

Fandom Language and Banter-Throwing in Football-Related Interactions among Nigerian Fans of English Premier League Clubs

Temitope Michael Ajayi
University of Ibadan/Universität Hamburg

Temidayo Akinrinlola
McPherson University

Daniel Ajayi
Technische Universität Chemnitz

Abstract. The discourse of football fandom has been underexplored in Nigerian scholarship, especially from the linguistic point of view. This study, therefore, investigates fandom language and banter-throwing in football-related interactions among Nigerian fans of English Premier League (EPL) clubs. The eclectic combination of relevant aspects of Brown and Levinson's face, Culpeper's impoliteness and Odebunmi's contextual belief theories serves as analytical framework. Online (Facebook) and offline interactions among Nigerian EPL clubs' fans constitute the data. Findings reveal pragma-linguistic practices such as personalisation of clubs' activities/affairs (through personal and possessive pronouns), name-calling and distortion of rival clubs' names, direct and indirect jocular mockery and distortion of rival clubs' logo for amusement characterise fandom discourse among Nigerian fans of EPL clubs. These pragma-linguistic practices, deconstructed as merely banter-throwing by participants, help create and sustain an atmosphere of camaraderie among the EPL fans.

Keywords: Football, Fandom, Nigeria, Banter, English Premier League

Languages: English, Nigerian Pidgin English, Yorùbá

How to Cite this Article:

Ajayi, Temitope Michael, Temidayo Akinrinlola, and Daniel Ajayi. 2023. "Fandom Language and Banter-Throwing in Football-Related Interactions among Nigerian Fans of English Premier League Clubs." *Arusha Working Papers in African Linguistics*, 5(1): 67-91.

1.0 Introduction

Different phenomena such as fashion, youthful exuberance culminating in gangsterism and cultism, sports, among others have caught the attention of Nigerian youths (and adults) in the existential trajectory of the country. For instance, the period between 1990 and 2000 could be described as a period during which cultism held sway among Nigerian youths, especially among university undergraduates (as well as students of polytechnics and colleges of education). Among the various cult groups many youths identify/ied with were/are Black Axe, *Ayee*, Jezebel, Black Beret. The activities of these groups, which are oftentimes manifestations of the rivalry between/among members of the groups, have been of great concern to law enforcement agencies and the Nigerian society at large. However, with the popularity of the English Premier League in the country, particularly as engendered by very many notable Nigerian footballers like Nwanko Kanu, Austin Jay Jay Okocha, and Mikel Obi, among others, joining and playing for different EPL clubs, the attention of many Nigerian youths has largely been drawn away from anti-social vices as cultism. In fact, it is no gainsaying that between 2000 and now (2020), cultism activities have arguably reduced among Nigerian youths. From observation, there is hardly any family in Nigeria with no youths identifying with one EPL club or the other. This observation is corroborated by Adetunji (2010). Prominent among the EPL clubs Nigerians have identified with are Arsenal FC, Manchester United (Man U), Liverpool FC, Chelsea FC, Manchester City FC, Tottenham FC, among others.

As such, the ‘rivalry’ among these football clubs in their English context has been subtly extended to the Nigerian context. As a projection of their fandom and support for their various clubs, many Nigerian youngsters, youths and adults (male and female) are often seen donning the jerseys of their clubs, organising parties to celebrate the victories of their clubs, as well as deploy both online (social media) and offline platforms to demonstrate their support for their clubs. They also often resort to banter-throwing in football-related interactions. Following the position already established in many extant studies, we conceptualise banter in this study as a linguistic action that is considered offensive on the surface but which is co-constructed by discourse participants as intended to create and maintain a feeling of comity. In other words, banter involves expressions that are literally offensive or impolite but are pragmatically used to achieve polite goals (Haugh, 2010; Flayih, 2013). This is well captured by Culpeper

(2011). He defines banter more comprehensively, “in terms of an understanding on the part of a participant that the contextual conditions that sustain genuine impoliteness do not apply” (Culpeper 2011: 208).

However, as central as this phenomenon is to football fandom in Nigeria, it has not enjoyed serious scholarly attention. From observation, fandom discourse, particularly with respect to the EPL clubs, has generally been underexplored in the Nigerian context, particularly from a discursive-pragmatic perspective. This is considered a vital gap in Nigerian scholarship on football discourse, particularly given the (dis)unifying role the EPL plays in the Nigerian society, as well as its implications for social interaction in the country. Thus, specifically, this paper aims to identify and discuss the discursive strategies of banter-throwing in football-related interactions among Nigerian fans of EPL clubs, with a view to describing its implications for language of fandom in Nigeria. The study draws inputs from Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) face, Culpeper’s impoliteness (1996, 2011) and Odebunmi’s (2006) contextual belief theories to account for the various linguistic strategies characterising fandom discourse in the Nigerian context.

2.0 The English Premier League (EPL) and Nigerian Fandom

According to Grant (2011), the English Premier League (EPL) is the top-tier professional football league in England, and it is reputed to be the most successful domestic sporting competition in the world. As reported by Vamplew (2017), the league was established in 1992 when the existing First Division of the four-division Football League in England made the move to become an independent organisation, the Football Association Premier League. Eventually, it had its name changed to the English Premier League in 2007 (Vamplew, 2017: 1). Perhaps its reputation as being the most popular league, among other top-rate leagues in Europe such as Serie A (in Italy), La Liga (in Spain), and Ligue I (in France), among others, coupled with many successful Nigerian footballers featuring in the league, is a major reason it has gained much acceptability in Nigeria, especially among the youths and adults. In fact, as noticed, a whole family (comprising the father, mother and children) can identify with a particular team. In some other instances, members of the same family support different EPL clubs. As such, whenever the various clubs supported by the different members of the family ‘clash’ in a football encounter, it is common to see them throw banter- fathers against sons/daughters, wives against husbands, and vice

versa. Adetunji (2010) notes that, watching EPL matches has particularly caught the fancy of its Nigerian fans (dominated by male youths) since the country has witnessed increase in the proliferation and affordability of satellite television, particularly the DSTV and GOTV, among others. Unlike before, many households could now easily procure and install cable devices connectable to their television in order to view live EPL matches in the comfort of their homes. Similarly, the love for the EPL has been further aided by the increasing number of football viewing centres in nooks and crannies of streets in different parts of the country.

