

## **Translation, Religion and Humor: Interrogating the Cognitive Boundaries of the Humorous**

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### **Abstract**

In this study, we suggest that while humor has the capacity to cause a release from the tension imposed on adherents by societal factors and the grave solemnity that religious sobriety and reverence requires, creating humor out of a traditionally orthodox and pious religious activity somewhat debases the element of devotion that should accompany the event. Drawing on Sigmund Freud's relief/release theory and Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren's benign violation theory for our study of Warri pidgin translations of the solemn Christian "Our Lord's Prayer" and the biblical Psalm 23 (The Lord Is My Shepherd), we explicate the funny bones in the texts and, supported by the results of a set of questionnaires used for scientific validation, argue that the debasement of the subject matter of the items in written texts violates the ethical codes of the Christian faith and reduces the level of humor perceptible to the committed Christian because of his psychological and emotional attachment to the violated norm. Based on this, the study validates the benign violation theory of humor and concludes that the relief theory, as already expressed by humor scholars, is circumscribed and not universally applicable. It also concludes that language is not significant in the practice of Christianity.

**Key words:** translation, humor, Warri pidgin, religion, violation

### **Introduction**

There are over 250 ethnic groups who speak over 450 languages across Nigeria. And although there is no overt evidence of war amongst the different ethnic groups, major socio-political issues are contested along the lines of complex ethnic and regional divides and this has, at various times,

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created socio-political and psychological tension for most of the nation's inhabitants and has left the country deeply divided. In addition, with the introduction and growth of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, religious affiliation has also become a very potent force in the socio-political lives of the people and is a strong determinant of brotherhood, integration, unity or otherwise. Religion is thus now a unifying force across ethnic boundaries such that Christianity and Islam are now considered secondary (and, in certain contexts, even primary) forms of identity for many in the country. To a considerable extent, religion tends to reduce physical tensions between, to say the least, adherents of the same religion.

However, though often overlooked, religious loyalty (and the grave piousness with which many things directly or remotely associated with religion are handled) also imposes its unique form of psychological tension on the individual and group. In some very strict Christian organizations and gatherings, temperance and sobriety are obligatory and hearty laughter offends the fabric of the faith. The consequence of this has been a two-fold reaction. On the one hand, there is built-up tension among such devotees for who release / relief is manifested in disproportionate raucous laughter whenever the occasion presents itself. On the other hand, and following from the first, the creativity and imagination of some Nigerians has forced a gravitation towards the translation of some prayers and scriptural verses into the Warri variety of Nigerian pidgin.

Owing to its vastly productive and creative lexicon, the "popular" Warri variety of Nigerian pidgin is steadily evolving to become the language of comedy in Nigeria and a rapidly increasing number of comedians are deploying it for heightened humorous effect. Perceived to be uniquely informal in tone, it easily lends itself to a comic adaptation of biblical prayers and scriptural verses. The Christian "The Lord's Prayer" and the popular "Psalm 23: The Lord Is My Shepherd" have been translated into the Warri pidgin with a significant humorous effect on the average reader. However, because these biblical subject matters customarily command reverence and solemnity from Christian adherents, creating humor out of them might imply the violation of certain ethical and religious norms, and a few questions immediately come into relief. What elements of the Warri variety of Nigerian pidgin and the adaptation of the biblical subjects into it produce the perceptible humor? How is it that the adaptation violates the ethical codes of the items and still generates laughter from both Christians and non-Christians alike? Is there any margin of difference in terms

of the degree of perception of humor for all categories of readers? What is the real effect of fusing humor into a religious text through translation? This paper engages these conversations.

We note that the approaches to the study of humor date back to classical times with Plato and his view of humor as a mixture of pleasure and pain (Piddington 1933, p. 152), Aristotle and the belief that humor “stimulates” the soul (quoted in Attardo 1994, p. 18), and Theophrastus’ assertion that humor is fictional (quoted in Attardo 1994, p. 22). The literature on modern research in humor includes the incongruity and release theories with which scholars such as Immanuel Kant and Sigmund Freud respectively are associated (Raskin 1985, pp. 38-40), while more contemporary theories include Raskin’s (1985) Script-Based Semantic Theory of Humor, Attardo and Raskin’s (1991) General Theory of Verbal Humor, Attardo’s (1994) Isotopy-Disjunction Model of Jokes (IDM) and (1997), Set-Up-Incongruity-Resolution Model of Humor, and MacGraw and Warren’s (2010) Benign Violation Theory.

### **Theoretical Base: Relief and Benign Violation Theories of Humor**

This work draws on the relief/release theory associated with Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud which states that “laughter arises if a quota of psychical energy which has earlier been used for the cathexis of particular psychical paths has become unusable, so that it can find free discharge” (Smith 2010 [2000], p. 1735). The thrust of this theory is that humor is a psychological response to tension and that our bodies build up nervous energy that is released by laughter brought about by humor. Johan Taels (2011, p. 25) also lends credence to the foundation of this theory when he says that “in laughter, [brought on by humor], energy is released, and the release creates enjoyment, because it spares the energy that normally would be used to keep psychic activities in check.” This suggests that humor has a therapeutic as well as a liberating effect as spare energy makes us better people, because we are then less likely to allow violent passions brought on by tensions, stress, fantasies, etc. take a better hold of our senses.

