INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF GENDER AND LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF MOCK-INSULTS AS EMBARRASSMENT AMONG NORTHERN NIGERIANS

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural and inter gender communication have been core interests of sociolinguistic researchers. Notably, perception of mock-insults is one those phenomena that is reported to be gender-based. While some findings from past studies reported that females often negatively perceive mock-insults, even when it is meant to be a compliment or solidarity, others reported otherwise. To further understand this phenomenon, this study investigates the role of gender and level of education in the perception of mock-insults, using embarrassment as its measuring construct, among Fulfulde-speaking Nigerians. A survey questionnaire is administered to 352 respondents, using stratified systematic sampling to collect their respective perception data. A two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) method was used for the statistical data analysis, and the results showed that neither gender nor level of education influences public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment.

Keywords: Mock-insults, public perception, sociolinguistics, gender, level of education

1. Introduction

In the northern region of Nigeria, the Fulani ethnic group is one of the dominant inhabitants. Though there are other ethnic groups that belong to the Northern region, they are not Fulani by ethnic. Among these minorities –compared to Fulani-Hausas in the Northern enclave of Nigeria –are Nupe, Itsekiri, Ijoma, Tiv and Gwari. Because the northerners account for more than 62% of Nigeria population, Fulfulde is the most widely spoken language among the elicited major languages.

Fulani language, Fulfulde, is said to be Afro-Asiatic of a traditional root of Hamito-Semitic (Njuma’a, 2010). Abdullahi-Idiagbon and Olaniyi (2011) investigated sociolinguistics impact on Nigerian English coinage. The study employed diffusionist theory of Gumperz to support the claim that the change in the linguistic nature of Nigerians is theoretically supported and responsible for the intersection in word coinage. However, no study has been able to study the sociolinguistic characteristics pertaining
to Northern Nigeria perception of mock insults, especially the Hausa-Fulani linguistic group despite being the largest in Nigeria.

Mock insults have been regarded as the most sarcastic (Gibbs, 1986; Kreuz, Glucksberg, 1989), and found to be dependent of explicit antecedents. It is said that since mock insults implicitly refer to conventions about politeness or pleasant utterances, ironic compliments which are not, would not be seen in the same light. Kreuz and Glucksberg cited corroborating examples of ‘a fine friend you are’ and ‘you are a terrible friend’ as ironic insults and ironic compliments respectively, to explain the obvious difference in the human reception. While ‘a fine friend you are’ will not cause ripples when used, ‘you are a terrible friend’ will be seen as offensive.

On the other hand, it had been essentially drawn from socio-linguistics observations that gender perception of language is significant to be examined (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2013), hence the perception of mock-insult is insinuated to be gender-biased (Holmes, 1995). However, some findings from significant gender studies experts, socio-linguists, social psychologists and physiologists have also disagreed with the submission of the influence of gender in perception of mock-insult (Jeniffer, 1993; Deborah, 1990; Lakoff, 1975; Suciu, 2000). Despite this, very few studies have endeavoured to explore public perception of mock-insults, considering the role of education. It is also observed that the cultural lineage of the people in question could determine the public perception of mock-insults (Quang, 2011; Chen, 2011).

2. Review of Related Literatures

2.1 What are Language Attitudes?
Language attitudes explain the phenomenon that examines the diverse ways of peoples’ speaking varieties, and the influencing factors (Kansikas, 2002; Campbell-Kibler, 2010; McKenzie, 2008). Factors affecting language attitudes, as reviewed by this study, are social class, social context, geographical origin, ethnicity, nationality, age, and gender. There are many factors that influence people’s way of speaking which are examined by sociolinguistics and certain research works of Wright et al. (2000), Liao (2010), McKenzie (2008), and Borbely (2011).

The social class epitomises the speaker’s position in the society which is valued by the education level, background of parent, profession and the effect they pose on syntax and lexis employed by the speaker. According to Wright et al. (2000), an important factor which affects sentences formulation is the speaker’s social class. Thus, so as to make accurate description, there has been a social classes division proposed. The social context explains the language register employed which is dependent of the changing situations. In formal meetings, as Borbely (2011) relates, formal language is employed while informal are used when meetings with friends, for instance, It is noticed that people are aware of the disparity in patterns of speech which mark their social class and are able to adjust their style to the interlocutor often. The geographical origin is always responsible for slight disparity in speakers’ pronunciation, suggesting the geographical region where the speaker originates. Chakrani (2010) carried out investigation on the manner of language change; depending on the region of the country it is used. For the description of a variety of languages that have difference in grammar, lexis
and pronunciation from others, the term dialect is employed. Furthermore, each community member has a unique way of speaking because of their life experience, education, and age and aspiration (Freiermuth, Huang, 2012).

