BRIDGING THE HUMOR BARRIER

HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Edited by JOHN RUCYNSKI JR. and CALEB PRICHARD

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Bridging the Humor Barrier

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Humor Competency Training in English Language Teaching

Edited by
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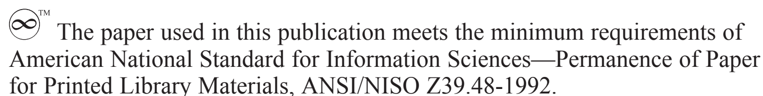
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Contents

Introduction vii
John Rucynski Jr. and Caleb Prichard

PART I: HUMOR COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE CLASS

1 Working Backward from Funny: Preparing Language Learners to Use Humor in Intercultural Encounters 1
Anne Pomerantz

2 Humor Competency: The Role of Sociopragmatic Knowledge in Expressions of Humor in Intercultural Interactions 25
Jules Winchester

3 Feeling Inadequate: Lessons from Cross-Cultural Adaptation to Help Learners Get over Inadequacies in Humor Competency 49
Maria Ramirez de Arellano

PART II: INTEGRATED HUMOR INSTRUCTION

4 Humor-Integrated Language Learning (HILL): Teaching with and about Humor 79
Mohammad Ali Heidari-Shahreza

5 Junior High English Textbook Interactional Humor: Pragmatic Possibilities 107
Scott Gardner

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6 Reading Jokes in English: How English Language Learners Appreciate and Comprehend Humor 135
Nadezda Pimenova

PART III: EXPLICIT HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

7 Humor Competency Training for Sarcasm and Jocularity 165
Caleb Prichard and John Rucynski Jr.

8 Theory, Content Knowledge, Input, and Output: Elements in the Teaching and Learning of Humor Competence 193
Richard J. Hodson

9 Using Diaries to Research and Develop Humor Competence in a Second Language 217
Maria Petkova

10 Training English Language Learners to Recognize English Satirical News 243
John Rucynski Jr. and Caleb Prichard

Index 269

About the Contributors 273

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Introduction

John Rucynski Jr. and Caleb Prichard

Early in his teaching career, Caleb Prichard, one of the editors, was having his Japanese university-aged English learners play a review game before a final test. One female student (let's call her Tomoko) was dominating, so Caleb approached her and asked with a smile, "Wow! Are you cheating or something?" He continued the class, thinking nothing of the exchange. That is, until after the class, when Tomoko approached him with tears streaming down her face. She exclaimed, "Why did you say I was cheating? I don't cheat!"

Caleb felt shocked and miserable for having crushed the poor student's feelings. He explained that he was joking; he knew Tomoko was not cheating, and actually he did not care even if she had been because it was just a silly game with no consequences! *Couldn't she understand this context? Didn't she notice his friendly expression and tone of voice?* However, Tomoko was still distraught. Fearing he had made her permanently demotivated toward learning English, Caleb vowed never to use humor again in his English classes.

A few weeks later, however, of course Caleb was joking again in class. How could he not? In English classroom settings like Japan, where students can be notoriously shy about speaking up, what better way is there to lighten the atmosphere and make using English seem more fun and less intimidating? And more importantly, humor is extremely common in communication and media. If students like Tomoko could learn to get humor in English, they would not be confused or offended in future interactions outside the classroom. On the contrary, they would instead be amused and feel a closer personal connection to target language speakers. In other words, rather than avoiding humor in the class, part of English language teaching should include helping learners to overcome the humor barrier.

Like this anecdote, many language learners and teachers have realized the great importance of humor in second language (L2) learning and

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communication. Indeed, as is discussed below, there is a growing body of research (largely theoretical) on humor and an increasing number of teaching resources on not only using humor in the L2 classroom but also humor competency training.

When the editors of this volume have given presentations on humor instruction at language teaching conferences, we are often approached by two different types of teachers. One type is fully convinced of the value of teaching with and about humor and is just looking for ideas and tips. However, the other type is concerned how it will go or is skeptical about whether humor is really teachable. With this volume on humor competency training in English language teaching, our target audience is both types of educators above.

While we wholeheartedly agree that students are likely to appreciate the teaching or use of humor in language classes, claims about its impact often tend to be merely theoretical or anecdotal. There remains a lack of research investigating the most effective techniques for humor instruction. With this unique volume, we aim to further the field by presenting and making recommendations for empirical research on humor competency training by language teachers and researchers from a range of teaching contexts around the world. Chapters in this book will either empirically examine humor competency training or present related research that has important implications for humor training. Readers can thus come away with a deeper understanding of research-informed methods for helping language learners improve their humor competency.

HUMOR AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION

While there is an ever-expanding body of research on humor in English language teaching, much of the focus has been on using humor as a tool, not as the objective. Language teachers and researchers from a wide range of global contexts have reported on the power of humor as an aid in language acquisition. Teachers from Japan (Neff and Rucynski 2017) to Malaysia (Ziyaeemehr and Kumar 2014) to Nigeria (Olajoke 2013) to the UAE (Aboudan 2009) have published research detailing their students' positive reaction to humor as a tool in making learning the English language more comprehensible and interesting. Other language teachers and researchers have narrowed this focus on the potential of using humor to assist in the teaching and acquisition of specific English language skills, including reading (Hayati et al. 2011) and listening (Rafiee et al. 2010).

Despite an increasing number of advocates of the use of humor in the foreign language classroom, many teachers still avoid the use of humor, fearing

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that the linguistic or cultural barriers could cause misunderstandings or confusion (Askildson 2005). Some teachers and researchers also argue that humor should be used only with highly proficient students (e.g., Deneire 1995) since, as Shively (2013) explains, comprehension of humor requires a great level of "linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and cultural knowledge" (931).

However, the complexity and potential negative consequences of humor does *not* mean it is something that language teachers should avoid. On the contrary, this volume has been published because the editors strongly believe that the pros of using and teaching about humor far outweigh the cons. Thus, the job of language teachers is not to dismiss the humor barrier as too big, but rather more thoroughly investigate ways of helping our learners cross it. Caleb learned that using humor can indeed backfire in the language classroom (as it can in any context!), but for every misunderstanding like this the editors of this book have dozens of stories where humor has enhanced their teaching. Still, language teachers and researchers need more empirical research on humor competency in order to empower English language learners (ELLs) to overcome the humor barrier. To quote an old popular song, the editors aspire to "accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative" (Johnny Mercer and The Pied Pipers1944) when it comes to how humor is used and taught in the language classroom.

The Need for Humor Competency Training in English Language Education

Elizabath Claire (1984) was prompted to write her book *What's So Funny? (A Foreign Student's Introduction to American Humor*) after noticing the struggle international students had, despite their relative proficiency in academic English, in understanding the humor used by students at American universities. Although this book was written more than thirty years ago, a great number of ELLs have yet to crack this mysterious English humor code. More recent research on humor in language education (e.g., Bell 2006; Wulf 2010; Lems 2013) continues to address Claire's claim that ELLs can be socially marginalized due to their lack of understanding of the humor of the target language. Indeed, failing to recognize a humorous utterance can have significant consequences (Gibbs and Colston 2002; Cheang and Pell 2011). Therefore, rather than look at humor as something to avoid, language teachers need research-informed approaches to help empower our learners to get over this humor barrier and realize their full potential in cross-cultural communication.

While misunderstanding humor can have significant consequences, comprehending humor or effectively producing it can help learners "win friends or a mate, . . . defuse tension, . . . or persuade others" (Wulf 2010, 156).

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Sociology research has shown how humor can bond those with differing values and backgrounds (Cann, Calhoun, and Banks 1997), and this suggests that understanding and sharing humor can strengthen bonds between L2 learners and the target community despite often huge cultural differences. In addition, as appreciating humor is necessary to fully grasp a culture, it can potentially also motivate learners to become more immersed in the target language media and society.

Despite the increasing interest in the role of humor in language acquisition and cross-cultural communicative competence, researchers (e.g., Wulf 2010) have noted that there is still a lack of empirical research investigating how language teachers can evaluate and improve their learners' target language humor competence. Bell (2009) has also warned that, despite all the possible benefits of using humor, many researchers and teachers have not "examined these complexities in the detail necessary for the target audience (i.e., classroom language teachers) to be able to make informed judgments concerning its humor possible role in their classrooms" (241). Thus, as noted above, this volume aims to help further the field by presenting empirical research and providing guidelines and examples of detailed accounts of humor competency development in (and, in some cases, outside of) the language classroom.

Aspects of Humor Competency

In this volume, we define L2 humor competency as having sufficient ability to deal with humor both receptively and productively to meet one's needs in the target language. The needs may vary for each language learner, but could be to enjoy L2 media, bond with target language speakers, or simply to avoid misunderstandings or conflicts with them. The humor could be in oral, written, or paralinguistic form, in interpersonal communication or the media. Humor competence involves several aspects (Bell 2009, 2011). While these vary in the literature, here we distinguish the following: *recognizing*, *comprehending*, *appreciating*, *responding*, and *producing*.

Recognizing intended humor, also termed *detecting* or *identifying*, is the first step in receptive competence, and is necessary for comprehension and appreciation. It involves noticing markers or cues which signal that humor is intended. It is important to remember that it is possible to recognize intended humor, but not "get it," which is the next aspect of humor competency.

Comprehending humor means understanding the meaning of the intended humor. Depending on the type of humor, this may involve correctly interpreting verbal irony, recognizing how the target of the joke was criticized, identifying the intent, etc. This requires detecting and accurately interpreting the cues to humor and fully understanding the context behind the utterance.

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However, this does not always mean agreeing with the message or enjoying the humor . . .

Appreciation is another aspect of humor competence. Again, comprehension does not always have to result in humor appreciation, as a person's sense of humor can reflect one's personality, identity, and opinions. Nevertheless, one goal of instruction can be to enjoy and value target language humor because different cultures appreciate different kinds of humor and this appreciation can be developed. If acquired, learners' chances of connecting with target language speakers would increase, as would their motivation; humor can have the same power as, say, movies or music in increasing language learning motivation.

Effectively *responding* to humor is another related competency. In communication, learners need to respond appropriately depending on their goals and on whether the intended humor was comprehended and appreciated. If they do not get a joke, they could use clarification strategies to grasp the meaning or they could just let it go depending on the situation. If learners do appreciate a joke, they could just laugh or choose to play along, depending on their persona, their desired relationship with the interlocutors, and other factors. Finally, if the humor is understood but deemed unfunny, they may choose to politely give one's opinion, to not react, or even to fake laughter. Again, this depends on one's goals (e.g., do they want to bond with speaker, avoid conflict, stand up against prejudice?). *Producing* humor is obviously a separate aspect of humor, different from the receptive layers above. It is likely the most difficult to do and not always necessary. However, it can lead to multiple benefits for language learners, as research suggests effectively producing humor serves several purposes from indicating intelligence to lightening a tense situation. This stage of humor competency can also be empowering for learners who frequently use humor in the L1.

Guidelines for Implementing L2 Humor Competency Training

Humor competency development can and does happen outside the classroom. This fascinating process of cultural adaptation and growth through intercultural communication has implications for ELT teachers seeking to help students develop their humor competence (see chapters by Pomerantz, Ramirez de Arellano, and Winchester).

However, while growth happens outside the classroom, certain aspects of humor competency may be more quickly and effectively acquired through instruction. Some researchers suggest that humor instruction can be effectively mixed with language learning (see chapters by Heidari-Shahreza, Gardner,

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and Pimenova). Indeed, extensive training is not always feasible, and briefly touching upon humor points in the language lesson or including an activity on humor may have a positive effect.

Nevertheless, the editors feel that for more complex aspects of humor, explicit and extensive training is needed for significant improvements to be made. This is especially the case when target culture humor norms greatly differ from those in the students' L1. Research suggests that explicitly teaching about humor can lead to results (see chapters by Hodson, Petkova, and the editors), but even extensive training and practice is not always enough.

While more research is necessary to ascertain best practices in humor competency training in language education, we strive to emphasize some basic guidelines. Based on the research described throughout this book, we propose the following guidelines.

1. *Humor competency training should have a clear objective related to student needs and the curriculum*. While we argue that humor competency training should be a part of the language teaching curriculum, careful consideration is needed about the content and extent of the instruction. There is a great variety of forms of humor that could potentially be taught, including but not limited to puns, jokes, jocular responses in conversation, sitcoms, and comic strips. Also, as previously explained, humor competency involves humor recognition, comprehension, appreciation, response, and production. Effectively teaching even just one aspect for one form of humor can be a huge undertaking. Therefore, it is imperative to select only the most needed aspects for instruction; educators should consider exactly how the humor unit will help learners meet their needs and whether effectively teaching this would take away from more useful activities. If the lesson is deemed worthwhile for the students' needs, the educator should specify the objectives before planning the rest of the unit.

   For example, coming from a culture in which sarcasm is used differently and less often, do high-intermediate proficiency Korean learners planning to study abroad in the US need to better recognize sarcasm in English? Probably yes. However, do they need to be taught to produce sarcastic humor? Probably not. While producing sarcasm does have several uses, it is rarely necessary. Even worse, making a sarcastic utterance could have consequences if not executed perfectly to the right audience. Finally, even if it is possible to teach the learners to effectively produce sarcastic jokes in the perfect way in the right context, this would takes weeks of instruction that could be better used on more needed skills.
2. *The training should overview the potential functions, benefits, and consequences of humor*. The instructor should clearly overview the functions

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of the form of humor being taught. By grasping the big picture and the positive roles of humor first, learners may be more motivated to learn and they may be able to implement the humor at the right time in the correct setting. On the other hand, the students must also be made aware of the consequences of failed humor and realize that different people have different interpretations. Related to this, it is essential to remember that there is not one form of English humor. Learners need to be fully aware that the attitudes toward different types and targets of humor vary greatly depending on the culture, subculture, and even from person to person. While a specific humorous utterance can deepen a relationship with one person, it can lead to disregard or interpersonal conflict (even violence!) with another.

3. *The training should include explicit instruction on the most relevant microskills that need to be acquired.* There has been a great amount of research identifying detailed characteristics of various forms of humor, and language educators should utilize these findings. Humor is often misunderstood, and for it to be successfully comprehended, the relevant aspects need to be grasped. Tiny variances in the timing, word choice, syntax, expression, and intonation, for example, can completely change the meaning. Educators need to consider which of the microskills are most essential to teach based on differences in humor in the L1 and the target culture (while again recognizing these aspects may vary within each culture). As previously stated, learning deeply about the humor of the students' culture is an invaluable aspect of understanding learner needs when it comes to humor instruction. In this sense, humor competency training is a way to fill the gap. Of course, learners will likely not benefit from (or be particularly interested in) an in-depth linguistics lecture; rather the focus should be on developing awareness of the most relevant aspects related to the objective.
4. *The training should include numerous examples.* Just as vocabulary acquisition requires encountering a word multiple times in varied contexts, learners need to be exposed to multiple amusing examples to fully grasp and acquire the essential aspects related to humor. Developing automaticity is needed, since humor cues not immediately grasped are often missed forever.

   Again, rather than using academic explanation, practical examples can be much easier to understand. These could include written texts, comics, GIFs, memes, media clips, or teacher modelled examples, depending on the overall needs of the class. When teaching cues to recognize sarcasm, for example, learners do not need to memorize the term *averted gaze*, but can instead be shown the meaning through visual examples (images from the web or teacher demonstration). Interpretation tasks are needed for

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students to correctly recognize the key aspects. These aspects may be better isolated at first (e.g., focusing just on intonation), but humor examples should eventually be presented in their full context since humor relies on the interplay of various aspects. Even just recognizing an ironic utterance, for example, involves considering the context, intonation, eye movement, word choice, etc. simultaneously.

5. *Humor training needs to include extensive practice opportunities using communicative methods*. Perhaps even more so than typical language education, humor competency training should involve principles of good pedagogy and communicative language teaching. This is because humor is a social construct involving interpersonal communication, and there are many subtle aspects that can affect its success. Basic communicative principles that should be applied include moving from structured drills to freer activities and numerous chances for interaction and collaboration through *language play.* While discussing different interpretations of humor or sharing their own creative playful attempts at it, learners can develop their humor competency in a safe, meaningful, and motivating environment.
6. *Humor training should encourage reflection and the teacher should offer personalized feedback throughout (and after) the lesson*. People's sense of humor varies greatly. What humorous media they select, when they do and do not laugh, and the humorous utterances they choose to produce (if any) all reflect their unique identity, personality, values, tastes, and objectives. How they produce and react to humor has huge implications, determining which people they bond with and affecting their ability to achieve other personal goals. Therefore, while it can be argued that all training needs reflection and support, humor competency training especially requires careful introspection and guidance, with learner autonomy in mind. In addition to in-class instruction, one-on-one communication via oral interviews or journals are possible techniques for promoting reflection and offering personalized support.

The above points are just general guidelines when explicit humor training is deemed necessary. Once again, how teachers implement humor competency training will greatly vary depending on the English level, native culture, and needs of the learners. The "Recommendations for Humor Competency Training" section at the end of each chapter offers more specific tips related to particular forms and aspects of humor.

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Guidelines for Implementing and Researching L2 Humor Competency Training

While the editors feel confident about the guidelines presented above, it should be noted that all of these points still require further research. Past research evaluating humor competency training, including some of the action-research studies in this book, has often not utilized empirical methods. Indeed, it is often not feasible to carry out a full empirical study, and action-based research and preliminary studies are also innovative and insightful. However, where possible follow-up research is needed using empirical methods to more reliably evaluate the efficacy of humor training. Some of the key areas humor competency research should continue to improve include the following:

1. If focusing on humor detection or comprehension, items should be pretested to examine their validity and reliability. Vocabulary, speaking rate, background knowledge, etc. and other factors need to be tightly controlled.
2. The test should be authentic. For example, recognizing humor in a sitcom is a more authentic measure than identifying humor cues in its transcript, which is more of a linguistic exercise.
3. Both a pretest and posttest should be designed to empirically examine if significant gains were made. (If possible, a delayed posttest is needed to see if the gains made are lasting.)
4. A control group is needed to ensure any gains made can be attributed to the training, not other factors, such as weak test design or competency developed outside of class.
5. Especially if there is no control group, steps should be taken to ensure pre- and posttest items have a similar difficulty level.
6. If focusing on responses to humor or humor production, the utterances should be externally rated by those from the target culture.
7. A qualitative component (follow-up interviews with learners, etc.) is preferable to triangulate the findings and to better understand participants' feelings about the instruction and their humor development.

These are general guidelines we hope future research on humor competency will better utilize. For specific guidelines and suggested areas of research related to specific aspects of humor competency, see the "Recommendations for Research" sections at the end of each chapter.

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OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

As previously stated, there is no shortage of research illustrating the potential of humor in making language learning more enjoyable and memorable. There is also no shortage of quantitative research showing that ELLs in a great range of cultural contexts welcome the addition of the use of humor in their language classes. However, there is a big, and often misunderstood, difference between teaching *with* humor and teaching *about* humor. While both of these areas can certainly coexist and complement each other, this book is more concerned with the less-explored area of how English language educators can make humor competency training a viable component of the language teaching curriculum. In other words, we hope to offer concrete, classroom-tested methods for helping ELLs finally overcome the humor barrier. While not all chapters include research directly focused on humor competency training, they all end with recommendations for implementing such training and researching the efficacy of it.

In this volume, we have compiled 10 chapters from contributors from a range of cultural and teaching contexts. In addition, these chapters also vary in which aspect of humor competency training they focus on, be it helping learners to detect/recognize, comprehend, appreciate, respond to, or even produce, humor in the target language. (Of course some chapters will focus on more than one of these categories.) Finally, the chapters also consider a wide range of genres of humor, from joke telling to satire to verbal irony.

While all chapters in this volume offer important implications for humor competency training, the book has been divided into three parts to reflect different research approaches and different ways competency can be developed. In Part I, "Humor Competence Development Outside the Class," contributors focus on how learners develop competency in "the real world" through intercultural communication and suggest implications for in-class humor competency training.

This section begins with "Working Backward from Funny: Preparing Language Learners to Use Humor in Intercultural Encounters" by Anne Pomerantz. In this chapter, Pomerantz provides an account of the steps Moroccan-born French comedian Gad Elmaleh took as he attempted to perform stand-up comedy in the new cultural and linguistic context of the United States. Pomerantz then frames this as a model of how language educators can assist their learners in the complex task of producing humor in English.

This section continues with two chapters investigating the role of humor competency in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. First, in her chapter "Humor Competency: The Role of Sociopragmatic Knowledge in Expressions of Humor in Intercultural Interactions," Jules

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Winchester describes her ethnographic study of Japanese women and their experiences with humor while living in the United Kingdom. Based on the results of her qualitative study, Winchester makes recommendations for the focus of humor competency training in a language classroom context, with an emphasis on the importance of pragmatic awareness.

Next, we move to a more personal account of understanding and using humor in a new cultural setting. In her chapter "Feeling Inadequate: Lessons from Cross-Cultural Adaptation to Help Learners Get over Inadequacies in Humor Competency," Maria Ramirez de Arellano begins by describing her own experiences with the humor barrier as a migrant from Spain to Ireland, explaining the frustrations of not understanding humor despite already being fluent in the target language. Taking an interdisciplinary perspective, existing theories of humor are reviewed and linked to relevant theoretical models of intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. The occurrence and relevance of these connections is based on the analysis of primary research data from a qualitative study on the role of humor in the adaptation process of Spanish migrants living in Ireland.

In Part II, "Integrated Humor Instruction," we journey inside the English language teaching classroom. Contributors to this section share their research and suggestions on integrating humor and language instruction.

As noted, the use of humor in language teaching should aim to provide value beyond merely giving learners a laugh. Moreover, there is not always enough time or curricular flexibility for explicit and extensive competency training. As a practical reminder of this, this section begins with the chapter "Humor-Integrated Language Learning (HILL): Teaching with and about Humor." In his chapter, Mohammad Ali Heidari-Shahreza outlines his model for integrating language and humor teaching and provides numerous examples from his experiences as an English language teacher and trainer in Iran. Numerous practical classroom-tested examples are included.

A constant struggle for teachers hoping to include a component of humor competency training in the language teaching curriculum is the availability and appropriateness of materials. In his chapter "Junior High English Textbook Interactional Humor: Pragmatic Possibilities," Scott Gardner provides a thorough overview of to what extent interactional humor is included in existing English language teaching textbooks. He then offers practical suggestions on how these humor instances can help teachers promote L2 pragmatic competence in their students, such as by tasking students with analyzing the style and purpose of humor found in textbook dialogues.

An important example of English interactional humor in humor competency training is joke telling, as ELLs often struggle to respond to jokes that they cannot understand. Nadezda Pimenova experienced this confusion

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firsthand as an international student from Russia in the United States and uses this experience as the basis for her chapter "Reading Jokes in English: How English Language Learners Appreciate and Comprehend Humor." Her chapter focuses on her investigation of how English language learners comprehend humor when reading different jokes in English.

The book concludes with Part III, "Explicit Humor Competency Training." In the four chapters of this section, contributors summarize their efforts to design and evaluate the efficacy of humor competency training in English language teaching.

One of the most complicated aspects of humor for ELLs to grasp is when there is incongruity between the literal meaning and true intent of English words. In their chapter "Humor Competency Training for Sarcasm and Jocularity," Caleb Prichard and John Rucynski Jr. explore humor training techniques for helping learners to better recognize the use of verbal irony. As prosodic, non-verbal, and lexical markers differ across languages and not all cultures use verbal irony as frequently, this chapter offers classroom-tested tips for helping learners better recognize this complex aspect of the humor barrier.

In his chapter "Theory, Content Knowledge, Input, and Output: Elements in the Teaching and Learning of Humor Competence," Richard J. Hodson provides an overview of several experiments he conducted to help his learners overcome the humor barrier. In addition to the comprehension and appreciation of English humor, Hodson also describes activities designed to give learners the opportunity to produce humor in the target language. He carries this out be carefully explaining the structure of English jokes, then tasking students with rewriting the cultural content.

As previously mentioned, one important aspect of humor competency training is to provide ongoing support for learners. In her chapter "Using Diaries to Research and Develop Humor Competence in a Second Language," Maria Petkova provides an overview of how journal writing is one way for instructors to gain valuable insights into their learners' comprehension and views of English humor. Learners' writing on differences between how humor is used in the United States and their native culture helped to inform in-class humor competency training.

As with verbal irony, satire is a form of humor not prevalent in all cultures, so it can cause great confusion for ELLs, especially considering the incongruity between literal meaning and intended message. In the chapter "Training English Language Learners to Recognize English Satirical News," John Rucynski Jr. and Caleb Prichard discuss the results of their experiments designed to help learners detect satirical news. As a starting point for helping students in an English reading course identify this popular form of English

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humor, the authors designed a series of tests that randomly mix English satirical news headlines and blurbs with real, but offbeat news items.

CONCLUSION

This introduction started with an anecdote that seemed to serve as a warning of what can go wrong when instructors attempt to use humor in a language teaching context. As argued previously, however, the pros of using and teaching about humor far outweigh the cons. A deeper understanding of the humor of the English-speaking world can empower ELLs to be more confident, creative, and proficient English users.

When we give presentations about humor at language teaching conferences, we often start with the seemingly ironic words "We take humor seriously." Indeed, making humor competency training a component of the language teaching curriculum is no simple task. As Bell and Pomerantz (2016) so aptly warn "even the most engaging lesson on humor loses its value if it is built on a shaky foundation!" (179). Properly implementing a humor competency component into the language teaching curriculum takes a great deal of research, collection and/or creation of materials, and, most importantly, trial and error.

We are extremely fortunate and grateful to have found a selection of contributors who also take humor seriously. They share our passion in that they do not merely want to provide their learners with a laugh, but to equip them with the humor competency necessary to become fully proficient English speakers. We see this volume as just a first step in advancing the field of humor competency training in English language education and we hope you enjoy the journey as much as we have.

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Part I

HUMOR COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT OUTSIDE THE CLASS

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Chapter 1

Working Backward from Funny

Preparing Language Learners to Use Humor in Intercultural Encounters

Anne Pomerantz

In 2015, Moroccan-born, French comedian Gad Elmaleh took his French stand-up act to the United States of America. Known as the Jerry Seinfeld of France for his witty observations of everyday life, Elmaleh is credited with introducing French audiences to American-style stand-up routines, albeit with a French spin. Why, then, would this award-winning, so famous he gets stopped on the street, multilingual (French-Arabic-Hebrew-English) comic want to deliver his act to a new audience? For the challenge, Elmaleh told interviewers at the start of his venture.[1] In the United States, he would be performing in English—the language in his plurilingual repertoire in which he felt the least comfortable communicating—for a largely American audience used to a certain style of stand-up comedy. Could he make his act work across various, complex, and likely unpredictable, linguistic and cultural borders?

While few language learners aspire to do stand-up comedy professionally in their new language, scholarly accounts of second language development have long illustrated that being recognized as funny and making others laugh within and through an additional language is something that some learners desire and actively work toward in their day-to-day interactions (e.g., Bell 2005; Davies 2003; Shively 2013, 2018). Spontaneous turns at interactional humor, both in person and online, can serve as displays of a speaker's intelligence, quick-wittedness, and good cheer. Indeed, for some learners, being funny is a central part of who they are socially and psychologically and not being able to enact this publicly is akin to losing a part of themselves (Bell 2005). Likewise, as sociolinguists have aptly demonstrated, interactional humor is a key resource for deftly accomplishing an array of social functions, from building rapport and easing tensions, to leveling critiques and challenging relations of power (e.g., Norrick 1993; Holmes 2000; Tsakona and Chovanec 2018).

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Yet, as research on the use of humor by second language users (see Bell and Pomerantz 2015 for review) and Elmaleh's experience illustrate, being funny in an additional language is not as simple as translating one's humorous utterances to a new idiom. As Elmaleh told Zach McDermott in an interview on *This American Life*,[2] cultural knowledge, genre, language forms, timing, and prosody are just some of the many factors that must be considered in making his humor meaningful and, more important, funny to an English-speaking, yet ethnically diverse and potentially bi/multilingual, US audience. As anyone who has ever tried to be funny in conversation or online knows, there is no "one-size-fits-all" recipe for getting a laugh. Producing humor requires the flexible and contextually contingent cobbling together of various communicative resources—some formulaic and rehearsed, others novel and created on the spot—and there is no guarantee, no matter how good the performance, that recipients will understand, acknowledge, or appreciate its funniness.

What, then, might Gad Elmaleh's story have to offer to language educators—aside from hope that additional language users can become successful stand-up comedians in their L2? Approaches to teaching for humor competence have tended to focus on the receptive dimensions of language in use (e.g., Hodson 2014; Kim and Lantolf 2016; Prichard and Rucynski 2018; Wulf 2010). That is, they have focused on helping learners identify, comprehend, appreciate, and reflect on the meanings created within and through particular instances of humor. In a word, they have tended to foreground what people need to know in order to arrive at particular interpretations.

Teaching people to use humor interactionally, however, provides an additional entry point. It asks us to consider what communicative resources, at what levels of language, might be used to achieve the goal of making someone else identify, comprehend, acknowledge, and hopefully appreciate an utterance or text as humorous. That is, instead of asking *What social meaning(s) are being constructed here?* We might take humor as our starting point and ask *How do we create "funny" as a possible social meaning here?* In other words, focusing on teaching humor production pushes us to work backward from funny and to ask how we get there communicatively.

In this chapter, I discuss how pedagogical activities that position learners as creators and enactors of interactional humor, rather than solely interpreters or recipients of humorous discourse, can contribute to ongoing work on developing approaches to humor competence training. To this end, I draw on both Elmaleh's story and research on additional language use to highlight aspects of successful humor production that are both isolatable and amenable to instruction. In so doing, I argue that an approach that asks us to work backward from funny resonates with scholarly efforts to specify what it takes to

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communicate successfully and with intention across multiple linguistic and cultural frontiers simultaneously. That is, it brings humor squarely into discussions about *intercultural communication*. Thus, in addition to contributing to this volume's aim of developing robust approaches to humor competency training, my chapter shows how a focus on doing humor and being funny can add to ongoing work in language education on articulating the dimensions of *intercultural competence.*

FUNNY BY DESIGN

Whereas Elmaleh's story is by no means representative of the experiences of typical language learners who engage in interactional humor spontaneously, it does highlight the communicative dimensions of being funny from the perspective of a professional, and highly successful, transnational comedian—a perspective that is missing from research on additional language use. Indeed, Elmaleh talks openly and in detail about his work with a language coach in New York City who helped him to refine aspects of his act. These adjustments, Elmaleh notes, were crucial to help him get laughs from English-speaking audiences and, ultimately, landed him a multi-city tour and several shows on Netflix. Thus, his story provides some guidance as to what aspects of language and interaction—including topics, genres, lexical choices, and intonation—might be implicated as humorous in the construction of a given utterance.

Moreover, rather than offering prescriptions, Elmaleh's story can also help language educators think about how they might help language learners recognize the meaning-making potential of particular communicative resources and how they might go about bringing these elements together for the purpose of amusing others. The research literature consists primarily of detailed descriptions of learners using humor of their own accord and without explicit instruction both in and out of the classroom (e.g., Bell 2005; Broner and Tarone 2001; Bushnell 2009; Davies 2003; Garland 2010; Moody 2014; Pomerantz and Bell 2007, 2011; Shardakova 2016; Shively 2013, 2018). Reading this literature in the context of Elmaleh's story can help language educators identify what instructional activities and experiences might help learners become more confident, comfortable, and successful engagers in communication that is both intended to amuse and intended to confer on the speaker the identity of being funny or witty. In the sections that follow, I discuss four areas of humor production that both Elmaleh and researchers have identified as important.

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Creating, Establishing, and Checking for Shared Knowledge

As Elmaleh notes, a joke about serving ice water to guests in overly air-conditioned US restaurants was a big hit in France, where room temperature water and less aggressive cooling are the norm, but it fell flat among Americans who did not understand or perhaps did not appreciate the irony of serving drinks meant to cool in an already very cold room. Whereas efforts aimed at humor identification and comprehension have focused on familiarizing language learners with the cultural knowledge and logical mechanisms necessary to identify, comprehend, and appreciate particular instances of humor, such work has also illustrated just how large and seemingly endless a task this might be (e.g., Hodson 2014; Kim and Lantolf 2016; Prichard and Rucynski 2018; Wulf 2010).

In contrast, research on spontaneous humor by language learners suggests that language educators might also focus their efforts on highlighting the ways that people go about creating shared knowledge, establishing whether knowledge is shared, or checking for familiarity with the logical mechanism at play in a particular attempt at conversational humor. For example, much of the research on language learners' spontaneous uses of humor, both in and out of the classroom, has shown that learners—and in particular those with less developed proficiency—often rely on aspects of the immediate interactional context as affordances for producing humor as a way to ensure that knowledge is shared (e.g., Bell 2005; Broner and Tarone 2001; Bushnell 2009; Pomerantz and Bell 2007, 2011).

Davies (2003), for instance, recounted an episode in which learners of English were discussing idiomatic expressions with their monolingual English-speaking peers. In Davies' example, a monolingual English speaker had asked for "examples of funny things that happened in trying to communicate with Americans" (1371). As one Indonesian learner laughingly described his confusion when confronted with the question *what's up?*, a Japanese learner exploited the humorous frame emerging during the storytelling to coin a new idiom, *what's down?* Among features of this interaction, Davies noted how the Japanese learner was able to use the semantic opposition between the prepositions *up* and *down* to humorously mock the arbitrariness of idiomatic expressions in English. This bit of humor, Davies observed, was tied to the local interactional context and made possible by the fact that the idiom, *what's up*, was the focus of the Indonesian learner's story.

In addition to capitalizing on the immediate context, learners might also be encouraged to think about what they know about their interlocutors and their shared interactional histories. For example, Shively (2013) highlighted deepening friendships and the amount of time spent with particular peers as responsible, at least in part, for one learner's increasingly successful efforts to

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do humor in Spanish during a study abroad program. These factors, Shively argued, led to the growth of "shared knowledge about each other's experiences, attitudes, and [interactional] styles" (942) and provided a base for producing novel instances of humor. But beyond familiarity, teachers might also help learners develop strategies for identifying or establishing shared knowledge prior to the humorous moment itself. Elmaleh himself references this practice, as he describes modifying the sequential ordering of jokes to provide enough in-the-moment context to increase the chance of jokes being perceived as funny. Yet, he also acknowledges that, no matter how much shared knowledge he builds, some jokes just don't seem to fly.

Playing to and with Expectations

When Elmaleh took his stand-up routine to North America, he quickly discovered that his new audience was surprised by the physicality of his performance. Whereas in France it is common for comics to act out humorous stories and jokes as they relate them, this practice struck his new public as odd and unexpected. It was not so much that his new audiences did not understand or appreciate his tendency to embody his comedy, but rather that they were not accustomed to seeing this kind of activity in a performance billed as stand-up comedy. Their underlying assumptions and expectations about genre were challenged. Hyland (2008) defines genre as the ways in which "writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations," arguing that "texts are most successful when they employ conventions that other members of the community find familiar and convincing" (543). The concept of genre, however, need not be limited to written texts. As linguistic anthropologists have long argued, oral interactions are also guided by expectations around the goal, sequence, participant roles, and interactional rights and responsibilities, as well as by assumptions about what should or should not be said and how (see Rampton, Maybin, and Roberts 2015 for discussion). Shively (2013), for example, found that one learner's attempts to use humor with Spanish-speaking peers were more successful when he moved away from the genre of deadpan humor and began to use other, more locally recognizable, genres, like the humorous revoicing of others' utterances. Likewise, Moalla (2015) found that in interactions between Tunisian learners of English and users of English from the United States, both groups favored affiliative humor over forms of humor that were more dis-affiliative in form and function.

While such findings might lead language educators to focus on what genres of humor typically circulate in particular communities and to instruct learners on what might constitute "conventional" humor use, such an approach has its limits. On the one hand, it is useful for teaching learners how to recognize,

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comprehend, and produce formulaic kinds of humor, like bar jokes (i.e., a man walks into a bar . . .). In terms of reception, a genre approach can help learners recognize the signaling of a humor frame and to look for a humorous interpretation. In terms of production, a genre approach can also give learners access to clusters of communicative resources that are conventionally associated with cuing humor and thus help them use these pre-existing frames for signaling and crafting novel instances of humor use (see Bell 2012 for discussion). On the other hand, a genre approach must not be understood as offering rigid prescriptions, because humor is often produced by violating genre expectations. Thus, metapragmatic awareness and learner agency must enter the picture, as language learners come to terms with the effects of manipulating or violating expectations around conventional aspects of language use. As Bell (2012), quoting Wray, put it:

> In many instances, the ability to playfully manipulate—and understand the playful manipulation of—formulaic strings will indeed demonstrate that the user is "sensitive not only to what is possible, but also what is likely" (Wray 2008, 240). This ability allows the user to create or comprehend language that is "sufficiently right to be acceptable but sufficiently wrong to cause amusement" (Wray 2008, 240). (Bell 2012, 199)

Indeed, it is important to note that Elmaleh did not rid his stand-up act of its physical elements just because North American audiences were not used to this kind of performance. Instead, he played on this difference as a strength. In playing with the genre of stand-up comedy and its various nationally situated iterations, Elmaleh was able to craft a style that was at once familiar enough to be recognized as local form of comedy and strange enough to be attention-getting and potentially amusing. Moreover, he was able to find a way of being funny that was consistent with not only who he wanted to be in English, but also how he saw himself as funny in French.

Indeed, Elmaleh's story is instructive here, as it foregrounds the importance of considering whether and to what extent being funny accords with learners' actual and aspirational identities. Whereas some learners may consider themselves funny people and desire to enact this kind of identity within and through an additional language, others may not. Thus, the relationship between humorous language use and leaner identities cannot be ignored in planning instruction. In addition, teachers might want to stress that being funny in an additional language may require engagement in forms of humor that feel personally or culturally strange or uncomfortable. Like Elmaleh, learners may need to make some changes to their ways of being funny or take some risks in order to (eventually) get the responses they desire (see the chapter by Ramirez de Arellano in this volume for more on humor competency and cultural adjustment).

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Attending to the End Game: Making Intentional Repertoire Choices

An additional aspect of Elmaleh's backstage preparation concerns the work he did with a language coach in New York City. Elmaleh noted that he spent approximately two hours per day with this educator, refining his communicative choices. For example, in a joke about his childhood, Elmaleh worked with the coach to figure out what tense/aspect markers to put on the main verb in order to convey the precise meaning he was aiming for in the set up. He credits this intensive, language-focused work in helping him get North American audiences to laugh.

This attention to fine-grained communicative choices echoes accounts of what happens when teachers encourage learners to write humorous texts in monolingual contexts. For example, Hogue (2011) reported that students in her university writing course were particularly deliberate in their language choices when the resulting product included the goal of amusing readers. Moreover, Moalla (2015) found that when people desire to use humor across what they perceive to be salient linguistic or cultural borders, they rely on *discourse staging* as a way to prepare for and potentially mitigate the potential for misunderstanding or lack of humor appreciation in interaction and thus adjust their utterances accordingly. Moalla noted that the participants in her study "reported to think ahead before exchanging humor with someone from another culture," taking into account "the hearer's point of view and possible reactions to their speech" (2015, 373). Likewise, she found that participants also drew on an array of what she called "accommodation strategies," including repetition, explanations, and the overt contextualization of their utterances as humorous through laughter, smiles, and direct references (e.g., "here's something funny") as a way to pre-empt the possibility of failed humor.

Thus, both Elmaleh's story and research on humor suggest a need for language-focused instruction that centers on meaning and audience reception rather than on correctness or conformity. Instead of asking, *is this the right communicative repertoire element to use?* We should be asking, *will the use of this repertoire element here and now make people laugh?* While a positive response cannot be guaranteed, shifting the instructional focus from correctness to meaning has implications not only for developing learners' capabilities with respect to humor but also for their overall understanding of intercultural communication more broadly.

Focusing on Delivery: Pronunciation and Timing

A final lesson from Elmaleh's story relates to pronunciation and timing. As Elmaleh noted, successful oral humor relies, in part, on the ability to construct

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contrasts by carefully manipulating stress, syllable length, juncture, pauses, and other meaningful phonetic resources. For a professional comic, this means paying rigorous attention to and rehearsing the delivery of every joke to make the humorous juxtapositions stand out within the ongoing stream of talk. Again, much like in the preceding sections, attention to pronunciation from a humor perspective puts the emphasis on the listener and not some idealized notion about correctness. In line with intercultural approaches to language education, helping people be funny in an additional language is not about teaching them to mimic the pronunciation patterns of native speakers, but rather about helping them construct their utterances in ways that are comprehensible and meaningful to others.

Indeed, Elmaleh's story echoes calls from contemporary work on pronunciation teaching in English language education, which has increasingly urged educators to focus on issues of intelligibility and comprehensibility within particular interactional contexts, rather than some externally defined notion of "nativeness" or correctness (see Ketabi and Saeb 2015 for review). For example, Murphy (2014) reported on a study in which he explored the possibility of "non-native" role models for pronunciation teaching. Inspired by an interview on US television with the Spanish actor Javier Bardem, Murphy developed a questionnaire for experienced language educators to assess whether Bardem's speech could serve as an exemplar text for pronunciation teaching in particular settings. Briefly, Murphy's questionnaire focused on aspects of Bardem's speech that past research had identified as contributing to intelligibility and comprehensibility, including topic; degree of deviation from what listeners considered a "familiar" accent; ease/difficulty of understanding content of talk; how much energy listeners had to expend to understand a speaker; rate of speech; use of "thought groups, rhythm, prominence (i.e., sentence-level stress), and contrastive stress; clarity of word endings; uses of facial expressions, body language, intonation, clarifications; and clarity of sound segments" (263).

Whereas Murphy's emphasis was on assessing the pedagogical suitability of the Bardem speech in terms of "what he does well" (262), one might imagine instructional activities that help learners identify and improve aspects of their pronunciation based on the funniness of their delivery. Indeed, Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen (2015) offer one such example, as they provided Dutch learners of English with explicit access to a training program intended to increase their ability to produce recognizable instances of a type of humor—namely, sarcasm. The training, which focused on rate of speech, loudness, pitch range, and emphasis, included both exposure to recorded examples and opportunities to practice using a software program that documented pitch contour. They also received explicit feedback from the study authors on their ability to recogniz-

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ably produce sarcasm. Smorenburg et al. found a positive effect for the training, suggesting that focused attention on issues of pronunciation can increase the likelihood of success with respect to learners' intent to be funny.

Beyond the enunciation of particular sounds and contrasts, however, the issue of timing bears mention as well. Here, it is worth bringing in the voice of John C. Reilly, the actor who plays Oliver Hardy in *Stan & Ollie,* the film about the comedy duo Laurel and Hardy.[3] In the following quotation, taken from an interview with Dave Davies on the radio program *Fresh Air,* Reilly observes the choreography that goes into producing physical comedy:

> And in order to get that comedy to look right so it just looks like we're just accidentally missing each other 15 times in a row (laughter)—in order to do that, it requires this diligence with the timing. And it's almost like a ballet or a piece of music that you're playing when you're doing it because what looks like very nonchalant just kind of like normal human behavior from the outside, inside is Steve and I going, five, four, three, two, turn. Wait—two, three, turn—right? So it's almost like this choreographed thing in our mind.

Whereas Reilly's comments describe the work he and his fellow actor had to do in order to produce a credible rendition of a Laurel and Hardy routine that was predicated on coordination, they echo findings by humor researchers that report on the frustration language learners feel with regard to the need to produce humorous utterances in ways that keep pace with the ongoing flow of interaction (e.g., Shively 2013, 2018) and will be understood as efforts to be funny. Thus, pedagogical activities that focus on turn-taking patterns in interaction, as well as strategies for getting a turn at talk and maintaining the floor, may also help learners to develop the interactional resources necessary for engaging in spontaneous humor.

HUMOR AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

While research on efforts to both specify what humor competency might entail and how it might be facilitated through instruction is still in its infancy, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider how these lines of inquiry might intersect with and inform a much larger body of scholarship in language education: research on intercultural competence. The latter, like scholarship on humor competency, aims to specify what knowledge, skills, and attitudes learners might draw on to communicate successfully and with intention across multiple and perhaps unanticipated linguistic and cultural frontiers, albeit on a much larger scale. Whereas the goal of humor research is to look specifically at how learners identify, comprehend, produce, and acknowledge/

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appreciate instances of communication that intentionally (or unintentionally) produce a feeling of mirth in oneself or others, the goal of research on intercultural competence has a broader purview. It is aimed at specifying the various competencies learners might draw on to handle a limitless array of social situations, functions, actions, intentions, and identities in new or unfamiliar settings. Yet, in bringing these two lines of inquiry together, it is clear that they both entail a shift from *things one needs to know* in order to communicate in ways that are in line with one's intentions and identity aspirations, to *how one might bring together particular communicative repertoire elements to achieve particular meanings and enact particular identities.* Thus, I now turn to what research on language teaching from an intercultural perspective might offer to those interested in humor competence training and to what humor scholars might offer to those working from an intercultural perspective in language education.

REFLECTING ON THE STATE OF PLAY: WHERE ARE WE AS LANGUAGE EDUCATORS?

Reflecting on the contemporary state of language education, Kramsch (2014) observed that instruction has never been more "interactive and imaginative" than it is today. Gone (well, mostly gone) are the days of senseless choral repetition and endless grammar drills. In their stead, teachers have developed an array of communicative pedagogies to engage learners in meaningful interaction in both face-to-face and online environments, including humor. In many classrooms, the development of *communicative competence* has become the goal, despite ongoing scholarly debates about what, precisely, communicative competence might entail (e.g., Leung 2005). Yet, despite these instructional and theoretical advances, growing awareness of the inadequacy of essentialist models of culture, mass migration, and rapid technological changes to the ways in which we communicate have left some language educators wondering "what they are supposed to teach" and "what real world situations" they are preparing learners to navigate (Kramsch 2014, 296), as many of the communicative forms, routines, and rules that have long been the staple of language instruction seem too scripted and too prescriptive for today. It is within this context that calls for humor competence training have arisen.

From Language to Communicative Repertoire

In an effort to specify the "what" of language education in a changing world, some applied linguists have called for an approach to instruction that takes an

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intercultural perspective (e.g., Kramsch 2011; Liddicoat and Scarino 2013; Risager 2006, 2007), foregrounding and leading to the development of learners' *intercultural competence* (Baker 2011; Byram 1997) or what Kramsch (2006) referred to as *symbolic competence*. Such a perspective requires educators to rethink not only how they understand and orient to fundamental concepts in their practice, like *language* and *culture,* but also how they conceive of the goals of language education.

An intercultural perspective begins from the premise that language is more than a finite and unchanging set of linguistic forms and rules for use. As comedians—and really anyone who has tried to use humor—know, language must be understood as multiple, complex, and dynamic, situated within particular contexts of use, and subject to various social and ideological forces. There is not one unitary or primordial variety of language to be acquired, but rather various socially situated communicative repertoire elements that cohere together with different degrees of fixity (Douglas Fir Group 2016). Briefly, Rymes (2014) defined a communicative repertoire as the "collection of ways individuals use language and other means of communication (gestures, dress, posture, accessories) to function effectively in the multiple communities in which they participate" (9–10). From this perspective, communication becomes a matter of assembling various repertoire elements to create various kinds of socially situated meanings in both conventional and unexpected ways. Such a shift pushes teachers and learners to think about acts of language use in terms of meaning, perlocutionary effect (i.e., the effect it has on the recipient—amusement, anger, etc.), and aesthetics, in addition to grammatical conventionality and "cultural appropriateness." Indeed, as Kramsch (2008), citing an earlier 2006 piece, noted,

> social actors in multilingual settings, even if they are non-native speakers of the languages they use, seem to activate more than a communicative competence that would enable them to communicate accurately, effectively and appropriately with one another. They seem to display a particularly acute ability to play with various linguistic codes and with the various spatial and temporal resonances of these codes. I have called this competence *symbolic competence* (Kramsch 2006). (Kramsch 2008, 400).

Such a perspective asks language teachers to concern themselves not only with the referential or denotational aspects of meaning in language, but also with social, emotional, historical, and aesthetic meanings that emerge in every act of language use. This expanded view of language and of communication is precisely the one that comes to the fore when people engage with and in humor, as they must consider not only their intentions, but also the effects of their utterances (Bell and Pomerantz 2014).

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Indeed, Elmaleh speaks to this point when he describes the failure he experienced when he tried to translate a joke that relies on the double meaning of the verb *violer* in a colloquial expression in French. In France, when one's house has been robbed, it is common to use the expression *je me son viole* ("I feel like I've been violated"). The same verb (*violer*) can also mean *rape.* When Elmaleh tried to this double meaning as the seed for a joke—a strategy that was successful with French-speaking audiences—he was met with icy silence. It was not that English-speakers did not understand the double-meaning of *violer.* They did. What Elmaleh failed to anticipate was that the negative connotations of the word *rape* in English were much stronger than the negative connotations of *violer* in French. His North American audience could not countenance this joke, even when he tried to explain it. Some topics, like rape, or genres of humor, like rape jokes, are embedded in larger cultural/ideological frameworks that make them difficult candidates for lighthearted humor.

From Having to Doing Culture

An intercultural perspective also requires language educators to rethink what they mean by *culture* and *culture teaching.* Within language education, culture has been traditionally understood as coterminous with particular nations (one language-one country-one people) and in terms of the 5Fs: food, festivals, fashion, flags, famous people, or more recently and robustly, the 3Ps: products, practices, and perspectives (Cutshall 2012). Yet, such views of culture, particularly when they are brought into the classroom, often presuppose or imply that the boundaries between cultures are clear and that cultural practices and values are shared uniformly across the group and not subject to change or contestation. Indeed, even when language educators take pains to recognize the "small cultures" (Holliday 1999) within larger national groups (e.g., Republicans vs. Democrats), they often present these groups in similarly essentialist and uniform ways. That is, rather than challenging the underlying conception of what culture is, complexity and nuance are introduced into the discussion by dividing large cultures into smaller and smaller units. This is evidenced within language textbooks whose attempts to present, for example, the diversity of the Hispanophone or Francophone world, often fall prey to the same criticisms that pushed them to consider language users beyond nations like Spain, Mexico, and France in the first place.

Thus, in keeping with this perspective, arguments in favor of teaching culture in language education have often begun from the premise that there are intrinsic and unwavering cultural differences that impede communication or at least make communication across perceived cultural borders fraught with

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problems (Piller 2007). Hence, culture teaching often takes the form of presenting facts about a group's homogeneous and unwavering beliefs, values, and practices in order to help learners avoid or mitigate misunderstanding and social gaffes. Learners are deemed culturally competent to the degree to which they are able to put this knowledge into practice in ways that illustrate their familiarity with and faith in the value of such bits of information (e.g., never discuss politics, money, or religion with Americans).

Yet, as Elmaleh's experience of bringing his French comedy routine to US audiences reminds us, just knowing what topics might be conventionally considered funny or not funny across national or social borders is not enough. Like culture, people's identification, comprehension, production, and appreciation of humor is at once shared and idiosyncratic. One can make predictions about whether certain kinds of people, depending on their histories, experiences, and social locations, will be more likely to find a certain utterance or text funny, but one can never know until after the fact whether a particular instance of humor will cause mirth, offense, go undetected, or fall flat (like the *violer* joke). Thus, experience with the shared yet individualistic, predictable yet ultimately uncertain, nature of humor can help learners go beyond the "us versus them" kind of thinking to which culture and culture teaching are often subjected in language education (Bell and Pomerantz 2014). Moreover, focusing on humor can also bring to the fore the relationship between language use and social identity. Whereas in some situations language users may desire to communicate in ways that are unmarked and unremarkable, conformity and appropriateness are not the only ways of being in the world. To be intentionally funny—a high-status identity in some social encounters—is to engage in behavior that is unexpected or transgressive in some form or another. Focusing on humor in language education can expand learners' views of what language is while also serving to recognize and promote learner agency as it provides options for being that go beyond static and essentialized notions of cultural appropriateness.

Like contemporary scholarship on humor and humor teaching, intercultural perspectives on language education begin from a different set of premises about what culture is and what culture learning might look like in language education. From an intercultural standpoint, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) explain, culture is understood as a "lens through which people mutually create and interpret meanings" (20). Thus, culture learning becomes a process of developing the ability to identify and interpret actions and events. As Liddicoat and Scarino put it,

> Culture learning . . . becomes a way to develop the interpretive resources needed to understand cultural practices rather than exposure to information about a culture. Such a view of cultures necessarily sees action as context-sensitive,

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> negotiated, and highly variable, but also as structured in that symbols come to have meaning as part of a system of interrelated possibilities. (20)

In other words, rather than thinking about culture in terms of products, practices, and perspectives bounded by geography or identity, culture is seen as something that people "do" in interaction with one another (Street 1992). Here, the focus is on culture as constituted by the activities in which people engage and the beliefs, values, perspectives, and practices—including language practices—that emerge within and through this doing. As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) assert, "this means that meanings are not simply shared, coherent constructions about experience but rather can be fragmented, contradictory, and contested within the practices of a social group because they are constituted in moments of interaction" (20). Thus, from this standpoint, culture is continually brought into being and can be changed, challenged, and remade. Yet, such a view of culture as dynamic and contested does not negate its durability. One might think about culture as exhibiting what Blommaert (2005) refers to as *layered simultaneity*. Every act of meaning-making "occurs in a real-time, synchronic event, but it is simultaneously encapsulated in several layers of historicity, some of which are within the grasp of the participants while others remain invisible but are nevertheless present" (130). Thus, as Kramsch (2008) argues, in language education we must

> teach our students less the ability to exchange information precisely, accurately, and appropriately in monolingual conversations with speakers of standard national languages, but, rather, that we develop in them a much more flexible capacity to read people, situations and events based on a deep understanding of the historical and subjective dimensions of human experience. (391)

It is this capacity to recognize that in any interactional encounter there are multiple potential interpretations, and that the interpretations available to a particular individual are inherently situated and partial, that intercultural approaches to language education aim to develop in learners. Thus, the goal of language education from an intercultural perspective is not the centering of a learner in a new cultural context, but rather the process of decentering. It is as much about learning about others as it is about learning about oneself. Indeed, as Elmaleh remarked, part of his journey to America required him to go up on stage, try out material, fail, and learn how to deal with this. Whereas twenty-two years of success in France had given him a strong sense of how to be funny and amuse audiences, taking his stand-up routine to a new audience was both humbling and revelatory. Working backward from funny, he began to ask how he was going to get a laugh.

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TEACHING FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

Just as Elmaleh points to specific aspects of his comedic performance that he had to change for American audiences, including what he joked about and how he enacted these jokes, so too have scholars attempted to identify the aspects of communication that matter in intercultural encounters. Perhaps the most well-known effort comes from Byram's model of *intercultural communicative competence* (1997). Though Byram's original model has been criticized for falling prey to some of the essentialist thinking shunned by researchers working from an intercultural perspective, it nevertheless remains an important touchstone for many in the field and has had a profound impact on curricular projects at the national and international level. Briefly, Byram begins from the premise that communication is not solely about the transfer of information but rather is predicated on creating and maintaining relationships (3). The goal, then, of language education becomes developing intercultural speakers, or people who are able to interact within and across difference, who recognize both their perspectives and the perspectives of others, and who have the capacity and willingness to deal with moments of uncertainty, dissonance, and discord. As readers of this volume will likely observe, these are precisely the skills involved in humor competence. To this end, Byram specifies five *savoirs* that he highlights as central to becoming an intercultural speaker: *savoir être* (attitudes), *savoirs* (knowledge), *savoir comprendre* (skills of interpreting and relating), *savoir apprendre/faire* (skills of discovery and interaction), and *savoir s'engager* (critical cultural awareness). These *savoirs* are then formulated in terms of learning objectives—some observable and measurable and some not—that Byram sees as evidence of their attainment.

Here, it is important to note that Byram views *intercultural competence* as a component of a larger model of *intercultural communicative competence*. Whereas one strength of Byram's model is his effort to specify what knowledge, attitudes, and skills might count as evidence of the attainment of intercultural competence, one tension lies in specifying the precise relationship between intercultural competence and communicative competence. In Byram's model, intercultural competence seems to be at once extralinguistic (i.e., it can be developed and manifested within a single language, no additional language learning required), yet part of the process of additional language learning. In other words, in conceiving of these as separate but interrelated domains, Byram leaves open the question of how intercultural competence is made manifest within and developed through additional language learning and use (see Diaz 2013, 4–12 for discussion). This question is one that the present volume aims to address.

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Whereas professional associations like the Council of Europe and the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language have recently advanced standards and performance indicators that foreground intercultural competence as an aspect of language education, Baker (2015) questions how much impact these and other efforts have had on actual classroom practice. Indeed, as McConachy (2018) has pointed out, given the primacy of language-focused instruction in language education, teaching for intercultural communicative competence—if it exists at all—is often equated with teaching pragmatics. This, McConachy argues, has meant that within language classrooms the language-culture nexus has been operationalized as a matter of helping learners become "familiar with the pragmalinguistic options for achieving illocutions and contextualizing them against broader norms of communicative appropriateness based on relatively static contextual variables" (19). Put simply, it consists of presenting sets of linguistic options for realizing particular speech acts or functions (e.g., different linguistic formulae for making a request: please, could you please, would you mind) each linked to a singular social meaning (polite/impolite; direct/indirect) and tied to an array of contextual factors governing its use (e.g., who are the interlocutors, how much social distance is there between them, how burdensome is the request, etc.). Thus, intercultural competence is reduced to the ability to make rational linguistic choices within a fixed set of options, based on one's knowledge of situation and one's presumed desire to act in conventional ways. While there is certainly a need for this kind of pragmatic awareness in language education, intercultural communication—like humor—is a more complex, nuanced, agentive, unpredictable, and reflexive endeavor and requires a more sophisticated approach.

Influenced by research on the interactional practices of multilinguals and those who use English as a lingua franca to communicate with one another, Baker (2011) proposed a model of *intercultural awareness* that embraces the views of language and culture that underlie intercultural approaches to language education. For Baker, intercultural awareness is "a conscious understanding of the role culturally based forms, practices and frames of reference can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication" (202). Recognizing the fluidity, contingency, and indeterminacy of communication in culturally and linguistically diverse spaces, while simultaneously leaving room for learner agency and desire, Baker sees intercultural awareness as the "capacity to negotiate and mediate between different emergent culturally and contextually grounded communication modes and frames of reference" (203). In other words, it's about recognizing and choos-

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ing between options, as well as creating those options *in situ,* not prescribing or imposing particular views of what “good communication” is or might be.

Here, Baker is adamant in suggesting that his model moves beyond some of the essentialism that has long dogged language education, noting that “English [as a lingua franca] is used to express and enact cultural practices and forms that are related to a range of communities, moving between the local and the global in dynamic ways that often result in novel, emergent practices and forms” (2011, 205). Intercultural awareness, like humor competence, is about knowing how communication works and recognizing what resources one might draw on, rather than knowing what to do in every communicative situation or presupposing that there is a “correct” or risk-free option available. Also notable is Baker’s distinction between “conceptual” forms of what Byram and others might call intercultural competence and more “practice-oriented” instantiations. Thus, for Baker, intercultural awareness includes both understanding and action. Yet, as Baker readily admits, his focus on practice does not go so far as to fully specify how intercultural awareness connects to language in use.