However, considering Hans Geybels’ statement that humor has its place in the gospel but “must be applied correctly” (2011, p. 17), and Walter Van Herck’s warning that there is a very thin line between appropriateness and inappropriateness with jokes in religious matters (2011, p. 192), we incorporate the benign violation theory to the theoretical base of this work to account for the actual possible effect of humor brought about by the translation of our religious texts into the Warri sub-variant of Nigerian Pidgin.

Important in this regard is the significant distinction in this theory between two terms, *severity* and *compromise*. Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren (2010, pp. 1141-1149) in the benign violation theory explain that laughter and amusement result from violations that are simultaneously seen as benign and state that three conditions facilitate humor. They say that (i) humor is often evoked by violations, including apparent threat, breaches of norms, or taboo content; (ii) humor occurs in contexts perceived to be safe, playful, non-serious, or in other words, benign and that (iii) humor requires these two contradictory ideas listed above, about the same situation to be held simultaneously. This implies that every humorous event most certainly violates a certain norm. Christie Davies (2010, p. 69) makes this same point when he observes that, “humor plays with deviance and rule breaking. It evades all the rules that constrain how we are expected to speak or write...” However, people who bring about these violations must know where the boundary between humor and ridicule must be drawn. McGraw and Warren note that this is what makes something amusing; the fact that it “violates” a norm, but not enough to cause offence. Benign-violation theory thus states that (MacGraw and Warren 2010, p. 1142) “anything that is threatening to one’s sense of how the world “ought to be” will be humorous, as long as the threatening situation also seems benign. They propose three tests to determine a benign violation as follows: (i) salient norm suggests that something is wrong, but another salient norm suggest that it is acceptable; (ii) one is only weakly committed to the violated norm, or (iii) the violation is psychologically distant.

### **The Problem**

The subject of humor in religion is a controversial one as there is but only a very thin line between humor and offence in religion depending on the context and the participants. In many religious contexts, it is considered sacrilegious to create humor out of sacred figures, subjects, objects or symbols or for the devotee to mix worship with humor because, as Geybels (2011, p. 13) observes, “both believers and non-believers tend to equate religion with seriousness, profundity, reverence . . . God prefers to be approached in a reverential, dignified manner, not familiar at all.” Is there then a border to what can be humorous?

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

**Text 1:** The Warri Lord’s Prayer

Our *Pale*<sup>(1)</sup> wey *arrange*<sup>(2)</sup> for heaven,

*We dey hail*<sup>(3)</sup> your name  
Make your *package*<sup>(4)</sup> *dey co-operate*<sup>(5)</sup> for earth as *e dey arrange*<sup>(6)</sup> for heaven  
Give us today, our deli bread as you dey do am before  
Abeg forgive us anyway wey we *fall your hand* <sup>(7)</sup>  
So that we go fit forgive the people wey *fall we hand* too  
No let us fall for inside *gobe wey we no fit carry*,<sup>(8)</sup> but deliver us from *bad market*<sup>(9)</sup>  
Na you get the kingdom, the *ogbonge*<sup>(10)</sup> power and the glory wey *brekete*<sup>(11)</sup>  
Till *eternity wey we never see*<sup>(12)</sup>  
AMEN!

- Olaryeankarh Naira land

**Text 2:** Psalm 23 (The Lord our Shepherd)

The Lord na mai shepherd, I *dey kamkpe*<sup>(13)</sup>  
He make me sidon for where *better dey flow*<sup>(14)</sup> and come put me next to stream make *mai bodi thermocool*<sup>(15)</sup>.  
*He panel beat mai soul come spray am white, come dey lead me go through express road*<sup>(16)</sup> of righteousness for sake of Hin Name.  
*Wahali!*<sup>(17)</sup> *If I waka pass where arm robber, 419, and juju people borku, come even join okada reach valley of the shadow of death sef,*<sup>(18)</sup> *mai body dey inside cloth.* <sup>(19)</sup> Your rod and staff *nko?*  
Na so them dey like back bone dey comfort me.  
*You don prepare banga and starch make I chop*<sup>(20)</sup>. *All mai enemies dey look anya-anya. You rub me Vaseline Intensive Lotion*<sup>(21)</sup>. *Mai cup na Ogunpa River* <sup>(22)</sup> wey come overflow hin bank.  
*True true, betta life & mercy go gum my back till I quench.* <sup>(23)</sup> *And man go tanda for God house sotey sotey from lailai to lailai*<sup>(24)</sup>. **GOD ALMIGHTY, NA YOU BIKO. AMIN!**<sup>(25)</sup>

- Nairaland <sup>2</sup>

### **Funny Bones**

The humor perceptible in the texts is traceable primarily to the deployment of the informal and creative Warri variant of Nigerian pidgin, the use of inappropriate personal reference, and semantic

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the expressions in the translations that are considered significant departures from the original texts are numbered consecutively in both texts from 1-25.

shifts and extensions. Essentially, these categories derive their humorous flavor from the contextual incongruity of their use in an otherwise formal situation.

