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## **Import of Laughter in Police-Suspect Interaction in Ibadan, Nigeria: A Multimodal Analysis**

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### **Abstract**

Studies on police-suspect interaction (PSI) have engaged the textual peculiarities of PSI. Scholarly works on the non-verbal mode of communication in PSI are very scanty. Dearth of studies in this regard has prevented an investigation of the significance of the non-verbal mode as a communicative tool in PSI. This study examines the resourcefulness of laughter as a non-verbal mode in PSI with a view to uncovering the contextual roles of laughter in PSI. The study adopts Norris' multimodal interaction analysis theory to investigate the motivations behind the deployment of laughter by investigating police officer (IPOs) and suspects during interrogation sessions. Data were collected at the Criminal Investigation Department, Iyaganku, Ibadan, Oyo State. Analysis of data reveals that, with particular attention to social context, IPOs and suspects engage laughter to build rapport, mitigate tension, modify verbal expressions and attitude, orchestrate deception, mock suspects, evade questions and maintain social order. The social actors' recourse to laughter as a meaning making mode reveals how their identities are co-constructed in the interaction.

**Key words:** Laughter, Multimodal, Social context, Police-Suspect Interaction, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Police-suspect interaction, henceforth PSI, is a form of forensic discourse. Police interrogation is a conscious attempt targeted towards establishing suspects' culpability or otherwise. Characteristically, the discourse is structured to achieve certain goals. Investigating Police officers, henceforth IPOs, are quick to ascertain suspects' guilt through a number of interactive strategies. Suspects, on the other hand, are poised to detract IPOs' investigative skills. It could be safely said that the social actors (IPOs and suspects) work at cross purposes. In a bid to achieve their institutional goals, the social actors dwell on textual features of interrogation. Communicative interaction between IPOs and suspects thrives along two major linguistic modes: textual and paralinguistic cues. Textual features involve the

## ***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

deployment of the written or spoken features of language while paralinguistic involves features other than the textual. It cuts-across gaze, laughter, space, gesture and visual forms (Kress, 2000, 2010).

Non-verbal features play significant role in PSI. These features interact with textual features to enrich meaning in such interaction. One of the noticeable non-verbal modes of communication in PSI is laughter. The concept of laughter has been conceived differently by scholars. It has been described as a phenomenon which is triggered by something funny and it has a strong motivating character (Hilary, 2012). It is perceived as a sign of consensus (Adelsward, 2008). It is seen as a unique attribute of man which widely conceived as part of universal human vocabulary.

Although IPOs and suspects are sometimes unaware of the resourcefulness of laughter in PSI, laughter is engaged in PSI to achieve institutional goals. Existing linguistic investigations in police discourse have characterized the textual features of police interrogation. Such studies have described the linguistic features of police interrogation and these features account for meaning. Some of such studies include Bamgbose (1971); Oyeleye (1985); Farinde (1997); Oyebade (2007); Adebowale (2010); Sadiq (2011); Ajayi (2016); Akinrinlola, (2016), and Akinrinlola and Ajayi (2017). These studies do not engage police interrogation from the multimodal perspective. Dearth of research from the multimodal perspective has prevented an understanding of how textual features of police interrogation interact with non-verbal to influence meaning, particularly within the frame of PSI.

There is need to examine the place of laughter in PSI so as to have an understanding of how laughter, a non-verbal paralinguistic feature, serves certain rhetorical purposes. It is needful to investigate how laughter is used to perform certain acts and the motivations for such acts. In view of this, the goal of this paper is to examine the import of laughter in PSI. This necessitates the adoption of Norris' (2004) Multimodal Interaction Analysis (MIA) as its theoretical anchor. MIA is a holistic methodological framework that allows an integration of verbal and the non-verbal modes within a particular social context.

This study intends to investigate how laughter contributes to meaning during PSI. The study is significant in a number of ways. Apart from extending the frontiers of research in forensic discourse, it will improve an understanding of how laughter as a paralinguistic cue facilitates meaning during PSI. Also, it will help to expound how the psychological states of social actors in PSI influence meaning during such interaction. Similarly, it will enhance how the motivations and acts of IPOs and suspects are studied from the multimodal perspective. Besides, the study will contribute significantly in improving criminal justice system in Nigeria. It also promises to be a good resource for language teaching.

### **Studies on Police-(suspect) Discourse in Nigeria**

Police discourse is a phenomenon that has received fair scholarly attention in Nigeria. It will be informative to give insights into the thematic preoccupations of the works in existence, particularly in the country. From the non-linguistic perspective, studies have engaged the social peculiarities of policing in Nigeria. Alemika (1995) observes that policing in Nigeria is characterized with various acts of lawlessness and social disorder. He affirms that such development has informed negative perception by the Nigerian public.

Alemika further stresses that there has been an age-long suspicious and antagonistic relationship between the police and the Nigerian public. Alemika's stance on negative public perception of the Nigeria police is further supported by Ayuba (2007). Ayuba submits that such negative perception has made it difficult for public members to accept the proposed Community Policing Project. Considering obstacles to effective policing in Nigeria, Onyeozili (2005) notes that factors such as, arbitrariness in the exercise of power, corruption, delay in the administration of justice and the concept of god-fatherism are some of the factors militating against the effective policing in Nigeria.

From the linguistic perspective, Bamgbose (1971) investigates language among Nigerian police officers and notes that Nigerian Pidgin is the 'unofficial' lingua franca among Nigerian police officers. Oyeleye (1985) observes some linguistic items such as 'your particulars', 'what you want here?', 'where your roadworthiness?', 'go away', among others characterise the language of Nigerian policemen. This, according to him, reveals the communicative incompetence of the men of the Nigerian Police in the use of English.

Farinde (1997) examines discourse acts in police-suspect interaction within the purview of Sinclair and Coulthard's Discourse Acts and observes police-suspect discourse is replete with acts such as elicitation, directive, prompt, evaluation, excuse and reply/informative. Farinde (2011) is a descriptive analysis of how police officers deploy questions and questioning to assert their institutional power in police-suspect interaction in Nigeria. Oyebade (2007) focuses on the graphonological, syntactic, and lexico-semantic features of police English in Nigeria and how they are reflective of the Nigerian sociolinguistic space. Similarly, a descriptive attempt on the stylistic features of the language of the Nigerian police during interrogation was made by Adebowale (2010) .

