



CONTEXTS AND ACTS IN TODAY'S MARRIAGES: A CARTOON DIMENSION TO MARITAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Marriage is a universal social institution recognised and respected all over the world and it is instrumental to a healthy society. It is nevertheless characterised by conflicts. The literature indicates studies on marital issues such as factors that contribute to social problems, diversities in marriage cultures, rituals, naming and so on. However, language scholars have not focused on the depiction of marriage in cartoons, especially the aspect of conflict among couples in this generation. This study, therefore, examines marital conflicts in the interactions of husbands and wives (Mr and Mrs) in *Vanguard* newspaper and their pragmatic implications for marital discourse in Nigeria. Mr and Mrs cartoons in the *Vanguard* newspaper have been identified as channels where conflicts among couples are brought to limelight through humour. The theory of pragmatic act by Jacob Mey was used to analyse pragmatic elements in the texts aided by linguistic features in foregrounding areas of conflict in the interactions. The data comprised 120 cartoons published at different times out of which 25 were purposively selected for analysis because of thematic recurrence. Ten practs: accusing, challenging, concealing, condemning, controlling, discontentment, eliciting, informing, threatening and warning were identified within three contexts, cultural, financial and social to principally interrogate norms and to subtly advocate gender equality. This shows that the cartoons do not merely convey utterances with semantic implications that provoke humour but also rely on contexts to perform acts in addition to understanding linguistic elements.

Keywords: Mr and Mrs, cartoon, context, pract, marital conflict

1. Introduction

The lives of the African people are made up of cultures and traditions which the influx of Christianity and civilizations have continued to change. Hence, the institution of marriage has continued to dwindle because of a lot of social, economic and cultural factors (Kyalo, 2012). He asserts that the community was central in marriages, but today, this is no longer

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the case as it has become 'couple concerned businesses' and there is an increase of illicit unions. Dillon, Nowak, and Weisfeld (2015) identified four areas of marital conflict as sex, finances, division of labour, and raising children. They observed that the absence of kindness, dependability, and understanding are potential factors in marital conflict and identified evolutionary and cultural aspects of the marital conflict. Among other things in the area of sex, which is of interest to the current study are suspected or acknowledged infidelity, over mate guarding, or jealousy as well as the sex ratio (more women than men). While their study involved couples in five diverse cultures from the perspective of psychology, the current study differs from it by examining these and more presenting issues from a pragmalinguistics perspective, taking its data from cartoons in *Vanguard* (Nigerian) newspaper.

2. Language as a Vehicle of Culture and Humour in Cartoons

The issues in Mr and Mrs are primarily ones that subtly address the marriage culture of Nigerians which now orient to Western culture, thereby deriding the African (Nigerian) values and roles in marriage. According to Odebunmi (2008), *"There is an intricate relationship between language and culture. This relationship is exhibited in terms of language being a part of culture, and yet being its vehicle. Language is an aspect of the culture of a people, where culture is the totality of the way of life of a people reflected in areas such as dressing, religion, ritual norms, behaviour, belief systems and so on. This important role of language as a tool for the transmission of social realities has made it an area of interest to scholars in disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, communication, computer science among others."* The importance of language is captured by Holtgraves (2002), *"For many scholars, it represents the medium through which we encounter reality; our language both reflects and creates that reality. For others, it represents a uniquely human ability—an ability that reflects the essence of what it means to be human."* In other words, language is the channel of expression of the realities of the social world of marriage in the cartoons which are a mimicry of the natural experiences of couples in the Nigerian marriage context. In its multifaceted functions, language is the medium of the conveyance of humour.

3. Pragmatic Acts Theory

Pragmatic acts theory is an extension of the speech acts theory which was discredited for its atomistic approach to the analysis of the pragmatic function of non-situated language use. According to Fairclough (1989:9), speech acts theory is *"thought of atomistically, as wholly emanating from the individual"* and that it lacks an action theory. The theory of pragmatic acts was proposed by Mey (2001), as a socio-cultural interactional view on pragmatics. Pragmatic acts theory, therefore, takes into consideration, the context or interactional situation under which language performs pragmatic roles and the affordances of the participants within the context. Mey describes this interactional situation as: *"the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation as well as what is actually being said"* (2001:221). The pragmatic act theory,

therefore, identifies a generalised act referred to as a *pragmeme*, within which various utterances count as ways of making meaning or instantiations within the prototype. In Mey's words, "Instead of starting with what is said, and looking for what the words could mean, the situation in which the words fit is invoked to explain what can be (and is actually being) said" (Mey, 2009:752). This theory takes the perspective that language acts are from the 'outside in', and places emphasis on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances. The *pragmeme* is captured in the diagram below.

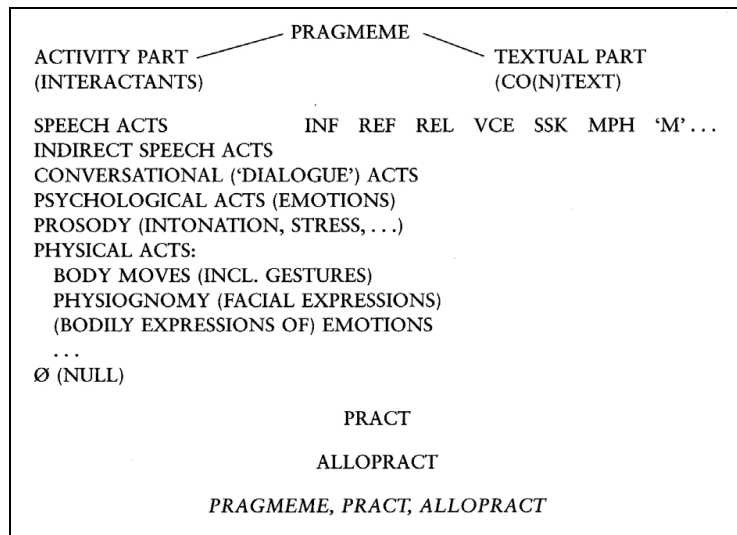


Figure 1: Pragmatic Act Model of Mey, 2001

The *pragmeme* comprises two parts, the activity and the textual part. The activity part consists of acts which interactants can select from for communicative purposes while the textual part features contextual elements in the text namely, INF for 'inference', 'REF' for 'reference', 'REL' for 'relevance', 'VCE' for 'voice', 'SSK' for 'shared situation knowledge', 'MPH' for 'metaphor' and 'M' for 'metapragmatic joker'. Pragmatic act deals solely with the illocutionary relevance of utterances, whose realisation, according to Capone (2005) requires participants' knowledge of the interaction between certain utterances and the context of their use. It is, therefore, speech acts in context. Sokari and Ugwu (2013:89), interpret pragmatic acts as what "... set the scene for reassessing acts of communication, from the situation in which the words are produced to the functions accorded the words by the situation". In the current study, marital conflict is the *pragmeme* that necessitates the various pragmatic acts or *practs* performed in highlighting areas of contention among couples where the influence of foreign culture challenges the Nigerian marriage context and/or spousal roles.