In an effort to bridge this gap, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) offer a model of intercultural teaching and learning that is predicated on meaningful opportunities for sense-making and reflection. To this end, they see engagement with language-in-use as a way to help learners to understand the relationships between language forms and their social meanings and to continually refine this understanding. That is, rather than presenting learners with rules for generating language forms or prescriptions about when to use particular forms, their approach entails experiential, inquiry-based activities that repeatedly position learners as noticers of communicative forms/patterns and makers of meaning. Learners are encouraged to continually reflect on how and why they have arrived at particular interpretations and to engage productively with moments of dissonance and discord. At the heart of this approach is an openness to uncertainty and partiality, as well as a commitment to recognizing and respecting others’ perspectives on what is meant by what is communicated. As Liddicoat and Scarino put it:

> The goal of language learning within an intercultural perspective is for learners to participate in communication to exchange meanings and to discover, in and through experiences of interacting in communication with others, the variability in meaning-making, the linguistic and cultural assumptions made in constructing knowledge and, ultimately, to develop self-awareness of their own interpretive system, as they make meaning of the world around them and share it with others, within and across languages and cultures. (63–64)

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Thus, becoming a "good intercultural communicator" is, in a word, about self-awareness. A big part of this includes sensitivity to the pragmatic dimensions of language in use, or *metapragmatic awareness* (see McConachy 2018 for a discussion of the applications of this concept for language education). Becoming a good intercultural communicator is about coming to understand what social meaning(s) are being, could be, or have been constructed within and through particular instances of language use. It includes being able to see these meanings from multiple perspectives, including one's own. For Gad Elmaleh, this has meant attending to the array of possible, and in his case more probable, meanings that his communicative choices create and entail with respect to the goal of amusing others. Perhaps more importantly, it has meant coming to terms with the risk and reality of not always achieving this goal. For no matter how well he hones his act, some people may get it but simply not think it is funny.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

In this chapter, I asked what happens when humor competency training focuses on production. That is, what happens when learners are positioned as the initiators or producers of humorous utterances? To this end, I argued that an emphasis on humor production shifts the focus of language education from *things one needs to know* in order to communicate in ways that are in line with one's intentions and identity aspirations, to *how one might bring together particular communicative repertoire elements* to achieve particular meanings and enact particular identities. I identified four broad aspects of communication around which language educators might want to build instructional activities in order to develop learners' abilities to successfully engage in interactional humor. These aspects of communication are pertinent to interactional humor that takes place face-to-face and in writing (e.g., text messages) and include:

1. creating, establishing, and checking for shared knowledge;
2. playing to and with expectations;
3. attending to the end game; and
4. focusing on delivery.

The first two aspects of communication—*creating, establishing, and checking for shared knowledge* and *playing to/with (genre) expectations*—are strategies that all speakers use, whether they intend to be humorous or not.

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Given that much humor emerges in the clever or unexpected juxtaposition of incongruous elements (thus resulting in two or more interpretive possibilities), interactional strategies that aid in checking for shared knowledge (e.g., do you know what X is?) can be highlighted in order to help learners appreciate the centrality of both gauging the potential for the successful realization of humor and creating sufficient context for their utterances to be understood as funny. Likewise, instructional activities that focus on the sequencing or staging of utterances (e.g., initiating a funny story by saying, "Want to hear something funny?") can help learners understand the importance of priming their interlocutors to privilege a humorous interpretation of the subsequent utterances.

Indeed, in a similar vein, activities that help learners notice patterns or interactional genres can help build the kind of knowledge of interactional norms/expectations that is central for acting in conventional and nonconventional ways. That is, rather than focusing on teaching learners what "others" know or do and presuming that learners always want to act in conventional and unmarked ways, learners can be encouraged to discover patterns and to play with the identity implications of conforming/not conforming to expectations. This kind of inquiry-driven approach, coupled with activities that position learners as competent and legitimate producers of humor (i.e., utterances that play with or on patterns/expectations), marks a shift from language instruction that takes a top-down approach to knowledge transmission and that presumes conformity to be the ultimate marker of language proficiency.

The final two areas of focus—*attending to the end game* and *focusing on delivery*—are instructional principles that are likely familiar to language educators. Both focus on helping learners make connections between specific language forms and their social meanings, albeit at different levels of language structure (discourse, syntactic, morphological, phonetic). That is, these principles focus on helping learners recognize and understand the perlocutionary effects and identity implications created and entailed by particular communicative moves. Put simply, attending to the end game and focusing on delivery mean encouraging learners to think about not whether their acts of language use are "correct" but what their acts of language use mean.

In intercultural settings, this requires stepping out of one's self and thinking about meaning from more than one perspective. In terms of humor competency training, this means developing activities that highlight both how particular forms of humor are created and how people signal that they wish to be perceived as funny. Likewise, it requires developing activities that allow learners to practice doing humor and to get feedback on their performances. While learners may not aspire to become comedians, everyone can benefit from opportunities to refine their use of particular communicative repertoire elements for the purpose of amusing others. After all, unlike many other

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instances of communication, eliciting a smile or even a laugh from one's interlocutor provides at least some indication that one's attempt at amusement has been recognized and understood.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

While it would be presumptuous to assume that making people laugh or being perceived as funny are the only or most important learner goals, this chapter illustrates that humor production provides an additional entry point for specifying how intercultural communication works and what it takes to be a successful communicator in intercultural contexts. Indeed, as much of the existing research on humor competency training has focused on issues related to comprehension, there remains a need for work that examines the efficacy of specific instructional interventions for teaching humor production, as well as work that considers learners' attitudes toward this instructional focus. Likewise, work that considers the long-term of effectiveness of humor competence training is sorely needed. Finally, in keeping with the emerging focus on the role of identity in second language development, researchers might ask what effect explicit attention to using humor in an additional language might have on learners' perceptions of themselves as certain kinds of people. Might learners who never thought of themselves as funny suddenly have access to new identity options? Might learners, like Gad Elmaleh, who were already funny have greater access to the communicative resources they need to keep enacting this identity? For as Elmaleh's eponymous character in *Huge in France* (Netflix, 2019) shows us, being funny in an additional language and in a new community is not easy, even for a professional comedian.

NOTES

1. https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-01-19/french-comedian-gad-elmaleh-leaves-fame-fortune-and-french-behind.
2. https://www.thisamericanlife.org/596/becoming-a-badger/act-one-3.
3. https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=685486807.

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Chapter 2

Humor Competency

The Role of Sociopragmatic Knowledge in Expressions of Humor in Intercultural Interaction

Jules Winchester

When devising a lesson on humor and intercultural competence for a post-intermediate level, mixed nationality general English class at a British university, I chose two clips to introduce the focus of the class. One was a clip featuring a well-known British comedian asking for money from a panel of entrepreneurs on a spoof of a popular British program called *Dragons' Den*, saying he needed the money for catering on another TV show he directed and starred in called *Extras.*[1] The second clip[2] came from a German comedy show and featured a father using the gift of an iPad his daughter had just given him as a chopping board whilst they prepared a meal together. A show of hands from my students once the clips had been played showed that the class had unanimously found the German clip far funnier than the British clip, even though not one of the students could speak or understand the German language.

On further analysis, it was evident that, although there were few unknown words in the British clip, the class needed background knowledge on the characters in the clip and the nature of the two comedy shows referenced to make sense of the apparent rudeness of the panel of entrepreneurs and the ridiculousness of the demands of the comedian. In contrast, the visual cues in the German clip made the humor behind an iPad being mistakenly used as a chopping board, and the generational differences this exposed, readily accessible to the class.

The use of these clips was designed to emphasize one of the main points of the lesson, namely that we need far more than knowledge of a language to successfully enact and comprehend humor; we also need to know how things "work" socially and culturally. In other words, we need sociopragmatic knowledge. This entails: recognition of cues at paralinguistic, prosodic, and discoursal levels; understanding of social meanings, including cultural references; understanding of how social meanings can be embedded in the form of

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assumptions and/or presuppositions; and recognition of interactional norms, for example in relation to variables such as power, politeness, and gender. In intercultural interactions, where it is probable that "norms of appropriateness" differ in terms of the content of humor and the emphasis placed on different types of humor (Geyer 2010), sociopragmatic knowledge becomes essential.

In this chapter, I explore the role sociopragmatic knowledge plays in instances of enactment and comprehension of humor in intercultural interactions. Much of this discussion focuses on analyzing empirical data taken from loosely structured interviews between me, a British researcher, and seven Japanese women with differing levels of English proficiency[3] and differing levels of exposure to local and broader social and cultural norms in the United Kingdom.

Firstly, instances of humor in the interactional data were classified according to the conversational functions (identification, clarification, enforcement, or differentiation) of humor (Meyer 2000). Secondly, the instances of humor were analyzed to determine the role of sociopragmatic competence in the achievement of these functions. Based on the findings of the empirical research, I surmise that expressions of humor which fulfil the uniting functions of identification and clarification require less in-depth sociopragmatic knowledge to be successful and so are more prevalent in intercultural interactions. It appears that expressions of humor which perform the dividing functions of enforcement and differentiation require in-depth sociopragmatic knowledge to be successful, as they pose a potential face threat, and so are far less prevalent in intercultural interactions. The implications are that sociopragmatic competence should be developed in the language classroom as part of humor competency training through:

1. awareness tasks, which require explicit knowledge (e.g., explanations of social meanings and cultural references in humorous exchanges);
2. interpretation tasks, which involve getting learners to notice (e.g., linguistic cues, and presuppositions); and
3. communication practice tasks (e.g., language play).

THE PRAGMATICS OF HUMOR

An understanding of a humorous utterance invariably requires the hearer to distinguish intended speaker meaning from literal meaning, and this requires sociopragmatic knowledge. For example, if a speaker says, "Pardon my French," the hearer needs a level of sociopragmatic knowledge to understand that the speaker is offering an apology for swearing in case the act of swear-

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ing has caused offense. The ability to recognize how broader societal rules for interactions are adapted locally, and the ability to use these rules to participate effectively within the constraints of the local interaction (Abrams 2008) requires the development of sociopragmatic competence, and this can be aided by explicit humor competency training.

Grice's Cooperative Principle

Grice's Cooperative Principle assumes that people are cooperative to achieve the purpose of being *maximally efficient* in their interactions (Grice 1975). The Cooperative Principle accounts for the process of distinguishing intended speaker meaning from literal meaning to make sense of an utterance. In general terms, the process requires an understanding of the communicative function of an utterance (i.e., the speech act performed through the message), along with the application of sociocultural knowledge (i.e., using knowledge of the world to decode a message), which allows the hearer to work out the inference. In more specific terms, the inference of an utterance can be determined through an examination of which of the maxims associated with the Cooperative Principle has been flouted, as this can reveal the implicature, or the intended speaker meaning.

In brief, the four maxims are Quality (be true), Quantity (be brief), Relation (be relevant), and Manner (be clear). These can be surmised as, "[m]ake your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Bowe and Martin 2007, 10). However, the maxims can be regarded as context- and culture-specific, so sociopragmatic knowledge is necessary to understand how the maxims can apply locally. In the case of the first comedy clip I played to my class, the maxim of Quality, whereby no untruthful or false information is given, and the maxim of Relation, whereby the information given is relevant, have clearly been flouted, for comedic effect.

Humor and Politeness

A further framework which can be applied to the process of working out the intended speaker meaning, particularly in conversational humor, is offered by Lakoff's Politeness Principle (Lakoff 2004), which comprises three maxims, namely *don't impose* (Distance), *give options* (Deference), and *make the other feel good* (Camaraderie). These different rules, or politeness styles as I refer to them in a revised taxonomy (Winchester 2007), encompass humor so that jokes at oneself's expense can be reflective of the Deference politeness style, functioning to show deference to, and give options to, the hearer.

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Self-Deprecating Humor

In practice this kind of self-deprecating humor is one of the most common types of conversational humor, along with other-deprecating humor (Greengross and Miller 2008), and functions to draw attention to our failings in categories such as intelligence (e.g., "I've made up my mind. Don't confuse me with facts") and physical attractiveness (e.g., Joan Rivers: "I have flabby thighs, but fortunately my stomach covers them"). Self-deprecating humor carries high risk if the intended meaning is not distinguished from the literal meaning, so that reported fake failings are perceived as real. In these instances, the speaker is likely to assume a degree of sociopragmatic competence in their interlocutors to mitigate the risk.

In the study conducted by Greengross and Miller (2008), gender differences in use of humor emerge so that female participants reported that they favored self-deprecating humor. In contrast, male participants favored other-deprecating humor. The most successful enactments of self-deprecating humor were in cases where the females were perceived as high status rather than low status, and the instances of humor were perceived as evidence of positive characteristics including high intelligence and humility (Greengross and Miller 2008, 394). As it may not be easy to read the markers of status in an unfamiliar culture (cf. Bourdieu's cultural capital), and humility may not be equally valued in every society (e.g., Schwartz 1992), a high level of sociopragmatic knowledge is necessary to work out the intended meaning of a humorous utterance.

Other-Deprecating Humor

Other-deprecating humor found in insults (e.g., John McEnroe's put-down to a spectator at Wimbledon: "What problems do you have, apart from being blind, unemployed, and a moron?") can be accounted for by theories on impoliteness (e.g., Culpeper 2011). The focus of the humor can be taboo topics or topics often avoided in conversation between those who do not know each other very well, such as politics or religion (e.g., "Why can't you compare Donald Trump to cancer? Because sometimes you can get rid of cancer."[4]). While the telling of jokes and humorous stories can be indicative of the Camaraderie politeness style, functioning to make the other feel good and engender bonding, there is again a high risk associated with instantiations of other-deprecating humor because of the inherent face threat they pose. The scope to "get it wrong," leading to sociopragmatic failure (Thomas 1983), is considerable in these instances.

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Humor across Languages and Cultures

Commenting on use of humor across languages and cultures and how this relates to politeness, Ladegaard (2009) depicts expressions of humor in cross-cultural professional communication as a "double-edged sword" as they "can mark solidarity and cohesion, signal self-depreciation, enable people to contest their superiors, and bridge cultural differences" (Rogersen-Revell 2007, 24 in Ladegaard 2009, 193). However, they can also mark "exclusion and superiority, signal mockery and ridicule, mask criticisms, directives and aggression, and be culture-bound" (Rogersen-Revell 2007, 24 in Ladegaard 2009, 193). The issues of power and identity that are implicated in this discussion of the inherent risks of humor, particularly in contexts where social and cultural conventions are unfamiliar, further support the need for sociopragmatic competence for the successful enactment and comprehension of humor.

Shardakova's study of use of humor by Russian and American English speakers also highlights the role of sociopragmatic knowledge, described as "an extensive knowledge of schemas, associations, and assumptions" (Shardakova 2012, 197), which is required to enact humor in intercultural interactions. Shardakova's study uncovers some differences in uses of humor between Russian and American English speakers in relation to politeness, so that, while humor functioned to engender solidarity (or Camaraderie in Lakoff's terms) and construct identity in the use of humor by both groups, the American group were found to be twice as likely as the Russian group to use humor in "playful provocations" which could be regarded as aggressive (Shardakova 2012, 222). Shardakova aligns these findings with a preference shown toward positive politeness strategies (see Brown and Levinson 1987) by the Russian participants, and a leaning toward negative politeness strategies (again, see Brown and Levinson 1987) or impoliteness (e.g., Culpeper 2011) by the American participants.

Shardakova found a further difference between the groups in terms of the social contexts regarded as appropriate for expressions of humor; American participants engaged in humorous exchanges with strangers and those in authority, while Russian participants avoided humorous exchanges in situations involving strangers or authority figures (Shardakova 2012, 223).

A further cross-cultural study, which focuses on humor in business meetings in New Zealand and Japan (Murata 2014), also suggests that, while humor serves the same bonding function in meetings held in New Zealand and Japan (labeled "Relational Practice" by Murata), the manifestations of humor are distinct in each context. On a micro level, each company (or Community of Practice) determines the amount, type, and structure of humor in business

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meetings. On a macro level (i.e., on a national level), there are significant differences in who initiates the humor. In the case of business meetings in Japan, it is the authority figure who takes this role as "humor is employed to reinforce power relationships" (Murata 2014, 262). This contrasts to meetings in New Zealand where there is a cultural expectation of "egalitarianism," which leads to more collaborative humor.

The cultural expectation of "group-orientation" highlighted in Murata's study (2014, 262) is reinforced by Zamborlin, who points out that there is a strong Japanese "linguistic etiquette" (Zamborlin 2016, 178) based on an "in-group" (*uchi*) and "out-group" (*soto*) distinction. This distinction is reflected in the level of intimacy viewed as appropriate between interlocutors and is evident in the expression of laughter (there are "laughter appropriate places" or *warai no ba*) and displays of rhetoric in humor; "the way the point of view is drawn differently in Japanese and English jokes displays a preference in each case for different rhetoric, which relates to distinctive socio-linguistic practices in each respective language and culture" (Takekuro 2009, 94 in Zamborlin 2016, 179).

A further distinction between use of jokes in Japanese and English-speaking cultures is made by Takekuro, who points out that, unlike in English-speaking cultures where humor is often used in formal situations, "Japanese jokes are limited to situations in which participants know each other well and the degree of formality is low" (Takekuro 2006, 90 in Neff and Rucynski 2017, 284).

Another cultural difference between English-speaking and Japanese cultures in preference for humor type is in use and understanding of sarcasm. While understood to be prevalent in the former cultures, "In Japan . . . , sarcasm will usually be misunderstood" (Neff and Rucynski 2017, 296; see Prichard and Rucynski, this volume).

The finding in these studies that "culture-specific humor styles" exist (Shardakova 2012, 225) has implications for intercultural communication and adds weight to the need for humor competency training to develop sociopragmatic knowledge in language learners.

HUMOR IN INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS

It appears that "culture-specific humor styles" did not adversely impact communication between Japanese and American workers communicating in English in the American South in a study by Sunaoshi (2005). The principal finding that humor was used as a communication strategy by workers to enable the work to be carried out efficiently suggests that "'national char-

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acteristics' are not necessarily the most prominent aspects in the analysis of 'intercultural' interactions" (Sunaoshi 2005, 218).

Although the conclusion drawn in this study would appear to suggest that the accommodation between interlocutors in intercultural interactions minimizes the need for sociopragmatic competence (see e.g., Davies 2003), the reality is that language learners find humor "far more difficult to pin down as it is a mode of communication rather than a specific form or function" (Bell and Attardo 2010, 424). Moreover, it is a mode of communication which turns conventions on their heads.

Bell and Attardo point out that there are seven levels of humor failure, with the lower levels pertaining to word level and meaning (Bell and Attardo 2010, 441). At these levels, sociopragmatic knowledge is less relevant to understanding a humorous message than lexical knowledge. Higher levels of failure include failure to understand the pragmatic force of a message, failure to recognize a humorous frame or the incongruity of a joke. Here, sociopragmatic knowledge is necessary for the recognition, understanding, and appreciation of humor. As "there is rarely an obligatory or preferred context for humor as there is for most speech acts," (Bell and Attardo 2010, 442) humor competency training is essential.

FUNCTIONS OF CONVERSATIONAL HUMOR

Humor can be viewed as "a universal, pan-cultural phenomenon" (Kruger 1996, 235), "adaptive for the human species as a way of coping with adversity" (Vaid 1999 in Vaid 2006, 153). This view of the origins of humor is part of a relief theory for humor. Other theories accounting for the origins of humor are the superiority theory, according to which humor can be used be used to make oneself feel superior in comparison to others, and the incongruity theory, according to which humor exists when there is an inconsistency between what is expected to happen and what actually happens (Kruger 1996).

Taxonomies accounting for the functions of conversational humor share a focus on the overarching uniting function of humor, which reinforces power and solidarity relations, or the overarching dividing function of humor, which challenges these relations (e.g., Meyer 2000; Norrick 2003).

These overall pragmatic functions can be achieved in different ways so that the uniting function of humor can be achieved through identification and clarification (Meyer 2000). The sub-function of identification is evident in use of humor to build support and group cohesiveness (e.g., through humorous personal stories), and also functions to reduce tension (e.g., through joke-telling). This sub-function can be linked to the relief theory of humor

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(Meyer 2000). The uniting function of humor can also be achieved through clarification, whereby humor can be used to clarify issues and individual positions (e.g., an assertion of identity claim), and can also be used to clarify social norms without correction or censure (e.g., use of humor to make a serious point). The clarification sub-function has been linked to the incongruity theory of humor (Meyer 2000).

The dividing function of humor, linked to the superiority theory of humor, can be achieved through enforcement of social norms with criticism, whilst identification with the audience is maintained, as in sarcasm (Meyer 2000). It can also be achieved by differentiation, whereby humor can be used to make distinctions rather than alliances (e.g., verbal irony or jocular mockery), which can involve ridicule. This final sub-function can be linked to both the incongruity and superiority theories of humor (Meyer 2000).

With reference to the clips I showed my general English class, the first clip, which featured a well-known British comedian asking for money from a panel of entrepreneurs on a popular British program called *Dragons' Den*, saying he needed the money for catering on another TV show he directed and starred in called *Extras*, could be interpreted as fulfilling a dividing function of humor. Specifically, humor was achieved through differentiation, as the *Dragons' Den* panel openly mocked and ridiculed the British comedian, as indeed the audience might, for requesting what could be seen as a disproportionately large sum of money for catering on another program. The links with both superiority and incongruity theories of humor are evident in this case.

Incongruity, and possibly superiority, are evident in the second clip I showed to my class in the use of an iPad as a chopping board; gentle mockery from the audience for the father in the clip appears to be invited, thus fulfilling a dividing function of humor through differentiation. However, it is also possible to interpret the clip evidencing a uniting function of humor through identification as the audience may be assumed to be a technologically savvy and cohesive group who understand the generational differences at play in the clip.

CURRENT STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine the need for humor competency training in a language learning context and, if it is needed, to determine which aspects of humor should be focused on. The data in this study forms part of a larger empirical study into linguistic realizations of politeness and identity in intercultural interactions (Winchester 2007). I conducted a series of loosely structured interviews with seven Japanese women with differing levels of

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English language proficiency and differing levels of exposure to local and broader social and cultural norms in the United Kingdom, summarized in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1. Participant Profiles

Participant (pseudonyms)	*Age*	*Years in Britain*	*Level of Social Contact with British People*	*Occupation*	*CEFR Level*
Yoko	40	13	Very high (married to English man)	Housewife	C1
Riko	30	8	Very high (married to English man)	Student	C1
Nyoko	31	8	Very high (most friends are British and was married to English man)	Translator	C2
Akemi	36	6	Very high (married to English man)	Classroom assistant	C1
Maeko	28	5	Low (married to Japanese man and rarely socializes with British people)	Housewife	B1
Chika	36	2	Low (teaches Japanese, socializes mainly with Spanish and French people she met in a language course)	Japanese teacher	B1
Eriko	Late 40s	2	Moderately low (married to Japanese man, although attends British university)	Student	B2

Created by the author.

The approach I took to data analysis was that "intercultural communication should be regarded and analyzed as ordinary communication" (Koole and ten Thije 2001, 571) as it involves a combination of intergroup factors (encompassing cultural norms, attitudes, and beliefs) and interpersonal factors (including interpersonal goals and socio-psychological orientation). I transcribed three half-hour interviews with each participant from different stages of our acquaintance over a period of around two years, and classified instances of humor in the interactional data according to the conversational functions (identification, clarification, enforcement or differentiation) of humor set out above (Meyer 2000). Secondly, I analyzed the instances of humor to determine the role of sociopragmatic competence in the achievement of these functions.

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FUNCTIONS OF HUMOR IN INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS

Uniting Function: Self-Deprecatory Humor

The most prevalent kind of humor in my data is self-deprecatory humor, which was used by six out the seven of the participants in the study, and which invariably had a uniting function in the interaction. In the first example, Akemi and I had been discussing whether we preferred to live in a city or in the countryside. The use of humor in this exchange had a bonding (uniting) function as Akemi invited me to identify with her ("*at our age*") and invited me to share in the laughter:

Example 1

A: Some people do love cities I know that; *even at our age* sometimes some mums say "oh, I leave my children to my husband and then go to clubs" and I don't fancy that at all, em, okay *I'm not trendy at all* (laughs) but I'm quite happy, you know, staying at home.

(Emphasis added)

Her self-deprecation focuses on her lack of "coolness" as a 36-year-old mother of young children. However, the use of humor does have a uniting function, as Akemi and I were the same age, and there is an implicit bonding with me as a mother, and one who was probably also perceived as "not trendy at all"!

The second example comes from an initial interview with Chika, where I was trying to get to know her and find out how long she would be around to take part in my research.

Example 2

J: So, when are you thinking of going back to Japan? Is it still a year or two away?

C: Well, one more year at least. I'd like to work because I want to just improve my English? I still I-I think my English is not good enough, so I want to

J: (overlap) You're a hard worker!

C: *A-actually I don't do anything* (laughs)

In this example, Chika's laughter could be perceived as fulfilling a uniting function, possibly releasing tension after my difficult question and her arguably (self-) face threatening answer, "*I don't do anything.*" It is possible that the uniting function was achieved through identification if my attempt at gentle teasing ("You're a hard worker!") had been recognized by Chika. It is also possible that it was achieved through clarification as Chika clarified

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her position on the identity label I had given her, having misinterpreted my comment as a compliment rather than gentle teasing; something to be denied in order to show humility according to Japanese cultural norms (Wierzbicka 1996, 541).Where variance in cultural scripts impact understanding of humor in intercultural interactions, humor competency training could clearly be of benefit.

The next example shows self-deprecatory comments from both the participant, Nyoko, and me, creating a feeling of solidarity between us. The exchange was about Nyoko having to wear a microphone for the interview and the slightly self-mocking comments may also have functioned to cover up embarrassment.

Example 3

J: That [the microphone] looks really good.
N: *Do I look kind of professional*?
J: You do (.) *It's a shame I don't* (laughs).

Nyoko used humor more than any of the other participants in the study, and often in a self-deprecatory way, which was playful (she labels herself "*very very slack*" for not visiting museums more often) or self-parodying (when describing wanting her wealthy parents-in-law to take her out for a meal whilst role-playing a panting dog "*yes please! Take me out!*"). These examples were designed to be entertaining and had a bonding effect in the interactions.

Interestingly, four out of the seven participants rarely, if at all, used humor in their exchanges with me. Yoko, who had lived in England longer than any of the participants, did not use humor in any of our interactions, and Eriko, Maeko, and Riko rarely resorted to humor. This may have been due to personal factors (e.g., personality type), interpersonal factors (e.g., what they were trying to achieve from the interaction), but it may also have been due to cultural factors such as not feeling that the interview context (as informal as I regarded it) was an appropriate context for use of humor.

On the occasions when these participants did use humor, they used self-deprecatory humor, which had a uniting function. In the next example, Eriko's slightly self-deprecatory comment was in response to my question about her description of a mature person as "someone responsible for their own actions":

Example 4

E: *Maybe I said these things because I try* (laughs) *to be this kind of person.*

It is also possible that Eriko was "playing for time" with this response as she may have been unsure of how to respond to my request for clarification.

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In other words, she was attempting to save face rather than entertain or bond. Nevertheless, the (perlocutionary) effect is a sense of social inclusion in the interaction.

There was only one instance in my conversations with Maeko which could have been construed as an attempt at humor and occurred during a discussion about her studies in Japan.

Example 5

M: Well, I [was] taking some teacher qualification course as well so I was quite busy . . .

J: Yes?

M: So, I did some law (!)

J: Uh-huh.

M: Yeah law-related education and well Japanese law (!) *I forgot!*

The comment "I forgot" could be construed as self-deprecatory and did have the effect of building support in the conversation, a uniting function, though it appeared to be covering up Maeko's evident embarrassment at discussing her studies, and it is noteworthy that there was no accompanying laughter. The guttural reflex sound that Maeko made during this exchange, marked with (!), signalled her discomfort when she came across a topic she found difficult for whatever reason.

Similarly, there was only one incidence of humor in my transcribed conversations with Riko and the humor was again self-deprecatory:

Example 6

R: I think I was most disturbed by my logic of thoughts (laughs)—*that's a very strange thing to say* (laughs).

As this self-deprecatory comment, pointing out the "strange" use of the English language in this context, came during a discussion of how Riko felt foolish being unable to understand cultural norms, it may have functioned to protect Riko's face, covering up any discomfort she may have felt.

Uniting Function: Gentle Teasing

As evidenced in example 3, humor was often co-constructed in my exchanges with Nyoko and served a uniting function. In the following example, she and I were in an art gallery and were commenting on a painting:

Example 7

J: Is it a self-portrait?

N: *So, you don't fancy him then* (laughs)?

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J: (laughing) *if you trimmed his mustache and he went to the dentist.*
N: (laughing) God.

Nyoko's gentle teasing of me at this early stage of our relationship was potentially risky as it could have been perceived as face-threatening. However, the effect was to confirm our shared perspective and had a bonding effect.

Multifunctional Humor

Apart from self-deprecatory humor and gentle teasing, there were other instances of humor which functioned to unite, particularly in my interactions with participants Akemi and Nyoko, although in many cases the examples of humor could be perceived as multifunctional. On more than one occasion, Akemi's entertaining anecdotes were based on exaggeration of her dislike for a certain kind of woman who lived in her part of the city (a group she termed "the Wilmslow wives," which could be read as a covert reference to "The Stepford wives," a group of apparently perfect women, made famous in the novel and film of the 1970s). As well as performing a uniting function through identification, these anecdotes served to clarify Akemi's position on social norms around her and also fulfilled a dividing function through enforcement. These were women, who were labeled "*the beautiful*" by Akemi, and who wore "*power suits and everything,*" were criticized by Akemi in the end for not contributing enough to their community ("*what do they do*").

In the next example, Nyoko's use of humor functioned to entertain and was uniting in that sense, yet it also had a dividing function as she differentiated herself to the Japanese company she described as "picky" for rejecting the color of the knob on a video game console, with a slightly mocking tone:

Example 8
N: You just sort of "*does it bother you*?" (laughs).

In a further example from Nyoko, she recounted an amusing anecdote about her experience with customer services when trying to return a pair of trousers which were "faulty." The humor functioned to unite but also to divide:

Example 9
N: Well I kind of—there was one incident; I bought a pair of trousers from a sort of shop like BHS or whoever and eh I didn't realize it was faulty. I realized it when I got back home and so I took it back and I went into the shop and said, "Excuse me, these trousers have a hole" and eh, the lady kind of fell silent for about five seconds and *eh the customer services kicked in:* "*So what do you want me to do?*" (laughs). *Well, you know,* "*What's the option?*" *You know, I was waiting for the options* (laughs). *You know,* "*These trousers have a hole.*" *In*

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my head they would react to it (puts on pompous voice), "*Oh I'm very very terribly sorry. Would you like us to eh refund or exchange, you know, the goods?*" (laughs). (Five seconds silence): "*What do you want me to do?*" (laughs).

In this example, Nyoko was consciously entertaining me with her anecdote but also clarifying her position in relation to social norms, thus fulfilling a uniting function through both identification and clarification. The anecdote also served a dividing function as Nyoko differentiated herself culturally or socially (i.e., through the implicit account of her own expectations in this situation). The story could also be viewed as serving a dividing function through enforcement as Nyoko put herself in a superior position in the anecdote, assuming identification with me, the audience.

There were other examples of humor being used in a similar way in my interviews with Nyoko as she also used humor to comment on the work ethic in the United Kingdom, where she voiced the imagined employee and boss roles ("It comes 5 o'clock; 'I'm off now,' 'The company's going to collapse tomorrow,' 'Yes, whatever'"). She also used humor to comment on the different approaches to shopping in Japan and the United Kingdom in terms of the attention to detail paid ("in Britain you can go into a shop and [they] say '*have you come to spend your money?*' and '*just spend'n go*!'").

There were several examples in Nyoko's interviews with me where she constructed her national identity with recourse to humor. As in previous examples, the anecdotes served to entertain, thus fulfilling a uniting function, however, they also had a dividing function through differentiation as Nyoko positioned herself outside the cultural norms she perceived in the United Kingdom. The following example is an extract from a conversation after a meal with me and my husband (H in this anecdote) in our home:

Example 10

H: Anyone like a top up of wine?

N: I'm alright actually.

J: Nyoko's hardly drinking.

N: *Sorry, I'm Japanese* (all laugh); *Can't take much* (laughs). *It's genetic* (laughs); *It is, I'm sorry!* (laughs). *I don't know why I'm apologizing for it. I get really bullied for it;* "*Why [are] you not drinking, nah, nah, nah*," *yeah, so I normally tell people*, "*Sorry, I'm Japanese. I can't; it's genetic*" (laughs), *and people are normally fine 'cause they're kind of a bit nervous about racial discrimination* (all laugh).

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In this instance, the extensive laughter from all participants may be viewed as a way to defuse the tension of this potentially awkward exchange, maintaining the uniting function of humor.

There are other instances where Nyoko used humor to clarify or negotiate her national identity, as the following example illustrates:

Example 11

N: People actually don't know where I live (laughs). *I'm actually homeless in Japan* (laughs), because if they know I live in Britain they just can't—they won't be able to talk to me (laughs). [It's a] kind of marginalized existence really. *You're a foreigner, but you're not Japanese, proper Japanese* (laughs), so I'm somewhere in-between, kind of wondering.

The clarification of Nyoko's identity in this example signals that humor served a uniting function, and also reduced tension as humor was also used to deal with a sensitive topic.

EVIDENCE OF SOCIOPRAGMATIC COMPETENCY

Viewing these exchanges through the lens of Grice's Cooperative Principle, the participants and I needed a certain level of sociopragmatic knowledge to work out the inference, or the implicature, in a message. This knowledge can be seen in exchanges where the humor is co-constructed, so in example 2, Chika may have correctly decoded my comment "You're a hard worker!," which flouts the maxim of Relevance, as teasing, and Nyoko definitely did in example 3 where my comment, "That [the microphone] looks good," was also correctly interpreted as gentle teasing as it flouts the maxims of Quality and Relation.

As outlined above, most of the participants used self-deprecating humor, albeit to varying degrees, in their interviews with me, presumably assuming a level of sociopragmatic competence in me to mitigate the risk of me perceiving their self-deprecatory comments as real. The exception to this is Maeko (see example 5), who signalled some discomfort talking about her previous studies and who may have been concerned that I took her comment "I forgot" when trying to remember exactly what she had studied at face value rather than as a humorous self-deprecatory comment. My use of self-deprecatory humor with Nyoko in example 3 was certainly predicated on the understanding that Nyoko would accurately "read" my intention to bond, which she did.

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As mentioned earlier, there is a high risk associated with instantiations of other-deprecating humor because of the inherent face threat they pose, and it is interesting that only two of the participants used this type of humor; Akemi, in her criticism of "the Wilmslow wives," and Nyoko, in her derision of shop workers in the United Kingdom and imagined others who criticize her limited alcohol consumption. This type of humor, which invariably fulfils a dividing function as well as a uniting function of humor, arguably requires a highly sophisticated level of sociopragmatic competence. This is because the potential face threat to me in each of these exchanges (e.g., perceived challenge to my gender, national, or personal identity, in the form of values) is evident. It takes great skill to mitigate the threat, skill which both of these participants showed.

It is noteworthy that one of the participants, Yoko, did not engage in any humorous exchanges with me at all despite having lived in the United Kingdom for the longest (13 years), being married to an English man, and having a good level of English (CEFR C1). Moreover, three other participants (Eriko, Maeko, and Riko) rarely used humor in our interactions, and when they did it could be interpreted as masking discomfort or embarrassment (see examples 5 and 6) or possibly "playing for time" (see example 4), rather than attempting to build rapport.

As mentioned earlier, although the lack of humor in our exchanges could have been due to personal or interpersonal factors, it could also be that these participants took a culture-specific approach to humor in our interactions. They may have viewed the relationship as purely professional, placing me in the "out-group" (*soto*) rather than the "in-group" (*uchi*) (Zamborlin 2016), and rendering laughter and humor inappropriate in the context of our interviews (Zamborlin 2016). It could also be they were adhering to a cultural expectation that it is those in authority who initiate humor (Murata 2014), depending on how they viewed my role as academic researcher. Perhaps this is a more likely interpretation in the case of Maeko and Riko, who were younger than me. In either scenario, it is arguable that a more developed level of sociopragmatic competence, enhanced through humor competency training, may have resulted in different views of interactional norms by these participants and could have resulted in more exchanges of humor.

The Development of Sociopragmatic Competency and Humor Competency Training

The question is how sociopragmatic competence can be developed. As "[p]roficiency [in L2 humor] is not a stable, linear condition [and] . . . is constructed in interaction" (Bell 2009, 246), one obvious way for language

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learners to develop their sociopragmatic competence is simply to observe and participate in intercultural interactions, without being afraid to attempt humor in their encounters. As I experienced in my interactions with some of the participants, "humor is jointly constructed in discourse and constitutes a negotiated accomplishment . . . which ultimately leads to a successful outcome of the interaction" (Ladegaard 2009, 196). However, this did not naturally happen with all participants as outlined above, and there is a strong argument for humor competency training in a classroom context in order to develop learners' ability to understand and use humor effectively. As Bell states, training "can provide [learners] with new ways of thinking about and trying to make sense of humor . . . and a safe place to ask and experiment with it" (Bell 2009, 250).

The difficulty for a learner of another language is that successful comprehension and use of humor requires more than linguistic knowledge of forms or grammatical knowledge; the necessary contextual knowledge, or sociopragmatic knowledge, needed may be hard to acquire without explicit input or guidance. The risks in "getting it wrong" may seem considerable as failure in communication of humor may lead to a learner experiencing a knock to their perceived status in an interaction; the "reduced personality" of the L2 learner (Harder 1980, cited in Bell 2007a, 28).

Training in humor competency enables language learners to explore the use of humor in the public/private sphere in different cultural contexts, as well as explore the wider contextual issues that make use of humor appropriate or inappropriate. This better equips learners to both interpret humor and make judgments of when and how to use humor in their intercultural interactions (Bell and Attardo 2010).

Development of sociopragmatic competence through humor competency training is particularly salient where humor performs a dividing function. This study shows that expressions of humor which perform a uniting, bonding function (e.g., self-deprecatory) and co-constructed humor, which promote solidarity and empathy between interlocutors in conversations can be prevalent in intercultural interactions, although not always. As was evident in my study, greater awareness of cultural norms affecting judgments of when it is appropriate to use humor may have benefited some of the participants. Expressions of humor which perform a riskier dividing function, particularly through differentiation, appear to be far less common among Japanese L2 speakers of English, yet they also appear to be a key way of constructing identity (e.g., gender or national identity) for conversational participants in intercultural encounters. In these riskier interactions, knowledge of local and cultural "norms of appropriateness" (Geyer 2010) is often essential for the successful understanding and communication of humor. This knowledge,

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evident in the exchanges with only two of the participants in my study, can only be enhanced by humor competency training.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

The data collected here suggests many Japanese L2 speakers of English may benefit from competency training related to sociopragmatic knowledge in expressions of humor. There is some evidence that such training, as part of a focus on teaching pragmatics, can be effective (O'Keeffe, Clancy, and Adolphs 2011, 138). Textbooks are often not an effective source of pragmatic input for L2 learners (O'Keeffe, Clancy, and Adolphs 2011, 139; also see Gardner in this volume for an analysis of pragmatics in textbooks). Therefore it is evident that the responsibility falls to the teacher to supply texts and activities which provide the learner with enough contextual information to be able to process or put into practice sociopragmatic features of language use in a humorous situation.

Awareness-Raising Tasks

Before learners are able to produce humor successfully in different cultural contexts, exposure to, and comprehension of, examples of humor helps build sociopragmatic knowledge and awareness. In terms of humor comprehension, evidence suggests that "[u]sing a processing model of recognition, understanding, and appreciation as a heuristic device may be useful" (Bell 2007b, 385). This is likely to be particularly the case in a classroom context, as outside of that context meaning is often negotiated and interpretations situated in an interaction. Pedagogic tasks can raise awareness, help learners to notice norms, and give communication practice (Marra and Holmes 2007). Tutor input can raise awareness of humor norms. For instance, tutors can focus on puns to raise awareness of L2 forms and meanings (Bell and Attardo 2010). In other words, this level of explicit instruction and guidance can play a significant role in the development of students' sociopragmatic competence as their increased knowledge and awareness informs their use of humor in interactions.

Going beyond explicit instruction, learners can be encouraged to keep reflective diaries in which they record their experiences with humor, which they then discuss and further explore with their teacher (as in Bell and Attardo 2010; see the chapter by Petkova in this volume for a deeper discussion of humor diaries). Such an approach would undoubtedly have been beneficial to the participants in the current study who did not use humor often, or even at all, in

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their interactions with me. A simple task such as noting the formality of contexts in which humor is used, based on their observations, may have revealed cultural-specific aspects of humor use they had not previously been aware of.

Interpretation Tasks

Key recommended practices in the teaching of pragmatics in general and humor competency in particular are the use of "authentic language samples" and tutor input before interpretation or production of humor, from early levels of learning (Bardovi-Harig and Mahan-Taylor 2003a, in O'Keeffe, Clancy, and Adolphs 2011, 141).

Tutors can highlight relevant cues which signal humor at paralinguistic, prosodic, and discoursal levels in authentic language samples. Input can also help students to notice social meanings, including cultural references, and their understanding of how social meanings can be embedded in the form of assumptions and/or presuppositions in humorous exchanges. Furthermore, input can point out interactional norms in humorous exchanges, norms which can then be considered in terms of how they relate to variables such as power, politeness, and gender. This is what I attempted to do with the humorous clips I introduced to my general English class. Used in the classroom, interpretations of the functions of humor in authentic intercultural exchanges, such as those highlighted in this chapter, allow learners to understand how powerful use of humor can be in an interaction; that humor can be used not only to bond socially, but also to construct identities or enforce social norms.

In a more learner-directed task, students can collect their own samples of humor and use discourse analytic techniques to analyze them (Bell 2009).

Communication Practice Tasks

A study by Lantz-Andersson suggests language play in a social media context as "a collaborative activity that sensitises students to pragmatic, formal and communicative linguistic aspects of second language use, offering them possibilities for developing sociopragmatic competence" (Lantz-Andersson 2018, 709). Language play could be introduced in a classroom context in activities which involve learners "playing with the units of meaning, creating words that do not exist or combining them in playful ways" (Lantz-Andersson 2018, 708). One way of doing this could be to encourage students to engage in language play in e-mail chat exchange with their fellow students (Bell 2009). Students, and particularly those who are about to study abroad, can also be encouraged to attempt collaborative joking in role-play as a way to develop intercultural communicative competence (Neff and Rucynski 2017, 297).

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON THE ROLE OF SOCIOPRAGMATIC KNOWLEDGE IN HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

The growing body of literature on intercultural communicative competence has much in common with the literature on humor competency, given the focus on the "language-culture nexus" (Byram 2012, 7) in both cases. Future research would do well to make the links between these two fields of research more explicit, bringing sociopragmatic competence to the fore.

Future research into humor competency and humor use in intercultural interactions should also ensure that a view of culture is not restricted to nationality. Although culture in a broad sense can imply nationality, culture is also viewed in the *small* sense (Holliday 1999), as in a Community of Practice (Wenger 1998) where local norms are set and applied. This more complex view of culture brings the importance of sociopragmatic knowledge to the fore, allowing for a consideration of how broader societal rules for interactions are adapted locally (Abrams 2008).

Similarly, research into humor competency training in a multicultural classroom context should also account for the individual as well as the cultural (Martin and Nakayama 1999). It should encourage awareness of one's own (inter) cultural norms as well as others', and also awareness of one's goals and motivations in the interaction, as well as the goals of others. Through the adoption of this approach, sensitivity in interactions can be encouraged, which means that fears about status or a "reduced personality" (Harder 1980, cited in Bell 2007a, 28) in an interaction involving humor, are hopefully reduced, and more risk-taking in terms of using humor to fulfil a dividing function, can result.

As previously stated, the main implication of my study is that sociopragmatic competence should be developed in the language classroom as part of humor competency training, and that the dividing function of humor should also be a part of this training, as risky as it may be considered to be.

Further research into the applications of social media as a way to develop sociopragmatic competence (building on the work of e.g., Lantz-Andersson 2018) is also recommended.

Finally, further research should also focus on tools to evaluate the effectiveness of humor competency training. One way of assessing learners' development of sociopragmatic competence following humor competency training as part of a language learning context is to conduct a test prior to the training, and then conduct a follow-up test once the training has been completed. Prior to the training, students could be asked to give responses to test items (e.g., along the lines of those used by Roever, Elder, and Fraser

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2014, in Kolesova 2016), or could be asked to perform role-plays, assessing knowledge of what is appropriate or humorous in different contexts. Following humor competency training, students could be asked to complete similar test items or to perform similar role-plays to assess the extent to which their sociopragmatic competence had developed. Students could also be asked to complete a questionnaire to explore how useful they perceived humor competency training to be (Kolesova 2016).

NOTES

1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uxi8dbRsVhl.
2. https://www.wimp.com/so-dad-how-do-you-like-the-ipad-we-got-you/.
3. Based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) descriptors for languages.
4. http://www.jokes4us.com/celebrityjokes/donaldtrumpjokes.html.

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Chapter 3

Feeling Inadequate

Lessons from Cross-Cultural Adaption to Help Learners Get over Inadequacies in Humor Competency

Maria Ramirez de Arellano

I developed a personal interest in humor communication after living in Ireland for six years and experiencing the ups and downs of cross-cultural adaptation. Being a fluent speaker of English when I moved to Ireland, language limitations were a rare cause of frustration. However, after about three years, the realization that I could not use humor with Irish people as easily as I used it with Spanish people became increasingly frustrating. I would find myself unable to translate or replicate remarks that would only make sense to Spanish interlocutors, due to my reliance on culturally-based content, wordplay, or impersonating accents. At the same time, my own accent, tone, behaviors, or comments came across sometimes as rude or fiery, resulting in unintended humor. Was this a lack of communicative competence? Why did I have a problem expressing humor if I did not have a problem expressing myself in other ways? Would I ever be able to overcome this? As a source of frustration, these issues were getting in the way of a sense of fitting into Irish society.

These reflections led me to research the role of humor in a study of the process of cross-cultural adaptation of Spanish migrants in Ireland (Ramirez de Arellano 2009). This approach was based not only on my personal experience, but also on sociocultural factors that backed up its rationale. Firstly, humor is an essential aspect of everyday interactions, which are at the heart of cross-cultural adaptation (Kim 2001), and cross-cultural adaptation brings about new codes and sources for humor that influence communication. Secondly, the communicative, social, and psychological functions of humor make it a powerful intercultural tool, which can minimize sociocultural boundaries (Holmes, and Marra 2002) and other challenges brought up by cross-cultural contact.

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The findings suggested that the fact that within an Irish cultural context I cannot express my humor in the same way I do in the Spanish equivalent is not in itself a sign of non-adaptation. The frustration that this issue was causing me was, however, such a sign. Due to language and cultural issues, certain features of the humor I use with Irish people would never be the same as those of the humor I use with Spanish people. Accordingly, the way I express my humor with people from other cultures or nationalities, including Spanish-speaking ones, differs in nuance from the way I express it with people from Spain. My resources to communicate humor vary depending on context and are part of my unique intercultural competence. This modest research showcased the relevance of humor in cross-cultural adaptation, pointing out areas that were worth investigating, such as the communicative and psychological facets that come to play in humor communication.

Accordingly, I pursued a qualitative study that would provide richer data and examined the role of humor in the cross-cultural adaptation process of twenty-one Spanish migrants living in Ireland (Ramirez de Arellano 2014). As a qualitative study, the findings are specific to its context and participants. Nevertheless, they contribute to a better understanding of the role of humor in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation.

Based on this research, this chapter aims to offer teachers who are interested in humor competency training a better understanding of the factors involved in communicating humor in intercultural interactions outside the classroom. Awareness of how these interactions influence and are influenced by learners' humor competencies will give teachers a useful perspective that will enable them to prepare their students for successful intercultural interactions.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Due to the lack of specific research and literature in Intercultural Studies, my research (Ramirez de Arellano 2014) included theories from philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and sociology. However, in order to contextualize the findings, I have included a brief overview of the concept of cross-cultural adaptation and some of the existing research that links such a process to the concept of humor. This is followed by a more detailed description of three theories which will later be connected to the findings in the section Linking the Data to Existing Theory. A discussion of both data and theory will focus on their relevance in terms of humor competency training providing information and suggestions that can be used by teachers in their classrooms.

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Cross-Cultural Adaptation

The term *cross-cultural adaptation* refers to the process through which an individual acquires an increasing level of fitness or compatibility in a new cultural environment (Kim 2001). This process involves challenges and changes triggered by differences in beliefs, values, and norms between the home and the host cultures, as well as the sense of social incompetence in responding to the new setting appropriately and effectively (Ting-Toomey 2018). But there is more in the process than just coping with stress and learning social skills because an exchange with another culture can lead to psychological and personal growth and provide an opportunity to develop self-awareness, and intercultural sensitivity. Observing the concept of humor competence from this approach can help researchers and teachers answer useful questions such as, "How does humor competence enable learners to function in a new culture?"; "What social skills are connected to it?"; "How does it contribute to their intercultural competence?"

Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theories and Humor

The significance of humor in cross-cultural adaptation has been highlighted in many intercultural studies, such as Ting-Toomey (1999, 2018), Gullahorn (1963), or Kim (2001). Both Gullahorn and Ting-Toomey, who explain cross-cultural adaptation in terms of developmental stages, include a "humorous stage" in their models, where sojourners learn to laugh at their cultural faux pas and no longer take things as seriously as in the previous stages.

On its part, Kim's integrative model of cross-cultural adaptation (2001) names humor as a factor for successful intercultural communication and an element of intercultural competence. Ting-Toomey (2005) also considered humor as both a trigger for miscommunication that can lead to awkward situations or loss of face, and as a communication strategy that can improve intercultural communication. Despite the lack of depth in the analysis of the role of humor, these studies draw attention to the communicative and psychological functions triggered by it.

In more specific studies on the nature of humor in intercultural communication (Cheng 2003; Habib 2008; Bell 2002, 2005, 2007), the role of humor in interactions between interlocutors of different cultural background showed ways in which speakers collaboratively manage the organizational, interpersonal, and ideological aspects of humor in conversations. These studies reveal the use of humor as an intercultural tool due to its communicative functions. However, they focus on non-native speakers' interactions among themselves,

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and tend to set aside the process of cross-cultural adaptation or the role of their first language and culture in intercultural interactions. In the Grounded Theory Study (Ramirez de Arellano 2014), I examined the role of humor within cross-cultural adaptation, which revealed how among other factors, the first language and culture and their interrelation with the target language and culture influence the development of learners' humor and intercultural competences.

THREE MAIN THEORIES

Taking into account the context of this book, I have selected three theories to discuss in connection to the findings: Kim's stress adaptation model, which explains the process of cross-cultural adaptation; Raskin's (1985) semantic theory, which explains the concept of humor competence within linguistic studies; and Vega's (1990) theory, which positions it in the field of L2 learning.

The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model

Kim (1988, 2005) sees cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic process where stress-adaptation experiences bring about change and growth. This is a continuous process of engaging and disengaging with the new culture: individuals encounter situations that do not match expectations, which creates stress and leads to a defensive reaction or a drawback; an individual then creates an adaptive response that will bring change, which would be a contribution to adaptation. Kim (1988) presents the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic as cyclical and continual "draw-back-to-leap" progression involving the three stages of the model: stress, adaptation, and growth.

Kim (2005) asserts that adaptation occurs through communication and the building of social networks and that cultural immersion is generally positively related with fluency in the language of the host culture. Her model maintains that migrants acquire host-cultural practices through acculturation, while simultaneously, deculturation, or the "unlearning of some of the old cultural elements" occurs (Kim 2005, 340). Through both processes, an adaptive change to a state of maximum possible convergence to the members of the host culture leads to the overall goal of the intercultural experience: assimilation. In terms of humor competence training, this would imply that teachers and learners should aim for assimilation of humor tendencies associated to the target culture and its members including styles, subjects, or taboos.

However, there are two major limitations regarding Kim's (1988, 2005) model. Firstly, the model assumes that assimilation is the overall goal of

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intercultural experience (Berry 1997); secondly, ease of cultural adaptation may not be positively related to the level of immersion in the host culture. Indeed, the more sojourners interact with host nationals, the more their perspectives on cultural frameworks and identity will be challenged, and the more potential they have for experiencing culture shock (Rohrlich and Martin 1991). However, this would also imply an increase in cultural learning, which would have a positive impact on long term adaptation (Ward et al. 2005, 2001). In the context of humor competency training, this means that exposing learners to humor which differs in style and content to that of their own culture will challenge their perspectives on the appropriate uses of humor. Nevertheless, this is likely to result in cultural learning that will increase their ability to use humor in the target culture.

Theories on Verbally Transmitted Humor

Raskin's (1985) script-based semantic theory of humor was a major contribution to the incongruity theory of humor from a linguistic perspective. With a cognitive focus, the theory aims to explain verbal humor by trying to determine the necessary linguistic conditions for a text to be funny. This is based on the concept of *scripts* which are cognitive structures that represent the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. Jokes and anecdotes have a point of culmination which brings together two contrasting and overlapping scripts: one which is logically correct and another which is the opposite of the first on some basis but can also be a logical interpretation.

In Raskin's theory, *linguistic scripts* contain information pertaining to words which is known to native speakers whereas *non-linguistic scripts* refer to our knowledge of the world. Within these Raskin distinguishes *general knowledge scripts*, known to all speakers, *restricted knowledge scripts*, known to certain people such as specialists or members of a group of society, and *individual scripts*, which are unique to a person.

The theory is designed to model the native speaker's humor competence, which is the knowledge that enables a language user to produce and interpret a text which is compatible with two opposite and overlapping scripts (Raskin 1985). Despite acknowledging social and individual differences, the theory is formulated for ideal interlocutors whose senses of humor are identical (Raskin 1985) and who are, for example, unaffected by racial or gender biases, obscene materials or boredom (Attardo 1994). However, in the real world these judgments will differ significantly, which calls into question the significance of the theory's purpose and highlights a major gap that has been explored by other linguistic theories, such as Chiaro's (1992) and Carrell (1997).

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In *The Language of Jokes,* Chiaro (1992) presents a model in which the interaction of three systems contribute to the competence needed to get a joke: the linguistic, the sociocultural, and “the poetic” (Chiaro 1992). To illustrate this, she offers the following children’s joke:

> A: How many ears has Davy Crockett?
>
> B: Two, hasn’t he?
>
> A: No three. He’s got a left ear, a right ear, and a wild frontier.
> (Chiaro 1992, 13)

To understand this joke, the hearer needs the linguistic competence to understand the sentence meaning, the sociocultural competency to know who Davy Crockett was, and the knowledge that the phrase “wild frontier” comes from the theme song of the children’s television show about him, and the poetic competence to read “wild frontier” as “wild front ear.” Chiaro’s theory includes a strong social dimension and is grounded in actual use of language in the world. Adding to this, Carrell (1997) emphasizes the importance of physical, mental, social conditions, and values in order to appreciate humor between and within individuals. Both Carrell (1997) and Chiaro (1992) point to social and individual circumstances as crucial elements in the conception of humor competence, which cannot be simply a universal cognitive skill. Nevertheless, the distinction between the different types of knowledge and competences as well as the individual factors that come into play in the processes of producing, understanding, and appreciating humor can help teachers understand how humor works and decide what areas that they need to focus on.

Humor and Second Language Learning

Vega (1990) examines Raskin’s (1985) notion of humor competence in the context of a L2 by analyzing its presence in communicative competence and its four components according to Canale’s (1981) theory: discourse, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competences. Firstly, she points out the relevance of discourse and grammatical competence in understanding and producing a joke. Secondly, she highlights the role of sociolinguistic competence in enabling learners to distinguish what is appropriate and inappropriate. Thirdly, she notes that there are many verbal and non-verbal strategies that can help learners to create and understand humor.

In addition, Vega (1990) considers Widdowson’s (1983) notion of *capacity* as the ability to actualize knowledge or use the language creatively in actual communication. According to her, there is a capacity component for every

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competency which varies within an individual. Because capacity involves psychological factors such as personality and intelligence, learners achieve different levels of proficiency and overall communicative competence. In the case of humor, sense of humor is a variable that affects capacity and in turn overall communicative competence.

Therefore, Vega's theory highlights the importance of "humor capacity" in humor communication emphasising that for humor to work there needs to be something more than shared knowledge. The question is whether these missing elements are linked and transferred from the first language and culture, or if can they be acquired during cross-cultural adaptation. Overall, the theory underlines the importance of humor competence in communicative competence and points out that second language learners fail to develop humor competency even when they reach native-like proficiency levels, which underscores the need for this line of research and its application in L2 teaching. Moreover, Vega pinpoints specific areas that need to be tackled in humor competency training such as knowledge of the semantic mechanisms of humor, grammar, discourse rules, communication strategies, social norms of language use, and world knowledge.

THE FUNNY SIDE OF CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION

In "The Funny Side of Cross-Cultural Adaptation" (2014), I investigated the nature of humor in intercultural interactions, and its impact in the adaptation process of 21 Spanish migrants living in Ireland. The participants of this study were Spanish migrants that had lived in Ireland from six months to fifteen years and had levels of English ranging from intermediate to fluent. Data collection was by interviews and data analysis was by constructive grounded theory. Both the data collection and analysis methods were selected in order to collect rich data in a scarcely studied area.

By analyzing learners' experiences from their own perspectives, the research revealed that humor competence is a key element of cross-cultural adaptation. First, as a factor for successful interactions, humor competence enables learners to function successfully in their new environment. Second, cross-cultural experiences contribute to learners' development of their humor competence as part of their intercultural competence. The study underscores the relevance of humor competency to both intercultural communication and second language acquisition. A better understanding of the factors, skills and processes involved in its development can help teachers prepare their students for both intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation.

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The Theoretical Model in a Nutshell

To start with, the data analysis of this study included an examination of participants' perceptions of cultural distance between Spanish and Irish culture and its impact on daily interactions. This analysis culminated in a theoretical model that explains participants' use of humor in intercultural interactions and its consequences in the process of cross-cultural adaptation as illustrated in figure 3.1. The major factors affecting the quality of humor communication in intercultural interactions were *language competence, cultural awareness, cultural proximity*, *individual affinities, and compatibility. Language competence* and *cultural awareness* improve newcomers' ability to understand and communicate humor, whereas cultural *proximity* and *individual affinities* imply a shared perspective that improves their chances of sharing humor and can affect their preferences for different humor styles. Finally, *compatibility* refers to the interlocutors' use of humor, which compensates for differences in a way that makes humor work. For example, shared experiences can become the subject of humor, shared values can define the fine line between humor and offense, and exposure or fondness for self-deprecation or sarcasm can affect their humor style or expectations and tolerance of others' humor.

Both effective and ineffective humor communication can trigger some of the communicative, social, and psychological effects of humor. For example, humor miscommunication can create tension, highlight differences, and trigger separation and feelings of inadequacy. In contrast, effective humor communication can ease tensions, highlight similarities, and trigger feelings of adequacy and bonding (Attardo 1994), making humor a powerful tool in intercultural communication.

Experiencing effective humor communication and miscommunication, along with an awareness of the positive and negative effects of humor, can lead to adaptive changes which improve the quality of newcomers' use of humor. For example, such experiences led participants to avoid certain subjects or to use humor as a strategy to overcome miscommunication. In turn, cross-cultural adaptation influenced participants' ability to overcome and cope with humor miscommunication, which minimized or reversed its negative effects.

This dynamic process of transformation leads to the development of newcomers' humor competence, or their ability to use humor in intercultural interactions. Such competency encompasses elements from the three major factors but also new skills such as the ability to focus on individual affinities in order to communicate humor. In this context, humor competence becomes an integrative element of cross-cultural adaptation, enabling participants to alter the factors that result in effective or ineffective humor communication. The following sections explain the different elements of this process.

