incongruous elements which are enacted playfully". Schnurr (2005:44) also defines humour as "utterances which are intended and/or perceived as being funny, and which result in a change of emotions in the audience, which then triggers some kind of response". Generally, it is seen as the tendency of experiences to provoke laughter and amusement (Singh et al. 2011); but as Dynell (2011a) rightly observes, certain humorous phenomena (for example, those indicating anxiety) may not induce laughter or amusement.

Because humour is intended to create fun, it is often regarded to be trivial, and discussions that are embedded with humour are thus considered as partaking in that triviality (see O'ring 2003; Schnurr 2005). Lockyer and Pickering (2008), however, argue that humour is far from being trivial. They see it rather as an integral part of social relationships and interactions. They further argue that although it may be viewed in some contexts as light-hearted banter, in other contexts, "it can injure people's social standing, or cut deeply into relationships and interaction between people within and across different social groups" (Lockyer and Pickering 2008:2). Indeed, we agree with Dynel's observation that "while it may be argued that the playful frame is conducive to the suspension of truthfulness and to deviation from norms obtaining for serious talk", it can also be postulated that "humorous duality allows speakers to convey *serious meanings*, while appearing to be "only joking" (2011a: 226, emphasis added; cf. Lampert and Tripp 2006; Mulkay 1988; Kotthoff 2007; Oring 2003; Simpson 2003).

As a universal phenomenon (see Attardo 1994), humour research is widely diversified, ranging over disciplines such as philosophy (Lippitt 1991; Cameron 2003, Morreal1 2012), psychology (Martin 2007; Kuiper 2016), anthropology (see Swinkels and de Koning, 2016 for the synthesis of some of the studies), sociology (Grzybowski, 2020, Kuipers 2008), and linguistics (Attardo, 1994; Dynel 2011; see edited volume by Sinkeviciute and Dynel 2017), among others. Intracultural and cross-cultural patterns of humour have also been studied widely, albeit scantily in Africa (but see Dowling 1996; Dowling and Grier 2015, Obadare 2009). Research in this area includes the characteristics of Jewish humour from a variety of perspectives and various contexts (Ziv and Zajdman, 1993), as well as works on Chinese (Chey and Milner Davis, 2011; Milner Davis and Chey, 2013), Japanese (Milner Davis, 2005), and Polish (Brzozowska and Chłopicki, 2012, 2019) humour. These studies have aided in the discussion of specific forms and sources of humour typifying different kinds of sense of humour also known as "taste-cultures" (Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017). The uses of humour, its importance in human life and the major theories on it have also been extensively researched into (see, Freud 1905, Raskin 1985, Attardo 1994, Harris 2009, etc.).

In the field of linguistics (the scope of this study), humour research is equally numerous and can therefore hardly be summarised exhaustively (see Coates 2007; Holmes 2006; Raskin and Attardo 1994; Attardo 1994, Norrick 2010; Dynel 2009; also

see edited volumes by Dynel 2011; Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017). Humour in linguistics has been studied as an all-encompassing phenomenon, covering linguistic and paralinguistic forms or events that elicit laughter, amuse, or are felt to be funny. It also covers topics and approaches which have been frequently borrowed from ample literature on "non-humorous" language (Dynel 2011: 2). Dynel (2011: 2) further notes that linguists with interests in pragmatics, for example, aim to describe chosen types, functions and mechanisms of humour as a communicative phenomenon (see papers in Dynel 2011; Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017).

Despite the abundance of humour research, there is a dearth of research on humour in Ghanaian contexts, particularly in the field of linguistics (but see Agyekum 2009, 2011). Agyekum (2011) only mentions humour in passing in his study of Akan palace language. He notes that one of the characteristics of the Akan palace language is the performance of appellations by griots (poets and oral artistes), who "often employ humour (2011). Agyekum (2009), on the other hand, considers puns, jokes and humour (among others) in the context of the ethnography of Akan speech play. On punning, he notes the use of ideophones and homophones in selected proverbs, songs and surrogate language on drums. He opines that punning here functions as an indirection to regulate face threats that may arise from comments on delicate issues or verbal taboo topics, but they may also be used just for humour or entertainment. Agyekum's (2009) paper also identifies a joking relationship between the Asantes and the Nzemas of Ghana, where they use joking language to insult each other without taking offence[1]. The insults in these jokes are considered as games for entertainment and, as such, anyone who takes offence is frowned upon. Such a joking relationship can be subsumed under the umbrella term of 'teasing' in linguistic humour research (Dynel 2009; Martin 2007; see also Takovski 2018 for a discussion on teasing/interethnic jokes). While Agyekum's work provides some significant insight into humour in Akan, specifically in speech play, the information on the section on jokes and humour is scanty, as it only mentions a joking relationship between Asantes and Nzemas without any linguistic data to demonstrate how this is done.

Considering that humour is central to language use and form, as well as human communication generally – and yet this has not been given much attention by Ghanaian linguists – this paper contributes to filling the gap by analysing humour in a popular Akan radio programme, the *Kookurokoo Morning Show*. Specifically, the study aims at investigating the type(s) of humour employed and the functions that humour plays in the programme. Attention is also paid to stylistic devices and other (para)linguistic strategies that participants employ in creating humour. A focus on the media (radio) is

[1] A similar joking relationship between the Dagaaba and the Frafra in Ghana is reported by Wegru (2000) from a socio-cultural perspective) – what has been referred to in the literature as 'interethnic or interracial jokes' (Sherzer 1985: 217).

important because the world is increasingly moving towards technology-mediated interactions and, as such, communication is shifting from interpersonal face-to-face interaction to sound and airwave interactions in Ghana (see Agyekum 2000 for similar observations). Again, since radio is a formal institution, it is expected that discussions in this space are rid of inflammatory language and discussants observe some decorum in their speech. The role of humour in navigating such terrain is thus important.