Ethnicity characterizes the difference between the use of particular language by the native speakers and other ethnic groups. For instance, through the study of social attitudes, a sociolinguist might determine that a particular vernacular would not be considered proper language use in a professional or business setting; she or he might also investigate the grammar, phonetics, vocabulary, and other aspects of this sociolect as much as a dialectologist would investigate the same for a regional dialect. Nationality is visible in the case of the English language as British English is different from American English, or Canadian English; Nigerian English is also different from Ghanaian English. Language variation study is concerned with social constraints which in its contextual environment is language determinant. Gender characterises disparity in language pattern employed between men and women, including speech quantity and intonation patterns. Age influences the speaker on the vocabulary and grammar complexity usage.

It is however instructing to note that all the above listed factors are important for researches investigating the public perception of mock-insult. This is because they could play complementary (nationality and ethnicity) or conflicting (social class and social context) role in the public perception phenomenon (Serafin, 2009; Poplack et al., 2006). However, in this study, gender and education level –as measuring variable of social class –are taken because they appeal most to the specificity of this study. The Fulani-speaking demography are largely regarded as a patriarchal community (Okeke, 1992), and posit that gender-mediated public perception will be profound. Also, when compared to Nigeria as a whole, the literacy rate in the North is lower. Based on this, this study picks interest in including level of education to see how it possibly has affected public perception of this sociolinguistic phenomenon.

2.2 Mock Insults
Mock-insult is a linguistic phenomenon that is obtainable in all languages, although in different forms and manner (Ladegaard, 2012). Further explanation in view of defining mock-insults, its types, and how it affects communication showed that it can be perceived as embarrassment. Flores and Galvan (2011) submitted that, in the case of Spanish linguistics, mock Spanish referred to a lingual discourse of hidden negative and primarily stereotypical codification. Mock-insult is literally a warped insult expected to be taken as solidarity or compliments. But often, the reactions towards mock-insult have always generated arguments as to what determines the perception in public discourse (Ladegaard, 2012; Willoughby, 2012).

Mock-insults, which are also called ironic insults, are form of sarcasm which might be taken offensive, in more cases than not (Gibbs, 1986). Considering the process of understanding ironic insults and ironic compliments, findings from reviewed extant literatures show that ironic insults have been much attended to, than ironic compliments (Gibbs, 2000). Nevertheless, differences and/or similarities in the interpretation of ironic compliments and insults have been claimed.
Mock insult has its ranks, mock impoliteness, jocular abuse and jocular mockery. In the work of Haugh and Bousfield (2012), a cross-cultural explorative study of intra-English usage was used to further explain the socio-pragmatic context of mock insults. The study emphasised the necessity of contextualizing mock insult into the specific language of the culture under study. In cases of English language as the communication medium, it is reported that the perception of mock insults differs in Australian English compared to British English, but this study examines mock-insults in Fulfulde, one of the major languages spoken in Northern Nigeria.

2.3 The Effects of Mock-Insults on Communication

Either way, mock insult was positioned in the theoretical framework of understanding politeness and impoliteness. The analysis of Haugh and Bousfield (2012) submitted that jocular mockery and jocular abuse as studied among male-only interpersonal interaction evaluate potentially impolite behaviour as being polite. It is emphatically stated that this evaluation arises as a result of shared sentiments of the persons in the conversation of the platform of ‘don’t take yourself too seriously’. The study therefore concludes that mock impoliteness is correctly contained in the social evaluation, and not necessarily as subsidiaries of politeness or impoliteness.

In the context of Fulfulde as the language of the Fulani people, a conversational thread as shown (see Appendix 1) shows the presence of mock-insults, and how these words are perceived by the Fulbe.

As shown from the sociolinguistic features of Fulfulde, mock-insult is mostly interpreted within the context of the environment and the situation that led to the conversation. Therefore, it is hard to identify the manner of its perception, among the speakers.