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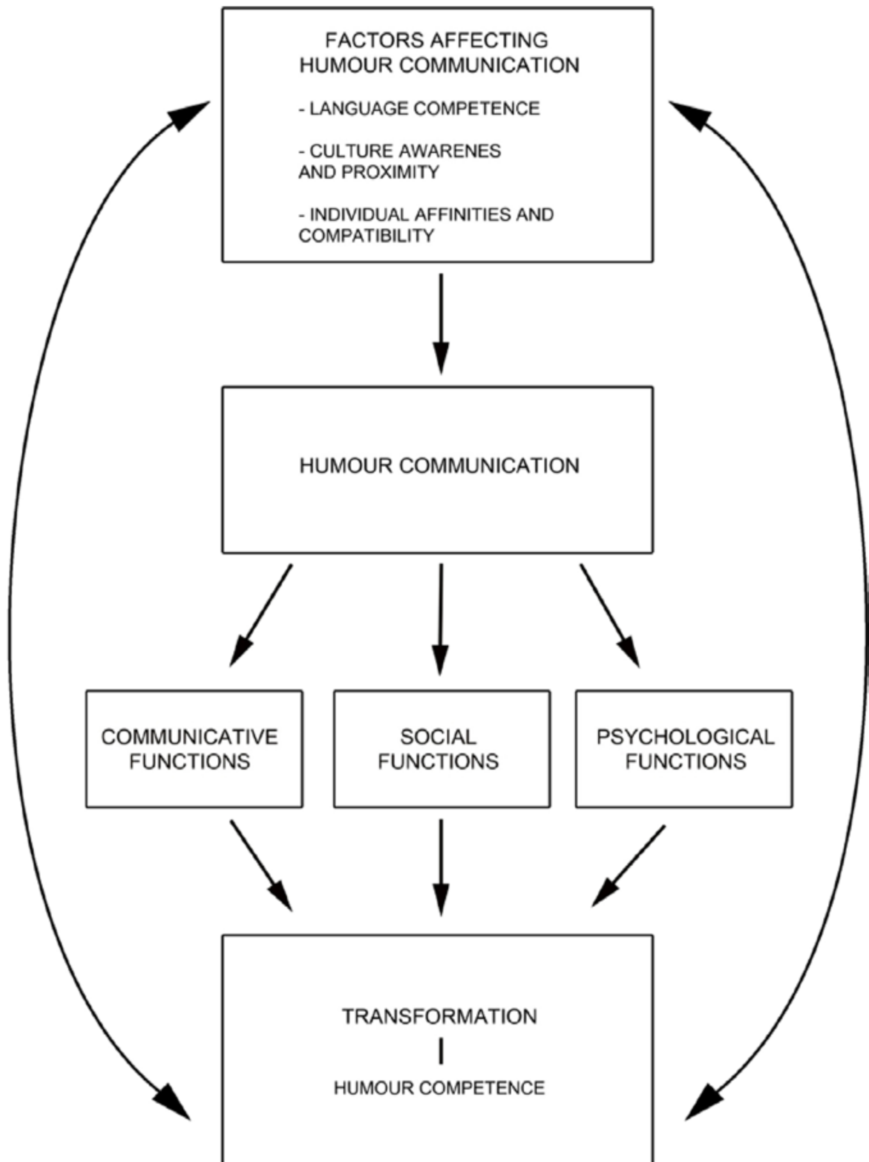

Figure 3.1. The Role of Humor in Intercultural Communication and Its Effects.
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Factors Affecting Humor Communication

Language Competence

Participants' language limitations in connection to humor communication varied depending on their language competence. For example, less fluent participants experienced challenges linked to their shortcomings in vocabulary range, accuracy, or pronunciation. In contrast, fluent participants who considered their humor competence to be reduced in their intercultural interactions put linguistic humor at the core of such imbalance. They focused on their personal difficulties in using comic devices such as wordplay, irony, accents, colloquial idioms, slang, and popular sayings. In addition, limited vocabulary affected their ability to be precise, resulting in the need for more words and explanations, which disrupted the flow of conversation and the timing for effective conversational humor.

In contrast, more fluent participants who assessed their humor competency as similar in both languages tended to minimize the impact of their limitations in humor communication, suggesting that their use of linguistic humor was dictated by the nature of the language they use and not by their own competencies or language limitations. This positive shift toward awareness of linguistic differences rather than a focus on personal limitations can be encouraged in humor competency training. This can be done by practicing or analyzing the use of linguistic humor in the target language, discussing its translatability or comparing it to the use of linguistic humor in learners' first languages.

Cultural Awareness

The findings suggest that *cultural awareness* promotes effective humor communication in two significant ways.

First, it encourages learners to use humor according to the cultural norms and values of the target culture, including communication style and humor tendencies. For instance, due to increased awareness, participants tended to avoid black humor and the use of political topics that they considered as taboo in Irish culture.

Second, cultural awareness increases shared knowledge between learners and their interlocutors, improving their chances of sharing humor of cultural content such as references to national stereotypes or popular culture. In contrast, lack of awareness and the need to use or ask for explanations affected humor effectiveness and spontaneity. Remarkably, participants' attitudes toward these experiences fostered different outcomes. For example, those who focused on limitations and difficulties tended to be more attached to

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interactions with co-ethnics, whereas those who regarded intercultural interactions as an opportunity to share cultural knowledge were more inclined to share their humor in intercultural communications and also learn new cultural knowledge that became part of their humor competence. This suggests that viewing interactions as a learning experience for all interlocutors fosters successful intercultural communication and the development of learners' humor competence. Accordingly, this is an attitude that could be encouraged in learners and integrated into teaching practices by sharing or analyzing humor that relies on cultural elements from the different cultures that come into play in a classroom or teaching context.

In addition, as participants increased their awareness of the target culture, their ability to overcome limitations and suit their humor to their interlocutors also developed; this included switching codes, basing their conversational humor on shared knowledge, adapting cultural humor, and knowing when to let go of cultural humor that would be lost in translation. In the following comments two participants explain that development (all names used in this chapter are pseudonyms):

> You learn to "change the chip," you can joke about things that you share, our experiences are different and I can't transfer that. Topics, characters, references to a specific culture, a specific society, I would need to explain it, so you "change the chip," and it's the same when I go to Spain. (Hugo)

> You learn to adapt humor because sometimes it doesn't translate, it doesn't work if you translate it literally or if you explain it, because of the cultural elements, so you need to change it a bit to keep it funny, but sometimes you just have to let it go. (Diana)

Hugo focuses on his ability to suit the content of his humor to his interlocutors based on shared knowledge and experiences, which bypasses the need for explanations. Likewise, Diana reveals the ability to "let go" of cultural humor that can be lost in translation, but she also reveals the ability to adapt cultural humor and predict its results. Both Diana and Hugo believe that their ability to communicate humor is similar with Spanish and Irish people, which is an indication of both their cultural awareness and their skills to manage humor of cultural content. The findings underscore cultural awareness as a central subject of humor competence training which can help learners develop those skills that can compensate an imbalance between learners' awareness of their home and target cultures. Skills such as code switching or adaptation of cultural humor can be practiced in the classroom so learners can incorporate them to their humor competence and use them more spontaneously in intercultural interactions.

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Cultural Proximity

Cultural proximity entails the degree of similarity or difference between cultures (Ward 2005). The findings regarding cultural proximity between Spanish and Irish culture highlight three main categories: values, attitudes, and behaviors. Cultural affinities in all three categories can lead to mutual understanding between interlocutors which can in turn encourage shared humor. This has a positive impact in cross-cultural adaptation by fostering a sense of empathy and closeness.

In contrast, cultural differences can lead to miscommunication where humor is unappreciated or unintentionally offensive. Such experiences led to adaptive changes in participants' use of humor including their choice of themes and targets or their use of tone, body language, absurd, dry, or black humor. As seen in the previous section, some participants reported the ability to adapt their humor to their interlocutors depending on whether they were Spanish or Irish, but other participants reflected an internalization of Irish humor tendencies, which became evident when they visited Spain and led to feelings of detachment from Spanish culture. Yet, for other participants, an awareness of differences in humor led to feelings of nostalgia and attachment to Spanish culture. In these cases, some participants opted to maintain their original tendencies, such as the use of black or absurd humor, taking the risk of not being perceived as humorous or offending their participants. However, retaining behaviour perceived as unusual in the target culture, can also result in successful humor communication as the following comment indicates:

> Sometimes I know I will make a joke that nobody will get, that it would sound too silly, or un-PC to Irish people but I still make it, and sometimes it works, because it's unexpected. (Cristina)

Cristina is aware that her humor can be unsuccessful or offensive in intercultural interactions in certain contexts, but she chooses to "take the risk" and accept its consequences. This highlights the importance of context and the fine line between humor and offense, which can be blurred by cultural differences. In connection to humor competency training, these findings reinforce the idea that the ability to manage cultural distance and to use and predict the outcome of humor that may not agree with cultural expectations is central to learners' humor competence. Accordingly, teachers should foster their students to reflect on the content and style of their humor, its cultural elements, and transferability to the target language cultures.

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Complicity and Individual Affinities

Participants referred to a sense of "complicity" or mutual understanding that exists between interlocutors and can lead to humor. For some participants, this feeling was more easily triggered in interactions with co-ethnics and linked to a greater tendency to socialize and develop friendships with them. In this context, the asset of a shared cultural background is added to the shared knowledge that comes with friendship and can lead to a more personal and spontaneous humor. On the flip side, lack of close friends inhibits awareness of the target culture and humor at this level of intimate interaction, promoting a superficial perspective of both. This is something that could be discussed by teachers in their classrooms to make students aware of preconceptions based on a superficial perspective of the target culture. At the same time teachers can encourage a deeper perspective by exposing their students to a more intimate humor with teaching resources based in native speakers' interactions, films or literature.

In addition, the findings revealed that a tendency to socialize with co-ethnics and other newcomers can trigger the use of humor based on the target culture and the incongruities triggered by it. Such humor can be a means of releasing tension created by cultural differences, but it can also be linked to poor adaptation by fostering an overcritical perception of the target culture and a focus on cultural differences.

Nonetheless, the data pointed out a development toward a more balanced ethnic humor resulting from cultural awareness of both cultures. The ability to produce such humor, which can be applied in both interactions with co-ethnics and intercultural interactions is another attribute of humor and intercultural competences. This could be cultivated in the classroom by encouraging students to compare cultural elements of both their home and target cultures, which might trigger humor when contrasted. Moreover, comparing differences in norms, behaviour, or values and contemplating their potential for humor might help students make light of such differences, which would also boost their humor and intercultural competences.

A Shift of Focus

Some participants' ability to generalize about their tendencies to share humor and bond with people from a specific cultural background contrast with other participants' tendency to prioritize the role of individual affinities for successful humor communication. This difference in focus was characterized by

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the importance given to shared knowledge and experience, based on individual identities, and rapport rather than on interlocutors' cultural background in terms of their nationality. This shift of focus from cultural proximity to individual affinities revealed an evolution in participants' humor competence, reflecting the ability to balance out cultural differences and account for other factors which are necessary for effective humor communication.

This shift can be interpreted as a sign that participants had overcome limitations imposed by cultural and linguistic differences and that they could value the potential for humor in intercultural interactions depending on each individual humor style. This vision aligns with the intricacy of humor in intercultural communication: in the first place, although individual affinities can derive from cultural proximity, shared humor cannot be triggered by cultural proximity alone (Chiaro 1992). This acknowledgment can help learners make light of the impact that cultural proximity has on humor communication.

Secondly, although the concept of nationality was used in the study as a proxy for cultural background, there are many other factors in play when it comes to cultural proximity between interlocutors, such as cross-cultural experiences, upbringing, education, or social status. All these factors can have an impact on communication and lead to the successful or unsuccessful use of humor in both intercultural interactions and interactions with co-ethnics, as Antonio points out:

> People might or might not get my humor and I might or might not get theirs, but it does not depend on their nationality, I guess it mattered at the beginning, because of the language and things like that but not anymore.

Antonio highlights the relevance of other factors, such as individual affinities regarding humor tendencies. However, he highlights the importance of language competence, and possibly cultural awareness in order to fully appreciate others' humor and express his own. In his case, the development of such competences is linked to a shift of focus. This suggests that although it is important to acknowledge that humor cannot derive from cultural affinities alone, this does not take away from the relevance of cultural awareness as an important element of humor competence that needs to be tackled in humor competence training.

Compatibility

Compatibility between interlocutors' personalities and senses of humor implies that humor communication can be successful even if the interlocutors' senses of humor are different but complement each other in a specific situation. Individual sense of humor is the ultimate component of humor

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communication, and each individual sense of humor has multiple components that determine what triggers humor in an individual (Martin 2018). A comprehensive analysis of this factor was beyond the scope of this study, but the findings showcased the value of learners' abilities to laugh at themselves, cope with being targeted by others' humor, and respond accordingly. This is particularly important in the context of Irish humor due to its reliance on self-deprecation, teasing, or *slagging*. Whereas some participants were fond of these tendencies from the start, others grew fond of them with time and yet others were still coming to terms with them. Regarding humor competency training, this suggests that although compatibility is a component of humor competence which relies on individual senses of humor, learners' familiarity with humor tendencies of the target culture can also contribute to it by fostering appropriate expectations in intercultural interactions.

Humor Miscommunication and Humorous Miscommunication

Any form of communication relates to the delivery of a message and a person's perception of that message (Jackobson 1972). Humor miscommunication implies a failure to elicit amusement, while a humorous miscommunication involves unintended humor in which a message is perceived as humorous or leads to situations that can elicit humor.

According to the findings, miscommunication tended to be caused by language issues and cultural awareness linked to communication style and content. For example, some participants reported that their communication style had been perceived by their interlocutors as offensive or aggressive, which led them to adapt their humor. However, the same style had also been perceived as comical and triggered humor, which encouraged some participants to use this behaviour as a comical device, making it part of their humor competence, as Susana illustrates:

> I have adapted a little but sometimes I am still very direct or abrupt and sometimes I think they like it, it amuses them!

Susana acknowledges a transformation in her communicative style due to prolonged contact with Irish culture. However, experience of triggering humor by surprising her interlocutors encouraged that behaviour occasionally. Her comment reinforces the idea that cultural distance can trigger humor intentionally becoming an asset of humor competence.

Regarding miscommunication rooted in content, the findings pointed at themes such as politics, taboos such as sex, and targets of humor as the main triggers of unintended reactions. Whatever the reason, participants were aware that humor miscommunication can escalate easily if interlocutors

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perceive that their humor is not welcomed or that they are being laughed at or not taken seriously, possibilities which need to be focal points of humor competency training.

Moreover, according to the data, the impact that humor miscommunication has on intercultural interactions relies significantly on the reaction of the interlocutors, which are influenced by factors such as personality, context, and cultural tendencies. For example, the data pointed to two main tendencies in Irish people's behaviour: avoiding confrontation and tolerating uncertainty. These tendencies hindered participants' perception of misunderstandings, as their realization relied on reading cues such as facial expressions or a change of topic. Hence, familiarity with cultural differences can foster awareness of misunderstandings and adequate responses as Pedro's comment illustrates:

> Sometimes you can notice on their faces, or they change the subject, or there is an uncomfortable silence . . . and you say, oh, oh, something went wrong . . . yes, it has definitely happened to me, but I can't remember anything specific . . . Irish people are like that, they don't ask for explanations, they change the topic quickly, oh, oh, and it is just the way they are.

Pedro explains different ways of picking up misunderstandings, which according to him, are usually resolved by changing the topic of conversation. The effect of Irish people's ability to tolerate uncertainty combined with their tendency to avoid confrontation can become apparent in their reactions. In this context, the importance of reading cues such as facial expressions or a change of topic becomes essential to perceive misunderstandings, which may otherwise pass by unnoticed. Familiarity with these cultural differences fostered participants' perceptions of misunderstandings and adequate responses that agreed with their interlocutors' behaviour. For example, participants tended to make no explicit notice of misunderstandings and avoided asking for clarifications which might make their interlocutors even more uncomfortable.

Likewise, some participants reported a change in their reactions to offensive humor and a tendency to avoid direct confrontation. Due to their awareness of cultural differences, they tended to express negative comments in a more indirect style such as using sarcasm, which they felt was welcomed by their Irish interlocutors. Concerning humor competence, these remarks highlight the importance of familiarity with cultural values and norms such as tolerance for confrontation, directness, conflict, or personal space in order to learn to communicate humor appropriately.

In the long term, humor miscommunication triggered two main emotions in participants: frustration and acceptance. Participants who experienced frustration tended to focus on their personal limitations and inability to express their humor. In contrast, acceptance reflected a positive attitude linked to two

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notions: that miscommunication is part of the learning processes involved in cross-cultural adaptation and that miscommunication is also a normal element of any interaction, including interactions with co-ethnics. These ideas could be used by teachers in humor competence training to help learners deal with their frustrations and encourage a positive attitude.

The Role of Humor in Intercultural Communication: Communicative, Social, and Psychological Effects

The findings highlight a close interrelation between the communicative, social, and psychological effects triggered by humor in intercultural interactions. The following sections discuss the different ways in which humor influences communication, social integration, and psychological well-being and how these experiences can inform humor competency training from an intercultural perspective that showcases humor as a powerful intercultural tool.

Communicative and Social Functions of Humor

The findings highlighted different ways in which humor aids intercultural communication. To start with, humor can create a good atmosphere, "break the ice," and facilitate first encounters by giving signals of acceptance and making participants feel welcomed and liked. In this context, humor contributes to learners' enjoyment of intercultural interactions, fosters engagement in conversations, and encourages further interaction. Secondly, humor can help learners overcome limitations in their communication skills by allowing them to project a positive or fun image and ease tensions brought up by miscommunication. Finally, humor allows criticism, without offending other interlocutors or causing them to lose face (Norrick 1993). This function makes humor a valuable intercultural tool which allows directness that can otherwise create tension when learners interact in the target language.

In addition, effective use of humor promotes social integration by highlighting similarities and facilitating bonding. In contrast, humor miscommunication has a negative impact by highlighting differences among interlocutors (Mulkay 1998), which can be linked to cultural distance and detachment from the target culture. Humor miscommunication can create or add to existing tension, creating awkward situations in which interlocutors lose face, if they fail to transmit or understand humor or offend each other unintentionally. The reoccurrence of such experiences can lead interlocutors to withdraw from intercultural interactions in favor of interactions with co-ethnics and further their attachment to their first language and culture, thereby hindering their integration into the target society. Awareness of these effects can be very useful for language teachers. On one hand, it might help the teacher to

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manage these dynamics as they take place during class. On the other hand, it can be valuable to prepare students for future cross-cultural experiences or intercultural interactions in the target language.

Psychological Functions of Humor

Humor can affect a person's mental and emotional state by triggering emotions such as joy, amusement, embarrassment, or irritation (Martin 2018). In the case of cross-cultural adaptation, the findings suggest that humor fosters a positive outlook that can promote well-being and that humor can be used as a defence mechanism to face, overcome, and compensate for the difficulties of cross-cultural adaptation. In this context, humor can trigger encouragement and foster adaptation. For example, the ability to laugh at misunderstandings caused by language limitations or cultural differences can not only minimize their negative effects but also foster learning and promote language competence and cultural awareness. Diana, a participant of this study, recalls a humorous anecdote about a stressful experience which took place when she arrived in Ireland for the first time:

> I got on the bus and I could not understand the bus driver, then I started to see signs in Gaelic, and I panicked as I thought "I don't believe it, they speak Irish instead of English." When I got off the bus and met my Spanish contact here, and I told her, she told me that it was the Irish accent, and we started laughing, I was kind of relief.

Diana's ability to laugh at the incongruity of her experience triggered immediate relief when it was disclosed, leading to a positive attitude toward the challenge of becoming accustomed to Irish accent.

Another participant, Oscar, gives an example of a humorous anecdote caused by a pronunciation mistake, due to L1 interference:

> I was going around Dublin looking for work, and I was saying "I am looking for a yob," and in one supermarket, the guy took me to the dairy department [laughs], to show me a Yop [yogurt drink brand]; it was quite funny.

Oscar was able to see the funny side of this incident at the time and suggests that being able to laugh at misunderstandings is "a healthy way of coping with shortcomings." These examples highlight the role of humor as a tool for releasing tension, and saving face (Adelsward and Oberg 1998), and reflect a positive attitude toward learning. These outcomes emphasize the

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value of seeing the funny side of linguistic and cultural mismatches, which can be cultivated in the classroom.

In addition, effective use of humor in intercultural interactions can contribute to a positive self-perception and the feeling of adequacy, which can be very motivating for learners. In contrast, the experience of being offended by humor or the inability to share humor can trigger frustration, discontentment, and discouragement toward cross-cultural adaptation. Such consequences underscore the overall significance of humor competence training in order to prepare learners for cross-cultural encounters.

Cross-Cultural Adaptation and the Development of Humor Competence

Cross-cultural adaptation is a dynamic process in which newcomers go through a series of adaptive changes that affect their ability to communicate effectively with people from the new culture, known as intercultural competence (Kim 2001). The findings identified humor competence as an essential component of intercultural competence and revealed that humor competence is part of this dynamic process, which makes it a factor that allows its continuous development.

The development of participants' humor competence was reflected in their tendencies to adapt their humor in intercultural interactions, which were also influenced by adaptive changes in the major factors affecting the quality of humor communication in intercultural interactions (figure 3.2). In the first place, a development of learners' language competence can not only improve their ability to use humor effectively but also foster a sense of attachment to the target language linked to a spontaneous and gratifying use of humor. Secondly, an improvement in their cultural awareness influences their individual affinities with other interlocutors, improving the likelihood of shared humor. In addition, participants' proximity to the target culture influenced their own use of humor and their expectations of others' humor preventing it from being offensive. Hence, some participants intentionally adapted the style and content of their humor whereas others had internalized certain aspects of their target culture, which resulted in a spontaneous use of humor. In any case, familiarity with humor tendencies provides learners with more accurate expectations and interpretations of humor in the target culture, making them more compatible with it.

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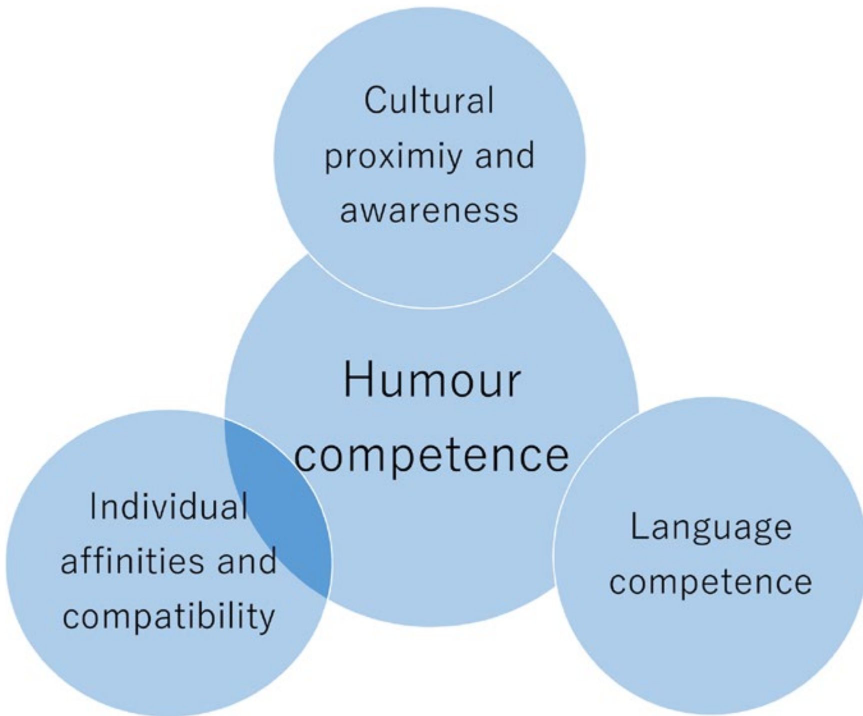

Figure 3.2. Factors Affecting Humor Communication. Created by the author.

As figure 3.2 illustrates, humor competence entails a combination of skills which are part of the major factors affecting humor communication in intercultural interactions. However, humor competence is characterized by other skills that complement these factors and minimize their limitations. These include the ability to switch codes, focus on individual affinities, and use humor as a communicative tool that smooths intercultural interactions and can reverse the negative effects of miscommunication.

Overall, as part of a dynamic process, the development of humor competence improves the quality of humor communication in learners' intercultural interactions, increasing their chances to share humor in a spontaneous and satisfying way. In turn, this type of interaction influences and reflects learners' adaptation to their target culture and integration in their new society, revealing the way they relate to its members, which makes humor competence a descriptor of cross-cultural adaptation. This dynamic process is based on the interrelation between humor competence, humor communication, and cross-cultural adaptation as illustrated in figure 3.3.

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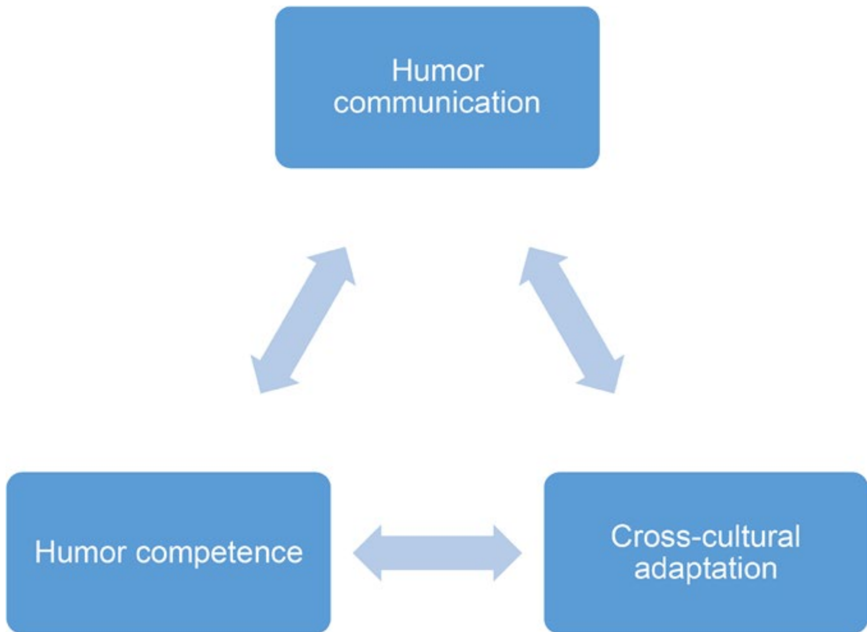

Figure 3.3. The Interrelation between Cross-Cultural Adaptation, Humor Communication, and Humor Competence. Created by the author.

This section has examined the development of humor competence in cross-cultural adaptation based on the data of the study. The next section will discuss the three theories presented in the section *Background to the Study* in order to shed further light on the findings and make connections with L2 learning.

LINKING THE DATA TO EXISTING THEORY

The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model

The findings and grounded theory model concur with Kim's (1988, 2005) model of cross-cultural adaptation in presenting it as a complex dynamic process where stress/adaptation experiences bring about change and growth (Kim 1988). Analysis showed that participants' difficulties in communicating within the new environment lead to a defensive reaction or drawback followed by an adaptive response that brought an adaptive change. For example, participants' lack of humor competency led to stressful situations triggered by misunderstandings, causing adaptive changes. However, the findings highlight the impact of newcomers' evaluation of the source of that stress in order

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to activate an adaptive change, depending on different factors such as whether they view it as a necessity or an option. Although newcomers' expectations may undergo an adaptation, they may choose to retain their original behavior as part of their humor competence. Nevertheless, these circumstances may result in growth characterized by an increased ease with the environment, their cultural origin, and their transformation.

In contrast, newcomers' adaptation of their behavior may not result in such growth if they feel frustrated or resentful toward the environment that induced such a change, their cultural origins, or their own transformation. These findings highlight the fact that the tension created by acculturation and deculturation may not necessarily lead to assimilation. Although assimilation may be logical in terms of a model, analysis of the data shows that not everyone will want to assimilate, and that the conscious choice not to assimilate may also lead to growth, whereas assimilation may not.

Accordingly, teachers dealing with humor competency training need to consider these possibilities and focus on enabling their students to both function in intercultural interactions and be comfortable with whatever adaptive changes they may or may not choose to undertake. As the findings suggest, traits associated to the culture of origin such as tone and humor trends may not need to be repressed and can be used successfully in order to trigger humor. In these cases, it would be a good idea to focus on learners' ability to predict the outcome of their humor.

Theories on Verbally Transmitted Humor

In relation to Raskin's theory (1985) and Chiaro's (1992) model, the findings highlight the importance of language competence and cultural awareness in learners' development of humor competence, which has an impact on their recognition and production of all types of scripts, but particularly those based on linguistic or sociocultural knowledge attached to their target culture and society. In addition, the findings confirm that sociocultural knowledge encourages culturally appropriate use of humor, helping learners to identify suitable contexts for humor and appropriate content to fit those contexts.

Finally, the grounded theory model highlights the interrelation between these factors and a person's recognition of *individual scripts* or *poetic competence* triggered by individual affinities. The findings suggest that disparity between interlocutors in each of these competences can lead to humor miscommunication and misunderstandings. Moreover, learners and their interlocutors can point to either competence as the major culprit of miscommunication. For example, they can blame their lack of language competence or sociocultural skills instead of their individual scripts in order to save face.

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On the flip side, the realization of a lack of linguistic, cultural, or poetic competences can cause feelings of inadequacy and frustration, affecting future intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adaptation. This points at the singularity of humor competence in language learners, which is discussed in further detail in the following section.

Humor and Second Language Learning

In relation to Vega's theory, the findings call attention to factors which are characteristic of non-native speakers such as their attachment to their first language or culture of origin. In this context, Vega's (1990) theory points to other factors as part of learners' humor competence, such as the significance of strategic competence, which can help them to overcome their lack of linguistic or cultural knowledge, and the use of humor as a communication strategy; a two-way relationship confirmed by the findings.

In addition, the notion of "capacity" as *the ability to use language creatively in actual communication* (Vega 1990, 14) involves personality and intelligence, and in the case of *humor capacity*, a sense of humor. This is linked to the findings regarding learners' individual affinities and the importance of individual humor preferences or compatibility with others' humor styles. In relation to humor competency training, this suggests that examining which individual affinities may trigger humor in different contexts would help learners to use humor in a more effective way.

Contributions to Knowledge

Scholars examining humor in L2 learning have emphasized the lack of scholarship regarding L2 humor pedagogy (Bell 2005; Wulf 2010; Johnson 1990; Vega 1990), an area of research which has received increased attention since Vega's (1990) study introduced the notion of humor competence in L2 and highlighted the need for a better understanding of this concept. The findings behind this chapter contribute to such understanding from an intercultural perspective by examining humor competence in intercultural interactions. Such analysis provides insight into the linguistic, cultural, and individual components of humor competence and the impact of intercultural interactions in its development. It pinpoints variables which may influence humor competence, such as newcomers' attachment to their mother tongue, their perception of the target culture or the nature and context of their interpersonal interactions.

Moreover, the findings contribute to a better understanding of humor as an intercultural and pedagogical tool considering its communicative, social, and psychological effects. For instance, they show how individual and cultural similarities and differences can lead humor to facilitate or disrupt communi-

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cation, promote bonding or feelings of exclusion, or lead to either frustration or satisfaction.

Also, within the area of L2 research, empirical studies have examined interactions between native and non-native speakers to study the communicative functions of humor such as those linked to the use of affiliative and aggressive humor. For example, Habib (2008) concludes that the use of humor in cross-cultural conversations contributes to cultural learning and that relational identities are displayed and asserted through humor, and both Bell (2008) and Habib (2008) highlight the collaborative nature of humor communication and their participants' tendencies to "accommodate" and call for further empirical studies of the use of humor in intercultural contexts.

Bell (2007) more specifically calls attention to the role of first language and culture as a limitation of her study, highlighting the need for further research regarding the impact of perceived differences attached to the first language and culture in intercultural interactions. In this context, the findings have contributed to a better understanding of the communicative functions of humor by considering such differences. For example, the study shows the relevance of cross-cultural differences regarding humor tendencies attached to Spanish and Irish culture and the appropriateness of certain subjects or contexts for humor use.

In addition, the study considers the social and psychological effects triggered by humor communication and miscommunication. For instance, it highlights the significance of participants' experience of accommodation as a communication strategy regarding humor use, suggesting that such experience can have a positive impact in intercultural communication but can also signal the "reduced personality" (Bell 2006) involved in such collaborative use of humor by which non-native speakers are positioned as limited conversational participants, which can have a negative impact in cross-cultural adaptation.

Finally, whereas studies of L2 learning point at humor competence as an indicator of fluency, the findings identify it as an indicator of intercultural competence and adjustment. Indeed, other studies on cross-cultural adaptation have considered humor to be a predictor or indicator of adjustment and as a coping mechanism (Tuna 2003; Savicky 2004; Pitts 2009). The qualitative nature of this research brings insight to these findings by examining the alienation and frustration experienced by newcomers when humor passes them by, the satisfaction and closeness triggered by effective humor communication and the release of tension linked to it. Such consequences showcase the importance of humor competency training within L2 learning.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

Within the field of L2 learning, teachers' awareness of the intricacy of humor communication and the difficulties faced by non-native speakers in interactions outside the classroom can help them support students in developing their humor competence as part of their intercultural competence. Based on the findings, these are some facets of humor competence that can be encouraged in the classroom:

- Awareness of the universal, cultural, and linguistic aspects of humor, as well as the weight of individual affinities in effective humor communication.
- Knowledge of explicit cultural differences based on values, norms, and behaviors, not only in general but also specific to humor communication, such as sensitive topics, common targets of humor or tone.
- Understanding of the nature of humor miscommunication, which can stem from both communication style and content.
- Knowledge and experience of useful skills and strategies to overcome the difficulties involved in humor communication, such as the ability to *switch codes* and base humor on shared knowledge.
- Ability to play down cultural faux pas and mistakes and appreciate their potential for humor.
- Awareness of the impact that attitudes toward humor miscommunication can have in both cross-cultural adaptation and the process of learning a language.
- Ability to tackle cultural differences in intercultural interactions as an opportunity for learning and sharing knowledge.
- Expertise to predict the outcome of humor and assess its potential to offend or trigger humor based on cultural awareness and context.

There is no doubt that humor can be a risky subject, but its occurrence and impact in intercultural communication make it impossible to avoid. Awareness of all the facets involved in its communication and the different factors that make humor work would help teachers focus on the knowledge and tools that can improve learners' humor competence.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Considering the limited generalizability of the findings which are relevant to the specific participants of the study, research with different groups of mi-

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grants or sojourners, bearing in mind the role of the first language and target culture, could contribute to a better understanding of the role of humor in intercultural communication and cross-cultural adaptation. Moreover, future research could follow up on other issues highlighted by the findings, such as the significance of cross-cultural differences regarding humor targets, intricacy, or taboos, and their development in cross-cultural adaptation.

Furthermore, follow-up studies with a greater focus on humor competency training could be connected to existing research of cross-cultural adaptation by observing students in cross-cultural settings and focusing on the development of their humor competence inside and outside the classroom. In this context, a longitudinal study may provide further insights into the evolution of humor in the course of cross-cultural adaptation, and the development of humor competence, intercultural competence, and intercultural identity.

Incidentally, considering that participants tended to be open about serious issues during the interviews, another fruitful area to consider is humor as a research tool. Such potential can be linked not only to the perception of humor as a lightweight topic but also to the significance of humor in the societal and individual elements of cross-cultural adaptation. Davies (2017) has described jokes as a thermometer of society which provides insights into it. I would like to describe humor as a thermometer of cross-cultural adaptation that can reveal insights into such a process. This interdisciplinary line of research will provide a better understanding of these insights, contributing to all intercultural, humor, and L2 studies.

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Part II

INTEGRATED HUMOR INSTRUCTION

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Chapter 4

Humor-Integrated Language Learning (HILL)

Teaching with and about Humor

Mohammad Ali Heidari-Shahreza

A couple of years ago, I was teaching an English course to a group of first-year university students in Iran. For different reasons, many students were not very interested in the course; their high school English learning experience, other academic tasks they had to do, and the fact that they were obliged to take this course, among other things, had made them resentful and unmotivated. What could I do to enliven my class? I tried different techniques with no notable success before I resorted to the last card up my sleeve. As I was doing research on humor at that time, I thought (and hoped) adding humor to the class could make a difference; and it did, indeed!

Integrating language and humor seemed to have significant pedagogical potential. The "fun" element in language activities notably contributed to the physical and mental presence of my students in the class. That is, they were more willing to attend the class and get engaged in learning activities. At the end of the course, based on the final test results and class evaluations, the course was a real success (see Heidari-Shahreza and Heydari 2019 for teacher and student perspectives on that course).

My experience in this class, well-supported by the literature on pedagogical humor, triggered me to develop what I term "humor-integrated language learning" (HILL) as a potentially effective approach to language teaching. I was fortunate to continue with almost the same students in their next course, an English for Academic Purposes course because I came to realize that HILL could have much more potential than I had previously thought; I noticed my students sometimes initiated humor in the class or continued my humor over the next sessions (i.e., the idea of "extended humor," see Heidari-Shahreza 2018a). Humor was slowly entering their talk-in-interaction. They seemed more familiar and comfortable with English humor.

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What did this mean? It implied that in addition to teaching *with* humor for the sake of language learning, HILL also had the potential to teach *about* humor. However, was developing second language (L2) humor competence necessary or even important? I recalled what Hall (1973), an anthropologist, once said about humor long ago: "if you can learn the humor of a people and really control it you know that you are also in control of nearly everything else" (52).

In this chapter, in light of the relevant humor scholarship (e.g., Bell 2009a, 2011; Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez, and Liu 2011; Bell and Pomerantz 2016) and building upon my previous research (e.g., Heidari-Shahreza 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Heidari-Shahreza and Heydari 2019), I elaborate on HILL as an approach to both language education and humor competency training. Although it is not a fully-fledged approach that has been empirically tested yet, I lay out the major components and features of such an approach. Outlining key aspects of HILL for humor competency training, I elucidate how L2 humor can be incorporated into the instructional cycle of a language class. As some chapters in this volume focus on more explicit humor competency training, I also argue for HILL as a practical framework within which language teachers can teach *with* and *about* humor at the same time. Through several examples, I touch upon how this approach can be implemented in class. I also address how it fits in major language teaching paradigms such as communicative language teaching, while ensuring learners' development of L2 humor competence. Finally, I turn to recommendations for teaching through HILL and potentially fruitful areas of research on humor and language integration.

HUMOR AND LANGUAGE INTEGRATION: TOWARD HILL

Perhaps a basic but fundamental question, to be addressed before anything else, is whether or not humor and language can be integrated. In other words, are they theoretically and practically compatible with each other? We may look at this question from two perspectives: From the perspective of humor or that of language. Since this book is primarily a volume on humor not language and linguistics, I will prioritize the humor aspect of HILL over its language counterpart. This order of treatment has an advantage, too; readers will already be familiar with the essential ins and outs of humor, especially the technical nomenclature, before I turn to integrating humor competency training into language education curricula.

From the standpoint of humor scholarship, language, more often than not, plays a major role in the realization of humor (see Ahn 2016). That is probably why an important type/genre of humor is labeled as "verbal" humor, humor which is manifested through its specific use of language (Heidari-Shahreza

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2018a). Attardo's general theory of verbal humor, as the most-accredited (linguistic) theory of humor, also highlights the central role of language in creation of humor (see Attardo 1994; Attardo and Raskin 1991). The theory identifies six knowledge resources (KRs) that work together to shape a piece of written or spoken discourse as humorous: 1. script opposition; 2. logical mechanism; 3. target; 4. situation; 5. language; and 6. narrative strategy. Although Attardo's general theory of verbal humor mainly pivots on script opposition as the essential component which renders laughter by juxtaposing two incongruous mental interpretations, language (i.e., how concepts are verbalized) is usually at work to bring about this incongruity. Puns are common examples of such language-based humor (see also Lucas 2005).

The connection between humor and language can also be viewed from the vantage point of linguistic creativity or what has come to be known as "language play" in the relevant literature (Ahn 2016; Cook 2000; Forman 2011). Language play refers to the creative manipulation of linguistic elements and features to induce laughter or rather to create humor (Bell 2011; Heidari-Shahreza 2018b). Funny neologisms, syntactic parallelisms, or puns can be considered as examples of language play. While humor and language play do not totally overlap, there is much affinity between the two especially if we think of verbal humor (see Forman 2011 and Heidari-Shahreza 2018a for more information on this relationship).

In addition to and aside from the conceptual/theoretical ties between humor and language, these two have been practically bound together. The relevant scholarship suggests that comedy, for instance, has historically enjoyed the interplay of both humor and language (see Heidari-Shahreza 2017 for a linguistic account of stand-up comedy and Norrick 1993 for humor in everyday talk). Jokes, funny stories, and funny comments as commonplace examples of humor in educational contexts also hinge on language-based humor tropes to a great extent (Bryant, Comisky, and Zillmann 1979; Martin 2007; Petraki and Nguyen 2016). In sum, "tongueless" humor is usually a "helpless" one! Humor and language seem not only compatible with each other but also complementary. Thus, the integration of humor and language as the underlying assumption of HILL can be well-justified. Having had a quick look at humor and language relationship, in the next section, I lay out the "nuts and bolts" of HILL.

HILL: MAJOR COMPONENTS AND FEATURES

HILL rests upon two key components: Humor competence and language competence. The former is mainly concerned with enhancing learners'

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knowledge of humor or humor competency training, while the latter is basically aimed at developing learners' language proficiency. In other words, the humor component constitutes that part of HILL which is responsible for teaching about humor. The language component, in contrast, refers to teaching with humor. That is, how teachers (and students) may benefit from humor in language class. As said earlier, HILL is a research-informed attempt to improve both learners' humor competence and L2 knowledge simultaneously.

It is worth noting that the idea of teaching with humor is not new. Apart from historical or anecdotal evidence of such an idea (that one may find in different educational contexts), humor scholarship includes studies dating back to 1960s and 1970s addressing the pedagogical role of humor (see e.g., Bradford 1964; Linfield 1977). Thus, at least more than half a century of scientific research informs *pedagogical humor*. The notion of humor (sometimes under the name of language play) has also entered language education and seriously been discussed for at least twenty years or so (see Cook 1997 as a pioneering work).

Teaching about humor to the effect that teachers would have a better sense of humor in educational contexts (or to be more "humor literate," so to speak) is also not new in the literature (e.g., Bryant et al. 1979; Welker 1977). Likewise, L2 humor scholarship has more notably addressed increasing learners' humor comprehension and awareness in recent years (e.g., Ahn 2016; Bell 2009; Lucas 2005; Moalla 2015). Bell and Pomerantz (2016), two pioneers of L2 humor research, have even taken a step forward to put teaching with (and about) humor within a more methodological perspective by advocating "backward design"; an instructional blueprint that I will turn to later (see also Wulf 2010). So, what does HILL have to offer? What is the gap to be hopefully filled?

HILL strives to put forth a practical framework to achieve the dual goal of teaching with and about humor. Its contribution initially lies in bringing humor (competency training) into the limelight. Secondly and more importantly, HILL, to my knowledge, is among the few attempts to systematically operationalize humor-language integration. Simply put, the idea that humor and language may benefit from each other or that a successful (L2) communicator needs to have knowledge of both has been discussed in the research for a good number of years. Yet, what exactly should be taught and how humor and language should be integrated are important questions that are not seriously taken into account. HILL intends to answer the "what" and "how" questions by offering a practical way to teach with and about humor.

It must be admitted, however, HILL in theory, practice as well as research has a long way to go. Thus, what is offered in this chapter is a sketch of what we may hear of more in the future. I endeavor, of course, to lay out

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HILL based on the most reliable guidelines available in humor scholarship. Also, my previous research and experience in teaching with and about humor would hopefully aid me in seeing HILL's possibilities and challenges better. In the next section, I discuss the humor component of HILL in detail.

Humor Component: Teaching about Humor

What constitutes (L2) humor competence? Or rather, what should we teach about humor? The question of what to teach may seem straightforward at first glance. It, however, turns into a hard one, once we consider the intricacy, variety, and situatedness involved in humor comprehension and production. HILL, notwithstanding, entails a clear answer to this question. Otherwise, we cannot approach humor and language integration in any practical way. In light of multidisciplinary scholarship on humor, here, I put forward a taxonomy for humor competency training as a component of HILL (see figure 4.1).

Broadly speaking and based on the related literature (e.g., Bell and Pomerantz 2016; Wagner and Urios-Aparisi 2011; Wulf 2010), humor competence may include four broad facets: 1. identification; 2. comprehension; 3. responding; and 4. production. In other words, to be considered as "humorally" competent communicators, language learners should be able to initially recognize the play frame and notice the humor that has just been realized (or is being cast). They then need to understand the humor; what has been intended to be laughable. In addition, they should know how to respond to humor appropriately. Finally, they are expected to go beyond being only the receiver of humor and ideally be able to create successful instances of L2 humor.

It is worth noting that "appreciation" in the sense of enjoying and finding humor funny and appropriate can also be an aspect of humor competence (training), as is described in the introduction of this volume. As further explanation, one may, for instance, fully comprehend a celebrity joke, but she does not feel like laughing at her own favorite singer. While appreciation is not treated as an isolated component here, it is indirectly considered in the discussion of humor comprehension and responding. In the following lines, touching upon their main elements and features, I address the four aspects of humor competency training.

Identification (or Detection/Recognition)

Normally, the person who intends to create humor does not directly inform his audience that "I will say something funny. Get ready to laugh!" Even when the audience is waiting for humor as in the situation where a stand-up comedian is performing, an attempt is made to get a natural laugh from the audience not one encouraged. If humor is not generally self-revealing, how

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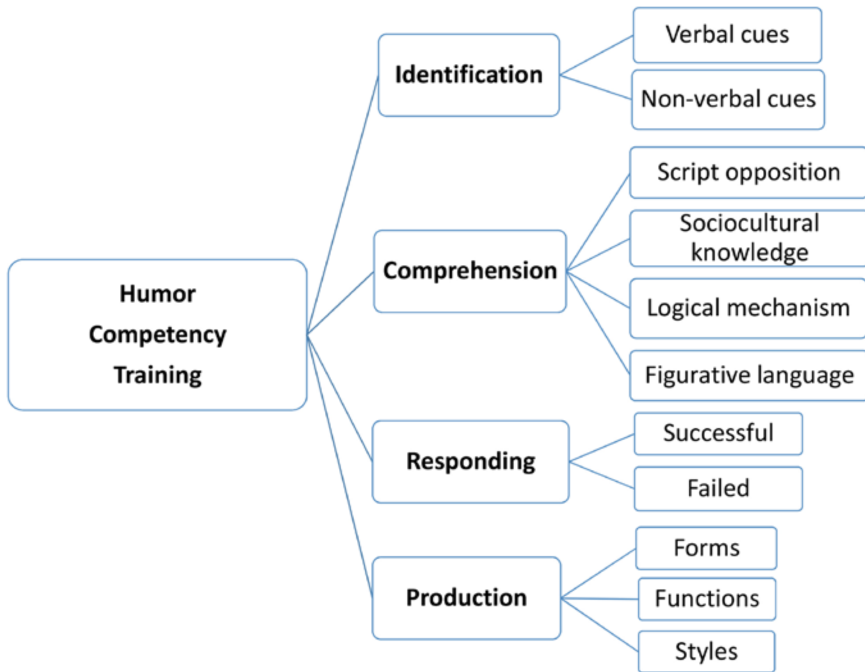

Figure 4.1. Main elements of humor competency training. Created by the author.

can a language learner detect humor in a second language and culture? The answer is "contextual" (or "contextualization") cues. Humor is almost always accompanied by some contextual cues. Laughter (perhaps the most common one), marked word order or prosody and, of course, facial expressions are examples of contextual features of communication which may signal the occurrence of humor (Hay 2001; Shively 2013). To better cluster these cues, I divide them into "verbal" (or "linguistic") cues such as word order and prosody and "non-verbal" cues such as laughter and facial expressions.

It should be noted that for humor to be detected, usually different forces come to play a role. For instance, in addition to verbal and non-verbal cues (that generally co-occur), interlocutors' expectations are pivotal. That is, what audience presume and prospect in a given context can affect if and how the play frame is recognized. Thus, a blank face (i.e., no salient cue) can effectively signal humor if interlocutors expect a humorous discourse (see Bell 2011; also Prichard and Rucynski in this volume). Successful identification of humor depends on various factors such as the contextual cues, interlocutors' expectations and intentions, their shared sociocultural knowledge, etc. Although it is not an easy job, HILL activities, as we will see later, have the potential to hone learners' humor recognition to decode a blank face.

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Comprehension

Having initially detected humor (as a prerequisite), how do we comprehend humor? It is a very interesting question. However, the question we need to answer in order to develop learners' humor competence is what do learners need to comprehend humor? To give a practical answer, an answer that simplifies not mystifies a concept further is needed, I regard humor comprehension as entailing the combined effects of four mental resources: 1. script opposition; 2. sociocultural knowledge; 3. logical mechanism; and 4. figurative language. This classification is mainly based on Attardo's general theory of verbal humor (mentioned earlier) and Wulf's conceptualization of humor competence (Wulf 2010). It posits that to successfully comprehend humor we should be able to marshal the "opposite" scripts, the concurrent but incompatible interpretations that lead to some mental incongruity. To fully grasp humor, especially "cultural" humor, we also need to be familiar with the social context and culture in which humor is cast. Moreover, we should be aware of how concepts are logically presented (e.g., "false analogy") and verbalized (e.g. "exaggeration") to create or heighten the intended humor (see Attardo 1994; and Attardo and Raskin 1991 for more information on linguistic and logical humor tropes). Space limitations do not allow me to further elaborate on this classification. However, this way of conceptualizing humor comprehension seems to serve HILL best, and it is favored by other humor scholars (e.g., Bell and Pomerantz 2016).

Responding

The third aspect of humor competency training is responding. It is mainly concerned with enabling learners to respond appropriately to humor. Although the extant literature on humor seems more concerned with the production and comprehension of humor rather than responding to it, this is by no means less important, particularly in the context of intercultural communication (see Bell 2006; Davies 2015). Logically speaking, we may base this dimension of humor competence on two conditions: 1. when a piece of discourse is successful to create its intended humorous effect on hearer(s) (i.e., "successful" humor) or 2. when it fails to do so (i.e., "failed" humor). Unfortunately, the humor scholarship has largely ignored these two, especially the latter (Bell 2009b). Nonetheless, I believe teaching learners on this matter chiefly involves a focus on agreement strategies in case of successful humor (see also Hay 2001) and teaching politeness strategies when humor fails (see Bell 2009b and Moalla 2015). I am not going to deal with these strategies here as it certainly goes beyond the scope and the space limits of

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this chapter. Yet, I will touch upon such strategies later when I set examples for humor-integrated language activities.

Production

The last, but definitely not least important stage of humor competence is humor production. Within the purview of humor competency training, perhaps, it should be addressed when language learners already have a basic understanding of humor identification, comprehension, and responding. As you will see later in HILL examples, this, however, does not mean we should postpone humor production to an advanced stage; HILL activities may incorporate all facets of humor competence at the same time. It is only to emphasize that, as with productive language skills (i.e., speaking and writing), humor production may naturally appear later or rather learners may need more time to feel ready to initiate L2 humor.

However, pedagogically speaking, what should we focus on in teaching humor production? Certainly, a myriad of factors come to play a role. Nevertheless, if we ignore the ones already tapped by the previous humor facets, humor "forms," "functions," and "styles" seem to stand out.

Humor forms (or "types") refer to the textual format and structure of humor instances (see also Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, and Smith 2006). The literature suggests that jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, and funny comments are among common humor forms in educational contexts (Heidari-Shahreza 2018a; Petraki and Nguyen 2016). Humor functions point to why someone instigates a piece of humor or what humor does. Considering the social nature of humor, functionally, we may assume two major types of humor: "Positive" or "pro-social" humor; humor that is intended to create or strengthen interpersonal bonds and "negative" or "anti-social" humor; the one that carries a critical, corrective overtone and is aimed at some social deficit (see also Wagner and Urios-Aparisi 2011). Humor styles, the third stratum of humor production, is concerned with the individualistic preferences in producing humor. The psychological thread of humor scholarship has identified four major humor styles (see e.g., Martin et al. 2003): 1. affiliative; 2. self-enhancing (positive styles); 3. aggressive; and 4. self-defeating (negative styles). These styles which take into account the target of humor (i.e., oneself or others) and the intent of its creator match the pro- and anti-social functions of humor I outlined above.

Teaching humor production along these three dimensions (i.e., forms, functions, and styles), among other things, means to a. familiarize language learners with different forms of humor and invite them to try out these forms, b. enhance learners' awareness of the social functions of humor and how to convey and respond to them, and c. recognize and acknowledge individual

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differences in making humor and increase their self-awareness with respect to humor styles (see also Bell, Skalicky, and Salsbury 2014). In the next section, I address the language component of HILL. Then, we will see, through several examples, how different aspects of humor competence training as outlined above may be incorporated into instructional cycles of language learning to serve the dual purpose of HILL.

Language Component: Teaching with Humor

In this section, I intend to shed light on the path through which we can design humor-integrated language activities; this includes practical steps to teach with humor in the language class. In so doing, I base my argument on a slightly modified version of the "backward design" Bell and Pomerantz (2016) suggest and was originally developed by Wiggins and McTighe (2005). It begins from the end in planning for instruction. That is, what we get at the end of the day is what is to be determined first. This rather outcome-oriented, functional design, secondly, emphasizes that there should be indexes to discern how close we have got to the desired instructional goals. It, then, takes into account the actual instruction by evaluating the choices available in a given educational context to reach the already-determined objectives. Bell and Pomerantz (2016) advocate backward design as an appropriate framework to teach with humor. They see humor as one of the options on the table which should be considered when planning the instruction itself. In other words, humor and language integration becomes part of the picture after the pedagogical outcomes are determined and respective evidence of attainment is identified. HILL adheres to backward design, as outlined above, to teach with and about humor. In the following, I elaborate more on the three phases of this instructional design, while saving space for examples of HILL activities (see figure 4.2).

Pedagogical Outcomes

The first step in backward design is determining pedagogical outcomes. That is, to decide on what we expect learners to have achieved when the course is over. As HILL aims at both humor competency training and language learning, this stage entails setting two types of goals, those related to learners' language abilities and those pertaining to knowledge of L2 humor. An important question that one may raise here is "can we target both sets of pedagogical outcomes at the same time?" Put differently, "are they pedagogically compatible with each other?" Earlier I argued, albeit briefly, that humor and language, in theory and practice, may come together. Now, as we are dealing with welding humor to language education, we need to consider humor

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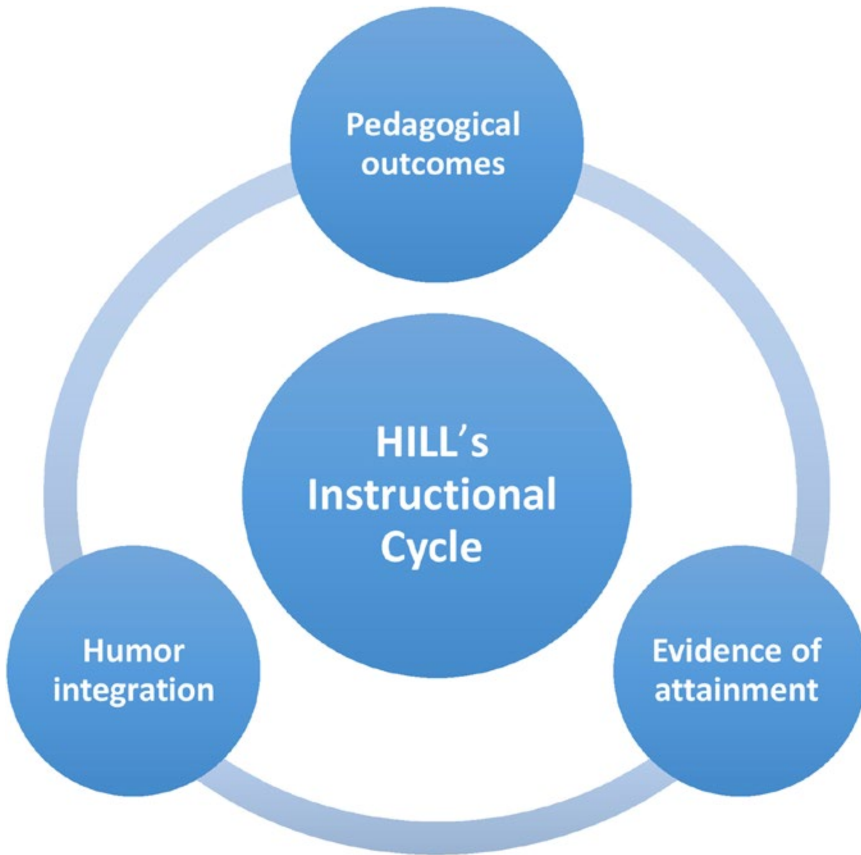

Figure 4.2. HILL's language component and its instructional cycle. Created by the author.

and language integration from the pedagogical perspective, too. I believe the answer is generally affirmative for the sociolinguistic venue in which humor may appear shares much affinity with the context of authentic language learning (see Cekaite and Aronsson 2005; Cook 2000). As the examples of HILL presented later will hopefully clarify, the path through which we pursue our language teaching goals is often rich enough to provide opportunities to introduce L2 humor as well. Humorous reading passages, for instance, may easily serve both the objectives related to developing learners' L2 reading as well as humor comprehension. Likewise, composing humorous stories can contribute to both learners' L2 writing ability and humor production. After all, HILL does not struggle for a place among major language teaching paradigms. As I will discuss later, HILL is a pedagogical toolkit that has much potential to fit in and enrich such paradigms. Thus, it needs not to override

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the whole curriculum but can be inserted when curricular units might benefit from such an approach.

Evidence of Attainment

The second stage in the instructional cycle of HILL is to discern the evidence of attainment. In other words, at this phase we need to determine what should be observed in learners' L2 performance or what they should be able to do for us to make sure that both language and humor learning have occurred. This, in essence, enters the realm of assessment. As for language assessment, there seems to be adequate guidelines to evaluate learners' progress (e.g., Brown and Abeywickrama 2010). Rubrics for humor competence assessment, in contrast, seem to be much less explored and developed. Interestingly, Cook (2000) argues that language play (and humor) can be a test of L2 proficiency. The relevant literature also suggests that more proficient L2 learners are generally more successful in comprehending and producing varied instances of humor (Bell et al. 2014; Heidari-Shahreza 2018b).

Whereas the nuances of this interplay await further research, it seems L2 proficiency and humor competence can be, to some extent, indicative of each other. This can aid HILL in determining evidence of attainment. In addition, the taxonomy of humor competency training I outlined earlier is, to a notable extent, practical with testable outlets. Therefore, it makes this stage easier to deal with. Nevertheless, this is an area we need to work on more. It is also worth pointing out that the assessment inherent to this phase of HILL is more of dynamic nature; an ongoing, process-oriented evaluation of learners' learning experiences with an eagle eye on their humor and language development (see also Poehner 2008 for more information on dynamic assessment). Hence, final, summative tests given at the end of a course is only a small part of the evidence we should gather.

Humor Integration

Integrating humor and language may be the most creative and perhaps challenging stage of HILL. Here, we seek for practical techniques to realize our pedagogical outcomes. At this stage, learning experiences are to be designed. That is, we decide on class activities in which humor and language are both aimed at. These activities should contribute to learners' L2 proficiency as well as their humor competence. The potential in the learning materials we have at hand, learners' needs, expectations, and readiness, among other things, can alter the balance in integrating humor and language. As a result, we may come up with an integration with the humor component more dominant (H+l), or the opposite, the language component more dominant

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(h+L). This variation also implies that one of the components can be treated "implicitly" while the other "explicitly." That is, learners' L2 humor may be enhanced in the context of and with the primary focus on language learning or vice versa. Methodological variations abound and HILL is flexible enough to receive them with open arms as long as its dual purpose (i.e., teaching with and about humor) is fulfilled.

