

## The Pragmatic Import of Humorous Utterances in Kiswahili Buying and Selling Encounters

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### Abstract

This paper analyses humour as a pragmatic resource that interactants draw on to promote interpersonal relations between themselves as they engage each other in the negotiation exercise. Humour is discussed as a pragmatic and strategic resource that the interactants tap in order to amicably transact, besides enhancing their solidarity and mutual understanding. They therefore position themselves as equals in the market encounter. Humour is one of the essential tools for exploring the ways in which market conversation achieves serious social effects, while appearing to be no more than ways of having a few laughs together. The author discusses humour in the context of the market negotiation where, the two parties engage each other in a relaxed talk. As such, the two parties interact as “free and equal individuals who are willing to construct a context in which they are free to engage each other in the transaction encounter in the way and manner that pleases them.

**Key words:** Pragmatics, Negotiation, Humour, interactants, Buying and selling, Kiswahili

### Introduction

Several researchers have studied humour as a research domain, having long attracted research from philosophical and literary perspectives. However, despite this rich multi-disciplinary tradition, relatively little of this research has involved empirical analyses of humour in naturally occurring interactions. The research on laughter and jokes carried out individually and collectively (Sacks, 1974, 1978; Jefferson, 1979; Jefferson, et al., 1987) displays the same limitations of CA. Fairclough (1995) for instance, explains that humour is relatively recent, generally, strongly influenced by CA, and also by Brown and Levinson’s (1978) account of “face”.

While Brown and Levinson’s suggestion that joking is a strategy that minimizes the threat to positive face is useful, their account remains too general to describe systematically the range of humorous devices which occur in

authentic casual interactions. Generally, these researchers see humour as involving at least a duality of meaning and often multiplicity of opposing meanings, being made available within the same text. Humour involves polysemy, where both a “serious” and a “non-serious meaning can be recognized. In other words, humour involves polysemy, where both a “serious” and a “non-serious” meaning can be recognized. Because simultaneous meanings can be made, interactions can claim either that the “serious” meaning was not intended, or that the non-serious meaning was not. Humorous utterances have been noted in Trader (T)-Customer (C) encounters as will be evident in this discussion.

### **Pragmatic import of Humour**

Trader-customer Kiswahili discourse contains a wide range of humorous utterances which are spread through the interactional encounter. Humorous expressions are those that amuse (Leech, 1983). These expressions help to tone down a tense situation and as such, they are a light way of saying strong messages (Habwe, 1999). Humour seems to enable interactants to speak “off the record”, to make light of what is perhaps quite serious to them. In other words, through humorous utterances, the interactants are free to say things without strict accountability, either to themselves or to others.

To explain why interactants would want to talk without strict accountability, critical interpretations view humour as the expression of social structure. In these views, humour functions to reduce social differences and conflicts tensions in the social context. Apparently, the market interactants engage each other in such a manner that gives them an opportunity to relax while at the same time, transacting as mutually benefiting partners. Humour, therefore, enacts contradictions and conflicts in the social relations between conversational interactants. It is these contradictions and ambiguities that interactants cover up boredom and fatigue through their use of humour. In this case, humour reduces or minimizes conflict and tension between discourse interactants, as is evidenced in trader-customer interactions.

Although this researcher did not record many of such expressions, he came across those that were largely used by the market interactants as a pragmatic resource that enhances the market discourse sustenance. These utterances are so common in the market setting and to a large extent; they enable the interactants to communicate effectively. As such, humorous expressions enable them to maintain polite behaviour as impoliteness could easily ruin the interactants’ cooperative venture.

There is general agreement among humour researchers that the clearest indication that something is humorous is that someone presents laughs. For this reason, many studies on humour focus on laughter, while recognizing that not all humour is indicated by laughter as is the case in this study where laughter does

not necessarily mark a humorous segment. Studies on laughter in naturally occurring spoken interactions have made a number of important observations: In authentic interactions people often laugh at things that do not seem all that funny. What is funny in one context, for one group of interactants, may well not be in another context for the same or as a different group of interactants. This suggests that “funniness” is created contextually, that talk gets to be funny because of its relationship to the social context. It seems not to matter who initiates the laughter and whether laughter is reciprocated or not.