Adetunji (2010) has further observed that a typical Nigerian football fan or supporter identifies with a particular EPL clubside, and feels obliged to watch their matches, either during the week or at weekends. In fact, as noted by this scholar, Nigerian fans of the EPL have formed different ‘associations of supporters/fans’, especially for the four most successful EPL clubs, also often categorised as the ‘big four’- Arsenal, Man U, Chelsea, and Liverpool. However, in recent times, new contenders such as Manchester City, Leicester City, and Tottenham Hotspur have joined the race for the top four positions in the league. Each of these clubs has its slogan(s) which form(s) a uniting linguistic ‘emblem’ among the fans. These are the following:

Arsenal:	Gunners for life/ the Gunners
Chelsea:	The Blues/ Blues for life
Liverpool:	Never walk alone
Manchester United:	Red Devil/GGMU (Glory glory Man United)

From the aforementioned picture, it suffices to posit that EPL fandom in the Nigerian context has assumed a ‘fanatical’ height among football lovers in the country.

3.0 Literature Review

A number of studies have investigated soccer and football discourse from different perspectives, with different aims and objectives. Lewandoski (2012) examines the language of online sports commentary from a comparative perspective. In particular, the study compares the register of online sports commentary with what obtains in written sports commentary and sports announcers’ reports. Findings of the research reinforce the hypothetical position that the language (register) of online sports commentary is a fusion of spoken and written language. Evidently, the study does not give thoughts to the (non)linguistic practice of sports enthusiasts,

and particularly football fans whose comments are equally worthy of scholarly attention, given the important place fandom occupies in sporting and football activities.

Penn (2013) attempts a comparison of the relationship between football and globalisation in England and Italy between 1930 and 2010 along three dimensions, namely nationalities of players, countries of origin of coaches, and club ownership. The study reports that players and managers were predominantly English and almost exclusively British in England during this period. Strict immigration rules introduced around the period of World War I were observed to have further ensured the maintenance of this pattern. Italian Serie A evidently revealed a similar pattern (akin to the one observed in England) for the most part of the period. For instance, as noted by Penn (2013), between 1930 and the late 1980s, Serie A players were predominantly Italians, perhaps an aftermath of the banning of non-Italians in the Italian league between 1965 and 1980 (Penn, 2013). However, with respect to coaches and club ownership, between 1930 and 1950, there were a number of foreign coaches in the league, particularly from countries such as Hungary, Austria and Yugoslavia. Club ownership, within this period in the two countries, was also strictly native to them. Humpolik (2014) investigates language of football commentaries in English, with particular focus on its linguistic and literary features as a genre of language use. The study comes as a veritable reference material for the understanding of the linguistic (modifiers, simple present tense, simple and complex sentences, among others) and literary (metaphorisation and metonymy) features of football commentaries in English. As comprehensively detailed as this study is, its shortcoming lies in its scope: it is limited to football commentaries by football commentators and pundits, to the exclusion of the linguistic practice of football fans.

Penn (2016) explores the link between football and language from the viewpoint of sociology. The thrust of the paper is to correct the widely held notion that football talk is enshrouded in negative terminological expressions, grounded in racism, sexism and homophobia. Penn (2016) concludes football discourse is largely 'positive and integrative' and not predominantly negative as reported by some observers. Although the study has scientifically hinted on the fact that the relationship between football and language is dialectical, its approach is rather radically sociological than being linguistic.

Sahragard and Rahimi (2017) is a critical discourse analysis of football reports, with emphasis on Real Madrid's official website. Particularly, the study is situated within Hodge and Kress' (1996) syntagmatic model of linguistic analysis. These scholars note as an ideological posture, the writers of the reports strategically deploy linguistic resources to 'sell' the team to the readers, emphasising and overstating the team's strength, opportunities, trophies, goal scoring and winning mentality.

Even after losing a game, the writers mainly concentrate on the Real Madrid team, irrespective of the result of the game. Thus, the major preoccupation of the team's side is to linguistically project its positive aspects, achievements and winning philosophy, even in instances the team is on a 'losing streak'. The study commendably gives insights into how football clubs deploy their sites to project their ideologies as well as appeal to the psyche of readers and would-be fans. However, the study, more like many other works on language and football, conspicuously glosses over how fandom is expressed with the deployment of linguistic resources. Alzawaydeh and Alghazo (2018) examine conceptual metaphor in football news headlines in English and Arabic, with the aim of establishing the similarities and/or differences between English and Arabic in the operationality of the identified metaphorical concepts. Alzawaydeh and Alghazo (2018) note that, the intersecting metaphorical concept in the news headlines in the two languages is 'football is war', although Arabic reportedly manifests more metaphorical tune than English. No doubt, this study details conceptual metaphorisation in Arabic and English news reportage, and demonstrates clearly how metaphors can be deployed to appreciate the similarities and differences between/among different languages. However, it leaves out language use by football fans in its scope.

Within the Nigerian scholarship context in particular, a number of studies have equally paid attention to sports and football discourse. These include Adetunji (2010), Ajayi (2014), Olagunju (2016a and 2016b (march)), Dogari et al (2018) and Olagunju (2019). Adetunji (2010) examines nicknaming of EPL players by Nigerian EPL supporters/fans. In particular, the study focuses on the strategies and criteria for nicknaming some popular players in the league. Adetunji observes that linguistic processes such as borrowing, analogy, and semantic transfer are employed in the process of creating nicknames for the players. Similarly, concepts such as performance, role, age, and physical appearance also play a significant role in nicknaming the players. It is no gainsaying that Adetunji's study is a brilliant approach to the study of the linguistic behaviour of Nigerian fans of the EPL. However, banter throwing, which forms an important aspect of EPL fandom in Nigeria, is largely glossed over. Ajayi (2014) examines language use in football rivalry, particularly from face/politeness perspective. Precisely, the study digs deep into how face-threatening acts are deployed by Jose Mourinho and Pep Guardiola, two of the most accomplished football coaches in Europe to project and negotiate their professional rivalry. This study, although interestingly details how football rivalry thrives on language, does not account for the use of linguistic resources in fandom rivalry, especially among EPL supporters in Nigeria.