### **Warri Pidgin**

Nigerian pidgin has an extensive creative reach and relies heavily on the context for the retrieval of the meaning of words, phrases and expressions. In **Text 1**, the choice of the expression *wey arrange*, literally translated “who/that is arranged” has a note of inanimate and indeterminate reference as well as a verb form denoting a non-agentive action. And although the actual interpretation of the expression to the average user of Warri pidgin would be “who is eminently seated,” and as such clearly and adequately represents the linguistic sense conveyed in the original formal version of the prayer, the note of informality and familiarity that it strikes is ludicrous and incongruent in the context of its use, contrasting sharply with the reverence that characterizes communication between man and the referent, God and thus induces humorous laughter.

*We dey hail* is also an informal term of address and form of greeting amongst contemporaries in Nigerian pidgin. It loosely approximates to a remarkably semi-formal “we greet you” and is diametrically at variance with “hallowed be thy name” which, in comparison, is very formal and marked for exaltation, praise, and reverence. Again, this absurdity borne out of informality lightens the tone and makes it humorous.

In this same text, the item *package*, which, in standard English, means a bundle made up for transportation, or a collection of things wrapped or boxed together among other meanings, is a vague term used as a collective noun in place of items like “stuff,” “things,” etc. and to refer to just about anything in Nigerian Pidgin. The reach of its semantic extension is limitless. Often, it is deployed when two interactants intend to leave a third party ignorant of the exact object of its reference. Granted that its semantic width enables it to capture the totality of all that “thy kingdom” from which it translates represents, it is characteristically a very informal lexical choice used between friends and acquaintances for who the term is mutually intelligible. In the same vein, the original text expresses a prayer that the will of God be manifest on earth in the same measure it is in heaven. In the translated version, however, the relationship of similarity between the correlated clauses is replicated in a witty manner. Clearly, the sense of the original text is represented as “Make your *package*<sup>(4)</sup> *dey co-operate*<sup>(5)</sup> for earth **as** *e dey arrange*<sup>(6)</sup> for heaven” and literally translates to “let your will *co-operate* on earth **as** it is *operating* in heaven.” The semblance

between the two clauses is re-echoed using the term *co-operate* and the repetition of its near synonym *operating* in the second clause. And significantly, the term *arrange* is imbued with a meaning different from that which it carried in the first instance of its use. While it means “eminently seated” in the first instance, it denotes “operating” in the second. This punning on the term familiarizes deity with man, gives the discourse an informal tone and produces the light-hearted humor that characteristically accompanies the use of the lexical term. In addition, *co-operate*, apart from denoting a relationship of mutual interdependence, has the added hint of indicating that there is a demand on the will of God to blend with the state of affairs on earth. This reversal of roles and responsibility between man and God creates comical humor.

The expression *fall your hand* is an exclusive Nigerian pidgin idiom meaning “embarrass or disappoint you.” It is humorous here because of its extremely informal tone and a level of familiarity (unusual in communication between Christians and God) that it also carries. Besides, in translating *our* in the original text into Warri pidgin, the sense of the plural first person (subject case) pronominal form *we* in the translated text seems to de-personalize and generalize the interaction unlike the original text which, though has the plural (possessive case) pronoun *our*, suggests a closed communion between God and a particular supplicant.

Similarly, *bad market* is another particularly humorous Nigerian pidgin idiom, and more so in this context. This is so because even in its everyday Nigerian pidgin contextual use, it is generally perceived as funny. An idiomatic phrase referring to any imaginable unsuccessful enterprise, it makes very light the seriousness conveyed by *temptation* in the original text.

*Ogbonge* is variously used to mean any of “superior,” “original,” and “wonderful.” It is a rather very enthusiastic way of saying that something is of good quality. While this term is not exactly humorous, its use as a pre-modifier of “power” reflects a bit of that exuberant enthusiasm which is, in this sense, amusing.

*Berekete* literally translates to “abundant” or “inexhaustible” and like *ogbonge* has that note of exaggerated exuberance and this, in addition to the repetition of the open back vowel /eu/ (usually articulated with a deep and heavy tone in Nigerian pidgin), gives it a tinge of humor. For the last expression examined in **Text 1**, it is in its vague reference and the fact that it appears to foreground man’s mortality that humor resides; in *eternity wey we never see*. In addition to this, it conveys a note of doubt about “eternity” by the post-modification of the noun phrase head *eternity*

by *wey we never see* which translates literally to “the/an eternity that we are yet to behold.” The doubt expressed here reinforces the humor perceived.

In **Text 2**, we also find many exciting linguistic choices. *I dey kamkpe* is used to mean “I am very okay.” However, unlike the form in the original text, it is laced with humor generated from the verve with which it is usually said. *Where better dey flow* is a translation of “where good things are.” *better* here is an indeterminate term used as a nominal to mean anything with the capacity to provide material comfort. However, there is a trace of synaesthesia as these non-definite supplies receive the vastness of a *flowing* river to paint a picture of abundance. And although *flow* has a sense relation with *water*, there is a humorous ironic subversion because the water in the original text is *still* (He leads me beside still (peaceful) waters). The first clause of the compound-complex *He panel beat my soul, come spray am white, come dey lead me go through express road* is used to mean “he restores my soul.” *Panel beat* usually collocates with concrete metal objects and denotes the process of refurbishing especially damaged cars (which are thereafter sprayed to make them look new again). This curious metaphor creates a humorous imagery of a damaged car as the conceptualization of the troubled human soul. In the process, it demystifies the complexity of a concept Christianity would rather maintain. The use of *express road* alludes to the few obstruction-free, state-of-the-art roads on which commuters experience neither traffic congestion nor road accidents in Nigeria. This added sense creates an amusing effect when Nigerians relate it with *paths* (of righteousness) in the original text.