Laughter initiated by either party can offer an invitation to growing intimacy, to which responsive laughter from any of the interactants, implies willingness to affiliate while with held laughter implies a declining of the invitation. Studies have also shown that laughter often occurs before anything at all funny has been said, and so can signal entry into the humorous “key”. Let’s sample the following fragment to illustrate humour as a bargaining strategy.

C: **Bei yako ya mwisho kabisa ni ngapi?** (*What is your very last price?*)

T: **Ya mwisho kabisa?** (*the very last price?*)

In this example, the trader pretends that she has not heard or understood the prior utterance, and so by repeating it, she is probably teasing the customer. This turn may also imply that the trader is not willing to continue with the transaction. In this exchange, the customer is aware that the trader has reduced the price of the commodity, but he finds it necessary to ask the trader about the possibility of reducing the price of the commodity further. The trader responds by asking a question: **Ya mwisho kabisa?** (*The very last price?*). For the sake of politeness, this response is desirable, yet humorous. One would think that by repeating the customer’s utterance, the trader didn’t quite follow the customer’s prior contribution to the transactional exchange. In the following excerpt, the two interlocutors are not willing to terminate the transactional encounter. As such, each party gives near convincing reasons why their offer is reasonable, as the following excerpt makes clear.

C: **Punguza bei mzuri nisikufinye wewe, usinifinye mimi. Badala ya kukufanyia hizi nguo forty...** (*just reduce the price; we don’t have to hurt each other, so instead of paying forty shillings...*)

T: **Forty. Hapo usiongee.** (*forty shillings is a good deal, so don’t talk further*)

T: **Tunatafuta ya kula, tunatafuta hata ya kujiangalia maishani.** (*we depend on this business for our food and also for our livelihood*)

- C: **Eeeh!** (*yes*)  
T: **Halafu hata ya mahali hapa.** (*and also for the watchman*)  
C: **Eeeh!** (*Yes*)  
T: **Hatufanyi bure.** (*we must make some profit*)  
T: **Fanya hivi. Bei yako mzee ukiwa umekasirika ni ngapi? Sasa ukiwa umekasirika sana.** (*do this, what would be your last offer, old man even in your annoyance? Now if you are a bit serious?*)  
T: **Nimekasirika?** (*am I annoyed?*)  
C: **Eeeh!** (*yes*)  
T: **Nafikiri ni kuelewana. Lete thelathini na tano thelathini na tano.** (*I think it all has to do with mutual understanding. Just give thirty five shillings for each*)  
C: **Ndugu kama umekasirika ni pesa ngapi?** (*brother, if you are a bit serious, what shall be your offer?*)

In this case, the customer also seizes an opportunity and teases his interlocutor. He thinks the trader is annoyed and so he keeps insisting that he be told the last offer. In the following exchange, the encounter generates a joke:

- C: **Mwisho?** (*Last price?*)  
T: **Mwisho ni pesa, hapo ishirini na hapo kumi.** (*last price is money*)

It would appear that the trader is simply not serious when producing this utterance. This joke, however, does not offend the customer who continues with the bargain encounter. The two parties are in full control of their discourse, though, in the sense they are able to make jokes even in a mutually benefiting encounter as this.

The joke cited above as well as other “unpleasant” utterances are not necessarily met by laughter. In many discourse encounters, humour is not necessarily signaled by laughter yet, a general “jockey tone” indicates that no one takes the other participants’ comments very seriously. Our access to other conversations suggests that this is a typical scenario in which conversations among the interactants in this context are carried out, and that these interactants are in a routine joking relationship. The excerpt starts with an extended tease sequence, and this is the dominant humorous strategy that feature in the market situation. Analysis of the tease sequences reveals a fundamental point. For instance, a tease involves either of the participants teasing the other party as seen in the following fragment:

- C: **Kwa hivyo unaniambia niende.** (*So, are you implying that I should go away?*)
- T: **Uende namna gani, si uongeze hiyo ishirini?** (*how can you possibly go away, cant you just add that twenty shillings?*)
- C: **Sasa niongeze zikitoka wapi kama sina.** (*How can add anything. From where can I get anything with which to add?*)
- T: **Sasa uache nguo sababu ya ishirini.** (*Now, how can you leave this cloth because of twenty shillings*)
- C: **Na itatoka wapi kama sina?** (*Where can I get it if I have nothing left?*)
- T: **Sawa** (*o. k*)