Olagunju (2016a) explores the implication of lexical relationship in selected football discourse in selected Nigerian dailies. The study, which is

situated within Systemic Functional Linguistics, demonstrates how the appreciation of lexical relationship in text enhances a good understanding of football discourse. It also points to the fact that football, as a sub-activity within the entire sporting enterprise, has its peculiar register. However, the study, like the other ones that have been mentioned, evidently neglects language and football fandom in Nigeria. Olagunju (2016b) investigates evaluative register in football texts in selected Nigerian newspapers, with the aim of establishing the evaluative contents of football texts and its significance in enhancing a better understanding of football register. As reported by Olagunju, football texts in Nigerian newspapers are replete with approbation and pejorative evaluative contents. As a commendable scholarly effort, the study reinforces the central place evaluation occupies in the discourse of football in particular, and sports in general. The scholar, however, toes the path of the other scholars (as mentioned above) in that she also does not consider it worthy of scholarly attention to look at football fandom discourse, especially among Nigerian fans of the EPL. Dogari et al (2018) attempt an investigation of the attitude and experiences of European football fans in television viewing centres in Nigeria, with a view to establishing whether fandom provides leisure, escapism, comfort, integration of diverse people, or constitutes a source of conflict among fans in the Nigerian society. The study is essentially situated in peace and conflict studies.

Dogari et al (2018) observe that football fandom plays a unifying role of bringing individuals and people with different linguistic, ethnic, and religious orientations together. However, it has the tendency of brewing conflicts in the society, if not well managed. No doubt, the argument of Dogari et al (2018) is valid, given some pockets of unfortunate incidents arising from football fandom that have been witnessed in the Nigerian space. But, the situatedness of the study within the confines of peace and conflict studies veils the linguistic dimension of football and fandom which forms the core of the present study. Olagunju (2019), drawing inputs from Ansary and Babai's (2005) Generic Structure Potential analytic tool, provides the discourse structure of football text in newspapers as well as its contextual configuration. She notes in particular that, the organisational sequencing of football text is catalogued as manifesting obligatory, optional and recursive elements.

As has been observed earlier, all the works mentioned above have either for disciplinary peculiarities or scholarly oversight, de-emphasised the role of language in negotiating and pursuing football fandom. This omission, we consider fundamental, given the pivotal role football fandom, especially as it relates to the EPL, has played in the Nigerian social space. Hence the strategic relevance of this study. the country.

4.0 Methodology

The data for the study comprise purposively sampled banter expressions used by Nigerian EPL fans to express their preference or dis-preference for one EPL club or the other, either in face-to-face or virtual interactions. As football fans ourselves, a series of ethnographic experiences observed by us in over thirty (30) interpersonal interactions in football viewing settings as viewing centres, ten (10) radio-studio presentations/interactions, and fifteen (15) casual football-related interactions among friends and students in Southwestern Nigeria were documented as data. Similarly, virtual interactions, comprising over fifty (50) posts and over one-hundred (100) response comments, which centre on the EPL generally and the 2019/2020 season in particular, mainly among Facebook friends (as publicly done on Facebook walls/pages) also constitute part of the data. However, for ethical reasons, the identities of the interactants are not revealed as only the excerpts/ideas considered relevant to this study are presented and around which discourses are generated. Similarly, for copyrights issue, only the linguistic explanations of the captured logos are done/presented without reproducing the logos/images. Extracts in languages other than English are translated where appropriate. Data are subjected to discursive-pragmatic analysis within the purview of relevant aspects of Brown and Levinson's face, Culpeper's impoliteness and Odeunmi's contextual belief theories. It is also important to note that data are grouped and analysed on the basis of the banter (cum fandom) strategies found therein.

5.0 Analytical Tool

This study is largely descriptive in nature, although it draws inputs from the tenets of pragma-discursive theories such as Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) face, Culpeper's impoliteness (1996, 2011), which are largely built on Goffman's (1967) face phenomenon; and Odeunmi's contextual belief theories. The choice of these theories is predicated on the 'camaraderie nature' of fandom language and bantering in football-related interactions among Nigerian fans of the EPL. Every EPL club fan in Nigeria wants to project their positive face through the projection of the 'superiority' of their preferred club(s) over rival clubs. Such practice often attracts mock and entertaining impoliteness, following Culpeper's (2011) conceptualisation of forms of impoliteness. Face, according to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself", and as such it is emotionally invested in; it can however be lost, maintained, enhanced and must be constantly attended to (Friess, 2008: 113). These scholars, therefore, distinguish between 'positive and negative' face. While the former relates to a person's desire to be liked or appreciated by others, the latter has to do with a person's desire to be independent and

free from imposition of others (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). Brown and Levinson's face 'theory' is essentially geared towards interactants orienting to politeness (face-saving mechanism) in interactions.

Culpeper's impoliteness maintains a contra posture to Brown and Levinson's. Thus, Culpeper (1996, 2011) argues that impoliteness is witnessed in interactive situations where the speaker's intention is to damage (threaten) the face of the addressee. Locher and Bousfield (2008: 3) describe the phenomenon as a (non)linguistic or behavioural action that is contextually face-aggravating. However, since it is not every action that superficially constitutes impoliteness is pragmatically interpreted so, Culpeper (2011), in his discussion of types/forms of impoliteness, hints on entertaining (and mock) impoliteness, alongside two other forms, coercive and affective which are actually face-damaging. Given the nature of this study, only entertaining and mock impoliteness are considered relevant and utilised accordingly. In Culpeper's opinion, entertaining/mock impoliteness manifests when the speaker intends to poke fun at the hearer with the intention of using their target's feelings to obtain amusement (Mohammed and Abbas, 2015). This is very common in humorous and less formal interactions as football-related interactions which are largely characterised by banter-throwing. Odebunmi's (2006) contextual belief helps in handling the participants' deconstruction of fandom language and bantering as purely fun-catching. According to Odebunmi (2016), discourse participants rely on (assumed) shared linguistic resources, experiences, situations, cultures, and sociopolitical realities, among others to (de)construct meaning in discursive interactions. These manifest in form of shared knowledge of the topic/subject of discourse, code (language or dialect), events, and situations, among others. Therefore, no linguistic expression operates in isolation, as meanings of utterances are context-dependent and essentially are jointly constructed by the participants.

