

HUMOUR IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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SUMMARY

The article aims to examine the role of humour in teaching and learning English language. It is proved that humour can reduce tiredness, boredom and anxiety which may be as affective factors that can impact English learning and also help students to develop their language skills. In addition to this, it is very useful for both teachers and students to improve their relationships. Concurrently, humour also can help English teachers not only create a positive classroom environment, but also be a source of enjoyment for teachers and learners. However, it is extremely important for language teachers to apply the appropriate use of humor in order to avoid the distraction and can achieve the most effective, interesting and attractive English classroom.

Keywords: *Humour, the importance of humour, the tiredness and anxiety, a positive classroom environment, the appropriate use of humor*

INTRODUCTION

It can be clearly seen that creating a positive language classroom environment is not easy for most language educators. In fact, it is necessary for most teachers to apply the appropriate strategies to help students from distinct areas who have the different English levels. For this reasons, student learning motivation plays a very crucial role in learning language, and teachers can be seen as an effective controller the learners' actions in the language learning experience.

However, student motivation can be affected by a number of factors, such as, the level of difficulty of materials presented, the kinds of activities used, support of classmates, and encouragement of the teacher. Even more importantly, the mood of the classroom can contribute a great deal to the learning process in the second language classroom. Previous research showed that humor can be beneficial to classroom learning (Cornett, 1986; Fisher, 1997). Humor can not only promote understanding, and hold the attention of the students, but also reduce tiredness, boredom and emotional disorders, too anxiety of learners. Therefore, once the students reduce their anxiety, they can acquire better communicative ability in English. As we all

know, anxiety is a negative way to present human feelings or emotions. When we are anxious, we feel nervous and fearful. We struggle, shake, perspire, and our hearts beat quickly. It is the main reason that humour is an extremely effective tool in education in order to motivate and have more receptive students and concurrently it makes the relationship between teachers and learners closer. Moreover, humour can contribute a great deal to the second language classroom. It enables language educators not only to create an affective or positive environment, but is a source of enjoyment for teachers and students. Language is seen in authentic and real life situations. Humorous situations allow students to express themselves without fear of ridicule and criticism. Anxiety and stress is reduced and your students are encouraged to take more risks in using their second language. In [9] Kristmanson (2000) emphasizes this need to create a welcoming classroom for language learning;

"In order to take risks, you need a learning environment in which you do not feel threatened or intimidated. In order to speak, you need to feel you will be heard and that what you're saying is worth hearing. In order to continue your language learning, you need to feel motivated. In order to succeed, you need an atmosphere in which anxiety levels

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are low and comfort levels are high. Issues of motivation and language anxiety are key to this topic of affect in the second language classroom."

THE ROLE OF HUMOUR IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

There is no doubt that using humor in the language classroom can be considered as the most effective way in learning language. Joseph Gatt (2000) [5] explains it best: "*It is the 'breathing-out of the soul'. When during the lesson the pupils only listen to the teacher, who may be teaching in the same tone, then it is as if they only breathe in and have no opportunity to breathe out. They need humor, which the teacher can find in very different places. Therefore the teacher must bring in humor during his lessons and this humor should result from the vitality and momentum of the lesson.*". This is due to the fact that humor is a natural part of human interaction in many environments. Therefore, humor in class can benefit teacher-student interaction, as it motivates the student's participation and help them "*to build on and sustain their interpersonal relationships as a community of English language learners*". ([10] - Hall & Walsh, 2002:193). Once learning in the classrooms is accomplished through interaction, humor can create an environment where students may feel they can overcome the natural barriers that they face in learning a foreign language as it relates to their self-image, etc.. It means that the use of humor in class can be an effective tool to promote participation and learning. For this reason, educators recognize the value of humor and fun in the classroom (Boerman-Comell 1999; Loomans and Kolberg 1993; McMahan 1999; Minchew 2001), finding that humor can motivate students, aid in their comprehension (Ruggieri 1999), and build self-esteem (Boerman-Comell). Humor is said to relieve stress (Lazier 1991), help students discover universal truths (McMahan), and give them a sense of acceptance (Boerman-Comell; Hill 1993).

As well as this, it is well recognized that students are more willing to participate in classrooms that allow them to feel supported. As with all learning, learning a second language requires a particular "positive" atmosphere in the classroom. (Kristmanson, 2000) in [9] emphasizes the need to create a "welcoming" classroom for language learning, so that the learning environment does not feel threatening or intimidating.