An analysis of the market transactions suggests that jokes function in part as a test or puzzle for interactants, who may lose face if they are unable to “get” the joke. This serious transactional encounter is achieved through the joke so that either party is free to talk about certain things and issues, humorously. Again, once one party initiates a joke, the other participant contributes. Both the trader and the customer joke with each other about the price of the commodity, and, as such, in the market context, either party becomes involved in teasing each other. Second, jokes are acceptable in the market context and to a large extent the teasing device encourages the interactant’s mutual involvement so that the linguistic behaviour of both parties enacts a mutual interaction. This linguistic encounter also fosters understanding between the two parties that are interpersonally connected to each other. Participants differ in the strategies they adopt in the face of teasing. The following tease is directed at the trader who does not react with any sense of seriousness, as he produces the appropriate utterance.

- T: **Ulikuwa na ngapi wewe?** (*how much do you have?*)
- C: **Wee ona kibeti kimebaki tu kitambulisho.** (*Just inspect my wallet, it contains my identity card only*)
- T: **Hauna hata kidogo** (*you have nothing at all?*)
- C: **Hakuna, hakuna hata naenda kulala njaa leo.** (*nothing; absolutely nothing. I will even go to bed on an empty stomach*)
- T: **Ni sawa hakuna shida, lete viatu, lete hapa. Pengine wajua wewe ndio takuwa customer wa hapa pamoja na customer wengine.** (*It is o.k, no problem. Just take this pair of shoes. You might as well turn out to be a regular customer such as those that I trust*)

That either party recurrently engages in the teasing exercise may in part explain why the trader and the customer transact as equal and mutually benefiting

partners. The patterns of joking with each other suggests that either party is linguistically integrated by taking few turns and expressing little personal attitude. Thus, the humour in the text arises out of a deliberate attempt to avoid tension in the social context of the interactants. The interactants talk humorously in order to define and transmit acceptable alignments with each other. From the following excerpt, the trader humorously says that the last price is just that; she doesn't quote the price as she assumes the customer may not be willing to buy after all.

- C: **Sasa tufanye hivi sasa umefanya revision mpaka iwe kumi. Wacha tugawe loss...** (*now, let us do this, just adjust the price to ten shillings. We need to share the loss...*)
- C: **Sasa mwisho wenu kama mmekasirika ni pesa ngapi, kama mmekasirika kabisa?** (*Now, what will be your last price if you are really serious. What will it be if indeed you are serious?*)
- T: **Aah! mwisho ni hapo hapo. Ni hapo hapo, mali ya leo mzee.** (*the last price is just that. Is just that, today's goods, old man*)

This interactional pattern is for the mutual benefit of both parties. In the following excerpt, either party freely produces humorous utterances:

- C: **Pesa si ni hizi kwani hutaki pesa.** (*This is money, not unless you don't want it*)
- T: **Hebu ongeza pesa mzee.** (*please add some money, old man*)
- C: **Hakuna.** (*I have nothing*)
- T: **Ongeza hiyo hamsini.** (*add that fifty shillings*)
- C: **Ukisikia customer akisema hakuna na sio mara yake ya kwanza kuja hapa.** (*if a customer tells you that he has nothing left, believe him*)
- T: **Ongeza pesa unaona hapa nimetoa zangu ninajua wewe ni customer.** (*add some money, you realize that I have had to sacrifice my profit because I know you are my customer*)
- C: **Na mimi nishatoa wewe ndio hataki kuuza.** (*I have already given you my offer; you probably don't want to sell*)
- T: **Ongeza pesa.** (*add some money*)
- C: **Hakuna** (*I have nothing*)

This explains the fact that trader-customer transaction is a humorous venture and is essentially meant to be so interpreted. For, in the cited excerpt, each party produces funny turns. It is noted that humour achieves many tasks. One, it gets the listeners on-side. Humour makes the participants to relax and thereby,