The intertextuality that *Walahi*, an Arabic item used by Muslims as an exclamation meaning “by Allah!,” introduces is ironically amusing considering the fractious relationship between Christianity and Islam. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” is translated as *If I waka pass where arm robbers, 419, and juju people borku, come even join okada reach valley of the shadow of death sef*. This adaptation, while aptly concretizing the dangers referred to in the original text (by listing factual issues that Nigerians readily relate with), also represents a humorous satirizing of the Nigerian society in which armed robbery (*arm robbers*), advance fee fraud (*419*) and fetish diabolism (*juju*) are prevalent by its use of the traditionally comic slang terms. The expression, “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me” is translated *mai body dey inside cloth* meaning “I am clothed” which actual import is in the negation of its antonymous representation: “I am not naked,” metaphorically implying that the individual is not shorn of material protection or is not exposed to danger. The humor here lies in seemingly



equating the covering provided by a piece of cloth with the power of God over the believer, whereas underlying this interpretation is the ironic subversion and imputation that God is able to provide maximum security with anything; including something as ordinary as a common piece of cloth.

“Banga” and “starch” is a delicacy among, predominantly, the peoples of the South-South region of Nigeria and it is amusing to domesticate and localize the immense capacity of God’s blessing in terms of a delicious local meal in *You don prepare banga and starch make I chop*. The amusement is further heightened by the following clause *All mai enemies dey look anya-anya* which combines the reduplication of the Igbo word for “eye” (*anya*) with other pidgin items, suggesting that the enemies behold the glory bestowed on the individual in amazement by the imagery of someone staring wide-eyed. Reduplication, a major word formation process in the

Warri sub-variety of Nigerian pidgin, is again deployed in *True-true . . .* <sup>(9)</sup> to reflect the emphatic sense that “surely” suggests. However, the rest of the utterance strikes a playful tune. *betta life and mercy go gum my back till I quench* literally means “the good life and mercy will be stuck on my back until I die” and represents “goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” This is a humorous exaggeration of the idea in the original text while *quench*, a Nigerian pidgin slang meaning “to die” in colloquial usage, is extremely informal and cannot be successfully adapted as a representation of “to die” in the original text without sounding unserious.

In *And man go tanda for God house sotey sotey from lai-lai to lai-lai* which means “and I will abide/dwell in the house of God forever and ever,” the productivity of reduplication in Nigerian pidgin is again at work. *Sotey sotey* means “till” while *lai-lai to lai-lai* means forever and ever. The repetition of the reduplication in the latter has its emphatic function but characteristically also makes the utterance light-hearted and playful. The concluding line of the text, *NA YOU BIKO. AMIN!* is rendered in capital letters to suggest that it was said with enthusiasm and spirit and crowns the entire text like a punch line in a comedy show. It creates the feeling that the writer expects applause, and this amplifies the text’s comical and humorous complexion.

### **Inappropriate Interpersonal Reference**

A glaring case of inappropriate interpersonal reference is in the reference to God using the pidgin lexical item *pale* <sup>(1)</sup> in **Text 1**. This is a word popularly used in Warri to mean “father.” It rings funny in the text because as a term of address, it is not only mostly informal but also distinctly

jocular. It is mostly applied in communication involving someone with whom the addresser has an extremely informal relationship. It thus carries with it an element of playfulness and a slight tinge of disrespect unlike the equally informal but quite respectful “Dad(dy).” It is this incongruity that triggers the humor herein.

### **Semantic Shifts and Extensions**

Obvious instances of semantic shifts and extensions also abound in **Text 1**. The first is *no let us fall inside gobe wey we no fit carry*. This is translated as “do not let us get into problems we cannot manage.” Characteristic of Nigerian pidgin and quite different from the original text, the tone of the translation reflects some lightheartedness. *Gobe* is a Hausa word which means “tomorrow” but which has undergone a semantic shift, taking in the element of uncertainty often associated with the future, such that today it is used in the Nigerian Pidgin context, as in the text, to mean trouble, problem, or difficulty. However, its use in place of “temptation” with the idea of sin that it invites in the original text appears to trivialize the subject by its frisky and humorous tone.

In **Text 2** as well, *Mai body thermocool* is a play on the word, here drawing on the antonymous relationship between “heat” (*thermo*) and “coolness” (*cool*) to suggest a soothing state of equilibrium engendered by being located beside a stream. It is an amusing metaphor however because *thermocool* (Haier Thermocool) is a brand name for a manufacturing company popular in Nigeria for their refrigerators and freezers and appears to equate the blessing of God with the comfort provided by the technology of a mere electronic appliance. Another usage that draws on a semantic shift is *You rub me Vaseline Intensive Lotion* which is here applied as a metaphor for blessing by its association with the Vaseline lotion. But to use this product in the stead of the very biblically significant anointing oil can only have an amusing effect.