Sadiq (2011) gives insights into the structure and organisation of the content of police-accused interaction; with the view to revealing the communication strategies and motivation in negotiating the interaction. Terebo (2012) examines the place and role of police interpreters in police-suspect discourse, and observes police interpreters are not very proficient in the use of the English language; a development that has made it difficult for them to function effectively well in this regard (Ajayi, 2016). Ajayi (2016) looks at the pragmatic deployment of politeness and impoliteness strategies as markers of power asymmetry between police officers and suspects in police-suspect interaction. Akinrinlola (2016) employs

## ***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

Mey's (2001) pragmatic acts theory to discuss power asymmetry in police-suspect interaction in Nigeria. The pragmatic import of the use of hedges in police-suspect interaction has been discussed in Akinrinlola and Ajayi (2017), and all these studies have made laudable attempts at investigating the stylistic peculiarities of police discourse. A cursory look at the studies reveal a robust engagement of the textual features of language. However, the non-verbal mode of police discourse is yet to receive scholarly attention. Dearth of studies on the non-verbal features of police discourse has prevented an understanding of how textual features are integrated into non-verbal modes to create meaning in PSI. This explains why a research of this nature needs to fill this identified lacuna. This necessitates the use of Norris' (2004) multimodal interaction analysis to investigate the import of laughter in PSI.

### **Multimodal Interaction Analysis**

Multimodality is a theory which examines how people interact with one another through writing, speaking, gesture, gaze and other visual forms (Kress, 2000). A mode is described as a channel that is recognized by a particular culture. It is a theory of communication and social semiotics. It examines communication with particular attention to linguistic and visual resources. It favors the use of different modes to make meaning plausible. An aggregate of these modes contributes to how multimodality influences different situations. In multimodality, everything creates meaning. Kress (2000) defines multimodality as 'a socially and culturally shaped resources for making meaning. It holds that semiotic modes are shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic potentialities of the medium and the values of societies and their cultures (Kress, 2010).

Multimodal interaction analysis is a theory propagated by Norris (2004). It is a holistic methodological framework that permits an integration of verbal and non-verbal features and integrates these into objects and the immediate environment. Scholars who have worked in this area include: Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and Scollon and Scollon (2003). Norris (2004) creates a distinction between embodied and disembodied modes. Embodied modes refer to modes that relate to interaction. Such modes are used in interaction. Examples of such modes include: gaze, laugh and gesture. Disembodied modes refer to the material world that people utilize in interaction. These include: music, print, layout and so on. She posits that individuals react to specific situations during interaction and she holds that what individuals react to is always co-constructed. Her claims go beyond the verbal text to include some other indicators such as head position and layout of objects or spaces. These variables, according to her, reveal how the co-construction is built. Her analysis is premised on awareness and attention. She asserts that awareness and attention comes in degrees and a person may be aware of something without paying attention to it. Multimodal interaction analysis is a form of mediated discourse analysis. Scollon and Scollon (2004) assert that MIA: sees discourse as one of many available tools with which people take action. It provides a way of understanding how all of the objects, the languages and the actions taken

with these various adjudication means interact at a nexus of multiple social practices and the trajectories of multiple histories and storylines

MIA examines multiple communication modes as possible cues to meaning rather than dwelling on language as the primary communication mode. PSI features quite a number of textual and non-verbal modes of communication. These variables account for meaning in such interaction. During police interrogation, the motivations and acts of IPOs and suspects are foregrounded through textual and non-verbal modes. A close study of the gestures, gaze, body posture, head movement, proxemics, layout of space and material, ways of handling materials and images helps to infer meaning in PSI. This study focuses on laughter, one of the non-verbal variables. It examines how laughter as a non-verbal mode is used to engage the subject of interrogation, and what social actors use laughter to achieve during interrogation session.

### **Laughter in Discourse: A (critical) Overview**

One of the essential elements of discourse that has attracted scholarly attention is laughter. It is a phenomenon that has been subjected to various scientific investigations at different levels of analysis, hence its varying and various definitions. For instance, Provine (2000: 43), from a psychological perspective, describes laughter as an essential aspect of humans. According to him, laughter is about relationships. In the opinion of Glenn (2003: 14), laughter is a 'solitary and group form of expression'. Hopper (1992) sees laughter as a form of mechanical vocal release that depicts surprise, amusement, bewilderment and reaction to situations. Trouvain (2003: 2793) conceives of laughter as an every-day nonverbal vocalization that is peculiarly human. Bachorowski *et al.* (2001: 1582) define laughter as 'any perceptibly audible sound that an ordinary person would characterize as a laugh if heard under ordinary everyday circumstances'. A critical appraisal of some of these various scholars' definitions of laughter although reveals the dialogic character of laughter. However, they have not accounted for the contextual import of laughter in interpersonal communication or interaction. For instance, Provine (2000) argues laughter is essential to man and human relationships; he does not spell out, in specific terms, the role it plays in such interaction. Similarly, Glenn's (2003) description of laughter as a solitary and group form of expression is conceptually vague, as there are some other forms of solitary and group expression such as crying and gesticulation, which are not necessarily laughter.

Our conception of laughter in this study follows the submission of Hopper (1992) who sees laughter as a vocal reaction which shows human reactions to different situations, which can be humorous and non-humorous (Hayakawa, 2003). As inferred from the argument of Hayakawa (2003), humorous situation laughter, which has attracted much scholarly attention than its counterpart (non-humorous laughter), is birthed by jokes. Non humorous laughter, on the other hand, is such that is witnessed in situations that are devoid of jokes or humorous activities that

## ***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

could engender an atmosphere of laughter. Following the line of arguments of these scholars in this study makes it possible for us to give attention to the function of laughter rather than the factors that engender it in police-suspect interaction. This study is interested in examining the pragmatic import of laughter in PSI. As a non-verbal mode, laughter is engaged by social actors involved in interrogation to perform a number of acts. The motivations of IPOs and suspects are influenced by laughter. As shall be seen later in this paper, laughter performs certain pragmatic functions in police-suspect interaction in Nigeria.