Nevertheless, it seems a less explicit, language-dominated version of HILL (i.e., implicit h+L) is often more feasible for language settings. Despite possible advantages of explicit humor instruction (see Part III of this volume), teachers perhaps find it more practical to nourish learners' humor competence because the curriculum and the course book have a primary focus on language (see also Gardner, this volume).This particularly sounds right if we think of factors such as teachers' time concerns and their usually extensive language teaching priorities. Thus, teaching humor in the context of language (i.e., h+L) should probably be considered first (see also the section Recommendations for Further Research). In the following lines, I sketch out several examples of HILL activities.

Example 1

Here, a humorous story is employed as the basis of a HILL activity. The short story points to cultural differences in respect to color connotations in a humorous way. It serves both as an elementary reading passage and an instance of cultural humor. Table 4.1 exemplifies what we may consider at each stage of the backward design of this HILL activity. It is worth noting that, as said earlier, in designing backward particularly at the third phase, when we integrate humor and language, we may think of different techniques, types of class cooperation, and student engagement. What I have provided in table 4.1 is just a case in point. This activity is to some extent based on Heidari-Shahreza and Ketabi (2010), and uses materials by Hill (1982).

Example 2

This example in table 4.2 is based on *Top Notch English Series*, *Book 1* (Saslow and Ascher 2010). Each unit of this internationally successful series is accompanied by a short video clip, called a "sitcom" (situation comedy), on the same topic. The clips depict several employees who work at a travel agency. The grammar and vocabulary of each episode reflect what the learners have already seen in the respective book unit. In this HILL activity, "getting and giving directions in English" is the main language component and situational irony within situation comedy is the instructional subject of the humor component (see Prichard and Rucynski, this volume, for the impor-

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tance of irony and sarcasm in L2 humor competence). In the respective video clip, a woman approaches Paul, a tour guide at the travel agency, sitting in a restaurant with his colleagues, to ask for a nearby cinema. Despite being a tour guide, he gives her a totally wrong address after lots of hesitation. His colleagues, then, make him aware of his mistake, while sarcastically reminding him of his job as a tour guide.

Table 4.1. Pedagogical Stages/Backward Design of a HILL Activity (Example 1)

Stage 1: Pedagogical Outcomes	
Language Component	*Humor Component*
– Learners' L2 reading comprehension at the elementary level will be improved. – New vocabulary and grammar in the reading will be (implicitly) learned. – Learners' intercultural knowledge will be enhanced.	– Learners will be familiar with the structure of a "funny story" as a form of humor. – Learners will learn how two "opposite scripts" work together to create humor. – Learners will see an example of "cultural humor."
Stage 2: Evidence of Attainment	
Language Component	*Humor Component*
– Learners will show understanding of complex sentences. – Learners will be able to guess the meaning of new vocabulary and use them in similar contexts. – Learners will show their intercultural awareness through discussing how their culture is similar or different from English culture.	– Learners will be able to identify the "punch line." – Learners will be able to explain why the story is funny; what works against the presumed interpretation. – Learners will see examples of cross-cultural differences that may cause laughter.
Stage 3: Humor Integration	
1. Teacher asks learners to skim through the passage in their groups (see Appendix A). 2. One student from each group tells the class what the story is about. 3. Next, teacher reads the passage, dealing with any grammar or lexis that may be troublesome for learners. 4. Afterwards, learners are instructed to do reading comprehension questions in their groups. 5. Teacher, then, directs them to humor activities. 6. Firstly, class addresses "what is funny in the story?" 7. Teacher, then, asks learners how black and white are misinterpreted by the boy in the story. 8. Learners try to spot where in the story humor is realized. 9. They discuss about the different connotations of colors across cultures. 10. Teacher encourages them to find funny examples of such differences.	

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Table 4.2. Pedagogical Stages/Backward Design of a HILL Activity (Example 2)

Stage 1: Pedagogical Outcomes	
Language Component	*Humor Component*
– Learners will be able to give and get directions. – Learners will be able to take notes while listening. – Learners will start and end a formal conversation with a stranger successfully.	– Learners will be familiar with situation comedy. – Learners will be familiar with irony of situation. – Learners will be able to recognize the contextual cues of humor. – Learners will be able to understand "sarcastic utterances."
Stage 2: Evidence of Attainment	
Language Component	*Humor Component*
– Learners will use "verb (+ object)" to make imperative sentences. – Learners will use "I'm looking for . . . " in their role-plays. – Learners will use vocabulary related to locations (e.g., bank, hotel, post office) in their role-plays. – Learners will use politeness strategies in social interactions.	– Learners will be able to define situation comedy. – Learners will be able to explain what turns a situation humorous as in a sitcom and provide examples. – Learners will distinguish literal meaning from ironical meaning. – Learners will use irony to mitigate the perlocutionary force of an utterance. – Learners will respond to sarcastic utterances appropriately.
Stage 3: Humor Integration	
1. Teacher asks students to watch the video for the first time (see Appendix B). 2. They watch the video for a second time and work together in their groups to mark the directions Paul gives on a map of city (already given to the groups). 3. They, then, match a list of directions with a set of small pictures indicating the directions. 4. Teacher encourages learners to think of what went ahead against their predictions in the video. 5. The learners are asked to identify the contextual cues which finally led to the intended humor. 6. They discuss what Bob's sarcastic remark at the end of the video means. 7. Teacher asks if there is anyone who has not found the video humorous. 8. Teacher explains how a piece of humor may fail to cause laughter or learners may fail to appreciate it. 9. Learners work in their groups to fill in a conversation's blanks with humorous, ironical expressions of their own.	

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Example 3

In this example, a comic strip is our HILL tool. It is a set of drawings in boxes that narrates a humorous story. Comic strips, which commonly appear in newspapers and magazines, can also be effective tools in language learning (see e.g., Liu 2004). Here, a blank comic strip (i.e., with empty conversation balloons) is employed to target at both L2 writing skill at the lower-intermediate level and the production aspect of humor competency training. The general topic of both humor and language production in this activity is reliable and unreliable sources of information. Table 4.3 presents the steps we may take together with the comic strip itself (figure 4.3).

HILL WITHIN MAJOR TEACHING PARADIGMS

As explained earlier, HILL is not intended to overtake common language teaching paradigms and practices. It is a complement to enrich learners' language learning experiences and bridge the important gap of L2 humor in language education. If HILL is supposed to work under the umbrella of major approaches, a vital question is whether HILL can be embedded in such frameworks. I will briefly address this question in light of, first, communicative language teaching (CLT, hereafter), as a well-established approach based

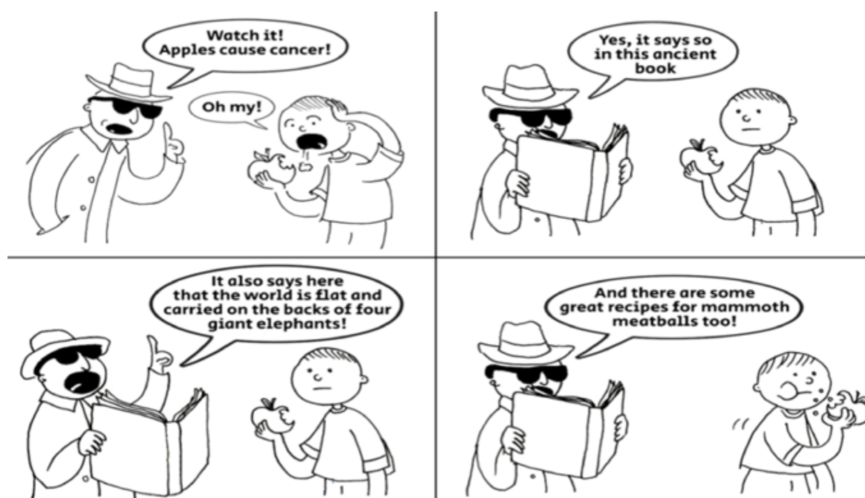

Figure 4.3. The comic strip with the original conversation balloons. More balloons and boxes of drawings can be added to it for the purpose of HILL. Open source comic, October 15, 2017, Racheli Rottner/Wikimedia Israel. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en.

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Table 4.3. Pedagogical Stages/Backward Design of a HILL Activity (Example 3)

Stage 1: Pedagogical Outcomes	
Language Component	*Humor Component*
– "Genre" and "process" subknowledges of learners' L2 writing will be improved. – Learners' brainstorming subskill and linguistic creativity will be improved. – Learners will practice the already-acquired L2 forms such as direct and indirect quotations.	– Learners' sense of humor (or their humor orientation) will be improved. – Learners' humor production will be improved. – Learners will practice how to show their appreciation of humor and respond appropriately. – Learners will learn how to humorously talk about at a topic in written language.
Stage 2: Evidence of Attainment	
Language Component	*Humor Component*
– Learners will be able to use L2 forms properly. – Learners will be able to generate enough ideas to write the story. – Learners will introduce the topic and develop it appropriately.	– Learners' will be able to experiment with humor techniques such as "overstatement" and "false analogy." – Learners will be able to establish a play frame in their humor production. – Learners will use responding strategies including agreement and politeness ones (e.g., [fake] laughter, questioning, commenting).
Stage 3: Humor Integration	
1. Teacher asks students where they can get the most reliable information. 2. He/she asks them to brainstorm sources of reliable and unreliable information in their groups. 3. Learners are then instructed to fill in the empty balloons of the comic strip. 4. Each group role-plays its comic strip in front of the class. 5. The class chooses the best group/winner for the comic strip writer and the best acting performance. 6. Groups discuss the idea of "reliable sources of information" and how their comic strips humorously point to it.	

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on which many teaching methods and techniques have been introduced (see Richards 2006). Then, I will turn to Vygotskyan social theory of learning to see how HILL can correspond to a theory which is, in spite of similarities, different in nature and origin but equally significant and applicable to both humor and language education (see Daniels 2016).

HILL and CLT

CLT puts great emphasis on communication, natural language use, and language learning through authentic interaction (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011). In other words, instead of focusing on isolated pieces of the language puzzle, CLT strives to present the whole picture. The question here is can HILL have a place within the gestalt of CLT? Put another way, humor (particularly verbal humor) may entail specific attention to language form (consider puns, for example); CLT, however, prioritizes function over form. Therefore, how could HILL fit into CLT?

This question unmasks a significant advantage of HILL. As Cook (2000) argues, humor and language play make it possible to focus on language forms while naturally being engaged in authentic acts of communication. That is, without violating CLT principles, learners may attend to L2 forms (e.g., grammar, vocabulary) within the *communicative context of humor*. What is more, they may practice newly acquired forms while remaining inside the boundaries of real social interaction. The example below depicts a part of naturally occurring student-teacher interaction in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context where the humor is built upon "too + adjective," a form just introduced to the class. The learner who instigates the humor not only shows his mastery of this form but also draws the other learners' attention to it. Furthermore, under the façade of humor, he safely expresses his negative attitude toward the number of units the students have to study for a test; a function of humor (and a part of humor competence development) which is labeled as strategic attitude" in the relevant literature (see Heidari-Shahreza 2018b).

01 T: Well, who can give another example?

02 S_1: It's too hard (.) for me (.) to lift this table.

03 T: Ok. Good. (2) (another student raises his hand) yes, *you*!

04 S_2: It's too hard (.) for us ☺to read five units.☺

05 T: HHH come on!

06 S_3: HHH [good example]

07 Ss: HHH [yeah /five very much/ (Heidari-Shahreza 2018b)

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The piece of discourse above sets an example for spontaneous humor with language learning potential. What about intentional humor? What about enhancing learners' humor competence? The following instance of humor comes from an elementary EFL class where the teacher takes advantage of a learner's mistake to create a pun or wordplay ("chicken in the kitchen"). The teacher draws learners' attention to the phonological and semantic aspects of two English words while maintaining the natural flow of communication and interaction. The teacher's humor hones learners' awareness of phonological similarities (as in puns). That, in turn, is conducive to higher linguistic awareness and humor competence.

01 S_1: I make (.) kitchen sandwich in home.

02 T: good (1) ☺ but (.) you mean *kitchen* or *chicken*? ☺

03 S_1: oh! (.) (realizing the mistake) ☺ *chicken*. ☺

04 Ss: chic[ken.]

05 Ss: HHH [chicken]

06 T: ☺ you can make chicken in the kitchen. have you ever made chicken in the kitchen? ☺

07 Ss: ☺ [yes: . . .

08 Ss: ☺ [no: . . . (Heidari-Shahreza 2018a)

In HILL's backward design, a communicative activity can be built upon a humorous theme or resource. The following example is taken from a low-level EFL remedial class where university freshmen work in groups to unscramble a funny story (or a joke), discuss its humor, and relate the story to the main theme of their lesson about prices and customer services:

- "That will be $50 please," he said to the horse.
- "With prices like yours, I'm not surprised," said the horse.
- The waiter said, "We've never had a talking horse in here before."
- Once upon a time a horse walked into a restaurant.
- The horse gave him the money and started to drink the lemonade.
- The waiter was very surprised that a horse could talk, but he poured him a lemonade.
- He asked the waiter for a lemonade.

In so doing, they mainly focus on meaning, do a reasoning gap (i.e., unscrambling the funny story), enhance their humor competence and of course, use their language skills all for an authentic communicative purpose. If

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intended for more proficient learners, the story may also include blanks for some of the content words that carry the humorous effect of the text (e.g., "lemonade," "$50"). This, in turn, increases the task complexity and entails more creativity on the part of learners.

Through such activities, learners experiment with instances of humor which provides opportunities to increase their knowledge of L2 humor. Moreover, they are likely enjoying working on language tasks. As Dörnyei (2001) suggests, this, in turn, makes "learning stimulating and enjoyable for the learner by increasing the attractiveness of the tasks" (141). Hence, HILL tasks also lend a hand to enliven class ambience and keep learners motivated throughout the course. In the nutshell, it seems the communicative milieu of a language class lets us target both language and humor. In the next part, I will elaborate on Vygotsky's concept of social learning.

HILL and Vygotskyan Social Cultural Theory of Learning

Vygotskyan social cultural theory of learning highlights the importance of social interaction in the development of one's cognition (Daniels 2016). As for language learning, it implies that learning may occur when learners engage in language tasks, interact with each other, negotiate for meaning, and try out L2 forms together (Lantolf 2000). One incidence of such social interaction within the class setting is what has come to be called "language-related episodes" (LREs). Swain and Lapkin (1998, 326) originally defined them as "any part of a dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others." Put another way, LREs are collaborative dialogues where learners "focus on form" and potentially learn together and from each other (Heidari-Shahreza, Dabaghi, and Kassaian 2012). Interestingly, a particular type of LREs, that is, "playful" LREs (PLREs) has recently been discussed in L2 humor scholarship (see e.g., Bell 2012). They share the same features as LREs. In PLREs, however, the shift from meaning to form is done playfully or rather humorously (Heidari-Shahreza 2018c).

The example below clarifies the point. Here, a small group of intermediate EFL learners discuss the double meaning of the word "bank" in a lighthearted way. Within the context of this group interaction, they attend to an L2 form and learn together. What is more, "peer teaching" happens. That is, one of the learners (i.e., S2) receives instruction from his teammates. This, in turn, may speak of zone of proximal development (ZPD) in Vygotskyan theory (see Daniels 2016). ZPD refers to the difference between what a learner can do independently and what she is able to manifest with the "scaffolding" (i.e., the aid and guidance) of the teacher or other learners (Lantolf 2000). In

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this excerpt, the learner comes to understand and use the L2 from properly through the humorous collaborative dialogue he has with his partners. In this regard, the relevant literature suggests that learning gains via PLREs are also higher and more durable than LREs (see Bell 2012).

01 S_1: ok! let's make a sentence with this, RIVERBANK

02 S_2: it's easy. (1) I always save my money in riverbank.

03 S_1: HHH and water take it away!

04 S_3: ☺ bank has two meaning. it is not *bank* for money here. ☺

05 S_1: HHH it's a word in that story, like beach.

06 S_2: ☺ why they don't say river *beach*!? ☺ (Heidari-Shahreza 2018c)

This is the potential latent in humor that can make a notable difference! The example I set, however, is a case of spontaneous humor; what may happen naturally in class interaction. What about HILL? When we deliberately use humor for the sake of both humor and language learning? Unfortunately, I did not find any recorded authentic dialogue where a PLRE occurred in a HILL activity. A second look at the above example, however, may give us a hint. The humor here originates from the polysemy of a word (i.e., "bank") and this is what we have in semantic puns or homonyms (e.g., seal, feet, match). This implies that puns as a common form of humor can potentially yield instances of PLREs. Hence, pun-based HILL activities can do the trick. Jokes and funny stories may also be composed based on such polysemous words and be employed for HILL. Consider the example below:

> A woman was driving in her car on a narrow road. She was knitting at the same time, so she was driving very slowly. A man came up from behind and he wanted to pass her. He opened the window and yelled, "Pull over! Pull over!" The lady yelled back, "No, it's a sweater!" (Fernández 2009, 45)

In sum, it seems there are diverse possibilities for humor to take place or be given a place in class interaction via HILL. The presence of humor subsequently offers valuable opportunities for learners to focus on form and fun at the same time. Csikszentmihalyi (2008), in this regard, speaks of "flow" as a mental state where an individual is fully engaged in an activity, enjoying "optimal experience" (see also Waring 2013). No matter whether we consider CLT or Vygotskyan theory, it seems HILL has the potential to aid learners achieve such optimal experience of both language and humor learning. In the next section, I will briefly point out several practical guidelines to implement HILL.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING THROUGH HILL

Although the whole chapter, in essence, revolves around teaching via HILL, in this section, I summarize several guidelines for implementation of HILL:

- We should consider the class and school culture before embarking on a HILL approach. Although nowadays *appropriate* pedagogical humor is generally welcomed in educational settings, some may still frown upon humor as a distractor for the serious business of teaching and learning. Additionally, the concept of appropriacy is usually culture-bound. Thus, using HILL should be based on a deep understanding and awareness of sociocultural as well as educational norms.
- Overnight outcomes should not be expected. Teaching through HILL (particularly in an h+L version) requires constant, systematic exposure to and recycling of HILL input. Ideally, HILL should be added to the whole curriculum and be implemented properly over continuous semesters to observe significant gains in learners' humor (and language) competence.
- Authenticity and creativity are the secret ingredients of a successful HILL activity. That is, preferably, real-life humorous materials (e.g., jokes, stories, cartoons, sitcoms) should be used creatively to design various HILL activities. Adhering to the same recipe may fail to win the favor of learners in the long run or may not yield the same positive results.
- "Microteaching" using successful samples of spontaneous or planned humor also seems beneficial to HILL teachers. Meetings to discuss the challenges of teaching with and about humor with other teachers can shape the culture of (pedagogical) humor in a language setting. This, subsequently, may pave the way for the full implementation of HILL.
- HILL chiefly hinges on teachers' use of *planned* instructional humor. That said, we should not ignore the potential of spontaneous, natural humor. There are usually funny moments in any class that a teacher (with a good sense of humor) can employ to class advantage (see Heidari-Shahreza 2018a, for related examples and possible benefits).
- Language play (i.e., creative use of language) is greatly endorsed by HILL. Therefore, teachers can build class activities upon learners' linguistic creativity. Puns, for example, entail creative manipulation of different aspects of language. Likewise, writing (or doing) language riddles involves creativity to work with language forms in new ways (e.g., "which letter of the English language has the most water? C").
- Finally, as learners gain more competence in second language and humor, HILL should become more student-centered and student-initiated. For example, teachers can ask learners to bring humorous language materials

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to the class, or encourage them to experiment with L2 humor outside the class by reading comics, watching comedies, and interacting with native speakers, etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON HILL

I believe the pedagogical benefits of humor are well-documented; the significance of humor in language education is (being) well-understood; the rationale for humor competency training is also well-grounded; thus, it is time for teaching with and about humor to be implemented effectively and researched empirically. That is, how can we do it systematically within a research-informed, practical framework? In essence, it means we should do research on HILL and similar proposals to discern their effectiveness, their points of strength and weakness. Topics of research in this regard abound. Here, I will point out several with respect to HILL.

Interested scholars may investigate the differential effects of HILL activities on learners' language and humor attainment. For example, are jigsaw activities using comic strips more successful than sitcom role-plays or collaborative funny story writing? Likewise, various methodological designs of HILL can be examined and compared. For instance, ± explicit, ± dominant characteristics of language and humor components of HILL yield important instructional variations that are worth looking into. That is, researchers, among other things, may focus on whether an implicit, language-dominated approach to HILL (i.e., h+L) is more feasible and effective or an H+l one.

Moreover, empirical studies should be carried out to determine if there is any statistically significant difference in pedagogical gains obtained via HILL as compared to approaches focusing on language and humor individually. In this respect, we should also see if the differences persist in the long run. That is, do we observe, for instance, the same positive attitude or higher learning outcomes in a HILL class after a year of implementing this approach? Or did the students merely outperform thanks to the "novelty" effect of the humorous approach? Additionally, the amount and duration of exposure to HILL input are important variables to be examined. It seems learners need to be exposed to HILL activities (especially in the h+L approach) regularly and systematically in order to significantly enhance their humor competence. How (long/much) this exposure should be and the other questions above call for longitudinal studies on HILL.

In addition, future studies may probe into the transferability of the humor and language skills gained through HILL to the target situations where L2 learners are expected to be able to successfully interact with native speakers

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and "do humor" naturally. Cultural differences and educational traditions should also be heeded. From authorizing humor in the language class to the red line of appropriate humor, discrepancies may be observed from country to country or even an educational context to another (see e.g., Zhang 2005).

How does HILL fit in major teaching paradigms such as CLT? This is a question which should also be investigated preferably using mixed-methods research, having a look at compatibility, practicality, and efficacy of such embedment. Language teachers should not be ignored, too. Ranging from their instructional mindset to their teaching practice, there might be barriers for teachers to do HILL (see Forman 2011d; Heidari-Shahreza 2018a). Humor orientation or sense of humor, for instance, is a research topic that has been addressed in the humor scholarship long ago (see Bryant et al. 1979; also Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin 2010 for a recent study). Nevertheless, further research is still needed to see how we may (and if we may) enhance teachers' humor orientation.

In conclusion, HILL is a pedagogical approach "in bud." As language and humor go far, I believe, so does HILL. However, we certainly need to implement it further while empirically investigating it. This will be possible as more insights are gained through research on HILL. The experience of language teachers working with HILL and similar approaches can also shed light on how we may target at both language learning and humor competence training. In this chapter, I endeavored to make a balance between the theoretical background and practical outlook of HILL. In so doing, nevertheless, I was confined to what the scholarship on pedagogical humor had scarcely to offer regarding the idea of humor and language integration at present. Hopefully speaking, HILL can be better presented, justified, and implemented as we invest more on *humor as and for language learning* in our future research and teaching practice.

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APPENDIX A: MATERIALS FOR EXAMPLE 1

A funny story: Mrs. Robinson was a teacher in a big school in a city in America. She had boys and girls in her class, and she always enjoyed teaching them, because they were quick, and because they thought about everything very carefully. One day she said to the children, "People in a lot of countries in Asia wear white clothes at funerals, but people in America and in Europe wear white clothes when they're happy. What color does a woman wear in this country when she marries, Mary?" Mary said, "White, Miss, because she's happy." "That's good, Mary," Mrs. Robinson said. "You're quite right. She wears white because she's happy."

But then one of the boys in the class put his hand up. "Yes, Dick!" Mrs. Robinson said. "Do you want to ask something?"

"Yes, please, Miss," Dick said.

"Why do men wear black in this country when they marry, Miss?"

NOTE

Source: Hill, Leslie A. 1982. *Elementary Steps to Understanding.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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APPENDIX B: MATERIALS FOR EXAMPLE 2 (SITCOM TRANSCRIPT)

00:07 *Bob* (Paul's colleague): But I'm not a French film fan.

00:15 *Woman*: Excuse me! I'm looking for the Rose Cinema.

00:17 *Paul* (a tour guide): The Rose Cinema? Let's see . . . oh . . .

00:22 that's on the corner of Market Street and Park Street.

00:25 Or is it 3rd and Grand? . . . no!

00:29 I think it's on market between 1st and 2nd Avenue. Okay! So . . .

00:34 go around the corner! Walk . . . three blocks . . . eh . . .

00:38 No! Five blocks to Harper Street.

00:43 Turn left! Sorry!

00:45 Right for another two blocks. No! Yes!

00:52 Two blocks to fourth avenue,

00:56 take a right! . . . yes! . . . walk about five blocks . . .

01:01 to Market Street. Go right again!

01:06 Go straight two more blocks,

01:09 the cinema is on your right.

01:10 Oh! No! Sorry. Your left.

01:14 *Marie* (Paul's colleague): Paul!

01: 16 *Paul*: What?

01:18 *Marie*: [whispers something into Paul's ear.]

01:25 *Paul*: You're looking for the Rose Cinema?

01: 28 *Woman*: Yes!

01:29 *Paul*: Go across the street!

01:32 *Woman*: And?

01:34 *Paul*: It's across the street.

01:37 *Woman*: Thank you!

01:42 *Bob*: And you're a tour guide!?

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Chapter 5

Junior High English Textbook Interactional Humor

Pragmatic Possibilities

Scott Gardner

In a Japanese textbook for teaching beginning-level English to junior high school students called *One World 1*, a dialogue appears near the beginning of the book in which two boys, Bob and Kenta, talk to each other as they walk around a large Japanese city. Bob points to a large, swirling, skeletal structure made of metal and asks Kenta, “What is that?” Kenta replies, “It’s a roller coaster.” Bob: “A roller coaster?” Kenta: “Just kidding! That’s an art object.”

In Book 2 of the same textbook series, Bob and Kenta are talking again, this time in a study space at their school. Bob says, “In Korea, there aren’t any club activities at school. Many students study in their classrooms until late at night.” Kenta replies, “That’s unbelievable!” Bob adds, “Kenta, maybe you should study as long as Korean students do!”

Presumably these dialogues were conceived by the textbook writers to demonstrate the English grammar structures that are the focus of the respective units they appear in, in particular “wh-” questions (in Book 1) and comparative phrases like “as ____ as” (in Book 2). However, while the characters’ statements may be typical from a grammatical point of view, there is something special about them from a pragmatic point of view. In the first dialogue, Kenta decides to respond to Bob’s question by teasing him, at least for a moment, about what the large metal object actually is. In the second dialogue, Bob turns the tables and decides to tease Kenta about his need to study harder.

These dialogues, while ostensibly fulfilling the instructional needs of the textbook units they appear in, stray from standard “pedagogically correct” information exchanges and instead include some good-natured teasing. The goal of these teasing exchanges may have been simply to amuse the textbook authors themselves, to entertain students using the books, or perhaps to demonstrate to students that normal English usage includes the possibility—and

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the opportunity—to engage in friendly banter and humor. Whatever the authors' goals may have been, their displays of mutual teasing in these textbooks exhibit an important pragmatic aspect of many ordinary conversations among English speakers: using interactional humor.

While there are as yet few language teaching textbooks focused particularly on improving learners' L2 humor competency, it may be encouraging to find that many textbooks—including some used in nationally approved language curricula—make some effort to employ target language humor, thereby opening avenues for teachers to raise learners' awareness of it. In this chapter, I look at several different English language textbook series (32 books in all) at the junior high school / early teen level, and describe some instances found there of interactional humor: humor that is intentionally spoken by a character in a dialogue. I also analyze those humorous interactions in terms of pragmatic purpose—or the perceived underlying reasons that speakers in a dialogue use humor in their conversations. Finally, I look at the potential of these dialogues as material for raising L2 (in this case ESL/EFL) awareness of the pragmatic possibilities of humor. In this analysis, I hope to show that, despite the limitations of these contrived, scripted dialogues, such displays of conversational humor may have value as cultural and pragmatic resource material for language learners.

HUMOR IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

As has been made clear throughout this book, the uses of humor in the language learning classroom are the subject of much research to date (e.g., Wanzer 2002; Bell 2005; Wagner and Urios-Aparisi 2008, 2011; Blackmore 2013; Davies 2015; Bell and Pomerantz 2016). Much less, however, has been said about humor that appears in language learning textbooks. Schmitz (2002) actually discourages the "institutionalizing" and fossilizing effect of inserting humor in a language textbook, and rather advocates setting the textbook aside every once in a while, to engage students with real-time humor. Medgyes (2001), on the other hand, laments what he sees as a pattern of decreasing humor in language teaching textbooks, which he attributes mostly to the influence of larger and larger publishing companies hoping to distribute more and more universally palatable materials:

> Every learner is a potential customer. . . . And every teacher is a customer with a multiplier effect. If she's fond of the book, she'll talk the school principal and hundreds of parents and students into buying that book. And not the other one which she hates for the revolting jokes in it. Better play safe. Better do without humour. (115)

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This does not mean, however, that language texts have been completely sanitized of humor and jokes, and the texts surveyed for this research show ample evidence that humor does exist in language textbooks. Many texts, at many age and linguistic levels, take advantage of cute and funny illustrations—often with accompanying captions—that typically have some relevance to the language topic at hand. These may serve to draw attention to the subject, or to enhance interest. Additionally, a small number of recent publications attempting to provide attractive cultural content have dedicated entire units to target-language humor (one example is Oxford University Press' *Q: Skills for Success* series from 2011). These efforts seem to subscribe to what many researchers (Liu 2004; Atir 2010; Banas et al. 2011; Özdoğru and McMorris 2013; Piaw 2014) claim is a positive effect of relevant humor on student comprehension, memory, and attitude.

Some researchers, however, suggest that publishers' choices of humor in their textbooks fail to give language learners opportunities to experience L2 humor as target-language speakers most often experience it, namely in their everyday conversations. Archakis and Tsakona (2012), for example, fear that "humor is presented as approachable and detectable in genres that do not originate in the speakers' daily repertoire and most probably are not included in it" (122). They also reference the pragmatic importance of interactional humor (described in more detail below) when they say that the "'positive' aspects [of humor] that refer to creating and strengthening bonds among interlocutors . . . are not projected" adequately in most language textbooks (Archakis and Tsakona 2012, 122). In other words, the humor that appears in language learning materials is often far different from the kind that people encounter in daily conversation. For these reasons, as well as others stated below, I have chosen to focus on *spoken dialogues* in textbooks, rather than on more general instances of humor.

PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF INTERACTIONAL HUMOR

Of the many pragmatic skills that learners need to put to use as they progress in language acquisition, using conversational humor may not seem to be the most important. Nevertheless, for decades now interactional humor has been an important part of research in conversation analysis and linguistic pragmatics (see Sacks 1974; Norrick 1993; Norrick and Chiaro 2009; Winchester, this volume). Dynel (2011) points out that humor is "a phenomenon central to language use and form, as well as communication" (6), and it has been estimated that English speakers spend as much as 10 percent of their conversational time exchanging humor with each other (see also Tannen 1984/2005,

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164; Attardo 1994, 318). Thus, from a pedagogical viewpoint, Bell and Pomerantz (2016) believe that “humor and language play [are] a kind of language use that should be central to language teaching, not ancillary” (13).

Our reasons for using humor in conversation have also been studied and analyzed, not only in terms of pragmatics but in the social and psychological realms. Brock (2010) compiles an extensive list of at least 17 interactional functions of humor, including “norm maintenance and social control”; “re-affirming and strengthening friendship”; “outgroup exclusion”; “positive politeness”; and “discourse management” (548–53). Schnurr (2010), on the other hand, manages to distill humor’s interactional role down to three main pragmatic functions:

- reinforce solidarity;
- do power; and
- express resistance and challenge.

(Schnurr 2010)

According to Schnurr, *reinforcing solidarity* is “the most typical function of [interactional] humor, which all instances accomplish to some extent” (311). This type of humorous exchange is of the sort that any casual conversation may include, in which the interlocutors make or trade humorous observations simply for the sake of having fun and making each other laugh or smile. As Oshima (2013) puts it, “[p]eople show each other how close they are, how well they know each other by joking about individual behavior and personalities” (105). This joking may also include supposedly harmless teasing or “making fun,” where on the surface the humor may appear to make the hearer look foolish, but the underlying intent is to reinforce the relationship by showing that it can withstand such “attacks.” Dynel (2011, 4) calls teasing the “epitome” of conversational humor.

While this kind of relationship-binding humor most often occurs between people who are well acquainted, it can be used even between relative strangers who want to accomplish a (temporary, at least) connection with each other, as in:

Vera: Hi.

Andy: You don’t remember me.

Vera: Yes I *do*. Yes I *do*.

Andy: I haven’t seen you since you were married.

Vera: That’s true. And we’re *still* married. It’s been *four* months.

(Norrick 1993, 29)

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Such attempts at humor seem intended to help interlocutors feel more at ease and more in synch with each other (Schnurr 2010, 311–12).

Doing power can feel much the same as reinforcing solidarity, but the players in the conversation may have additional or different goals than just emphasizing similarity. This function of humor may be employed by superiors in hierarchical conversations to reinforce the hierarchy and promote camaraderie simultaneously (Schnurr 2010, 313). Geyer's (2008) analysis of discourse and politeness in primarily professional situations found that "teasing [is] a resource for displaying jocular authority *and* affiliation" (121; emphasis added). One of Geyer's examples comes from a discussion in a faculty meeting at a Japanese secondary school:

Kameda: Well, then, as for the teachers' meal . . .

Doi: Yes.

Kameda: Who's gonna make it?

Others: He he . . .

Doi: (slow tempo) We'll make it all together.

Murao: Three of you men will make it.

Taki: Well, Mr. Kameda, we'll depend on you.

Kameda: No! haha.

(Geyer 2008, 111–12)

At a planning meeting for a school trip and cookout, junior teacher Kameda asks a question in a slightly insensitive manner that hints at gender role stereotyping, so the other older and (mostly) female teachers first spell out the reality for him, then teasingly assign him the role of cook. Even Taki, an older male teacher, abandons Kameda in light of his social faux pas. In this way, the superiors use humor and teasing to point out Kameda's insensitivity and assert their seniority, but also to keep him included as part of the group.

Expressing resistance, like doing power, can build camaraderie as well as achieve its additional aim of subversion. As Schnurr (2010) puts it, this type of humor "may support relatively powerless interlocutors in their attempts to subvert existing power structures and the status quo, while at the same time reinforcing solidarity among those who participate" (314). The following example is from a business meeting:

Clara: He wants to get through month end first; he's . . . he can't multitask.

Peg: It's a bloke thing.

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Clara: It's in the genes.

(Schnurr and Holmes 2009, 105)

Others in the meeting begin laughing throughout this put-down of a colleague who is not present. Although the absent colleague is not of a higher rank than the two speakers, their humor is still "subverting wider societal values which . . . tend to value male skills more highly than female" (Schnurr and Holmes 2009, 105). Sarcasm in conversation is a likely candidate for this categorization. While sarcasm can be used in a friendly teasing manner, as "a non-aggressive verbalisation...framed as a hostile act" in Alberts' (1992, 155) words, as Schnurr (2010) points out, "some instances of sarcasm may also contain an element of aggression" (320). (See Prichard and Rucynski, this volume, for a detailed discussion of sarcasm.)

It is important to remember that a person using humor in a conversation may have a number of goals that revolve around building or maintaining solidarity with the hearer or hearers, and as we will see below, even the simplified dialogues of characters in language textbooks can be shown to have multiple goals.

PRAGMATICS IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

Attention to pragmatics in L2 research and methodology has increased since Firth and Wagner's (1997/2007) manifesto calling for a greater research balance between cognitive and social elements of L2 learners' acquisition and use. However, pragmatics instruction—explicit training in social interaction-oriented language areas such as speech acts, politeness, and conversation strategies—remains under-emphasized in mainstream L2 teaching. When it does appear, it is often brief, stilted, and based on intuition or anecdote rather than on actual usage research (see Crandall and Basturkmen 2004; Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan 2010; Eisenchlas 2011; de Pablos-Ortega 2011; Diepenbroek and Derwing 2013; Ekin 2013; Abrams 2014; Taguchi 2014). Ishihara (2010) states that "most textbook series are yet to incorporate pragmatics in a robust way," and "it is likely that teachers interested in including pragmatics instruction will need to adapt somewhat the materials they have, or prepare supplementary materials that address pragmatics more effectively" (145).

Among major global publishers in the ESL/EFL field there have been efforts to provide more materials that give learners awareness of and practice in pragmatic usage. Examples include, but are not limited to, *Nice Talking with You* (Cambridge), *Conversation Gambits* (Heinle Cengage Learning), and *Introduction to English Speech Acts* (Japanese publisher Nan'un-do).

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However, it remains a challenge for textbook authors to adequately present L2 pragmatics in their materials without neglecting or trivializing the contextual and (multi)cultural information that must come with it (see Vellenga 2004; Simo-Bobda 2008; LoCastro 2012). McConachy and Hata (2013) argue that "the most serious problem with the presentation of pragmatics in L2 textbooks concerns the ways that language forms are contextualized or, in many cases, decontextualized" (295). The reasons for this often seem to include space limitations, perceived difficulty, or the overwhelming variety of pragmatic expressions in their full, contextualized form.

One of the most obvious areas in textbooks, where pedagogical and publication factors limit readers' exposure to pragmatic variety in language, is in the character dialogues created to present or practice new material. Textbooks may demonstrate anywhere from one to a handful of ways to say things in order to achieve basic conversational goals. However, even when several options are provided, typically "[n]o information is given as to the differences among these forms or when and why a person might choose one over another" (Diepenbroek and Derwing 2013, 15), which is the heart of pragmatic competence acquisition.

Moreover, even if choices of expression are offered, "the texts chosen for class input are often adjusted in order to facilitate learners' processing, or shortened to a more desirable length. . . . [L]anguage presented to the learners may be different from language as it is used in real communication" (Sinclair 2004, cited in Clavel-Arroitia and Fuster-Márquez 2014). Arguably there are circumstances in which simplified, narrow-context dialogues may be desirable (e.g., English for Specific Purposes; see Widdowson 1998). However, in general texts that have been created and polished by authors to demonstrate predetermined linguistic structures, with little or no mention of the myriad ways in which real people construct their speech according to where they are and who they are talking to, are neglecting basic pragmatic aspects of language usage (see also Gray 2010, 160–63, for some interviewed teachers' comments on this neglect).

Despite the difficulties involved in deciding when, how much, and *whose* pragmatics to include in textbook dialogues (see for example Pütz and Neff-van Aertselaer 2008; House 2010; and Murray 2012 about the need for teachers to consider a *multicultural* pragmatics of English), researchers seem to be of one voice in stressing the need for pragmatics instruction of some kind in order to let students experience the ways language is used to convey meanings beyond the sum of the words they say. In the words of Murray (2010), "we have a responsibility to try and develop our students' pragmatic competence and help them better appreciate and understand how form and context interact to create meaning" (293).

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TEACHING THE PRAGMATICS OF HUMOR IN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

As shown above, pragmatics instruction is notably rare in language textbooks, particularly at lower levels. Therefore, textbook examples of people using humor in conversation for pragmatic purposes are predictably not very common. However, English textbooks endeavoring to provide realistic examples of target-language dialogue would do well to consider including more examples of conversational humor. This is not simply to provide entertainment, or to compel students to be "funny" in English, but to "familiarize learners with a variety of conventional practices around humorous interaction, so that they are better able to take part in it" themselves when talking to people from English-speaking cultures (Bell and Pomerantz 2016, 170).

The analysis in this chapter compiles several dialogue examples that appear in junior high school level textbooks from several multinational publishers (which we might call "global" textbooks; see Gray 2010), as well as several appearing in limited-audience "domestic" textbooks from Japan and Greece. These dialogues are analyzed with the hope of showing how they and others like them might help teachers in developing learners' humor competence.

To draw a connection between the humorous textbook dialogues and actual humorous language (in this case English) usage, I have categorized the humorous expressions in the dialogues according to pragmatic role(s) they seem to fill. Although precise distinction of the roles of interactional humor can potentially result in numerous classifications (see Brock 2010), for the purposes of analyzing these textbooks I will use Schnurr's (2010) three general functions, described above. However, in order to adequately describe recurring patterns I found in the textbooks, I felt the need to subdivide her overarching "solidarity" category into smaller groups, as follows:

- reinforcing solidarity
  - simple affirmation
  - teasing
  - "comic foil" (see below for explanation)
- doing power
- resisting and challenging

As Norrick (1993), Martin et al. (2003), Brock (2010), Schnurr (2010), and other humor researchers have warned, categorizations of humor and joke tellers' motives can never be discrete, and assignment of a sample is often a case of it resembling one category only slightly more than another.

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Textbook List

The textbook series (10 series, total of 32 textbooks) selected are:

Global

Connect (1, 2, 3). (2009). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Get Ahead (1, 2, 3). (2013). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Side by Side (1, 2, 3). (2016). White Plains: Pearson.
Time Zones (1, 2, 3). (2016). Boston: National Geographic Learning.

Japan

New Crown English Series (1, 2, 3). (2011). Tokyo: Sanseido.
New Horizon English Course (1, 2, 3). (2012). Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki.
One World English Course (1, 2, 3). (2012). Tokyo: Kyouiku Shuppan.
Sunshine English Course (1, 2, 3). (2013). Tokyo: Kairyudo.
Total English New Edition (1, 2, 3). (2013). Tokyo: Gakko Tosho.

Greece

Think Teen (1 Basic, 1 Advanced, 2 Basic, 2 Advanced, 3). (2008). Athens: National Book Center of Greece.

The global textbooks are meant to represent some of the most common offerings in the EFL and ESL market from the largest international language instruction publishers in the world. The Japanese and Greek textbooks are seen as representative of government-sponsored materials for English learners in public junior high schools.

Procedures and Analysis

I examined the model dialogues in each of these texts in search of exchanges that could be construed as conveying intentional humor on the part of one or both of the speakers. In many cases, exchanges included explicit humor markers such as the phrase “I’m kidding” or a response such as “haha.” In a few cases, these humorous exchanges were marked more subtly by accompanying pictures of the characters smiling or laughing. (In very rare cases, characters actually appeared to grimace, showing confusion at or unappreciation of the humor.) In each case where such interactional humor occurred, I also tried to set out which pragmatic function may be best served by the characters using humor in this way. This is key to establishing the dialogue’s value in teaching pragmatic use of humor to language learners.

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Humorous narratives, funny pictures, situational humor, and other non-interactional instances of humor were not included. Additionally, interactions that could be interpreted by readers as humorous, but did not display a character's clear *intention* to be funny, are not included here. This is a gray area, because in constructed textbook dialogues it can sometimes be difficult to tell whether or not a speaker who is "playing dumb" or saying something ironic is being intentionally funny. ("Dry" or straight-faced humor might be included here as well.) There is no opportunity to ask the speaker after the fact. (Contacting textbook authors about the intent was not considered feasible, but it could be useful for follow-up research.)

For example, in *Get Ahead 2* there is a conversation between Bob and Anna, in which Bob talks about a TV show he enjoyed watching last night. When Anna accurately "predicts" what happened at the end of the show, Bob is impressed and asks, "How did you know that?" Anna reveals that the episode is a rerun that she saw last month. While this dialogue seems designed to make readers laugh, it is questionable whether we can call it a deliberate attempt by Anna to be funny. Anna's revelation may strike both of them as funny, especially in hindsight, but can we say the humor emerged deliberately, or was the dialogue merely "accidentally" funny?

There were several such examples like this in the textbooks studied here, but I have chosen to label them as funny "developments," not as examples of intentional humor between interlocutors. Therefore, they were not included in this analysis.

Discussion and Pedagogic Suggestions

Of the 32 textbooks researched, 21 contained one or more instances of intentional humor within character dialogues; 11 of the texts did not. (These 11 books were not completely devoid of humor, but only of *interactive* humor; see above.) Therefore, the first general result of this analysis is that roughly two-thirds of the texts contained at least one example of interactional humor.

The following sections describe more detailed results according to the categories I established (based on Schnurr 2010), and provide illustrative examples from the textbooks. (Titles in all caps were assigned by me for reference purposes.) In each section, I also try to assess the value and pedagogical potential of one or two of the examples (and the category in general) as material for the study of pragmatic competence.

Reinforce Solidarity: Simple Affirmation

As a confirmation of Schnurr's (2010) suggestion that solidarity-reaffirming humor is the "most typical" form of interactional humor (311), there were far

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more examples of solidarity-building humor than of doing power or resisting/challenging—30 instances in 17 of the textbooks. As I have divided this category into three subcategories, however, I will address them each separately.

The first subcategory, Simple Affirmation, includes simple amusing comments seemingly meant to harmlessly draw laughter from the interlocutor. Textbook dialogues with such comments can show friends building or maintaining their friendship by being playful with each other, rather than using their talking time simply to achieve meaningful "outcomes" (which is often stated as an important goal in task-based teaching activities; see Richards and Rodgers 2001, 223). This type of humor is generally harmless and not pointed at anyone (except perhaps at the speaker him/herself), and is to be contrasted with the more socially complicated "teasing" and "comic foil" categories described below.

There were at least 10 examples of simple acquaintance-affirming, bonding humor found in eight of the textbooks, six of which appeared in the global publishers' books. Here is one example:

NEW SHOES (*Get Ahead 3*, 7)

Mika: Hi, Jin. What are you up to?

Jin: I'm shopping for shoes.

Mika: I'm looking for some boots. I love shopping! I go shopping most weekends.

Jin: I hate shopping, but I need to buy some new shoes for school.

Mika: Well, I don't really need new boots. I already have three pairs! Do you want me to help you find some shoes?

Jin: That would be great! Thanks, Mika.

Mika makes a somewhat humorous confession to Jin that she is not shopping for boots out of necessity, but is simply enjoying herself shopping. This kind of self-deprecating humor is common and is seen as a harmless way of employing humor, because the speaker herself is the only "target" of the joke. However, in talking this way she not only makes light of her own behavior, but also signals her willingness to help Jin with his own shopping needs.

These relationship-reinforcing aspects of the dialogue may not come immediately to the mind of students reading or listening to it, but a simple awareness-raising activity, based on Mullan (2015), can help them. It can be enough to simply have students answer a couple of questions about the relationship between the characters:

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- Do Mika and Jin know each other well?
- Do they get along with each other well?
- What do they say that makes you think so?
  (See Mullan 2015, 40)

Hopefully, students can locate particular parts of the dialogue that point to the answers to these questions—not only the humor (which is admittedly subtle in this case) but the greetings, informal style, Mika's offer to help, etc. All of these cues are pragmatic ones. Students could talk about what they might say if Mika did not want to help Jin, or if Jin did not need help. Such factors would change the dialogue, perhaps eliminating either character's inclination to be funny, but noticing this would be part of noticing why people *do* try to be funny.

This type of "dialogue analysis" activity could potentially work with any of the examples that follow. It was originally intended as a humor-oriented discourse analysis tool for studying genuine recorded conversations to teach both linguistic and cultural aspects of target language speakers (see Mullan 2015), but it can work to some extent even with these scripted dialogues to help students grasp the (simplified) humor and pragmatic expressions that can be found in them.

Reinforce Solidarity: Teasing

Teasing is seen to be a common but potentially problematic variation on the simple affirmation category above. Teasing in some cases can be seen as a kind of "test," not only of the listener's ability to catch the tease, but of the listener's willingness to play along and accept the bonding intent of the teaser. Teasing between characters was the most common type of interactional humor found in the data, with 13 examples appearing in ten of the 21 textbooks, and these examples occurred fairly uniformly among the Japanese, Greek, and global publications. I will provide a few examples from different texts.

SHERLOCK HOLMES (*Sunshine 1*, 63)

Yuki: What are these?

Matt: They're pictures of Sherlock Holmes. He lives on Baker Street.

Yuki: Does he live there now?

Matt: Yes, he does.

Judy: No, he doesn't. Matt!

Matt: Sorry. Just kidding.

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Yuki: Oh, Matt.

In this dialogue, Matt tells Yuki a small fib with the intent of teasing her. Judy steps in to chastise him for it (see *Reinforce Solidarity: Comic Foil;* interactions below).

I'M FROM NEW YORK (*Sunshine 1*, 27)

Mike: I'm from New York.

Yuki: Are you a baseball fan?

[image of Yankee Stadium and of Mike's baseball-themed pen]

Mike: Yes, I am. Are you a baseball fan too?

Yuki: No, I'm not. I'm a soccer fan.

[Image of Mike looking dejected.]

This dialogue is a bit more complicated. Yuki's question and perceived interest in his pen lead Mike to think that she is a baseball fan, but in the end she pulls the rug out from under him and proclaims her preference for soccer. The conversation ends with Mike looking shocked and a bit hurt.

SOUVENIRS (*Think Teen 2 Basic*, 55/teacher's book, 84)[1]

Katerina: And what about shopping? Have you done any yet?

Adonis: I must say, I haven't managed to do any real shopping yet as I have been so busy. But I have managed to get a couple of souvenirs from Harrod's for mum and dad, and you, of course!

Katerina: Yea, sure! What about The London Eye? I have heard that it is fantastic.

Here Katerina engages in a mild-mannered sarcastic tease of Adonis, assuming that he is not telling the truth about remembering a souvenir gift for her.

These three dialogues all portray variations on teasing, but the teases are not equally apparent. As is shown by the SHERLOCK HOLMES dialogue (as well as one of the exchanges between Kenta and Bob described at the beginning of this chapter), it is possible to tease playfully by simply saying something unlikely or outrageous during the course of a conversation, then rectifying the situation by saying "Just kidding." Teachers can present students with role-play situations and encourage one of the students in a pair to "tease" the other in a similar fashion:

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A: Do you have any pets at home?

B: Yes, an elephant.

A: An elephant??

B: Just kidding. We have a dog.

While there is no guarantee that every attempt will be a "hit," practice can lead to more creativity, not only in this activity but perhaps in other role-play activities to practice other skills. Teasing like this in role-plays has the benefit not only of making the interaction more interesting but of also increasing the amount of output for both students in the dialogue. It should not be forgotten, however, that the main purpose of this activity is to show that friends, regardless of language and culture, will occasionally have fun with each other in conversation by teasing.

The exchange between Mike and Yuki in I'M FROM NEW YORK may not seem funny at all if judging only from the written dialogue. However, the accompanying illustrations imply that Yuki is engaged in a kind of teasing. She pretends to show interest in baseball for Mike's benefit, but then "bursts his bubble" by revealing that she actually doesn't like baseball. This act of teasing seems more malevolent than the SHERLOCK HOLMES example, and Mike's speechlessness and the look on his face in the accompanying image indicate that he may not have enjoyed the joke. Thus, this dialogue is an example not only of misapplied teasing, but of the possible results of dispreferred responses, which are common in conversation but perhaps underrepresented in language learning textbooks.

Here it could be a good idea to have students consider their own L1 ways of reacting to dispreferred responses to offers or requests. It is "a vital part of the intercultural learning process," as Mullen (2015, 43) puts it, that "students reflect on and explore their own culture" with its similarities and differences to target language examples, including ways of disagreeing or saying no. After such reflection, students may again do a role-play activity revolving around dispreferred responses—funny, teasing ones like this or otherwise.

The SOUVENIRS dialogue is another one that may be difficult to sense as teasing just from reading the words on the page. It becomes necessary in this case to have students listen carefully to the recorded audio and notice both Adonis' tone of voice when he falters in his account, and Katerina's tone of voice in her "Yea, sure!" response. Also important is the way she quickly changes the subject to something else, perhaps to show that her sarcastic tease was not a serious criticism. As suggested above, students can reflect and compare cultures on issues such as:

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- how they themselves might respond to a friend's promise or assertion that they don't really believe;
- why that friend might make such dubious assertions (he/she might also be teasing);
- how close the friends would have to be for one to tease the other like this.

Whether or not the students can imagine themselves responding as Katerina did to Adonis' suspicious assertion, it is the process of reflecting and comparing itself that is central to awareness raising.

Reinforce Solidarity: Comic Foil Interactions

I have chosen to define this category with a stand-up comedy term that is often used with so-called double acts: two comedians working as "foils" to each other in their conversations on stage. One of the two characters in a double act, often called the "comic," "funny man," or "banana man,"[2] is perpetually confused and out of place, making either silly or improperly direct statements, while the "straight man" or "stooge" acts in a markedly different way, giving a variety of responses ranging from perplexity to reproach to sarcasm (see Vintaloro 2014). Sometimes the comic's remark is the funny part, but perhaps just as often it is the "straight man's" response that provides the main wit and insight. Another way of describing the comic foil style of humor could be to call it a "chemistry of opposites" (Smith 1986, 1). Famous examples of this style include English-speaking comedy acts such Abbott and Costello or Morecambe and Wise. This kind of comic foil humor appeared at least seven times in six of the 21 texts.

The SHERLOCK HOLMES dialogue above may qualify as a modified "comic foil" dialogue, although Judy as reprimanding "straight man" only enters the dialogue at the end. A more traditional example follows:

PUFFERFISH (*Time Zones 2*, 48)

Ming: Do you have a pet, Stig?

Stig: Actually, I do. He's really cute. Do you want to see him?

Ming: Sure!

Stig: He has a funny dog face, but he's cuter than a dog.

Ming: Cuter than a dog?

[Stig shows his pet to Ming.]

Ming: But . . . that's not a dog, it's a fish!

Stig: It's better than a fish, it's a dogface pufferfish!

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Stig (intentionally?) misleads Ming in describing his pet, and this creates comic confusion for Ming. Ming responds in "straight man" style with questions and frustrated corrections in response to Stig's odd statements.

STIGOSAURUS (*Time Zones 3*, 98)

Maya: They have a dinosaur called a Stegosaurus. It's really interesting.

Stig: A Stigosaurus? You mean there's a dinosaur named after me?

Maya: No, Stig! It's a Stegosaurus. Anyway, its brain was only the size of a walnut!

Stig: Oh, that's not what I imagined!

This exchange again displays the recurring character Stig's off-the-mark remarks. (I will discuss below the appeal of a textbook using recurring characters like Stig.) In this dialogue, Maya is able to come back with a witty rejoinder for Stig concerning the size of his namesake reptile's brain. This teasing serves as a mild moral reproach for Stig's ignorant outburst, and is typical of "comic foil" interaction.

The "comic foil" category of interactional humor is an important variation of *reinforcing solidarity*. It has been shown that, among young people in cultures such as Japan, at least, "the roles of *boke* [roughly equivalent to *comic*] and *tsukkomi* [*straight man*] are the ones most commonly adopted in humorous conversational exchanges" (Oshima 2006, 106). Many of the dialogues involving Stig in the globally published *Time Zones* series demonstrate that these roles may be just as familiar to young people in other parts of the world.

From a pragmatics perspective, one that applies especially to the classroom, the concepts of "comic" and "straight man" may resonate with another concept often found in school culture, that of the "class clown." This is the attention-seeking student who may at best be a comic contributor to the atmosphere of learning, but who may at worst be disruptive and demoralizing. The class clown will gladly play the role of "comic" against the rest of the class—including the teacher—as "straight man." In the *Time Zones* series, Stig tends to play this role, allowing the other characters, his classmates, to comment humorously in response to his seeming ineptitude or intentional silliness. (He is also the victim of teasing at other times in the series.)

Encouraging actual class clowning for the sake of humor awareness may not seem like a great idea to many teachers. A teacher could, however, discuss the general relationship benefits of these types of interactions as seen in the textbooks, while making the point that it is often the "straight man" who has the upper hand by showing insight and restraint, rather than the crazy "comic."

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One other important element to consider regarding the types of comic relationships between speakers in the dialogues, is the recurring characters in many of these textbooks. Series such as *Time Zones, Think Teen*, and all of the Japan-produced series use characters recurrently through their books, and in some cases even through different levels. From a pragmatics point of view, as well as an interactional humor point of view, this can be beneficial. Students using such books get to watch friendships deepen between characters, and this can show in the humor of their interactions. The dialogues described at the beginning of this chapter are a clear example of this. Kenta and Bob take turns in different conversations making fun of each other. Potentially hurtful teases are mitigated by both boys' knowledge—and the understanding of the textbook readers—that they have become good friends.

Notably, one textbook series with a very low number of interactional humor examples—the *Side by Side* series—had no recurring characters and gave names to very few of them, using only "A" and "B" in the vast majority of dialogues. Teachers who have a choice of textbooks to use with young students may want to consider the pragmatic instructional value that may come from seeing recurring textbook characters get to know each other during the course of the school year. Students may even identify more closely with certain characters than others. It may be possible at some stage for students to be able to create their own dialogues consisting of what they think the characters would likely say to each other.

Doing Power

It might seem unlikely and unproductive, in a language textbook geared toward impressionable junior high school–aged children, to highlight the sort of humor a person in a superior position would use to reinforce his or her position of authority. On the other hand, the classroom, with its authority figure and its "captive" students, is a natural site for "power" humor to take place. Students may be more aware and tolerant of this type of humor than we realize. There were in fact a small number of such situations to be found: three of the textbooks (two Japanese, one global) contained one example each. Here is one:

BEARS (*Connect 2*, 103)

Guide: You can see a lot of amazing things in this park.

Kate: So, what can you see on this trail?

Guide: You can see some incredible mountains, hot springs, rivers . . .

Kate: Can you see any animals?

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Guide: Yes, you can. You can see snakes and wolves. And sometimes you can see bears.

Kate: I don't want to see any bears right now!

Guide: And they don't want to see you!

In this dialogue, the park guide playfully turns Kate's words around. In doing so, he is accomplishing several things: displaying his authoritative knowledge of bears' habits, lightly mocking Kate for being afraid, and also bonding with her by acknowledging what she said in a playful way, perhaps in hopes of allaying her fears. In this sense, the guide's didactic yet affiliative humor exhibits all the signs of doing power.

A teacher with an open mind could, after discussing the possible reasons for the guide's attempt at humor, ask students to reflect on their own experience with hierarchy-oriented humor, perhaps even from the teacher him or herself. Doing so may even entail a "role-play" that actually involves the teacher: the teacher performs some simple tease or self-deprecating joke, and students respond either in earnest or in a role. Afterward, if sufficient trust is there, perhaps students can discuss their honest reactions to humor from superiors: Do they feel like they are being criticized? Do they feel closer to the person joking with them? Do they feel pressure to laugh? These are all questions that might shed light on the pragmatic purposes of humor from "above" (see Holmes 2000).

Another type of joking that relates to this category is what are often called in America "dad jokes," which can be described more generally as attempts by older men to demonstrate wit and impress their kids (or anyone younger than they are) by telling a lot of simple puns. Students could be asked to consider why their elders try to joke with them in such a way. Examples could be found online and discussed in class. Students could also be encouraged to freely evaluate the humor of such jokes. This kind of project may naturally lead them to the sort of interactional humor that is described in the next section.

Resisting and Challenging

It should not be surprising that these young adolescent-targeted textbooks have few instances of subversive or authority-challenging humor, especially of the kind that would be considered funny by both speaker and hearer. Nevertheless, in the analyzed texts there were three times as many appearances of subversive or resisting humor as those of power humor. Nine examples appeared in seven of the 21 texts, with more than half (five) appearing in the Greek publications.

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GONE TO GREECE (*Think Teen 2 Advanced*, 48)

Anna: Why Tom! . . . Hello! . . . Look at you! You've got quite a tan! . . . And . . . what . . . I thought you said you had to work this summer . . .

Tom: Well, believe it or not, my boss did give me those two weeks off, after all. So I packed my bags and ran off to Greece before he could change his mind! Ha! Ha! Ha!

This dialogue of course also constitutes a sort of bonding humor between Tom and Anna, but it is at the expense of Tom's boss, to show a sense of victory against his earlier strictness. Tom's comment, and the laughter that follows, seem to show his great satisfaction, not only in taking the vacation, but in being able to "get away with it."

This next example of subversive humor is aimed more directly at the authority figure:

CAMP (*Connect 2*, 37)

Megan: Let's go. Hurry up, Mom.

Mom: Just a minute, Megan. Don't wear a dress. Wear something comfortable.

Megan: But this *is* comfortable, Mom.

Mom: Fine, Megan, but read the checklist again. It says "No computers." Leave your computer at home, please.

Megan: But I use my computer at night, Mom.

Mom: I know, but there are camp activities at night.

Megan: Oh, good! I can stay up till midnight.

Mom: No, Megan! It's camp. Don't stay up late.