Similarly, *Mai cup na Ogunpa River wey come overflow hin bank* alludes to a third-order stream in the Eastern part of Ibadan in Nigeria which, in 1960, exceeded its banks and rendered more than a thousand residents homeless and again in 1963 over-flowed its banks and flooded the city, damaging more than five hundred houses. The dotty comparison of the over-flow of God’s blessing upon the believer with the destructive over-flow of the Ogunpa River is humorously satiric of the Nigerian society when juxtaposed with the serious and solemn context suggested by the original text.

### **Cognitive Borders of Humor / Methodology**

Although the capacity of these items to generate humor within the context of their use is now apparent, many questions naturally arise. Is it appropriate to create humor out of religious subjects, objects, figures or symbols through translation? Are some translations of certain aspects of religious codes more appropriate than others? Is the perception and cognition of inherent humor in religious material uniform for all individuals across religious divides? Is the language significant in the practice of Christianity? To find answers to these questions, a total of one hundred and fifty questionnaires were randomly distributed to one hundred and fifty respondents between the ages of eighteen and seventy (considered old enough (but not senile) to have developed a personal religious inclination and appreciate textual humor). The questionnaire contained boxes in which they were required to indicate their religion and age and to indicate whether they found the texts humorous. The expressions in the translations into Nigerian pidgin which (in the view of the researchers) were significant departures from the original texts were marked and the respondents were asked to indicate their perception of them as either “Appropriate,” “Mildly Appropriate,” “Neutral,” “Mildly Inappropriate” or “Inappropriate.” The analysis of the responses from the respondents was conducted using simple percentages. This was then subjected to significance tests (T-test) and Non-Metric Dimensional Scaling to validate the comparative statements that would emerge from the analysis.

### Discussion of Findings

Of the one hundred and fifty respondents, one hundred and seven were Christians, twenty-four Muslims, and nineteen practiced different forms of African traditional religion. Apart from six respondents, four of whom were either slightly below eighteen and two slightly above seventy, the ages of the respondents fell within the bracket targeted by the researchers. Both the Christians and the non-Christians were familiar with the original texts, except one Christian who was not familiar with **Text 2**. Two participants from the other religions were not familiar with the prayers also, but were all shown the original texts to enable them make a comparison between the originals and the “Warri” versions.

On a general note, ninety-six (96) participants (64%) found the translated texts humorous. Twenty-seven participants found them offensive, while twenty-seven other participants found them neither amusing nor offensive.

**Table 1.**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Humorous</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Offensive</b>
Christian	84	21	24
Non-Christian	12	06	03

From these figures, we considered it safe to conclude that the texts were perceived to be generally humorous. In addition, most of the respondents—Christian, Muslim, and African traditionalist—(66) who indicated that they were deeply religious reported that they found most of the choices of expressions too playful and, as such, rated their feeling of humor in the texts Below Average. At the other end of the scale, those (84) who stated that they were only moderately religious (or not religious) found much more humor in the texts. Seventy-six (76) of them rated their feeling of humor Above Average while eight rated theirs Average. This suggests that the perception of humor in the given texts varies from one individual to the other within and across religious borders and that certain other psycho-social factors in the individual are instrumental in determining the perception of verbal humor in written texts. The table below illustrates this.

**Table 2.**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Deeply Religious</b>	<b>Moderately Religious</b>	<b>Not Religious</b>
Christian	48	72	09
Non-Christian	18	00	03
<b>GRADIENT</b>	<b>BELOW AVERAGE</b>	<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>AVERAGE/ABOVE AVERAGE</b>

From the analysis of the responses, it was observed that the religions and age of the respondents was not a significant factor in this regard. A significant range of differences were however observed with several items on the “Appropriate” – “Inappropriate” gradient and these are discussed below. For organizational clarity, we adopted an integrated approach and grouped the expressions per their linguistic categorization as was done in Funny Bones above.

**Nigerian Pidgin**

**Table 3.**

Text	Appropriate	Percentage	Mildly	Percentage	Neutral	Percentage	Mildly	Percentage	Inappropriate	Percentage
<i>wey arrange</i> <sup>(2)</sup>	0	4%	3	26%	4	30%	0	06%	5	34
	6		9		5		9		1	%
<i>We dey hail</i> <sup>(3)</sup>	3	24%	3	20%	5	38%	0	06%	1	12
	6		0		7		9		8	%
<i>Package</i> <sup>(4)</sup>	1	12%	3	22%	4	28%	2	18%	3	20
	8		3		2		7		0	%
<i>dey co-operate</i> <sup>(5)</sup>	2	14%	2	14%	4	28%	4	30%	2	14
	1		1		2		5		1	%
<i>as e dey arrange</i> <sup>(6)</sup>	3	24%	2	16%	1	12%	3	26%	3	22
	6		4		8		9		3	%
<i>fall your hand</i> <sup>(7)</sup>	0	04%	0	04%	0	04%	3	28%	9	64
	6		6		6		6		6	%
<i>bad market</i> <sup>(9)</sup>	1	08%	1	08%	0	06%	3	26%	8	54
	2		2		6		9		1	%
<i>Ogbonge</i> <sup>(10)</sup>	5	38%	4	32%	3	26%	0	00%	0	04
	7		8		9		0		6	%