2.4 Embarrassment as a Public Perception Dimension

Notably, fewer studies have compared shame and embarrassment. In part, this may be because shame and embarrassment have often been considered to be even more closely related than shame and guilt. Izard (1977), for example, conceptualized embarrassment as an element of shame. Kaufman (1989) asserted that however mild or intense, embarrassment is not a different affect from shame, and Lewis (1971), in her extensive treatment of shame and guilt, only briefly mentioned embarrassment, as a shame variant. Buss (1980) cited a variety of differences between the two emotions (e.g., with embarrassment being less intense; more likely to be accompanied by blushing, smiling, or feelings of foolishness; and less likely to involve feelings of regret and depression), He strongly implied that the root of these differences lies in the nature of the shame versus embarrassment-eliciting event. Modigliani (1968), Short (1979), and Klass (1990) all proposed that shame is tied to perceived deficiencies of one’s core self, whereas embarrassment results from deficiencies in one’s presented self.

Embarrassment is tied to more transient and situation-specific failures and pratfalls. Buss (1980) similarly contrasted the enduring loss of self-esteem of shame with the temporary loss of self-esteem of embarrassment. Shame has thus been considered a grimmer, weightier emotion; whereas feelings of foolishness or awkwardness are likely to accompany embarrassment, feelings of regret and depression are likely to accompany shame (Buss, 1980; Plutchik, 1980; Costa et al; 2011). Since embarrassment can be one of the displays of public emotion, possibly induced during a interpersonal communication, it is plausible to investigate the sociolinguistic dimension.
2.5 Role of Gender in the Public Perception of Mock Insults

Gender is found to be affecting the psychological form, and perception of sign, words and any communication medium is an example of this psychological scenario (Hofsede, 1980; Gefen & Straub, 1997; Ueno, 2003). In a comprehensive study comprising of questionnaires collected in over 40 countries with 116,000 sample size, Hofsede (1980) concluded that cultural differences manifest in the divergent nationalities’ orientations. Gefen and Straub (1997) in their study on cross-cultural and cross gender difference in perception studied the gender difference in the usage and perception of e-mail using technology acceptance model (TAM) as a theoretical footing. It revealed that sociolinguistic research has shown that men focus on interpersonal discussion via an independent mindedness and hierarchical structure, while women’s focus is on solidarity and intimacy. The study which tested for gender difference sampled 392 women and men, and found out that women and men differ in their perception of e-mail, but are similar in its usage. The study thus suggests inclusion of gender in information technology (IT) diffusion models with other associated cultural factors. It found that men and women differ in their perceptions but not in the use of e-mail. The result however suggests that gender and other culture effects should be included in IT diffusion models by the researchers.

Ueno (2003), in his research on gender differences in Japanese conversation explores the differences between the style of interaction of Japanese men and women by specifically examining three interactional patterns in Japanese talk variety show: back channels, interruptions and reactions to interruption. The context of these different interruptions is closely examined in qualitative analysis and the functions of interruption are probed. The result shows that both Japanese men and women tend to give up the floor instead of continue speaking when interrupted. Gender is found to play a significant role in Japanese conversation behaviour as well where women are found interrupting the conversation more often than men.

A report on gender communication of personal and professional development stated that in mixed-gender groups such as public gatherings and many other informal conversations, men spend more time talking and initiate more interaction than women do. Also, men are more likely to interrupt the speaking of others while women are more likely to be interrupted than men and some of the interruption that women experiences are from other women. Women also do not resist interruption as much as men do; they allow an interruption of their talk to be successful (Azadeh & Bayer, 2009; Naughton, 2005)

In the same vein, Kalvas and Ruzicka (2007) empirically explored the way in interpersonal communication and gender influence the process of agenda setting. They stated that the concept of which interpersonal exchanges influence, and how incoming issues are understood is known as contextualization. It emphasises the need of setting criteria for which issues are seen as important. Morley (1995) and Fiske (2003) also explained the role of gender to be; different ideas about relevant topic lead to different discussions and that the household labour division leads to different mode of television viewing. The result of the analysis found support that is moderate for and thus validating the contextualization concept and Morley’s and Fiske’s idea. A more through research design for a better understanding of the investigated problem is suggested to a better conclusion.
In reference to communication style and preferences, it is shown that the communication style of women differs from those of men. Women are also suggested to show linguistic politeness and converse cooperatively while men seem to competitively organize their conversation and that the differences in their communication styles may cause some misunderstanding in conversations. A qualitative research method of a single case study was conducted in Limpopo province of South Africa for the exploration of a woman principal communication strategy (Netshitangani, 2008).