4. Some Studies on Pragmatic Acts

Odebunmi (2006 and 2008) are studies that have applied the theory of pragmatic acts to examine the pragmatic functions of proverbs in literary texts: *Yemoja Attahiru* and *Dry Leaves on Ukan Trees* by Ahmed Yerima, as well as Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are to Blame*. In both studies, the cultural context provided the basis upon which the proverbs derived their

meanings, thus foregrounding the sensitivity of proverbs to context. In the former, he identified proverbs as performing the practs of counselling, accusing, pronouncing, and assuring through utilisation of the con(o)textual elements of Ref, Mph, Rel, SSK and SCK (which he introduced into the pragmatic acts model of Mey based on the reliance of the proverbs on shared cultural knowledge). He concludes that the exploitation of the pragmatic acts potentials of the proverbs explicates the users' intentions and reinforce the readers' understanding of the texts. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the focus was on crisis-motivated proverbs. Two crisis situations: social and political gave impetus to the proverbs that were selected for analysis. The practs that characterised these situations are counselling, cautioning, challenging, veiling, persuading, prioritizing, encouraging, threatening and admitting. These functions were found within the psychological act in the activity part while relying on contextual features of reference, metaphor, inference, shared situation knowledge, shared cultural knowledge and relevance to establish their intended meanings. Hence, he modified the pragmeme to include shared cultural knowledge (SCK) as illustrated in the figure below.

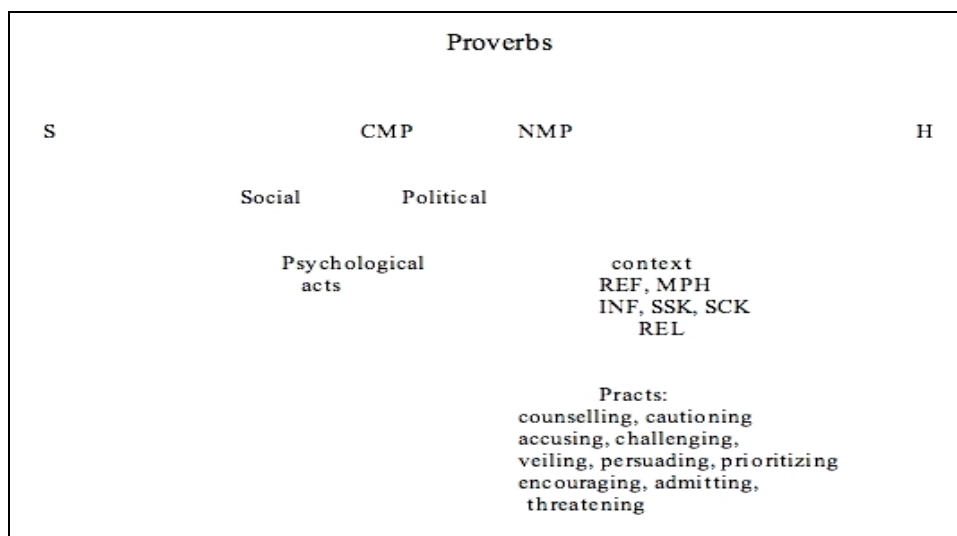


Figure 2: Modified Model of Pragmeme: Odeunmi (2008)

Inya (2012) examines Christian apologetics and identifies the practs of arguing, substantiating, disclaiming, authenticating, challenging, defending as instantiations of the pragmeme 'defending a thesis'. These practs are a product of the interaction between the psychological act and the contextual features of Ref, Rel, Inf, SSK, Mph and Vce and are the various ways apologists defend the thesis of their argument. Focusing only on the contextual feature of metaphor in the pragmeme, Sokari and Ugwu (2013) examined selected discourses from key actors and stakeholders in different roles and multiple locations on the Niger Delta crisis. Their study revealed that demonstrate that while linguistic meanings could be encoded in metaphoric expressions, the context of the speaker/hearer significantly conditions their use and facilitates their interpretation. In other words, the environment of the discourse both determines and constrains the meaning of the metaphors deployed. Three conditions, social, environmental, historical and political aid the meaning potentials of the metaphors

which were used to perform the pragmatic acts (practs) that condemn actions, issue threats, express rejection and legitimise violence in the Niger Delta discourse. They find that the elders and other educated stakeholders in the crisis prefer to be pacific and exhibit flexibility in their use of metaphors, the youths (especially the militants) use metaphors to legitimise the consciousness of violence and express the pragmemes [practs] of mistrust, rejection, frustration and issue of threat. Extending the pragmatic studies on the works of Ahmed Yerima's literary texts, Adeniji and Osunbade (2014) examined the pragmatic acts performed in the utterances of characters in *Mojagbe* by establishing a thematic link between the play and culture through the theory of pragmeme (pragmatic acts). Eight practs and allopracts of informing, invoking, warning, assuring, cautioning, lamenting, insisting, and accusing were found in traditional and communal contexts in the text to address issues of power, danger, immortality, reincarnation, death, bravery, punishment, insincerity, and war via the contextual features of SSK, SCK, Inf, Ref and Vce. The understanding of the themes in the text and the culture were aided by the contextual features in the pragmeme.

5. Some Studies on Cartoon

Cartoons are a satirical or humorous genre, through which an artist subtly informs, educates and entertains his viewers. It is a means of portraying social realism and has become a pungent instrument of communication and illustration in Nigeria (Adejuwon and Alimi, 2011). The art of cartoons as with other forms of arts is a purposive way of sending intended messages which address societal happenings (Brown, Edim, Etteh and Ashibel, 2016). Thus, cartoons have been used in exposing issues in politics such as salient themes like corruption, official responsibility, political failure and brutality/cruelty/suffering (Medube, 2002; Ogbo and Nuhu, 2016); communication (Sani, Abdullah, Ali and Abdullah, 2012; Febola, 2013; Akindele and Sunday 2013; Shaikh, Tariq and Saqlain, 2016).

These studies have amongst other linguistic tools, deployed critical discourse analysis, semiotics, pragmatics to bring out the communicative function of political cartoons in showing significant meanings, dominant themes, expressions of views in addition to bringing out the potency of cartoons. However, the role of cartoons in the marriage discourse which constitutes an important social institution with high societal implication has been under-researched. Akindele and Sunday (2013) examined Mr and Mrs cartoons from the perspective of spousal communication using cooperative principle, politeness principles and speech acts theory as their theoretical anchorage to show how spouses interact to express their views about each other as well as make their expectation about each other known. The current study while using data from the same source differs from theirs by examining marital conflicts necessitated by influence from foreign cultures.