Thus, in sum, Brown and Levinson's face addresses face-related issues in the study; Culpeper's impoliteness handles aspects of superficially 'malignant' expressions in the discourse; while Odebunmi's contextual belief helps engage how participants in the discourse could relate to the various face-threatening linguistic practices in the discourse as solely banter and not necessarily deconstructed as 'face-damaging.'

6.0 Data Analysis

As mentioned in the latter part of the methodology section, our analysis in this study revolves round the identification and description of the identified linguistic cum banter features in the sampled data.

6.1 Personalisation of Club and Clubs' Activities

Personalisation aptly describes some of the linguistic behaviour of EPL fans in the Nigerian space. Personalisation is a term that is peculiarly used in the corporate, marketing or business world (see Vesanen, 2005; Shen and Ball, 2009; Roy et al, 2015). Largely, it refers to the process of ‘personalising’ the activities or affairs of corporate organisations or systems by their representatives or image makers, to strategically and positively project their affairs. It involves the use of personal pronouns ‘we’ ‘us’ and ‘our’ by organisations’ ‘public images’ in reference to their organisations. Although conceived differently, Ajayi and Filani (2014) have examined the pragmatic deployment of personal pronouns to create and pursue superiority and rivalry battle by Nigerian hip hop artistes. Following the argument of these scholars, we posit that personalisation of clubs’ activities or affairs is a very salient linguistic practice among Nigerian supporters of EPL clubs, especially those supporting the ‘Big Four’. In this regard, EPL club supporters deploy personal pronouns such as I, me, us, we, among others to show their strong identification with their various clubs, while pragmatically dissociating themselves from others. This is illustrated in the excerpts below.

Excerpt 1A

A:	È ẹ̀ rí bí mó ẹ̀ fọ̀ ọ̀ yín lẹ̀nu lánàá <i>Can you see how I broke your mouth yesterday?</i> <i>Can you see how I beat you (your team) mercilessly yesterday?</i>
B:	Sé mi náà ò kí n ná ẹ̀ ní. Ẹ̀ o mọ̀ oye ìgbítí a tí pàdẹ̀, ẹ̀ o mọ̀ oye ìgbà tí mo tí ná ẹ̀ <i>Don't I also beat (defeat) you. Do you know the number of time we have met, you know how many times I have beaten (defeated) you.</i>
A:	Ìgbà méléó l'ẹ̀tí ná mí? <i>How many times have you beaten (defeated) me?</i>
B:	Mo mà tí yàtò gan an nísinyí <i>I am now really different</i> <i>I have really improved now</i>
A:	Mo gbọ̀ o <i>I have heard you.</i>

Excerpt 1B

A:	Sé o rántí 49 unbeaten? <i>Do you remember 49 unbeaten?</i>
B:	O like history. Ìgbàwo lo gba cup last? <i>You like/enjoy history. When last did you win a cup/trophy?</i>
A:	History is part of football.
B:	Pele o, historian. O ò ní winning philosophy <i>Take care/sorry, historian. You don't have winning philosophy</i>

Excerpt 1C

A:	O ò ripé àwọn ọ̀mọ̀ mí n ta lẹ̀nu gan an. <i>Can't you see my children are now very hot.</i>
B:	Sèbí season ẹ̀şẹ̀ bẹ̀rẹ̀ ní. <i>The season has only just started.</i>

A:	Before nko? <i>What do you expect?</i>
B:	Elémi ló máa last <i>Only the strong shall succeed at the end.</i>
A:	Awon omò mi sàà ní make sense <i>My children are hot/doing well, irrespective (of your thought).</i>

In excerpt 1A, speaker A, in an attempt to project his club's positive face as a club that knows its onions, having performed fantastically well in its last match, initiates the interaction with speaker B, who incidentally, is a supporter/fan of the club speaker A's club has just defeated. The extent of the defeat is captured in the Yoruba slangy expression '*fó o yín lènu*' 'break your mouth' (beat you mercilessly) as used by speaker A. This statement also exhibits elements of exaggeration, as what has transpired between the two teams is a football match (and not a physical fight) where speaker A's team emerges victorious. However, to achieve the intention of banter-throwing in the discourse, speaker A deliberately resorts to the use of the identified hyperbolic expression which linguistically constitutes a face-threat to speaker B. Of particular note in the interaction is the use of personal pronouns 'mo' translating as 'I' (subject) and 'yin' (you) (object) in speaker A's utterance. Given speaker B's understanding of A's intention as throwing banter at him, he equally resorts to the use of personal pronoun 'mi' (I) (object) and e (you) (object) in his response '*Sé'mi náà ò kí ñ ná é ni*' 'Don't I also beat you?' to counter the face threat in A's utterance, and the interaction continues with both using pronouns as mo (I), e (you), mi (me) to negotiate the banter discourse. The speakers, rather than directly referring to their respective clubs by clearly mentioning their names, deploy the use of personal pronouns to personalise the activities of the clubs (to show the degree of their identification with their clubs). Evidently, making recourse to the shared situational knowledge of the 'playful' (although sometimes serious and fatal) rivalry that exists among the EPL club supporters in the Nigerian context, both participants in the discourse co-constructed the exchange as banter and not one that suggests a physical fight as literally suggested in their utterances. Similarly, the shared knowledge of the subject of discourse (a football match between the speakers' teams), the shared knowledge of the code (Yoruba, and especially the slangy expression used) as well as the referents in the discourse are particularly useful in relating to the texture of the discourse. Both speakers understand their use of personal pronouns to personalise the activities and prowess of their respective clubs as not referring to their personalities as linguistically evident in the utterances but as referring to their respective clubs.