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suggesting that whatever is said is not really serious. Humour enables the interactants to “read” the sequence of the discourse encounter. In offering his appraisal of the transaction event, the interactants express themselves through humorous utterances. Through this relaxed talk, the two parties interact as “free and equal individuals who are willing to construct a context in which they are free to interact in the way and manner that pleases them. In the following turn, the customer ‘ridicules’ the trader by indicating that the shirt in question cannot go for as much as two hundred and eighty shillings:

- C: **Enhe! Hii shati inaweza kuwa two-eighty? (!) hiyo ni price kali.** (*Yes, can this shirt go for two hundred and eighty shillings?*)
- T: **Kwa nini? Wewe ulikuwa wataka nikuuzie ngapi?** (*why? How much would you want to pay?*)
- C: **Mami ukiangalia hii nguo waweza kununua kwa two eighty?** (*mom, if you inspect this cloth properly, would you really pay two hundred and eighty shillings only?*)
- T: **Mimi siwezi kujua hiyo wajua nakuuzia na bei yake.** (*I really wouldn't know; am actually selling it at its worth*)
- C: **Eeeh!** (*Yes*)
- T: **Sasa wewe si uniambie wataka kununua na ngapi?** (*now, just tell me, how much would you want to pay?*)
- C: **Nieleze tu. mimi ni binadamu.** (*just tell me I am a human being?*)
- C: **Eeeh? Mama wacha nikwambie tu ... nimetembea ni ... nmetembea Webuye, nimetembea Eldoret, nimekuja Mariakani na Mombasa hapa sasa Kongowea kwenyewe. Yaani sijapata mama mwenye roho ngumu kama wewe.** (*Eeeh! Mom, let me tell you. I have been to.. Webuye, Eldoret, and now I have come to Mariakani, Mombasa and Kongowea itself. The thing is, I have never seen a mother who is as rigid as you*)
- C: **Eeeh! Acha mami tufanye hivi ...** (*Eeeh! Let us do this mom...*)
- T: **Hakuna kitu tunafanya.** (*There is nothing we can do*)
- C: **Eeeih!**
- T: **Kama hakuna mia ishirini unaweka hapo tu.** (*if you don't have one hundred and twenty shillings, then just leave it*)
- C: **Oooh ... ok mami, sasa nakusikia na ni asante kwa sababu umekuwa mama mzuri umekuwa open na ukaniambia. Hehee ... ukaniambia kule kutoka mia tano hamsini ukaja mia hamsini lakini hiyo hiyo mama unenikausha kumaanisha naenda Mariakani kwa sababu mimi nilikuwa nataka kusimamisha ya Moroni hapa...** (*Oooh ... OK,*

*Mom, I understand nad I wish to thank you for being such a good and open-minded Mom.you have reduced the price from five hundred and fifty to one hundred and fifty shillings.if I pay that much, then I will be left with nothing yet I really wanted to buya good brand )*

- T: **Lakini mpaka nikwambie ukweli.** (*but I bust tell you the truth*)
- C: **Eeeh Lakini hakuna mambo. Ok. ni uzuri.** (*Fine, there is no problem. ok, that is fine with me*)
- T: **Unajua kama mzazi akitaka kuishi vizuri na watoto wake hapishani hata ukienda nayo basi ukienda nayo basi majority ... kwa sababu hata unawazima nam...** (*you know, if a parent wants to be at peace with her children, she does not argue with them...you will have discouraged them a great deal.you have to side with the majority*)
- C: **Eeeh!**
- T: **Nasema ukweli wa mambo. Mungu akinibariki, akinijalia utakuja Kuniambia.** (*am telling you the whole truth. By God's grace, should we meet again, you will surely understand*)

The cited turns do not initially appear to be particularly humorous pieces of talk, but the utterances come across as being funny in the sense that each party seems to understand how the talk makes sense to them. The utterance is understood and taken in a lighthearted manner. However, their moment of lightheartedness is not accidental: the interactants in the cited turns make very strategic use of humour. The first indication of humour in the text comes in the customer's contribution to the transactional exchange as evident in the following turn.