6. Methodology

The data comprise 120 Mr and Mrs cartoons from the *Vanguard* newspaper published at different times. For the analysis, 25 cartoons are purposively selected. No time span is chosen

because the issues in the cartoons are recurrent but may be presented in different ways. All texts in each of the selected cartoon are considered because of the brevity of linguistic interaction in them which are also all relevant to the contexts of situation. Mr and Mrs' cartoons are selected because they are mediums of humour that relieves tension, entertains and simultaneously present many important and/or conflicting issues in marriage. It is also selected for the richness of the language which pragmatically highlights the areas of marital conflict as regards the traditional roles as well as 'borrowed' (culture and attitudes) social behaviours. The data were analysed using content analysis through a description of the contexts that constrain the linguistic choices that generate practs in the cartoons.

7. Contexts and Pragmatic Acts in Mr and Mrs Cartoons

The analyses of linguistic features in this study do not take into consideration the semantic relations in strings of words used in the expressions of the couples, but in the contextual constraints that necessitate the choice of words or expressions. Meaning in Mr and Mrs cartoons are established through pragmatic acts (practs) in three contexts namely, cultural, social and financial. The meanings of expressions are made explicit through co(n)textual features to establish the pragemme of marital conflict.

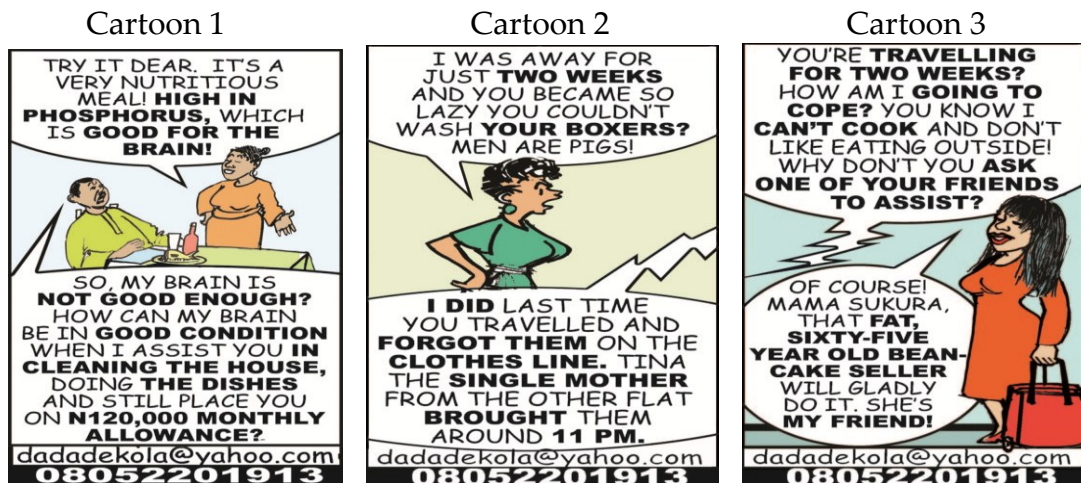
7.1 Cultural Context

The cultural context captures culturally assigned marital roles of men and women in the traditional Nigerian setting which are challenged by the behaviours of couples in modern marriages as a result of influence from other cultures. These behaviours manifest in the areas of domestic chores, culinary skills and financial dependence which contrast Nigerian marriage norms, values and beliefs in these areas.

Precisely, this context pragmatically explains these important aspects of marital ideals in the Nigerian situation and the underlying changes that constrain and facilitate the use and interpretation of linguistic choices by the discourse participants. These are expounded presently.

A. Domestic Chores

This aspect of the cultural context addresses matters of regular house jobs like cleaning of dishes, cooking, laundry and so on which are women's stereotypical domestic roles in Nigerian marriage situation. These jobs are traditionally women-assigned roles in Nigeria, but today, due to external influence and other social changes consequent upon civilization, they have become daunting tasks for women. One avenue of such foreign influence is the gender equality crusade that advocates equal rights, benefits, opportunities and obligations for both men and women. Three routine tasks of women in the Nigerian marriage setting are signalled in cartoons 1, 2 and 3.



In the first instantiation, exploiting shared cultural knowledge (SCK), that men are not to do house chores and negotiating a common ground that domestic works are women-assigned responsibilities, Mr interprets Mrs' act of care to mean that something is not right with his brain. This is derived from the interpretation within the cultural context that men engaging in domestic chores are acting under spells cast on them by the women, that is, taken love potion, which makes them lose their sense of position as ones that dominate in marriage. On the other hand, it implies subservience to women which is referred to as "woman rapa". By asking "How can my brain be in good condition when I assist you in cleaning the dishes ...", he pragmatically accuses the woman of advancing gender equality in the family while simultaneously informing her of her 'stereotyped tasks' as well as his performance of his 'stereotyped role' as being financially responsible for her. While Mrs employs an indirect speech act, Mr performs a direct speech act of questioning to achieve his pract of accusing. In the second cartoon, the expression of Mrs "I was away for just two weeks and you became so lazy ... wash your boxers" is used to inform the man that it is also his duty to wash his clothing. Put differently, she informs him that domestic chores are a joint responsibility thereby buttressing Mr's accusation of Mrs in cartoon 1 of advancing gender equality. However, Mr in cartoon 2 practs informing to remind Mrs that laundry is the duty of women by making reference (Ref) to "Tina", another woman who brought in the boxers from the clothes line. Also, the reference "single mother" and "11 pm" works as a psychological act to generate the inference (Inf) that Mrs' absence and her consequent inability to perform her duty exposed him to another woman and possibly caused him to have an affair with her. This meaning is derived from shared situational knowledge (SKK) that married men in Nigeria could have affairs with other women and that "11 pm" is an ungodly hour for an unmarried woman to be around a man whose wife away from home. Cartoon 3 establishes the cooking role of women and the norm that married men should eat foods prepared by their wives and not to eat out. Mrs practs warning through SKK, that men use the stereotyped domestic roles of wives to in their absence (the women's absence), engage other women and by so doing, get sexually involved with them. She warns Mr to stay away from women by saying "Mama Sukura, that fat, sixty-five-year-old bean-cake seller will gladly do it. She is my friend.". The reference, "Mama Sukura" within shared cultural