In excerpt 1B, the tune of the discourse set in 1A is reinforced. In particular, speaker A wants to project the positive face of his club by making reference to the past achievement of his club (which played forty-nine matches without being defeated in a particular season in the past). With

this historicisation, his intention is to bring on record how it has been impossible for the club supported by speaker B to achieve the same feat (threatening his positive face), and ultimately project his club as such that can still record such success. This face threat is immediately countered with another face threatening question: *Igbawo lo gba cup last?* ‘When was the last time you won a cup/trophy?’ Note the featuring of the pronominal element ‘lo’ (the contracted form of *ni o*) which breaks down as ‘that you’ in the question. Speaker B, rather than asking when last did your (speaker A) club win a trophy, chooses to make the question personal to speaker A (as is the linguistic practice among EPL club supporters/fans in Nigeria). The use of personal pronoun also features in the last line of the interaction where speaker B concludes with a face threatening assertion, ‘*O ò ní winning philosophy*’ ‘**You** don’t have a winning philosophy’ to silence speaker A.

In 1C, the practice of personalisation of club’s affairs/activities or success is taken to another dimension. In the excerpt, speaker A refers to the players of his club as his children ‘*awon omo mi*’ my children, as though he was referring to his biological children (if he had any). The speaker is apparently praising the brilliant efforts of the players in a match and conceives such as evidence or sign of a beautiful season ahead, since the said performance was recorded at the beginning of a new season. As argued in this section of the paper, as a way of identifying with the outstanding performance of the players in the club, speaker A proudly refers to them as ‘his children’ through personalisation with emphasis on the possessive pronoun ‘my’ in ‘*Awon omò mi*’ ‘my children’. Making recourse to contextual belief, speaker B understands and deconstructs ‘children’ in the utterance as not referring to the biological children of speaker A, especially given the fact that speaker B knows he (speaker A) is not married yet, neither does he have children known to him. They both are able to situate the interaction within the football fandom discursive context, which aids in the proper interpretation of the noun phrase ‘*awon omo mi*’ my children as used in the interaction.

Holistically, all the linguistic practices in the interactions above, although literally depict elements of affective impoliteness, when contextualised, particularly within the purview of Odebunmi’s (2006) contextual belief, fit into Culpeper’s (2011) entertaining/mock impoliteness phenomenon, and such deconstructed as banter interactions by the participants, mainly to catch fun, reinforce the spirit of friendship and camaraderie among them.

6.2 Name-Calling and Distortion of Clubs’ Names

Another major linguistic practice that forms the core aspect of fandom language among the Nigerian fans of the EPL is name-calling and distortion

of teams’ name(s). Literally, name-calling, a phenomenon that often derives from nicknaming, is a face-threatening impoliteness practice that is capable of generating offensive feelings in interpersonal interactions (see Kolawole and Adeosun, 2009, Crozier and Dimmock, 2010). However, pragmatically speaking, especially within the context of football fandom and banter-throwing, the phenomenon is not deconstructed as such. Rather, it is well received, understood, and deconstructed as part of what makes fandom fun by EPL club supporters in Nigeria (of course with the aid of certain shared contextual beliefs). Examples are presented below.

Excerpt 2A

A:	Arsenal oníḃòṅḃé tún rò ó jẹ lánáá. Chelsea ló pa á léún pèlú àmì ayò méjì <i>Arsenal, oníḃòṅḃé, lost yesterday. Chelsea beat her by two goals.</i>
B:	òtẹ̀ yí náà ni. <i>That is lampooning.</i>
A:	Kí gbogbo è le dùn ni... <i>It is a for fun...</i>
A/B:	(Laughter)
C:	Àwọn ṣ’óoróyé <i>The ṣ’óoróyés</i>
D:	Òtẹ̀ ré o <i>This is conspiracy</i>

In Excerpt 2A presented above, two instances of name-calling are identified. In the first instance, speaker A refers to Arsenal as *oníḃòṅḃé* ‘one who possesses a fake gun’ and later in the interaction, speaker C refers to the team as *ṣ’óoróyé* (which ordinarily translates as can you see royalty/can you appreciate the beauty of being identified with royalty). These two lexical constructs are found in the Yoruba language spoken in Southwest, Nigeria. It is important to contextualise the use of these ‘names’ in reference to Arsenal in this discourse. The Yoruba lexical item “*oníḃòṅḃé*” goes through a number of morphological processes for its derivation. These range from prefixation which merges *Oní* (the onwer/possessor of) and *ìḃòṅ* (gun) to derive *oníḃòṅ*, (the owner of a gun) followed by deletion of ‘í’ in *ìḃòṅ* (gun) to give *oníḃòṅ* which is further merged with *òjé* (fake/counterfeit) through the process of compounding to achieve *oníḃòṅḃé*. As noted earlier, the phrase or lexical item literally means ‘the owner of a fake/counterfeit gun’. Making recourse to the shared knowledge of the logo of Arsenal football club, its slogan ‘the Gunners’ and its performance in recent times (especially between 2010 and 2020, for instance) helps the participants in the discourse to properly understand the meaning, essence and relevance of this name associated with the club in the interaction.

At the centre of Arsenal's logo is the image of a gun, which symbolises the philosophy and ideology of the club inferred to be 'gunning down opponents or opposition clubs'. This notion is also evident in the slogan of the club 'the Gunners'. However, juxtaposing this ideological philosophy with the performances of the club, particularly since the last time the club won a major trophy, and having had to struggle for years to win the FA Cup (a trophy not as prestigious as the EPL Cup and Champions League) in the 2017/2018 and 2019/2020 seasons, it becomes clearer why the club is regarded as a 'possessor of a fake gun' in this interaction. Evidently, the club is projected as such that has lost its winning prowess; in other words, it has practically lost the potency to 'gun down' its opponents as the team has been observed to be struggling to maintain its spot among the 'big four' category in the league. On a number of occasions, the team has been heavily defeated by teams considered to be 'small' clubs against which it is often believed/expected the team could easily pick points to boost its chances of either winning the league, or easily securing its top four position.