- T: **Unajua kama mzazi akitaka kuishi vizuri na watoto wake hapishani hata ukienda nayo basi ukienda nayo basi majority ... kwa sababu hata unawazima nam...** (*you know, if a parent wants to be at peace with her children, she does not argue with them...you will have discouraged them a great deal.you have to side with the majority*)

In light of the cited turn, one might want to ask: What's funny about this utterance? What does the customer want to do? He seems to accuse the customer for being insensitive to the realities in the market context. As there is little laughter. To a large extent, the market talk is interpreted as a humorous encounter. Neither party should be taken seriously as the co-interactants do not take each other seriously, as they equally participate in constituting the humour. For example the response in turn (C: **Eeeh!** Does not come out as a challenge, and thus indicates that he "reads" the trader's turn as being funny, not serious, and thereby could as well be meant to create a relaxed environment for the transactional encounter. This has an implication: Whatever the trader initiates



seriously, the customer responds humorously or put another way, whenever the customer initiates the transaction seriously, the trader responds with humour. They, therefore, hide their serious comments behind humour and indeed both parties are successful at it. In the following turn, the customer inquires from the trader if the stain will come off. The trader responds with finality: *it will come off*. This response is funny in that the trader pretends to be knowledgeable in so far as the stains are concerned. The extract is indicated hereunder and the two funny turn are underlined.

- C: **Na hii stain itatoka?** (*will this stain come off?*)  
 T: **Itatoka.** (*it will*)  
 C: **Utaongeza ngapi mia. Fanya three eighty.** (*will you add one hundred shillings?*)  
 T: **Wewe uko mbinguni, mimi nataka uwe ardhini kama mimi. Wewe uko juu ya janga bana. Mia utaongeza ngapi?** (*your offer is unreasonable and devastating to the point that we may not agree. How much will you add to one hundred shillings?*)

While the interactants' humorous utterances enact interpersonal relationship between the discursive interactants, it also exposes them as socialized agents. Humour exposes and covers up tensions, besides rendering resistance to such habitual socialized patterns of interaction. The analyses of humour in the cited excerpts supports the fundamental claims that this author wishes to make about humour in trader-customer transactions. These are as follows; Humour is used in trader-customer conversation to make it possible for interactants to do serious work (e.g. bargaining) while being able to distance themselves from boredom and fatigue. There is a sense in which either party can claim that they did not really mean what they said, and that they were only joking.

Humour disguises the serious work that is being achieved through talk and as such, provides the market interactants with a resource for exercising discursive power, and so conforming to the non-hierarchic relations of the interactional context. At the same time, humour functions to reaffirm to the interactants that what is being constantly negotiated and contested in trader-customer conversation is the price of the commodity; that they are being positioned and socialized as they sit joking with and teasing each other at the market place.

Like other linguistic resources, humour constructs meanings through negotiation. Humour arises as interactants make text in contexts which involve conflicts, tension, and contradiction. Humour reduces effects of conflict, tensions and contradictions in the market context. Humour enhances interpersonal relationships between the trader and the customer so that their use of and response

to humour enact their positioning in the bargaining context, including their personal response to immediately present co-interlocutors.

In this section the author has analyzed humour as a pragmatic resource that interactants draw on to promote interpersonal relations between themselves as they engage each other in the negotiation exercise. Humorous utterances are explicated as pragmatic and strategic resource that the interactants tap into order to amicably transact, besides enhancing their solidarity and mutual understanding. They, therefore, position themselves as equals in the market encounter. This analysis demonstrates that humour is one of the essential tools for exploring the ways in which market conversation achieves serious social effects, while appearing to be no more than ways of “killing time” and “having a few laughs together.”

This author has discussed humour in the context of the market negotiation where he has demonstrated that in this discourse of bargaining, the two parties engage each other in a relaxed talk. As such, the two parties interact as “free and equal individuals who are willing to construct a context in which they are free to engage each other in the transaction encounter in the way and manner that pleases them. Another strategy that the transacting partners use in negotiating the price of the articles of trade is the code-mixing strategy.