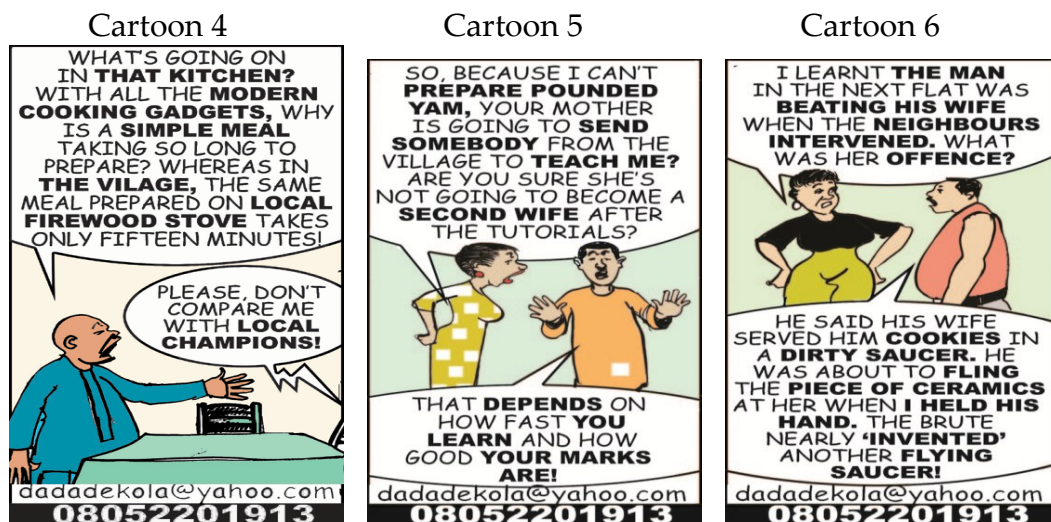
knowledge interprets as a woman who is 'spent' and may be sexually inactive. The cotexts 'fat', 'sixty-five-year-old' and 'bean-cake seller' are references that further supports the fact that the woman will be sexually unattractive to Mr, thereby putting his sexual desire under control while she is away for two weeks through indirect speech act and reference. This act proves that the woman is exercising some form of control over the man just as the belief in the institution that control or dominance is for the man.

B. Culinary Skills

It is common knowledge that many city women do not know how to cook local foods and would prefer their husbands to eat out or take fast food or snacks. These are alien eating practices which have found their ways into Africa because of civilization (Western influence). This tendency is attributed to two factors. These are: concealing deficiency in cooking skills and resistance to female domestication or negotiation of equality in obligations. Thus, processes of cooking and types of meals served or offered have become sources of conflict among couples. These issues are instantiated in turn.

i. Deficiency in Cooking Skills (DCS)

This captures men's expectation of women to be skilled in cooking traditional foods, hence their demand for home-cooked foods. DCS also manifest as men's resistance to 'junk-foods'. These are two issues which are common phenomena among modern couples. The following cartoon excerpts illustrate these features of DCS.



ii. Concealing Deficiency in Cooking Skills (CDCS)

Most modern women have issues with their husbands when it comes to cooking traditional foods as a result of relies on foreign foods and their ways of preparation. Concealing deficiency in cooking skills thus covers matters of cooking local (African) dishes.

In cartoon 4, Mr relies on indirect speech act and SSK that modern gadgets cook faster to pragmatically accuse Mrs of not knowing how to cook local dishes. This is made obvious by the fact that despite her use of modern gadgets, the meal is not ready as expected. Local food is contextually derived from the use of the prepositional phrase ... *in the vill[!]age* and the

noun phrase ...*the same meal prepared on local stove*. The use of 'local stove' in the context also generates the inference that the village is one that is undergoing a transformation as 'firewood' is the means of cooking, and not 'firewood stove' which is semi-alien – a blend of firewood (African) and stove (modern). Mrs' response, *Please, don't compare me with local champions*, contains two pragmatic inferences: first, it shows that she is a city woman, hence her inability to cook the traditional food as appropriate; second, the REF, 'local champions' which is derogatory, is INF which implicates differences in the ways of city and village women (those who have not embraced modernity) and simultaneously carries the illocutionary force of concealing her deficiency. In cartoon 5, the city wife's inability to prepare local foods is explicitly conveyed through orientation to SSK. She exploits the common ground that she cannot prepare 'pounded yam', a local food to challenge the polygamist ideology of Nigerians. Again, the fact that village women are knowledgeable at the preparation of traditional meals is foregrounded as Mrs challenges the intention of 'someone coming from the village to teach her how to make the local food'. The inherent pragmatic force from the perspective of Mr is a preference for the traditional way of life in marriage, especially, with regard to food. In the same wise, Mr's reply, *that depends on how fast you learn*, is a deployment of REL and indirect speech act to make relevant his desire for 'village wife' as a way of emphasising the demand for the retention of certain African norms in modern marriages. Tellingly, the role of mothers in the Nigerian marriage context, which includes making marriage choices for their sons is highlighted in the linguistic context expressing Mrs' fear, '*... your mother is going to send...a second wife ...?*'. The implicit meaning in the MET employed by Mr, *That depends on how fast you learn and how good your marks are*' is willing to retain local flavours – both polygamy and food.

Reliance on already made foods or fast foods as meals are one factor responsible for city wives' deficiency in preparing local meals. This phenomenon manifest as serving snacks or fast food at home or as eating out. In cartoon 6, men's (Mr's) resistance of junk foods resulted in a violent reaction as it was conceived as an offence. The cotexts in Mr's utterance, *cookies* and *saucer*, both depict foreign food and service which 'the man in the next flat' resists, possibly, as a way of showing preference to local foods.

Through the exploitation of INF, the man in cartoon 6 interprets the snack being served in a *dirty saucer* either as his wife not being mindful him or that she is not homely enough to know a dirty saucer which is the reason for his violent reaction. Thus, Mr utilises indirect speech act to inform his wife that men are averse to eating snacks instead of real local foods.

iii. Resistance to Female Domestication (RFD)

Domestication, as used in this paper, refers to men's expectation of women to perform all household or domestic tasks despite their office or other engagements that make them contributors to the family upkeep.