### **The Data and Analytical Procedure**

The data for this study were collected by the researchers at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Iyagankun, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria between 14th May, 2013 to 3rd March, 2014. It is a department of the Force that is saddled with crime investigation. Sixty five sessions of interrogation were randomly observed. These included interrogations on cases such as burglary and stealing, conspiracy, assault, felony, affray and defamation of character. However, seven cases were purposively selected because of their relative use of laughter in the interrogations observed. Data collected were transcribed into text and for conversations in Yoruba, efforts were made to translate them into English. For ethical reasons, the researchers were not allowed to take a video coverage of the interrogation sessions. The researchers also sought the permission of the suspects before the recordings were made. The non-participant observation technique was adopted. The IPOs and the researchers made the suspects to understand that the purpose of the recording was purely academic. Also, the names of suspects were coded. The qualitative method of analysis was adopted. Emphasis was on the use of Norris' theory of multimodal interaction analysis to explicate the various motivations behind the use of laughter by police officers and suspects. The study engages the significance of embodied mode by the social actors during interrogation sessions. The various contextual roles of laughter from the perspectives of IPOs and suspects were analyzed. The results were subjected to multimodal interaction analysis.

### **Contextual Functions of Laughter in the Interaction**

This section captures the roles of laughter in the entire interaction. It examines the motivations behind the use of laughter by IPOs and suspects. The study holds that both IPOs and suspects appeal to laughter as a multimodal mode to achieve meaning in the interaction. An analysis of the data reveals that the social actors resort to laughter to build rapport, mitigate tension, evade questions, modify verbal expression, orchestrate deception, mock suspects and maintain social order. These contextual functions are presented below:

#### **The Deployment of Laughter to Build Rapport**

One of the multimodal functions of laughter in the entire interaction was to build rapport. Both IPOs and suspects resorted to laughter to create friendly atmosphere during interrogation sessions. The entire interrogation sessions were laced with

fear, anxiety and suspicion as suspects were conscious of being freed from the claws of the IPOs. One of the means of extricating themselves was to devise means of creating access in the discourse. An example from the data is presented below:

**Excerpt 1**

1. P: When did you see CB?
2. S: I saw him last week.
3. P: Did you see him the day you went to court?
4. S: Yes, we were there together.
5. P: How did you get to know CB?
6. S: He is my cousin.
7. P: Ah! So you are related?
8. S: (laughs)Yes, he was born when I was in Kano.
9. P: Did you stay in Kano?
10. S: Yes, at Sabongeri.
11. P: I served for seven years at Sabongeri Police Station.
12. S: (*Laughing*) Oh! That is wonderful. My house is not far from there now.
13. P: Everybody knew me there then.
14. S: *Eeyah!*(laughs)
15. P: I came back not long ago.
16. S: *eh eh!*
17. P: I really had a nice time there.
18. S: Oh! That is Hausa people for you. They are very nice.
19. P: Yes, so how do you find the South here?
20. S: Well, it is not bad. People here think that everybody from the North is a Hausa man and a Muslim.
21. P: You are very right.
22. S: (*Laughing*)
23. P: So, you are CB's guarantor?
24. S: Yes! We were together in court that day. He was asked to show up again on the next hearing. I did not know he absconded.
25. P: You see you have to be very careful with people. Don't you know that court injunctions are usually adhered to?
26. S: In fact, I thought he would go because I was busy with other things.
27. P: No! It is not done that way. You should have ensured he attended because the court and police will always be on your neck.

The interaction above is a case of perversion of justice. The suspect is a guarantor to his cousin who was arrested and charged to court for his failure to pay his accrued rent. The said suspect promised in court to always produce his cousin anytime the court demanded his presence. On the day scheduled for the following hearing, the suspect's cousin was nowhere to be found. This informed the arrest of the suspect. It is apposite to assert that the interaction places the IPO at a vantage position. The suspect is left with the task of wriggling himself out of the snare of the IPO. One of the means of achieving his aim is to manipulate the resources

## ***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

available at his disposal. The IPO is curious to know the motivation behind the suspect's decision to make such huge promise at the court scene. The IPO's question in line 7, 'so you are related' prompts the suspect to introduce another mode other than the textual mode to engage meaning in the interaction. He resorts to laughter as an embodied mode to establish that the actual offender is his kinsman. In a bid to drive home his claims before the IPO, he introduces in line 8 that 'he was born when I was in Kano'. The suspect laughs before the mention of Kano is made. The contextual import of his laughter is to convince the IPO beyond all reasonable doubts that he (the suspect) is certain of his narrative. It is also aimed at winning the IPO to his side. It is an attempt to build friendliness and rapport with the IPO. The goal of employing laughter as a strategy is to influence the IPO to soften the severity of his case.

Another embodied mode in the interaction is the mention of Kano. The mention of Kano appears to influence the meaning in the interaction. This prompts him to relay his experiences as a serving police man in Kano. He says, 'I served for seven years at Sabongeri Police Station.' The suspect adopts laughter again in line 12 to establish his strong affinity towards Sabongeri. The use of laughter in line 12 is to accept the IPO's testimonies and affirm his own claims. The suspect also endears himself to the IPO by claiming his own house is not far from Sabongeri Police Station. The same goes for his interaction in line 22 when he says 'people here think that everybody from the North is a Hausa man and a Muslim.' Having confirmed his assertion, the suspect laughs to stamp the IPO's approval of his claims. The use of laughter in the entire interaction is to develop an atmosphere of friendliness with the IPO in a bid to influence the latter's investigative skills. The result of this study is in tandem with Norris (2004) study on the use of embodied mode as a meaning making device, and as a means of sustaining institutional interaction. This study is in consonance with that of Hilary (2012) which posits that laughter is employed during university lectures to sustain interaction.