Megan: Mom, please stop. Camp is supposed to be fun!

Here Megan subjects her mother to a sarcastic accusation that to follow her advice would result in a total lack of fun at camp. Megan is expressing what she probably believes to be snide humor at her mother's expense. She does not seem to be trying to establish nor maintain a friendly atmosphere with this type of humor.

As with "power" humor discussed above, teachers may not wish to spend a lot of time priming students to use subversive humor with superiors or with people they don't like, but it is likely that students are aware of it and use it already, at least in their own language and culture. As has been pointed out several times above, it is important that students be given a chance to notice the similarities and differences in pragmatic expression between their own

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culture and the target culture in contexts such as these. They can learn from evaluating their own ways of "getting it" when humor is used and comparing it with these usages in the textbook, whether the humor is intended to reinforce a relationship or to challenge it.

Teachers who think their students are ready for it can use these textbook examples as a springboard, giving their students opportunities to practice their own resistant humor through something like "sarcasm drills." In a role-play situation involving status differences (parent/child, teacher/student, boss/employee), students could be encouraged to respond to unreasonable demands (such as "Finish this project by 2:00!") by using understatement ("Ok, I guess lunch can wait."), overstatement ("Two o'clock . . . next month?"), or even flagrant sarcasm ("Best. Boss. Ever!"). (See Gibbs et al. 2014 for an overview of the forms verbal irony and sarcasm can take.) Responses are not likely to come very quickly, or wittily, at first, but the practice itself may slowly spur creativity, and dwelling on the frustration of the characters in the role-plays (and in the textbook dialogues that inspire them) can raise learner awareness of irony/sarcasm's prominent place in English. While sarcasm is likely expressed in every culture around the world, its manner of expression varies, as well as its primary targets, and English learners would benefit from explicit instruction in its cultural forms and uses (see Attardo et al. 2003; Kim 2017; Shively 2018; Prichard and Rucynski, this volume).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERACTIONAL HUMOR IN HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

This study has located and categorized examples of interactional humor in several junior high school/young adolescent level English teaching textbooks from around the world. The pragmatic functions of these examples of humor have been described in terms of three main categories, based on Schnurr (2010): reinforcing solidarity (including teasing and expressing "comic foil" relationships), doing power, and resisting or challenging. Reasonably fitting examples of each of these types of pragmatic purposes were given, and some ideas were provided on how the examples can be of use pedagogically to aid students with pragmatic competence of interactional humor.

Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011), in their comprehensive categorization of the myriad roles of humor in the language classroom, believe that students of language should be "exposed to authentic situations [in the target culture] in which humor also plays a role" (426). There is no doubt that the textbook dialogues examined here fail to portray "authentic situations" of humor; they are by definition and design inauthentic. A language teacher with serious de-

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sires, despite the limitations of the classroom, to give students practical exposure to pragmatic usages of interactional humor would need to look elsewhere for adequate material to prepare students for genuine humor in conversations.

Ishihara (2010) encourages teachers who wish to improve pragmatic awareness of their students to supplement typically limited textbook examples by finding research-based resources that can flesh out the realities of language usage (150). In the case of interactional humor, research collections by Norrick (1993; Norrick and Chiaro 2009) and Dynel (2011), for example, provide numerous real-world examples from many situations that shed much light on everyday humor usage. A recent study by Shively (2018) examines authentic examples of students using L2 humor in study abroad situations. Consulting these resources would be invaluable to any teacher wishing to give students more authentic interactional humor examples.

As mentioned at the start, however, it can be a challenge for teachers to develop teaching units on L2 interactional humor, not only in terms of finding useful authentic material but in terms of finding time to teach them, especially at the junior high level. The humor analyzed here is indeed a poor substitute for real humorous interaction, but it is available in textbooks which have already been prepared to teach the target language via other more conventional aspects of vocabulary, grammar, and so on. As we have seen, the authors of these textbooks saw a role for humorous dialogues to play in their compositions. If a teacher takes just a little time to exploit the humor's pragmatic functions as well as its language-modeling and entertainment functions, so much the better.

To recap some of the teaching suggestions discussed in the previous section, a teacher can use humorous dialogues in a textbook to:

a. point out the relationship cues and pragmatic purposes of the humor that people use in conversation with each other, whether they are in relationships that are co-equal (friends, classmates, coworkers) or unequal (parent/child, boss/employee, teacher/student, etc.);
b. show students how people sometimes deal with unconventional or dispreferred responses in conversations (whether humorous or not);
c. demonstrate methods of achieving interactional humor, e.g. substituting truthful responses with understated, overstated, outlandish, or sarcastic ones; and/or
d. open up opportunities for students to compare cultural norms of humor and challenge them through role-play, or even through direct engagement with authority figures, e.g., the teacher.

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Despite the intent of some of the pedagogical suggestions outlined in this chapter, the goal of raising students' pragmatic awareness of interactional humor should not simply be to try to make the students "more funny" in their L2 (although that may be a side effect, or indeed even an expressed ideal of some students). Most students are already well equipped within their own culture to be able to say funny things on occasion, just as they are equipped to be polite or start a conversation.

Nevertheless, "learning a second language is not just the mastery of its forms, it is also a process of identity formation and self-positioning in that second language" (Kim 2012, 38). Just as L2 learners try to express themselves differently in terms of vowels, consonants, nouns, and sentences, so must they try to express themselves differently in terms of interacting, sharing, and laughing. They may never *be* naturally funny in the target language, but pragmatic—and L2 humor—awareness must still be part of their *becoming* as a second language user. Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011) also recognize the individual's (and the classroom's) shifting place *between* cultures, even in terms of humor: "Every educator should have thought about the role that humor plays 1) in the target language culture, 2) as pedagogical tool in the world language classroom, and 3) in students' personal pragmatic development" (427).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON INTERACTIONAL HUMOR IN TEXTBOOKS

The number of textbooks researched here was limited, and the humor examples described were neither authentic nor knee-slapping funny. However, the humorous scripted dialogues in these texts were found to fit the same categories of interactional humor usage that linguists have found when researching real people who are joking with each other in conversation. A wider study of language textbooks from around the world, particularly from other global publishers, may yield a greater picture of the variety of interactional humor modeled for language learning. Such a study may of course also expand beyond the junior high school level and into primary school or adult-oriented texts. It is hoped that the discovery of such examples will dispel the fear of Medgyes (2001) that humor is being sifted out of language textbooks in order to please (or avoid offending) wider audiences.

Another possibility for classroom research based on this analysis is—following Ishihara's (2010) advice and using the pragmatic categories set up here and by Schnurr (2010)—to locate examples from authentic (or at least less instructional) material, such as field recordings or scenes from movies.

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Two (or three) classes could be set up as "textbook group" and "authentic group" (and perhaps even a third "no interactive humor" control group) to see over time which types of humor dialogues are more effective in heightening learner awareness and production of conversational humor.

It is important to note that, while many examples of conversational humor were found and analyzed for this research, they were located across dozens of textbooks. The classroom reality is that students have only one or two textbooks for use in their classes, and—at present, at least—humor of any kind is going to be relatively hard to find in them. Perhaps the greatest research challenge for teachers wanting to improve their students' awareness of pragmatic uses of humor is to engage with students humorously in regular conversation themselves—before, during, and after class—in ways that reflect the pragmatic purposes outlined in this paper. In other words, teachers could occasionally show power or resistance to power or tease a bit now and then, while hopefully at all times emphasizing affiliation and solidarity with students.

As pragmatics instruction is gradually taken more seriously in second language pedagogy, more and better examples of interactional humor will hopefully make their way into textbooks, based more closely on genuine examples from corpora or collected conversational data. If so, this would fulfill the call to action of Bell (2009):

> Rather than leave learners to struggle alone to discover the nuances of L2 humor, it is the responsibility of instructors and textbook writers to take advantage of the growing research base on humor in native English speaker interaction to help their students as they grapple with this aspect of the L2. (252)

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NOTES

1. Very few of the *Think Teen* series dialogue scripts were printed in the student books, so most of the scripts were taken from the teacher books. It could be argued that, because of this, the *Think Teen* series has different linguistic objectives for its listening texts than the other series in this analysis. The recorded dialogues tended to be longer and to contain more naturalistic elements (hedges, overlaps, etc.) than the dialogues in the other textbooks, which had their scripts included for students to follow and study.
2. While it is by no means the case that this form of stand-up comedy is performed exclusively by men, the terms used to describe it do not seem to have come around to reflect gender neutrality.

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Chapter 6

Reading Jokes in English

How English Language Learners Appreciate and Comprehend Humor

Nadezda Pimenova

More than ten years ago, when I was an international graduate student in the American Midwest, I felt that some jokes told in class were lost on me. I did not always feel comfortable asking my classmates what was funny. When I did ask for explanation, it was still hard to appreciate their take on it. I faked a smile to imply I understood, so no one could see the truth.

It was frustrating that I could not understand a joke, but also, I could not make one myself. I used to tell funny stories to my friends and family in Russia all the time. However, when I tried to translate a funny Russian joke into English, my friends just sat there staring at me with that blank look on their faces.

For example, I once said, "While wandering around the streets of Berlin, Stierlitz notices that people are staring at him suspiciously. *They have spotted me! I wonder why. It could be my masculine Russian features . . . or could it be this parachute on my back*?" My friends asked, "Wait, who is Stierlitz?" Even after a lengthy explanation that Stierlitz, the "Soviet James Bond," is a fictional spy during WW2, and that this Stierlitz joke satirizes his deductive train of thought, the joke was lost in explanation.

Understanding humor in a foreign language requires a greater effort. Besides making sense of what each individual word in a joke means, L2 learners have to understand some hidden layers, such as idioms and cultural references. Without this knowledge, even a funny joke most likely will go down "like a lead balloon." One famous joke that requires knowledge of idiomatic English is the plane joke: *Have you heard the joke about the plane? No? Well, it was over your head anyway*. When the joke is "over their head," L2 learners might feel frustration or even shame.

An English learner in Russia told me that she could not understand the following joke: *While stealing from a blood bank, the thief was caught*

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red-handed. She said, "I can translate it word for word, but . . . the metaphorical meaning and the expressions are not clear for me; it's a shame" (Pimenova 2011, 121). I can relate to English language learners' frustration when they do not get a joke. For example, if they do not know an idiom like *over one's head* or *catch someone red-handed*, a joke will create an awkward silence.

This chapter describes two studies which involved L2 learners reading American jokes and those from other cultures. The pedagogical objectives of this activity were to build learners' competence in comprehending and appreciating jokes and to improve their overall reading fluency. In order to make research-based recommendations for humor competency training and research, this chapter reviews the relevant scholarship related to joke comprehension to contextualize data collected by the author. The first study analyzes how Chinese and Saudi students comprehended and appreciated different cultural jokes that they read in English. The second study examines how English language learners from Peru, Colombia, and Saudi Arabia perceived and understood various cultural jokes. In both studies, participants rated jokes for funniness and ease of comprehension. Before sharing the results of the original studies, I will explain some theories of humor. I will also examine how culture and L2 proficiency affect humor comprehension and appreciation.

GENERAL THEORIES OF VERBAL HUMOR

While there are many theories of humor, I will touch upon two: The Semantic Script Theory of Humor and Superiority Theory.

Semantic Script Theory of Humor

In order to better teach and research about jokes and other humor, whether in English or another language, we need awareness of some humor theories. One influential semantic theory of jokes became known as the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (Raskin 1985). According to this theory, a joke needs to have two scripts—both must be overlapping and opposing at the same time. The following joke was used by Raskin (1985, 25) as an example to demonstrate his theory:

> Who was that gentleman I saw you with last night?
>
> That was no gentleman. That was a senator.

The above-mentioned joke activates two scripts—"senators are gentlemen" and "senators are not gentlemen."

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Later Attardo and Raskin (1991) revised the Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH) and introduced the General Theory of Verbal Humor (as cited in Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin 1993, 124). Besides script opposition, introduced in the SSTH, they added five knowledge resources: language, narrative strategy, target, situation, and logical mechanism. Essentially, any joke is a text with linguistic components. A joke is a form of a narrative—a dialogue, a riddle, or a story. A joke may not have a person or subject that is being mocked or ridiculed, but if it does, then this joke has a target. In the example above, the butt of the joke is senators. According to the first script, senators are supposed to be outstanding citizens, but according to the second script, senators do not live up to those high expectations. The forth knowledge resource in a joke is a situation, like going on a date, wandering around the streets, stealing from a blood bank, among others. When two scripts (senses) in a joke are activated, one of the logical mechanisms is involved:

1. *Juxtaposition*: Two things with conflicting effects that are put together can create a humorous effect, as in the T-shirt slogan *Gobi Desert Canoe Club* (Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin 1993).
2. *Garden-path*: We are being deceived and led to believe in something which is not true. The following joke serves as an example:

   My wife. It's the same every night. "When are you going to paint the kitchen?" "When are you going to paint the kitchen?" Every bloody night. "When are you going to paint the kitchen?" I've told her about it ten times now, and she still has not done it. (*Comedic Device*s n.d.)

   At first, based on gender stereotypes, we may assume that a nagging wife constantly reminds her husband that he needs to paint the kitchen. However, we have been led down the garden path; it is the husband who has told his wife ten times to do the chore.
3. *Figure-ground reversal*: This happens when foreground and background concepts switch, as in Steven Wright's quote, "I couldn't fix your brakes, so I made your horn louder" (Wulf 2010) or the following bulb joke:

   How many Poles does it take to screw in a light-bulb?

   Five. One to hold the light bulb and four to turn the table he is standing on. (Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin 1993)

Certain cultures may use these "mechanisms" of humor more than others. If this is the case, examining such jokes in L2 education may be beneficial because familiarity with such joke patterns can help learners recognize the gap between joke-telling in the L1 and L2 culture.

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Superiority Theory

Superiority theory particularly fits well with jokes, especially disparaging humor (Abrams, Bippus, and Mcgaughey 2015; Braun and Preiser 2013; Gutiérrez, Carretero-Dios, Willis, and Morales 2018). According to Duncan (1985, 558), "superiority theory views the basis of laughter as the triumph of one person over other people and the resulting varieties of humor that can occur." Disparaging humor ridiculing others may be universal, and there are several groups of people who are being ridiculed or mocked in different jokes across the globe, for example people stereotyped, often wrongly, for lacking intelligence. According to Hasenauer, "by telling jokes about the stupidity of a group, people can gain reassurance that they and the members of their group are not stupid" (as cited in Tisgam 2009, 4). In the United States, blonde jokes are one example of this. Other common targets of jokes are no-good drunkards, henpecked husbands, and sleazy lawyers, among others. A common theme in many jokes is a reversal of conventional expectations as in the following example (Ayiçiçeği-Dinn, Şişman-Bal, and Caldwell-Harris 2018, 36):

> When I was young, I didn't like going to weddings. My grandmother would tell me, "You're next." She finally stopped nagging me when I started saying the same thing to her at funerals.

Being aware of disparaging humor in L2 culture can help L2 learners navigate complex social interactions involving humor both inside and outside the L2 classroom.

JOKE COMPREHENSION AND APPRECIATION

Receptive competence of a joke requires three aspects, which are recognition (or detection), comprehension, and appreciation (Hay 2001). According to Hay, after a joke is detected, understanding may occur; moreover, without recognition and comprehension, there will be no joke appreciation. Bell (2007, 377), argued that "understanding, like appreciation, can be of varying degrees, and that appreciation does not necessarily imply full understanding." Bell gave an example of a female L2 learner, Pum, who recognized the joke in a conversation with two male native speakers of English. This recognition was the first step of receptive competence. However, the woman had limited understanding of the joke (the comprehension aspect), even though she clearly appreciated it. Pum thought that her conversation partners were talking about camping while they actually implied "a sort of extremist survivalist script" (Bell 2007, 377). Whatever the native language, jokes in English can

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present a significant (linguistic and cultural) challenge for English language learners. Below, I will discuss several factors which influence L2 humor comprehension and appreciation.

L2 Proficiency

For any language learner, language proficiency is essential for comprehension. A number of scholars looked at how language proficiency can influence humor detection, comprehension, and appreciation. Bell and Attardo (2010) created a typology of failed humor, including seven layers that may prevent non-native speakers from appreciating and understanding humor. One of these layers is failure to understand the meaning of words. An example that Bell and Attardo provided was when the Korean student Tommy did not understand the slang expression *brown-nosing* in the story that his classmate told. Understanding that the guy in the story helped to carry bags not because he was kind but because he was trying to impress someone is "crucial to understanding the story as a whole, as it provides a re-evaluation of the boy's actions" (2010, 431). Failure to understand the meaning of words may hinder L2 learners' joke comprehension.

When attempting to recognize or produce humor successfully, L2 learners need to know conventional and formulaic language patterns, which represents the first challenge for L2 learners. Another major challenge will be "to detect purposeful deviations from these patterns with humorous or ironic intent" (Bell and Skalicky 2019, 120). For example, the English language learner whom I mentioned in the introduction did not know the meaning of the idiomatic expression *red-handed*; thus, she could not understand wordplay in the joke about the thief being caught red-handed while stealing from a blood bank.

Knowledge of L2 vocabulary is important in humor comprehension. This leads me to question whether an advanced level of L2 proficiency will help ESL/EFL students understand humor better. L2 language learners need to comprehend nearly every word in a joke in order to get the humor.

Shardakova (2016) examined whether proficiency affects comprehension of textual L2 humor. Native Russian speakers and three groups of American students with different levels of Russian language skills read six different texts—three literary texts and three news articles in Russian. The first group merged L2 learners with intermediate-high and advanced-low proficiency levels; the second group consisted of L2 learners with advanced-mid proficiency, and the third group was comprised of L2 learners with advanced-high and superior proficiency levels. All participants read humorous and non-humorous texts and identified humorous instances. There was a statistically significant difference in humor detection among the three groups of Russian language learners.

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In Shardokova's 2010 study as well as Bell's 2005 research (cited in Shardakova 2016), L2 proficiency correlated with L2 learners' ability to recognize (and produce) humor. Nevertheless, in Shardakova's 2016 study, humor comprehension of learners with various L2 proficiency depended on the type, genre, and text humorousness. Thus, besides the level of vocabulary difficulty, the text type and genre may matter in L2 joke comprehension.

Not only will advanced learners likely understand the humor better, they may appreciate it more. In one study (Ayiçiçeği-Dinn et al. 2018), advanced English language learners experienced jokes in L2 as slightly more humorous compared to the jokes in their native language, which, according to these researchers, is consistent with the achievement/satisfaction theory supported by other linguists (Raskin 2008; Alm 2013; Darvin and Norton 2015; Ross and Stracke 2017, all as cited in Ayiçiçeği-Dinn et al. 2018). It could be the case that bilinguals with strong L2 skills feel pride and satisfaction when they are able to understand humor, so that may be why L2 learners sometimes feel that jokes are funnier in a second or foreign language (11).

To identify, comprehend, and appreciate humor L2, learners need to have basic understanding of L2 joke topics and types, too. Some of the most popular topics in English jokes are sex, work and business, marriage, health and doctors, religion, battle of sexes, money, education, various ethnic jokes, law and order, drinking and drunkenness, death, blondes, food and drink, and lawyers (Arnott and Haskins 2004). Jokes can be broadly categorized into three broad types: narrative texts, one-sentence verbal jokes, and mixed-code messages consisting of images and captions (Attardo and Chabanne 1992). Another classification was suggested by Hetzron (1991, 70) who divided jokes by pulses, which are "successive episodes . . . that form an ensemble to make the story, or parts of an enumeration." Single pulse jokes have a continuous story that culminates in a punch line, for example, the Stierlitz joke or the plane joke mentioned in the introduction. Dual jokes, for example, "good news-bad news" jokes, contain two pulses while rhythmic jokes have three or more pulses. I will provide the examples of a dual joke and a rhythmic joke below.

> Two carrots were walking when one was struck by a car. The other carrot called an ambulance and accompanied his friend to the hospital. In the waiting room, a physician approached the friend and said, "Mr. Carrot, I have good news and bad news. The good news is that your friend will recover from this trauma. The bad news is that he'll be a vegetable." (Fialkoff 2011)

> A newspaper reporter goes around the world with his/her investigation. He/she stops people on the street and asks them: "Excuse me Sir/Madam, what is your opinion of the meat shortage?" The American asks, "What is 'shortage'?" The

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Russian asks, "What is 'opinion'?" The Pole asks, "What is 'meat'?" The New York taxi-driver asks, "What is 'excuse me'?" (Hetzron 1991, 75–76).

In order to comprehend and appreciate humor, L2 learners need to be proficient enough to understand the vocabulary in the joke but also possess some sociocultural knowledge. For example, in the above-mentioned dual joke about two carrots, L2 learners must know that the word "vegetable" is polysemous. It might mean "a plant that is eaten as food" and "a person who is unable to talk or move because of severe brain damage." When reading the rhythmic joke about meat shortage, L2 learners need to understand what lies behind certain people's reaction about the issue. The wealthy American purports they do not understand what deprivation is. The Russian claims they do not have free thinking. The Pole cannot remember what meat was because of economic oppression in their country. The New York cabdriver is incapable of understanding what politeness is (Hetzron 1991, 75–76). Thus, L2 proficiency is not the only factor that influences L2 humor comprehension and appreciation.

Culture

Sociocultural knowledge is often a built-in part of jokes which makes understanding the point of the joke even more challenging for L2 learners (Wulf 2010, 159). In most cases, cultural jokes are funny if the speakers share the same culture; outsiders will most likely not find these jokes amusing (Tisgam 2009, 6). As I have mentioned in my introduction, the Stierlitz joke that I tried to tell my American friends fell flat because they did not share the same sociocultural knowledge as me.

Indeed, our cultural background can help or hinder our comprehension of humor. Therefore, we will consider a joke funnier if its cultural references are similar to our values and less funny if they are not (Raskin 1985; Lynch 2010). This idea is supported by Erdodi and Lajiness-O'Neill's research (2012, 464). In their study, Hungarians rated the jokes with ethnic stereotypes as the funniest, while Americans with no knowledge of Hungarian culture rated them as the least funny.

In addition to background knowledge, people from different cultures may appreciate certain types of jokes more. Nevo and her colleagues (2001) asked Singaporean participants to write down a particularly funny joke. When comparing Singaporean and American subjects' samples, the researchers found that Singaporeans supplied more aggressive jokes and fewer sexual jokes than Americans. In the study of Ruch and his colleagues (1991), German participants gave higher appreciation ratings to nonsense humor and incongruity-resolution humor while French subjects preferred jokes and cartoons with

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sexual content. Later Ruch and Forabosco (1996) used the German data sample from the previous cross-cultural study (Ruch et al. 1991) to compare it with an Italian sample. They found out that Italians appreciated sexual humor more than Germans. Also, nonsense humor was less funny for Italians than Germans. I will provide the examples of all four above-mentioned types of humor below.

Aggressive humor has elements of aggression, hostility, and ridicule, such as the light bulb joke I mentioned when explaining logical mechanisms of the General Theory of Verbal Humor. In that joke, Poles are a target of aggression. Another example will be the following present in Nevo (1984, 186–87).

> A Jew goes to the doctor, "Doctor, do you remember that you cured my rheumatism a year ago and told me not to get wet?"
>
> Doctor: Of course, I remember—
>
> Jew: I haven't had any pain since then, doctor. I just wanted to ask if I can bathe now!

Nonsense, or *absurd humor*, occurs when expectation or script is inconsistent with the punch line.

> Why did the elephant sit on the marshmallow?
>
> Because he didn't want to fall into the cup of hot chocolate.
>
> (Rothbart and Pien 1977, 37)

Incongruity resolution humor happens when a punch line deviates from one's expectation like in the joke below.

> Teacher: Why are you late?
>
> Student: There was a man who lost a 100-dollar bill.
>
> Teacher: I see. Were you helping him look for it?
>
> Student: No. I was standing on it.
>
> (Dai et al. 2017)

Sexual humor has sexual connotations. An example of a sexual joke will be the well-known joke, mentioned in Raskin (1985, 100):

> "Is the doctor at home?" the patient asked in his bronchial whisper.
>
> "No," the doctor's young and pretty wife whispered in reply. "Come right in."

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As evident from the research on humor appreciation by people from different cultures, some types of humor are enjoyed more by individuals from a certain culture (or subculture) than others. Appreciation depends on whether cultural references in humor are similar or different to the values held by people with various ethnic backgrounds. Because culture plays a big part in humor comprehension and appreciation, it is not surprising that L2 learners may comprehend and appreciate L2 humor differently than native speakers.

ORIGINAL STUDIES

My research has focused on how L2 learners appreciated and comprehended jokes that they read in their L2, which is English. I was mainly interested in how L1 cultural background and L2 proficiency of participants affected their humor comprehension and appreciation.

In both studies, participants read three kinds of humorous texts—American jokes, jokes with references to L2 learners' native culture, and jokes with foreign cultural referents (other than American). If ESL and EFL teachers know more about how the L1 culture of English language learners may affect their L2 joke comprehension, teachers will be able to plan and conduct more effective humor competency training sessions for their students. In addition, these experiments reveal the methodological challenges in researching joke comprehension and appreciation. Scholars researching the efficacy of humor competency training related to jokes will need to overcome the limitations and difficulties highlighted below.

Study 1 Methods

I recruited participants who were attending an intensive English program at a university in the Midwest at the time of the study. They were L2 learners from Saudi Arabia (N = 18, 6 female and 12 male) and China (N = 9, 5 female and 4 male). Their average age was 23.7 years (range 18–30). The time that these L2 learners had spent studying English in their native countries varied greatly (Chinese 0.5–10 years, average 6.6 years; Saudis 0–13 years, average 2.8 years), which means that only a few Saudi students did not have any English instruction prior to coming to the USA (N = 3). On average, the native speakers of Arabic spent slightly over one year studying English in English speaking (ES) countries (range 1 month–5 years) while the Chinese students received from one month to two years of English instruction in ES countries (average 5.7 months). The length of time studying English was used to estimate the proficiency of the students since standardized proficiency test

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scores were not available. This is a limitation, as proficiency can be developed at varying rates.

The study employed two data collection instruments: a short questionnaire and a reading assignment. Participants self-reported how often they communicated with American friends and in what ways they were exposed to American culture (e.g., by watching TV news or American movies, reading local or national newspapers, attending cultural events on campus, or listening to the radio).

The reading assignment consisted of 15 jokes: five jokes about Americans, five jokes about Chinese, and five jokes about Arabs. None of them revolved around wordplay or idioms. The themes of jokes varied from the importance of knowing a foreign language to corruption in political circles and elections. I selected the jokes both from internet joke sites and two printed sources, including "Carnivalesque Politics: A Bakhtinian Case Study of Contemporary Arab Political Humor" (Badarneh 2011) and *100 Chinese Jokes through the Ages* (Lu 1985). As will be discussed below, one limitation of this study is that the jokes were not piloted among target language users to determine if these jokes were representative of jokes in their culture in terms of difficulty and funniness.

Participants rated the jokes' levels of funniness on a 1–4 scale (1—not funny, 4—very funny) and easiness (1—very difficult, 4—very easy). Unfortunately, this ranking was subjective, and there was no objective measure of comprehension. They also were instructed to write down any words they did not understand in each joke. They could look up the unknown words in a dictionary.

Study 2 Methods

In the summer of 2018, I recruited participants from 3 different programs in another large public university in the Midwest. The first group was enrolled in a 4-week intensive English summer program. They were faculty from both public and private universities from Colombia (N = 12, 5 female and 7 male, average age 44.3 years). The time that Colombian participants had spent studying English in Colombia varied greatly (range 2 months–15 years) with a mean of 4.8 years. They spent on average 1.5 months studying L2 in ES countries (range 0–1 year).

The second group consisted of faculty from a private university in Peru who participated in a 2-week curriculum development program with an emphasis on supporting L2 learners (N = 4, 2 female and 2 male, average 38.8 years, range 30–53). Peruvians studied English on average 5.7 years in Peru (range 3–12 years, one of the participants did not provide an answer to this

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question). Only one Peruvian faculty member studied English in ES countries (5 years).

The third group were students from a large public university in Saudi Arabia majoring either in computer science or engineering (N = 4, all male, average age 21.5, range 20–21). They participated in a 5-week engineering and entrepreneurial program with 2 weeks of English language instruction. On average, Saudi students spent 6 years studying English (range 2–16 years) in Saudi Arabia, and only one participant spent time (2 months) studying English in ES countries.

As in the first research study, I used two data collection instruments: a short questionnaire and a reading assignment. The reading task consisted of 12 jokes: three American jokes, three Peruvian jokes, three Colombian jokes, and three Saudi jokes. All jokes were presented in English. The themes of the jokes revolved around a reversal of conventional expectations. American jokes were selected from internet joke sites. I used several Saudi, Colombian, and Peruvian informants to suggest authentic jokes from these countries with no wordplay or idioms.

Participants received a short questionnaire and a list of 12 jokes. As in the first study, they rated each joke's level of funniness and their ability to comprehend it on a 1–4 scale. After each joke they were asked one question (a multiple choice or a short answer) to check their joke comprehension. This was intended to be a more objective measure of joke comprehension, compared to ranking difficulty. Participants wrote down any words they did not understand in each joke. They were informed that they could look up the unknown words in a dictionary.

Results: The Impact of L2 Proficiency

The effects of proficiency on L2 learners' humor comprehension and appreciation were not so clear-cut in my research. The length of time studying English was used to estimate L2 learners' proficiency. This includes time L2 learners studied English in their home countries and the time they learned English in English speaking (ES) countries. A simple correlation analysis was done to determine the relationship between total length of study and all jokes comprehension and appreciation ratings. In the two studies, there was surprisingly no positive significant correlation between the time studying English and the reported difficulty comprehending jokes. As for reported funniness, it did correlate significantly in study 1 only, r (27) = .39, p = .04. L2 learners perceived jokes as being funnier with the increase of L2 instruction.

Why was there no positive significant correlation between the time studying English and the reported difficulty comprehending jokes? My findings

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could suggest that length of time does not always predict proficiency, especially when comparing students from different educational backgrounds. Moreover, difficulty ratings may not always reflect comprehension and lack reliability. Participants' level of honesty in self-reporting may be an issue. Some L2 learners with a lower level of proficiency might have been tempted to present themselves in a more favorable way by choosing *easy* and *very easy* options while rating jokes. Humor is both an emotional and cognitive response, and ratings likely emphasize on the cognitive component (Scheff and Scheele 2014). In other words, it is might not be easy for L2 learners to give objective joke ratings when a joke triggers an emotional response.

The most difficult jokes were analyzed to examine how vocabulary could play a factor in joke comprehension and appreciation. Even though no jokes were selected based on wordplay, an examination of the most difficult jokes suggests how vocabulary could have had a large effect. In study 1, participants rated joke #15 as the most difficult joke (see Appendix A), which was written as a dialogue between a US naval ship and Canadians authorities. Six out of 27 participants reported that had to look up the meanings of the word *collision;* 7 participants did not know the word *divert*. Also, unfamiliarity with formulaic language patterns common in radio conversations might be an issue in L2 learners' low comprehension and appreciation ratings. The examples of speech formulas which are used in a specific conversational context in joke #15 are *negative* and *your call*.

Joke #11 (Chinese) got the second lowest comprehension ratings possibly because of some unknown vocabulary. Seven participants reported the words *manuscript*, *cursive*, and *sneered* were unfamiliar to them. Participants rated joke #2 (Arabic) as the third most difficult joke to comprehend. For example, 13 participants did not know the word *pigeon*; ten participants did not know *anniversary* and *proclaimed*. In study 2, joke #8 (Saudi) was rated as the most difficult joke (see Appendix B). Eleven out of 20 participants did not know the word *henna*. L2 learners gave joke #10 (Colombian) the second lowest comprehension ratings. One of the reasons could be that eight participants noted that they did not know the word *cleats*. Therefore, they did not understand the punch line—"But, dear Priest, I was given the cleats." Although significant results were not found in this study, the literature suggests vocabulary does have a large impact on comprehension which supported the qualitative data collected based on participants' responses.

These results indicate a strong corollary between L2 proficiency and understanding jokes. However, these are not the only factors that determine humor comprehension and appreciation among L2 learners. Understanding cultural context might play as significant role as vocabulary.

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Results: The Impact of Cultural and Background Knowledge

Two analyses were deemed fit to evaluate the effect of cultural and background knowledge on joke comprehension and appreciation: cultural comparison and time spent studying English in English speaking countries. In this section, I will also discuss why some jokes were easier for L2 learners to understand and why some jokes went over their head.

The first analysis compared participants' ratings of jokes from one's own culture with American or other L2 learners' cultures. Surprisingly, in neither study there was a significant difference between how L2 learners comprehended native jokes compared to American jokes or jokes from each other's culture. As per reported funniness, after combining the responses of all participants in both studies, jokes from one's own culture were rated funnier than jokes from other cultures, $t(46) = 2.03$, $p < .05$.

Results favoring native humor over foreign humor are congruent with the previous research discussed in this chapter's literature review (e.g., Erdodi and Lajiness-O'Neill 2012). When responses from study 2 were analyzed separately in terms of joke appreciation, Colombian, Peruvian, and Saudi participants appreciated American jokes more than native jokes, $t(38) = 2.15$, $p < .05$. These results are consistent with the achievement/satisfaction theory explained in L2 proficiency section of this chapter. The feeling of achievement in comprehending target culture jokes (Ayçiçeği-Dinn et al. 2018) could have enhanced L2 learners' humor enjoyment and understanding of American jokes. However, the results may be simply the consequence of the joke selection. As mentioned in the description of the original studies, there was no piloting to determine if the jokes are representative of jokes from each culture in terms of their funniness. The mixed results in both studies showed that L2 learners either favored native humor over foreign humor or found American jokes funnier than native jokes.

The second analysis is related to cultural and background knowledge and the length of time participants had studied L2 in English speaking (ES) countries, which in most cases was the United States. Considering all participants in both studies, time studying in ES countries had a negative correlation with the reported difficulty L2 learners had comprehending American jokes, $r(45) = -.35$, $p < .01$. That means that L2 learners with more years of L2 language instruction in ES countries found American jokes more difficult. As I have mentioned in previous section of the chapter, there might be a lack of honesty in participants' self-reporting of joke comprehension. Some less proficient L2 learners might have rated jokes as *easy* or *very easy*, but in fact did not comprehend them fully. In terms of joke appreciation, with the increase of L2 instruction L2 learners in study 1 perceived American jokes funnier ($t = 2.29$, $p < .05$). While follow-up research is needed, this could suggest that the time

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in the target country increased the participants' familiarity with some cultural references in the American jokes (Raskin 1985).

In addition to these two analyses, I examined the most difficult and least funny jokes in both studies and how cultural and background knowledge could have played a factor in joke comprehension and appreciation. In study 1, the lowest comprehension ratings were given to joke #15 (American), joke #11 (Chinese), and joke #2 (Arabic), which I discussed in the previous section. As for appreciation ratings, L2 learners found American joke #13 as the least funny joke (see Appendix A). Saudi and Chinese participants most likely did not know that in the United States' presidential elections of 2000 George W. Bush narrowly lost the popular vote to Democrat Al Gore but defeated him in the Electoral College. If L2 learners had known this fact, they might have found joke #13 more humorous.

As I have mentioned earlier, joke #8 (Saudi) in study 2 might have been rated as the most difficult joke because of unknown vocabulary. Another reason could be that L2 learners did not know that henna, a basic element for women's make-up during festive occasions like weddings or Eid, is not waterproof. Therefore, they might have given this joke the lowest comprehension and appreciation ratings, as evident in Appendix B.

Joke #10 (Colombian), which was discussed in the previous section, was given the second lowest comprehension ratings. Besides having difficulty understanding some words, some participants might have not known how sacred the ritual of Communion bread is for Roman Catholics. This could be a factor why L2 learners found joke #10 hard to comprehend. Joke #12 (Saudi) was about hashish (weed) users, who are a popular topic in jokes frequently posted on Saudi social media. Over 1.2 million people followed Hekmat Mohashish Facebook account while Nokat Mohashishen Twitter account had over 144,000 followers (Sabq News, as cited in Hendricks and Radwan 2018). Though popular in Saudi Arabia, jokes about drug users might not be as popular in Peru and Colombia. That is why participants gave one of the lowest comprehension ratings to joke #12, as evident in Appendix B.

Looking at these examples, it seems likely that L2 learners have difficulty understanding L2 humor that requires culture-specific knowledge. Because lack of cultural and background knowledge can hinder humor comprehension and appreciation, let me explore below why some jokes are universally understood and enjoyed.

Universal Humor

Some jokes from other cultures were reportedly easy to understand and ranked as humorous. These jokes were examined as examples of jokes where culture-specific knowledge was not required or where the humor type may be

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universal, as in disparaging humor. (For the complete list of the easiest and most difficult for comprehension jokes see Appendixes A and B.)

In Study 1, two Arabic jokes were ranked easy to understand and humorous. While qualitative research is necessary to verify this, it seems that these jokes contained cultural referents that are well-known to other L2 learners. The humor in joke #9 (Arabic) revolves around a misunderstanding between a son studying in college abroad and his father, a rich Arab man. When the son writes to his father that he is ashamed because professors travel by train while he drives a gold Mercedes to school, his father sends him money to buy a train so as not to embarrass their family. The second example, joke #14 (Arabic), refers to the "Big Brother is watching you" cliché. Soon after the son e-mails his father warning him not to dig soil in the garden because there is something under it, the FBI and CIA show up and dig holes all over the place but find nothing. Then the son sends another e-mail telling his father he can now plant his potatoes. This is an example of a cultural joke that most participants could understand because most people around the world know of American efforts try to stop terrorism. It also seems to be an example of "garden path" humor, which may be common in many cultures.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, disparaging humor is very common and may be present in many cultures. Jokes utilizing disparaging humor were represented in the research from different cultures, and these jokes were reportedly the easiest to understand and the most humorous jokes. An American joke, which ridiculed a father's old age, was rated one of the funniest and easiest to understand in both studies (#1 in study 1, and #3 in study 2). In the joke, a father scolds his son by saying that at his son's age, Abraham Lincoln used to walk nine miles to get to school. The child unexpectedly turns the tables by saying, "Well, when he was your age, he was president." Thus, the joke is on the father now, who got mocked by his own son.

Two Peruvian jokes and one Colombian joke in study 2, which received the highest comprehension ratings, are examples of disparaging humor, too. In joke #4 (Peruvian), a man misinterprets the directions on a shampoo bottle *"for dry hair"* and refuses to use it on his wet hair. In joke #5 (Colombian), another simpleton thinks the chemical formula H2O + Co + Co means coconut water. In joke #7 (Peruvian), after finding small pieces of copper, German scientists conclude their ancestors had a telephone network 2,500 years ago, while after finding small pieces of glass, Russian scientists announce there was a national optical fiber system in ancient Russia 3,500 years ago. Peruvian scientists claim their ancestors used satellite wireless technology 5,000 years ago after they found nothing when excavating 250 meters underground. The reason why Peruvians have such a ridiculous claim is that they do not want to admit they lost a competition against other countries. Looking at

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these examples of universally appreciated humor, we can see that the above-mentioned jokes are based on disparaging humor or culturally understood referents. If there are commonalities between cultures, it is easier for L2 learners to comprehend and appreciate these types of jokes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING FOR JOKE COMPREHENSION

Reading jokes in a target language is a primarily language learning activity which can also make language learners more competent in L2 humor. Students become more aware of different types of L2 jokes and silently compare them to L1 jokes. Moreover, they might want to share similar L1 culture jokes with their peers and teachers. In the case when L2 learners do not find this or that L2 joke particularly funny, they might want to know why they do not get the joke which is considered to be humorous for native speakers. In this section, I discuss how instructors can help their students to be more successful in comprehension and appreciation of L2 humor by teaching them about sociocultural knowledge in jokes, introducing common formats of L2 jokes, and pre-teaching difficult vocabulary.

Sociocultural Knowledge

Although the study provided mixed results, the literature shows that sociocultural knowledge is a significant factor in comprehending scripted jokes. It will benefit learners if teachers include explicit instruction to increase L2 learners' awareness of sociocultural knowledge. However, this is a slow process; though it can help L2 learners to comprehend and appreciate specific jokes, it might not increase L2 learners' humor competence of jokes in general.

Teachers might want to explain different cultural scripts to make L2 learners aware of different schemas and connect L2 learners' existing schemas to new ones. In study 1, many L2 learners had no knowledge about the 2000 US presidential elections when they read joke #13 (American). If some political controversies and the difference between the popular vote and the Electoral College were explained to L2 learners, they might have appreciated the joke that implied George W. Bush's victory. In study 2, L2 learners would have had a better understanding of joke #8 (Saudi) if they were first taught about the importance of henna in Arab culture. While the Super Bowl is not a universal sport phenomenon, in many cultures major sporting events are very well attended. Hence, L2 learners could understand why in another joke in

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study 2 (#11, American), a guy would not want to miss the Super Bowl game even on the day of his wife's funeral.

In order to appreciate a joke, we need to share sociocultural knowledge. Looking back at my unsuccessful attempts to tell a funny Russian joke about Stierlitz to my American friends, I wish that, first, we could have discussed the topic of spies during WW2 and the most common mistakes that got them caught by the Germans. For example, spies could not blend in if they did not alter their facial hair to look like locals or did not wear "authentic" clothes or shoes. Then, we could have talked about stereotypes about spies. Lastly, I could share that, similar to James Bond in Western culture, in Soviet and post-Soviet culture, we had Stierlitz who was the butt of a common genre of Russian jokes, for example:

> Stierlitz and Müller go to a sauna. As they undress, Müller notices the large red star on Stierlitz's underwear. "Stierlitz, where did you get that?!" "In Moscow." Stierlitz answered, then thought to himself, "I hope I didn't say too much."

Pragmatic Awareness and Jokes' Common Formats

The major cause of humor failure, according to Bell and Attardo (2010), is pragmatic. One example of pragmatic failure is when the humorous frame is not recognized. Masao, a Japanese student in Bell and Attardo's study, misinterpreted the professor's teasing, "Oh, what's your new injury?" for the speaker's concern for Masao's health (434). Another example is when irony in an utterance is mistaken for an order (a mother's comment: "Go ahead, do not take off your muddy shoes," said to a child).

The good news is that pragmatic awareness can be increased even after a few hours of explicit instruction (Bouton 1988, 1994; Kasper 1997; Koike and Pearson 2005; all as cited in Bell and Attardo 2010, 442). Teachers can let students practice L2 pragmatic abilities when telling jokes inside and outside the classroom and responding to the jokes told by others. In order to appreciate a joke, L2 learners need to fully comprehend it. An example of a class activity could be a teacher telling half of the class a joke and checking that all of them understand it. After that L2 learners are paired up with those who have not heard the teacher's joke. They need to retell this joke and explain it if needed (Wulf 2010). In Prichard and Rucynski's 2019 study, participants were better at recognizing satirical news after they received humor training, including experiential collaborative learning. Collaboration between students is one promising way for students to discuss joke meanings together in the safe environment of the classroom.

When teaching English jokes, ESL and EFL teachers might want to explain to their students the role of knowledge resources (language, narrative

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strategy, target, situation, script, and logical mechanism). For example, after I introduce the light bulb joke, I could point out that this joke is written in a form of a dialogue, and suggest in terms that the students can understand the joke is considered funny because two opposing scripts are activated. The logical mechanism is figure-ground reversal where what is supposed to move remains motionless and what is supposed to stay in one place is being moved. Then I will show them another figure-ground reversal joke and ask them to analyze it (what narrative strategy is used; whether there is a target or not). Then I might ask my students to write their own figure-ground reversal joke, which perhaps will be the next step in humor competency training. (See the chapter by Hodson in this volume for an explanation of how learners can also rewrite jokes using references from their own culture.)

Vocabulary

As the research has suggested, learners' proficiency and vocabulary level can be a factor in comprehending jokes. Developing proficiency and vocabulary is extremely time consuming, and it may not be the primary goal of explicit humor competency training. However, there are certain vocabulary or formulaic expressions that are frequently used in jokes (Bell and Skalicky 2019), and these could be effectively taught. Participants could also be taught to cope with unknown language used in jokes.

To make humor an integral part of your lessons, it may be best to start small. You do not need to be a stand-up comedian in front of the class. You can ask your students to read a joke in English that you have selected, based on the topic you are going to teach that day. The joke can include vocabulary or grammatical structures that you want to reinforce. My personal favorites among jokes are puns, which require students to think aloud while reading (Pimenova 2017, 105–8). Reading puns aloud was a technique that personally helped me to better comprehend (and appreciate) English humor. It is important to consider a variety of techniques to help L2 learners increase their humor competency when it comes to the genre of joke telling.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCHING JOKE COMPREHENSION

The focus of both original studies was on how cultural background and L2 proficiency of participants affected their humor comprehension and appreciation. While the studies did not involve humor competency training, the findings can help humor researchers and L2 instructors understand why some

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jokes are comprehended and appreciated well by L2 learners and some are not. These factors should be considered and controlled for in future research, as explained below. In addition, the study highlights challenges in empirically examining the comprehension and appreciation of L2 jokes. The limitations presented in this research should be addressed in future studies.

First, as there are limitations with self-reporting joke difficulty, in future research participants could answer not just one but two comprehension items for each joke: a general comprehension question and a question about each joke's punch line. Collecting qualitative data is also preferable to verify exactly why participants felt the jokes were difficult or not funny.

Another recommendation would be about joke selection. In study 1, like in Erdodi and Lajiness-O'Neill's 2012 research, I selected the stimulus material (jokes). Therefore, the jokes might reflect my biases. In study 2, authentic Colombian, Peruvian, and Saudi jokes were suggested by several informants who also assisted in translating those jokes in English. It would also be recommendable if a different group of volunteers from the cultures in which the humorous texts originated from would have read those jokes in their native language and rated those jokes on the level of funniness and difficulty. Their ratings would have been compared to the humor ratings of the participants in the study, as in Ayiçiçeği-Dinn, Şişman-Bal, and Caldwell-Harris (2018). Future studies should include piloting of the jokes to ensure they are representative in terms of their level of funniness and difficulty. If a pretest and posttest is done, the items should be leveled in terms of vocabulary, and the level of background knowledge required to comprehend the joke should be controlled.

The last suggestion is about determining L2 learners' proficiency levels. In Shardakova's 2016 study, participants were grouped based on oral interviews with L2 learners. Ayiçiçeği-Dinn and her colleagues (2018) relied on participants' answers when dividing L2 learners into more proficient and less proficient groups. When determining participants' language dominance (Hungarian or English), Erdodi and Lajiness-O'Neill (2012) relied on participants' responses. I also used L2 learners' self-reported data on how many years of English language instruction they received. Unlike in Shardakova's 2016 study, I did not conduct oral interviews or group L2 learners by proficiency levels. This would have helped me to verify participants self-reported proficiency levels. The most valid and reliable option would be to utilize learners' proficiency test scores, if available.

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APPENDIX A: SELECTED JOKES FROM STUDY 1

Joke #1 (American): #3 easiest, M = 3.37, SD = 1.04; #1 funniest, M = 3.22, SD = 0.80

"You should be ashamed," the father told his son. "When Abraham Lincoln was your age, he used to walk ten miles every day to get to school." "Really?" the kid said. "Well, when he was your age, he was president."

Joke #2 (Arabic): #3 most difficult, M = 2.67, SD = 0.68; #2 least funny, M = 2.04, SD = 0.81

There was once a celebration marking the anniversary of the army. The president, the minister of the defense, and the chief of staff who were there wanted to show the people their power through pigeon shooting. The chief of staff shot at the pigeons, upon which the announcer proclaimed, "Allahu Akbar! The chief of staff has shot down ten pigeons!" After that it was the turn of the minister of fefense, and the announcer proclaimed "Allahu Akbar! The minister of fefense has shot down twenty pigeons!" When the turn of the president came, he could not shoot down any pigeons. Seeing this, the announcer proclaimed most enthusiastically, "Allahu Akbar! The miracle happened! The dead pigeons are flying!"

Joke #9 (Arabic): #2 easiest, M = 3.41, SD = 1.12; #3 funniest, M = 3.07, SD = 1.04

An Arab student sends an e-mail to his dad saying:

> Dear Dad, Berlin is wonderful, people are nice and I really like it here, but Dad, I am bit ashamed to arrive at my college with my gold Mercedes, when all my teachers travel by train.
>
> Your son Nasser

Sometime later Nasser gets a reply to his e-mail from his dad:

> Loving son, twenty million dollars transferred to your account, please stop embarrassing us, go and get yourself a train, too.
>
> Your Dad

Joke #11 (Chinese): #2 most difficult, M = 2.59, SD = 0.84; #3 least funny, M = 2.07, SD = 0.73

Prime Minister Chang was happy enough to write, but he did not put a lot of care into his brush strokes. Everybody sneered at his bad handwriting, and the prime minister himself really did not care. One day Chang thought of a

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beautiful sentence and at once wielded his writing brush to write it down. Indeed, there were dragons flying and snakes dancing all over the paper. Then he ordered his secretary to write it out neatly. When beginning to copy, his secretary stared tongue-tied and did not know where to start. The young man had to take the manuscript back to the prime minister. “Prime Minister Chang, I cannot read your handwriting, please tell me what words they are.” The prime minister read his cursive hand a long time and did not know what Chinese characters they were, either. He then turned to blame his secretary. “Why did you not come earlier to ask me? I myself have forgotten the words which I have written.”

Joke #13 (American): #4 most difficult, $M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.94$; #1 least funny, $M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.86$

In America, anyone can be elected president—as long as his father was president, his brother is governor of a state with lots of electoral votes, his state campaign co-chair in that state is in charge of certifying the state’s election results, the police of that state keep members of racial minorities from getting to the polls to vote, and not even a plurality of votes across the nation is needed to be elected.

Joke #14 (Arabic): #1 easiest, $M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.90$; #2 funniest, $M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.99$

An Arabic man living in his house in the USA has a piece of land so he intended to plant potatoes; he started to dig the land and found out it was too hard to go through. Anyway, he wrote an e-mail to his son asking for help because he could not dig it himself. His son wrote back to him telling him, “Please father, do not dig, I have something under there. Please do not touch it. Do not touch anything. I will deal with it.” So, the next day the FBI, the CIA, and National Security went over there and dug a lot of holes here and there. They did not find anything, so they left. The next day, the son of this man wrote an e-mail again. “Hey Papa, I hope by now you have enough holes made in the land, so you can plant your potatoes.”

Joke #15 (American): #1 most difficult, $M = 2.48$, $SD = 0.85$; #3 least funny, $M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.02$

The following is allegedly the transcript of a radio conversation of a US naval ship with Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995, as released by the chief of Naval Operations:

> Canadians: Please divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

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Americans: Recommend you divert your course 15 degrees to the North to avoid a collision.

Canadians: Negative. You will have to divert your course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

Americans: This is the captain of a US Navy ship. I say again, divert YOUR course.

Canadians: No. I say again, you divert YOUR course.

Americans: This is the aircraft carrier USS *Lincoln*, the second largest ship in the United States' Atlantic fleet. We are accompanied by three destroyers, three cruisers and numerous support vessels. I demand that YOU change your course 15 degrees north, that's one five degrees north, or countermeasures will be undertaken to ensure the safety of this ship.

Canadians: This is a lighthouse. Your call.

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APPENDIX B: SELECTED JOKES FROM STUDY 2

Joke #3 (American): #1 easiest, M = 3.50, SD = 0.61; #2 funniest, M = 2.95, SD = 0.76

Father: When Abe Lincoln was your age he walked 9 miles to school and did homework by candlelight.

Son: When Lincoln was your age, he was the US President.

Joke #4 (Peruvian): #2 easiest, M = 3.30, SD = 0.80; #5 funniest, M = 2.40, SD = 0.75

There were two Peruvians bathing in a soccer club.

– Hey Pancho, can you lend me your shampoo?

– But, Pedro, you have yours.

– Yes, but mine says it is for dry hair, and my hair is wet.

Joke #5 (Colombian): #3 easiest, M = 3.26, SD = 0.65; #4 funniest, M = 2.65, SD = 0.88

– Tell me, what corresponds to the chemical formula H2O+Co+Co?

– Well, I am not that silly, right? It means it is coconut water.

Joke #7 (Peruvian): #2 easiest, M = 3.30, SD = 0.73; #3 funniest, M = 2.85, SD = 0.67

German scientists excavated 50 meters underground and discovered small pieces of copper. After studying these pieces for a long time, Germany came to the conclusion that the ancient Germans had a national telephone network 2,500 years ago. Of course, the Russian state did not think anything of the findings. They asked their own scientists to dig deeper. At 100 meters underground, they found small pieces of glass that, according to them, were part of the national optical fiber system that the ancient Russians had 3,500 years ago. Peruvian scientists were not impressed. They dug 150 meters underground and found nothing, excavated 20 meters more and still nothing, then dug 250 meters in total and found nothing. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that more than 5,000 years ago the ancient Incas used satellite wireless technology.

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Joke #8 (Saudi): #1 most difficult, M = 2.20, SD = 1.06; #1 least funny, M = 1.68, SD = 1.25

There are ants on a beach, and they look out at the ocean and see a woman drowning. The only part of her that is above water is her hand. One ant asks, "Why is her hand the only part out of the water?" Another ant replies, "Because she has henna on it."

Joke #10 (Colombian): #2 most difficult, M = 2.40, SD = 0.94; #3 least funny, M = 1.80, SD = 1.01

A tipsy guy enters a church at the time when the Communion bread is going to be given to all attendees. The pastor is worried that the drunk guy may approach to take the communion. As time passes, the line gets shorter, and the drunk guy is getting closer to the pastor. Then, the pastor looks around for a thing similar to a piece of bread to give to the guy. When he is about to receive his bread, the pastor gives him a pencil eraser instead and says, "The body of Christ is given for you." And the guy replies, "But, dear Priest, I was given the cleats."

Joke #11 (American): #4 easiest, M = 3.15, SD = 0.67; #4 funniest, M = 2.65, SD = 0.99

A man had 50-yard-line tickets for the Super Bowl. After a short time of his taking his seat, a man comes down and asks if anyone is sitting in the seat next to him. "No," he says, "The seat is empty." "This is incredible," said the man. "Who in their right mind would have a seat like this for the Super Bowl, one of the biggest sporting events in the world, and not use it?" He says, "Well, actually, the seat belongs to me. I was supposed to come with my wife, but she passed away. This is the first Super Bowl we haven't been to together since we got married in 1967." "Oh, I am sorry to hear that. That is terrible. But could you not find someone else—a friend or relative, or even a neighbor to take the seat?" The man shakes his head. "No, they are all at the funeral."

Joke #12 (Saudi): #3 most difficult, M = 2.60, SD = 0.82; #5 least funny, M = 2.15, SD = 0.88

Three stoners get into a taxi. The taxi driver immediately sees this as an opportunity to make some quick cash. They tell him where they want to go. He says, "Ok," starts the car, moves forward a couple inches, then stops it and says they have arrived. The first stoner thanks him and gets out. The second stoner pays him and gets out. The third stoner slaps him across the face and says, "You idiot!" The taxi driver is worried that he has been busted. The stoner continues, "You should drive slower!"

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Part III

EXPLICIT HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

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Chapter 7

Humor Competency Training for Sarcasm and Jocularity

Caleb Prichard and John Rucynski Jr.

I (Caleb) was stuck in a committee meeting at a Japanese university and colleagues were discussing who would head the committee the following year. It was proposed that Tanaka (pseudonym) could do the job. I liked the idea. Tanaka-sensei was an extremely experienced and well-liked professor, who would surely proceed through meetings with quick efficiency. Moreover, he spoke English fluently and discussed academic matters in a way that suggested he had spent extensive time overseas. He and I seemed to be on the same page frequently, and I felt we had mutual respect for each other.

However, there was one problem. "I cannot accept this appointment because I am too busy," he answered in English, as there were several non-Japanese speakers present. I really wanted him to take the job, but he was right. Everyone knew he was way too busy and overworked with a high-level university position.

With a smile, I quipped sarcastically, "You are not *that* busy."

Ha! Everyone will enjoy my light-hearted attempt to add some jocularity to the meeting, right? . . . Right?!

Tanaka-sensei glared at me. "Yes. I AM busy."

No! He thought I was serious . . . I slumped in my chair, red faced. I had just deeply offended the highest-positioned ally I had, and I was in my final year before my tenure was up to be examined.

As soon as the meeting ended, I approached him to try to talk to him, to indirectly show I respected him and to suggest I was joking. He ignored my approach.

Indeed, verbal irony is often not detected or misinterpreted, and this could lead to communication breakdown and even conflict. While this happens frequently even among native speakers, English language learners have even

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more difficulty recognizing verbal irony in the target language. Fitzgerald (2013, 3) wrote that "most if not all" of her Japanese students of English could not understand sarcasm. This may be because markers, including lexical, prosodic, and non-verbal cues, vary in different languages (Cheang and Pell 2011; Kim and Lantolf 2016; Okamoto 2007). When faced with ambiguity, foreign language learners will likely take a literal interpretation (Cheang and Pell 2011). Another potential reason for the difficulty is that not all cultures use verbal irony as frequently, such as Koreans (Kim and Lantolf 2016) and Japanese (Fitzgerald 2013). If they are not expecting an ironic utterance in a certain context, they might not pay attention to irony markers that they would otherwise notice. As we saw with the opening anecdote, this can happen even with proficient English speakers with cross-cultural experience.

Difficulties with verbal irony can take other forms, as well. Even if the irony is detected, misinterpretation is frequent, as its functions differ in various languages (Fitzgerald 2013; Kim and Lantolf 2016; Okamoto 2007). Finally, especially if a learner knows or assumes that the target culture frequently uses sarcasm and jocularity, they may assume a literal utterance is ironic. Not detecting irony, or thinking a literal utterance is ironic, can lead to major miscommunication (Gibbs and Colston 2002; Cheang and Pell 2011) because the interpreted and intended meanings are different, and in fact often polar opposites. It could lead to someone taking misguided action. For instance, if an office manager walks into an office on a summer day and says sarcastically "it's totally freezing," this could prompt an unwitting employee to turn off the air conditioner.

While many misunderstandings could be easily corrected, they could lead to more serious consequences, including interpersonal conflict and hurt feelings (Cheang and Pell 2011). Indeed, while Tanaka-sensei did eventually seem to forget or forgive Caleb's failed attempt at humor, Tanaka-sensei did feel offended, causing Caleb to feel extremely distressed. As in this example, feelings could be hurt if one thinks they were criticized, when in fact they were praised in a jocular way. Furthermore, a sarcastic utterance may be detected but misinterpreted; one might detect hostility when the utterance was actually intended to amuse or bond (Attardo 2002; Gibbs and Colston 2002). The reverse is also possible; a person could be praised literally, but the listener could assume the compliment was sarcastic. Again, this could lead to hurt feelings and conflict.

For language learners, frequently misinterpreting jocularity and other humor can be demotivating and lead to social isolation (Lems 2013). Korean learners of English in the United States reported feeling stupid and embarrassed when they could not interpret the intent of sarcasm (Kim and Lantolf 2016). One can understand the frustration language learners must experience

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when they know all the vocabulary in a statement but still misunderstand the true meaning or intention.

Because sarcasm is frequently undetected and misinterpreted, one website offering sociocultural advice to English speakers doing business in Japan actually recommends avoiding the use of sarcasm completely. Indeed, it certainly would be wise for non-Japanese to avoid using too much sarcasm with less fluent Japanese speakers of English. However, for language educators whose job is to help learners develop communicative competence in real-world situations, it would be a mistake to avoid using or teaching verbal irony. Gibbs (2000) claimed that irony is the most common form of wit among Americans, making up 8 percent of all utterances in his study. If it is really this frequent, it is imperative that teachers help learners recognize, interpret, respond to, and perhaps even to use verbal irony. Doing so could help learners avoid potential confusion and conflict in their future interactions with English speakers. Moreover, learners can also reap the benefits of appreciating and using humorous verbal irony, such as increased bonds and motivation to interact with the target language speakers and to access media. This chapter overviews efforts to implement humor competency training to language learners for detecting sarcasm and jocularity.