Taylor et al. (2007) also examined the extant data of learning in which there exist difference in skills and competence in communication between boys and girls, and women and men and the result suggested a biased communication still occur along education line in the larger culture. Some biases existing against femininity and feminine communication behaviours behaviour thus affecting boys whose behaviours do not fit the patterns of traditional masculine as well as girls and women on reaching their workplace. This is also supported by Roter et al. (2002) stated that gender of physician has been viewed as a source of variation in the interpersonal aspects of medical practice, speculating that more open and equal conversation is facilitated by female physicians than male physicians. It concluded that female primary care physicians engage in more communication that can be considered patient centred and have longer visit than their male colleagues. On another end, Thayer and Ray (2006) on Online Communication preferences across age, gender, and duration of internet usage stated that gender has no significant main effect on online communication and relationship preference.

The results of the literatures reviewed above point to the possibility that: gender influences the perception of mock-insults, though with studies on gender influence on communication perception pointing to both possibilities. The interest in further study on gender influence is that psychological situations that are being studied revealed mostly that gender difference influences the perception. This is reported to be responsible for a difference in the experience of male perception and that of a female in communication.

2.6 Role of Level of Education on the Public Perception of Mock Insults

On the role of education level of the respondent on the perception of mock insult, Morgan and Korschgen (2001) investigated professors’ and undergraduate students’ perception of faculty ethics, and Maisarah, Noriza and Othman (2004) conducted a study on lecturers’ and students’ perceptions on academia ethics and lecturer-student interaction. Both studies agreed that education level influences communication perception. Morgan and Korschgen (2001) observed that though both samples positively react to faculty ethics, the professors are more ethic conscious than the undergraduate students. The difference in their ethics perception is arguably opined to be linkable to their level of education.

Undoubtedly, there are few studies that have examined the role education status of the recipients play in the perception of message, during conversation. This literature inadequacy is one of the motivations of this study. From the results of Morgan and Korschgen (2001) and Maisarah, Noriza and Othman (2004), the academic level of education is reported to be influencing perception of message received and events. The results of these studies can be duly set as a basis for this study to...
investigate the role of education in public perception of mock-insults. This brings the role of education in perception to the fore.

2.7 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Mock insults, being ironic insults or ironic compliments, and the associated perception are explained theoretically in this study, using the Standard Pragmatic Model (SPM) (Grice, 1975), gender role theory and selective exposure theory. First, the philosophical assumption made by SPM is that there is temporal priority of the literal interpretation of utterances. This emphasises the obligatory nature of literal meaning to words used, irrespective of their underlying irony or sarcasm. Mock insults or Ironic compliments are automatically immune to contextual information.

However, nonliteral meanings could be derivative and optional. SPM thus assumes different processing routes for literal and nonliteral language uses, regardless of strength and bias of context. While both literal and nonliteral utterances are being processed literally initially, only nonliteral language is expected to involve an additional phase of adjustment to contextual information. This model’ SPM, therefore justifies the possibly wrong interpretation (e.g. as stereotypes, embarrassment) of mock insults because of the override of literal interpretation over the intended compliments.

The gender role theory attends to the difference in the distributions of women and men as the primary origin of sex-based social behaviour and their behavioural impact, as mediated by psychological and social processes (Eagly, 1997). Notably, Tonya (2014) observes that gender, not to be loosely used as sex, focuses on the social construct that affects the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits that are associated with one’s sex. Its concentration is mainly on the responsibilities, expectations, and aptitude of men and women as a modified by the interaction of culture, society and environment. This therefore suggests that gender differences play a role in psychological processes. This study, as previously argued from past studies therefore posits that gender difference would have a role in the perception of mock insults.