### **Laughter as a tool to mitigate tension**

Data also revealed that laughter was employed in IPOs' interaction with suspects to douse tension in the investigation room. It was observed that most suspects were always panicky and jittery during investigation sessions. Some of them adopted laughter as a strategy with which the tense situation could be mitigated. Below is an example:

#### **Excerpt 2**

1. P: When did this incident happen?
2. S: That was on 17th November, 2012.
3. P: How would you describe the man in question?
4. S: He is tall, fair and lanky.
5. P: You saw this man at a Convention ground?
6. S: Yes.
7. P: Which church?
8. S: XX.

9. P: You think he bears a good resemblance of the 419?
10. S: Yes! That was the first day I saw him, but now I have realised he is not the one.
11. P: Do you know this is a strong case against you? A fine woman like you should not be kept here for long. Should you? (*laughs*)
12. S: (*Laughing*) Sir (XO) please I am almost late for work.
13. P: Madam Eagle eye! Your eyes deceived you eventually.
14. S: Hmm!
15. Another Police Officer: She must be taken to court for defaming Mr XX's character.
16. P: (*Laughs*) You have to pay some fines, madam.
17. S: I am pressed sir.
18. P: Take it easy, madam. Any problem?
19. S: Not at all.
20. P: (*Laughs*) Just be patient. I will meet my boss and you will be freed.
21. S: Okay sir.
22. Another Police Officer: When a thing like this happens and you freed, do you know another man will accuse you of the same offence one day?
23. P: (*Laughs*)

Excerpt 2 is a case of defamation of character. The lady in question, who later turned out to be the suspect, was attacked and robbed on her way to Lagos on 11th April, 2012. She made several attempts to get back at the evil doers, but to no avail. On a fateful Sunday at a church convention, she saw a young man that bore a resemblance to one of those that attacked her on her way to Lagos. The lady quickly accused the young man publicly and the former filed a case against the lady at the state Criminal Investigation Department, Iyaganku, Ibadan. In the interaction, some background information provides a better understanding of the case. The IPO has a better knowledge of the severity of the case than the suspect. Also, the veracity of the suspect's claim has not been established as there are no pieces of evidence provided. The IPO and the suspect appeal to laughter as a multimodal mode to process meaning in the interaction. As soon as the IPO creates an awareness of the suspect's ignorance, she becomes increasingly nervous. This acceptance of ignorance is captured in line 10 when she says, 'yes! That was the first day I saw him, but now I have realized he is not the one.' Having withdrawn her earlier statement, the IPO interprets the content of the case more literarily when he asserts that 'do you know this is a strong case against you?' The IPO realizes that his assertion could affect the composure of the suspect, he quickly introduces a seemingly rhetorical expression to make the suspect feel at home: 'a fine woman like you should not be kept here for long. Should you?' This statement is made to soften the tense psychological state of the suspect.

The IPO engages laughter in line 11 to control the situation. The use of laughter in the said line is meant to douse the built up tension in the suspect. Besides, it serves to put the suspect together so as to further get some confessional statements from her. The disposition of the IPO informs the suspect's resort to laughter in line 12.

## ***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

The use of laughter by the suspect in line 12 is an acknowledgment of the IPO's decision to 'temper justice with mercy'. To further prove the suspect's fallacious tale, he retorts, 'Madam Eagle eye! Your eyes deceived you eventually'. This statement is meant to render invalid her claims. In line 16, the IPO teases her by recommending that she pays some fines before she is exonerated though the IPO's statement is accompanied with laughter to suggest the triviality of her (IPO's) assertion. The same goes for line 20 when the IPO laughs to mitigate the suspect's fears with a declarative statement that the case will be settled. He affirms that 'just be patient. I will meet my boss and you will be freed.' This statement serves to reassure the suspect of freedom from custody. The result of this study contrasts with that of Nicola (2012). Nicola's study holds that laughter functions mainly as a means of handling ambiguities in institutional interaction. This study, however, views laughter as an instrument for dousing tension during police interrogation.

### **Deployment of Laughter to modify verbal expression**

Data also revealed that IPOs and suspects relied on laughter as a mode for modifying verbal expression during interrogation sessions. Laughter was used as a narrative strategy which accompanied spoken expression. The use of laughter in the interaction enhanced a better understanding of the motivations behind IPOs and suspects' actions and inactions.

#### **Excerpt 3**

1. P: *Njẹ́ ọ mọ̀ ọ́ ? (Do you know her?)*
2. S: *Bẹ́ ẹ̀ ni. Ó tó ọjọ́ díẹ̀. (Yes sir, for some time now.)*
3. P: *O sọ́ fún wa pé ọ́ ré kùnrin òun ni ẹ́. (She told us you are her boyfriend).*
4. S: *Bẹ́ ẹ̀ ni (Yes.)*
5. P: *Njẹ́ ọ mọ̀ pé ó ti lóyún? (Are you aware she is pregnant?)*
6. S: *Ó sọ́ fún mi lósù tó kojá. (She told me last month.)*
7. P: *Kílódé tóo sọ́ fun pé kó loògùn? (Why did you tell her to take drug?)*
8. S: *Oga, mi ò sọ́ bẹ́ ẹ̀. Òun ló mú àba nàà wá. (I did not sir. She suggested it.)*
9. P: *(Laughs) Olóríburúkú ọkùnrin ni ẹ́. (laughs) (You are such an unfortunate man.)*
10. P: *Mo mọ̀ pé ọkùnrin bí iwọ́ ò lè se bẹ́ ẹ̀. laughs. (I know big boy like you won't do that. (Chuckles)*
11. S: *Rára ọ́ gá. Monísé ọ́ wọ́, sùgbọ́n ó ní bẹ́ rù àtilóyún. (At all sir. I have a good job, but she is afraid of being pregnant.)*
12. P: *Şùgbọ́n ọ́ se nńkan tó tọ́. Ó yẹ́ kóo fé ẹ́ nísulọ́ kà. (But you have not done the right thing. You are supposed to marry her according to her tradition. (Laughs)*
13. S: *Bẹ́ ẹ̀ eeni ọ́ gá. Màáa se é. Wọ́n kàn fé sùn kàn mí ni. (Yes sir. I will do that. This is just an allegation.)*
14. P: *Tóo bá sòota, màá fi ẹ́ sílẹ̀. Njẹ́ ọ fun ní oògùn lò? (If you tell the truth, I will release you. Did you give her drug?)*
15. S: *Rára ọ́ gá. Mi lè parọ́. Ó mọ̀ mi dáadáa. (No sir. I can't tell lies. She knows me.)*