The turns that are cited above point to the fact that trader-customer Kiswahili discourse is an example of a spontaneous interaction. By this, it should be understood that the interaction occurs naturally so that the participants’ import to the talk–exchange is not censured. This is why the trader, gives a detailed account of the type of clothes that he sells, by sayings: **Kuna nguo ambayo inaitisha long yake** (There are those clothes which must be worn with particular ones). As the transactional encounter proceeds, the customer decides to temporarily change the topic. He says: **Moody Awori ni Mjaluo?** (Is Moody Awori a Luo?). The trader responds by saying: **Si mjaluo ni mluhya. Sasa niambie, utatoa ngapi?** (He is not a Luo; He is a Luhya. Now tell me, how much can you pay?).

In this transactional exchange, the two participants evidently engage in side sequences and bring on board the topics that are not directly relevant to the dictates of the present transactional event. The two interactants are aware of what is going on in their surrounding world, and as such, they are free to comment on any socio-economic and political issues<sup>7</sup> which might affect them in a certain way. In this case, the topics that come on board may not be transactional in content and intent: the topic that comes on board may be less important (**Si mjaluo ni mluhya. Sasa niambie, utatoa ngapi?** (he is not a Luo; He is a Luhya. Now tell me, how much can you pay?). This argument is valid in light of other excerpt. These turns contain some pragmatic meaning in the sense that the two discourse

participants are transacting at the interpersonal level. It is in this light that the following phrases should be interpreted:

- . **Wasemaje brother** (*what would you say, brother?*)
- . **Kwa nini brother** (*why brother?*)
- . **Kumi na tano damu** (*fifteen shillings will be an ideal price*)
- . **Kumi na tano damu** (*fifteen shillings will be an ideal price*)

Evidence from other excerpts indicate that there is no one-to-one correspondence between what is said and what is meant so that in most interactional encounters, we are at a loss in understanding the speaker's intentions and sincerity. In this case, we refer to the following turns.

C: **Mwisho?** (*Last price?*)

T: **Mwisho ni pesa, hapo ishirini na hapo kumi** (*The last price is money; those go for twenty shillings and these, ten*).

In this turn, the trader has initiated the overall topic of this transaction. He is talking about the worth and value of the goods that he's selling. He is being persuasive in the sense that he is praising and probably exaggerating the quality of the clothes that he is selling. For instance, he talks of many of his shirts and coats matching with almost all other trousers (**huwa zina-match na nguo nyingi**), but the customer doesn't really take him seriously. When he takes the next turn, he ignores the trader's contribution and thereby, initiates a new topic, which is within the realm of the discourse of bargain. In turn two, the customer asks:

- **Moody Awori ni mjaluo?** (*Is Moody Awori a Luo?*)

One may ask: what is the relevance of this question in the context of the bargaining activity? In other words, what is the transactional value of this question in relation to the objectives that inform this bargain? The answer to these questions lies in the wider political context that is in place as the two interlocutors engage each other in the bargain process. It is noted that when the NARC government took over power and effectively replaced the previous regime (KANU government) in December 31, 2002, Mr. Mwai Kibaki became the president and Mr. Wamalwa Kijana his vice. A few months later i.e. August 2003), Mr. Wamalwa died and was subsequently replaced by Mr. Moody Awori. The two happen to belong to the same linguistic community (Luhya). One characteristic feature that seems to be deeply rooted in the Kenyan political discourse is the linguistic element.

If Mr. Wamalwa (the eighth vice president since independence) were to be replaced by one from another community, then this would have created political tension as the Luhya community would have cried foul that they hadn't been given a fair deal. The two interactants are fully aware of a possibility of such a

tension, and as a result, the trader finds it prudent to avoid that topic as soon as possible. The trader, responds to this question in such a casual manner: **Si mjaluo, ni Mluhya** (*He is not a Luo, he's a Luhya*). The cited turn is a typical example of an utterance that does not seem to be a substantive contribution to the progressivity of this transactional exchange.

The fact that the topic doesn't generate new substantial contributions, means that it is not relevant as at now. From this encounter, it seems that the issue at hand, is not political, but social and transactional and as such, it has nothing to do with Mr. Moody Awori *being a Luo or a Luhya*. This utterance does not contribute to developing the current topic, and as such, it is closed down interactively. By producing this turn, it seems that the trader is cooperative, and by, abandoning the topic (about Moody Awori), he seems to suggest that either this topic is potentially complete or is largely in-consequential in light of the dictates of the current discourse. It can therefore be claimed that in the event that either the trader or the customer introduces a topic that has no direct bearing to the discourse at hand, the two parties may choose to collaborate in closing it. This move displays the acceptance of the proposal for closing and collaboration in doing so is in agreement with the prior turn.