Lastly, selective exposure theory historically refers to individuals’ tendency to favour information that reinforces pre-existing views while avoiding contradictory information (Knobloch-Westercwick, 2014). This theory is used to explain why the level of education, which might be responsible for pre-existing information, could be responsible for the public perception of mock-insults. Based on these theoretical explanations, the conceptual framework to be empirically investigated by this study poses three hypotheses:

H₁: Gender influences the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment

H₂: Level of education influences the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment

H₃: Gender moderates the influence of level of education on public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment
3. Research Methods
This study presents a formal research to empirically investigate the effect of gender and level of education in public perception of mock insult, using embarrassment as the measuring construct. Gender is dichotomous variable and education which is categorical. So with the continuous nature of public perception, quantitative data are absolutely appropriate for the realization of this study’s objective (Sekeran, 2000).

Notably, more studies have essentially investigated the effect of gender on communication perception, though with no specific attention to mock insults, as done by this study. It has been reported that gender espouses cultural sentiment and therefore there is tendency of behavioural differences among males and females. According to Hofsede (1980), apart from the physiological differences between males and females, perception of signs and words in any communication medium is also gender-biased. On another end, education, which is conceptualised as the level of formal education, or certificates earned, has been hypothesised to have a role in communication perception, specifically, mock-insults. The studies of Morgan and Korschgen (2001), and Maisarah, Noriza and Othman (2004) on professors’ and undergraduate students’, lecturers and students’ perception of academia ethics suggested this. However, no study has empirically investigated the roles of these variables on mock-insult perception, and among the Northern Nigerians. This is the primary focus of this study. The advantage of this type of exploratory study is that it helps in understanding the situation being studied more deeply and accurately (Sekeran, 2003). It also helps in the advancement of knowledge contributed to theory through the results of the hypotheses tested. The applications of this research study—as given above—address issues elicited in this study as it focuses on understanding the interaction of the earlier mentioned variables; gender and education, so as to provide more information on their roles in the public perception of mock insults, using embarrassment as a dimension, among Northern Nigerians. The statistical techniques used are Descriptive and Two-way between-groups Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The choice of the statistical techniques is due to the nature of the variables to studied, and its difference among the three groups –Diploma, Undergraduate, and post-graduate.

3.1 Population and Sampling
According to 2006 Nigeria Census Head Count (the last census for the country), the total number of people of Adamawa State, where this study is conducted, is three million, one hundred and sixty eight thousand, one hundred and one (3, 168, 101). The sampling frame of this population—as shown in the 2006 Nigeria Census Head Count—consists of male and female, with population of 1,606,123 and 1,561,978 respectively. Since this study is basically interested in investigating gender influence on its dependent variable – perception, an instrument administration that cuts across these two sexes is appropriate.
The choice of this study’s respondent demographics, as Fulfulde speaking Northern Nigerians, is because of the prominence of the language in the Northern enclave of the country, and also the ethnic group of the researcher. The instrument designed is administered to a sample size of three hundred and fifty (360). This follows Sekaran and Bougie (2010) sample size, and with the provision that any sample size greater than 30 and lesser 500 is eligible by any research. The choice of the sample size enables the collected datasets eligible for reliable results (Pallant, 2007; Tabachnick, Fidell, 2012). The Fulfulde language version of the instrument was given to Fulfulde language experts, and their feedback is employed in making the questionnaire more comprehensible.

3.2 Research Instrument

The use of questionnaire as the data gathering instrument is considered as efficient (Kumar, 2011). Furthermore questionnaire that are self-administered having closed-ended questions, and responses based on Likert scale have been proven widely to become a reliable method of collecting data in quantitative researches (Kumar, 2011; and Babbie, 2010). The questionnaire adapted in this research is based on related literatures. Items measuring public perception using embarrassment were adapted from Withers and Vernon (2006). Table 1 presents the items measuring public perception using embarrassment.

Table 1: Items measuring Public Perception using Embarrassment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hearing those words in any conversation pushes my gaze down.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I am internally depressed when those words are used at me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I am forced to feign a pleasant mood when those words are used at me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I turn away from the conversation anytime I hear those words used at me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I suddenly have a gaze shift when those words are used at me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I have my gaze moving up and down when those words are used at me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel embarrassed when those words are used at me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These items are expected to be responded to, using the Likert scale, after careful examination of some selected mock-insults statements in Fulfulde.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Respondent Profile

The population distribution of the respondents is stratified based as shown in table 2. For each of the group labelled a – f, sixty (60) survey instruments were administered and the responses were 56, 53, 59, 51, 55 and 58 respectively. This gives a total of 332, and a response rate percentage of 92.2.