To properly contextualise the study, which hinges on talk in interaction, section 2 will look at conversational humour research and discuss some of the approaches and concepts relevant for this study. Section 3 presents brief background information about the Akan society and the language used for broadcasting in the media. Section 4 gives an overview of the theoretical framework employed in the study whiles chapter 5 highlights the methodology. The data presentation and discussions are presented in section 6. The summary and conclusion of our discussions are in section 7.

## 2. Conversational humour

Conversational humour (CH) comes under the umbrella term of verbal humour, and it is largely credited to Victor Raskin for his 1985 seminal work on the *Semantic Script Theory of Humour*, which was later developed into the *General Theory of Verbal Humour* (see Dynel 2011a: 2; cf. Attardo and Raskin 1991; Attardo 1994, 2001). CH is said to be one of the most important categories of humour, as it occurs frequently in the (pragma)linguistics of humour research (see edited collections by Dynel 2011; Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017; Coates 2007; Dynel 2009; Holmes and Marra 2002). It is defined as "humour relevantly interwoven into conversations, both spoken and written, whether private, institutional or mediated" (Dynel 2011a: 4).

An important facet of (conversational) humour is the concept of play frame or humorous frame inspired by Bateson's (1953) influential work on frames[2]. Bateson (1953, 1972) opines that actions can be framed in terms of serious/non-serious or play/non-play. Conversational participants can, therefore, "frame their talk as humorous by signalling 'this is play'" (Coates 2007: 51; see also Dynel 2011a, 2011b; Everts 2003), which suggests that the talk is not serious. Key to establishing a successful play or humourous frame is intentionality. Conversational humour researchers like Holmes and Hay (1997) see successful humour as a joint enterprise between participants, where the speaker invokes a play frame and the hearer maintains it (see also Coates 2007). Although intentionality is often difficult to access, contextual cues such as laughter, giggles, change in tone of voice, the use of a smiling voice etc.

[2] Dynel (2011b: 219) views the frame as "an interactive event orientated towards a particular goal and centered on rules and expectations but negotiated and co-constructed by interacting parties".

have been identified as signals that a play or humourous frame has been invoked (see Holmes and Hay, 1997; Jefferson 1985). Dynel (2011b) notes that these contextual cues, including nonverbal forms, can be used before, during or after producing a humorous unit.

## 2.1 Types of conversational humour

Conversational humour encompasses various subtypes like witticism, banter, putdown, self-denigrating humour, retort and *teasing*, which is considered as the most common subtype (see Dynel 2011a, 2011b; Haugh 2010, Geyer 2010, Pullin 2011, Chovanec 2011) – which is also the type of humour that dominates this study. According to Dynel, teasing can be conceptualized as

> a higher-order concept embracing jocular utterances performing a variety of pragmatic functions (such as mock challenges, threats or imitation), the meaning of which is not to be treated as truth-oriented and which invariably carries humorous force to be appreciated by both interlocutors (2009: 1293).

It is seen as combining elements of both (ostensible) provocation and (ostensible) playfulness (Haugh 2014). It has been noted in the literature that although teasing carries some ostensible aggression or face-threat, this should not be considered as genuine. In other words, the teaser speaks within a humourous frame and does not intend to be genuinely offensive towards the one it is directed at, even if he implicitly conveys certain pertinent meanings outside it. In terms of functions, teasing has been variously viewed in terms of mocking, or as playful mitigation of threatening propositional meaning (see Dynel 2009; Drew 1987), but more so in terms of its solidarity-building (Bateson, 1972; Dynel, 2011b; Sinkeviciute, 2013; Coates 2007; Crawford, 2003).

Closely related to teasing, and of particular interest to this study, is what has been referred to as jocular mockery (see Haugh, 2010, 2014; Haugh and Bousfield, 2012). Indeed, Haugh (2010) refers to it as a type or a particular instantiation of teasing. Haugh (2014) also sees jocular mockery as one of the interactional mechanisms through which "teasing as mocking/ridiculing can be accomplished within a jocular or non-serious frame" (p.76). In other words, jocular mockery is defined as teasing that is accomplished through mocking or ridiculing a conversation participant or a third party within a jocular or non-serious frame. Putting it in a play frame is important for humour appreciation since the ordinary meaning of mocking entails a "figurative cutting down or diminishment of the target" (Haugh 2014: 72). This puts a considerable moral

pressure on the target to treat it as jocular, and thus not to be taken (too) seriously (Haugh 2014: 72; cf. Fox 2004; Goddard 2006, 2009; Norrick 1993). Like in teasing generally, jocular mockery may be signalled by "various combinations of lexical exaggeration, formulaicity, topic shift markers, contrastiveness, prosodic cues, inviting laughter, and facial or gestural cues" (Haugh 2010: 2108)[3]. As has been identified in humour research broadly, and on teasing in particular, jocular mockery is a joint enterprise between the speaker and the hearer, who may maintain the play frame through laughter (although laughter does not always suggest acceptance of the play frame), (partial) repetition of the mocking remark, elaborating or countering the mockery (Haugh 2010: 2108).

Another important type of conversational humour relevant for this study is retort, which is defined as "a quick and witty response to a preceding turn with which it forms an adjacency pair" (Dynel 2011b: 1291; see also Norrick 1993; cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Sacks 1974; Schegloff 1986). Schaffer (2005) argues that the rhetorical question is one of the common but rarely investigated techniques of performing a humorous retort. She further notes that because all rhetorical questions-as-retorts are intended to be funny, it is possible to argue that humour is an intrinsic feature of such questions, although some fail to amuse because of conversational context and other factors. According to Dynel (2011b), a retort can also be a manifestation of sarcasm – an example of which is discussed in section 6.1.2.

## 3. The Akan society and language use in the media

Akan refers to both the language and the people who speak it. Speakers of Akan constitute about 47.5% of Ghana's population, according to the 2010 population and housing census (GSS 2012). It is also spoken by the majority of non-native speakers as a lingua franca (Agyekum; 2006, 2017, 2018). The language is used in several domains of communication (media, education, entertainment, market etc.). With the proliferation of many private FM stations and Akan being the majority language in Ghana, most of these stations carry out their programmes (for example, morning talk shows, proverbs competition, sports, etc.) in the Akan language to get a wider audience[4]. Agyekum (2010a) discusses the sociolinguistic role of Akan in Ghanaian radio and notes that radio broadcasters, as well as their audience, are agents for the modernisation

[3] For signals on teasing in general, see Attardo et al., (2003), Edwards (2000), (Lampert and Ervin-Tripp, 2006).