The contribution of speaker C also points to another ludicrous name the team is christened among EPL football lovers in Nigeria, especially in the Southwestern part of the country. The fellow practically refers to the club as *ṣ'óoróyé*. Making recourse to the shared cultural/historical knowledge among the Yoruba, the ethnic extraction of the participants, including the large audience/community within which the radio station is situated and as evident in the contribution of the listeners that call onto the programme, participants are able to relate to and deconstruct the pragmatic import of the lexical item *ṣ'óoróyé* in this discourse. Historically and culturally, the expression *ṣé o rí óyé* 'can you see royalty?' is a loaded question that suggests to the individual (aspiring to a royal position) to whom it is addressed the impossibility of him becoming crowned or honoured either as a king or a beaded chief. It is a question that clearly and unambiguously tells the fellow no matter how hard he tries or spends money and resources, he can never achieve his dream of becoming a king or a beaded chief, two personalities that enjoy royalty or royal affluence in Yoruba culture. Relating this to Arsenal football club implies, however hard Arsenal has been trying/struggling to win major trophies, especially the EPL or UEFA Champions League, since its last achievement (winning the EPL over a decade ago), it can never achieve its aim. The pragmatic imports become better appreciated when the knowledge of the number of finals the team has participated in in recent times but failed (at least not less than five)

to emerge victorious is brought to the fore by the participants. This shared knowledge is what is dug up by speaker C in this interaction to amuse the Arsenal fans listening to the programme.

Following the tune of the discussion above, another club that is so ‘negatively’ named by supporters of other rival clubs is Chelsea, variously referred to as *ológógóró* ‘the drunk’, *shepe* (master) ‘local alcoholic drink often consumed by youths, mainly commercial drivers and motorcyclists), among others. This practice is informed by the club sharing the same name with a popular alcoholic gin ‘Chelsea’ which is often consumed mostly by the category of people mentioned above in the country. Incidentally, majority of the supporters of the club fall within this category of people, and that explains why many supporters of rival clubs such as Man U and Liverpool, for instance, believe majority of Chelsea fans in Nigeria are ‘louts’ or not so-refined, hence the club is not considered an elite club, even though there are many well-informed and lettered individuals who are fans of Chelsea football club in Nigeria. This is illustrated in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 2B

A:	The sky is always Blue. Congratulations Chelsea Fans.
B:	Àwọn <i>ológógóró</i>
C:	<i>Shepe masters</i>
D:	Na wa o, see as some people dey support ordinary Chelsea club. Wonders shall never end. <i>This is serious. Can you imagine how people are supporting ordinary Chelsea club.</i>
E:	With what I saw you guys play yesterday! Hmmm
F:	Chelsea doesn’t usually play well against weaker teams...

In the interaction above, speaker A projects his positive face, being a fan of a team, Chelsea, that has just secured victory in its just concluded match, apparently to poke fun at the team’s rival clubs, chief among which is Man U. Manchester United was one of the fiercest rivals of the team in the battle for a spot in the top four race in the 2018/2019 EPL season, with Liverpool and Manchester City having already secured the number 1 and 2 spots, respectively. Thus, it could be argued that while the fellow projects his positive face, identifying with a club performing well, he indirectly threatens the positive face of the supporters of Man U, for instance, in his friends list, with the intention of making them feel ‘morose and sad’ for supporting a team that is not outstanding in its performance. To such fans of rival clubs, the victory of Chelsea in the particular game might mean the chances of their clubs in securing a spot in the big four category is very slim, a development that might cost the team a place in following season’s

Champions League, a competition rated one of the most prestigious football competitions in Europe. The face threat is reinforced by speaker E who does not consider Chelsea's performance as anything to write home about in the referenced match, especially considering it had to struggle to beat a perceived 'small club'. This is however countered with a face-saving response that depicts Chelsea, as a club, has the trajectory of not 'dissipating' its energy in executing matches against 'small clubs'. The inference here is that, Chelsea's perceived unimpressive performance in the last (although it emerges victorious) match is not necessarily a sign of weakness but a mark of diligence, knowing what matches to display its athletic dexterity and fantastic performance, as against those not requiring much outstanding display of soccer artistry.

Another interesting dimension to the practice of naming-calling in the linguistic practice of EPL fans in expressing fandom in Nigeria is distortion or mutilation of other (rival) clubs' names to invoke the feeling of amusement in their supporters. Often, the Nigerian EPL fans resort to the deployment of morphological processes of clipping and compounding to achieve this. While the former deals with the deletion of a part or portion of word in the process of creating a new one, the latter has to do with the combination of two or more lexical items (Lamidi, 2012). Examples of name distortion in the sampled data are presented below.

Excerpt 2C

A:	Up Chelsea
B:	Blues for life
C:	Chelshit
A:	All these Varchesters
B:	Don't mind them

In the excerpt above, speaker A, a Chelsea fan, hails his team, and speaker B, being a fellow supporter of Chelsea, responds 'Blues for life'. The response from speaker B reveals he is a committed Chelsea fan and that he would remain a fan of the club for as long as he lives. However, the positive face of speakers A and B, co-constructed in the discourse, is threatened by speaker C who, showing disaffection for the club (Chelsea), chooses to mutilate or distort the name of the club by compounding it with 'shit', which literally connotes something obscene, irritating, nauseating or offensive. In doing this, the 'sea' of Chelsea is clipped off, and the remaining 'Chel' is compounded with 'shit' to derive 'Chelshit'. In response, speaker A refers to speaker C as 'Varchesters', which involves the compounding of VAR (Video Assistant Referee) and the 'chester' after having clipped off Man from Manchester (United). This countering is

immediately supported by speaker B, who, deploying shared situational knowledge of the developments and events that have taken place in the 2018/2019 EPL season, especially after the short Covid-19 break observed by clubs across Europe, could deconstruct the amusement intended by speaker A by referring to speaker B and his club as ‘Varchesters’.

It is common knowledge that since the various EPL clubs came back from the Covid-19 break, many supporters of rival clubs to Manchester United have been accusing the League Management, which is supposed to maintain neutrality and impartiality in the manner in which the various clubs in the league are treated, of showing soft spot and support for Manchester United, and this support manifests in the team being assisted by the VAR in winning its matches. It is argued that the VAR, in a bid to ensure Manchester United wins its matches, has awarded a number of undeserving penalty kicks to the team, as well as cancelled some goals their opponents have scored against it; a move believed to have unjustly aided the club’s victories in recent matches. In view of this, many fans of clubs like Chelsea and Arsenal, for instance, have resorted to tagging Manchester United ‘derogatory’ names like ‘penalty cravers, first love of VAR, among others. The interaction below further helps in reinforcing this shared situational knowledge discussed above.