Table 2: Respondent’s Profiles and Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the total of 332 respondents, 168 and 164 are male and females respectively, making the percentage distribution to be 46.4% and 53.6%. The three different levels of education that are involved in our study’s data are diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate. Out of the total 332 respondents, 107 are diploma students, 108 are undergraduate students, and 117 are postgraduate students. This gives the percentage of the respondents’ level of education for diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate as 32.2, 32.5, and 35.3 per cents respectively. In the same vein, the age distribution of the respondents is presented in table 4.4. It shows that respondents of age 15-20 years are 108, 21 – 25 years are 66, 26 – 30 years are 75, and above 30 are 83 – making 32.5, 20.0, 22.5 and 25.0 percentages, respectively.
Table 3: Age Distribution of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 – 20 years</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 25 years</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 30 years</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 30 years</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Reliability and Validity

According to Smith (2012), the quality of a measurement procedure provides repeatability and accuracy. However, a reliable measure may not be able to assess a specific item despite showing consistency. The reliability coefficient is expressed in terms of Cronbach’s alpha (α). An α value of 0.60 to 0.80 is generally acceptable (Kaplan & Sacuzzo, 2008; Pallant 2011). The Cronbach’s alpha (α) value of the items designed to measure public perception as embarrassment is 0.833.

4.3 Data Screening

The data screening is the next stage of the data analysis process, conducted after the descriptive part that concentrates on the population distribution, as reported above. This is to ensure that the data is suitable for inferential data analysis. After a duly-performed data screening, answering of the research questions and testing the hypotheses can be confidently done. As Hair et al. (2010) posited, stages of data screening to be executed before analysing multivariate data specifically are missing data, detection of outliers, and normalization of the datasets. There are no missing data in the data collected. Therefore, the detection of outliers is performed. Tabachink and Fidel (2006) reported that outliers are individual respondents of extreme scores on a particular variable among the set of variables in the administered survey instrument. It is said that it distracts the general result.

Detection of outliers is done through the calculation of Mahalanobis distance for each respondent and then be compared with the Chi-Square with a significant error of 0.001. The Chi-Square is normally obtained from the general Chi-Square table using the number of items designed in the questionnaire as the determinant. This study has a total number of 16 items (df), making a critical value ($X^2$) of 39.25, and the maximum Mahalanobis distance ($D^2$) is 16.649. From the above, the maximum Mahalanobis distance ($D^2$) is lesser than the critical value ($X^2$), this therefore suggests that there is no substantial multivariate outliers in the data (Pallant, 2010). Hence, further assumption; i.e. normality of the data should be investigated.

4.4 Normality of Data

For the data normality step, Skewness and Kurtosis values are calculated as measures for data normality (Pallant, 2009). Hair et al. (2010) posited that a z-skewness value of less than 2 is
appropriate for a moderate sample size (within 150 – 350). Normality is a description of normally distributed data, usually depicted by a symmetrical and bell-shaped curve (Pallant, 2010). The Normal Q-Q plot shows that the data is normally distributed; the skewness value is also less than 2, though the Kolmogorov-Smirnov values show normality for total embarrassment variable (with Sig. value of more than 0.05), and suggested violation of assumption of normality for total stereotype and total compliments variables (with Sig. values of 0.000).

4.5 The Experimental Design Analysis with Two-Way ANOVA

In this study, gender and level of education are categorical independent variables to be tested against embarrassment, compliments and stereotype (as dependent continuous variables) as separate sub-variables of public perception of mock insults, to identify any interaction effect. This is the main reason why two-way ANOVA is the suitable statistical technique (Pallant, 2010). In investigating the difference in the effect of level of education on public perception of mock insults as embarrassment for males and females, the following hypotheses were tested:

H₁: Gender influences the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment

H₂: Level of education influences the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment

H₃: Gender moderates the influence of level of education on public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment

From the Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances, the Sig. value is given as .065 (>.05), which is a non-significant value. With it, the assumption of homogeneity of the variance is not violated. For the gender and level of education interaction, a Sig. value of .784 is recorded (i.e. > 0.05), suggesting that there is no significant interaction effect. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the effect of level of education on public perception of mock-insults as compliments for males and females.