In the cited example, the trader responds to the customer's question, but continues to produce an utterance that contributes new or relevant information on the topic. The market interactants are aware of the floor holding rules but they do not prepare the co-interactant for the next topic. In this case, this discourse is a shared activity although the mutual topics are not necessarily signaled. This is because the interactants share enough information for its understanding and interpretation, and as it were, the purpose of the encounter is well known to the interactants. In this way, the trader restores the progressivity of the topical talk. The trader, says:

T: **...Sasa niambie, utatoa ngapi? Ili kesho usinisumbue. Sijui wewe kama una-value time kama mimi. Mimi kama ningekua wewe nungekuambia bei ya mwisho utoe ya mwisho na mimi nitoe ya mwisho ili kama kuna haja ya kuja kesho, ndio ukija na hiyo bei surely. Kwa hivyo afadhali uangalie kama kuna haja ya kuja kesho. Si uniambie utatoa gapi na mimi nikuambie kama itawezekana? Ndio unajua hii nguo kuna vile inateremka bei. Kama hii chagua yote pamoja tumezitoa kwenye.** (*Now tell me, how much are you willing to pay? You really don't have to regret if you don't find this item of clothing. Moreover, I don't know if you value time as I. If I were you, I would just mention the last price so that there would be no need to come tomorrow... can't you just tell me your last price so that I can make up my mind...*)

In this turn, there is compelling evidence that the trader is not really interested with the topic concerning Moody Awori; instead, she interactively and amicably closes it off just before re-introducing matters related to the previous topic. It can, therefore, be claimed that conversational interactants are free to introduce completely unrelated matters. The only constraint involved is that they have to get their co-interactants to accept their proposal for initiating and ratifying such topical matters. In other words, such topics that are introduced must be established collaboratively. This explains why the just cited turn may be taken as an example of an interactional discourse where the topic in progress has not been interactionally closed off. The two participants are still bargaining and as a result, the trader finds it prudent to link her contribution to the prior discourse. The issue concerning: “Moody Awori” seems to be a new mentionable that may not be topicalized. Such topics are dealt with briefly and exhibit degrees of simplicity. The most common features of such topics are in most cases, topic nomination, acceptance and comment by the co-interactant. In the same turn, the trader decides to retrace an earlier topic of the transaction. He says:

T: **Sasa niambie, utatoa ngapi? Ili kesho usinisumbue. Sijui wewe kama una-value time kama mimi. Mimi kama ningekua wewe nungekuambia bei ya mwisho utoe ya mwisho na mimi nitoe ya mwisho ili kama kuna haja ya kuja kesho, ndio ukija na hiyo bei surely. Kwa hivyo afadhali uangalie kama kuna haja ya kuja kesho. Si uniambie utatoa ngapi namimi nikuambie kama itawezekana? Ndio unajua hii nguo kuna vile inateremka bei. Kama hii chagua yote pamoja tumezitoa kwenye.** *(Now tell me, how much are you willing to pay? You really don't have to regret if you don't find this item of clothing. Moreover, I don't know if you value time as I. If I were you, I would just mention the last price so that there would be no need to come tomorrow...can't you just tell me your last price so that I can make up my mind...).*

From this conversational segment, there are no specific and distinct discourse markers that can be said to signal the end of an exchange or the initiation of a new topic. When the transition moment reaches, the discourse participants appropriately and amicably revive, change or just initiate a new topic for the conversation. Interlocutors collaboratively manage to introduce and sustain their mutual conversational topics without explicitly making use of such phrases as ‘ok’, ‘anyway’ as would be the case in other discourse situations (e.g. courtroom discourse). In a competitive bargain such as this, the participants are free to introduce, brush off or even abandon topics at will without necessarily appearing to be rude to each other. We therefore realize that in this discourse, the topics are not fixed beforehand, but are negotiated in the process of interacting, and as evidenced, throughout the transaction process, the next topic of the transaction is

developing; each speaker contributes to the transaction in terms of both the existing topic framework and his or her personal topic. The following turns present such an interesting scenario, in the sense that one would ask: why should the two discourse participants continue bargaining if they are not explicitly cooperative and collaborative? In order to get the entire picture of our argument, there is need to refer to the following turns.