[4] It is estimated that there are about 247 radio stations in Ghana (see Wiafe-Akenten, 2017:28 and National Communication Authority), and out of these, about 70% are Akan radio stations. In these stations, the programmes are held in the Akan language. For the historical development of radio in Ghana (see Agyekum 2010b and Wiafe-Akenten 2008; 2017 for further details).

and development of the language by educating, informing and entertaining the Ghanaian populace. He further notes that as a model for proper language use and a catalyst for linguistic innovations, radio discourse in Akan helps radio broadcasters to tap, manufacture, design, and redesign repertoire of words where radio broadcasting serves as databank and reference point for future use (see also, Agyekum 2000, 2006). Per the nature of certain programmes (like news and newspaper reviews), what listeners need are the facts. At the same time, it is expected that presenters also make their programmes interesting to sustain the attention of their listeners. The role of humour in keeping the balance is thus important. But there has been a public outcry in recent times concerning how some local news presenters (especially Akan) broadcast news and interlace it with so much humour that it sometimes loses its 'seriousness'[5]. Indeed, Opare-Henaku (2016: 4) reports of how this "has become a source of concern for media experts and some members of the general public who believe local language radio newsrooms in Ghana lack professionalism", something which the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) considers as unethical (see Daabu, 2009, cited in Opare-Henaku 2016).

In other studies, on the use of Akan in the media (not necessarily on humour), attention has been paid to the use of interactional strategies that are useful for analysing the role of humour in this study. For instance, Wiafe-Akenten (2017) discusses the use of Akan language in radio and TV in current times and notes some changes in modern broadcasting, where some speakers on radio, especially on morning shows and, in the news, resort to the use of indirectional strategies (such as proverbs, circumlocution, simile, etc.) in order to save their faces. She also observes that mitigating and softening mechanisms like honorifics, humour and comedy also thrive in this highly sensitive and delicate context as well. Agyekum (2010b) examines the ethnopragmatics of Akan compliments and notes that as a universal pragmatic speech act, compliments convey perlocutionary effects on the addressee. He found out that compliments express goodwill and solidarity. By identifying the two functions of compliments (positive and negative), he states that whereas the positive function enhances the image and says something good about the addressee, the negative, on the other hand, threatens the face of the addressee. As shown in many radio advertisements in Akan on appearance and beauty products, positive compliments are particularly useful in selling the products (see Agyekum 2010b: 18-20); but positive compliments are also good for solidarity-building, which is considered as a key function of humour.

[5] Peter Essien for instance notes in his article on Radio broadcast in Akan: "News is a serious business and must be presented as such … Sometimes I listen to radio news in Akan on some radio stations and I cannot tell whether it is news or comedy" (https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/opinion/radio-broadcast-in-akan-by-peter-essien.html).

These studies provide useful information for the contextualization of the current study. For example, while Agyekum's (2010a) work show the significant role of radio broadcasters in educating, informing and entertaining the Ghanaian populace, Wiafe-Akenten (2017) work unearths some of the strategies that can be considered relevant in fulfilling this mandate. Similarly, participants in radio programme (like *Kookurokoo*) try to inform, educate and also entertain their audience through humour, which has been observed to be frequent and has recently gained popularity (see Wiafe-Akenten 2008; 2017 for further details). Wiafe-Akenten (2017:85-86) for instance postulates that even though humour exists in the language, the proliferation of many radio stations has also increased its patronage. She notes that politicians will either resort to laughter, coughing (as a means of distracting the speaker from saying it as it is), non-verbal cues, or banter-politeness when issues they are discussing are delicate or relate to their party to save their face and that of their party. The use of similar strategies during discussions to generate humour has also been observed in the *Kookurokoo Morning Show*, which this study seeks to explore because it has become an important phenomenon in the Ghanaian media space. It shall be argued that participants use these strategies in a humorous way in order to adhere to the face needs of their listeners.

## 4. The Incongruity theory

Incongruity[6] is one notion that runs through almost all the researches on humour (see Attardo 1994, 2002; Foot and McCreaddie 2006; Raskin 2008; Wu 2013). Like most theories in humour research, the incongruity theory originated from philosophy and psychology (Attardo; 1994, 2008, Morreall; 2008, 2012, etc.). In psychology, it is understood as a "deviation from the cognitive model of reference" (Dynel 2011a: 3), where there is a violation of expectations. According to Attardo (2008:103), incongruity theorists claim that "humour arises from the perception of an incongruity between a set of expectations and what is actually perceived". In other words, it occurs when a speaker violates the expectation of his audience to create laughter (Morreall 2012; Archakis and Tsakona 2005). It, therefore, emphasizes "the unexpected, the absurd, and the inappropriate or the out-of-context"/place situations as the source of humour (Foot and McCreaddie 2006:295).

From a linguistic perspective, Dynel (2011a: 3) describes incongruity as "a mismatch or contrast between two meanings". It has been argued in the literature that it is the resolution of the incongruity that brings pleasure or enjoyment in humour and

[6] According to Attardo (1994: 47), this theory is usually credited to Kant (1724-1804) and Schopenhauer (1788-1860).

not just the mere apprehension of the incongruous (Kulka 2007; Dynel 2011a)[7]. There have been several attempts to describe the incongruity resolution (IR) model, however, the most influential account is the one propounded by Suls (1972, 1983) which sought to provide an explanation for the tactics underlying humorous texts/caned jokes. According to proponents of this model, humour (mostly jokes) usually follow a parallel linear processing pattern (Yul 2016), where the hearer encounters an incongruity when a humourous text/ joke is processed and s/he obtains the intended humorous effects through a resolution. This is captured by Suls as follows:

(1) First, a recipient will encounter an incongruity, this originates from the dissonance which occurs as a result of an expectation which is violated.