The main effect Sig. values of gender and level of education is given as 0.671 and 0.168 (both >0.05), indicating that both gender and level of education have no effect on public perfection of mock-insults as embarrassment. This says that there is no difference in the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment scores among diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and also between males and females.

The findings showed that both gender and level of education do not influence public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment. Also, gender does not moderate the influence of level of education on public perceptions of mock-insults as embarrassment. Therefore, all the hypotheses H₁, H₂ and H₃ are rejected.

5. Discussion

First, from the descriptive analysis of this study, in view of understanding the respondents' profiles, the elements of the sampling frame are students of three different categories – diploma, undergraduates, and postgraduates.
In this study, 332 respondents are administered the survey instrument, 168 are males, while 168 are females. The diploma students 107, 108 undergraduates, and 117 are the postgraduates. Though of no research implication, the age distribution of the respondents shows that the respondents are of ages 15-20 years, 21 – 25 years, 26 – 30 years, and others above 30.

The distribution of the survey instruments is done using the stratified sampling techniques to ensure that it uniformly cut across the elements of the sample, especially, considering the fact that gender (male and female) and level of education (diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate) are the independent variables investigated in this study.

As earlier stated, the central objective of this study is to investigate the influence of level of education on public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment for males and females. From this, it is evident that gender, level of education and public perception are the variables under this study. Gender and level of education are categorical variables, while public perception is continuous with the embarrassment as the dimension. This aligns with the choice of two-way ANOVA as the suitable statistical technique.

5.1 Investigating the differences in the effect of level of education on public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment for males and females

This objective is achieved by attending to these hypotheses (H$_1$: Gender influences the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment; H$_2$: Level of education influences the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment; H$_3$: Gender moderates the influence of level of education on public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment) using the two-way ANOVA technique. In this case, embarrassment is considered as the measuring variable of public perception of mock-insults.

This result revealed that hypotheses H$_1$, H$_2$ and H$_3$ are rejected, implying that that there is no difference in the public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment scores among diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and also between males and females. The findings show that both gender and level of education do not influence public perception of mock-insults as embarrassment. Also, gender does not moderate the influence of level of education on public perceptions of mock-insults as embarrassment.

The findings of this study disagree with almost all the previous studies on the role of gender on public perception of mock insults (Torppa, 2010; Cinardo, 2011; Azadeh & Bayer, 2009; Kalvas & Ruzicka, 2007), and the role of level of education (Maisarah, Noriza and Othman (2004) ) on the same phenomenon. It only agrees with Thayer and Ray (2006) on Online Communication preferences across age, gender, and duration of internet usage, which stated that gender, has no significant main effect on online communication and relationship preference. This findings, despite its validity, demands further studies of this public perception of mock insults with due attention to other intervening variables.
5.2 Limitation of the Study
The limitations of this study, as observed are into two folds. First, for more deepened theoretical exploration of this investigated phenomenon –public perception of mock insults –more variables must be introduced to the conceptual framework. Example of these is social status, measured by family background, or its related variables. Also, investigating respondents from different ethnic identities for comparison would serve as a good basis of identifying the influence of ethnicity in the phenomenon. Second, in respect to statistical analysis tool, a Structural Equation Modelling analysis tool would present a more rigorous statistical analysis.

5.3 Conclusion
Communication and gender sensitivity have been core interests of sociolinguistic researchers, especially with focus on diverse perception of the recipients, and the attending peculiarities which could be gender and/or level of education. Notably, perception of mock-insults is one those phenomena that is reported to be gender-based. This study investigates the role of gender and level of education in the public perception of mock insults as embarrassment among Fulfulde speaking Northern Nigerians. Using a quantitative method of inquiry that involves survey design and administration, with two-way ANOVA as the statistical analysis technique, the study found that neither gender nor level of education influences public perception of mock insults as embarrassment, and that gender does not moderate the influence of level of education on the perception.
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Appendix 1

i. **Fulfulde**—“Muusa nangidaama bee debbo goddo”
   