16. P: Ó maṣ`e`? (*laughs*) Njée` o fe` e niisule`kà? Báwo ló se maṣ`e`? *She knows you? (laughs). Is she legally married to you? How could she have known you)*

Excerpt 3 is a case of attempted felony. The suspect is alleged to have compelled his girlfriend to abort a two-month-old pregnancy. The lover birds had been in an informal relationship for some years. The parents of girl in question were aware of the illicit relationship. The girl developed a strange illness days after the parents got to know about her 'new status'. Consequently, the parents alleged the friend of having forced their daughter to use contraceptive. The context of the case has it that the suspect being interrogated has not been found guilty of the crime. The case is premised on an allegation. This explains why the IPO appears to be lenient with the suspect. In line 7, the IPO questions the rationale behind the suspect's decision to force the lady to use drug, but the suspect's reply in line 8, '*I did not sir. She suggested it*' prompts the IPO to resort to laughter in line 9. This is in line with Norris' (2001, 2004) submission that multimodal interaction thrives on social context of interaction.

The IPO's recourse to laughter is underscored by the suspect's response which is considered very jocular, funny and ridiculous. The use of laughter as non-verbal mode serves to qualify the expression, '*you are such an unfortunate man.*' The use of laughter in such context tends to establish the attitude of the IPO towards the subject of interrogation. In a bid to further express his critical disposition towards the subject, the IPO asserts that 'a big boy' like the suspect could not have done so. This is accompanied by laughter again in line 10.

The use of laughter in line 10 establishes the contents of the verbal expressions of the IPO. In line 12, the IPO criticizes the suspect for his failure to marry the lady according to her tradition and resorts to laughter to express his disapproval of the suspect's actions. Laughter is engaged here to lend credence to the IPO's disparaging remarks. The IPO recommends that the suspect fails to do the needful when he says, '*but you have not done the right thing*'. The utterance of the IPO is accompanied with laughter as a mode which serves to strengthen the IPO's stance. In line 16, the IPO queries the suspect's claim that he (the suspect) does not tell lies. The suspect asserts that the pregnant lady knows that he (the suspect) does not lie. This claim informs the IPO's agitation to contest the suspect's stance. The IPO believes that only married couples could give such assertive comments. This informs the IPO's laughter in line 16 as a mode to establish his critical disposition towards the suspect's claims. Laughter thus becomes a strong multimodal feature that helps to enhance spoken expression and attitude during such institutional discourse.

### **Deployment of Laughter to evade Questions**

It was observed in the data that suspects devised means of escaping IPO's questions during interactive sessions. Since questions constitute a strong interrogation tool, suspects were quick to work at cross purposes with IPOs in a

***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

bid to frustrate the latter's goals. Laughter was adopted as a non-verbal mode to thwart IPO's investigative skills. Instead of responding to interrogation questions, suspects resorted to laughter to evade IPOs' questions. An example is presented below:

**Excerpt 4**

1. P: *ńjẹ́ o na omọ̀bìnrin náà? (Did you beat the young girl?)*
2. S: *Rára ọ̀ gá. (No sir).*
3. P: *Óyẹ kóo dá owó náà padà, dípò rè, o tan àwọn tókù. Sọ fún mi, n̄jẹ́ o náà (You were supposed to return the money, instead you deceived others. Tell me, did you beat her?)*
4. S: *(Laughs) Ọ̀ gá, mi ò lè na ẹ̀nítí mosìjẹ lówó. (smiles) Sir, I could not have beaten someone I am still owing).*
5. P: *Báwo lo se rí gbogbo egbò ara rè wọ̀ nyí? (How did she sustain these bruises on her body?)*
6. S: *(Laughs) Ó yé ọ̀lọrun. Sir, bí ara rè se rí nígbà tó wá sọ̀ dọ̀ mi nìyẹn. (God understands. Oga, that was how she looked when she came to me).*
7. P: *Kílódé tóò tì san owó rè? (Why have you not paid her?)*
8. S: *(Shakes head and laughs) Àwọn ẹ̀nàyàn mi mọ̀ mi dáradára pé mi ò kí n̄ jẹ owó. Lọ́ dún tó kojá gan an, mo fi owó kún owó egbẹ́. (Shakes her head and laughs) (My people know me that I don't owe. Even last year, I added to the money in the Association's coffers.)*
9. P: *Ìgbaàwo lo máa dá owó náà padà? (When are you likely to refund it?)*
10. S: *(Laughs) Ọ̀ gá, ẹ mọ̀ pé mo ti san lára rè. Àìmọye àwọn tó jẹ ẹ̀mi náà lówó. Mo gbàdúrà kí owó mi rú gọ̀ gọ̀ sí. (Laughs) (Sir, you know I have paid some. So, many people are owing me too. I just pray my business improves.)*

The case above is that of stealing and assault. The suspect was arrested for breaching the agreement of a credit and thrift society. Members of the Association makes contributions on a weekly basis and give their contributions to the next deserving member. When it was the turn of one of them to collect, the suspect in question, who is a member of the Association, failed to make his own contribution. This act of his prompted his arrest. In an attempt to glean some information from the suspect, he (the suspect) plays around the questions, using laughter as a strategy to de-emphasize the IPO's questions. In line 3, the IPO asks if the suspect beats the lady who comes to him (the suspect) to demand her money. The IPO's question is structured in a yes/no question form, a polar question. This question form demands the suspect to affirm or object it. Instead of answering the question the normal way, the suspect resorts to laughter to engage the discourse. His use of laughter in line 4 is rhetorical.