(2) In the second stage, the recipient will resolve the incongruity by making an effort to obtain a "cognitive rule" which is intended to reconcile the punchline in the initial incongruity (Suls 1972: 82 cf. Kaczorowski 2011).

Shultz (1972) adds that a meaningful resolution of the incongruity will lead to a humorous response from the hearer.

Although the IR model was originally used for caned jokes, Dynel (2008, 2009) maintains that it can be used to examine other forms of humour, e.g., parody (see also Kaczorowski 2011). IR is also useful in examining the pragmatic aspects of humour as it relies heavily on context (see Yus 2016). For instance, the context, including contextual cues like a speaker's tone or facial expression, will determine whether something is out of place, and thus humorous, or not (Miczo et al. 2009: 444; see also Wu, 2013). As noted by Yus (2017: 6) the IR model also fits Sperber and Wilson's (1996/2002) relevance-theoretic model of comprehension because "it describes the inferential activity of an evolved psychological ability that invariably selects the most relevant interpretation by making comparative judgments among competing interpretations and opting for the one that provides the highest relevance". That is, a hearer will consistently choose the most relevant interpretation which corresponds to the requirements of "effects vs. effort" (Yus 2017: 6; see also Yus 2016).

Yus (2017) identified 12 new taxonomies of the incongruity resolution model (based on five hundred corpora of jokes) and distinguished them using these two parameters of incongruity: *discourse-centred incongruity* and *frame-based incongruity*. Whereas the discourse-centred incongruity focuses on the inferential strategies that are applied by the hearer to the joke (to change it into an entirely contextualized proposition

[7] But see Nerhardt (1976) who believes that incongruity alone may be sufficient to trigger a humorous effect.

like reference assignment, disambiguation, concept adjustment, saturation), the framed-based incongruity centres on what the hearer uses to make sense of what is happening in the situation i.e., joke, usually in the make-sense frame (see Yus 2017: 8). As the most prominent theory on humour studies, the incongruity theory provides us with the appropriate explanation for interpreting some of the utterances made in the *Kookurokoo Morning Show* as humorous.

## 5. Methodology

This paper set out to do a pragmatic analysis of humour in a popular Akan radio programme – the *Kookurokoo Morning Show* at Peace 104.3 FM[8]. Data was therefore sourced from pre-recorded audios of the programme aired between October and November 2018, after formal permission had been sought from the station (they were informed that the data taken will be used for a purely research-driven analysis of language use). The programme airs between 6:00 am -10:00 am, from Monday to Friday, and covers a wide range of topical issues like the morning's news bulletin, newspaper reviews, interviews, general panel discussions, sports segments, phone-in sessions etc. The length of the whole corpus was for an average of 160 hours of talk time. However, attention was paid particularly to the newspaper reviews and general discussion segment of the programme (with an average of about 20hours talk time). These segments were selected because they form the core component of the show and contain a wide range of topics like politics, economic and socio-cultural issues. Our choice of this programme was also informed by the fact that it is highly patronized because it is a prime-time programme, thereby increasing the expectation that an 'appropriate' language which also makes the programme interesting and catchy will be used to sustain the interest of the listeners. More importantly, they were selected on the basis of their rich humour content. This was determined by observing factors such as the use of wordplay, witty comments and contextual cues like giggling voices, laughter etc., which we later interpreted as instantiations of jocular mockery.

The participants in this show are the hosts, newspaper discussants, political representatives, social commentators, etc. who are speakers of the Akan language. The

[8] Peace 104.3 FM is selected because it has the widest listenership and also has affiliate stations in almost all the regions in Ghana (see Media Watch, Pragma and Synovate Ghana survey (2014), Wiafe-Akenten 2017). In the 24th Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) awards, Peace FM received 'the best radio station (Akan)' and 'radio station of the year' awards categories. Also, the *Kookurokoo* Morning Show was awarded in 2019 as the 'best morning show' and 'radio morning programme of the year' in the Radio and Television Personality awards due to the quality of the content of the programmes and its larger audience as well.

data were transcribed, using the following transcription conventions (adapted from Bucholtz, 2007):

| **Symbol** | **Function** |
|---|---|
| , | pause, including end of a statement |
| ! | exclamation |
| ? | rising intonation |
| … | omitted transcript |
| [ ] | transcriber comments/background information |
| ‘ ’ | quotation |
| **Word** | transcriber emphasis |
| *Words* | original data |

The data was also translated from Akan to English and analysed by categorising them under two major types of conversational humour. The following sections present the findings from our analysis.

## 6. Data analysis and discussion

As has already been discussed in section 2, this study falls under conversational humour. In situating it within the subcategories of conversational humour research (see section 2.1 for discussion), findings from this research generally point to teasing, jocular mockery in particular (Haugh 2010, 2014; Haugh and Bousfield 2012; see also Dynel 2011a), as the dominating humour type. However, the data also shows a few instances of ‘retorts’ (see Dynel 2011a, 2011b; Norrick 1984, 1986, 1993). The types of humour and their occurrences are summarized in Table 1, and Table 2 gives a summary of the stylistic devices [9] and other linguistic strategies (and their occurrences) used in creating the humour.

Table 1: Types of humour

| **Type** | **Number of occurrences** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| Teasing (jocular mockery) | 15 | 88.2 |
| Retorts | 2 | 11.8 |
| **TOTAL** | **17** | **100.0** |

[9] Dynel (2011a: 5) notes that devices commonly used in humour include primarily irony and puns (the most salient form of wordplay, i.e., play with language forms).