   **English** [Muusa has been found with some body’s wife]
   
   **Response**—“Keccam ku ngu u haa ndey.”
   
   **English** [When will this childish attitude fade away from him?]

**EMBARRASSMENT**—Muusa being an old man still has a bad manner that reflect on the fact that ‘he is caught with some wife’. In this environment Muusa have a bad attitude and sound as offensive according to Islamic jurisprudence.

ii. **Fulfulde**—“Duudu seeraama fahin”
   
   **English** [Duudu has been divorced]
   
   **Response**—“Ndey? Haa I’am am dari”
   
   **English** [When? This statement has paralyzed my thought]

**EMBARRASSMENT**—Duudu as a housewife has been divorced again for the second time. The responder perceives it as a negative statement; which has paralyzed his thought.

iii. **Fulfulde**—“Ndal gujjo goo warata”
   
   **English** [The thief is coming]
   
   **Response**—“Haa to moo?”
   
   **English** [Where is he?]

**EMBARRASSMENT**—The general view of this statement is that ‘he is afraid of the thief’ and he was shocked to hear that message. The responder feels depressed and it is also a negative perception.

iv. **Fulfulde**—“Laadi tappi Daada maako kennya”
   
   **English** [Ladi beat her mother yesterday]
   
   **Response**—“To yidi o mbara mo fuu”
   
   **English** [Let her even kill her]

**EMBARRASSMENT**—Laadi beat her mother. The responder perceives it as a negative perception.

v. **Fulfulde**—“A nani Dawda wii o wasmiti Nyibuki kombi maayo”
   
   **English** [Dauda stressed that he had regretted building near a river]
   
   **Response**—“Soofay tawan, to soofi yakkoto”
   
   **English** [He is yet to regret]
EMBARRASSMENT- Building near to the river put Dauda into trouble. It is because of the dangerous animals, Crocodile live inside the river which makes him to fear

vi. Fulfulde-“Abba! Daada Amin wii o defata nyiiri hannede”
   English [My father, our Mother said she will not cook food today]
   Response-“Walaa ko wanni hummiido bee cakaaki luumo”
   English [It is not my problem; let her not cook for ever]

EMBARRASSMENT-The comment given by the son, doesn’t affect the father. The father responds that he is reserved with everything and also perceives it as a negative perception.

vii. Fulfulde- “ Gomnati wii riwete kuugal”
    English [Government plans to sack you from work]
    Response- “Fotantam kal, yeedi bee waati fuu”
    English [Be it sun or rain, their move will not ginger me]

EMBARRASSMENT- Even if they sack him from work he has no regret because he is reserved.

viii. Fulfulde-“Hubbirde moodon tuumoy maa bee wonnuki ceede sigaade”
    English [Your group linked you, with the embezzlement of its fund]
   Response- “Be libaniyam bu’e gerttugal?”
   English [They have dented my image]

EMBARRASSMENT- Positive perception; sound as an aggressive comment.

ix. Fulfulde-“Ardo wii see to o yii baawo maada”
   English [Ardo plans to frustrate you]
   Response- “Ayyee!, min duhidan sarla gajanje”
   English [Well done! I will see who will frustrate who]

EMBARRASSMENT- I will see who will frustrate who meaning; he is ready to fight back.

x. Fulfulde-“Hamidu wii o yi’an no a hebirta saabeere haa wuro ngo’o”
   English [Hamidu maintains to frustrate you getting a farmland in this town]
   Response- “Moye hannko boo! O saali o wari- wariijo naa?”
   English [Who is he to frustrate my effort; he is just a migrator to this place]

EMBARRASSMENT- Hamidu is a migrator to this land and a negative perception meaning he is not capable or having authority on the said land.

xi. Fulfulde-“Kennya; - Laami hudi Mallumjo mum”
   English [Yesterday, Laami had abused her teacher]
   Response- “Ay o soraaka sam”
   English [Don’t be surprised, she is not disciplined]

EMBARRASSMENT- Negative perception; she is not disciplined

(Excerpt from the Interview with Aminu Usman Nyibango, an elderly man of Yola South, Adamawa, Northern Nigeria, conducted by the researcher).
These statements (in Fulfulde) are from Mal. Sahabo Umar Tahir, Federal College of Education, Yola; Adamawa State, Nigeria. As an expert in Fulfulde language, the researcher approached him for examples of mock-insults in the Fulfulde language.