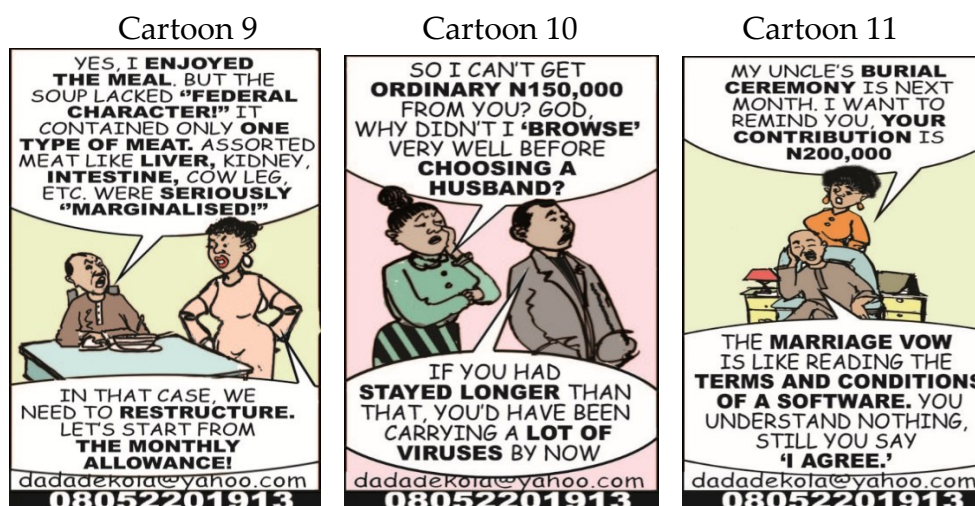


In texts 7 and 8, the Mrs are both employees that work to earn money and have assumed certain class roles as men. In both excerpts, the women rely on SSK, that office work is time demanding to practice challenging the fact that women should be saddled with domestic chores of ... *warming soup, making the home comfortable and cooking* (text 8). Obviously, there is a rhetorical twist in the demands of the women in both texts as they employ the hitherto work excuses of men in order to distribute the domestic duties. The REF to office assignment: *meeting with clients, senior manager* (7) and *the office* in text 8; are linguistic indicators of the context of workplace that equate women with men as against the previous concept of marital responsibilities whereby men work to generate money for the upkeep of the family while the women were largely housewives and managers of the home. Implicit, though, this act is a marker of gender equality which is being advocated. Hence, the women subtly dissociate from domestication as the men are expected to relieve them of such domestic duties earlier mentioned while they go to the work. Also, it can be inferred from Mr's response in 7, *With a brand new car plus a million naira as monthly salary, who's complaining, me?*, and Mrs' plea in 8, *Please bear with me, I have to rush to the office, let's dash to the nearby eatery for some fast food*, that the men are the ones who remain at home while the women go out to make money for the home. This trend is no longer strange in modern marriages as some women are the breadwinners of their families. However, it is worthy of note that while Mrs in cartoon 7 performed a direct speech act to ask the man to do her bidding, Mrs in 8 is indirect about her inability to cook, using her office as an excuse.

Another area where marital conflict ensues is in finance. This is examined in the next section.

7.2 Financial Context

Within this context, men are traditionally expected to be responsible for the financial needs of women. Thus, women put a lot of demands on the men ranging from money for family upkeep, dressing/look, contribution towards wives' families. The excerpts below exemplify these.



The influence of modern technology and its implicit role in the culture of Nigerians, and by extension, Africans, is evident in the shared situational knowledge (SSK) of the couples in excerpt 10 and 11.

In text 10, the relevance of the internet for browsing and its attendant benefit is exploited by Mrs, who feels that a more thorough search of the internet would have afforded her a better husband, one who is able to meet her financial needs. The cotexts, *N150,000* and *husband* in her first sentence show that the man (husband) is expected to meet her financial demands to be considered responsible and qualified to be a husband within the dictates of the society. This warrants her regret, *Go[b]d, why didn't I browse well before choosing a husband*. Mr, sharing the common ground knowledge of the internet, where browsing is done, responds appropriately to her pract of accusing him of irresponsibility by deploying MET of *virus*, which is associated with browsing the internet, to indirectly tell her of the possible danger she would have fallen into by browsing for too long. Mr's response licenses two inferences (INF) explicable from the reference to virus. These are:

- that she would still have not been married;
- she may have got a worse husband (to possibly demand divorce).

The two inferences generated are sources of 'diseases' within the Nigerian context of marriage just as the virus is a disease to the computer technology used for browsing. The first inference derives from the fact that being unmarried as at a certain age within the Nigeria culture is frowned at (unacceptable) just as the virus is unacceptable to computer users. Similarly, divorce is frowned at in the society and a divorcee is stigmatised the same way as the unmarried woman, two situations which Mrs would not have contemplated. Armed with this shared cultural knowledge (SCK) while performing a psychological act, Mr informs her of the cultural values of being married by saying *If you had stayed longer than that, you'd have been carrying a lot of viruses by now*.

Like the couple in text 10, Mr in text 11 draws from his knowledge of the computer technology/internet resources to subtly challenge the tradition of men being saddled with responsibilities from their wives' families via the exploration of MET of marriage vows and terms and conditions of software. This implies that a man's marital responsibilities are extended to his in-laws in the Nigerian context. In the present instance, Mr is reminded by

his wife of his financial obligation to her family by reminding him of the amount allotted to him to pay as an in-law, *My uncle's burial ceremony ... N200.000*. By making reference to his knowledge about access to software, which computer users are eager to have in much the same way as men are eager to take women as wives during marriage ceremonies or rites, he infers that some things are not clear to the men or overtly stated as part of taking the women, yet in their eagerness *the vow* in order to have the women, they simply say 'Yes'. Accordingly, the marriage vow is compared to terms and conditions of a software to which the 'user' must agree to its implicit and explicit conditions to have. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Mr draws information from the source domain of computer technology to the target domain of marital conflict to interrogate a prevailing situation within the Nigerian marriage culture. Within the ambience of the study, the exploitation of computer knowledge in these two excerpts is demonstrative of the role of civilization/digital age in today's African marriages.

The Nigerian political context is alluded through the use of lexical choices – *federal character, marginalised* and *restructure*. Sharing the situation background, SSK, of governance in Nigeria, Mr accuses Mrs of 'marginalisation' by not giving all assorted meat (innards) types or not evening distributing the meat among them as against the resources sharing principle in the country - federal character, by which all federating units are represented in the resource sharing of the country. Appropriately decoding Mr's accusation, Mrs employs direct speech act to call for a *restructuring* of the monthly salary possibly so that she could have sufficient money to take care of her look. The clamour for restructuring by Mrs is to meet the need of both of them, that is, the equal representation of innards in his food and her own personal needs which are all the needs of the family (family upkeep).

Again, the reference to all the innards is drawn from SCK where such meat parts count as a typical cultural delicacy. Similar to the MET in the other two examples in this section, the socio-political Nigerian context is deployed to explain aspects of marital conflict in the Nigerian context. Also, by Mrs' call for restructuring, she practs challenging for Mr to live up to expectation as a husband. In summary, all three instantiations in this section rely on both SSK, SCK and MET to relate marital conflicts in the Nigerian society. The next section examines the social context.

7.3 Social Context

The social context examines participants' (couples') involvement or relationship with people besides their spouses as well as personal outer presentation. In this regard, conflicts are generated around other women/men; friends, employers/employees and other family members and appearances and pleasure. In this connection, the following have been identified namely, context of infidelity, context of fashion and behaviour, and disobliging context.

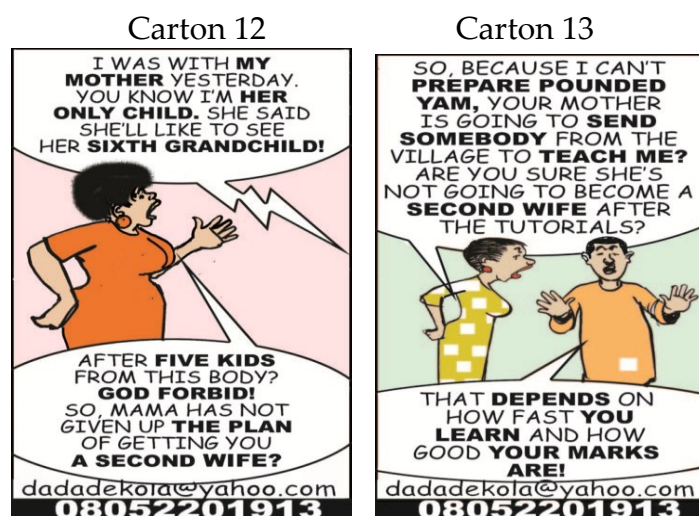
A. Context of infidelity

The context of infidelity foregrounds male dominance which manifests in the form of philandering. Infidelity is conventionally conceived as any act extra-marital affairs. In this

regard, men display subtle discontent with one sexual partner by overt or implicit references as well as the women's suspicious statements. Two types of infidelity have been identified namely, culture-induced and environment-induced infidelity. These are discussed in turns.

i. Culture-induced infidelity

By this, the act of womanising is brought upon men by the demands of their culture or tradition which may be fostered by another family member (s') demand. Cultural norms are therefore regarded as the motivations for men's extra-marital affairs. Instantiations are presented shortly.