VERBAL IRONY IN ENGLISH

In order to teach language learners about verbal irony, it is essential to first thoroughly examine it, including its functions and its cues. Verbal irony is a key form of non-literal communication in which the linguistic message does not match the intended message and listeners need to make inferences to understand the true intent of the speaker (Gibbs 2000, 2007). Verbal irony differs from the broader definition of irony, which often describes a situation, not a person's intent (Haiman 1998). However, while ubiquitous, verbal irony is not always easy to identify; Utsumi (2000) suggested that verbal irony and sincerity are not categorical as the degree of irony varies and speakers use it in a variety of ways.

While the focus of this chapter is mainly sarcasm and jocularity, verbal irony also includes rhetorical questions, hyperbole, and understatement (Gibbs 2000). Colston (2017) adds ironic praise, ironic criticism, ironic analogy, and ironic restatement, while not including jocularity. (This chapter considers ironic criticism as sarcasm and ironical praise as jocularity.) Moreover, although the focus here is on oral communication, verbal irony is prevalent in written text, especially on social networking sites and online comment sections.

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Sarcasm

While the form and intent of sarcasm may vary and definitions differ, many researchers define sarcasm as having a victim with the main intent to criticize or to change someone's opinion or behavior (Jorgenson 1996; Kotthoff 2003; Okamoto 2007). Dynel (2014) stressed that verbal irony is sarcastic only if the ironic utterance is indented to exacerbate the negative evaluation of the target. Indeed, sarcasm often has a hostile intent, and it is often considered as crude and uninteresting (Gibbs 2007). Huang, Gino, and Galinsky (2015) showed that sarcasm increases feelings of interpersonal conflict. For these reasons, "communication coaches" often provide guidance online on ways to "eradicate sarcasm from the workplace" (Huang, Gino, and Galinsky 2015, 174).

However, while sarcasm is often viewed negatively since it is often intended to belittle, scholars (e.g., Gibbs 2000) have suggested that sarcasm also includes irony use intended to mitigate criticism. Indeed, sarcasm use has a variety of positive functions and effects; it can be used to mitigate an otherwise tense situation (Boxer 2002; Gibbs and Colston 2002) or to save face by avoiding direct criticism (Jorgenson 1996). Research suggests that people respond better to sarcastic criticism than anger expressed literally; for example, participants who heard sarcastic criticism were more creative in problem solving than participants who were criticized literally (Miron-Spektor, Efrat-Treister, Rafaeli, and Schwarz-Cohen 2011). This effect also has an effect on the person who expresses sarcasm (Huang, Gino, and Galinsky 2015).

Sarcasm use can also confirm solidarity and bond interlocutors if the negative evaluation is trivial (Jorgenson 1996) or if the target is not the listener (Dynel 2014). It be playful, and it requires interlocutors to collaborate in order to explore and appreciate a shared circumstance, belief, or ironic situation (Gibbs 2000). In some cases, the ironic message may intentionally be made clear to some of the audience while unclear to others (Haiman 1998), serving to bond the in-group and criticize or signal distance from others.

Finally, and most relevant to this book, sarcastic utterances are often intended and considered to be humorous (Gibbs, Bryant, and Colston 2014). Sarcasm is often a form of benevolent humor (finding something amusing in a bad situation) and corrective humor (urging a change in behavior in a gentle, humorous way; Bruntsch and Ruch 2017). Humor can be caused by a sarcastic utterance if it is witty and surprising or if it creates a mutual sense of superiority by targeting a third party (Dynel 2014). Sarcasm production and detection, like other humor responses, correlates with mental fitness, so it could be used to indicate intelligence (Howrigan and Macdonald 2008) and even to select a mate (Greengross and Miller 2011).

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Indeed, the use of and the effect of sarcasm is complex, as Oscar Wilde's quote suggests: "Sarcasm is the lowest form of wit but the highest form of intelligence."

Jocularity

Jocularity differs from sarcasm in most definitions. In a simplistic definition, Rothermich and Pell (2015) consider sarcasm as positive language with negative intent while jocularity is negative language with positive intent. However, the division between jocularity and sarcasm is often blurred. Colston and O'Brien (2000) contended that jocularity is more of a function than a specific form. Jocularity is used to affirm relationships or lighten the mood, and this could include sarcastic praise. Jocularity may be even more common than critical uses of sarcasm, and this is especially the case among those in amiable relationships (Seckman and Couch 1989). However, jocular utterances can be risky because if the irony is not detected, the utterance may be considered a negative evaluation of the target. Moreover, as described below, jocular sarcastic praise has been shown to be more difficult to detect than sarcastic criticism (Bruntsch and Ruch 2017).

Detecting and Interpreting Verbal Irony

Detecting verbal irony and correctly interpreting it depends on context and a variety of cues. However, recognizing sarcasm, jocularity, and other ironic utterances is not always easy even for native speakers (Kreuz 2000). People who are less intelligent, less cheerful, and more emotionally unstable may have more difficulty detecting sarcastic praise (Bruntsch and Ruch 2017).

Because of the maxim of quality or "truth bias" in communication (Grice 1975), interlocutors generally assume truthfulness. Listeners' default mode is to presume an utterance is literal, unless there is a clear cue or context suggesting otherwise. Recognizing indirect messages necessitates careful interpretation of the speaker's intent, and involves both verbal comprehension and processing of paralinguistic information (Kim and Lantolf 2016; Rothermich and Pell 2015). Attardo, Eisterhold, Hay, and Poggi (2003) argue that this multimodality nature of verbal irony is partially what makes recognizing it so complex; listeners must evaluate and integrate context and various non-verbal cues, including facial expression and prosody. In most cases, verbal irony is easily recognized by interlocutors as it would be risky to not make the ironic utterance salient. However, the saliency of the cues may vary. While some cues are made obvious in *dripping* sarcasm, they are subtler in *dry* sarcasm

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(Bryant and Fox Tree 2005) with the possible intent of conveying dissatisfaction or hiding the true message to some listeners (Haiman 1998).

Moreover, the saliency of an ironic utterance is dependent on the relationship of interlocutors, including the level of closeness, solidarity, and authority (Seckman and Couch 1989). Thus, listeners eavesdropping on a strangers' conversation may have some difficulty detecting verbal irony, even if they are normally a very good "sarcasm detector."

Verbal Contextual Cues

The context of an utterance is often essential in identifying verbal irony (Woodland and Voyer 2011). Incongruity between listener expectations and what one actually hears leads to the perception of irony. Sometimes the context provides clear incongruity. For example, if someone says "What a nice day!" when it is violently stormy, interlocutors will need little paralinguistic cues to grasp the speaker's intent. However, the literal meaning is not always the opposite from the intended meaning, and there may be only a small "gap" between the literal and the implied meaning (Kotthoff 2003, 1387).

Incongruity is not always semantic, but also pragmatic (Dynel 2014). In the case of a pragmatic gap or a small semantic gap, context is interpreted by listeners along with other non-verbal cues to determine the sincerity of the message. Woodland and Voyer's study of 82 L1 participants demonstrated how context interacted with other cues leading participants to more quickly and confidently identify sarcasm. However, for L2 learners, one's vocabulary, pragmatic competence (see Winchester, this volume), and overall listening proficiency likely is a significant factor in detecting and interpreting verbal cues.

Prosody

A number of phonological markers have been noted in early sarcasm research, such as slower speech rate, lower pitch, and higher intensity (Rockwell 2000). A minority of participants identified other cues, such as a louder or deeper voice, exaggerated intonation, word stress, monotone, and slower speech.

However, most research into verbal irony prosody has relied on observation, and many of the findings have diverged (see Attardo et al. 2003 for an overview). Because of this, Attardo and colleagues used pitch-tracking analysis for a more empirical analysis. They found that a strong within-statement contrast, compressed pitch pattern, and pronounced pitch accent were the most frequent phonological cues. Strong within-statement contrast was exemplified by one phrase uttered with a high pitch range followed by one with low pitch range. (This pattern was sometimes reversed.) A compressed pitch

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pattern could be described as flat intonation. Finally, a pronounced pitch pattern has been described as exaggerated stress, and it may involve elongated syllables and exaggerated pauses, as observed in previous research.

Nevertheless, there is not a specific tone or pitch for all English irony. First, an ironic utterance is marked by differing in some way from the speaker's norm (Attardo et al. 2003; Bryant and Fox Tree 2005). Therefore, it is likely much more difficult to detect verbal irony if you are hearing someone speak for the first time. Second, as there are different kinds of verbal irony, prosodic cues vary based on pragmatic intent (Attardo et al. 2003; Bryant and Fox Tree 2005). Bryant and Fox Tree (2005) found significant differences in their acoustic analysis between dry sarcastic utterances, which were unmarked, and dripping sarcastic utterances, which were higher pitched and had less amplitude variability.

Overall, prosody has been shown to be a key factor enabling sarcasm detection in research studies. In fact, sarcasm can be recognized with prosody and facial cues alone, without context (Rankin 2009). Bryant and Fox Tree (2002) found that participants could not accurately perceive sarcastic utterances without vocal cues. However, prosody alone may not always be enough, especially for dry sarcasm. In Bryant and Fox Tree's follow-up study (2005) in which lexical information was removed using content filtering, participants could significantly recognize the ironic statements in the dripping sarcasm subset, but not for the dry sarcastic utterances subset.

Visual Cues

A number of facial expressions have been identified as markers of sarcasm, including: rolling, wide open, or squinted eyes; averted gaze; glaring; winking; raised or lowered eyebrows (Attardo et al. 2003; Rothermich and Pell 2015; Williams, Burns, and Harmon 2009). Smiling and a scrunched face were noted in expressions that did match tone or the verbal message. Another prominent cue identified by participants in other research is a "blank face," which is a person's resting face or a lack of expression with no movement of eyebrows or the mouth (Attardo et al. 2003). An exaggerated expression is more likely in dripping sarcasm, while a blank face is more common of dry sarcasm. Body language may be a less frequent sarcastic cue; just two of 31 participants noted hand gestures as a marker in Rothermich and Pell's study (2015).

Verbal Irony Use in Other Languages

As with other types of humor, in order to develop training activities for detecting verbal irony, it is essential to understand how it used in other languages. Is it as frequent? What are the functions? What are the markers?

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Since our research has focused on Japanese learners of English, Japanese verbal irony use will be described below. The Japanese term, *hiniku*, often used as a translation for irony, is generally considered to be a negative term expressing spite or cutting someone down (Fitzgerald 2013; Okamoto 2007). Little research of irony in Japanese has explored other non-critical uses of ironic utterances (Fitzgerald 2013). Overall, verbal irony seems to be used less often in Japanese than in English (Erickson et al. 2002). While verbal irony consisted of 8 percent of utterances in Gibbs' data of American conversations (2000), Fitzgerald (2013) found just six instances in 4.5 hours of Japanese conversation and 15 cases in 4.5 hours of Japanese television dramas known for being witty or sarcastic. However, this is a small sample size, and the researcher stresses that may not be indicative of Japanese norms.

Okamoto's (2007) research analyzed a corpus of written media and a small sample of transcribed television shows in which the writer or speaker explicitly noted that irony was used. He categorized the different forms of irony, and found that the following were the most frequent: unrealistic interpretation of situations; insincere praise, advice, or apology; rhetorical questions; inappropriate style or register; and understatement or hyperbole. This is somewhat similar to American English sarcasm, though inappropriate style and register has not been prominently mentioned in description of English sarcasm. Nakamura (2009) suggested that Japanese tend to avoid using biting sarcasm among peers since they take care not to insult someone of equal status. Japanese participants rated sarcastic criticism even more harshly than literal criticism, especially when given by someone of equal status.

While most of the research on verbal irony in Japanese focused more on sarcasm, Fitzgerald (2013) did look at jocularity and noted several instances. Research has suggested that Japanese consider verbal irony more humorous than non-ironic utterances (Okamoto 2007). Other researchers have noted that overall humor is less frequent in Japanese conversation than in English, though it more common among close acquaintances (Takekuro 2006). Also, the boundaries between humorous teasing and critical sarcasm may be clearer because humor in Japanese is usually victimless (Liao and Abe 2001). While Humor does sometimes mix criticism, it tends to be light-hearted teasing (Fitzgerald 2013). According to Kodama (1995, as cited by Haiman 1998), insults may be utilized to indirectly reveal one's true feelings since Japanese are supposedly too shy to overtly state one's affections. This is not prominently mentioned in the literature about English sarcasm.

Irony Cues in Other Languages

Research suggests that verbal irony use has similarities and differences across languages in terms of use, meaning, and prosody (Adachi 1996; Kim

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and Lantolf 2016; Matsui et al. 2016; Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen 2015). Manipulating speech rate and pitch is a reported feature of sarcasm in many languages, including Chinese, Japanese, and French (Cheang and Pell 2011; Matsui et al. 2016). Long pauses may mark sarcasm in German and English (Haiman 1998). Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen (2015) suggest that prosodic markers for sarcasm differ in Dutch to the degree that even advanced learners have difficulty conveying sarcasm orally. The main prosodic difference between Cantonese and English showed that English speakers lowered the mean fundamental frequency (F0) to indicate sarcasm, whereas Chinese speakers raised it (Cheang and Pell 2009).

Non-verbal cues of Japanese verbal irony have been little researched, but Okamoto (2007) mentions unnatural gestures, facial expressions, and vocal tones, but these were not described in detail. Adachi (1996) notes syllable lengthening and an utterance-final glottal stop as prosodic cues, which has not been mentioned as an English cue. Okamoto (2007) frequently mentions inappropriately polite or impolite language use as a cue of irony, and this seems to be more prominent in Japanese than in English.

The Korean research on sarcasm suggests some differences from English. In Korean, tag questions are not used to indicate sarcasm, and the speaker often overtly says they are being ironic (Kim and Lantolf 2016). They may elongate vowel sounds words or use exaggerated gestures to further mark sarcastic utterances, both of which have been mentioned in the English literature.

RECOGNIZING VERBAL IRONY IN AN L2

L2 learners may have difficulty recognizing verbal irony in the target language. While not examining verbal irony directly, Bouton (1999) found that it was cultural background rather than language proficiency that predicted learners' ability to understand conversational implicature. Learners from European backgrounds, including Spanish and German participants, performed better than those from east Asian backgrounds, especially those from Japan and China.

While Haiman (1998) suggested sarcasm could be recognized even in an unfamiliar language since sarcasm may be encoded to universal emotional features, this does not seem to be the case. Cantonese and English speakers could not recognize sarcasm in the other language, despite some similarities in prosody in the languages and despite the fact that they could identify other emotions based on vocal cues (Cheang and Pell 2011). The researchers concluded that prosodic differences marking sarcasm may lead to errors in the cross-linguistic communication.

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Kim and Lantolf's (2016) research of advanced English proficiency Koreans studying in graduate schools in the United States revealed that participants had trouble recognizing sarcastic cues, including prosody, facial expression, and context. The researchers suggested the difficulty came from the fact that Korean sarcasm is used differently. Even when they could recognize it, the learners revealed how they felt foolish and confused not understanding the intended meaning of sarcastic utterances.

Two research studies have examined the ability of Japanese to recognize speaker attitudes in English (Erickson et al. 2002; Shochi, Rilliard, and Aubergé 2009). While these studies mostly focused on various types of sincere utterances, they also included some focus on sarcasm. Erickson and colleagues (2002) researched 20 Japanese English learners' ability to detect speaker intent based on a short response (e.g., "That's wonderful") recorded by a native speaker to suggest either anger, disappointment, admiration, suspicion, or sarcasm. The Japanese had the most difficulty identifying sarcasm, which they recognized only half of the time. The researchers found that only one of the two pitch contours used in the sarcastic utterances was easily recognized. The rising-falling pitch contour was identified 72.5 percent of the time, but the high and then low, flat pitch contour was identified in 45.6 percent of instances and was frequently confused with suspicion. However, the study also had several limitations. Only five sarcastic utterances were included and all recordings included the same two words. Moreover, the high-low pitch contour was produced only once, so firm conclusions cannot be made. Finally, the suspicion items were not highly validated by native speakers.

In an examination of how L2 participants could identify expressions with various affect and intent (Shochi, Rilliard, and Aubergé 2009), Japanese and French speakers had more difficulty identifying short sarcastic English utterances compared to native English speakers. However, even the native speakers had great difficulty with the task, suggesting the study lacked validity. Moreover, the proficiency level was not mentioned in detail, and the utterances were very short (two to five syllables).

STUDY 1

As previous studies on the ability Japanese to detect sarcasm had great limitations, we designed a study using a database developed by Rothermich and Pell (2015) in which four trained native speaking actors performed 920 recorded vignettes. Each scene had two speakers and two or three lines. One speaker asked a question (e.g., "Do you want some of the cookies I baked?"), and second replied with positive sincerity (e.g., "Yes, they look

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so delicious"), negative sincerity (e.g., "No, they do not look very appetizing"), sarcasm (e.g., "Yes, they look so delicious" spoken with ironic cues), or jocularity (e.g., "No, they do not look very appetizing" spoken with ironic cues). White lie items were also in the database, but not included in this study. In many scenes, verbal context was added. One speaker was shown talking on the phone and telling his/her true feelings (e.g., "I totally hated the play") before the other speaker entered the room to ask a question (e.g., "So, how did you like the play?").

Rothermich and Pell (2015) recruited 38 native speakers to test the validity of the vignettes. For the present study, only 40 items with the highest validity were chosen (where speaker intent was identified 95.40 percent of the time). Therefore, the sarcastic videos chosen were more of the dripping sarcasm variety. To ensure participants' ability to detect sarcasm was being analyzed, not their general listening skills, the transcript of each scene was shown on the screen for 12 seconds before the clips were presented. For words not among the most common 2,000 in the British National Corpus (2007), Japanese equivalents were shown in efforts to better determine sarcasm detection, not vocabulary proficiency.

The 40 items selected were divided into five sections of eight items each. One section consisted of items with all three cues (audio, video, and verbal context), and another section included audio and video without verbal context. To evaluate ability to recognize various cues, only certain modes were presented in the other three sections:

- to analyze recognition of prosodic cues, audio was played without video;
- to evaluate visual cues, videos were shown muted; and
- to analyze verbal context cues, scripts with context cues were shown but media clips were not played.

For each section, there were two items of each of the four speaker intents (positive sincerity, negative sincerity, sarcasm, and jocularity).

The current study included 155 participants at a national Japanese university. The participants were convenience sampled from two low-proficiency, two intermediate-proficiency, and two high-proficiency classes.

Results

The results showed that the participants correctly interpreted the sarcastic and sincere statements 80.35 percent of the time. While this is higher than was expected, this still suggested that learners had plenty of room for improvement, especially considering these items were of the dripping variety and participants had access to a script. Moreover, if learners cannot distinguish

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sarcasm from sincerity nearly one in five times, this would lead to frequent and significant communication breakdown.

As table 7.1 shows, the participants scored higher on the verbal irony items compared to the literal ones. Therefore, it is possible that the learners were overly looking for sarcasm or that they expected native speakers to be sarcastic. The largest difficulty was with the literal positive items where just over one in three items were mistaken for sarcasm. This suggests that the learners need to improve at recognizing compliments and other positive statements from sarcasm.

Table 7.1. Correct Response Mean Score by Intent

Sarcasm M (SD)	*Jocularity M (SD)*	*Verbal Irony Total M (SD)*	*Literal Positive M (SD)*	*Literal Negative M (SD)*	*Literal Total M (SD)*
82.90	83.38	83.11	67.80	87.35	77.78
16.25	15.56	13.39	16.20	12.55	11.92

Created by the author.

Table 7.2 shows the scores by mode. There were not significant differences among the different modes, suggesting that the learners may need roughly equal practice on detecting verbal, prosodic, and visual cues.

Table 7.2. Correct Response Mean Score by Mode

Audio, Video, Verbal Context M (SD)	*Audio, Video Only M (SD)*	*Audio Only M (SD)*	*Video Only M (SD)*	*Verbal Context Only M (SD)*	*All Items M (SD)*
81.20	83.11	78.41	80.00	79.00	80.35
10.11	13.31	14.68	18.35	17.87	10.11

Created by the author.

STRATEGY TRAINING

Research has suggested that living in the target culture may help learners improve their ability to better understand certain types of conversational implicature, including some forms of verbal irony Bouton (1994a). While focus on written text, a longitudinal study showed that learners improved their ability to interpret implicature from 79.5 percent to 91.5 percent after four and a half years Bouton (1994a). A second experiment in the study suggested that learners improved significantly in their first 17 months in the United States, but

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after that gains made were minimal and the learners still had not reached native levels. Other research suggested that even advanced proficiency Korean learners living in the United States still had trouble detecting verbal irony (Kim and Lantolf 2016). Considering living in the target culture is not enough to master conversation implicature, including sarcasm, Bouton (1994a) and Kim and Lantolf (2016) both concluded that training is necessary.

A few studies have examined the effect of competency training on verbal irony. While not examining verbal irony exclusively, Bouton (1994, 1999) found that a six-week intervention in which ESOL participants in the United States were taught strategies of dealing with understated criticism and "Pope Q implicature" (e.g., responding "Is the sky blue?" to a yes-no question) led to significantly gains on the posttest scores. Kubota's study (1995), involving Japanese language learners, replicated those of Bouton, but involved an implicitly trained group that underwent awareness exercises, an explicitly trained group, and a control group. Although both of the interventions were just one class each, both experimental groups improved their score on the posttest compared to the control group. However, these studies did not focus on sarcasm or jocularity, and there were just one or two items dealing with understand criticism and Pope Q implicature. Moreover, the focus of the studies by Bouton and Kubota was on written language.

Kim and Lantolf's study (2016) was the first to explicitly focus on strategy training for detecting oral sarcasm. Nine advanced Korean learners of English were privately tutored on recognizing and interpreting sarcasm in television shows, movies, and other media for an hour a week for 15 lessons. Two 90-minute group lessons were given to groups of three students. In the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest, participants were shown 10 video clips twice and the students were asked to underline the one sarcastic utterance in each script. The participants also aimed to identify up to three cues. Points were scored for correctly recognizing the sarcastic utterance and identifying each cue. The results showed that the participants improved significantly on the posttest and delayed posttest.

While significant results were found, there were limitations with Kim and Lantolf's study. First, there were only nine students and no control group. Finally, the training may have limited relevance to most L2 educators as it was one-on-one for 10 hours. ESOL curricula rarely allow such personal and extensive focus on sarcasm.

Study 2

This study intended to determine the efficacy of strategy training on English sarcasm and jocularity in a classroom setting with Japanese university

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students. As in study 1, participants were shown videos from the resource developed by Rothermich and Pell (2015). The study involved a pre- and posttest, with a control group.

Nighty-four first-year students from four listening and speaking classes were convenience sampled at a national Japanese university. Two classes had relatively low scores on the Global Test of English Communication (M = 177.48) while two classes had high-intermediate proficiency (M = 263.54). The experimental (N = 46) and control group (N = 48) each contained one low- and one higher-proficiency group. The classes were taught by the two authors, and each taught one control group and one experimental group.

The training began with a 20-minute introduction on English sarcasm and its numerous roles. The rest of the intervention focused on introducing verbal irony cues and detecting them. Each lesson focused on a different cue. For training on visual cues, images and GIFs of faces with sincere and sarcastic expressions were used. For prosodic cues, videos and audio clips found on the internet were presented. The teachers also modelled the sarcastic cues and prompted students to imitate them. Dialogues were created by the researchers to examine the role of verbal context. (The materials and methods will be described in more detail later in the chapter in the *Recommendations for Humor Competency Training* section.)

In the detection practice, students responded on whether the images, videos, audio clips, and written dialogues expressed sincerity or not, and they discussed with a partner. The teacher then gave the answer pointing out the specific cues for each sarcastic item. Participants also planned and performed their own sincere and sarcastic scenes utilizing the cues taught. Other groups guessed if the scenes were sincere.

Results

While pretest results were similar among the two groups, the results showed that the experimental group made significantly more gains than the control group overall (see figure 7.1). However, while the experimental group gains were higher on each section compared to the control group, the differences were not significant.

Experimental gains were higher on each intent, yet the only significant difference was for the mean score of the combined ironic items (see figure 7.2).

Overall, the results suggested the training was moderately successful and joins Kim and Lantolf's study (2016) in suggesting that L2 learners can better distinguish verbal irony from sincere utterances after training. The present study is novel in that it took place in a classroom setting and was done in a timeframe suitable of a typical ESOL syllabus. Moreover, unlike many studies on humor competency training, the participant numbers were adequate, a control group was involved, and the materials were validated.

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However, results for each specific mode and each speaker's intent were not significant, suggesting the training had room for improvement. It is possible that further gains would have been made had the training been longer and more extensive. However, a longer training was not feasible due to curricular restraints. As has been discussed elsewhere in this volume, educators implementing humor training must balance other language learning goals and humor instruction cannot always be too extensive.

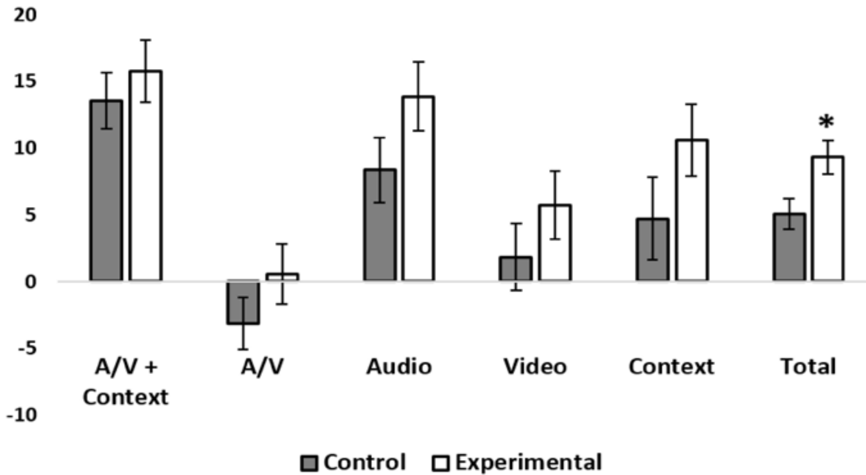

Figure 7.1. Pre- and posttest results by mode. * $F(1, 92) = 6.343$, $p = .014$, $d = .743$. Created by the author.

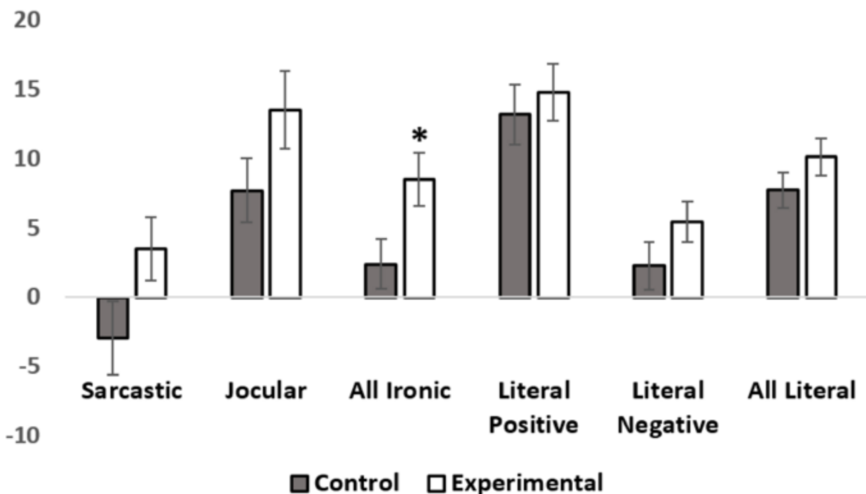

Figure 7.2. Pre- and posttest results by intent. * $F(1, 92) = 5.405$, $p = .022$, $d = .855$. Created by the author.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING IN VERBAL IRONY

Considering the frequency and importance of verbal irony in English, language educators should likely include some focus on it. This is especially the case with learners from backgrounds where verbal irony is less frequent and where irony is used differently. While the studies described here focus on training learners to detect sarcasm and jocularity, instruction could also focus on how to interpret, appreciate, respond to, and perhaps even produce it. Moreover, while our studies focused on oral irony, written irony is also common. For example, learners could be trained on how to understand and respond to irony on social networking sites or online discussion boards. Although more research is needed to confidently suggest exactly which training methods are effective, the below activities can be recommended with some confidence based on the research discussed in this chapter.

Detecting Verbal Irony

Depending on their needs, learners may benefit from direct instruction on detecting visual, verbal, and prosodic cues. To ensure the class time is used wisely, the training should be targeted toward cues that are the most frequent and differ from the learners' L1. A great number of markers have been identified in the research, and it would likely not be fruitful to go over ones that are not used frequently. Similarly, while research has shown the certain formulaic structures can be learned quickly, not all of them are so common, such as Pope-Q irony.

Of course, instruction should be done in language that the learners can understand. For example, the term "speaking style" may be used instead of "prosody." Before the teacher presents the cues, it may be more engaging and meaningful to have learners brainstorm cues they have noticed or have them identify cues from examples provided. Indeed, before, during, and after introducing cues, providing plentiful examples will likely make the instruction much more salient and memorable. While care needs to be taken of using photos and other media without permission, finding amusing images and videos on the internet can make the lesson more fun and motivating. Examples could be some combination of text, images, audio, and video, or the instructor can model the cues.

Learners likely need plentiful chances to practice detecting the cues. In this practice, it is important to show both examples of irony and sincerity so that the learners do not come to think that everything is ironic. As discussed

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above, thinking a sincere message is ironic can be just as damaging as not identifying an ironic utterance. Since most utterances are sincere, perhaps at least half of the practice materials should be literal utterance. Finally, since the goal is to build confidence and ability, the detection practice should likely go from easier, more obvious examples to more challenging ones. The latter should aim to include plentiful authentic examples. Challenging items can be fun for students to discuss in groups, or a "detection game" can be played where teams of students try to guess which items are ironic. Again, while class time devoted to verbal irony may be limited, having many items to practice is better to increase accuracy and automaticity. Spaced review activities (e.g., a quick review activity done the following week) likely would lead to more lasting gains.

Finally, while the goal may be on detection (not production), having learners practice the cues can help reinforce them. Pairs of students can make their own sincere and sarcastic scenes for example, and classmates can guess if each is sincere or not. While these productive activities could be fiction, they could be based on the students' real opinion. For example, students could ask each other about controversial topics, foods, celebrities, or media which some love and others despise (e.g., "Do you like Donald Trump?" "Do you like kimchi?" "Do you like heavy metal music?") Learners could be required to answer "Yeah" to all questions but to show their true feelings through prosody, facial expression, and/or verbal context (e.g., "Yeah. I tooootally loooove heavy metal. [Rolls eyes.] I even listen to it when I am falling asleep. [Grins.]").

Verbal Context Cues

Instruction on verbal context may focus on the four maxims in Grice's (1975) cooperative principle (quality, quantity, relation, manner) as in Kubota (1995), and formulaic ironic utterances can be taught as in Bouton (1995a). It could be suggested to look out for understatement and hyperbole, noting that adverbials like "not at all" and "totally" might be used. However, learners may simply need to be encouraged to listen for utterances that do not match expectations or the context.

Training and practice on detecting verbal context cues can take the form written text or audio, but utilizing visual materials is effective because learners can have time to carefully consider the congruity of the verbal message and the visual context. Memes and comic strips could be highly effective for this because the media is both authentic and humorous. In our training, we made our own media with images and text that either did or did not match (see figure 7.3 for an incongruous example). Several sincere and sarcastic examples were presented on various slides and shown on the projector.

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Figure 7.3. Example of media shown to students who needed to determine the congruity of the verbal message and visual context. Photo by Flickr user rjp used with permission; cc by-sa 2.0 license; accessed September 20, 2018, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/.

Having many dialogues in the detection practice can be effective. Learners can decide if the responses are sincere or not, as in the following examples:

1. A: How was your class?

   B: It was so exciting. I totally love listening to 90-minute lectures.

2. A: How was your class?

   B: It was boring. Actually, I was playing with my smartphone the whole time. Ha, ha.

Longer dialogues can also be provided where learners need to identify the ironic line(s).

A: So, how was the restaurant I recommended?

B: It was pretty good. The food tasted fine and the atmosphere was pretty good.

A: Sounds good. So, why don't you seem happy?

B: There was a hair in my food.

A: Gross! That just adds flavor, doesn't it?

B: Ha ha. So, I tried to get a new dish, but they didn't let me. They just took the hair out!

A: What? That's crazy.

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B: I was pretty upset.

A: Sigh. So, I bet you left a big tip.

B: Yeah. At least 30 percent.

Visual Cues

A variety of facial expressions have been noted in the research, but only the most prominent and divergent ones should be presented. In our research, we focused on the blank face and rolling eyes, as these seem to be more prominent in English compared to Japanese. Several images of sarcastic expressions were found from a Google image search or taken on our own (e.g., figure 7.4) and presented for instruction and detection practice.

Figure 7.4. Images used to demonstrate sarcastic and sincere expressions. Photos taken by lead author.

Image A (averted gaze) and Image C (blank face) could be pointed out as typical sarcastic facial expressions. However, teachers should also help students realize that another key is identifying expressions that do not match the verbal message. If the utterance is "The restaurant you suggested was absolutely terrible!" Image B is the one that would be ironic. Several expressions and quotations could be shown to provide plentiful practice.

Although not prominently mentioned in the research, we have noted that a sudden change of expression is also a visual cue, with the last expression usually indicating the true feeling of the speaker. A sarcastic slow clap can also be shown or demonstrated to reveal incongruous facial expressions and body language. GIFs were used to demonstrate these two points (available at prichardcaleb.blogspot.com/p/sarcastic-reaction-gif.html). Our students enjoyed imitating ironic expressions and body language. In addition to GIFs, many videos can be found online of sarcastic and jocular expressions. The resource by Rothermich and Pell (2015) could be an excellent resource. Truman State (2018) also produced excellent materials, including images of sarcastic facial expressions.

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Prosody

A variety of vocal cues have been identified, but once again, several of them may be too uncommon or hard to explain or demonstrate to students. Therefore, in our training, we only focused on the following:

- slower speech (elongated vowels, as in, "Yeah, riiiight" and, "It was sooooo awesome.");
- a speaking style differing from one's normal style;
- a "fake" tone of voice (like bad acting or an exaggerated tone); and
- a negative tone for positive words or a positive tone for negative words.

As with the other cues, these cues could be explained using examples and teacher modeling. Then students need extensive practice distinguishing irony and sincere utterances. Truman State's resource (2018) is also useful for instruction and practice detecting ironic prosody.

Appreciating Verbal Irony

In addition to *detecting* verbal irony, training could be done aiming to get learners to *appreciate* it. As is explained in this chapter, there are several functions of irony and learners need to be aware of them. It should be stressed that sarcasm is not just used to criticize, but also to amuse and bond. Several such examples should be presented, and discussed by learners. Learners could also be shown sarcastic utterances and they could guess the intended meaning and function.

For humorous examples, they could rate them or choose the funniest ones. Discussing their reaction with peers is likely highly effective for two reasons. First, humor is a social construct, and values and tastes in humor are established among one's culture (Kuipers 2015). Laughter shows you are on the same "wavelength" as peers (12), according to Kuipers. If others from your in-group, including classmates from a similar background, think something is funny, you may be more likely to acquire the taste. The social role of humor was made clear in the humor training; the room was silent when learners did the detection practice alone, but laughter filled the room during group discussions of the content. Second, research shows a joke is funnier if it is detected instantly. While explaining humor kills the joke, as is discussed elsewhere in this volume, learners can help each other get the humor. Learners may be able to quickly pick up on future humorous utterances using this form. If picked up on quickly enough, they may find similar uses of the humor funny. This needs further research.

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Responding to Verbal Irony

Although it was not the focus of our research, learners could also be trained to respond to verbal irony. Language learners could learn how respondents often play along with the speaker (Colston 2017). For example, hyperbolic sarcasm may be dealt with further exaggeration, as in the following:

A: Sigh. That was the best game I have ever seen.

B: Ha, ha. Yeah, it was great. We only lost by 5,000 points!

Or the hyperbole could be ignored, and the response can focus on the intended message (Attardo 2001). For example:

A: That was the best game I have ever seen.

B: Yeah. It is depressing how bad we are this year.

For jocular utterances, learners may be advised to laugh or acknowledge the joke (saying "Ha, ha," or "You're so funny"), even if they think it is not funny. Not doing so can be detrimental to the mood or relationship, and this may be especially the case among distant interlocutors (Bell 2009a, 2009b).

However, if one is offended, attacked, or disagrees with a sarcastic jab, learners should know it is normal to take other approaches, such as withdrawing from the conversation, arguing back, or criticizing the speaker (Colston 2017; Bell 2009). However, such an approach could be risky for speakers new to a culture or still learning the language.

Learners could discuss ways to appropriately respond to various forms of verbal irony in various contexts and for different functions. They could practice responding to them in oral conversation or in written form, as in an online chat.

Using Verbal Irony

Considering the negative views of sarcasm and the potential risks of offending or confusing others, most teachers might want to avoid training learners to use verbal irony and especially sarcasm. However, such training could be effective for advanced learners; as using irony serves a great variety of functions, language learners who can successfully use it may enjoy a multitude of benefits, such as the ability to make connections, lighten the mood, or to criticize in a way that saves face.

Learners would need to be trained to use specific English prosodic, verbal, and visual cues accurately based on their specific context and communicative needs. If learners are aiming to be humorous, they may need to consider how

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their utterances can be creative, surprising, and incongruent to hearer expectations, without confusing or offending the interlocutor (Piskorska 2014). Most importantly, learners would also need to be encouraged to carefully reflect on their interlocutors' position and their persona in order to evaluate their potential reaction toward irony use. They need to deeply consider ways in which verbal irony can fail and the reflect on the potential consequences.

Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen (2015) successfully trained Dutch learners to use prosody more successfully in the production of English sarcasm. The training was manageable by limiting the guidelines to three (louder speech, slower speech, and a wide pitch range). Learners also would need extensive practice and feedback on their production of the cues. Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen (2015) gave such extensive feedback and also had participants practice using the software, Praat (Boersma and Weenink 2014).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON VERBAL IRONY

The previous studies on detecting and interpreting verbal irony often did not follow standards for empirical research or the guidelines for researching the efficiency of humor competency training provided in this volume (e.g., including a pretest and posttest with a control group). While our research presented here avoided these pitfalls, it still had limitations such as a lack of delayed posttest.

In order to determine if the training was effective in enabling participants to detect a specific form and mode of irony (e.g., detecting understatement based on prosody), there should be multiple items of each type. Most previous research in this area had too few items to be reliable.

Some of the precious studies did not establish the validity and reliability of the items. Utilizing a validated resource like one by Rothermich and Pell (2015) may be the best option. However, it would be ideal to use authentic items from the media, as in Kim and Lantolf (2016). If this is the case, the validity of the items for the pre- and posttests should be evaluated to ensure the tests are valid. The pretest and posttests should have a similar difficulty level, especially if there is no control group.

Many studies on conversational implicature and irony also overly relied on written scripts. Detecting verbal irony in written form, such as on social networking sites, is a relevant skill. However, several previous studies had learners analyzing written conversation scripts. In Bouton (1995a, 1995b) and Kim and Lantolf (2016), for example, learners had time to analyze the script, which of course is impossible in normal conversation. Moreover, most of the scoring in the latter study depended on identifying specific cues, and it was

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reported that even native speakers had trouble doing this untrained. Therefore, this amounted to more of a linguistic exercise than a valid analysis of recognizing sarcasm in real-world communication.

Our current study also utilized scripts shown briefly before each item. This was a limitation, but it was deemed necessary since the study involved low-proficiency participants. Especially for more advanced learners, scripts should not be used at all (if the focus is on verbal irony in conversation). Ideally, participants should be exposed to utterances and they should be asked to identify whether it is sarcastic or not in a short time, as in real-world communication.

If focusing on responding to verbal irony or producing it, an external review by target culture speakers rating the participants' production of irony is needed. Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen (2015) did this well for prosody.

Topics for Future Research

While some studies have examined detecting irony, further research is still necessary. What length of training is necessary? What type of training is most effective? Moreover, the research could be replicated among learners of different cultural backgrounds. Also, this research focused on sarcasm and jocularity, but other forms of verbal irony could be analyzed. Studies could also involve verbal irony in written form, especially in online communication.

As was suggested above, more studies are needed on interpreting and responding to verbal irony. Finally, the efficacy of training aimed at producing verbal irony is needed. Smorenburg, Rodd, and Chen (2015) evaluated prosody, but participants' ability to utilize visual cues and verbal content for verbal ironic production could also be evaluated.

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Chapter 8

Theory, Content Knowledge, Input, and Output

Elements in the Teaching and Learning of Humor Competence

Richard J. Hodson

Research in language teaching, as in many fields, often begins with a question, or a set of questions. The questions may appear simple at first, but usually expand to encompass a host of subtleties, a series of sub-questions, an ever-broadening need for inquiry, experiment, and practice. Unfortunately, the answer, even in humor research, is unlikely to be "42." (More on this later.) The questions to be addressed in this chapter are: "Why?" "How?" and "What?" My choice of "addressed" rather than "answered" is a deliberate one. "Why?" comes first. After that, it gets difficult.

THE CHALLENGE OF HUMOR COMPETENCE

Why train language learners to be humor competent? To begin with a definition, according to Attardo (2002, 161), humor competence is:

> the capacity of a speaker to process semantically a given text and to locate a set of relationships among its components, such that he/she would identify the text (or part of it) as humorous in an ideal situation. This humor competence is analogous and in fact part of the semantic competence of speakers: being able to recognize a sentence as funny is a skill equivalent (but not identical, of course), for example, to being able to recognize a sentence as synonymous with another sentence.

Wulf (2010, 156) concludes that "it is enormously valuable for L2 students to gain some level of L2 humor competence" and Petkova (2013, and this volume) found humor competence training to be both effective and necessary in the second language classroom. More recently, Bell (2014, 672) argues that: "Both the use and understanding of humor represent a formidable linguistic

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and cultural challenge to language learners, yet it is crucial that they meet this challenge, given the important role humor plays in human interaction." Several chapters in this book make the case for the importance of humor competence in language learning and intercultural communicative competence in much greater detail; but Bell's answer to the "Why?" boils down to a simple, hard-to-deny assertion. Humor plays a crucial role in human interaction—in the "construction of communities" (Carroll 2014, 2)—and language learners will be participants in that interaction, in a second or foreign language. They need to be able to understand and use humor to do so. Is this an assertion with which language teachers would be likely to agree?

Between 2009 and 2011, I conducted a survey to investigate the views of language teachers on this issue and, by and large, the answer was "Yes."[1] All 143 of the respondents were teaching English in Japan, the majority either at the university level or in junior or senior high school. Eighty-three percent either agreed, or strongly agreed with the statement, "Studying English humor helps students to improve their English," and 86 percent either agreed or strongly agreed that "Studying English humor helps students to learn more about other cultures." "Helps," of course, is not the same as Bell's "crucial" and, in fact, a lower proportion (51 percent) of my respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Learning about English humor is important for my students." Perceiving the value of humor competency training may not be exactly the same as giving it priority in curriculums or classrooms. Nevertheless, more than half of my respondents had attempted to teach English humor (46 percent of the junior and senior high school teachers, rising to 72 percent of the university teachers), with two-thirds expressing interest in teaching it.

So much for the "Why?" Things quickly become more complicated when we turn to the "How?" and the "What?"—"How can we train language learners to be humor competent?" and "What materials and methods should humor competency training for language learners use?"—even when it comes to simply deciding which of these questions should be addressed first. Bell (2014) calls the understanding and use of humor a "challenge"—indeed, a "formidable challenge"—and here too, the teachers that I surveyed would seem to agree. Only 9 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "It is easy for my students to understand English humor," with 73 percent agreeing that humor needs a high level of cultural knowledge on the part of learners, and 58 percent a high level of learner proficiency in English (Hodson 2009, 2012b).

The perceived challenge of humor training is, it seems, even greater for teachers themselves. Of those surveyed, 87 percent agreed that it needs a high level of teacher cultural knowledge, and 70 percent a high level of teacher

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English proficiency. Only 29 percent of the respondents to my survey indicated that they were confident in their own ability to teach English humor (50 percent among native speakers, but only 9 percent among non-native speakers). Lack of confidence was the most commonly-selected option chosen by teachers who had not attempted to teach humor; followed by never having thought of teaching humor, inability to find appropriate materials, and lack of time. Lack of perceived importance or appropriateness for students, and lack of teacher interest were much less frequently chosen options.[2] Even amongst those teachers who had attempted to teach humor, 51 percent characterized the experience as difficult or very difficult; although it may come as some relief to learn that only 27 percent characterized their experience as not very, or not at all successful.

The three studies that will be summarized in this chapter represent partial attempts to answer the "What?" and the "How?" by focusing on four associated pedagogical elements that teachers aiming to incorporate humor competency training in their classrooms need to consider. These are: 1) the extent to which humorous meta-knowledge, such as familiarity with theories of humor, can benefit students; 2) the role played by potentially culture-specific content knowledge in the understanding of humorous texts; 3) the necessity of providing learners with appropriate input of model humorous materials; and 4) ways to provide opportunities for learners to produce their own humorous output and evaluate its success.

STUDY 1: OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUMOR PRODUCTION USING NEWSPAPER CARTOONS

My first study in humor competence (Hodson 2011), which focused on providing structured opportunities for humorous output, was an attempt to control some of the many variables that I had observed operating in humor comprehension when I first tried to use humorous texts with five high-level learners of English, an experience documented in Hodson (2008). This earlier investigation, which did not involve explicit humor competency training, had made me realize that I could not begin to provide humorous materials for my EFL students, let alone train them in humor competence, without a systematic approach; and that such an approach would have to begin by reducing the number of affective, linguistic, and cultural factors that humorous input texts involve. I decided to do this by restricting the study to examples of one type of text (a newspaper cartoon), dealing with one content area (a topical event), and with only one possible area for learner production of humor (a missing caption).

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My decision to focus on the humor competence skill of humor production—to provide an opportunity for students to create their own humorous output from the outset, not simply to be more or less passive recipients of input—was informed by the principle that humor in the language classroom should be "purposeful and not merely entertaining" if its use is to be engaging and motivating, rather than distracting (Gardner 2008, 12–13). In "real life," one might argue, we may encounter more frequent, and more varied opportunities to be humor-recipients than humor-producers: when we watch a TV sitcom, for example, or when we listen to a stand-up comedian, read a funny story, or look at a newspaper cartoon. However, although as Bell and Pomerantz (2015, 37) note, "other than for professional comedians, humor is rarely a conversational *necessity*" (emphasis added), opportunities to be funny are widespread in personal conversation or in informal written communication, should we want them; and focusing on humor and verbal creativity "can help students to build a repertoire of communicative strategies that will allow them to participate more comfortably and competently in interaction" (148).

In this study (Hodson 2011), university EFL students in Japan wrote captions for newspaper cartoons dealing with a topical event, rated the captions of their peers, and had their own output evaluated by native speakers of English. The event chosen was the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, with a focus on three incidents from that event that received widespread media coverage in Japan at the time of the study: the success of the US swimmer Michael Phelps; a controversy that erupted at the time surrounding suggestions that underage Chinese gymnasts were competing in the Games; and the success of the Jamaican sprinter and multiple gold medal-winner Usain Bolt. By selecting this topic, I hoped (perhaps a little naively, it turned out) that students would already be familiar with the cultural content of the cartoons that I would be asking them to respond to, and therefore already within the "inner circle" (Davis 2008, 551) of these humorous texts, at least at the level of having a basic level of shared content knowledge.

The 87 students taking part in the study, comprising four classes of mainly first and second-year EFL students in higher education in Japan, were asked to respond to these texts in two ways. Firstly, they were asked to rank three input cartoons on each of two topics (Phelps and the gymnasts) in terms of difficulty, and then of humorous appeal. They were then asked to create their own output. Given two cartoons (featuring Usain Bolt and Michael Phelps, respectively) from which the text in a speech bubble had been removed, I asked the students to write their own original text for each cartoon. In a follow-up task, conducted in a subsequent class, I selected sets of six alternative texts for the blank speech bubble in each of the two output cartoons, five written by students, and one by the original cartoonist. I asked the students,

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who had been told that all of the texts had been written by peers in different groups, to choose the three funniest texts, and rank them. This output ranking task was also performed by two groups of native speakers of English (26 and 16 respondents, respectively), all of whom were university students studying in Japan on short-term exchange programs.

Under its broad aim of providing structured opportunities for humorous output, this study had three main goals. Firstly, addressing the skill of humor comprehension, I wanted to see if there was any relationship between how difficult the students found a "variable-controlled" input text—in this case, a newspaper cartoon on a familiar topic, with a restricted text length—and how funny they found it. However, due perhaps to methodological issues with the rating and ranking systems that I used—issues which will be described in detail alongside the limitations of all three studies in the "Recommendations for Further Research" section at the end of this chapter—I was not able to draw any firm, or even any tentative conclusions on this question.

Secondly, addressing humor production, I wanted to see if learners, given access both to a topic and to related input texts on a content area with which they were presumed to be familiar, could produce their own humorous texts, and what forms those output texts would take. Here the results were more encouraging. Learners *were* able to produce their own humorous texts which met with considerable—although not universal—success when rated by peers and native speakers. These texts were largely on-topic, comprehensible, and showed skill in manipulating English set phrases to humorous effect. They also reflected key linguistic and thematic elements from the input texts: in particular, the use of situational incongruity as a source of humor in the original cartoons. Although it cannot be said that the students had received *explicit* humor competency training, they had been provided with several of the elements—input, output, and (assumed) content knowledge—that might form part of such training.

Thirdly, and mainly addressing humor appreciation, I wanted to investigate both whether language learners and native speakers of English would agree on the funniness of alternative humorous texts on a given topic; and also whether there would be any perceptible difference in appeal (either to learners themselves, or to native-speaker informants) between the output texts produced by students and texts produced by a native speaker: in this case, the creator of the original cartoon. Major differences in perception might point to a need for more training for learners not only in the skill of humor production but also in humor appreciation. Although there was no clear correlation between the text-ratings of the students and the native-speaker informants, student output texts were at least able to compete with the original cartoon texts, with some being ranked as highly as, or even more highly than the

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originals, especially when rated by groups of their peers, but also—although to a lesser extent—when evaluated by native speakers. Interestingly, while the students and the native speakers did not agree amongst themselves to the same extent on which texts they found to be the funniest, they did tend to agree more strongly with each other when they did *not* find a text to be funny. Viewed in the context of training learners, this suggests that humor appreciation itself may be a complicated, or at least a multifaceted, construct; it may be as complex, perhaps, as production and comprehension, and more complex, perhaps, than the detection (or identification) of humor.

STUDY 2: OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUMOROUS OUTPUT USING CULTURAL CONTENT

Background Project: Rating Input Jokes

After the completion of this first study, I turned to a larger-scale and longer-term project, which led to a second study. The driving force behind this "background project" was both pedagogical and research-based. Looking for answers to "How?" and "What?" I wanted to provide a wider variety of humorous texts for my students to respond to and rate in order to start looking for insights into how to select and sequence materials for future use in more explicit and comprehensive humor competence training. I did not have access to enough sufficiently large classes to gather meaningful data in a single investigation, but worked instead on using the same texts and tasks with a number of classes over a couple of years.

In this background project, 124 students from five different first-year EFL classes at a Japanese university were given 22 input texts, this time in the form of English jokes, and asked to rate them in terms of difficulty and funniness. The jokes were chosen and sequenced to match language functions, forms, and topics found in their class conversation textbook, in accordance with Medgyes's advice that texts used should be useful in dealing with language that "can be applied beyond the given context" (2002, 6). They ranged in length from 12 to 153 words, with an average length of 61 words. This is slightly less than the optimal length of 103 words reported by the *Laughlab* project (British Association for the Advancement of Science 2002), from which most of the jokes were sourced (as well as from Chiaro [1992], Ritchie [2003], and various internet sources). The majority were presented to the students with little or no modification to their language or content. The eighth joke in the sequence, for example, was this, from *Laughlab* (British Association for the Advancement of Science 2002, 39):

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A man walking down the street sees another man with a very big dog. One man says to the other: "Does your dog ever bite?" The man replies: "No, my dog doesn't." The man pats the dog and has his hand bitten off. "I thought you said your dog didn't bite," said the injured man. "That's not my dog," replied the other.

The word "ever" was added and the joke included with materials to accompany class work on English for talking about routines and daily activities. Using a five-point scale modelled on Stock and Strappavara (2002), students were asked to rate each joke for funniness and difficulty, with humor ratings of 1 (not funny), 2 (not very funny), 3 (mildly funny), 4 (funny) and 5 (very funny), and difficulty ratings of 1 (very easy), 2 (easy), 3 (so-so), 4 (difficult) and 5 (very difficult). The humor ratings were illustrated with emoji-style faces showing expressions ranging from a frown to a broad grin. This scale was used as the rating/ranking system used in my first study had proved unsatisfactory, and the five-point scale was also used in the second and third studies to be described in this chapter, below.

From the point of view of research, the aim of this project was purely exploratory: the equivalent of dropping a variety of types of bait into the lake to see what would bite. Which jokes would prove more popular than others, and which less popular? Indeed, would there be any clear winners or losers? Would there be any clear relationships between how difficult students judged the various jokes to be, and how funny they found them? Would it be possible to find any other relationships between humor ratings and various characteristics of the jokes themselves (lexical density, the type of humor involved, the presence or absence of a narrative, content elements, affective factors, etc.)? In other words, would I be able to get any pointers toward answers to the "What?" by identifying which types of bait would attract bites; and equally importantly, which types would not.

Each of the jokes in the study was rated by an average of 116 students, with no joke receiving fewer than 93 ratings. The easiest joke, with a difficulty rating of 2.35 and a funny rating of 2.9 (ranked as the 10th funniest joke), was this:

Two kids were talking in the playground. The first kid says: "My mum is from Ireland and my dad is from America. That makes me an Irish-American." The second kid says: "Well, my mum is from Iceland and my dad is from Cuba. So I guess that makes me an Icecube."

The most difficult joke (difficulty rating 4.21, funny rating 2.44, ranked as the 19th funniest joke) was this:

A man lay sprawled across three entire seats in a theater. When the usher came by and noticed this, he whispered to the man: "Sorry, sir, but you're only

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allowed one seat." The man groaned, but didn't budge. The usher became impatient. "Sir," he said, "If you don't get up from there I'm going to have to call the manager." Again, the man just groaned, which infuriated the usher, who turned and marched briskly back up the aisle in search of his manager. In a few moments, both the usher and the manager returned and stood over the man. Together, the two of them tried repeatedly to move him, but with no success. Finally, they summoned the police. The cop surveyed the situation briefly. "All right, buddy, what's your name?" "Sam," the man moaned. "Where are you from, Sam?" the cop asked. "The balcony," replied the man.

The funniest (difficulty 3.24, funny 3.63, ranked 10th most difficult) was this:

A duck walks into a post office and asks the postman: "Do you have any corn?" The postman answers politely: "No, we don't have any corn here." The next day the duck enters the store again and asks: "Do you have any corn?" A bit annoyed, the postman answers: "No! We don't have any corn." This goes on for a couple of days. Finally, one day when the duck asks: "Do you have any corn?" the postman gets so upset he yells: "NO! For the last time, we don't have any corn, and if you ask again, I'll nail your beak to the counter!" The next day the duck returns to the store and asks: "Do you have any nails?" The postman answers: "No." Then the duck asks: "Do you have any corn?"

The least funny (difficulty 4.15, funny 2.14, ranked 2nd most difficult) was this:

I went down to the local gym. I said: "Can you teach me how to do the splits?" He said: "How flexible are you?" I said: "I can't make Tuesdays."

What did my analysis of these ratings reveal? Other than a moderate negative correlation between the difficulty and humor ratings of the jokes, very little. There were no apparent correlations between the difficulty and humor ratings and several linguistic measurements of each joke (including text length, lexical density, and readability as measured by the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Ease score). There were no apparent correlations between the difficulty and humor ratings and the order in which the jokes were introduced: in other words, student ratings did not seem to increase (or decrease) as the course progressed.

I also looked at the humorous content of each joke, and the types of humor involved. I had coded each joke as containing both linguistic and situational incongruity (3 points), either linguistic or situational incongruity (2 points), or minimal use of incongruity (1 point). The last is almost a null category, in fact, as such a joke might be, arguably, not a joke at all; Attardo (2014, 384) notes that within humor studies "the general consensus is that incongruity is a necessary but not sufficient feature of humor." Similarly, I looked at whether each joke contained either a strong degree of "superiority"

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(3 points), some superiority (2 points), or minimal superiority (1 point), in the Hobbesian sense of there being elements in the joke which provoke laughter "at certain people because they have some defect or failure of character" or because a character either explicit or implicit in the joke "finds himself or herself at a disadvantage in some situations or experiences some sort of misfortune" (Roeckelein 2014, 342). Finally, I looked at whether each joke relied on strong (3), some (2), or minimal (1) use of psychic tension, through the use of potentially anxiety-inducing elements such as death, injury, etc., which the release theory—for a summary of which see, for example, Berger (2014)—sees as being released through humor.

These points were totaled to give a crude "humor score" for each joke. In theory, this could have led to a maximum possible humor score of 9, and a minimum score of 3, but in practice no joke had a score higher than 6, and none scored lower than 4, with an average score of 5.23. A separate coding was based on whether the text contained a narrative crucial to the joke (3 points), had a narrative present but not crucial (2 points), or had no narrative (1 point). As with the more objective, linguistic factors, comparing these scores with student difficulty and humor ratings of the jokes produced, to my disappointment, no apparent correlations.

At the end of the project, I had few concrete answers to my "What?" question, certainly nothing close to a "42." If you are still puzzling over the relevance of this mysterious number, it is, of course, the "Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, The Universe, and Everything" in Douglas Adams's radio comedy, and later novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979); and thereby a demonstration of the importance of cultural knowledge in identifying humor! In place of my "42," though, I was able to come up with a tentative working hypothesis. Although there is some reason to believe that learners tend to find jokes funnier when they find them easier, other linguistic and humor factors—at least to the extent that I investigated them; one of the limitations of this project to be discussed at the end of this chapter—appear to have little generalizable influence. Individual preferences may be an important factor in accounting for learner appreciation of English jokes; and significant insight into the nature of these individual preferences might only be obtainable by looking at the learners as individuals.

STUDY 2: REWRITING THE "CARNEGIE HALL JOKE"

Fortunately, although my input bait-scattering had caught no fish, this was not the only outcome of the project. It is one of the principles of this book

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that humor competency training should revolve around student needs and curricular objectives. In this spirit, the background project was implemented to provide supplementary material for the textbook I was using in class, which includes a “Can you tell a joke in English?” question within its final review activity, but which did not provide substantial joke texts or structured productive activities that focus explicitly on this area of communicative competence. In other words, I wanted to give students the tools to tackle this question—which demands that learners have some humor-production skill—by means of appropriate input *and* opportunities for meaningful output. Analysis of student output led directly to my second study, preliminary findings of which were reported in Hodson (2010) and Hodson (2012a). A detailed description of the procedures that can be followed when using this activity as an independent classroom resource can be found in Hodson (2017).

In this study, 118 university EFL students rewrote the cultural/content elements and punchl ine of a well-known English joke. As in Study 1, above, my aim was variable control: to give students one short, lexically-simple text, the humor of which could be understood in terms of one theory of humor (the resolution of the incongruity generated in a pragmatically ambiguous question/answer exchange), and which afforded clearly delineated areas for learner production of humor. The joke used was number 12 in the background project sequence of 22, with an average student difficulty rating of 2.97 (just below “so-so”; ranked 13th most difficult) and a humor rating of 3.23 (between “mildly funny” and “funny”; ranked 6th funniest), chosen to complement in-class study of the language function of asking for directions:

> A tourist in New York realizes that he’s lost, and asks a passer-by: “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” The passer-by replies: “Practice, practice, practice!”