As in [7] Chiasson said, "It's important for the teacher to create a "positive atmosphere" for learning. Humour, by decreasing anxiety and stress can, contribute to this positive classroom, to class unity and learning ." Humor, whether in the form of jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, humorous comments or other humorous items, builds a bond between the instructor and students, bridging the student-teacher gap by allowing students to view the instructor as more approachable. A number of researchers have found that humor is instrumental in creating a rewarding classroom environment, reducing stress, improving attention, enhancing learning, creating a positive emotional and social environment, reducing anxiety, enhancing self-esteem, and increasing self-motivation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF APPROPRIATE USE OF HUMOUR

The researchers also indicated that under certain circumstances humour can become damaging to the treatment: if implemented or applied at the wrong time, it may bring about distraction; if humour is overused it can get out of the instructor's control and alter the classroom into a comedy stage; if it is engaged inappropriately (e.g. sarcasm, irony), it has the ability to ruin student's self-esteem, motivation, or cause distraction. Zillmann and Bryant (1983) insist that instructors ought to use humour as a natural part of a lesson plan in order not to evoke the effects of abuse or

inappropriateness. The teachers who do not find themselves comfortable with the useage of humour in the lesson, as the authors claim, should avoid forcing it into their classrooms. Additionally, if humour is not subject-related, the limited, thus priceless, lesson time may appear to be wasted, the students may misbehave and the acquisition of the information may be hindered. Zillmann and Bryant conclude that humour should always serve a specific purpose; it should not be aimless in terms of the lesson content.

Powell and Andersen (1985) have noticed that the misuse of humour, especially the verbal one, in the language content implementation carries another element of risk. Humour, due to its character, may seem completely opposed to the seriousness that usually defines teaching. The manner of verbal humour delivery, accordingly to Powell and Andersen, should be spontaneous, but most of all, adjusted to the instructor's personality. Furthermore, language teachers must avoid implying humour through insult or sarcasm. Only then will learners pay attention to the lesson without any unnecessary and unintended misunderstanding.

In conclusion, the careful use of humour by teachers is a strong and effective tool not only to establish a positive environment, but also to promote creativity and to reduce tension. As Korobkin (1988) claims, instructor that engages humour judiciously sets students at ease and decreases essentially the inequity of the teacher-student interrelationship. Contrarily, inadequate use of humour develops an unfriendly learning environment that promptly disturbs communication and lowers self-esteem (Loomans and Kolberg 1993).

GUIDELINES FOR APPROPRIATE USE OF HUMOR

Humor is most effective when it is appropriate to the situation and reflects the personality of the instructor (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992). The appropriate use of

humor is a powerful tool to build a sense of community, promote creativity, and reduce conflict. Judicious use of humor by the instructor sets people at ease and reduces the inherent inequity of the status relationship and the situation with the students (Korobkin, 1988). In contrast, if using humor is inappropriate, it may be likely to create a negative learning environment. Edwards & Gibboney, 1992 in [5] said that when a college student is the target of ridicule, humor has a negative effect on the classroom climate.

The power of humor is such that it must never be directed at an individual or a group; racial slurs or put-downs of a target group must be avoided (Snetsinger & Grabowski, 1993). The targeted students' discomfort is magnified by the fact that leaving the situation is not usually a viable option and thus they become class scapegoats. An instructor must resist the temptation to refer to ethnicity, family, disability, appearance or any other identifier that a student might find offensive when couched in a humorous context (Harris, 1989). A joke that is at the expense of a group or individual may result in a variety of negative consequences in the classroom and can even turn students away from an entire field of study.

It is obviously illustrated by the fact that the use of humour will depend on the content you are teaching and the availability of appropriate humorous material. Have specific goals or objectives in mind. Using humour, like teaching, has to be well prepared. With time you will become more and more at ease, or self assured with its use. Allow yourself time to experiment and see what works well.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it can be concluded that language teachers have the opportunity and responsibility to create low-anxiety learning environment for students by using humour in classrooms. It is also suggested that teachers should remember one thing that

their roles are very important because they control the learning process. It is also important to use different techniques and methods to create interesting and attractive English classroom. Especially, when used in the correct manner, humor can help to reduce the 'distance' between teachers and students, who would remember more if they are enjoying themselves; however, inappropriate humor can also increase this distance. Therefore, it is vital that the lesson is well prepared and that only positive humor is adopted in the English classroom and this will help achieve the intended to help the students learn English.

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TÓM TẮT SỰ HÀI HƯỚC TRONG LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH

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Bài báo đề cập đến vai trò của sự hài hước trong quá trình dạy và học tiếng Anh. Sự hài hước có thể giảm đi sự mệt mỏi, buồn chán và sự lo lắng đó là những nhân tố có ảnh hưởng lớn đến việc học Tiếng Anh của người học, và nó cũng có thể giúp sinh viên phát triển các kỹ năng ngôn ngữ. Ngoài ra, sự hài hước còn giúp cho cả giáo viên và sinh viên phát triển các mối quan hệ thầy – trò. Đồng thời, sự hài hước cũng giúp cho giáo viên không chỉ tạo ra môi trường học tập sôi nổi trong lớp mà còn mang lại niềm vui cho thầy và trò. Tuy nhiên, giáo viên ngoại ngữ cần áp dụng sự hài hước cho phù hợp để tránh sự bối rối và có thể đạt được những bài giảng hiệu quả nhất, thú vị nhất và hấp dẫn nhất.

Từ khóa: *Sự hài hước, tầm quan trọng của sự hài hước, sự mệt mỏi, buồn chán, môi trường học tập sôi nổi trong lớp, sử dụng sự hài hước phù hợp*

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