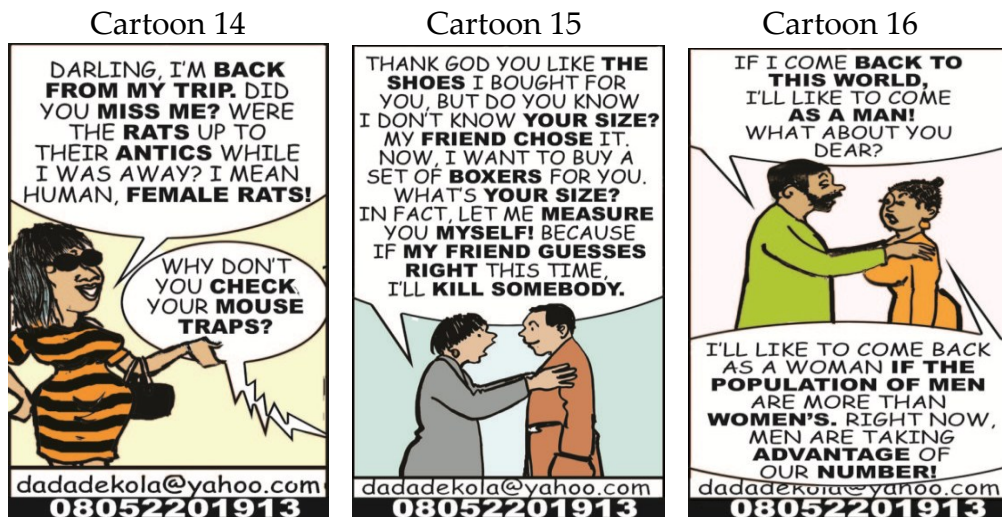


One of the ways male dominance prevails in the Nigerian society is through cultural acceptance of polygamy. Also, in many Nigerian communities, the mother of the husband has an influence on some decisions in the home of the couple, especially with regards to another wife. In the two cartoons in this section, the mothers of the men support polygamy because of child-bearing and cooking of traditional meals. While today's couples desire few children, the older generation still prefers having children by the gross. Mr's reference to his mother's demand, *...she'll like to see her sixth grandchild*, an indirect speech act, is appropriately interpreted by Mrs as inferring that a second wife is necessary. Telling Mr draws from SSK that his wife does not want to have another baby to indirectly attribute the demand to his mother (because of the roles of mothers as earlier mentioned) to want another wife. Mrs' understanding of the culture via SCK accuses her mother-in-law of trying to make her son take another wife. Mr also plays on SCK that parents who have 'one-child' always want such children to have many children. Similarly, in cartoon 13, Mrs' questions to Mr is possibly inferred from Mr's information to her that his mother is sending another woman to teach Mrs how to prepare pounded yam. However, armed with the knowledge of the role of mothers in marriages, she decodes the act of her mother-in-law as sending a second wife to her son. Also, Mr's answer to her question is not an outright affirmation because the tradition sees nothing wrong with polygamy, therefore the 'tutor' can very well end up as his wife if Mrs does not learn fast or score good marks. However, since the 'good marks' is the prerogative of Mr, he could decide to retain the 'tutor' as another wife. From the perspective

of the mothers, however, both desires are in consonance with cultural norms. The contributions of the two men are thus, practs of informing to take second wives.

ii. Environment-induced infidelity

Within this context, the overwhelming female population has been identified as an external factor responsible for philandering. The population consist of other women, (female) friends, female employers/colleagues. The cartoons below typify instances of other women and friends.

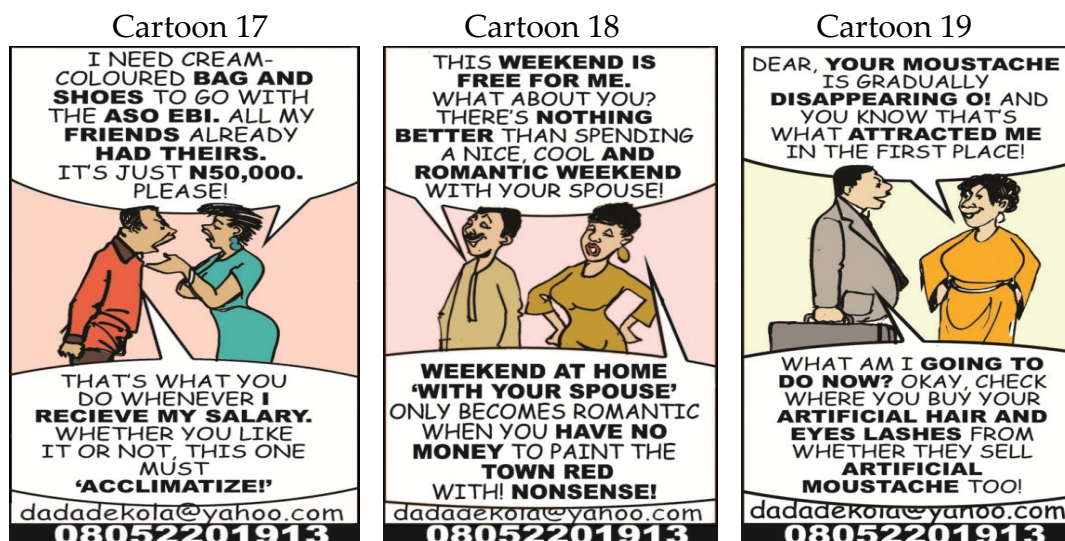


The effect of the huge population of women in the society is alluded to by the three cartoons within the social context of marital conflict. Mr in Cartoon 14 metaphorically refers to his mistresses as *rats* who may have tactically visited or nosed around the house in his absence to find out about him. Mrs appropriately decoding the meaning of rats, which Mr further modified as *female rat* deploys REL to refer him to his 'mouse traps'. The aptness of her response derives from SSK that rats are caught for elimination from houses by *mouse traps* and so she refers him to it, thereby making her contribution relevant. While Mr's question pragmatically counts as a pract of eliciting information, Mrs' answer which makes the adjacency pair, is a rejection of infidelity as a mark of male dominance precipitated by population; a reason which she will not endorse as a modern woman that believes that a married man should stick with his wife as the marriage vow dictates - one man, one woman. The REF to other sex partners as 'rats' also counts as REL in the situational context based on the shared knowledge that mistresses are as unwelcome within modern marriages rules as rats are unwelcome in homes because of the danger they constitute. This INF also becomes accurate when viewed from the perspective of disease transmission as both rats and extra-marital-sex-partners have the potentials to spread diseases. Unlike the explicit eliciting of information about the 'other women' in 15, in text 16, it is Mrs who tactically requests information in order to confirm her suspicion of her husband's illicit affairs with her friend who chose the correct size of his shoes. Mrs' threat, *If my friend guesses right this time, I will kill somebody.*, is a function of SSK that boxers (men's underpants sizes), in an ideal modern marriage is a thing that should be known only by their wives. Hence, the possibility of her