This joke was the only text of the 22 that contained a significant reference to visible culture that required explanation in class: in this case, the New York concert venue Carnegie Hall. Apart from this content knowledge, the language of the joke itself is relatively simple, but its humorous effect relies on the ambiguity inherent in the question “How do you get to . . . ?” which is intended by the tourist in the joke to mean, “Could you tell me the way to . . . ?” The passer-by (either unintentionally or deliberately) breaks the Gricean maxim of relation (Grice 1975) by answering the question as if it meant “How do you get admitted to . . . ?”: the less likely of two possible interpretations.

After having read and rated the original joke, students were asked to rewrite it to make it easier for people in their home country (Japan) to understand; an instruction which, in itself, drew attention to the cultural element of the joke. In other words, I was asking them to provide a cultural “translation” of the joke (Davies 2014). Students were then asked to tell their rewritten

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joke to their classmates, and to rate their classmates' versions. Of the 118 students who took part in this activity, 104 produced jokes that were rated for both difficulty and funniness by at least one peer, that contained a punch line, and that clearly established an identifiable location for the joke. The activity produced, in total, 71 unique student modifications of the joke, and the study both analyzed the content elements of this student output, and compared how it was rated to the ratings of the original joke.

The majority of student output focused on varying three main elements of the original joke: the location of the conversation, the destination of the tourist, and the punch line, with relatively few attempts to vary peripheral elements such as the nature and sex of the tourist, or the description of the passer-by. Japanese settings were by far the most popular choices of location, and the majority of the destinations were also Japan-based. The majority featured sports-themed destinations, such as a famous baseball stadium, followed by education-themed destinations such as an elite university, and arts-themed destinations such as a famous concert venue.

The joke text as presented in class contains a repetition, with the punch line word "practice" appearing three times in succession. Arguably, it is of the kind described by Ritchie (2003, 174) that "may not be central to the joke, and its role may be relatively minor, peripheral or even redundant." Nearly half the student versions retained this triple punch line, and almost all that did so used an imperative verb, perhaps reflecting not only the form of the original joke, but also orders given to the students themselves in their own experience of study or sports practice! However, showing implicit recognition that a repeating punch line is not essential,[3] other punch line forms were produced, using a variety of structures including imperative sentences (such as "Become a big actor of kabuki," used with an arts venue) and other explicit instructions to the tourist (such as, "You must study!" used with an educational destination).

As a teacher, I was satisfied with students' grasp of the skills of comprehending humor and producing humor, as judged by the quality of their output. This showed, by and large, that the students had been able to appreciate the central concept of the original joke: that is, that the tourist's destination has to be both a geographical place and, metonymically, an institution with tough admission standards. In terms of humor appreciation, too, students seemed to be engaged by the efforts of their peers, perhaps with the activity serving as a version of Bell's "safe place" for students to experiment in (2009, 250). The 104 student jokes were rated by peers in the class in which they were written, giving 109 peer-ratings at an average of 1.05 ratings per joke (1.54 per unique variation). Each joke was given an average rating for humor of 4.13 (between "funny" and "very funny"), an increase of 28 percent compared to the original.

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The average difficulty rating for student jokes was 2.16 (between "easy" and "so-so"), a decrease in perceived difficulty of 27 percent. Although this result is promising in terms of humor appreciation, particularly when humor is viewed as a collaborative endeavor (a point to which I will return later), the validity of the comparison is limited, as the raters were not only involved in the production activity themselves, but had also read the original joke. In order to investigate whether these jokes would also be appreciated by those without an affective advantage, I also subjected them to two further rating exercises.

Firstly, 85 students with a similar profile to the writing groups who had not been given the original form of the Carnegie Hall joke, were each given two (out of a selection of five) student-written retellings with the instruction that "The next two jokes are variations on the same idea" and asked to rate them using the same scales as for other jokes. They were not told that the jokes had been written by students in other classes. The five selected jokes were rated by an average of 33 students each, with an average difficulty rating of 2.12, noticeably lower than the 2.97 achieved by the original joke, and comparable to a 2.16 difficulty average for peer-rated jokes. Although there was considerable variation, all five blind-rated jokes were rated as less difficult by this group of 85 students than the original Carnegie Hall joke had been by their counterparts. The humor ratings of the five blind-rated jokes were also all higher than the 3.23 of the original (3.77 on average), but none of the five scored as highly as the 4.13 average peer-rating for student jokes.

Secondly, 76 native speakers of English studying in Japan as exchange students were each given three (in some cases four) variations of the joke, including the original, and asked to rate them for humor only. As the joke is fairly well-known, I decided that it would not be possible to achieve a completely blind rating; and I informed these respondents that the variations had been written by EFL students in Japan. On the whole, the native speakers—who were not "inner circle" members for this joke after its cultural translation—did not tend to find the student jokes as funny as the original (although the fact that each joke variation was rated by more than ten times as many blind-peer raters as native-speaker raters means that comparisons should be viewed with caution). However, there were a number of student jokes that actually received higher ratings than the original.

To the extent that they could be separated from those of the larger, "background" project, this study had two main goals. Firstly, I wanted to see if students, given access to an appropriate input text to modify, could produce their own humorous English texts, and what forms these texts would take. Secondly, I wanted to investigate how these student output texts would be received, and rated specifically for difficulty and funniness, by the students themselves; by students of a similar cultural and educational background

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with no affective stake in the rating process; and by a group of native-speaker informants, also with no affective stake, but also with a different cultural relationship not only with the original joke but also with the student output.

The study found that student joke output tended to be rated, by the students themselves, as both less difficult and funnier than the original joke, for reasons which may include greater familiarity with content schema and with cultural elements in the rewritten jokes themselves. The affective considerations involved in rating a classmate's output may also play a role, but blind-rating of student output by independent groups of Japanese EFL students also showed lower difficulty and higher humor ratings. However, student output was rated by the native speakers as less funny than the original joke, and these informants also found student output less funny than the learners themselves found it. The discrepancies tended to be largest in cases of unoriginal content—such as use of the "triple practice" punch line—and when cultural references in the rewritten joke were relatively opaque. However, these raters did not need to consider affective factors when judging student output, and some student jokes did achieve relatively high ratings from native speakers of English. As with Study 1, although the message from external, native-speaker review of learner humor *production*—arguably a high bar to jump over—is one of mixed success, when viewed as an approach for facilitating learners' humor *appreciation*, joke rewriting seems to have something to offer.

STUDY 3: TEACHING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND HUMOR THEORY

Although I felt that this attempt to allow students to generate their own humorous content had been, with some reservations, worthwhile in its focus on the skill of humor production (and perhaps more so in its contribution to humor appreciation), its role in any larger project of designing a comprehensive, multiple-skill program of instruction in humor competence could be only a partial one. The final study to be described in this chapter (Hodson 2014) documents an attempt to combine two elements from the first two studies (humorous input, and opportunities for learner output) with explicit teaching of some of the characteristic content elements of English humorous texts, and the provision of information about humor theory, in a dedicated course in humor competence, following Attardo's definition cited at the beginning of this chapter.

The participants in the study were 32 third-year students studying English as a foreign language at a private university in Japan. The students were taking an elective class in English humor, albeit one with a generic title. Informal

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inquiry in the first session soon revealed a situation that university EFL teachers in Japan at least may recognize: most of the students had not read the detailed description of course content provided in the syllabus. Therefore, few (if any) of the students could be said to be taking the course because they were *already* interested in learning about English humor.

In the first six weeks of a 15-week semester, I provided the students with a variety of humorous materials, and introduced two sets of tools that they would need to deal with these materials, and that would help them to address the skills of identifying humor and comprehending humor. The first toolset involved awareness of the varying extents to which they would require linguistic and content knowledge to understood humorous texts. Beginning with one joke and one cartoon linked by a key word, I explained the linguistic features (lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic) and content elements (background information and specific cultural references) of each text. The second toolset was knowledge of three basic theoretical approaches to humor: the incongruity theory, the release theory, and the superiority theory. These were illustrated using the first two texts, as well as one more joke: the "world's funniest joke" from the *Laughlab* project (British Association for the Advancement of Science 2002). At this early stage, I chose not to have the students attempt to produce humor themselves, but instead first to tell a story of something funny that had happened to them, and then to use the two toolsets to reflect on it. Subsequent classes continued this guided analysis using more joke texts.

In the next eight weeks, the students made group presentations on examples that they chose, either by themselves or (if they requested it) with my guidance, of a number of different types of humorous text including one-liners, cartoons, puns, and bar jokes. I asked the students to use the tools identified in the first six weeks for their analyses, as well as their own personal reactions to each joke; and presenters were cautioned to avoid uncomfortable or embarrassing material where possible. Each student presentation was preceded, in the previous week, by a teacher presentation on the theoretical background to each type of text, including information on common structural features and themes. After each student presentation, I gave in-class oral feedback and, if necessary, clarified and amplified issues raised.

In the final week, I asked the students to write a brief analysis of two humorous texts from a set of six jokes and two cartoons representing the various types of text used during the presentation phase. During the semester, I used a variety of supplementary activities, including two joke-rating surveys and a joke-rewriting exercise similar to that used in Study 2 (above); and gave the students a test on the information about humor presented in the early weeks. In other words, the course was designed to be pedagogically comprehensive, to tackle my own "Why?" and "How?" questions, and to address the humor

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competence skills of identifying (or detecting), comprehending, appreciating, and (to a lesser extent) producing humor. I did not provide any explicit training in the skill of responding to humor.

During the sixth session, I asked the students to rate how funny they had found each of the 13 jokes and one cartoon that they had been introduced to during the first five weeks of the course. Eleven of these texts were identical with jokes rated by learners in the background project described above. Later in the course (week 14), I again asked the students to rate a set of jokes, 12 this time, representing types of jokes that they had used in their group presentations. Aiming here to address the skill of humor detection, I removed the humorous content from one joke from each joke type, and asked the students not only to rate how funny they found each of the texts, but also to indicate if they thought any of the texts were not actually a joke at all. Students were, therefore, aware that they may have been distractors among the texts, but they were not informed of how many there might be. By the end of the semester, they had been exposed during the course to a number of typical English jokes, given information about how humor works, and about the content with which English humor frequently deals, and participated in both teacher-led (through in-class workshop sessions) and student-led (through preparation for group presentations) analysis of joke texts. Would this process help them to appreciate English jokes and, at a more basic level, distinguish humorous texts from non-humorous ones: what we might call the "Attardo test," perhaps?

Viewed with due caution as a straightforward comparison, between the introductory joke ratings of this group (who had, ostensibly, chosen to take a humor class as an elective), and the ratings of the same jokes by students in the background project (who had not), explicit humor competency training in this course seems to have something to be said for it. Students in this study rated the 11 introductory jokes at, on average, 3.37 (between "mildly funny" and "funny"), which was 15 percent higher than these jokes received in the background project. All but one of the 11 jokes was rated more highly in this study, but the ratings across groups seemed to be consistent, with a strong positive correlation between the two sets of ratings.

However, the results from the second rating exercise were not so promising, although the lack of a pretest means that I cannot determine whether students' humor detection skills had, in fact, changed. Each student in this study only correctly identified an average of 1.08 of the four non-humorous texts in the exercise as non-humorous, and there were many instances of students misidentifying humorous texts as non-humorous. This joke, in its original form "I used to be addicted to soap, but now I'm clean now" (multiple internet sources) but modified to "I used to be addicted to soap, but now

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I'm not" for the exercise, was the most successful, with 14 students correctly identifying it as non-humorous, of which 13 rated it as "not funny" and one as "not very funny." Its overall score, including ratings by students who had not identified it as a non-joke, was a very low 1.48, in an exercise with a theoretical lowest possible score of 1.00.

At the other end of the spectrum was this non-joke, constructed for the exercise: "A duck walked into a bar and ordered a drink. The barman said, "I'm sorry, we don't serve beer." None of the students identified this text as non-humorous, and it attracted a humor rating of 3.27, considerably higher than the average rating of all jokes in the exercise, which was 2.68. Although students were not asked to give reasons for their ratings, some commented that they found the idea of a duck trying to order a drink intrinsically funny.[4] This indicates both that the construction of this text may have been a methodological error, highlighting the need for the use of an informant group to test item validity in any attempts to measure humor detection skills; and, intriguingly, that students were actively engaged in the process of humor appreciation in a way that I had not anticipated.

The second major assessment exercise came in the final session of the course, when I asked all of the students to choose two jokes to analyze from a choice of eight texts representing the seven types of joke presented in class. The jokes were selected from materials that had been made available for group presentations, but not actually used by the students who had made those presentations. I asked the students to explain what linguistic and/or content knowledge they thought was necessary to understand each joke, indicate how easy they found it to understand, explain the humor in each joke (making reference to humor theory if they could), and say how funny they found it.

I examined the students' responses to determine whether: 1) the response specified that linguistic knowledge, content knowledge, both kinds of knowledge, or neither kind of knowledge was needed to understand the text; 2) the response referred to the incongruity, superiority, or release theory of humor, or to none of these theories; 3) the response made reference to any of the following structural elements of the joke: misunderstanding, narrative, one-liner, pun, set-up/punch line, situation, stereotype, or two meanings of a word. I also categorized the reasons that students gave for finding a joke funny (using eight categories) and the reasons that they gave when they found a joke was not funny (also using eight categories). In a further indication of the complexity of humor appreciation, some of these categories appeared in both positive and negative reactions to a joke: for example, five responses said that a joke was funny because the joke situation was absurd, with one

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response saying that a joke was *not* funny because its situation was absurd. No student gave more than two reasons in response to either text.

Finally, I looked at whether the students' responses showed that they had *actually* understood the humor in the joke text (humor comprehension). Forty-nine out of the 64 responses (77 percent) showed that they had. The most successful joke in this exercise was this one-liner by Tim Key: "Drive-Thru McDonalds was more expensive than I thought . . . once I'd hired the car" (2011). None of the 20 students who analyzed this joke misunderstood it. In contrast, three of the six students who tackled this one-liner by Tim Vine were not able to analyze it successfully: "Last night my girlfriend and I watched three DVDs back to back. Luckily I was the one facing the TV" (Handley 2012). Interestingly, in 10 of the 15 responses that revealed that the student had not fully understood, or had misunderstood the humor of a joke, students still stated that they had found the joke funny.

These results mirrored some other apparent anomalies that emerged here and in in the earlier humor-identification exercise (such as the case of the duck/bar non-joke mentioned above), and suggest that students were actually engaging with the nature of humor as "a collaborative or co-constructed communicative endeavor" (Bell and Pomerantz 2015, 34). In other words, while I was attempting to focus on the skills of humor detection, and humor comprehension, what may have been emerging was in fact a form of humor appreciation. My instructions for this exercise did not specify that students should choose texts that they actually found funny, but the vast majority did so. All 64 responses tackled the question of which kinds of knowledge were needed to understand the jokes. Twenty-five of the 32 students made reference to at least one structural joke element in their analyses, and 53 of the 64 analyses were able to give a clear and comprehensible reason why the text was found to be funny (or not funny). However, only 41 percent of the responses made reference to theories of humor, and there was no correlation between students' use of theory references and the extent of their joke comprehension. Wulf (2010, 166) sees humor theory as a source of information for instructors, and does not advocate teaching it to L2 students. Ultimately, whether my findings lend support for, or provide evidence against, Wulf's position may depend on how low you consider 41 percent (tantalizingly close to 42!) to be. How long is a piece of string?

At the end of the course, I conducted a holistic analysis of all of the data I could gather from the 26 (out of 32) students in the class who had completed all of the assessable elements of the course: the first and second joke-rating exercises, the final joke analysis task, a mid-semester factual test on humor theory, content and joke structure elements, and the completion of a class

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journal, keeping notes on lectures and presentations, and record their reactions to the jokes and cartoons introduced in class. Would I be able to argue, for example, that students who had scored highly on the test, kept a comprehensive journal, and rated the jokes in weeks 6 and 14 highly, were those who performed most strongly in the final joke analysis? As with my background project, my search for easy answers here turned up no concrete evidence of any correlations between any of these elements. Nothing to see here, perhaps?

My original report on the study (Hodson 2014, 159–60) concluded that there was no quantifiable evidence either to prove that students taking the course demonstrated a high level of humor competence at its conclusion; or to determine that students' mastery of course content knowledge and/or use of humor comprehension tools were related to their performance in identifying humorous texts. Methodological issues that will be addressed at the end of this chapter make it difficult to determine exactly the extent to which the unclear outcome of the course was actually the result of ineffective training. However, there are, I think, both pedagogical and research-related reasons to be optimistic about the study and its implications for humor competency training. Student course evaluations were positive, with a larger-than-usual number of respondents referring to class content in the free comment section of the evaluation. Two students described the course as "mildly funny," a verdict which might seem to be a textbook example of damning with faint phrase but which was, in fact, a reference to the status that this option in the joke-rating exercises had achieved as a class catchphrase throughout the semester—at least, that is what I would like to think! During the course, students *were* able to appreciate humorous texts and articulate their reasons for this appreciation, even to the extent of adding humor to, or interpreting as humorous, some texts where humor did not, or at least was not intended to, exist.

According to Attardo's definition, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, the students may not in fact have been humor competent at the end of the course; and of course my study does not even shed any light on how humor competent they were at its *beginning*. However, we may wish to ask whether the "ideal situation" required by that definition for the exercise of humor competence is actually obtainable in the context of an EFL classroom; indeed, investigating the obtainability of humor competence is the main aim of this book. Carrell (1997, 174) has proposed that the linguistic competence involved is in fact composed of two parts: joke competence, "which is concerned with recognizing particular texts as jokes"; and humor competence, which deals with "passing judgments relating to those texts." It could be argued that the many students who took this course displayed *this* form of humor competence, if not joke competence in a stricter sense.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING

Single-Skill Training

Two of the studies that I carried out, and that I have described in this chapter, mainly addressed the skill of humor production. Both were attempts to create structured spaces for learners to create and evaluate their own humorous output; not out of the blue, but based on appropriate input that could be modified (the Carnegie Hall joke in Study 2) or used as a springboard for creative language play (topical newspaper cartoons in Study 1). As such, they may provide partial answers to the "What?" and "How?" questions that I posed at the beginning of this chapter. Providing a caption for a cartoon and rewriting an existing joke are activities that are simple to implement and assess, with easily accessible materials, and relatively low demands on teachers' language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and confidence in their own second language humor competence. I think, provided that they could be appropriately integrated with, rather than just shoehorned into, a learning program, that these activities could serve as a starting-point for many of the teachers that I surveyed for whom lack of time, confidence, and materials, rather than lack of interest or perceived pedagogical value, were obstacles to the implementation of humor competence training in their classrooms.

Multiple-Skill Training

Making pedagogical recommendations based on the outcomes of the course outlined in Study 3 is much more difficult. This course attempted to address multiple humor competence skills: mainly identifying and comprehending humor, but also including humor production and humor appreciation. To do so, it made use of a much wider variety of activities, and a greater diversity of content (ranging from input and structured output of humorous material, to meta-knowledge about humor itself); at the same time, it did not address the important skill of responding to humor in any systematic way. To replicate and revise such a program would no doubt require a greater investment in time and a greater level of teacher confidence, than I suspect many of the respondents to my survey would be willing or able to make.

Viewed through the lens of a strict definition of nurturing students' humor competence, the success of its outcome was not clearly demonstrable. Refocusing on its results as a course in one of the skills of that competence—humor appreciation—is much more encouraging. If given the luxury of curriculum freedom, I hope to be able to develop and improve the class as a multimodal EFL course focusing on English humor at some time in the

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future. Such a development would rely heavily on lessons learned from the limitations of all of my studies, to which I will now turn.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The process of making recommendations for future research entails a certain amount of pain as well as an opportunity to inspire: an examination of missteps as well as an indication of promising avenues to follow. Looking back at the three main studies outlined in this chapter, as well as the "background project," it is possible to identify a number of shortcomings that future researchers should avoid. Some of these are specific to research into humor. One example is the relative crudity of the instruments used in the qualitative analysis of the background project jokes. A more sophisticated look at, say, the varying lexical difficulty and cultural/content features in the set-up and punch line of a joke might shed light on why it attracted the funniness and difficulty ratings that it did; why, for example, Sam falling from the balcony was found to be difficult and not funny. Many of the other limitations and shortcomings are common to any classroom-based research. Four areas in particular stand out: issues relating to rating systems; the need for pre- and posttests to measure student progress; the use of informants to establish and test item validity; and the need for control groups.

Rating Input and Output Texts

In Study 1, I used a ranking system for students to rate input texts and peer output. This may have caused confusion and therefore cast doubt on the reliability of my analysis of some results in this study. Use of a criterion-referenced rating system (as employed in subsequent studies) would have been more effective; and could have yielded more valuable insights had I also included it in the final joke analysis activity in Study 3.

Pre- and Post-tests

Although I was able at the end of the course described in Study 3 to make a judgment on the level of students' humor competence, I could not assess the extent to which the course had helped them to *become* humor competent. In other words, I was not able to determine how much, if anything, students had gained from the multi-skills humor competence training that I had attempted to provide. For reasons as much pedagogical as research-oriented, the use at least of a pretest and a posttest is essential.

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Using Informants and Establishing Item Validity

On a number of occasions in the first two studies, I used groups of native speaker informants to rate student output and therefore serve as a comparison with peer-ratings. This could have been done more consistently—although it may not always be possible for teacher-researchers to have access to such groups, either appropriately constituted, or at all—and more extensively. Insights from informants, either quantitative or qualitative, would also have added to the findings of the background project. Crucially, feedback from such informants could have helped me to avoid the problems I encountered in creating non-joke items to test humor identification skills in Study 3.

Control Groups

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I could have used control groups, similar in learner profile and composition to the experimental groups reported on throughout this chapter, but without access to the training given in Study 3, to provide an empirical yardstick against which both learner performance and the effectiveness of the training that I had provided could be measured. Despite the slightly underwhelming evidence of the tests undertaken at the end of this study, it is quite possible that students in my class may have performed better than students who had not received any humor competency training; but in the absence of a control group, such a conclusion can never be more than speculative.

NOTES

1. Preliminary findings of this survey, analyzing responses from 54 teachers, were reported in Hodson (2009), with the full results presented at the JALT conference in Hamamatsu in October 2012.
2. Bell and Pomerantz (2015, 141) list six commonly-encountered reasons given by teachers to "shy away from non-serious or playful language use": 1) lack of training; 2) curriculum considerations; 3) perceived threat to instructor credibility; 4) uncertainty about learners' affective reaction; 5) linguistic and cultural complexity; and 6) perceived threat to classroom control. My survey addressed a narrower issue—teaching humor—and the options presented to my respondents covered only reasons 1, 2, (arguably) 4, and 5. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that although issues of training, curriculum, affect, and linguistic/cultural complexity, as well as materials, also appeared in optional, open follow-up responses, instructor credibility and classroom control were not mentioned by any of my respondents.

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3. Repetition is not present in the early version of the joke recorded by Cerf (1956, 335), nor in that supplied by Carnegie Hall itself ("Carnegie Hall: History FAQ," 2012).

4. The BAAS's account of the *Laughlab* experiment suggests, perhaps a little flippantly, that "ducks are indeed the funniest animals" (British Association for the Advancement of Science 2002, 98).

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Chapter 9

Using Diaries to Research and Develop Humor Competence in a Second Language

Maria Petkova

As a Bulgarian woman who has lived, studied, and taught English as a second or foreign language in Bulgaria, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States in Colorado, Nebraska, and California, I have often experienced and witnessed, personally and professionally, the serious importance of humor competence in cross-cultural communication. One of my former students, for example, an elderly Afghan American, who served the insurance needs of Afghans and Bulgarians in Southern California, once wrote about his dream to retire and build his own house in Bulgaria. As a young man, he had been a foreign college student in Bulgaria, mastered the language, earned undergraduate and graduate degrees, married a Bulgarian girl, had two children, and worked in high-level management positions in this small Eastern European country. "In Bulgaria," he wrote in his diary, "I even understand the humor. When people laugh, I get the jokes. Not here, in the United States, where I arrived much later in life. Sometimes Americans laugh and joke, but I see nothing funny. I just don't feel that comfortable to retire here." This diary entry pinpoints the significance of humor competency training for students who may be highly advanced English language learners, but still are not fully functional or happy in many contexts of the target culture when it comes to humor comprehension and appreciation.

Diary studies provide such deep insights into language learners' feelings, learning processes, and communication needs. Although this is only one individual learner quoted above, his story can generate multiple hypotheses (Bailey 1991, 83) about the social significance of humor competency, how it may or may not develop in a second language, and the powerful affective aspects and pragmatic functions of humor. These hypotheses can then be researched experimentally and quantitatively for more generalizable results. While keeping a diary, or journaling, has many potential benefits for

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language learners, this chapter will focus on the various ways it can potentially develop humor competency.

THE PURPOSE OF DIARY WRITING FOR LEARNERS

Diary studies are used as a fruitful and popular research method in many social sciences and can be both qualitative and quantitative (Alaszewski 2006). There are some fascinating diary studies in fields as diverse as the psychology of humor (Martin and Kuiper 2018, 504–5; Guenter et al. 2013), medicine (Janssens et al. 2018), and marketing research (Lovett and Peres 2018). A review of the list of references selected by the International Research Foundation for English Language Education (2017) reveals 95 journal and diary studies on language learning and teaching. They begin with Schumann and Schumann in 1977, then proliferate in the following decades with the work of Bailey (1991) and many others (Absalom and De Saint Leger 2011; Curtis and Bailey 2009; Helm 2009; Matsumoto 1987; Nešić and Spasić-Stojković 2017; Severino 2017; Tanaka 2009).

However, in addition to being a research tool, journaling can also be an educational tool. Its benefits for language learning, in particular, have been well documented and described in most of the diary studies cited above. The diarist's self-observation, introspection, and retrospection (Bailey 1991) promote learner autonomy (Benson 2011). By regular journaling, students become more aware of their own learning needs, processes, progress, and strategies that work for them. Matsumoto (1987, 26) points out that apart from being a research tool, in second language learning diaries can also be used for "self-awareness, self-evaluation, self-improvement, and orientation for other learners." According to Bailey (1983), journaling can even be therapeutic for learners as they express their frustrations and try to solve their problems instead of skipping class or avoiding intercultural communication. As a form of reflection, diaries are essential for developing learners' cultural competence and are a reliable way to assess it (Deardorff 2006).

Dialog journals are one variation of journaling that can be used to improve humor competence. Their effectiveness has been thoroughly researched in various second or foreign language learning settings and with different types of learners. A review of the list of references selected by the International Research Foundation for English Language Education (2018) reveals 80 publications on the effectiveness of student-teacher or peer-to-peer dialog journal exchanges, beginning in 1980 until present. In written, audiotaped, or electronic form, journals are now the norm in teacher education to foster reflection, and have been used with language learners, both children and adults, to

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build a classroom community and improve sociocultural competence, critical thinking, communicative skills, fluency, confidence, vocabulary, and even syntax and morphology.

While some diary studies do sometimes incidentally focus on and analyze the humor attempts of second language learners (i.e., Severino 2017, 20), the specific use of "humor diaries" in TESOL (teaching English to speakers of other languages) was first described by Bell (2009, 248). Her study asked seven international graduate students in the United States to keep humor diaries over the course of eight weeks in the fall of 2004. Every two weeks, Bell and her students gathered to share, analyze, and explain the cross-cultural humor issues students mentioned in their journals. Although Bell (2009) describes some problems arising in the discussion of one diary entry on political humor, she still concludes humor instruction is helpful and needed in the second language classroom. Students can have more agency (Bell and Pomerantz 2016) in developing their own humor competence and experience their first taste of humor research by keeping a humor diary. In addition, keeping a humor diary will provide regular, meaningful language practice for second language learners (Tanaka, 2009).

According to Absalom and De Saint Leger (2011, 190), the purpose of a reflective diary often involves four goals which may occasionally overlap. The first goal is "to reflect on one's own experience as a learner or as a practitioner in an ongoing fashion." Thus, a humor diary can encourage more and deeper reflection on past humor or humor attempts with interlocutors and in the media. Such reflection can help students understand past humorous situations better, come up with successful strategies and therefore, be better prepared to deal with humor in the future. This is also a way to alleviate affective factors in humor contexts, for example, by increasing confidence or motivation, and avoiding anxiety and reticence.

The second, partially overlapping goal of a reflective diary, as specified by Absolom and De Saint Leger (2011, 190) is "to develop analytical, critical or problem-solving skills in a particular field." Along these lines, a humor diary can make students aware of differences in the target language and culture, such as various cues of humor and how to detect or recognize them, how to understand a different sense of humor or why things are funny in the target language and culture, different targets of jokes, and different taboos for joking.

The third goal of reflective journal writing usually is "to enhance creativity and/or improve written communication skills" (Absalom and De Saint Leger 2011, 190). To be creative with humor, students can use their diary to make jokes and practice joke production, including setting timing, topic, cues, delivery, etc. In the form of a dialog journal, students' humorous ideas or experiences may be shared with peers in order to gain new knowledge

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and ideas, or students can get feedback from the teacher on specific points in order to develop their humor competence. In addition to writing, a humor diary can actually improve oral communication skills for humor production if the diary is audiotaped.

The fourth goal Absolom and De Saint Leger (2011, 190) formulate is "to support planning and progress in a project." Therefore, in the area of humor competence, a diary can promote more and deeper planning for future action, for instance, using humorous materials, preparing better ways to react to humor, or make a joke. In their diary, students can also practice ways to respond to humor, including failed humor. A written, audiotaped, or electronic diary can provide a safe way to practice humor competency by trying out different media, settings, and methods.

METHODS OF JOURNALING

As I was reading Bailey's (1991) article on diary studies, I decided to follow her recommendation for language teachers to keep a diary. However, I turned mine into a humor diary in order to experience the humor journaling process myself. This is an excellent step for any teacher of humor competence asking students to keep humor diaries. For six months, I strived to record every instance of humor I heard or produced in spontaneous conversation. It was easier done at home than at work or other settings, but still possible everywhere with a bit of delay, flexibility, and a lot of determination (I did have a notebook but sometimes also took notes on my cellular phone). The act of writing down humorous remarks naturally provoked reflection about the nature of relationships, desire to amuse or be amused, and power struggles among new roommates, for instance. Overall, humor journaling is not easy and requires strong motivation, persistence, intellectual curiosity, and even a certain detective or hunting spirit. Efforts should be made by the teacher to ensure that students feel the process is worthwhile from the beginning, as described below.

A careful needs analysis, perhaps comparing students' use and appreciation of humor in their native culture to their use and appreciation of humor in English (see Petkova 2013 for a possible questionnaire) could raise students' awareness of some discrepancies in their humor competence. Collecting and comparing jokes or types of humor in both cultures, class discussions, sharing past experiences with humor, stand-up comedy, funny movies, memes, etc. can intrinsically motivate students to seek ways to improve their humor competence in English as their second or foreign language. Depending on the age of the students, the teacher can share some sociolinguistic or psychologi-

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cal research with them to prove the serious importance of humor competence for successful relationships, career advancement, and overall acceptance and well-being in a new culture. Students can also be guided to do their own mini-research projects to establish the need for humor education for themselves, in particular the effectiveness of a humor diary or dialog journal.

As for extrinsic motivation, students should be given credit to incentivize their work. Marketing researchers pay consumers a lot of money to keep a diary of their shopping behaviors (Flaherty 2016). While teachers cannot do this of course for class work, assigning an adequate number of points to the assignment could motivate students to put more effort into it.

Second, the process should be as easy as possible. Marketing researchers have participants dictate diary entries on their mobile phones (Lovett and Peres 2018), and medical researchers strive to make diary keeping as brief as possible to avoid repetitive boredom (Jacelon and Imperio 2005, 995). Applied linguists report higher student participation and motivation with electronic reflective journals, such as online forum posts, blogs, or word-processed entries (Absolom and De Saint Leger 2011). Although journaling should be somewhat easy, pleasant and not boring, it is also important to remember, however, that in a humor diary, the deeper the reflection, the better the opportunity for subsequent discussions, analysis and feedback, and therefore, the better the probability of improving humor competence will be.

When something worth recording in a humor diary happens in natural conversation, it is not always convenient, appropriate, or even possible to record it immediately. Unfortunately, delayed journal entries may miss a lot of essential information or skip entire speech acts that may be forgotten by the time participants find the time, space, and desire to write in their diaries. It is therefore worthwhile to consider the so called "snippets" technique (Flaherty 2016); that is, jotting down a word or two, possibly as electronic notes on the ubiquitous cell phone, as soon as something humorous happens. These should be keywords or phrases that can jog the diarists' memory later, preferably during the same day, when they have the opportunity to describe the situation, interlocutors, and language play in rich detail. As with most projects, it helps to have a set schedule for humor diary writing, for instance before going to bed every night, or at the beginning of every class.

Feedback is very important for the development of humor competency, especially timely and targeted feedback. One way to personalize humor instruction and provide more communicative language practice is to use dialog journals (The International Research Foundation for English Language Education 2018). In dialog journals, students may be communicating with their teacher, peers, or both, on paper or online. They can ask some sensitive questions about humor in the target language and culture and share experiences,

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strategies, and resources. Variations of dialog journals can connect English language learners with pen pals and increase their motivation to write more (Larrotta and Serrano 2012).

There are many benefits of using pen pals to develop cross-cultural competence that have been well researched and documented (Barksdale, Watson, and Park 2007). Often, language teacher trainees are paired with the types of language learners they aspire to teach upon the completion of their teacher training program, as was the case in Larotta and Serrano's 2012 study. Qualitative data showed positive results for both the graduate student volunteers and the adult English language learners, who developed friendships, learned about each other's lifestyles, and enjoyed discussing a variety of subjects. Apart from pen-and-paper letters, students can be more motivated with e-mail exchanges, blogs or online forums because of the faster response time.

To compare traditional diaries and blogs as reflective tools, Absalom and De Saint Leger (2011) investigated how Australian college students learning Italian and French perceived the aims and the usefulness of the tasks, and how these perceptions differed for pen-and-paper learning journals and blogs. In general, student perceptions of the aims of both reflective tasks coincided with the aims stated by the instructors, namely regular language use, independent learning, and personal organization. The idea of regular work seemed very important to students, and the blog in this regard incentivized them more because of its automatic time stamp, while the paper diary allowed for several entries to be hastily written and back-dated at the last moment before submission. Interestingly, however, students considered both reflective tasks to have also been aimed at tracking student progress by the instructor, an idea completely absent from the stated objectives. As far as usefulness of the tasks, virtually all participants considered the blog useful, while a few students reported negative experiences with the diary (e.g., repetition, boredom). The traditional diary was also seen as a privileged channel to communicate with the teacher, and as an individual task, elicited more and deeper reflection than the collective space of the blog.

Helm (2009) focused on language and culture in an online context, and specifically what learner diaries can reveal about intercultural competence. She studied the effects of telecollaboration in an intercultural exchange project between classes of language learners in Italy and the United States of America. Using both quantitative (corpus processing tools such as keyword lists) and qualitative methods to analyze electronic learner diaries, she found evidence of all components of intercultural competence in them. However, it was difficult to establish whether learners already possessed this competency, or it developed with the telecollaboration project.

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ORIGINAL STUDY

Given the paucity of empirical or other research on the use of humor diaries in TESOL, my study relied on diary studies in related areas, as well as on the work of Bell (2009) to investigate the effects and perceptions of a humor competence curriculum that included humor diaries as both an instructional and data-collection method. Inspired by Bell's work on using humor diaries/journals (2009), I designed a pretest posttest quasi-experimental study (Petkova 2013) in which data from students' humor diaries were used to triangulate (Bailey 1991, 88) and qualitatively illuminate my quantitative results. The purpose of the study was to investigate and document the effects and perceptions of teaching English language learners about the uses, functions, and markers of different types of American conversational humor, as well as to document any improvement or lack thereof in their own attempts at humor in role-play scenarios. Keeping a humor diary also was considered part of the humor competence curriculum and therefore, part of the humor training participants received.

It has been said that explaining a joke kills it. Far from trying to explain every joke, as it is impossible to predict what banter language learners might encounter in spontaneous conversation, my curriculum encouraged international students to think about humor in a pragmatic way. It was hoped that discussions of filmed humorous conversations would help learners understand the multiple functions of humor and assist in deciphering what real-life interlocutors might be trying to convey in an indirect manner of speaking. In addition, students were provided with a safe place to try out their own jokes to express complex meanings in role-play pair work. As many of the English language learners that Bell (2009, 255) interviewed said, "They can think of and understand humor, but always too late." For this reason, humor diaries, class discussions, and group preparation for role-plays (Petkova 2017, 222–26) were designed to provide more time for students to think and practice. Furthermore, humor diaries invited students to reflect on similarities and differences in the use of humor in their native culture and in English.

The participants were my 35 advanced students of English as a second language, enrolled in two intact sections at the highest level of a required Listening/Note-taking class in a university-based intensive English program in Southern California (Petkova 2013). There were 14 Saudi, 14 Chinese, 1 Omani, 1 Kuwaiti, 1 Taiwanese, 1 Turkish, 1 German, 1 Austrian, and 1 French students. Instruction and data collection included students keeping "humor diaries" for eight weeks. The following weekly prompts were provided for this journal writing as an optional guide, just to get students started, but not to limit their reflections:

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Week 1: How, when, and where do people use humor in your native culture?

Week 2: What do people NOT joke about in your culture (taboos)?

Week 3: What is your experience with humor in the US?

Week 4: Do you watch any funny TV shows? Why do you like or not like them?

Week 5: What do you do when you do not understand humor in English? Can you find out the meaning later? How?

Week 6: What kinds of humor are popular in your native country? Give some examples.

Week 7: What kind of English humor is easiest and most difficult to understand? Why do you think that is?

Week 8: How can you prepare in advance to say something funny in English?

All 35 participants contributed varying amounts of information to their humor diaries (Petkova 2013). They responded to at least one or more of the weekly diary prompts above. Responses were coded and classified in groups by similar content with emerging themes (Richards 2003, 273–76). The results were used to triangulate the data from other research instruments (humor questionnaire, humor comprehension pre- and posttest, and student evaluation of humor instruction).

The humor diaries made my international students' voices heard in this study. Apart from being a qualitative research instrument informing humor competency training, journaling constituted an important part of their humor training itself. The diaries seemingly raised their awareness of issues in cross-cultural humorous communication and provided a safe space to reflect, ask questions, and later discuss them with the instructor and other students.

Other Training Methods

In addition to keeping humor diaries, the students received humor training for 30 minutes per day twice a week for eight weeks (Petkova 2013). The treatment included lessons focusing on several of the different mechanisms of verbal humor as outlined in Wulf's (2010) humor competence taxonomy, namely irony, sarcasm, ambiguity, allusions, metaphor, their functions, verbal and non-verbal markers in spontaneous conversations, different types of

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laughter, etc. In class, participants discussed their encounters with humor in real life. These were instances of speakers from the target culture using humor with each other, or American speakers using humor with the student, or the student's own successful or failed attempts at humor in English. The class worked to understand the humor in these examples, made anonymous when presented by the teacher if a student so desired.

The typology of humor was briefly presented to students, mainly for them to appreciate its diversity and to learn the associated vocabulary. Then video clips of each type were shown and students were asked to match each example to the appropriate term or terms. Students discussed the meaning, functions, and cues of the humorous interactions, and pointed out differences from their own culture. Participants focused on observational humor in particular as a leading type used by many contemporary stand-up comedians in the United States.

The instructor also recorded different types of laughs and asked the students to match them to words like bitter, nervous, polite, hearty, or hysterical. This led to a discussion of the different meanings of humor, inviting students to make comparisons to their native culture.

Other Research Methods

While this chapter is focusing on humor journals, this was just a complementary component of the training methods in the original research (Petkova 2013). Therefore, other research methods will be described. As a whole, this study was designed to answer the following research questions before and after the training:

1. What are students' perceptions about understanding and using humor in spontaneous conversation in their native language?
2. What are students' perceptions about understanding and using humor in spontaneous conversation in English?
3. Is there a difference in the perceptions of students about understanding and using humor in their native language as compared to understanding and using humor in English? Are there differences between students' understanding of American conversational humor?
4. Are there differences in the students' use of humor in English conversation?
5. How do the students perceive the effectiveness of humor instruction?

Gay et al. (2009) described the questionnaire as a quantitative technique for self-evaluation. This was one of the ways the present study explored participants' opinions and perceptions of their ability to understand and produce humor in both their native language and in English. In order to answer research questions one, two, and three, a Likert-scale questionnaire was administered

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before and after the treatment. First, demographic information about the participants was collected, including their name, age, gender, native country, and length of residence in the United States. Next, participants were asked to rate as *always*, *often*, *sometimes*, or *never* their enjoyment of humor in conversations in their native language and then separately rate their use of humor in English in daily life, with family and close friends, in a school setting, and in business. Participants also rated their ease of understanding conversational humor in both languages, and the frequency of their use of humor in both languages in different settings. When administered before the treatment, this questionnaire also served to raise students' awareness of these issues and became the basis of discussion for participants in pairs and subsequently as a whole class.

Considering the scarcity of research on the assessment of humor competence, my 2013 study drew on the recommendations of research on pragmatics because it is a broader area of skills that includes humor competence. Several researchers have written on the assessment of English language learners' pragmatic skills (Brown 2008; Brown and Abeywickrama 2010; Yamashita 2008), dividing receptive and productive skills to test separately. They also recommended role-play and visual prompts rather than paper and pen tests for pragmatic skills. Based on these recommendations and on the type of treatment the students received, participants took a pre- and posttest about the meaning of humorous remarks in a video clip. This test collected data about students' receptive skills to answer research question four: Are there differences in the students' understanding of American conversational humor before and after the course of instruction?

A pre- and posttest of producing humor in an assigned role-play situation, video-taped for later analysis and evaluation, was also used to provide the data for research question five: Are there differences in the students' use of humor in English conversation before and after the course of instruction? Thirty-two participants took the English humor production test. The test consisted of three assigned role-play situations, in which students were asked to produce a humorous remark to accomplish certain pragmatic goals. The three situations in the pretest were different from, but similar to the three situations included in the posttest. The pre- and posttests was scored by two proficient speakers of English from the target culture. The two raters were trained and established inter-rater reliability at the training session. They used the scoring rubrics provided by this researcher to rate students' video-taped responses for being funny and appropriate.

All tests and questionnaires were scored by the researcher, except for the humor production test, which was scored by two native speakers of English, an older male with a business background and a thirty-year-old female with a TESOL background. The two raters were trained together by the researcher. Using practice samples of students' responses to class assignments similar to

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the tests, inter-rater reliability was established at a meeting with both raters before they began scoring. They used scoring rubrics to rate students' video-taped responses for being funny and appropriate according to the proficient speakers' from the target culture expert judgment.

The final program evaluation questionnaire included both Likert-scale, ranking, and open-ended questions to answer research question six about the effectiveness of the humor instruction. Participants were asked how much this class helped them learn about humor, to describe how their understanding of and/or use of humor improved, to rank their favorite and least favorite humor activities, to recommend other information, materials and activities for future humor instruction, to evaluate the length of the humor training and whether it is better to learn about humor in or outside the classroom.

Thirty-one participants took a humor comprehension test before and after the course of humor instruction. The test consisted of watching a short video clip of Jerry Seinfeld's (sharedjerry 2009; MechaNikos 2009) stand-up comedy performance and answering the following questions about it: How funny do you think the humor was? How much do you think you understand the humor? What was the meaning? The video clips used for the pretest and the posttest were different, both part of the same stand-up comedy performance of Jerry Seinfeld, but one on the topic of airports (Sharedjerry 2009) and the other on Halloween (MechaNikos 2009). This is a limitation, however, considering the clips were not piloted; it is possible one of the clips may be considered easier to get or more funny, even by fluent speakers of the target culture.

Results

While the study had limitations (Petkova 2013), quantitative results suggested significant improvement in the comprehension and appreciation of English humor after eight weeks of humor journaling and instruction. Qualitative results suggested that improvement in the production of humor in English did occur as well. Many more students found the humor in English funnier, and they felt they understood it better after the course of humor instruction than before. T-tests confirmed statistically significant results on both (Petkova 2013). The third question, about the meaning of the humor, was open-ended and was scored by the researcher as 1 (correct) if the students mentioned making fun of, respectively, airports, and Halloween and as 0 (incorrect) if they mentioned other topics or did not produce any answer. The percentage of correct responses rose from 61 percent on the pretest to 90 percent on the posttest, showing significant improvement in the students' comprehension.

As for the production task, participants chose not to respond in quite a few situations, but the percentage of responses rated as Insulting or Inappropriate was relatively low, too. The percentage of responses rated as Unintelligible

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also declined from the pretest to the posttest. However, a high percentage of students were able to produce comments rated as Very Funny/Funny and Very Appropriate/Appropriate on the pre-test, even before the course of humor instruction, and these percentages remained relatively similar to the posttest. In addition to the percentages of responses, each participant was given an individual score on the Humor Production test. Contrary to the hypothesis, the T-test found no statistically significant difference between the two sets of scores.

The quantitative results of the humor program evaluation provide somewhat positive results for the training, and mixed results for the journal writing. For the first question, "How much did this class help you to learn about humor?" seven students (23 percent) answered A Lot on the Likert scale provided, 19 students (61 percent) answered Somewhat, five students (16 percent) answered Not Much, and no students answered Not at All.

To answer the third evaluation question, students ranked their two favorite and two least favorite class activities. As table 9.1 suggests, journal writing was noted as the favorite activity for just four participants and eight voted it as their least favorite activity.

Table 9.1. Class Activities

Rank	*Favorite Activity*	*n*	*Least Favorite*	*n*
1	Video Clips	25	Journal Writing	8
2	Discussions	8	Role-Play	8
3	Vocabulary Cards	7	Vocabulary Cards	8
4	Journal Writing	4	Lectures	5
5	Lectures	3	Reading	4
6	Role-Play	3	Discussions	2
7	Reading	2		

Created by the author.

As discussed below, this does not suggest the journal writing was ineffective, but that it was relatively less popular than the in-class training. Naturally, many students would prefer watching funny video clips over writing in a journal. Journaling creates a heavy workload for both the students and the instructor providing the all-important, ample, and timely feedback. This problem needs to be solved by explaining to students the effectiveness of regular reflection for developing humor competence in their second language, by offering substantial course credit for the journal assignment, and by considering variations such as blogs, dialog journals with fluent English partners, audio feedback, etc.

For the fifth question of the Humor Program Evaluation, "What is your opinion about the length of this humor training (10 weeks)?" only three participants (10 percent) chose "Too Long" on the Likert scale provided.

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The majority, 24 students (77 percent) thought it was about right, and four students (13 percent) wrote it was too short.

The sixth and final Likert-scale question of the Humor Program Evaluation questionnaire asked, "What do you think is the best way to learn about American humor: in the classroom, or in your daily life outside of class?" No one chose "Only in Class," and only one student (3 percent) selected "Mostly in Class." The majority, 18 participants (58 percent) chose "Equally in Class and Outside," while nine students (30 percent) thought they should learn about humor "Mostly Outside of Class." As most students felt that language learning should be done both in class and out-of-class, journaling can be seen as a way to connect in-class training and out-of-class activities.

The qualitative results of the two open-ended evaluation questions are presented below. Question 2 of the Evaluation questionnaire asked participants to describe how their understanding of and using humor improved in this class. Most students appreciated the positive affect humor brings into the classroom, learning about the different types of humor, improving their comprehension, vocabulary, making friends, and learning about American culture. Some also mentioned that humor can travel across cultures and that the instruction helped them improve in using humor in their native language. Others said they could understand the differences between cultures, such as body language, and it would be beneficial for their future conversations. Three students wrote that they needed more explanations; one felt he needed to know his classmates better before he could use humor with them, and one believed that humor should be spontaneous only. Participants' comments are listed below, classified by these emerging themes. Question 4 of the Humor Program Evaluation questionnaire asked participants what other information, materials, or activities they would recommend be incorporated in the class on humor. Their suggestions included telling jokes, Canadian humor, games, music, song lyrics, more examples of types of humor, TV series, talk shows, more time to learn vocabulary in advance, acting, translating jokes from the native language, more explanations about American culture, a stricter schedule, entertainment magazines, other movies, role-play, and vocabulary games.

Analyzing the Humor Diaries for Humor Training Implications

All 35 participants contributed varying amounts of information to their humor diaries. Diary excerpts are summarized below, categorized by emerging themes, each followed by a discussion of potential implications. They can inform future humor training including lesson planning, class discussions, and journaling, and they suggest topics and themes for follow-up research.

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The Use of Humor in the L1 and Target Language

Participants had noticed that Americans enjoy humor like most people in their culture, but that English speakers in the United States tend to prefer different types of humor and accept joking perhaps more than in other cultures. For example, one student wrote, “In Saudi Arabia, there are many things we don’t joke about, but here in the US people are freer.” This shows students are aware of the gap between humor in their native cultures and in the target culture. This awareness is often the first step toward accepting or tolerating target culture norms.

In general, Saudi participants expressed more positive attitudes toward humor in their native language and said they enjoy it, but it depends on the situation and the interlocutors as “you have to get to know people before you can joke with them.” It was interesting that eight Saudi students and only one Chinese student wrote that they use humor a lot in their native culture. This Chinese student explained he personally was “a funny guy” and his friends know that, so “they don’t mind.” He tells them jokes he learns from the many funny Chinese talk shows he watches all the time on his computer. On the other hand, the Saudi students emphasized a love for jokes by the whole community, as “people will like you if you have a sense of humor” and “when you meet your friends, you have to say something funny to make them laugh.” They also understand humor can be a double-edged sword (Rogerson-Revell 2007) and try to be careful with it, since they “hate to hurt anyone.” For example, one said that “There is a red line and I don’t go past it” because “some people may think me impolite.”

As for the type of L1 humor, irony and sarcasm, concepts that were taught in this study’s experimental course of humor instruction, were mentioned a lot here. In addition to *cold jokes* from China and stand-up comedians from Saudi Arabia, as well as TV shows, newspapers, wordplay, humorous narratives, teasing, pranks, ethnic, sports and sexual jokes were also mentioned. In contrast to students’ statements that they were not supposed to joke about their governments (see below), several participants mentioned that political jokes were popular in their cultures, and that they made fun of various people in power.

Many of these points here suggest similarities between the participants’ cultures humor and target culture humor. Nevertheless, there are certainly differences in the types of humor, and empirical analysis is needed to verify this. However, the participants did notice some differences between target language humor related to taboos.

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Taboos

The most common taboos mentioned were religion and parents, in addition to the government, the law, politics, banks, hospitals and personal problems. The most universal taboos were religious topics, including God, Prophets, and Holy Books. It is not only socially unacceptable to joke about these topics, but also illegal in some countries. Fourteen Saudi students mentioned religion as a taboo subject. For example, one wrote "a lot of people get mad if someone makes fun of their religion." One even noted that people are much more "faithful to their religion than to themselves."

Needless to say, teachers utilizing humor training may obviously want to avoid religious jokes in their lessons. However, showing examples of how some people in the target culture light-heartedly criticize their *own* religion may serve as a soft introduction to religious humor. The point would not be to get students to appreciate or definitely not to start using such humor. However, it could help them understand the target culture and be somewhat more tolerant of religious jokes given by target language speakers.

Many participants from different cultures mentioned that, in addition to religion, they would not joke about their parents or others' family, as they deserve high respect. Seven Saudi students mentioned parents as a taboo subject, in addition to four Chinese. Someone joking about their parents would make them "feel unhappy, even very angry" and they, and even others would "hate him."

Again, this is slightly different in the target culture, and it may shock students to see some sitcoms or other media and speaking making disrespectful remarks toward parents, such as "yo mama jokes." Teachers may have to explain a lot about egalitarian values.

Several Chinese and Saudi participants, as well as one Turkish participant, also wrote it may be dangerous or illegal to make jokes about the government in their country. According to one participant, in Saudi Arabia "if you say something bad about the government, you will be in jail." Also, as another participant wrote "political humor is not that common in Germany just because of the Second World War."

Students from these cultures may need a lot of explanation of views of democratic and human rights, political freedom, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press in the target culture. They could be shown multiple political jokes or political cartoons about the target culture to make these points.

Most Chinese students and one Taiwanese mentioned it is not polite to joke about other people's personal troubles, bad luck, age, etc. On the other hand, Saudi students mentioned they often make fun of people, their face, their body, etc.

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As a general rule, students could all be taught that in the target culture, it is usually safe and even shows strength to joke about oneself, one's own troubles and shortcomings, but not those of other people. Certainly, it is never acceptable to joke about abused women and children, as one French student mentioned.

Joking is also limited to informal situations in the cultures of many of the participants. In serious political and business situations, Chinese participants would avoid joking, for example "the banker never jokes about what they do," "the doctor is never kidding with the patients," and neither are "lawyers with the law and courts."

In contrast, there is a whole genre of "lawyer jokes" in the culture of the United States. The serious demeanor in business practices is quite different from the target culture, which welcomes humor in professional settings to release tension and build relationships. Students will therefore need to be exposed to such business practices and receive pragmatic training through role-plays, discussions, observations, and professional contacts with proficient English speakers.

In summary, of course caution should be used if the class focuses on subjects pointed out as taboo in the students' journal writing. While pointing out target culture norms is important, of course, care should be taken not to shock or anger students. Students should also reflect on the fact that joking or even sharing humor on social media related to sensitive topics like religion or politics can have serious repercussions. It should also be noted that it is often considered inappropriate to joke about or even discuss religion or politics in many situations in the target culture. As is noted by Pomerantz (this volume), humor norms vary among various groups within a culture. Rather than focusing on larger cultures norms, it iis mportant to consider how each interlocutor might react and feel about the humor. Students could be prompted to reflect on this their journals.

Popular Humorous Media in the Target Language

Most participants (8 Chinese, 10 Saudi, 1 German, 1 French, and 1 Turkish student) said they do watch and enjoy American comedies on television. They mentioned certain shows, such as *Friends* (1994), which uses simple, everyday English, as being easier to understand than other shows, such as *The Big Bang Theory* (2006), which uses academic vocabulary and different accents. Only one Chinese and one German student shared that they could not enjoy or identify with this type of sitcoms. The few students who did not watch American comedies wrote that after viewing the videos in class, they would start watching on their own.

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In general, participants thought that media using standard accents, simple, everyday vocabulary, situated in a rich context and accompanied by body language would be the easiest to understand. In contrast, humor that uses advanced academic vocabulary, lesser known accents, and no context or body language would be the most difficult to understand.

Popular television shows and other materials that are comprehensible to students could be shared with the class as a way for others to discover new media to potentially learn from and enjoy. This could be considered a step toward humor competency, especially if it could be accompanied by discussions with target language speakers in or out of class, through dialogue journals, research, or reflection.

Strategies for Coping with Misunderstood Humor

Participants often noted that they could tell when they missed humor, such as when others around them started laughing. Other learners replied that they relied on facial expressions to notice if they missed humor.

Noticing facial expressions is an important strategy used by fluent speakers to detect verbal irony (see Prichard and Rucynski, this volume). When body language and the verbal message do not match, the target language speaker will intuitively trust body language, including facial expressions. Facial expressions, as well as tone of voice certainly are distinctive markers of humor and should be taught, as some are culture specific. Using videos, pictures, and role-plays would be a helpful aspect of humor competency training.

Participants relied on many strategies for coping with jokes they do not get in real-world interaction. As Bell's (2015) important work on failed humor has shown, saving face in such situations is very important for building relationships; therefore, the strategies participants shared in their journals are valuable to describe and further research the success of such coping mechanisms. Most students wrote they would laugh anyway out of courtesy or to avoid embarrassment, to be polite, and to keep from "destroy[ing] the atmosphere." Others, as explained below, said they rely on facial expressions, and then do some research on the internet, check dictionaries, or ask close friends, figure out the meaning by themselves later. Often, they just let it go.

Obviously, clarification strategies are more conducive to learning about humor, but "letting it go" may nevertheless serve pragmatically valuable, communicative purposes. For instance, students need to research, discuss, and build background knowledge for the humor they did not understand to be able to figure out all layers of its meaning and connotations. This is a way to improve their humor competence, but in certain situations saving face may be more important to them than learning about humor at that particular moment. A humor diary would be the perfect solution to this problem as it gives

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students the opportunity to privately record such interactions and reflect on them later, when they have the time and cognitive capacity to find out the linguistic and cultural background needed to understand the humor. Specific ways learners dealt with misunderstood humor will be discussed more below.

Laughing Just to Fit in Socially: Many participants mentioned that they laughed when others did even if they did not get the joke. One said "First, I'll make sure they are not laughing at me, and then I will laugh with them to improve our relationship. If everyone is laughing but I'm not, it's weird." Another said that she just smiled, adding she "hate[d] those situations!"

Indeed, fitting in is very important for social and professional success. Although it may be a bit shortsighted, laughing when they do not understand the humor may save face. Nevertheless, students could be encouraged to remember, record as soon as possible, and discuss the humorous remarks later, with trusted proficient speakers or do some online research. This would help improve their humor competence step by step as it will lead to better understanding and knowledge of the target culture. This is advice I orally and informally gave the students in this particular study, but it would be better to include it in more formal, written instructions they receive at the beginning of humor journaling. The instructor could explicitly explain and demonstrate its importance, then follow up.

Searching the Internet to Understand the Humor: Three participants mentioned they will use the internet to check the background knowledge they could not understand. Google search engines were frequently mentioned.

Fortunately, technology has made so much background and linguistic information accessible to students who are willing to research humorous remarks. The wealth of online resources giving examples of humor in different cultures is beneficial to teaching humor competency. The teacher should recommend and ask students to share useful websites or YouTube videos that explain American humor, idiomatic expressions, political and cultural background, such as onlineslangdictionary.com, explainthejoke.com, quora.com, in addition to local, national, and international news.

Using a Dictionary: Two students mentioned the strategy to look up unknown words on their phone or dictionary. This is usually a good strategy considering how lexicon are essential for most humor. Dictionary use is now much easier by online dictionaries and voice recognition software. Nevertheless, it may be difficult to find the humorous connotations of a word in the dictionary. Students should be encouraged to look for multiple meanings until they find one that fits the situational context. It would really help if the humor were in an "online show that can be rewound" and perhaps subtitles could be

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turned on. This is a strategy that may need to be supplemented by the next strategy, asking a target language speaker to confirm the humorous meaning.

Asking Someone: Six people said they would ask interlocutors to explain the joke. One mentioned, that if they are watching a movie, “for the points I don’t catch, I write down the expression on the first paper I have at hand, even the theater ticket.” She discreetly checked with a friend or waited until later to ask about the unknown point. Another student said she is sure this strategy “improves [her] language skills and prepares [her] for the next humoristic situation.”

Indeed, this is one of the best strategies, as long as students have someone they can trust to be both competent and benevolent, preferably a fluent speaker, such as a teacher, friend, or host family member. It is a natural way to share cultural background and enjoy humor together. If possible, it is a good idea to ask someone who was present in the humorous situation, so they would know what was going on, what was said, and why it was funny.

Figuring out the Meaning by Oneself Later: Three students mentioned that they would try to think through the situation later to try to figure it out. For example, one student wrote: “Sometimes I could figure out the meaning of a joke later. By recalling what people said, I thought about the joke once again or even many times.”

This may sometimes be discouraging to students as they feel it is then too late for the joke, but actually it always moves them a step closer to being able to understand similar jokes in the future. Building background and learning about different attitudes or types of humor takes time, and many small steps will eventually lead to improved humor proficiency. Perhaps, students should be encouraged to see this strategy as an intellectual game, a brainteaser, a puzzle to be solved for the sake of future success in humorous interaction. However, it would still be beneficial for them to confirm their guesses with someone from the target culture, or with someone very familiar with the target culture even as students gradually become more independent in their humor competence.