Table 2: Stylistic devices and other linguistic strategies

| **Stylistic devices/linguistic strategies** | **Number of occurrences** | **Percentage** |
|---|---|---|
| Pun (wordplay) | 5 | 25 |
| Irony | 2 | 10 |
| Simile | 1 | 5 |
| Allusion | 1 | 5 |
| Proverb | 1 | 5 |
| Apologetic expression | 1 | 5 |
| Idiomatic expression | 1 | 5 |
| Insinuations/inferences | 2 | 10 |
| Rhetorical questions | 6 | 30 |
| **TOTAL** | **20** | **100** |

As shown in Table 1, teasing (jocular mockery) has the highest number of occurrences (i.e., 15, representing 88.2%), while retort has 2 (11.8%). On linguistic strategies used, Table 2 shows rhetorical questions recording the highest number of occurrences (6, representing 30%), followed closely by pun (wordplay) with 5 occurrences (representing 25%). This is followed by irony and insinuations/inferences with 2 (10%) each, while simile, allusion, proverb and other linguistic strategies like idiomatic and apologetic expressions recorded the least occurrences 1 (5%) each.

Overall, participants tend to tease other participants on the show or a third party mostly through the use of rhetorical questions and wordplay. Section 6.1 gives a more detailed analysis of instances of the humour types and strategies used, while section 6.2 addresses the function of humour in the study.

6.1. Teasing in the *Kookurokoo* Show

It was generally observed that humour in the programme appeared in the form of teasing (ridicule), which is regarded as the basic component of all humorous material because it is often more acceptable socially than an insult (Gruner 1978). Teasing is traditionally viewed as involving feigned hostility and real friendliness (Sinkeviciute and Dynel, 2017; cf. Radcliffe-Brown, 1940). As discussed in section 2.1, although teasing generally carries ostensible aggression or face-threat, this must not be interpreted as genuine. This is prevalent in the data sampled, especially in the newspaper segment used by the reviewers.

Excerpt 1 illustrates teasing that arises out of incongruity – an inconsistency between a set of expectations and what is actually perceived, or from a linguistic perspective, "a mismatch or contrast between two meanings" (Dynel (2011a: 3; see section 4 for further discussion).

**Excerpt 1. General discussion, November 6, 2018**
[The participants were discussing an alleged corruption scandal in the banking sector which involved prominent personalities in the country; pseudonyms have been used for anonymity].

1. Host: *Yɛabobɔ din: PMO, AE, OMA, RGD, AKM nom. Mekae ne mɛmo bi a na wo serialize, yɛde wɔn akɔ kɔɔt. Seisɛi mo kɔɔto keesi no nso ɛte sɛn? Participant1 nti wohunuu saa adeɛ wei na ɛte wo sɛn*?
We have mentioned the names: PMO, AE, OMA, RGD, AKM. I recall that you were serializing their memo; you were taken to the court. How far with the court case? Participant1 what did you make of this when it came out?'
2. Participant1: *Hmm! Host, asɛm no ka yɛ den, deɛ woreka no nyinaa yɛ nokorɛ…mekae sɛ wɔnom de yɛn kɔɔ kɔɔto sɛ yɛresɛe wɔnom adwuma ….na wɔnom de yɛn kɔɔ kɔɔto no, ɛyɛ me sɛ papa yi wonim mmara kakra?*
'Hmm! Host, this issue is a dicey one but all that you have said are true… I recall that they sent us to the court that we are destroying their work…and when they sent us to the court [to Participant2] I guess you are a lawyer and you know a bit about the law?
3. Host: *Participant2 nyɛ lɔya oo*
Participant2 is not a lawyer oo'
4. Participant1: *ɛna woaspoti saa no?*
[to Participant2] And you have dressed nicely like this?'

5. All: *Haha! Haha!*

Looking at just the appearance of Participant2, Participant1 assumed that he might be a lawyer. As typical of the incongruity theory, his expectation was squashed when the host said "Participant2 is not a lawyer oo', which serves as the punchline for the set-up. In other words, it creates a mismatch between Participant1's expectation and the actual situation (see Archakis and Tsakona, 2005). This occurs at the first stage of the incongruity-resolution (IR) model discussed in section 4, where a hearer encounters an incongruity due to a dissonance. It can be argued that Participant1 made an effort to resolve the incongruity (stage 2) by appealing to his sense of how lawyers are expected to dress in Ghana (Participant2 was probably in a black suit, a white shirt and a tie).

Although Participant1's rhetorical question in turn 4 carries ostensible face-threat, it is not considered as genuine because it occurs within a humourous frame (see section 2.1), thereby creating laughter in turn 5. Indeed, Sinkeviciute and Dynel (2017: 2) add that teasing has been variously defined not only in the context of its aggressive/face-threatening potential but also in the context of its solidarity-building function (e.g. Bateson, 1972; Drew, 1987; Pawluk, 1989; Alberts, 1992; Norrick, 1993; Alberts et al., 1996; Boxer and Cortés-Conde, 1997; Keltner et al., 1998; Tholander and Aronsson, 2002; Partington, 2006; Geyer, 2010; Haugh, 2010; Dynel, 2011b; Sinkeviciute, 2013). This excerpt exemplifies one of such solidarity building. The resolution of the incongruity is seen in the explanation given by the Host. This supports the literature on incongruity that it is its resolution that brings out the aesthetic (see Kulka, 2007).

### *6.1.1 Jocular mockery as an instantiation of teasing*

As discussed in section 2.1, Jocular mockery is defined as teasing that is accomplished through mocking or ridiculing a conversation participant or a third party within a jocular or non-serious frame (see Haugh 2010; 2014). Although not a prototypical example of jocular mockery, Excerpt 1 above illustrates elements of this since, according to Haugh (2010: 2108), "[j]ocular mockery may be locally occasioned in response to the target ''overdoing'' or exaggerating a particular action". In Excerpt 1, the target (Participant2) was seen to have dressed like a lawyer which in reality, he is not, and this occasioned the expression of shock and the teasing by Participant1. Other examples of jocular mockery are illustrated in Excerpts 2-3.