In the first instance, his use of laughter tends to express his withdrawal from the question. It also serves to express neutrality, and confound the investigative skill of the IPO. This propels him to affirm that, '*Sir, I could not have beaten someone I am still owing*'. His verbal expression is meant to validate his laughter in line 4. When the IPO asks if he is responsible for the bruises on the lady's body, he resorts

to laughter again to manipulate the IPO. . He engages laughter in line 6 to withhold his responses, claim innocence, invite God and deny the IPO's stance. In line 8, the IPO asks why he has not paid the lady in question. The suspect's response is accompanied with two fundamental embodied multimodal features. The first is the head movement which is significant. The suspect shakes his head. Drawing insights from Norris (2004), such head movement takes cues from the social context to achieve meaning. The suspect's head movement connotes disapproval of the IPO's claims. It tends to invalidate the complainant's words and establishes his perceived innocence. Also, the movement is a clever way of avoiding his commitment to the interrogation question.

The suspect's laughter performs a multimodal function of evading the IPO's question. His resort to laughter to escape questioning is underscored by his vague response in line 8, *'my people know me that I don't owe. Even last year, I added to the money in the Association's coffers'*. Existing studies in police discourse (e.g Heydon, 2005; Ajayi, 2016 and Akinrinlola, 2017) have expounded series of strategies adopted by suspects to evade questions during interrogation. These studies do not identify how laughter contributes to question evasion in interrogation. This study holds that laughter is a resourceful multimodal feature that shapes meaning in institutional discourse.

### **Deployment of Laughter to orchestrate deception**

One of the multimodal functions of laughter in the entire interaction was its use to express deception. IPOs adopted laughter to play on the psyche of suspects. Deception involves series of manipulative skills which are geared towards concealing the intents of IPOs during interrogation sessions. Laughter was engaged to achieve the institutional goals of the IPOs. The excerpt below presents an instance:

#### **Excerpt 5**

1. P: You look very relaxed. Did he follow you to the farm?
2. S: Yes.
3. P: How long has he been with you?
4. S: For about four years now.
5. P: How the log fall on him?
6. S: Sir, I told him to stay away and mistakenly the rope slipped off his hand.
7. P: Where were you then?
8. S: I was at the other end.
9. P: Your account is detailed enough. Who was with the jack?
- 10.S: He was sir.
- 11.P: (*Laughs*) In a case like this, suspects tell lies without considering the implications.
- 12.S: I won't tell lies sir. That is the truth.
- 13.P: (*Laughs*) Listen, you have not committed any serious offence. Have you? Afterall you were looking for your bread.

***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

14.S: Yes sir. But...

15.P: I pray you will not kill in Jesus' name. (*laughs*). You are XX. Your surname tells me you are from my town.

16. P: (*Laughs*) I will take you to Station Officer and prepare your release if you confess. I will release you if you cooperate. We know an incident like this is unavoidable sometimes and one may not be able to control it. The victim could have caused it too.

17. You are very sir. I know God will see me through.

The case in excerpt 5 is that of negligence. The suspect is a driver who specializes in transporting timber. On one fateful day, he went for the business in company of his apprentice. Having placed a log on the caravan, the duo attempted to fasten it with a jack and rope. The master allegedly told the apprentice to stand at the other end of the caravan to ensure a firm attempt. Unfortunately, the rope slipped off the apprentice's hand and the log rolled and hit him (the apprentice) on the back causing him to sustain a serious injury. The master was subsequently arrested. The interaction between the IPO and the suspect reveals a conscious engagement of laughter to conceal the intentions of the IPO. In line 11, for example, the IPO appeals to laughter and subsequently informs the suspect that, 'In a case like this, suspects tell lies without considering the implications'. The IPO's turn is taken to lure the suspect to tell the truth. The use of 'implication' in his turn is meant to frighten the suspect to give maximum cooperation which will facilitate the investigation. The IPO's deceptive skills run through line 13 as he attempts to douse the suspect's tension by mitigating the degree of his offence.

The IPO asserts that, 'listen, you have not committed any serious offence. Have you? After all you were looking for your daily bread.' There is a conscious effort at justifying the suspect's actions at the surface of the interaction. The IPO's laughter is an example of embodied mode in interaction which foregrounds his intention to thread the path of justification of the suspect's actions. Laughter is adopted in the interaction to complement the intentions of the IPO. In line 15, there is the deliberate use of a subjunctive proposition to express prayers for the suspect as the IPO says, 'I pray you will not kill in Jesus' name.' This prayer is accompanied with laughter to express deception. As if that is not enough, the IPO's deceptive tactics also come in form of expressing affiliation with the suspect by saying, 'your surname tells me you are from my town'. The adoption of laughter as multimodal feature of interaction in the interaction is targeted towards eliciting facts from the suspects. The IPO's acts of promising the suspect in line 16, 'I will release you if you cooperate' and justification of the suspect's actions in the same line are evidence of the IPO's deceptive tactics. Although Akinrinlola (2017) studies deception and its forms in police interrogation, the study does not include laughter as a deceptive strategy. This study does not tow the lines of Akinrinlola's (2017) study. The study submits that textual features do not unilaterally make meaning in PSI.

**Deployment of Laughter to mock suspects**

IPOs navigated the interrogation sessions with the use of laughter to satirize suspects' antics. They created humorous scenes to ridicule suspects and provoke reactions in the suspects. Laughter was adopted to appeal to suspects' vulnerability during the course of interrogation. An instance is presented below:

### Excerpt 6

1. P: Olùṣò` àgùtàn ni ẹ́? (*You are a pastor?*)
2. S: Bẹ́ ẹ́ ni, bẹ́ ẹ́ kọ́ sùgbọ́ n...(Yes, no but...)
3. P: Kílódé tóo wá tún jẹ́ sàtánà? (*How come you are a satan?*)
4. P: O ja àwọn ènìyàn lólè tóo fi kọ́ lé sí ilú Osogbo. Wọ́ n sì tún n wá sí sọ́ ọ̀ sì rẹ. *You duped people to build a mansion in Osogbo. Yet they still attend your church.*
5. S: Oga, oga...(He begs the IPO rubbing his hands together )(Sir sir...)
6. P: (*Hits him with a baton and laughs*)
- Another Police Officer: (*Laughs*) Oponu.! Fool!
7. S: (*Cries.*)
8. P: Èkún àgbàlagbà máa n pa ni lẹ́ rin gan an. Nígbà taa wá ilé rẹ̀ wò, a rí àwọn àfọ̀ sẹ̀ kan níbẹ̀ . Şe óún lo àwọn, àfọ̀ sẹ̀ yí láti kéde ìhìn rere Olorun ni? *It is funny to see an old man cry. When we searched your office, we saw many charms there. Do you use them to preach the gospel of God?*
9. S: Rárá ọ̀ gá. Ẹ́ jẹ́ kí n...(No sir sir... let me...)
- 10.P: Ìgbàwo lo ti n ja àwọn ènìyàn lólè? (*laughs*) *How long have you been duping people? (laughs)*
- 11.S: Oga... Mo... (*Sir... I ...*)

Excerpt 6 presents a case of conspiracy and stealing. The suspect was arrested for allegedly defrauding some people. Although the suspect was popular as a pastor in Osogbo in Osun State, Nigeria, he was said to be involved in duping people to make quick money. The long arm of the law eventually caught up with him when he did same to a law enforcement agent in the same town. The IPO engages the interaction using laughter to mock and satirize the suspect's actions and inactions. Laughter, as used in the interaction, takes its source from the prevailing circumstance in the interaction. In other words, the IPO's laughter derives from the statements of the suspect. As seen in line 2, the IPO asks him if he is a pastor. His response in line 2 suggests suspicion, inconsistency and deceit. In order to plead for clemency, the suspect, in line 5, resorts to an embodied mode of interaction to appeal to the IPO.

The suspect's *rubbing of his hands together* indicates acceptance of guilt. The suspect's act in line 5 informs the IPO's laughter in line 6. The act of *hitting the suspect with a baton* expresses disapproval of his action by the IPO. In the same line 6, he laughs the suspect to scorn. Laughter is used in this context to satirize, mock and ridicule the suspect's act which is against social expectations. Another IPO, present at the investigation room, further rides on the suspect's vulnerability through wild laughter. He calls the suspect *a fool*. Laughter is used in this context to signal a sense of indignity on the part of the suspect. As the suspect cries in line

***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

7, the IPO continues with a mockery of the entire scenario by commenting that *the cry of an elderly person sounds very funny*. In a bid to trace his years of experience in the criminal act, the IPO asks him, *'How long have been duping people?* This question propels the questioner to resort to laughter. His laughter is informed by the nature of the question asked. One does not expect the suspect to give a specific and appropriate response to such an interrogative statement. This seemingly difficult question provokes the IPO's laughter. Such laughter is meant to humour the entire subject of the interrogation.

**Deployment of Laughter to maintain social order**

IPOs' appeal to laughter as an embodied mode of interaction could be described as an institutional control device. Apart from dominating and controlling turns, IPOs erect power in the entire interaction. By virtue of being members of the Nigeria Police Force and their knowledge of law and crime, IPOs are at a vantage position in the interaction. Another form of embodied mode which signals IPOs' superiority in the interaction is space. While suspects are seen on the floor, IPOs are seated comfortably on chairs. Laughter is used as an instrument for mapping identities in the interaction. IPOs adopt laughter to maintain social order and institutional identities in the interaction. The excerpt below presents an instance:

**Excerpt 7**

1. P: *Ọdún tó kojá ni obìnrin náà gbà ẹ'?* (*The woman employed you last year?*)
2. S: *Bẹ ẹ` ni sir.* (*Yes sir.*)
3. P: *Obìnrin náà ti sọ àwọn nìkan búburú tóo ẹ. Ó ní o kówó iléisẹ' jẹ, pé oò sì sanwó àwọn òsìsẹ'. The same woman has made series of allegations against you. She said you embezzled the firm's fund and refused to pay staff salaries.*
4. S: *Mo san lára àwọn owó náa sir. Nígbà tí ọ̀rọ̀ ajé Nigeria ò ẹ dáadáa mọ' ni mi ò lè san án mọ'. Àti pé... (I paid some salaries sir. It was when Nigerian economy collapsed that I could not cope with payment. And....)*
5. P: (*Laughs and waves his hands to stop him*) *Dáke'! Tẹ́ tí gbọ́ mi. Ìgbà tí mo bá ní kóo sọ̀ rọ̀ nìkan ni kóo sọ̀ rọ̀. ()*. (*Keep quiet. Listen to me. You only talk when I ask you to talk.*)
6. S: *Mo gbọ́ sir sùgbọ́ n... (I heard sir but...)*
7. P: *A ti ẹ àwọn iwadií wa a sì ti ríi pé o yan obìnrin yìi jẹ. O sì ní àwọn dúkiá bíi ilẹ̀ ékà méjì sí XX àti ọkọ̀ ayọ́ kẹ́ lẹ́ Toyota Camry kan. A máa tàá láti san míliọ́ nù mẹ́ ta tóò kóje yìi. (We have made our investigations and we have discovered you cheated this woman. You also have some property like the two acres of land at XX and your Toyota Camry car. We will sell these items to refund the three million naira you embezzled).*
8. S: *Àwọn dúkiá mi nìyẹn sir. Mo sisé kí n tó ri wọn kójo. Olorun mọ́ pé mo ti sèwọ̀n tí mo lè ẹ. (These are my personal belongings sir. I worked hard to get them. God know I have done my best.)*

9. P: Dáke´ , arákùnrin (*laughs and bangs his hands on the table to silence him*) *Keep quiet, young man.*
10. S: Obìnrin yì kàn jẹ´ aláànú ni o. Ò bá ti fiyà jẹẹ´ gidi. (*This woman is just a kind person. She would have dealt seriously with you.*)
11. P: O ní one hundred and fifty thousand lo ra generator fún ilé isẹ´ náà, ìwe táa rí sì sọpé one hundred thousand. Báwo lo ẹ fe´ ká gbàyeṅ gbọ´?(*You claimed to buy a generating set for the firm at one hundred and fifty naira and the receipt we saw has one hundred naira. How do you want us to believe that?*)
12. S: Sir sir...
13. P: (*Laughs*) Dáke´ . Olè ni ẹ´ . *Keep quiet. You are a thief.*