<i>Wey berekete</i> <sup>(11)</sup>	2 7	18%	2 7	18%	4 2	28%	2 4	16%	3 0	20 %
<i>eternity wey we never see</i> <sup>(12)</sup>	2 1	14%	5 1	34%	2 7	18%	2 7	18%	2 4	16 %
<i>I dey kamkpe</i> <sup>(13)</sup>	4 2	28%	4 8	32%	3 0	20%	1 8	12%	1 2	08 %
<i>better dey flow</i> <sup>(14)</sup>	5 1	34%	3 9	26%	1 8	12%	2 4	16%	1 8	12 %
<i>He panel beat my soul, come spray am white, come dey lead me go through express road</i> <sup>(16)</sup>	2 1	14%	1 8	12%	4 5	30%	3 6	24%	3 0	20 %
<i>Walahi!</i> <sup>(17)</sup>	0 6	04%	2 7	18%	4 8	32%	2 1	14%	4 8	32 %
<i>If I waka pass where arm robbers, 419, and juju people borku, come even join okada reach valley of the shadow of death sef . . . .</i> <sup>(18)</sup>	0 6	04%	0 9	06%	3 3	22%	4 5	30%	5 7	28 %
<i>Mai body dey inside cloth . . . .</i> <sup>(19)</sup>	0 9	06%	2 7	18%	3 6	24%	3 3	22%	4 5	30 %
<i>You don prepare banga and starch make I chop.</i> <sup>(20)</sup>	1 5	10%	1 5	10%	4 5	30%	3 3	22%	4 2	28 %
<i>True-true, betta life and mercy go gum my back till I quench.</i> <sup>(23)</sup>	3 9	26%	4 2	28%	3 6	24%	2 7	18%	0 6	04 %

<i>And man go tanda for God House sotey</i>	3	20%	3	24%	2	18%	4	30%	1	08
<i>sotey from lailai to lailai<sup>(24)</sup></i>	0		6		7		5		2	%
<i>NA YOU BIKO. AMIN!<sup>(25)</sup></i>	6	42%	4	30%	2	16%	1	08%	0	04
	3		5		4		2		6	%

**Inappropriate Interpersonal Reference**

**Table 4.**

Text	Appropriate	Percentage	Mildly	Percentage	Neutral	Percentage	Mildly	Percentage	Inappropriate	Percentage
<i>Our Pale<sup>(1)</sup></i>	0	04%	4	28%	5	38%	1	10%	3	20
	6		2		7		5		0	%

**Semantic Shifts and Extensions**

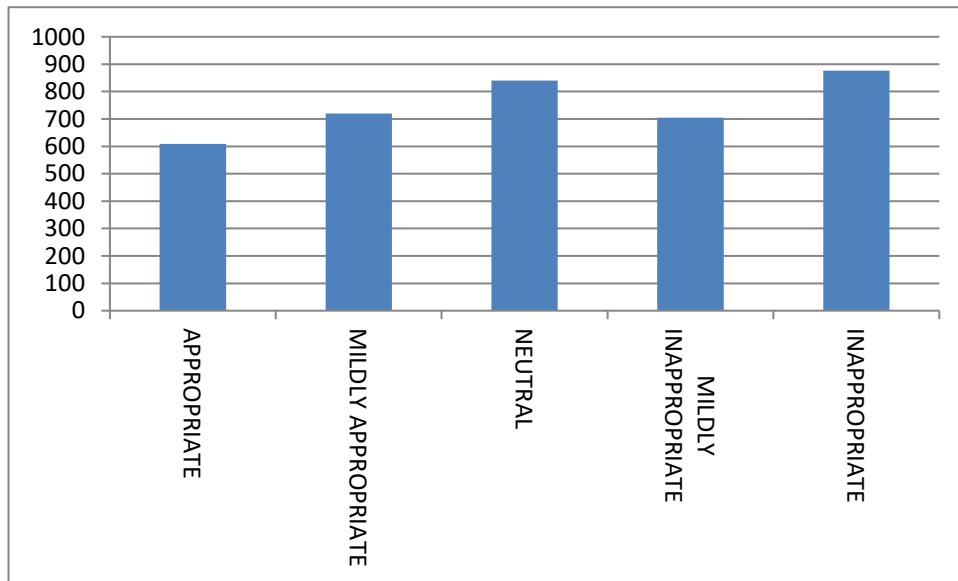
**Table 5.**

Text	Appropriate	Percentage	Mildly	Percentage	Neutral	Percentage	Mildly	Percentage	Inappropriate	Percentage
<i>No let us fall inside gobe wey we no fit carry<sup>(8)</sup></i>	2	14%	1	12%	2	14%	2	16%	6	44
	1		8		1		4		6	%
<i>Mai body thermocool<sup>(15)</sup></i>	0	06%	2	14%	2	18%	2	16%	6	46
	9		1		7		4		9	%

<i>You rub me Vaseline Intensive Lotion .</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>.. (21)</i>	<b>8</b>		<b>5</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>4</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>%</b>
<i>My cup na Ogunpa River wey come</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>08</b>
<i>overflow hin bank (22)</i>	<b>3</b>		<b>7</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>9</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>%</b>