- C: Can you mention your cost price? I want to make a customer out of you.
- T: No.....you don't have to.
- C: **Utachukua shilingi mia nne niamue kuchukua au kuacha.** (*Will you take four hundred shillings (offer) before I change my mind?*)
- T: **Usini-promise eti kesho nitakuuzia hii. This is mitumba brother, unajua hazinacontrol price. Mimi naweza hata nikaamua nikuuzie hata shilingi mia lakini kuna hesabu ambazo sisi hufanya, sisi hufanya hasa! Ninajua hata ukija kesho hata mimi mwenyewe sitaweza kukuuzia kwa hiyo bei.** (*Don't promise that you will buy this pair of shoes tomorrow. These are second hand commodities, and as you know they have no price control. I can decide to sell it to you at one hundred shillings but we wouldn't want to sell (anything) at a loss. I confirm to you that I will not reduce the price tomorrow. I may even sell it at a higher price*)
- C: **Ndio hiyo lakini kesho nitakuja.** (*That is it, but I will have to come back tomorrow*)
- T: **Unaweza kuchagua yoyote hapa hivi, koti yoyote itakutoshea. Leo una uwezo wa kuchukua, lakini kesho utakuwa na uwezo wa kununua nguo nzuri. Ununue nguo ya uwezo wako.** (*Just choose from any of these, any of these coats will fit you. Today you have the money with which to buy this coat. Tomorrow you will not have it. Just buy a cloth that is commensurate with your ability*).
- C: **Kesho nitajaribu.** (*I will try to come back tomorrow*)
- T: **Kama huwezi afford material si ununue....** (*If you can't afford this material then can't you... buy*)

In one of the cited turns above, the customer out-steps his discursive boundary when he quips: *Can you mention your cost price? I want to make a customer out of you.* He seems to be asking the trader to provide solid evidence in so far as his buying price is concerned. And at this juncture, one may ask: How can solid evidence be constituted? Is the trader under any moral obligation to be truthful when such "truths" may deny her of the returns or profits that could accrue from the transaction? It turns out that this interaction is neither a fact-finding mission nor an interaction where the participants are expected to present

evidence pertaining to the buying and selling prices. Therefore, party has the moral authority to decide who among them is “telling the truth” and who is ‘lying’. Moreover, the two parties are aware of the dictates of the discourse of bargain. In this transactional exchange, the interactants are transacting as mutually benefiting partners. They are negotiating as equal partners so that their utterances are deemed appropriate and cooperative in light of the assumptions that they bring to the conversation. When the trader says that the ‘**last price is money**’, she seems to be implying that there is no need for a protracted bargain.

From the analysis, it is apparent that the traders and customers were not at pains to participate in a bargain where fruits, vegetable and cereals are the main articles of trade. This is because such commodities are relatively cheap. In this case, bargaining is not worth the time and energy regarding these items. The trader does not therefore expect the customer to ask for the reduction of the price where the mentioned items are involved. In other words, the trader is indicating that she has already made up her mind that she is not ready for a bargain encounter. It is this respect that it should be understood that language is used to perform many functions such as exchanging information, maintaining social bonds of friendship as well as deciding and carrying out a joint action.

### Conclusion

The analysis so far has demonstrated that the market discourse is marked by humorous utterances in respect of the multifaceted intentions of the interactants. This discourse, therefore, comes across as a strategic undertaking in the sense that the transacting partners use various strategies in an attempt to win favours from their co-interlocutors. These strategies are meant to obtain the compliance and cooperation of the co-interlocutors. This is a mutually benefiting bargain that calls for cooperation from the two parties. In this setting, humorous utterances are accepted and accommodated. This is why the market discourse largely exhibits order and a definite structure, even when the interactants engage each other through the use of a mixed code which enhances cooperation, other than aiding the transmission of information and creating a rapport between the two discourse participants. The participants are therefore able to engage in a conversation that runs smoothly, without much interruption from either party.

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