**Excerpt 2. Newspaper review on October 9th, 2018**
[There was a report that the Minister of National Security had gone to a town in northern Ghana to resolve chieftaincy clashes that led to two deaths and several injuries]

1. Host1: *Na The Daily Dispatch de owura KD mfonin abɛto hɔ, ɛɛ security minister na atiefoɔ bɛkae a, Bole ne Damango nsɛmnsɛm bi a ɛsisii hɔ me-nte-me-ho-ase bi ɛsii wɔ hɔ no;* ***ne kurom kwan nyɛ ooo***.
The Daily Dispatch has brought the picture of KD, the National Security Minister; and if listeners can recall the conflict that occurred between the indigenes of Bole and Damango; **but the road to his hometown is very bad oo [said with a giggling voice]**
2. Host2: ***Haha! Haha!***
3. Host1: *Woreka ɛkwan bɔne a ɛwɔ Ghana a, Honourable KD kurom kwan, Kwaman nom ne Kyekyewere ne nkaeɛ, a! Awurade Nyame!...*
'If you are talking about bad roads in Ghana, then KD's hometown road is part, Kwanman, Kyekyewere and its environs, oh my God!'

From excerpt 2, Host1 intentionally digressed from the main issue (the conflict) and rather teased the National Security Minister, which is incongruous to the situation at hand (stage 1 of the IR). His statement, that "the roads in his hometown are bad", is an example of political humour which appeared in the form of an insinuation or an inference, to suggest that he may not be able to solve their problems because he has not solved the poor road issues in his hometown. Host1 invokes a humorous frame, through a smiling/giggling voice (see Holmes and Hay, 1997 for similar contextual cues which signal a play frame), and this was interpreted as such (stage 2 of the IR) and maintained by Host2 in turn 2 (note that laughter is often regarded to be synonymous with humour, Attardo 1994, Ruch, 2008). In other words, the incongruity was resolved when Host2 interpreted the oddness of Host1's comment, together with the contextual cue (the smiling/giggling voice), as an insinuation that the Minister may not be able to resolve the problem.

It is worth noting, however, that invoking a humorous frame here allows them to address a serious national issue (poor road networks). By diverting the conversation to the roads, this will hopefully attract the Minister's attention for action. This aligns with observations in the literature, that 'while it may be argued that the playful frame is conducive to the suspension of truthfulness and to deviation from norms obtaining for serious talk', it can also be postulated that 'humorous duality allows speakers to convey *serious meanings*, while appearing to be "only joking"' (Dynel 2011b: 226, emphasis added; cf. Lampert and Tripp 2006; Kotthoff 2007; Oring 2003; Simpson 2003).

It can be argued that the use of these linguistic strategies (inference, insinuation or indirection) in Excerpt 2 is to mitigate the effect of the underlying message – that the Minister is incapable of solving the problem at hand. Other indirectional strategies and stylistic devices like idiomatic and apologetic expressions, proverbs, wordplay, allusion, and simile are employed by participants to create humour in Excerpt 3.

**Excerpt 3, Newspaper review on October 9th, 2018**
[Participants were discussing a report that the president went to the Financial Times World Summit and said that his administration came to meet debt from the previous government. The former president had written a rebuttal, which prompted the current vice to also send in his rebuttal to the former president's statement]

1. Host: **[with a giggling voice] … *ɔmanpanin dadaa JDM na ɛni ooo, Ghana manpanin abadiakyire Vice president DB nso na ɛni ooo, wɔmo na ɛreto mane yɛn ho no***. *Wei ɛyɛ ɛɛɛm, mpanimfoɔ yi mmienu, ɔmanpanin JDM akasa afa ɔman yi deɛ ɛrekɔ ho, nyɛ a ɛnyɛ ne seɛ a aseɛ ne nneɛma a ɛreha adwene. ɛna ɔmanpanin abadiakyire DB ɛnso ɛrekyerɛ yɛ a wɔmo ɛreyɛ no yie, ɛne ɛka wɔmo agya ɛne seɛ a wɔmo seɛ no ama wɔmo abɛtena ho ɛnti na ɛnnɛ awie yɛn sei. **Anka ɛnte saa anka ɛnnɛ Ghana ɛnwie yɛn sɛ Amoako ne Adu. ɛnwie Amaoako no na Adu mpo abɛka ho.** Enti sɛ ampa sɛ wɔmo reyɛ nnoɔma yie a, ɛɛɛ ɔmanpanin dada, **sɛbe**, ɔnka n'ano ntom na 'incompetency' a wɔnom gyaeɛ no anaa sɛ 'incompetent' nnoɔma ɛna ɛnnɛ awo deɛ awoɔ yi*.
**[with a giggling voice]** '**the former president JDM is here ooo; and Ghana's vice president DB is here ooo. They are giving it to each other**. This is erm, these two elders/leaders, ex-president JDM has spoken about how the country is being run, how bad it is and how worst it has gotten to, and how worrying it has become. Vice president DB is also indicating how they are fixing it for better, and how they left debt for them that is why the country is in this state. If not so, then **Ghana would not be like 'Amoako ne Adu'**. **It would not get to Amoako, not to talk of Adu.** So, if it is true that they are working to make things better, then, **excuse my language**, the former president should shut up because it is as a result of the incompetency they left, that is why things are like these'.

In Excerpt 3, a humorous frame is invoked as the Host uses a giggling voice, an indication of jocular mockery. To set the stage for the teasing/jocular mockery, the Host

resorts to the use of wordplay with a rhyming effect[10] on the opening sentences "JDM is here ooo … DB is here ooo". The use of the wordplay here is for the purpose of creating a humourous effect, which in the end functions as ridicule for a moral transgression (i.e. high political leaders 'insulting' each other). To reinforce the humour, whilst adhering to the face needs of his listeners and using 'appropriate' language, the Host resorts to the use of idiomatic and apologetic expressions in the review. For instance, the use of the idiomatic expression "they are giving it to each other" (*wɔmo na ɛreto mmane wɔn ho no*) is considered more appropriate than 'they are insulting each other' – something that may be considered as moral decadence and, thus, not expected from such public figures. This serves as a face-saving mechanism for the sender, his audience and the targets (Brown and Levinson 1987, Bonvillain 1993, Agyekum 2010b). As it has been pointed out in the literature, formulaic or idiomatic expressions appear to frame the mockery as non-serious by indicating a possible summarizing and closing of the sequence (Haugh 2010: 2108; cf. Drew and Holt, 1998).