friend guessing Mr's right size will amount to a confirmation of the indirect suspicion that he and her friend have affairs. Mrs' inferred stance is that the size of shoes can be guessed right because it is external but the waistline is private to the man and his wife. This is without recourse to the fact that even that can be guessed right (especially by those in the tailoring profession) because of the shared situational knowledge of both Mr and Mrs that philandering is a phenomenon within the marriage institution in Nigeria. The assertive expressions of Mrs in cartoon 15 is also a pract of eliciting information. Cartoon 16 summarises the inferences in the other two as the theme of male dominance in marriage within the context of infidelity is made bare by the confession of Mrs. As a resistance to male dominance in marriage, Mrs in Cartoon 16 gives a conditional affirmation to Mr, *I'll like to come back as a woman if the population of men are [is] more than women's*. She supports her conditional answer with, *Right now, men are taking advantage of our number*. In other words, in addition to the reason for philandering mentioned in the preceding section, (cultural acceptance of polygamy), Mrs presents another reason which is men's out-numbering of the female population. Her conditional answer pragmatically accuses men of infidelity, thus making it relevant within the current context. In summary, the physical environmental factor, the more men to fewer women population in the society is the reason for men's infidelity. Put differently, both men and women have shared knowledge of the fact that men are womanisers because there are more women than men in society. In all three instantiations, the indirect speech act was blended with the various practs to achieve the illocutionary force. The second social factor of marital conflict is discussed next.

B. Context of Fashion and Behaviour

This covers outward looks and behaviours that are influenced by knowledge from a borrowed culture(s). It is foregrounded in dressing, hair-styles and behaviour. Within this context, conflict is engendered because one spouse is either not pleased with or comfortable with the other's social attitude or appearance. The following excerpts are examples of the situation.



The obvious attitude of Mrs' financial demands whenever Mr receives his salary is a behaviour that Mr wishes to curb. This unwelcomed behaviour of the woman is borne out of a shared situational knowledge (SSK) which triggers the INF, that men have more attraction outside when they have money to spend. Hence, Mrs' demand is a subtle way of checking his involvement with other people, especially women. There is also the shared knowledge that women in present days are attracted to men who have money and can spend it on them. Thus, she practs controlling by always asking for money anytime he gets his salary. The adverb, *whenever* is a habitual marker which means she determines the behaviour of the man. Similarly, from the perspective of Mr, the refusal to oblige her demand in the present instance is to assume supremacy/dominance as is typical of the African society where women usually take on in the subservient role. In other words, it is a resistance to gender equality, thereby maintaining the male-dominating *status quo* of the traditional African culture. This is evident from his response, *Whether you like it or not, this one must acclimatize'*. The selection of the word 'acclimatize' contextually agrees with making the woman get accustomed to the African marriage culture. Cartoon 18 obviously confirms the INF in 17, that men have more attraction outside when they have money to spend. Guided by this information, Mr's proposal, *This weekend is free for me ...nothing better than spending a nice, cool and romantic weekend with your spouse.*, which is an indirect speech act to conceal that he is out of cash, is met with a cynical response from Mrs, *Weekend at home only becomes romantic when you have no money to paint the town red with nonsense*. This statement counts as REL as it corroborates a script of men's attitude which she has and which appropriates answers Mr's proposal. The expression, 'paint the town red' is most tellingly, with other women. Pragmatically, her answer is a condemnation of men's womanizing attitude.

Staying young or having appealing looks are attractions to both the male and the female folks in modern times. Largely, women adopt this as a way of checking their husbands' desire for other (younger) women by engaging in artificial makeups such as hair, nails, eyelashes and so on. This SSK is exploited by Mr in Cartoon 19, who asks his wife to look for artificial moustache to make him look as attractive as he was that made her marry him. The fact that the woman does this is captured in Mr's second sentence, *Okay check where you but your artificial hair and eyelashes* Mr's request, therefore, counts as REL in the context

C. Disobliging Context

Disobliging context refers to a spouse's refusal to comply with the other's request. This covers monetary-demands and attitudes towards money. In this regard, two types of contexts are identified namely, demand-motivated conflicts and parsimony-motivated conflicts. Each of the features is discussed presently.

i. Demands-motivated conflicts

Demands-motivated conflicts account for situations where arguments ensue because of disobliged requests, looks-motivated conflicts, as well as dissatisfaction with earnings. Disobliging arises from the fact that in the Nigerian marriage situation, men are considered responsible for the needs of women. Therefore, within this context, the women are mainly,

the initiators of the arguments. Instances of the three situations within this context are exemplified.



Cartoon 20 demonstrates conflict associated with the disobliged request. In this instance, Mrs barricades the door to stop Mr from going out because he has not obliged her request for money. This is a physical act that stems from shared cultural knowledge (SCK) that the husband is to provide the needs of the wife. Working with this knowledge she considers it mandatory for him to meet her need or he would not be given access to the door. In order to assert his dominance as a man which is also an SCK, he utilises MET of David and Goliath from the Bible to threaten her by saying, *If you don't leave that place now, I'll push you or my name is not David*. This simultaneously derives from SSK of how young David defeated a mighty warrior (Goliath). By exploiting these contextual features, he informs, Mrs that he can have his way because he is more powerful than she thinks she is to warrant her blocking the entrance. Processing this information accurately based on common ground, Mrs also deploys SSK to challenge the notion that men are more powerful than women by her utterance, *And I will show you that not every David can defeat Goliath.*, and dares her husband to prove this fact. All practs in this situation orient to the activity feature of physical act as the woman uses her obviously big body mass to block the entrance as well as Mr's threat of pushing.