Letting It Go: Four students mentioned they sometimes just forget about humor that they could not get. Three said they did this especially for jokes that seemed typical or “boring.”

This may seem like an easy way out, but students could be encouraged to evaluate the situation first and decide whether or not it may be important to understand the humor. If they determine it does not matter, then letting it go may lower some of the cognitive and emotional overload they experience when trying to function in a new language. In this sense, it might help them to consider humor competency like other aspects of language learning, such as

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understanding the difference between active and passive vocabulary. Sometimes not all humor is important or practical to remember.

Preparing to Be Humorous in a Second Language

Again, students said the internet can help them improve their ability to be humorous. They also mentioned American friends, comedy shows and books, or teachers. Humorous input from all these sources can give students much needed examples and models of when it might be appropriate to joke, on what topics and with whom, in addition to providing more cultural background knowledge necessary to function in a humorous mode.

These are excellent strategies, whose rationale may need to be explained to students since quite a few participants wrote they do not like to prepare jokes in advance, as humor should be spontaneous, or that it is difficult to prepare because they do not know what situation they might be in. This is consistent with research on failed humor (Williams and Emich 2014; Bell 2015) finding that speakers often do nothing about it. Instead of avoidance, which does not help relationships, here is some sound advice from Bell and Pomerantz (2016, 173): "Rather than attempting to follow the norms of the target community, learners can emphasize their outsider status, exploiting linguistic and cultural differences for humor."

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USE OF DIARIES TO IMPROVE HUMOR COMPETENCE

Although the use of humor diaries alone has not been empirically shown to increase learners' humor competency, along with in-class training the journals do seem to be effective. The ideal procedures for journal writing would vary depending on the goals, age, English proficiency, and motivation of the learner. To fit in with other humor training, diaries should provide a venue to reflect on the material presented in class and to find connections to and explanations of humor used in the target culture outside the classroom. One approach is to assign a humorous video clip or reading for students to journal about. This could be done in class to ensure that everyone does spend the time to reflect in the diary and then entries could easily be discussed with the teacher and classmates. The teacher can also invite guest speakers, for example English-speaking students from the target culture, to discuss some humor issues from learners' diaries.

Alternatively, students can be encouraged and given credit to write in their journals at home or any time they encounter humorous interactions in the target culture, and share whether they understood enough or not, how they

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coped, and what further explanations they need. The teacher may collect student diaries and respond individually in a dialog journal format, or ask students to discuss their entries in class. Students may also collect jokes they like in their journals to tell the class and be ready to explain them, if needed, or record instances when they felt confused by American humor to seek explanation and clarification in class.

As with any reflective journal, humor diaries can serve as a tool to deeper process, practice, and evaluate the humor training activities the teacher has designed for the class. For instance, after introducing irony, watching some video clips, and engaging in role-play, students can write in their journals about examples of irony they have encountered in the target culture, offer their own ironic remarks in imaginary realistic situations, and compare the use of irony in English to the use of irony in their native country. They can also reflect on the appropriate settings and interlocutors to use irony with, the communicative and pragmatic goals that may be achieved with it, and the ways to avoid insulting people and creating enemies at school or work.

With less motivated or mature students, the teacher may find it easier to provide journal prompts just to get students to start writing. Once they get started, though, the prompt should not limit the flow of their ideas but encourage them to expand and look deeper into the significance of their experiences or problems with humor in the target culture and compare them to their native culture. In my study, students were given one different prompt every week to reflect on in class, which ensured they all completed the task and had clear instructions, enough time, support, and encouragement to do it. The most fruitful prompts turned out to be the ones asking students to think of various strategies to cope with English humor they do not understand, and how to prepare in advance to say something funny in English. Students can then share their successful strategies with classmates and choose the best three for them personally.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH USING HUMOR DIARIES

Diaries are a naturalistic way to collect qualitative data about humor competence in a second language, although diaries can also be analyzed quantitatively. Many types of electronic journal entries, such as blogs, social media posts, or word-processed diaries are better suited to quantitative analyses and corpus-processing technological tools, making it possible to process huge amounts of writing with multiple participants over longer periods of time (Helm 2009). Qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti,

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and MAXQDA, provides annotations and coding tools, data visualization and linking ability, text analytics, and statistical analysis. The best ways to use humor diaries would probably be to explore possible needs and directions for humor research in TESOL, to generate research hypotheses, as well as to triangulate results from other research methods. Keeping a humor diary can also make teachers more aware and empathetic of their students' cross-cultural challenges with humor and teach participants how to do ethnographic research.

Since journal writing is also seen as a potential way to improve humor competency, the results should be tested empirically to investigate the effectiveness of this method. As this research included a variety of training methods, it is hard to ascertain how influential the journals were. Future research should involve a control group who does not use journals to better examine if journaling aided the experimental group.

In addition, the current study had some other limitations, namely the inability to randomly assign equal participants to groups, and the use of the researcher as the participant instructor. While quasi-experimental studies are common and quite reliable in education, the researcher being simultaneously the teacher delivering the treatment may have imposed at least two limitations on this study: it was more difficult for a busy teacher to observe carefully and notice important points about the students' performance; and this participant structure may have influenced the behavior and attitudes of the students. For this reason, it was repeatedly made clear to the students that any part of the humor instruction or pre- and posttests and questionnaires did not have any influence on their course grades, so students did not worry about making a bad impression on their regular class teacher.

The pre- and posttests also need to be improved in follow-up research. Researchers should ideally include more items in the comprehension test for statistical analysis. Especially, if there is no control group, researchers should also pilot the pre- and posttest items and establish whether proficient speakers from the target culture find the two tests equally funny and comprehensible.

In conclusion, empirical follow-up research could help determine if journaling is effective in assisting learners in developing humor competency in the target language. It could also point out ideal approaches to journal assignments. The end effect could potentially be learners with better metacognitive strategies to develop their ability to detect, comprehend, appreciate, respond to, and produce humor in the L2.

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Chapter 10

Training English Language Learners to Recognize English Satirical News

John Rucynski Jr. and Caleb Prichard

An article with the surprising headline, "Osaka Launches Foreigner-Only Carriages to Curtail Inconveniences," was shared on social media sites by many foreign residents of Japan in October of 2016. An unsuspecting reader may have wondered "Why would they do such a thing?" and "How exactly does this make riding the train more convenient?" Many members of the foreign community living in Japan, however, instantly recognized the "news" item as the latest work of *The Rising Wasabi*, a Japan-based satirical news website founded in 2015. It was clear that the creators were quickly satirizing a recent incident in which a train conductor in Osaka made a Japanese-only announcement in which he apologized for the crowded conditions due to the great number of foreign passengers on the train that day (McCurry 2016). Such an announcement may have just seemed like business as usual for a majority of passengers. After all, Japan is well-known for a remarkably efficient and punctual mass transportation system, with conductors routinely making announcements reminding passengers to be courteous of others and repeatedly apologizing even when a train is late only by a minute or two.

Even for readers not familiar with *The Rising Wasabi*, it should have soon been evident that the site is merely satirical. The website has features common to other satirical news sites, such as clearly photoshopped images and headlines that are wildly exaggerated or questionably newsworthy (e.g., "Man Survives 78 Days on Wild Berries Looking for Shinjuku Station Exit 27K"; "Gaijin Tries Natto, Dead at 25"). Finally, one does not need to search long to find *The Rising Wasabi's* disclaimer (written in both English and Japanese) that "*The Rising Wasabi* is Japan's premium *satirical news publication* covering the latest from the land of the rising sun and current events from around the globe" (emphasis added).

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As is often the case—especially when considering cultural and language barriers—not everyone recognized this article as satire. Several confused (or angry) Japanese commenters pointed out issues or inaccuracies marking the story as not true, such as the obviously photoshopped image accompanying the story. Identifying a news story as satirical when reading in a foreign language is no easy task, so these commenters clearly missed the point that writers of satirical news (generally) admit that their work is fictional and meant to be detected as satire (Rubin et al. 2016). In response to these somewhat misinformed Japanese commenters, one assumedly non-Japanese commenter wrote that "Perhaps [Prime Minister] Abe should get a team together to research why Japanese people don't seem to be able to understand sarcasm and irony."

While this final comment may come across as harsh (along with confusing sarcasm with satire), it is a common reaction when a type of humor natural and funny for one person is indecipherable for another. Humor is a universal phenomenon, but there are vast differences between the context, purpose, and styles of humor across cultures. Ethologist Konrad Lorenz aptly observed that laughter can either "form a bond" or "draw a line" (1963, 253). While Lorenz was not writing about the specific contexts of language education or intercultural communication, his remark has a strong connection with the main theme of this book, which is to investigate how to help ELLs (English language learners) reap the benefits of having a greater understanding of how humor is used in the English-speaking world. Of equal importance, we endeavor to also help them avoid the pitfalls of not understanding the humor of the target language or culture.

In this chapter, we will report on our efforts to design humor competency training methods for helping English language learners to detect English satirical news. We carried this training out and tested it using a pre-, posttest experimental group design (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). In addition, previously unpublished quantitative data and qualitative interview results will be reported to offer research-informed tips for other teachers and researchers.

SATIRICAL NEWS IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

Satirical news has been a ubiquitous feature of many English-speaking countries for the past couple decades. Satirical news is sometimes labeled as "fake news," but this is only because it is indeed not true or real. The key difference with satirical news is that it is purely fictional news intended to be humorous. This humor can range from merely poking fun at trivial daily occurrences to offering political or social commentary (Ermida 2012; Peters 2013). Whatever the deeper purpose, satirical news is always fictional and

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creators of satirical news generally do not intend to fool the general public into thinking it is otherwise.

Satirical news of course can take many forms, from TV shows to print media to websites. In recent years, satirical news may most be associated with the television format, thanks to the immensely popular *The Daily Show*. The former host, Jon Stewart, is credited with featuring clever political satire that "works to blur the line between news and entertainment" (Day 2009, 85). While satirical TV news shows may be the most popular current form of satire, for reasons to be explained later, this chapter will focus on training English language learners to detect written satirical news stories from satirical websites. This form of satirical news pre-dates the rise of the internet. The most famous current satirical news source, *The Onion*, began as a print publication in 1988 and started publishing satirical news on the internet in 1996. Satirical stories from *The Onion* are commonly shared on social media.

This popular format of online satirical news has spread to other English-speaking countries, with similar sites in Australia (*The Shovel*), Canada (*The Beaverton*), and the United Kingdom (*The Daily Mash*), to name just a few examples. With the rising popularity of online satirical news sites, sites for subcultures or specific communities have even sprung up. There are now satirical sites for sports fans (*Sports Pickle*), progressive liberals (*The People's Cube*), and Washington, DC, residents (*Stuck in DC*). Finally, the aforementioned *The Rising Wasabi* has the very specific target readership of the foreign, English-speaking community of Japan.

TARGETS AND PURPOSE OF SATIRICAL NEWS

Satire is often described as an aggressive form of humor that harshly criticizes the government or society (Simpson 2003). When it comes to satirical news websites such as *The Onion* or *The Rising Wasabi*, however, this is not always the case. While *The Onion* often makes sharp political commentary with their articles (e.g., "Nation Elects First Black-Hearted President" after President Trump's 2016 election victory), it also produces a great number of articles merely poking fun at mundane topics of daily life (e.g., "Baby Has Sinking Feeling He Left Home without Oversize Multicolor Plastic Keys"). *The Rising Wasabi* includes the same range of satire. For example, in satirizing Japan's notoriously low gender equality ranking, a recent headline was "Japanese Prime Minister Asks [British Prime Minister] May, 'What Are You Cooking Your Husband for Dinner?'" Just as often, however, the website features inside jokes of daily frustrations felt by foreign residents of

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Japan, such as the confounding difference between the *wa* and *ga* particles in the Japanese language ("Foreigner Just Gonna Go with が (Ga) Particle").

Benefits of Satirical News

As satire is often labeled an aggressive and biting form of humor, skeptics may wonder if there are benefits of becoming more familiar with this type of humor. As McClennen and Maisel (2014) aptly point out, however, when it comes to satire, "Its goal is not to denigrate but to spark active thinking" (10). Numerous scholars have discussed the potential of satirical news in increasing political awareness and participation (Schulzke 2012; Hoffman and Young 2011), media literacy (Fife 2016; Stark 2003), and critical thinking (Glazier 2011). Teachers have also praised satirical news as a highly effective tool in teaching rhetoric, argument, and critical thinking (McClennen and Maisel 2014).

While most of the existing literature on the benefits of satirical news does not specifically take the educational context of English language education into consideration, there are also several reasons why English language learners could benefit from exposure to satirical news. One important potential benefit is an increased awareness of the culture and humor of the target culture. Again, the main purpose of this volume is to investigate how to help ELLs develop their humor competency. A growing number of researchers have pointed out how a lack of humor competency can lead to embarrassment or even social isolation for ELLs (Bell and Attardo 2010; Wulf 2010). Considering the ubiquitous nature of satirical news in many English-speaking countries, familiarity with the concept and style of satirical news could be beneficial for learners in developing their humor competency.

On a related note, this familiarity with satirical news can also help ELLs develop their use of social media in English. Free social media networking sites such as Facebook offer many opportunities for ELLs to read and interact in English online. Stories from English satirical news sites are frequently shared on Facebook and can cause confusion for ELLs unfamiliar with this form of humor, as described with the example from *The Rising Wasabi* at the beginning of this chapter. Even worse, commenting on such posts could cause embarrassment for ELLs who mistake the items for real news stories. Again, developing humor competency in English involves not only reaping the benefits, but also avoiding the pitfalls of not understanding English humor.

In addition to developing digital literacy skills, understanding satirical news is an important component of increasing media literacy. ELLs who study abroad in English-speaking countries or do academic research in Eng-

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lish face more and more complex obstacles as they strive to comprehend great amounts of English information. Especially for ELLs from cultural contexts with a relative lack of satirical news, navigating and understanding the difference between biased, fake, real, and satirical news can be a daunting task. However, a deeper understanding of the concept of satirical news can help them to develop the increasingly-important twenty-first-century skill of media literacy.

Finally, the ability to detect satirical news can also help ELLs to develop their critical reading skills. For ELLs coming from cultural backgrounds with a focus on rote learning, reading in English may have been taught using a grammar-translation approach. In other words, students are merely tasked with literally translating what they read from one language to another. While such an approach can be effective in developing a strong foundation of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, it is often insufficient when it comes to analyzing deeper or hidden meanings in a text or passage. Familiarity with satirical news is one way for ELLs to develop the important ability to not only consider the *literal meaning* of the words, but also the *intent* of the writer. When it comes to understanding humor in another language, frustrated learners often report that they understand all the words in a joke, but simply do not understand why it is funny. Since satirical news is often written using relatively easy vocabulary, it is thus one form of humor that provides learners with the opportunity to develop their humor competency by considering the true *intent* or *message* behind the words.

MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF SATIRICAL NEWS

As previously mentioned, writers of satirical news may present their work as real news (with regards to format), but do not expect it to be interpreted as such (Rubin et al. 2016). Still, satirical news can easily be misunderstood if the reader is not aware of the specific context and cultural references (Fan, Mukherjee, and Dragut 2017), or if they do not recognize the cues of satire, which include absurdity, hyperbole, and informality (Ermida 2012; Rubin et al. 2016). In addition, while disclaimers usually appear on satirical news sites acknowledging that their work is merely fictional satire, these are not always explicitly stated or easy to find (Frain and Wubben 2016).

There are abundant examples of foreign news media mistaking satirical news for real news. In one famous example, the Fars News Agency in Iran republished a 2012 story from *The Onion* claiming that rural white Americans prefer Iranian President Ahmadinejad to President Obama (Sanchez 2012). A 2015 article in *The Washington Post* describes seven cases of foreign media

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or individuals being fooled by *The Onion*, from Bangladesh to Trinidad (Taylor 2015). Linguistic and cultural barriers, however, are not the only reasons satirical news has been mistaken for real news, and even native speakers are fooled, including writers of both Fox Nation (McClennen and Maisel 2014) and *The New York Times* (Broadwater 2011).

Satire and Humor in Japan

Another explanation for the struggle to detect satire is a relative lack of satire—especially satirical news—in respective countries. This appears to be the case in the cultural context of Japan, where the authors currently teach English at the university level. There is indeed a rich history and culture of humor in Japan, with some type of comedy show on the air nightly. In addition, traditional forms of comedy have a long history in Japan. These include the stand-up comedy duo format of *manzai* and the humor-filled traditional storytelling performance known as *rakugo*.

Despite the Japanese love of humor, there are vast differences between when and how humor is used in Japan and many English-speaking countries. Milner Davis (2013) noted how the Japanese term for humor, *yūmoa* (ユーモア), "denotes kindly, gentle laughter in the Dickensian sense" (3). This is in stark contrast to the term "humor" in English, which can refer to anything from lighthearted wordplay to scatological or dark humor. Oda (2006) describes the strict social restrictions of using humor in Japan with the term *warai no ba*, translated literally as a "laughter place," and described as the appropriate occasions when people are free to laugh and joke with others openly. As an example of these social restrictions, research by Takekuro (2006) revealed that joking is used much more frequently in English than Japanese conversations, even including formal business situations.

As satire often includes sharp criticism of public figures, the social restrictions placed on the use of humor in Japan may partially explain the relative lack of satire in modern Japanese society. Milner Davis (2013) attributes this lack of a custom of satire to the social conventions in Japan that "little public expression of criticism—particularly of one's seniors-occurs" (7). Inoue (2006) also commented that very little space is given overall to humor in Japanese newspapers. In a description that offers insight into the lack of satirical news in Japan, he explained that "news coverage should be unambiguous and easy to understand" and "its style must be simple to avoid misunderstandings, especially for coverage from a subjective point of view" (187). This is in great contrast to the situation in some Western countries, where there

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has been a growing lack of trust in major media sources in the United States (Walsh 2015) and the United Kingdom (Tobitt 2018). This growing mistrust has been attributed as one of the reasons for the popularity of satirical TV news programs and the role of satirists in "correcting the misinformation of the news" (McClennen and Maisel 2014, 175).

Even when satire is present in modern Japan, Wells and Milner Davis (2006) pointed out that it is very mild, especially when compared to European satire. Also referring to the social conventions of humor in Japan, one of the main reasons for this lack of biting satire is a preference for farce over more aggressive forms of humor like satire.

The differences between Japanese and European use of satire resulted in an unfortunate international controversy in the wake of the March 11, 2011 earthquake and tsunami-triggered disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. In September of 2013, the French satirical newspaper *Le Canard Enchaine* published a cartoon of emaciated sumo wrestlers with extra limbs with the caption "Thanks to Fukushima, sumo has become an Olympic sport" (Alexander 2013). Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary demanded an apology from the French newspaper, claiming the cartoons were hurtful toward victims of the disaster. One of the editors in chief of the newspaper, however, refused to apologize, citing both the French tradition of satire and a misunderstanding over the actual target of the humor (Laundauro 2013).

While some Japanese were also upset with the handling of the Fukushima disaster, this anger was generally not expressed through the use of satire. Although there is a long tradition of editorial cartoons in Japan's major newspapers, Stewart (2016) pointed out that "satirical bite" is rare. Frustration over the government response to the disaster did in fact lead to in an increase in more aggressive uses of humor, but such cases were generally limited to cartoons published on the internet or in magazines not considered mainstream media (Stewart 2016).

When it comes to satirical news websites such as *The Onion*, Japanese language versions do exist, but with far lower levels of popularity. As of this writing, for example, *The Onion* has 6.5 million Facebook likes, while the closest Japanese language equivalent, *Kyoko Shimbun News*, has less than 20,000 likes. This is less than the 30,000 likes received by the aforementioned *The Rising Wasabi*, which has a far smaller target audience of foreign English-speaking residents of Japan. Considering this lack of satirical news, even many Japanese digital natives may be unfamiliar with the format and concept of online satirical news.

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MEASURING THE ABILITY OF LEARNERS TO DETECT HUMOR

While there is now a growing body of research examining the detection of satirical news (Skalicky 2019), there is a paucity of research specifically targeting detection among ELLs. Considering this gap in the research, we conducted the first of two experiments focused on satirical news with two objectives (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). The first objective was to test the theory that Japanese learners of English would struggle to detect satirical news. While both authors have taught English at the university level in Japan for more than 15 years and have collected much anecdotal evidence that our students have trouble detecting and comprehending this form of humor, we had not previously tested this explicitly. The second objective was to use the results along with previously unpublished qualitative data and an analysis of participant variables to design training to help learners improve their ability to detect satirical news. In other words, if Japanese learners do struggle to comprehend this type of English humor, what research-based and classroom-tested steps can language teachers take to help improve their learners' humor competency?

As previously noted, for these experiments we focused on detection through *reading* satirical news for two main reasons. First, satirical news articles are a much more comprehensible gateway into understanding satirical news. When it comes to comprehending satirical news TV programs, learners would need advanced level listening skills and a fair amount of background knowledge about the political issues being satirized. Second, this form of humor best fit our respective teaching context, as both authors were teaching multiple sections of reading courses. As stated as one of the core guidelines of this volume, humor competency training should have a strong connection with the learning goals of the course and the needs of the learners. The aim of providing competency training on English satirical news was not merely to make reading class more fun, but to help further develop students' critical English reading skills and media literacy. Moreover, reading ability and understanding of the target culture would be developed.

As mentioned, the first step of the experiment (Prichard and Rucynski 2019) was to investigate whether Japanese learners of English do in fact have trouble in detecting English satirical news. In order to measure this, we developed a test in which students were tasked with trying to differentiate between satirical news and real (but offbeat) news. It seemed a logical choice to ask learners to compare satirical news with offbeat but true news stories (e.g., "Namco Unveils Potato Chip–Flavored Cola"). This was deemed a good comparison tool considering that while offbeat news might come across as unbelievable, it is always true. On the other hand, while satirical news

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mimics real news or events, it is always fiction. In addition, satirical news items are sometimes an incredulous response to an actual event. As previously mentioned, the headline from *The Rising Wasabi* in the opening anecdote of this chapter ("Osaka Launches Foreigner-Only Carriages to Curtail Inconveniences") was satirizing actual international headlines describing the controversial event.

A preliminary study was thus devised with 22 total items, including 12 offbeat but true news stories and 10 satirical news stories. In order to mimic how news stories appear when shared on social media, participants were given just the headline and a short snippet of the article. This format may in fact make it more difficult to detect satirical news, as researchers have pointed out that news stories, whether real or satirical, shared on social media platforms generally share the same visual format (Rubin et al. 2016). The format also possibly mimics current reading trends in certain countries, as recent polls indicate that a majority of Americans read only the headline of news stories before commenting on them or sharing them on social media (Dewey 2016).

Satirical news stories were taken from both American sites such as *The Onion* and Japan-based English language sites such as *The Rising Wasabi*. Sample satirical articles included:

- "World's Scientists Admit They Just Don't Like Mice"
- "Study Reveals: Babies Are Stupid"
- "BREAKING NEWS: Husband Cooks for Wife"
- "Gaijin Tries Natto, Dead at 25"

To be consistent with the satirical news stories selected, offbeat news stories were also taken from a mix of sites from both native-English speaking countries and English-language Japan-based sites. These included, for example, stories from the offbeat section of *Yahoo News* (United States) and *SoraNews24* (Japan). Sample offbeat but true news stories included:

- "Teenager Posts about Drunk Driving on Facebook, Then Gets Arrested"
- "California Woman Gives Up Home to Care for Thousands of Cats"
- "Cool Cat Delighting Animal Lovers as He Regularly Rides the Train in Tokyo"
- "Butter Sushi Becoming an Unlikely Hit in Osaka"

In compiling the test, several important factors were also considered. First, items with too many infrequent words were avoided. Since too many unknown vocabulary items may have interfered with general comprehension of the headlines and snippets, Japanese participants were also allowed to

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use a dictionary while taking the survey. Lexical complexity was carefully controlled, as the main point was to focus on detecting satire, not treating the survey as a traditional reading comprehension check or vocabulary test.

Second, the effect of background knowledge in understanding humor was carefully considered, so articles that required too specialized knowledge or that were already too widely publicized were also avoided. Headlines were first piloted with both Japanese and Western participants to help eliminate such obviously true or satirical stories.

Third, overly political or taboo topics were generally avoided. While understanding the humor of the target culture provides learners with valuable cultural insights, with humor competency training, cultural appropriateness also always needs to be taken into account. For many Japanese participants, this was the first exposure to satirical news. Therefore, for example, articles with severe criticisms of real figures were not included. Poking fun at the emperor is still considered taboo in Japan, so such clearly controversial items were avoided.

Instead of just asking participants to guess "satirical news" or "real news," a 6-point Likert scale (1 = satirical news/joke, 6 = real news) was used. This would help in more carefully measuring how certain or uncertain participants were about respective items on the survey.

In order to test the first hypothesis that Japanese learners of English struggle to detect satirical news, survey scores of Japanese participants were first compared with those of American participants. The survey was given to 121 Japanese university students and 52 volunteers from a state university in the northeast region of the United States (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). As the survey in Japan was administered to students in several different English courses, there was a fairly wide range of English levels. Scores on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) ranged from 550 to 940. Overall, these scores indicate high-intermediate to advanced proficiency among the Japanese participants. With regards to the American participants, all 52 volunteers were native speakers of English born in the United States and undergraduate students in a liberal arts faculty. None of the participants had ever visited Japan.

Results

The results of the first study revealed that Japanese participants did have significantly more trouble in detecting satire compared to the American participants (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). The American students were significantly better at identifying the satirical items. This could perhaps partially be explained by familiarity with the format and style of satirical news, as the

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American students were better at identifying both the satirical and real news whether the items came from American or Japanese sites. Surprisingly, the American participants had very similar ratings as the Japanese concerning the real news items. This suggests that, overall, the Americans tended to be more critical of all media. This may be because of the prevalence of satire and fake news in English media. Indeed, when reading media on the web, being skeptical is part of media literacy.

Exploring Reasons Why the Japanese Participants Struggled

To better understand the source of the difficulty for the Japanese participants in detecting satire (in order to design the training curriculum), in previously unpublished follow-up research, we examined the effect of participant variables, analyzed the most difficult items, and administered five interviews. The participant variables analyzed involved gender, TOEIC scores, time spent overseas, the use of social networking sites (SNSs), the number of foreign SNS friends, the frequency of reading English news, and the frequency of reading satirical sites.

Of the 121 participants who took the original pilot test, five volunteers agreed to meet with one of the authors for semi-structured follow-up interviews to discuss the test and their views on satirical news. The interviews each lasted 35 to 45 minutes. The interviews were conducted almost entirely in English, but Japanese was used to explain particularly complicated responses. In order to collect a diverse range of opinions about satirical news, the participants had a mix of academic majors, English levels, and overseas experiences. The headings in the sections below illustrate the topics covered with all participants. All names used are pseudonyms.

Unfamiliarity with Satirical News

As previously mentioned, one key theory in embarking on this research project was that there is a relative lack of use of satire in modern Japanese society. Consequently, Japanese learners of English would struggle to detect such English humor. On the survey participants took before taking the satire instrument, few students reported reading satirical sites in Japanese. However, a few did, and statistical analysis suggested this was the biggest predictor of the accuracy in satirical news detection.

In the interviews, three of the five participants admitted that satirical news was a very new concept for them, including all three students with experiences as international exchange students. Surprisingly, however, two of the five participants were quite familiar with the *Kyoko Shimbun*, the aforementioned Japanese satirical news site. The other three participants had never

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seen or even heard of the *Kyoko Shimbun* and appeared baffled when the interviewer showed the homepage. None of the five participants were familiar with *The Rising Wasabi* before the satirical news survey, not to mention satirical news pages from English-speaking countries, such as *The Onion*.

As English satirical news is commonly shared on social media platforms, the participants were asked about their social media usage. All five participants reported fairly frequent use of social media, but only two participants regularly used social media in English. While two participants mentioned that their previous exposure to the *Kyoko Shimbun* came from friends sharing articles on social media, they found such articles different from English satirical news in that they could instantly recognize that it was just a joke and were never tricked by Japanese satirical news. Although she used social media in both Japanese and English, Akari confirmed the lack of satire in modern Japan by commenting that "my Japanese friends don't share fake things." However, her later open-mindedness about satirical news suggests that Akari was merely pointing out cultural differences with regards to social media usage and was not dismissing satirical news as deceptive or harmful.

Proficiency and Other Related Factors

While it may seem natural for native speakers to outperform English language learners on an all-English test, as noted above, the vocabulary was controlled and the Japanese participants were allowed to use their dictionaries. Moreover, they were also given 30 minutes to read only 22 items. Nevertheless, we found that language proficiency did have a small, but significant correlation with the ability to detect satire. (While TOEIC scores and experience reading satirical sites did have an effect on the Japanese participants' ability to detect satire, other variables did not.) Therefore, it is possible reading proficiency played a small factor and the participants could not clearly comprehend certain news items enough.

The item the Japanese participants had the second most difficulty with ("World's Scientists Admit They Just Don't Like Mice") did include a difficult word (*rodent*) and had a long, complex sentence: "Nearly 700 scientists from 27 countries convened at the University of Zurich Monday to formally announce that their experimentation on mice has been motivated not by a desire to advance science, but out of total hatred for the furry little rodents."

All five interview participants had fairly high scores on the TOEIC test, with a range of 615 to 890. Despite this level of English proficiency and despite the fact that the vocabulary level was controlled, all participants expressed that they found the test "quite difficult" or "very difficult."

Usually a confident and motivated student in English class, Chisa admitted that she lacked confidence throughout the test and that "really only a couple

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of them were easy to guess." She added that it was not necessarily a language issue, as she knew almost all of the vocabulary on the test. She confided that even if the test had been given in Japanese, she might not have been able to identify the satirical items.

Ryotaro also stressed that it was not merely an issue of unknown vocabulary. Despite being exposed to Japanese satirical news previously on social media, he felt that something was different in the style of the humor. While he can instantly identify Japanese satirical news as fake, he admitted that with the English satirical news "I'm not sure I can find the punch line, even if it's absolutely fake."

Even Mariko, who had just recently returned from a year of study abroad at a state university in the United States, struggled with the test. Although she only needed to consult with the dictionary once or twice during the entire test, she confided that she "didn't have the skill or confidence to answer easily."

Although limited to five participants, participant responses to this question confirm that Japanese English learners, even with fairly high proficiency levels, struggle to detect English satirical news. As with other areas of humor competence in a foreign language, the difficulties are often more a result of cultural rather than linguistic barriers. This again illustrates that humor competency training involves more than just, for example, vocabulary instruction, but also explicit strategy training in the style and format of the humor, along with the microskills necessary for increasing comprehension.

APPRECIATION OF ENGLISH SATIRICAL NEWS

Although this satirical news study was mainly focused on the detection and comprehension of this genre of humor, it is also insightful to know whether participants actually eventually found such humor funny. If, even after understanding that it is satirical news, participants do not find it funny at all, there could be a lack of motivation to improve the skill of detecting satirical news. On the other hand, humor appreciation can also lead to increased motivation and appreciation of the target culture. For these reasons, on the tests, after informing the participants which ones were actually satirical, participants were asked to complete a separate Likert scale survey on funniness, ranking each satirical news items from 1 (not funny) to 6 (very funny).

The previously unpublished results showed that there was no overall difference in the humor ratings for the satirical items between the Japanese and American participants (see figure 10.1). This is somewhat surprising considering the Japanese actually had trouble recognizing many of these items as satirical. It is possible funniness ratings have limitations since "funny" may

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mean different things in different languages; the word for funny in Japanese is *okashii*, which also can mean *strange* or *weird*.

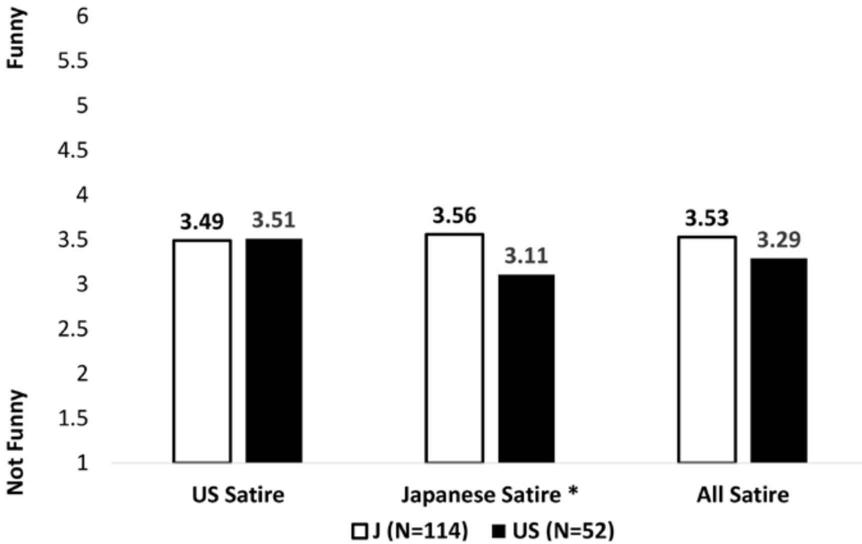

Figure 10.1. Funniness ratings by Japanese and American participants. Created by the author.

Rating funniness may lack reliability because, as Scheff and Scheele (2014) suggest, humor is a cognitive and an emotional response, but ratings over-emphasize the cognitive aspects. However, it is also possible the Americans are used to satire and were critical of it, while the Japanese participants found it more novel and fun. Nevertheless, it does make sense that Japanese did think the satirical items about Japan were funnier. The Americans could better detect them, but could not really enjoy the humor likely since they could not understand the context.

In the interviews, generally speaking, participants confirmed in the quantitative results that they found many of the items humorous. The inclusion of items from *The Rising Wasabi* did seem to be a helpful way to introduce satirical news, as participants not surprisingly rated items closer to their lives and cultural backgrounds funnier. For example, one item consistently mentioned by participants as one of the funniest was *The Rising Wasabi* article "Gaijin Tries Natto, Dead at 25." Natto, fermented soybeans with a strong smell and challenging texture, is a popular Japanese food disliked by many foreign residents of Japan. Many Japanese, however, seem to take a great deal of pleasure in the uniqueness of this food and any foreign resident has most

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likely been asked "Can you eat natto?" numerous times. Participants enjoyed the absurdity of someone dropping dead just from trying this notorious food.

Reactions were more mixed when it came to items with a stronger element of satirizing social issues. For example, the item "BREAKING NEWS: Husband Cooks for Wife" was an obvious jab at gender roles in Japan. Shuhei, however, failed to see the humor or social criticism in this item, as he explained that "I think now lots of husbands cook for their wives. My father made meals for us every weekend." On the other hand, Mariko explained she rated this item the highest on the funniness scale as she lamented the lack of career goals of her female acquaintances at her university in Japan.

Other Reactions to Using Satire in Language Classes

As previously reported in this chapter, Japan has sometimes had a somewhat uneasy relationship with satire, culminating in the controversy over the French satirical cartoons depicting post-Fukushima Japan. Considering this, it was important to, again, first give a test mostly consisting of lighter satire and gather participant opinions about the appropriateness of using satire in the language classroom. As many satirical items on the survey came from *The Rising Wasabi*, the five interview participants were also asked their perspectives of non-Japanese criticisms—in the form of humor—of their culture.

Participants generally echoed claims in previous research (Liao and Abe 2001) that Japanese prefer victimless humor. For example, participants had no issues with certain jokes about death, such as with the aforementioned natto article, as the absurdity of it makes it obviously fictional and it is not poking fun at a real person. Akari even found the article "Disgraced Foreigner Caught Wearing Shoes in Apartment Commits Harakiri" very humorous, as it seems clear that a person would not really commit ritual suicide over such a minor transgression. She also drew the line, however, at the satirical cartoons about Fukushima. Despite the explanation that the target of the satire was actually Prime Minister Abe and the Japanese government, Akari still found it inappropriate to make light of a horrible disaster in which actual people perished.

There were, however, some contrasting views about whether a joke just depends on the target or if a whole topic remains taboo. For example, in explaining that the article "God Rejects Wish at Meiji Shrine after Woman Claps Three Times" was not humorous, Ryotaro expressed concern at making fun of serious topics like religion. Akari, however, actually found this article to be one of the funniest items, again referring to the absurdity and incongruity of God not granting a wish just because the woman clapped three times instead of following the Shinto prayer ritual of clapping twice. Again,

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the article is not making fun of a real person, and Akari added that "Japanese can't imagine this situation, so it's funny!"

None of the participants expressed any issues with foreign perspectives of Japan in the form of satire. While all participants did clarify that there are also limits, no specific examples were given. Ryotaro merely expressed concern that writers of satirical news "should not confuse people." In other words, satirical news is acceptable as long as it is obviously not real and not meant to deceive people. Specifically addressing the case of the creators of *The Rising Wasabi*, Chisato welcomed this form of satire, explaining that "They live in Japan, so they have the right to express their opinions." As previously mentioned, Mariko particularly appreciated the example of shedding light on the issue of gender roles, as she felt disappointed that when she brought up such issues with her female peers "they look at me like I'm weird."

Benefits of Satirical News

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, researchers and teachers have made many claims about the benefits of satire. However, most of the research in this area is not considering the specific area of English language education and the needs of ELLs. When implementing humor competency training, it is essential that there are some benefits for learners to deepen their understanding of the respective form of humor. While the authors of this chapter previously argued that there are indeed several benefits for ELLs as well, it was important to also get actual learner perspectives about this. Therefore, participants were asked whether they now considered detection of satirical news a valuable English skill.

All participants replied that they found exposure to satirical news useful and important. The most commonly repeated reasons were connected to living in the information age. Shuhei stressed that as students now use the internet every day for gathering information it is vital to "get the skills to identify real or not real news. This skill is needed to survive in this information generation." In referring to the gap between using satire in Japan and English-speaking countries, Mariko explained that "My foreign friends understand what's fake, so I want to know too."

Even though the test did not include many overly political or biting examples of satire, some participants suggested that satire can have benefits beyond merely English language learning. In addition to Mariko's previously mentioned appreciation of using satire as a springboard for discussing gender issues, Chisa similarly commented on the potential of satire. She explained that satire could shed light on important social issues, as "Japanese people tend to have no interest in politics . . . it's one of the serious problems. So [exposure to satire] would be helpful for Japanese society."

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Strategies for Teaching Satire

When implementing humor competency training, it is important to have a grasp of to what extent learners can currently comprehend the respective form of humor. Again, this is where a qualitative component of research can be particularly useful, as it can be used to help acquire valuable insights into reasons for a lack of comprehension or competency, be they linguistic or cultural reasons. Considering this, interview participants were asked what steps teachers could take to help learners improve their ability to detect English satirical news.

Perhaps because satirical news was generally a new concept for them and also because these interviews took place before students actually received explicit training on satirical news, participants struggled to come up with specific techniques. Overall, however, participants were very open to the idea of *some* form of exposure to English humor in English language classes. Ryotaro revealed that in junior or senior high school, he did not learn anything about English humor. Therefore, he believed that now that students have the foundation of the English language, university students should be taught more about the humor and culture of English-speaking countries to help build up their background knowledge and thus potentially increase humor competency.

Mariko added that Japanese students simply need exposure to the respective form of humor and practice in understanding it more deeply. She shared her personal experience of seeing a "news" article in her Facebook feed about an American female politician stripping off all of her clothes to reveal her "true self." While in her mind she was almost completely certain that it could not be real news, she still consulted with American friends to get confirmation about this new type of humor for her. She added that even though it was American friends that she consulted with in this case, it would be useful to allow students, even if all Japanese, to collaborate and compare their background knowledge to distinguish between satirical news and real news.

Chisa also commented that even the structure of the original news survey was a helpful technique for getting Japanese students to employ critical thinking. She explained that "Japanese students think the correct answer is the best thing" and that there is only one correct answer. By presenting the survey using a Likert scale, however, Chisa believed that this encourages Japanese students to understand that there may not be a clear answer and that different perspectives are valuable. In this way, Chisa also expanded on Mariko's belief that it would be helpful for students to collaborate and try to detect the humor together.

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HUMOR TRAINING AND EXAMINING ITS EFFECT

When attempting to implement humor competency training into the language teaching curriculum, it should first be established that learners do in fact have trouble comprehending such humor and that there is value in understanding it more deeply. This may not be the case with all learner populations, but it was established among our Japanese university participants. Moreover, it was shown in the pilot study and interview data that the students tended to respond positively to the inclusion of satire in the lesson. Using these findings, the more complex task was to design classroom activities that actually helped learners to improve their comprehension of that specific genre of English humor.

In order to investigate the efficacy of potential humor training methods for satirical news, for the second experiment we used a pre- and posttest design, with an experimental ($N = 35$) and control ($N = 34$) group (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). The two groups consisted of students taking different sections of the same second-year university English reading skills course. As developing a range of reading strategies was a core learning objective of the course, the ability to detect satirical news was considered an important aspect of twenty-first-century reading skills. For this experiment, students with a much narrower range of TOEIC scores were selected, with scores ranging from 560 to 580, or approximately high intermediate level. The pre- and posttest followed the exact same format of 12 offbeat but true stories and 10 satirical news stories. All students took the pretest in the first lesson and the posttest in the final lesson. As with the first experiment, students were given 30 minutes and were allowed to use their dictionaries.

The two courses followed the same curriculum, with the key exception being that the experimental group received two one-hour sessions of humor training, once in the eighth lesson and once in the fifteenth lesson (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). The students read and discussed authentic English news articles throughout the course, but aside from the humor training for the experimental group, skills for detecting satirical news were not explicitly taught.

During the training sessions, the students practiced guessing if satirical and offbeat news articles were satirical or not, while explicit strategy instruction was given from the teacher on how to identify satirical news. For example, students were advised to question whether each headline was newsworthy and plausible. In addition, in the second training session, students worked in small groups and thus were allowed to collaborate with their peers on making use of the strategies they had learned to detect the satirical items. More specific details about the humor competency training will be provided in the Recommendations for Humor Competency section.

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Results

Even with just two sessions of humor training, students in the experimental group scored significantly higher overall on the posttest (Prichard and Rucynski 2019). Interestingly, the experimental group actually scored slightly worse on identifying real news. However, this suggests that they were skeptical of the news overall, which is not necessarily a bad thing considering the amount of propaganda and unreliable content on the internet. Although the experimental scores declined on the real news items, they greatly improved their ability to detect satirical news, while the performance of the control group actually declined.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMOR COMPETENCY TRAINING IN SATIRICAL NEWS

Considering the current ubiquitous nature of satirical news in English-speaking countries, ELLs could greatly benefit from humor competency training on this form of humor, both to develop their language skills and gain insights into the humor culture of the target culture(s). Improving the ability to detect satirical news is not only about humor, but also can be a gateway into developing the increasingly important twenty-first-century skills of media and digital literacy. Finally, a deeper understanding of this style of humor can make ELLs more aware and confident users of social media in English.

As the humor competency study described in this chapter focused on detecting satirical news articles featured on websites such as *The Onion*, these recommendations will generally focus on this form of satire. Depending on the learning context and level of the learners, however, of course different forms of satire could be introduced in the language teaching curriculum. Proficient learners who are interested in studying abroad or studying content such as politics would benefit from being familiar with satirical news programs such as *The Daily Show*. One of the authors has also used scenes from the classic animated version of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* during holiday lessons to discuss satirical commentary about the commercialization of Christmas.

Since there is little existing research on the ability of ELLs to detect satirical news, it is of course difficult to argue that there are guaranteed techniques for humor competency training in this area. Based on the promising results of our recent current study (Prichard and Rucynski 2019), however, we will offer a range of classroom-tested tips that can help learners increase their awareness and understanding of this type of humor. Most of these tips will focus on the ability to distinguish satirical news from real news, as that was the main purpose of this study. For the next stage of humor competency,

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however, it would be even better for ELLs to learn to appreciate and even respond to satirical news shared on social media.

While some may speculate that it is simple to detect satirical news just by looking at the source, the amount of confusion caused by satirical news, even for native English speakers, suggests that it is much more complicated than that. As pointed out by some researchers (Rubin et al. 2016), stories from satirical websites share a nearly identical visual appearance to legitimate news sources when shard on social media. Therefore, training ELLs to detect satirical news involves a lot more than just providing, for example, a list of known satirical sites.

Fortunately, a growing body of research offers tips on detecting satirical news that can be modified to suit English language teaching. These strategies can be explicitly taught and practiced with ELLs while examining satirical and offbeat news items. One strategy is for learners to consider whether an item is actually newsworthy. A tactic commonly used in satire is wild exaggeration or inflation of a topic (Simpson 2003). For example, would the simple case of a man cooking for his wife really make the news? *The Rising Wasabi* writers are critiquing society to suggest that such an event is so rare that it *is* newsworthy, but it should be fairly easy to spot that this is not the type of item that will really appear in a news source.

A similar strategy employed to help detect satirical news is to consider whether the news item is really believable. While this can be tricky, when comparing satirical news with offbeat news students can learn to distinguish believable and unbelievable items with practice and employing their background knowledge or experiences. For example, while it may seem hard to believe that a train station in Japan stayed open just to accommodate a single school girl, a true item used in the test, Japanese learners quite accurately guessed that this was a real item, as they are constantly hearing news about the issues Japan is facing with its declining population. This is in contrast to some unbelievable examples of satirical news that may, for example, announce decisions made by God, such as the aforementioned article in which God rejected a wish at a shrine because of an extra clap.

A third strategy is to make learners aware of the writing style or word choice in the article. Hints that might help to detect satire include the use of vague details, slang or conversational language, and profanity (Burfoot and Baldwin 2009). With regards to vague details, a common technique used in satirical news is just to refer to "a local man," whereas real news will usually identify a person by name from the beginning of the article. Because satirical news is also entertainment, Fang and Mukherjee (2017) pointed out that satirical news is more likely to use aggressive language in order to get the attention of the reader, unlike professional journalists, who are supposed to

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maintain a more neutral or conservative tone. Although we do not want to willingly expose our learners to profanity, they will undoubtedly come across it on the internet, and it is another easy hint for detecting satirical news. As with the previously mentioned article about the *gaijin* (foreigner) passing away from eating natto, *The Rising Wasabi* consistently makes reference to *gaijin* in their headlines. A shortened form of the Japanese *gaikokujin*, it is considered by many to be a derogatory term, and is thus unlikely to be used in headlines by legitimate news sources.

While practicing strategies such as these, allowing collaboration between students can create a more fun and engaging classroom atmosphere. While exposure to satirical news has benefits beyond merely entertainment, it is only natural when teaching about humor to strive for fun and laughter along the way. As an example of this, two students who are close friends enjoyed some good-natured friendly competition during the collaborative activities. One student confidently argued that the headline "Namco Unveils Potato Chip–Flavored Cola" must be satirical news, considering that Namco is a video game company and thus does not make food or drink items. His group member, however, had actually seen the item in question recently while visiting an arcade and knew for certain it was real news, and was happy to win this friendly "competition" with his friend.

If the teacher wishes to collect quantitative data, participants will of course need to take pre- and posttests individually, but collaboration can make the humor training much more enjoyable. This is a constructive way to let students combine their background knowledge with the strategies taught by the teacher to try to identify satirical news in a collaborative fashion. As with the previous example, the teacher could even make it a kind of class competition between different groups with points given for correct answers. To take this idea even further, different groups could each be assigned one satirical and one offbeat news source each and be tasked with making their own tests for their classmates.

Connected to this previous idea, more proficient learners could also be tasked with collecting their own examples of satirical news. This would especially fit with classes in which finding independent reading materials is part of the curriculum. Although not empirically tested, one of the authors piloted this activity in an elective English reading and discussion class for advanced learners. In one class in the second half of the semester, students received an overview of satirical news from the instructor and took a condensed version of the satirical and offbeat news survey. The instructor also prepared a short reading giving an overview of *The Rising Wasabi* website. For this assignment, students were only given *The Rising Wasabi* as a source, as it fit in with a course unit they were doing on foreign perspectives of Japan.

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For homework, students were tasked with collecting articles for two different purposes. The first task was to choose any three articles and explain what they believed the punch line, or target of the humor, was. The teacher gave the example that the article "Man Survives 78 Days on Wild Berries Looking for Shinjuku Station Exit 27K" pokes fun at the experience people from other countries may have when faced with navigating the world's busiest train station. The teacher explained his own personal experience of struggling with such train stations after moving to Japan from rural upstate New York and using train transportation for the first time in his life.

The second task was to also choose any three articles that they found confusing. However, they were still supposed to write what they *thought* the target or punch line could be. This second task proved to be the most engaging, as students naturally chose some of the same articles and enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with their classmates in attempting to navigate English humor in a safe and supportive environment. The instructor then collected the homework worksheets and wrote up a summary with explanations for the most common confusing articles.

These are just some of the class activities and strategies employed as humor competency training for helping students to detect and understanding satirical news. As with all humor competency training, it is essential for instructors to make a strong connection with the class curriculum and learning goals. For example, all of the participants who took part in the study described in this chapter were taking English reading courses and learning and practicing a great variety of strategies to improve their overall reading skills. So, a unit on detecting English satirical news naturally fit into the curriculum. This is not to say that satire can only be taught in reading classes, but teachers will likely get the best results when there is this strong connection between the humor being taught and the goals of the unit or course.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ON SATIRICAL NEWS

While this study was a promising first step in measuring the ability of ELLs to detect satirical news, there are many possibilities for future research. This includes variations on both the design and participants of the research.

With regards to research design, due to time constraints no delayed posttest was given. Participants in this study just met for a 16-week course, so there was no way to measure the lasting effects of the humor training. Teachers who teach longer courses could thus also give a delayed posttest.

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In addition, participants in the experimental and control group came from a very narrow range of TOEIC scores. Students who took the initial pilot survey had a much broader range of TOEIC scores and results were thus analyzed to test the effect on language proficiency on the ability to detect English satirical news. With only students from a limited range of proficiency level taking part in both the pre- and posttest and only the experimental group receiving the humor training, it is difficult to definitively suggest a minimum level of English proficiency required to benefit from humor training on this particular genre of humor.

Finally, the study described in this chapter was limited to Japanese learners of English. It would be very valuable to replicate the study in different cultural contexts, including multicultural classrooms. For other contexts, however, it would be necessary to replace the items from Japan-based sources. As a lack of satire in Japan is one likely reason Japanese learners struggled to detect satirical news, it would be valuable to compare the results with learners from cultures with more of a tradition of satire in the native language.

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Index

appreciation (humor competency), xi, 2, 4, 9–10, 13, 31, 42, 54, 83, 136–43, 145–53, 168, 180, 184, 197–98, 203–11, 217, 220, 227, 238, 255–57
appropriate v. inappropriate (content of humor), 5, 11–14, 16, 26, 28, 52, 54, 58, 60, 63, 70, 72, 74, 83, 99, 101, 195, 219, 224, 226–28, 230–32, 236, 252, 257
appropriate v. inappropriate (context or timing for humor), 29–31, 35–36, 40–41, 43–44, 50, 53, 60, 61, 70, 166, 236–37, 244, 248
assimilation, x, 1, 5, 49, 52–53, 70, 234
awareness activities, xii, xiii, 42–43, 73, 96, 99, 108, 151–52, 177, 180, 184, 226, 236–37, 261

background knowledge (role of), xv, 25, 61–62, 141, 143, 147–48, 150–53, 184, 201–7, 234–36, 250, 252, 259, 262–63
backward design, 2–3, 14, 82, 87, 90–92, 96
benefits. *See* functions of humor

challenging authority. *See* functions of humor
Chinese language learners / Chinese humor, 136, 143–44, 173, 230–32
Colombia language learners / Colombian humor, 136, 143–45, 147–49, 153, 160, 161, 173, 230–32
comedy (television shows and movies), 25, 32, 128–29, 144, 177, 196, 220, 224, 229, 230, 232–33, 235, 245, 249, 250
comics (printed), 12, 13, 93–94, 100, 181
communicative activities, xiv, 18–20, 43, 81, 82, 89, 95–97, 99–100, 110, 119, 120, 126–27, 185–86
competency training guidelines and recommendations. *See* guidelines and recommendations
comprehension (humor competency), x–xi, 4, 9–10, 13, 83–85, 88–89, 136, 138–53, 195, 197–98, 203, 206–7, 209–11, 224, 227, 238, 250–51, 255, 259–60

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consequences of failed humor, vii, ix, xii–xiii,12–13, 28, 37, 39, 41, 60, 67, 73, 165–67, 169, 185, 186
context cues, x, xii, xiv, 4–5, 16, 19, 27, 41–42, 64, 71, 73, 84, 85, 92, 113, 169–71, 173, 174–76, 178–79, 181–82, 185–86, 233–34, 247, 256
conversational humor. *See* interactional humor
cooperative principle. *See* Grice's cooperative principle
cross-cultural adaptation and adjustment, 3, 6, 7, 27, 44, 49–74
cues (of humor), x, xiii, xviii, 6, 18, 26, 43, 64, 115, 166–67, 169–87, 219, 224–25, 233. *See also* context, pragmatic, prosodic, and visual cues
cultural proximity, 56, 60, 62, 67

delivery (in oral humor), 7–9, 18–19, 219
detection. *See* identification (humor competency)
discourse staging, 7, 19

expectations (playing with), 5–6, 13, 18–19, 31, 60, 84, 138, 142, 145, 149, 170, 185–86
explicit instruction, xii, xiii, xiv, 18–20, 180–84, 211–12, 255, 262–63

facial expression. *See* visual cues
failed humor, vii, ix, xii–xiii, 5, 7, 9, 12–13, 28, 29, 37, 39–40, 60, 67, 73, 85, 139, 165–67, 169, 186, 220, 224, 233–34, 236
formulaic structures in humor, 2, 5–6, 152, 180–81
French–speaking English learners and French humor, 1, 4–6, 12–14, 142, 173–74, 222–23, 232, 249, 257
functions of humor, x–xiii, 1, 10, 19–20, 26–44, 49, 51, 55, *57*, 65–67, 72, 86, 95, 109–12, 114, 116–27, 166–69, 180, 184–85, 217, 223–25, 244, 246–47, 258; amusing (entertaining), vii, 3, 6, 19–20, 36–8, 63, 66, 107, 127, 166, 184, 220, 262; building rapport (bonding, reinforcing solidarity), x, xi, xiv, 1, 11, 28–29, 34–36, 37, 39–41, 43, 56, 61, 65, 72, 86, 109, 116–24, 125, 166–68, 184, 244; challenging authority and doing power, 1, 29, 30–31, 110–12, 114, 117, 123–26, 129, 220; criticizing, 1, 10, 28–29, 32, 37, 40, 65, 86, 120, 124–26, 167–69, 172, 177, 185, 231, 245, 248, 252, 257, 262; demonstrating intelligence, 1, 138, 168–69; easing tension, vii, x, xi, 1, 11, 56, 65, 167, 169, 185, 232

gestures. *See* visual cues
Grice's cooperative principle, 27, 39, 169, 181, 202
guidelines and recommendations, xi–xiv, 18–20, 42–3, 73, 99–100, 116–28, 150–52, 180–85, 211–12, 236–37, 261–63

hyperbole, 37, 167, 172, 181, 185, 247

identification (humor competency), x, 2, 4, 9–10, 13, 83–84, 138–40, 165–67, 169–84, 186–87, 198, 201–13, 243–4, 250–55, 258–64, 283–84
identity, xi, xiv, 3, 5, 6, 10, 13–14, 18–20, 29, 32, 38–41, 53, 74, 128
idioms, 4, 58, 139, 144–45, 234
incongruity (context cue), 31, 139, 181, 252
incongruity (role of) and incongruity theory, 31–32, 53, 61, 142, 170, 197, 200, 206, 208
interactional humor, 1–5, 8–9, 14, 18–19, 25–45, 107–29, 172–73, 177, 185–87, 196, 220–21, 223–26, 248

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intercultural communication / intercultural competence, 1–3, 9–10, 15–18, 25–45, 49–74
input (interpretation) activities, xiii, xiv, 43, 180–84, 261–63
Iranian learners of English, Iranian humor, 79, 247–48

Japanese humor, 172–73, 248–61
Japanese learners of English, 151–52, 165–67, 174–79, 194–210, 243–46
jocularity, 32, 165–87
jokes (panned or scripted), x, xi, xii, 4–8, 12–4, 15, 28, 30–31, 53–54, 60, 74, 82–83, 86, 98–99, 109, 114, 124, 133–53, 198–213, 217, 219–20, 223–24, 229–37

Korean learners of English / Korean humor, 12, 139, 166, 173–74, 177

Lakoff's politeness principle, 27, 29
language play, 14, 26, 43, 81–82, 89, 95, 99, 110, 211
laughter, xi, xiv, 1–4, 7, 14, 20, 30, 34, 36, 39, 40, 66, 81, 83–84, 91, 92, 94, 110, 115–17, 124, 125, 128, 138, 184–85, 201, 217, 224–25, 230, 233–34, 244, 248
layered simultaneity, 14

markers. *See* cues
movies. *See* comedy (television shows and movies)

non-verbal cues. *See* visual cues

Peruvian learners of English / Peruvian humor, 136, 144–45, 147–50, 153, 160
planning, constructing, and designing humor, 3–9, 99
pragmatic awareness and competence, ix, 6, 16, 18, 25–45, 105–29, 151–52, 217, 226, 232, 237
pragmatic cues, 118, 127, 247
productive humor, xi, 1–20, 42, 43, 50, 53, 61, 70, 83, 86–89, 93–94, 97, 129, 139, 140, 168, 185–87, 195–207, 211–12, 220, 226–28, 238
pronunciation, 7–9, 58, 66
prosodic cues, 2, 25, 43, 84, 166, 169, 170–76, 178–81, 184–87

recognition. *See* identification (humor competency)
reinforcing solidarity. *See* functions of humor
release theory, 201, 206, 208
repertoire, 1, 7, 10, 14, 121
research guidelines and suggestions, xv, 20, 44–45, 73–74, 99–100, 128–29, 152–53, 186–87, 211–12, 237–38, 264–65
responding to humor (humor competency), xi, xii, xv, 39, 63, 83–86, 92, 94, 115, 120–21, 124, 126, 146, 151, 174, 180, 185, 187, 220, 238, 243–44
role play, 35, 43–45, 92, 94, 100, 119–20, 124, 126–29, 232–33, 237
Russian learners of English / Russian humor, 135, 139, 151

sarcasm, xii, 8–9, 30, 32, 56, 64, 126, 165–87, 224, 230, 244
satire, 243–65
script-based semantic theory, 35, 53–54, 70–71, 81, 84–85, 91, 136–37, 142, 151–52
schema. *See* background knowledge (role of)
self-deprecation, 27–29, 34–37, 39, 41, 56, 51, 63, 66, 117, 124
shared knowledge and experiences, 4–5, 12–14, 18–19, 37, 55–56, 58–62, 73, 84, 168
sitcoms. *See* comedy (television shows and movies)

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Saudi language learners / Saudi humor, 1, 136, 143–49, 150, 157–58, 230–31
Spanish language learners / Spanish humor, 4–5, 12, 49–50, 55, 56, 59–60, 66, 170
stand-up comedy, 1–20, 219
superiority theory, 31–32, 138, 168, 200–201, 206, 208

taboo. *See* appropriate v. inappropriate (content of humor).
television comedy. *See* comedy (television shows and movies)
timing, xiii, 2, 7–9, 58, 219
training. *See* awareness activities, communicative activities, explicit instruction, and input activities

understatement, 126, 167, 172, 181, 186

vocabulary (role of), xv, 12, 58, 91–92, 95, 139, 140–41, 146, 148, 150, 152–53, 166–67, 170, 175, 218–19, 225, 228–29, 232–36, 247, 251–52, 254–55, 270. *See also* idioms
visual cues, 8, 25, 64, 84, 169, 171, 173, 175–76, 179, 181, 183, 233
verbal irony, vii, 4, 32, 58, 90–91, 112, 121, 126, 151, 165–87, 233. *See also* hyperbole, jocularity, sarcasm, and understatement

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, 95, 97–98

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