The case above is that of stealing. The suspect was employed to manage a firm for Mrs XX entrusted all administrative duties and finances into his care care. Two years later, the employer decided to carry out an internal audit of the firm. The results of the auditing revealed that the suspect had allegedly embezzled the firm's funds. He was subsequently arrested. In the interaction above, the IPO exercises power by appealing to laughter to achieve the goal of the interaction. The suspect's response to the IPO's question in line 3 precipitates laughter. When asked as to why he refuses to pay staff salaries, he says that, '*I paid some salaries sir. It was when Nigerian economy collapsed that I could not cope with payment. And....*' The mention of 'Nigerian economy' informs the IPO's laughter in line 5. The response appears very vague, evasive and slippery. In a bid to shut him up and take over the turn in the interaction, the IPO resorts to laughter coupled with the movement of his hands to indicate that the suspect should stop talking.

In addition to the deployment of the non-verbal means, the IPO thunders that the suspect should keep quiet. He adds further that he (the IPO) determines when he should participate in the discursive interaction. There is another instance of laughter in line 9 when the IPO cautions the suspect to answer the specific question asked instead of evading it. The suspect asserts that, '*these are my personal belongings sir. I worked hard to get them. God know I have done my best.*' when he is told that his belongings would be sold to pay back his employer. To sustain orderliness in the interaction, the IPO resorts to laughter and physical acts ( *banging of the table*) to maintain institutional order in the interaction.

The motivation behind the IPO's appeal to laughter and physical act is to ensure that the goal of the interaction is achieved. Laughter serves as a veritable tool for moderating institutional identities in the interaction. Its function as a means of constructing institutional identities is geared towards foregrounding the authority and supremacy of IPOs over suspects. It is used to create lines of distinction in terms of social status between the IPO and the suspect. This submission is in tandem with that of Heydon (2005) which asserts that textual features of police interrogation account for power relations. The study establishes that non-verbal features also shape meaning.

## ***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

### **Implications of the use of laughter for suspects' rights and Nigerian policing**

The section describes the implications of the use of laughter for suspects' rights, and how the adoption of laughter reveals the contemporary issues in Nigerian policing. The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 as amended confers some inalienable rights on the citizens. The same Constitution also makes provisions for instances where the rights may not hold sway. A person in detention is not to be deprived of his rights because of an accusation which has not been proved by the law court. The cases above show subtle (rather than forceful or brazen) disregard for the rights of the suspects. The suspects in excerpt one is alleged to have perverted justice for failure to present a suspect who reneged on his promise made to pay his rent. The position of the law on arrest states clearly that a suspect needs not to be restrained except the suspect is violent or attempts to escape; another individual must not be arrested in place of the suspect; a relation of the suspect must not be arrested in place of the suspect; an arrested suspect must not be subjected to physical distress. Suspects in Nigeria suffer a great deal of disregard of their rights to dignity owing to myriads of criminal allegations levelled against them.

The Nigerian Police violation of suspects' right has created mistrust and unpleasant impression in the mind of the public with regard to the activities of the Nigerian police. The study's focus on laughter as a discourse strategy has some implications for policing in Nigeria. The study shows that policing in Nigeria involves coercive or ideological regimentation of social life through the activities of the police which are aimed at suppressing behaviors, actions and orientations that threaten prevailing social order. The use of laughter in the interrogation clearly demonstrates the fact that IPOs in Nigeria, in addition to the use of force (Ajayi, 2016; Ajayi and Oyetade, 2016), deploy non-verbal linguistic means to secure suspects' cooperation, orchestrate mockery, legitimize power and orchestrate deception.

### **General Discussion and Conclusion**

Although the study deviates from the position of Ajayi (2016) and Ajayi and Oyetade (2016) that asymmetrical power relations in police-suspect interactions is often marked by the police violating the constitutional rights of the suspects, the study's engagement of the resourcefulness of laughter in interrogation establishes that IPOs engage laughter to subtly enact and legitimize social order during interrogation sessions. As, shown in our analysis in this study, rather than resort to the use of forceful physical act to manipulate the suspects into confessing to crime, the police resorts to the use of psychological use of laughter. Perhaps the officers are guided by the constitutional provision of the rights of suspects as encapsulated in section (34), sub-section 1 thus: Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his/her person, and accordingly (therefore) –*No person shall be subjected to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment* (Salman, 2009).

In particular, the study submits that IPOs and suspects pursue the subject of interrogation with diverse motivations. The goals of the social actors (IPOs and suspects) differ in all respects; while IPOs work earnestly to get suspects confess to crime, suspects, on the other hand, manipulate the sessions to wriggle themselves out of IPOs' traps. The study has argued that textual investigation is not sufficient to account for the dynamics involved in police-suspect interaction, hence the need to engage the resourcefulness of paralinguistic features, and laughter in particular in such interaction. The study holds that laughter is a strong weapon of achieving institutional goals in PSI. IPOs and suspects appeal to laughter to perform series of acts identified in the study. These acts are targeted towards achieving institutional goals.

The adoption of Norris' (2004) multimodal interaction analysis in this study is significant in that it depicts how textual features of police interrogation connect the non-verbal mode to influence meaning. It also studies how the social context of PSI helps to achieve meaning in the interaction. The study has contributed in no small measure to existing body of knowledge in forensic linguistics by expounding the multimodal significance of laughter and how identities are constructed via laughter in PSI. An analysis of the multimodal roles of laughter identified in the study shows that the psychological states of social actors influence the subject of interrogation. The findings of the study are relevant in improving criminal justice system in Nigeria. The study is also a good reference material for students and teachers of forensic linguistics. The study recommends that enlightenment programs should be constantly organized for members of Nigerian Police Force to educate them on the provisions of the Nigerian Constitution on suspects' rights. The Human rights community and the media should also promote civic education with respect to the relevant provisions of the Administration of Criminal Justice Acts.

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***Laughter in Police-Suspect Interactions by Ajayi & Akinrinlola***

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