Another linguistic strategy used is the apologetic expression *sɛbe* (literary meaning 'excuse my language') which serves as both politeness and mitigation strategy. If not for the use of this expression, the Host would have been criticized for using language in its 'plain' form (that the vice president said the former president should *shut up* because the mess in the country is as a result of *their incompetency*). Indeed, the literature on language use among the Akan indicates that the appropriate use of this apologetic expression signals the speaker's communicative competence in the language (see Diabah 2020; Agyekum 2010c). This show of politeness is significant, not just for the speaker, but for the entire society (see Agyekum's argument that in African societies, face transcends the individual and encompasses the entire society, 2010b).

Humour is again reinforced through allusion[11], by comparing the current state of the country and the leaders' behaviour with the proverb about two friends (If not so, Ghana would not be like Amoako ne Adu) – also note the use of simile in making this comparison. History has it that Amoako and Adu were friends who were lazy and aimless. They, therefore, begged for alms (including food). People eventually became fed up with their lazy behaviour and stopped giving them alms. They, therefore, became poor and hunger-smitten, and they were used as a reference for anybody who was seen as exhibiting such traits. This gradually became a proverb among the Akan and the Ghanaian community in general. By alluding to this proverb, the Host equates the

[10] Dynel (2011a: 5) describes a wordplay as "play with language form … which also can manifest itself in non-punning figures, such as rhyming" (cf. Attardo 1994; Alexander 1997; Dynel 2009a, 2009b; Venour et al. 2011).

[11] Allusion refers to making reference directly or indirectly to a person, event, thing or characters from another story or text, to his or her own story. This is intended to add context or depth to the story being told or written (Agyekum, 1999).

former president JDM to Amoako (the eldest) and the current vice president DB to Adu (the youngest) and insinuates how both governments have made a mess of the country's economy. The humour content of the excerpt is further strengthened by using the proverb in the wordplay *ɛnwie Amaoako no na Adu mpo abɛka ho* "it would not get to Amoako, not to talk of Adu".

### *6.1.2 Teasing and retorts*

Although teasing (jocular mockery) is what dominates in this study, a few instances of the use of retorts, i.e., quick and witty statements, were identified (see section 2.1). These also include some rhetorical questions. Schaffer (2005: 434), for instance, notes that "while all RQs [rhetorical questions] seem to be used specifically to imply that the answer to the prompting question should have been obvious to the asker, many are also clearly exploited in different ways to create humour". Excerpt 4 further illustrates retorts amidst teasing.

**Excerpt 4. Newspaper review, November 1, 2018**
[Participants were reviewing a publication on the government's response to people's reactions to loans they had contracted. This was against the background that the government had campaigned against similar loan contracts by the former administration].

1 Host1: [with a giggling voice] *Na ɔmanpanin AA na ɔreka sɛ ɔnkɔtenkɔte a yɛabɔ bosea! yɛbɔɔ bosea a, obiara tua ne yɔnko deɛ!* [there was laughter at the background]
[with a giggling voice] And president AA says he has been hearing some rumours that we have gone for a loan! 'if we have gone for a loan, each one should pay the debts of the other!'

2 Host2: *Hei!*
Hey!

3 Host1: *Enti wo nso mebɔɔ bosea na wo nso wobɛtua na ayɛ dɛn? Na aban rebɔ bosea dodo! Na ɔse: oouu! oouu! bosea no yɛwɔ 2!*
So, you too, if I have gone for a loan and you come and pay it, what is wrong with it? But the government is taking too much loan! And he says 'oh! oh! we have two types of borrowing!

4 Host2: *Ookay, saa?*
'Ookay, really?'

5 Host1: *Yɛwɔ bosea: 'makɔbɔ bosea abɛkyɛ adi; ɛno no wɔ hɔ'*; *ɛna* '*yɛakɔbɔ bosea de abɛyɛ 'investment', yɛde abɛyɛ adwuma!*'

We have this type 'I have gone for a loan and I have squandered it with others', that one is there; and 'we have gone for a loan but we used it for investment, we have used it in development!'

6 Host2: *Saaa? Aaa, 'but' sɛ ɛyɛ bosea?...*
Really? Aaa! but is it not a loan?

7 Host1: *Yee!.. Woasɛm wa! tie na ma me nkyerɛkyerɛ mu.*
[with a giggling voice] 'Yee! you talk too much! Listen and let me explain it'.

8 Host2: *Aaa! kyerɛkyerɛ mu!*
Aaa! explain it!

9 Host1: *AA kyerɛ sɛ bosea no wabɔ, ɔde, woaahu? Woahu?*
AA says that he has contracted the loan for, do you get it? Do you get it?

10 All: Haha! Haha! Haha!

11 Host1: *ɔgu so rebɔ, ɔno no deɛ no ɔse ɛyɛ according to deɛ no bi, kyerɛ sɛ ɔrebɔ de ayɛ adwuma! a, adwuma no nso a ɔreyɛ no wotumi de wo nsa kyerɛ so sɛ ɛnie! Obi wɔ hɔ a ɔkɔbɔ bosea a na wadi. Obi nso de yɛ adwuma ma yɛhu sɛ ɛnie!..* [there was laughter at the background]
'He is still borrowing. He says that his own is the 'according to type', this means that he is working with it! And you can point at the work he is doing. Someone else will go and take a loan and squander it. Another one will take a loan and we will see it!'

12 Host2: *Enti bosea no ɔbɛkɔ so abɔ anaa ɔbɛkɔ* break*?*
'So, is he going to continue the borrowing or he will go on break?'