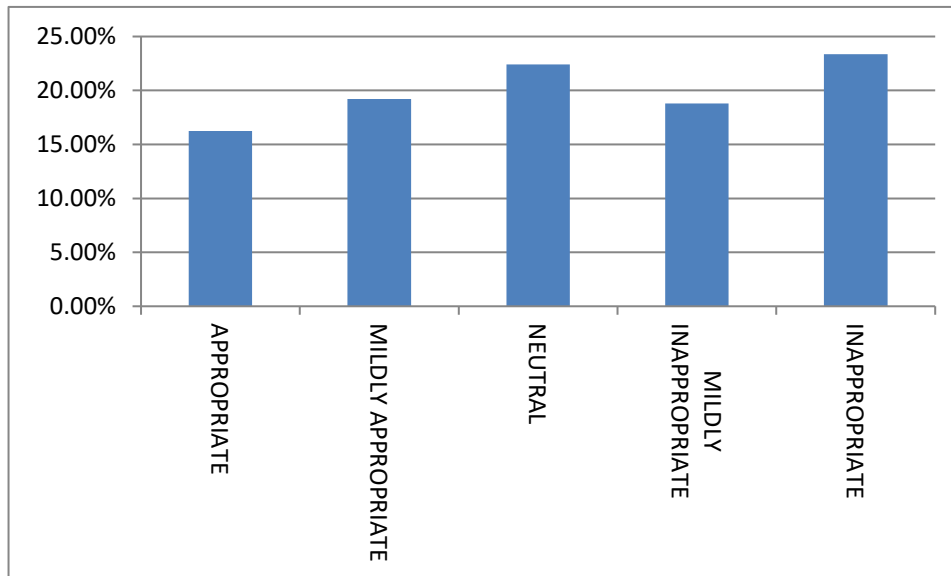
As shown in **Tables 3, 4 and 5** above, twenty-five translations of expressions that were considered significant departures from the content of the original versions of **Text 1** and **Text 2** were selected and numbered consecutively from <sup>(1)</sup> – <sup>(25)</sup> and then grouped according to their linguistic classification under the headings of Nigerian Pidgin, Inappropriate Interpersonal Reference and Semantic Shifts and Extensions.

**Figure 1. Graph of Frequency**





**Figure 2. Graph of Percentage**



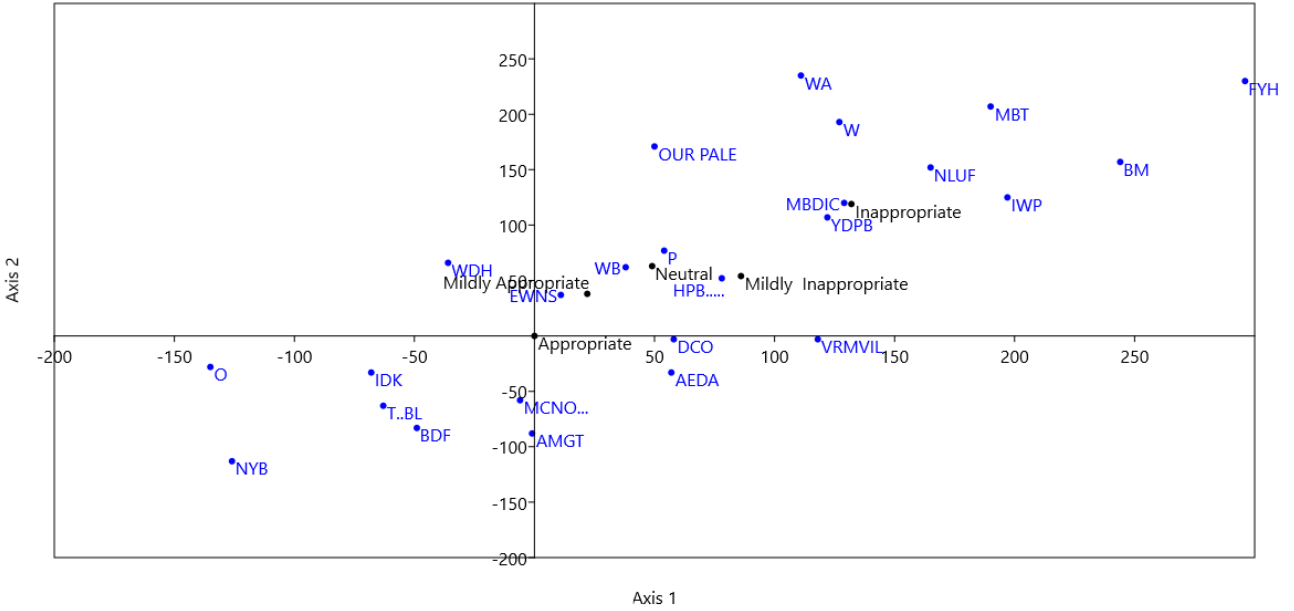
Out of a total of 3750 responses (being the sum of the total number of respondents multiplied by the number of selected expressions), 609 items (16.24%) were Appropriate, 720 (19.20%) were Mildly Appropriate, 840 (22.40%) were Neutral, 705 (18.80%) were Mildly Inappropriate, and 876 (23.36%) were Inappropriate. On the “Appropriate – Inappropriate” gradient therefore, it is evident that even though a greater percentage of the respondents had generally indicated that the texts were humorous, only 16.24% of them considered the selected expressions appropriate while 23.36% of them concluded that many of the expressions were inappropriate, accounting for a difference of 7.12%. It is also clear that the “Appropriacy” end of the gradient (that is the combination of “Appropriate” and “Mildly Appropriate”) has 1329 items (35.44%) while the “Inappropriacy” end (or the combination of “Mildly Inappropriate” and “Inappropriate”) has 1581 items (42.16%) also accounting for a difference of 6.72% (see Table 4 below). This is an indication that regarding the creation of humor in religion through translation, the difference in cognitive perception between the appropriate and the inappropriate is relatively marginal.