Looks-motivated conflict is illustrated by Cartoon 21, where Mrs' apparent bald-headed appearance engenders an argument because Mr considers her request of N20,000 for a hair-do as a waste of resources. By the expression ... *almost going bald*, stimulates the INF that Mrs is ageing and should therefore not be bothered about her looks. It can also be deduced that Mr implicates that as one married for such a long time (to the point that she is ageing), she should no longer consider appealing to her man as important. Mr's two intentions are borne out of the prevailing attitudes about ageing and dressing in marriage, especially with regards to women. Contrary to his view, Mrs sees the absolute need to maintain her appealing looks, hence, she proffers a more expensive idea of keeping it. Her response, *It's my natural hair. If you prefer, the artificial one, no problems. Brazilian hair is N50,000*

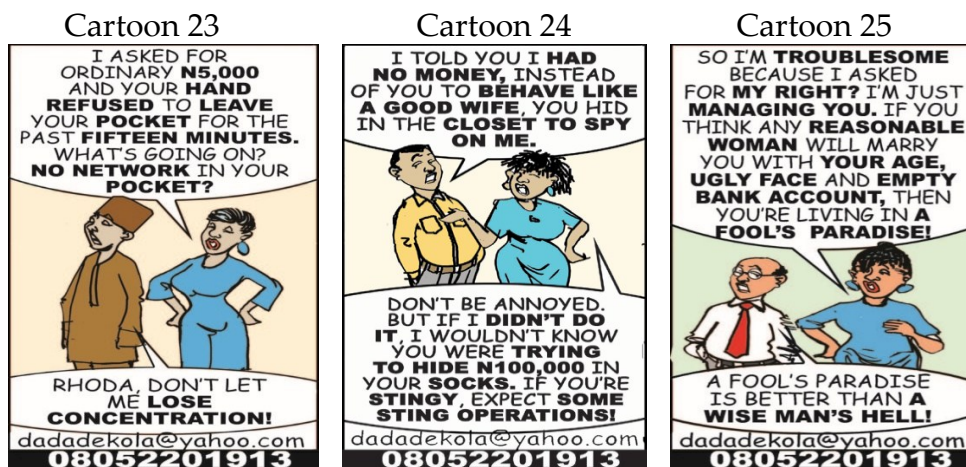
upwards, is a psychological act that realises two practs. First, she is informing her husband that she is prudent. Second, it is a threat because if her less expensive and considerate choice is a waste, then a more wasteful option, which is 'Brazilian hair' will be preferred. This act is aimed at making him give her the said amount while emphasising her desire to stay attractive. The acts derive from SSK that in modern Nigeria, even the old (by age and marriage) strive to maintain young and attractive looks.

The contention in text 22 differs from the preceding two as not being a decline to requests, but dissatisfaction with what Mrs gets because of the less-paying job of Mr. His desire for a romantic name is informed by SSK that, *Sugar, Sweet Heart and Sweetie*, are naming forms of modern couples. However, his REF to *the wife of Henry* is hijacked by Mrs to exploit a psychological act to make him see himself as undeserving by informing him of what 'Henry' does for his wife, ... *give his wife N200,000 monthly allowance and a chauffeur-driven car....*, which he does not do. Thus, she practs discontent about what Mr offers her in the marriage as a sugar company worker. She also licenses the INF that romance in marriage is a function of satisfaction or happiness.

Another conflicting area in the financial context is based on the attitude toward the spending of money. This is labelled context of parsimony and discussed in the next section.

ii. Parsimony-motivated Conflicts

Context of parsimony addresses conflicts in marriage necessitated by men's unwillingness to part with their money. It manifests either in their unwillingness to spend it on their wives or by making it inaccessible to them. Husbands being financially responsible to wives as dictated by the norm in the Nigerian society, their (men's) seemingly negative attitude towards the release of money has become a source of conflict. The two defining situations of parsimony are exemplified shortly.



Mrs confronts her husband over his attitude in cartoon 23 because it was difficult for him to give her the money she demanded. The glueing of his hands to his pocket conveys a

shared situational knowledge that he is unwilling to give out the amount demanded. Having this script of her husband, she deploys MET to liken his behaviour to ... *no network*, a situation drawn from SSK of the operations of telecommunication service providers in Nigeria, where one sometimes does not get through with a call because of lack of 'service', that is, interconnectivity. Sarcastically, he demands to know if his hand was not making contact with the money in his pocket. The pract of challenging is achieved through Mrs' question, *What's going on, no network in your pocket?* The SSK of the telecommunication outfits is used as MET to aid her to perhaps, preempt that she was not going to get the money from him just as 'no network' hinders communication. However, the response of Mr suggests that is a temporary delay to gain concentration, ... *don't let me lose concentration*. In order words, he is trying to make sure that he does not release anything more than N5,000, thereby practicing concealing of the amount he has in his pocket. This act, therefore, generates the INF and the indirect speech act function to implicate that he has more than the requested amount in his pocket but does not want the wife to know. The concealing act is expressly conveyed in cartoon 24 by a physical act, where Mr makes outright attempt to hide money in his socks. The utterance of Mr, *'... instead of behaving like a good wife, you hid in the closet to spy on me.'* goes to mean that a woman who noses around her husband, especially because of money is not considered a good woman. The overt apology of Mrs is a pract of accusing borne out of SCK that he is financially responsible to her. The two practs of concealing and accusing are explicitly captured in text 25 where Mr accuses Mrs of being troublesome because of her demands for money which she considers a right by norm, orients to SCK; *So I am troublesome because I asked for my right?* Her further contribution, *If you think any reasonable woman will marry you with your age, ugly face and empty bank account, then you're living in a fool's paradise.* Mrs' use of the idiom 'fool's paradise is a declarative speech act that communicates two pragmatic meanings: 1. That Mr does not seem to realise that she brings him happiness by being his wife despite his physical conditions; 2. The expression, *I'm just managing you*, implies she could leave if he does not change his attitude. However, Mr appropriately interprets *a fool's paradise* as a situation of restricting spending on a woman and prefers it to *a wise man's hell* which explains a situation of lavishing money on a woman. By choosing the latter in favour of the former, he informs Mrs that he does not subscribe to it.

8. Conclusion

The paper reveals that three contexts namely, cultural, financial and social; characterise Mr and Mrs cartoons in *Vanguard* newspaper in Nigeria. Ten practs: accusing, challenging, concealing, condemning, controlling, discontentment, eliciting, informing, threatening and warning, which are largely psychological acts, combined with co(n)textual elements such as shared situational knowledge, shared cultural knowledge, reference, inference and metaphor to perform pragmatic acts that among other things, depict the norms in the Nigerian marriage context, challenge gender roles and highlight other areas of marital conflict such as the inability of modern women to prepare native foods, womanising, parsimony and discontentment with husband's earning. This shows that the cartoons do not merely convey

utterances with semantic implications that evoke humour, but also rely on contexts for the understanding of the linguistic features deployed in the discourses. It also implies that contexts and cotexts are crucial in the realisation of these praxs which are instantiations of the pragmeme, marital conflicts in Nigeria; in addition to aiding the meaning potentials of the utterances in the cartoons. At the theoretical level, this paper adds to the literature on pragmeme while being a pedagogical tool for marital discourse analysts as well as being resourceful to marriage counsellors in Nigeria, and Africa by extension.

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