13 Host1: *ɛno deɛ gye sɛ wobɛgye bisa no!*
**You have to come and ask him yourself**!

14 All: *Haha! haha! haha!..*

It has been acknowledged in the literature on humour research, and especially on teasing, that humour is a joint enterprise between the speaker and the hearer, who may maintain the play frame through laughter and other contextual cues, (partial) repetition of the mocking remark, elaborating or countering the mockery (see Haugh 2010; Coates 2007). The participants here mock the attitude of the president by trying to differentiate between his style of contracting loans (the 'according to' type, i.e., for investment) and that of his predecessor (the squandered type) through various signals of 'this is play'. For instance, Host1 invokes a humorous frame when he notes that the president said 'he has been hearing some rumour …' with a giggling voice. This is interpreted as such by Host2, who employs a lot of discourse markers (hey!, aa!, ookay!) and laughter which function as encouragement markers to lead the speaker on, thereby sustaining

the discussion in a jocular mockery frame. Host2 also uses a lot of questions (including rhetorical questions) based on a pretended misunderstanding to create an opportunity for Host1 to continue in this jocular mockery frame (see turns 4 and 6).

In addition to jocular mockery, which characterizes the entire dataset, participants also use retorts as a sub-type of conversational humour. By feigning misunderstanding, Host2 (in turn 6) makes a 'statement' with a rising intonation which, on the surface level, appears to be a genuine question 'is it not a loan?' However, what she indeed intends to say is 'this is also a loan'. Based on this feigned misunderstanding, Host1 then retorts 'Yee! you talk too much!' (amidst giggles) and offers to provide the president's explanation for why their loan may be 'justified' and should, therefore, not be treated on the same level as that of their predecessors. This aligns with Dynel's (2011b: 1292) argument that one of the subtypes of retorts is based on a pretended misunderstanding which pertains to cases couched in ambiguity that manifests itself at the level of inferences rather than be rooted in the surface structure (cf. Ritchie 2004; Dynel 2009).

Again, in turn 12, Host2 asks a question which elicits a witty and sarcastic response (a retort) from Host1 in turn 13. This question is ironic because Host1 had already noted that the president is still borrowing (turn 11), and Host2's use of 'break' in itself only suggests an interruption, not a complete stop. The answer, therefore, appears to be already embedded in the question, hence the retort in 13. By this, Host 1 dissociates himself from the question (similar to what Haugh, 2010, refers to as disaffiliative stance). In other words, since the answer is 'obvious', but Host2 still wants to know, the best person to address that question is the president himself, not him (Host1). Another application of irony (which ties in with incongruity) is seen in turn 1, where the president is reported to have said ''if we have gone for a loan, each one should pay the debts of the other!'. The expectation here is that each person would pay for their own debt, not the other way round. This is foregrounded later in 3 through the use of the rhetorical question "you too if I have gone for a loan and you come and pay it, what is wrong with it?", which is interpreted here as a retort directed at his earlier statement (see Schaffer, 2005 for a discussion of rhetorical questions as retorts) – indeed, Schaffer argues that "a substantial number of RQs [rhetorical questions] might be taken as supporting incongruity theories based on content, as their humour seems to stem from unusual or incongruous phrasing or imagery" (2005: 446). The irony in this humorous frame is interpreted as such by the other participants, as they join in the laughter. This reiterates Coates assertion that "conversational humour is a joint activity, involving all participants at talk" (Coates 2007: 32). These ironies, rhetorical questions etc. act as indirect strategies to mitigate potential face threat to the referents – high political actors in this case.

6.2 Functions of humour in the *Kookurokoo* Show

Conversational humour has been described in the literature as a joint activity involving all participants in the conversation. Consequently, many researchers see its key function as the creation and maintenance of solidarity (see Norrick, 1993; Hay, 1995; Crawford, 1995; Boxer and Corte`s-Conde, 1997; Holmes and Hay, 1997, cited in Coates 2007: 31-32). Like these studies, humour in the *Kookurokoo Show* generally functions to create and maintain solidarity among conversation participants (for example, see Excerpt 1 and 2). Other functions include:

1. teasing for the sake of amusement or entertainment of the participants, not necessarily the target (see Haugh & Bousfield 2012; Yu 2013). This is shown through the use of discourse markers like "hey!, aa!, ookay, yee!, and really" in Excerpt 4 and contextual cues like smiling/giggling voices in Excerpts 2 and 3.

2. playful mitigation of threatening propositional meaning (see Drew 1987; Dynel 2009; Yu 2013). This is manifested through the usage of the apologetic expression *sɛbe* in Excerpt 3 to mitigate the effect of telling a former president to shut up and describing his government as incompetent. It is also shown in how the Host employs a proverb and the wordplay thereafter to insinuate how the two governments have made a mess of the country's economy. Thus, humorous duality is useful here, by allowing the Host to convey serious meanings, while appearing to be just joking (Dynel 2011b: 226).

3. indicating moral transgressions (e.g., Drew 1987; Everts 2003; Franzén and Aronsson 2013). This was seen in Excerpt 3, where the host used the idiomatic expression *wɔmo na ɛreto mane yɛho no* "they are giving it to each other" to downplay how the two presidents were 'insulting' each other.

4. claiming or ascribing identities (e.g., Drew 1987; Queen 2005; Schnurr 2009). This was subtly shown in Excerpt 1 when Participant1 mistakenly described Participant2 as a Lawyer based on his dressing.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper set out to investigate how humour is manifested in a popular Akan morning show programme (the *Kookurokoo Morning Show*) in Ghana. It has been shown that the newspaper review and general discussion segments are mainly characterized by teasing (jocular mockery) which is often targeted at politicians. Because

ridicule/teasing can sometimes be interpreted as offensive, especially by the addressee, participants resort to the use of indirectional strategies and stylistic devices such as wordplay, irony, allusion, idiomatic expressions, politeness and softening strategies to mitigate face threat. This is particularly important when it comes to public figures like politicians, who have a lot of followers. The paper reiterates that invoking a humorous frame in a situation like this helps to reduce tension and creates a cordial atmosphere for solidarity building, while at the same time conveying *serious meaning*. This strategy is also useful in providing participants with some leeway to retract their statements, irrespective of their initial intentions (see also Dynel, 2011b).

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