**Table 6.**

GRADIENT	Appropriate	Mildly Appropriate	Neutral	Mildly Inappropriate	Inappropriate
NUMBER OF ITEMS	609	720	840	705	876
PERCENTAGE	16.24%	19.20%	22.40%	18.80%	23.36%

It is also noteworthy that of all the selected expressions, the highest percentages were recorded in the “Inappropriate” variable of the gradient on items <sup>(2)</sup>, <sup>(7)</sup>, <sup>(8)</sup>, <sup>(9)</sup>, <sup>(15)</sup> and <sup>(17)</sup> (34%, 64%, 54%, 44%, 46%, and 48% respectively). On examination, it was observed that these were the expressions that tended the most to either demean or diminish the glory, might, sovereignty or reverential status of God. As already explained in Funny Bones above, item (2) has an incongruent and ludicrous note of informality and familiarity, (7) has an extremely informal and familiar tone unusual under any circumstance in any communication between Christians and God, while (9) has been shown to be a particularly funny idiomatic phrase even in its everyday use and intolerable in communion with God. Item (8) has been shown to trivialize the concept of sin by its frisky tone, (15) appears to demean the blessing of God and (17) is an exophoric reference to the Muslim religion. Again, this is an indication that that the perception of humor and offense by humor in religion depends significantly on the violated norm and the individual’s level of commitment to the violated code.

Figure 3. Non-Metric Dimensional Scaling



<b>T-TEST</b>	
<b>RESPONSES: Inappropriate</b>	<b>Appropriate</b>
<b>N: 25</b>	<b>N: 25</b>
<b>Mean: 35.04</b>	<b>Mean: 24.36</b>
<b>95% conf.: (25.026 45.054)</b>	<b>95% conf.: (17.462 31.258)</b>
<b>Variance: 588.54</b>	<b>Variance: 279.24</b>
<b>Difference between means: 10.68</b>	
<b>95% conf. interval (parametric): (-1.1659 22.526)</b>	
<b>95% conf. interval (bootstrap): (-1.08 21.84)</b>	
<b>t : 1.8127</b>	<b>p (same mean): 0.076128</b>
<b>Uneq. var. t : 1.8127</b>	<b>p (same mean): 0.076924</b>
<b>Monte Carlo permutation:</b>	<b>p (same mean): 0.0799</b>

### **Conclusion**

There is evidence to suggest that the Warri sub-variant of Nigerian pidgin is immensely inherently creative and humorous, easily lending itself for adaptations to significantly hilarious effects. The translations of the Christian “Our Lord’s Prayer” and the biblical Psalm 23, “The Lord Is My Shepherd” into Warri pidgin and their humorous appeal for a greater percentage of readers justifies this claim. Quite many respondents also commented that the texts were humorous, justifying the earlier claim in this paper that Nigerians had resorted to humor as a way of seeking relief from the tensions imposed by the socio-political climate of the country and tensions engendered by the strict requirements of religious dogma. From the perspective of Freud and Spencer’s relief theory therefore, it is assumed that the laughter generated by humor in these texts was the result of the release of nervous energy.

However, the fact that a significant percentage of items were considered inappropriate in the translations of religious discourses that were still perceived to be humorous indicates that there were indeed violations of ethical codes, but violations that were insufficient to cause significant offense. This is then an implicit validation of the benign violation theory to the extent that the perception of humor [in religious discourse] for different individuals is relative and subject to the level of commitment of that individual to the violated code that triggered humor in the given context. This claim is amply supported by the report above which demonstrated that the percentage of responses that were deemed out-rightly “Inappropriate” was highest for the items that seemed to lower the reputation of God and belittle the character of “Godness.” As well, it is in synchrony with the fact that the quality of humor perceived by those who indicated that they were deeply religious was subdued and less, compared with those who stated that they were either only moderately religious or not altogether religious.

The fact established here suggests that the release of nervous energy accumulated from pent tension brought on by the expected psychological disposition with which religious phenomena are handled can either be full, partial or subdued depending on the text, context and psychosocial disposition of the participants. If this is the case, it raises a vital question regarding the applicability of Freud and Spencer’s relief theory of humor and lends credence to the theory’s lack of universal appeal among contemporary humor scholars.

Overall, T-test shows that the difference in the perception of language (pidgin in this case) in religion between the religious and the non-religious groups is not significant ( $P > 0.05$ , T-test), T-test value being 0.34279. In addition, the difference between Appropriate and Inappropriate is not significant ( $P > 0.05$ , T-test). Also, the distribution of the frequencies of responses on the Non-Metric dimensional scaling supports this fact. This is an indication that language—standard, non-standard or pidgin—is not significant in the practice of Christianity.

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