Excerpt 2D

A:	Presents the team list of Manchester United players to feature in a match commencing soon
B:	I have been on my prayer mat that Man U lose today o. Although you guys are penalty cravers and the first love of VAR. I hope the practice of giving guys penalty will not repeat itself again today o
A:	Egbon, go na goal jare <i>Sir, a goal is goal</i>
B:	Keep doing your ojoro, sebi you guys will go and disgrace yourself in Champions League
C:	Like your Chelsea is currently disgracing itself abi? Don’t forget Bayern Munich o
B:	Oníyèyè Clown

As argued earlier, making recourse to the shared situational knowledge of the developments in the EPL, particularly on how Manchester United has been alleged of winning its games through undeserving penalties awarded by the VAR, the participants have come to take the various ‘face-threatening’ linguistic practices/behaviour in the interaction as elements that make fandom fun, interesting, and amusing. Thus, rather than seeing one another’s actions as impolite in the affective sense, they are seen as instances of entertaining impoliteness which is well expected in the context of banter.

6.3 Jocular Mockery

Culpeper’s (1996) mock impoliteness, defined as “superficially impolite” but “understood as not intended to cause offence” (Culpeper 1996: 352), aptly captures the use of mockery in banter-throwing in football-related interactions among Nigerian EPL supporters. Jocular mockery, as defined by Haugh (2010), is a specific form of teasing which involves the use of linguistic resources to diminish something of relevance to someone not co-present within a non-serious or jocular frame. As argued by Maíz-Arévalo (2015), jocular mockery is more of a response move, triggered by a previous comment or action by the target in a light-hearted interaction. While we agree with Haugh’s (2010) idea of jocular mockery as having to do with ‘diminishing something of relevance to someone’, as far as this study is concerned, we disagree with the idea that the participants in jocular mockery do not have to be co-present. This is because, although the participants in our sampled online interactions are not co-present physically, they are co-present virtually as evident in their conversational trend and thread, exhibiting elements of jocular mockery like making jest of the other (and their clubs), passing comments that depict the other and their club as bereft of ideas, among others.

Two forms of jocular mockery are evident in the linguistic practice of Nigerian supporters of EPL clubs, with both tending towards banter. These are direct jocular mockery and indirect jocular mockery. The two are discussed and exemplified accordingly below.

6.3.1 Direct Jocular Mockery

This is a form of mockery in which an individual makes direct mockery of the activities of a target club as well as its fans, mostly by deliberately mentioning the names of the target in relation to ‘failure’ or failed attempts to succeed. It is a ‘face-threatening’ mock impoliteness practice that unmistakably refers to the incompetence, lack of ideas, follies or failure of the target. This is exemplified below as captured in our data.

Excerpt 3A1

A:	Chelsea and Arsenal should be sold off and the money used to by Camry for Uber business
B:	From your mouth? I will remind you when you Liverpool begins to walk alone again.
C:	E pain my doki
B:	Kontunu
C:	Game over

Excerpt 3A2

A:	For English, press 1 For Yoruba, press 2 For Igbo, press 3 For Hausa, press 4 and For Manchester United, press 5
B:	E go do you like film when Man U finish 3 rd
C:	<i>Finisher ni</i> <i>It is finisher (a form of parody)</i>
B:	Awon olotè. E go 'shook' you Evil wishers. You will be shocked
C:	Shock ko, chalk ni. Well, sebi you guys are penalty cravers and first love of VAR. <i>Not only shock, but all chalk (parody)</i> Yeyenotu (a Yoruba clownish comment)
B:	Jelosi. You don forget that you have some Wolves on your way ¹ . Devour them and let's talk. <i>Ijà sèṣè bèrè ni</i> <i>Jealousy. You have forgotten you still have some wolves ahead of you. Devour them first and let's talk. The battle has just started.</i>
C:	We shall see

In the excerpt above, the direct mentioning of Man U by speaker A indexes a direct jocular mockery of the club (and by extension its fans). In achieving this, the fellow plays around the co-participants' shared situational knowledge of the communication practices among network and communications service providers in the country, particularly the activities of the 'customer care unit' which involve a customer care officer, in a pre-recorded voice, directing a customer to follow some instructions or steps in navigating his/her access to some services of a telecommunications company. For instance, in that communication exercise, a customer could be instructed to press certain keys on their phone to choose their most preferred language for the purpose achieving a particular goal. In the particular excerpt captured above, making recourse to the shared situational knowledge of the EPL, particularly how Manchester United has been struggling hard to pick a spot in the top four position and how achieving that feat has suffered a setback, arising from a 2-2 draw in a Manchester United-Southampton encounter (with Manchester United still occupying the fifth position), other participants in the interaction are able to relate to the mockery intended. Understanding this mockery as being targeted at Manchester United, especially with direct reference to it in the jocular comment of speaker A, speaker B responds it will 'shock' him (speaker A) when Man United eventually finishes 3rd at the end of the season. Speaker C intensifies the atmosphere of jocular mockery already created by speaker A by 'twisting' the lexical item 'finish' as 'finisher' in speaker B's statement for amusement purpose.

¹ A code-mixed expression in Nigerian Pidgin and English

The situation described above is further reinforced by another meme, apparently created by a non-supporter of Manchester United. In the meme is a mockery text: ‘Man U trying to enter top 4. MUNSOU#’, and a picture of individuals trying to force a big cow into a saloon car. In the meme, the laborious efforts of Manchester United struggling to secure a place in the big four category is metaphorically and pictorially compared to the attempt to force a cow into a saloon car that can only comfortably and reasonably accommodate four people, but definitely not a big creature as a cow. The weight or extent of the mockery is appreciated when the activity in the meme is subjected to the shared situational knowledge of the participants in the discourse/interaction on how difficult, if not impossible; it is to attempt to sit a cow in a saloon car, given its big size. It therefore suggests no matter how much Manchester United tries or struggles to secure a spot in the top four category, its efforts would amount to futility. This is a superficially biting and ‘face-threatening’ comment in form of a meme but which, when contextualised within the atmosphere of banter in which the interaction has taken place, is seen as entertaining impoliteness, given its manifestation of Culpeper’s mock impoliteness phenomenon.

6.3.2 Indirect Jocular Mockery

Indirect jocular mockery is said to be indirect, given its ironical nature. It manifests in instances, for instance, where supporters of rival clubs ‘hail’ the performance or efforts of a rival club superficially but both the supporters and the fellow doing the hailing know or interpret the hailing as mockery, especially given the situational context that engenders such linguistic behaviour. For instance, a team has just lost a match and one would expect the supporters of a rival club or clubs to openly or directly make jest of the loser club and its supporters. However, in the context of indirect jocular mockery, the mocker has chosen to be ironic or indirect or meaning the exact opposite of an openly expressed face-saving linguistic behaviour. This is illustrated in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 3A3

A:	Up Blues
B:	Pèlẹ̀ o èyin ọ̀lòtẹ̀ <i>Sorry you evil wishers</i>
A:	Lol
B:	Ìwọ̀ lo mò o <i>It is your business</i>
A:	E je lo change coach yin..bobo yen o le gba’fe fun yin <i>You had better change your coach</i>
B:	Maybe because of his style

Excerpt 3A4

A:	Up Man U!!! Man U Sippoters: (No response)
B:	Wọ̀n ọ̀n wá <i>They did not come</i>
C:	Sé kò sí àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ Man U níbí ní (laughing)? <i>Are there no Manchester United supporters here?</i>
Others:	Wọ̀n ò ní lẹ̀ sọ̀rò <i>They won't be able to talk/respond</i>
A:	Man tẹ̀ <i>Disgraced Manchester</i>

In both instances presented above (3A3 and 3A4), the mockery intention of speakers A is clearly understood by the co-participants even though it is not superficially obvious from their hailing that they are actually mocking both Chelsea and Manchester United who have just lost their respective matches. The responses of other participants in the interactions further attest to their shared knowledge of the situation as depicting mockery and not commendation (as superficially suggested by the linguistic practice of hailing by speaker A).

6.4 Logo Distortion

Following the position of Adîr et al (2012), a ‘logo’ is a graphic, visual symbol or sign that speaks volumes of the structure, ideology, philosophy and belief system of an organisation or a group. It is a distinct graphic element that distinguishes between institutions, establishments, and groups. In the EPL, every club has its logos that pragmatically depict its historical trajectories, ideological orientations and ideals. Kindly refer to the Arsenal logo earlier presented in the study. One pragmatic way Nigerian fans of EPL clubs display their support for and against other rival clubs is distortion or dismembering of the symbolic elements in other clubs’ logo(s), especially done to describe the state of their rival club(s) at a particular point in time. Consider the interaction below:

Excerpt 4

A:	(Posts a meme of a distorted Chelsea’s logo with the overriding text: Breaking News. The lion in Chelsea’s logo has left the club.
B:	Àwọ̀n ọ̀lọ̀tẹ̀, we shall bounce back <i>The evil wishers. We shall bounce back</i>
A:	Backer ni <i>It is backer (parody)</i>
B:	The ram that reverses has only gone to gather momentum
A:	You better don’t reverse into a well
C:	Lol. E pẹ̀lẹ̀ o ẹ̀yin ọ̀mọ̀ Chelsea <i>Sorry, you Chelsea supporters</i>

In the interaction presented above, speaker A projects the state/experience of Chelsea at a time the team is seriously facing a hard time, losing their consecutive matches. Symbolically, the lion in Chelsea's logo depicts strength, authority and dominion. It presents Chelsea as a team that poses a terror to its rival teams, by virtue of its strength, technical-know-how and philosophy. However, that has not been the case with the club as deduced from the distorted logo. The notion expressed in the distorted logo suggests Chelsea has lost its bite as a team; it has lost its strength and authority in the EPL. In fact, the idea is unambiguously captured in the superimposed text on the logo: 'breaking news, the lion in Chelsea's logo has left the club'. This is deliberately done by the meme creator to poke fun at Chelsea and its fans, and his aim is achieved as evident in the responses of speakers B and C in the interaction. This notion is further reinforced with another memetic image where the logo of Arsenal FC is distorted. In the created meme, the gun image in original version of the team's logo is deliberately left out. Thus, the new version of the logo projects Arsenal FC as a team that has lost its power or potency as a 'gunning club'. Apparently the meme creator is a supporter of a rival club to Arsenal who latches on the team's 'abysmal' performance to hit at it and the fans with the distorted logo of the club to generate amusement and the atmosphere of banter in which fandom discourse is situated in the Nigerian context, especially among EPL club fans.

7.0 Conclusion

This study has attempted an investigation of the underexplored fandom discourse in Nigerian scholarship, especially as it relates to the linguistic practice of English Premier League supporters or fans in Nigeria. The study, contra previous studies which are largely situated in sociological and peace and conflict scholarship, is situated within linguistics. In particular, the study is carried out with specific reference to the relevant aspects of discourse cum pragmatic theories as Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) face, Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness and Odebunmi's (2006) contextual belief. Applying these theories to a series of online (Facebook) and offline interactions, including sports/football-related radio interactions/presentations, which constitute our data, findings revealed fandom language among Nigerian fans of EPL clubs is replete with significantly peculiar linguistic expressions that tend towards banter and

banter- throwing. Specifically, it was revealed that pragma-linguistic practices such as personalisation of club activities/affairs (through personal and possessive pronouns), name-calling and distortion of rival clubs' names, direct and indirect jocular mockery and distortion of rival clubs' logo for amusement characterise fandom discourse among Nigerian fans of EPL clubs. It is also noteworthy that such linguistic practices, which are superficially signaling affective impoliteness (capable of causing face damage, given their face-threatening nature), rather than generating feelings of hatred, acrimony, unhealthy rivalry and ultimately an atmosphere of offence among Nigerian fans of EPL clubs, create an atmosphere of camaraderie, fun, humour and laughter among the fans, irrespective of the fact that they all support different clubs. This study further lends credence to the arguments of some scholars (see Ajayi, 2018; 2020, for instance) in language scholarship that politeness and impoliteness are more of contextual than mere linguistic phenomena.

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