

Uses of Humour in an English Language Class

Shumaila Abdullah

University of Baluchistan, Quetta, Pakistan

Javed Akhter

University of Balochistan, Quetta, Pakistan

Abstract

Humour is peculiar to human beings and an essential characteristic of human life. When it is applied in English teaching, it enhances students' learning ability. If the teachers start adding element of humour in their teaching method it could definitely improve students' English learning ability. Therefore, humour is considered an important element to reduce the anxiety factor and boredom in an English language class. However, its uses make English language class more effective and interesting. It creates a learning environment in such a way in a language class that helps the students to perform even better. Mostly the teachers follow the same old traditional method of English teaching and avoid cracking jokes in the class in order to maintain discipline and class control. That is why students do not take much interest in their classes. However, the negative kind of humour such as to make fun of the students, to hit their families, sarcasm, hit ethnicity and insult should be avoided as it badly damages the students' personality as well as it ruins the sacred environment and discipline of the class. The negative impact of humour makes the student offensive and can bring negative results in the classroom.

Keywords: Pedagogical Humour, Students' Learning, Mimicry, Mockery.

Introduction

Humour is considered an essential characteristic of humans' life. No one can deny its importance in human life. It is the only source of reducing tension, boredom and anxiety in an English language class. No doubt, learning English language is by no means an easy task in a multilingual society. However, Pakistan is a multilingual country in which learning and teaching English language is neither the first nor the second language but a foreign language. Therefore, a large number of students take admission in language centres to learn English language as their basic requirement to receive knowledge of science and technology, not only in educational institutions but for other societal needs too. English is passport of success and upward social mobility. For this reason, centres of English language are considered the biggest source of learning English language. Learning of English language requires a positive and friendly classroom atmosphere. However, this research is an effort to highlight the importance of humour, which is an essential teaching tool in a language class to learn English language more efficiently.

Nevertheless, teaching is a serious profession and learning English language is not so easy job. We are all aware of the fact that the students of English language are more willing to participate in classrooms that allow them to feel relaxed. P. Krishmanson states that the need to create a "welcoming" classroom for language learning, so that the learning environment does not feel threatening or intimidating (Krishmanson, P.2000, pp. 1-5). A teacher must be creative to develop a positive learning environment in such a way that a student not only learns but also enjoys, not hesitates but also learns and not feels stressed but relaxed. A teacher must have sense of humour and use humour in a proper way to teach the students, cultivating good taste, aesthetic credo and sense of humour in his students. This is possible only when the teacher knows how to entertain his/her students to use humour in classroom because humour not only reduces the boredom and anxiety level of the students of English language but constructs students learning ability in a way that the students perform even far better.

Nevertheless, the mood of classroom imprints positive effects on English language learning experience because humour can promote understanding and attract the attention of the students until end to make learning process more affective and interesting one. It is the duty of a teacher to create a relaxed, pleasant and positive attitude in their teaching so that the students take much interest, learn more and more and have a lot of fun. G. Walter claimed that the students who laugh have less disturbing outbursts in class. Therefore, when humour is applied to teaching it enhances the students' learning ability (Walter, G., 1990, pp. 43-44).

Moreover, humour plays an important role in second language or foreign language learning as English and is an integral part of second language teaching and learning classroom environment. It is a very skilful way of motivating those students who are demotivated, showing no interest in English language classes due to various factors like lack of confidence, anxiety factor, language ego, shyness, hesitation and nervousness. Those teachers, who do not like to use humour, share and exchange jokes with their students, are not very much popular among the students. While on the other hand, those teachers who produce a friendly environment in such a way that they crack jokes, use humour and

funny incidents and share such things with their students are the most popular among the students. The students take more interest in this kind of language classes in which their language learning capability automatically enhances and for this reason, they learn English as a second language or foreign language within no time because humour helps them to keep the things in their minds and memorise the elements of English language for a long time. Casper stated that learning induced by humour strengthens the learning memory (Casper, R., 1999).

Thus, humour is an important spice of teaching English in Pakistan. It can imprint positively influences on the minds of the English language learners to learn a second language, and avoiding humour may deprive the learners of gaining access to second language learning. Moreover, it produces an environment of tediousness and boredom in an English language classroom in which students do not enjoy learning. On the contrary, the touch of humour is extremely beneficial for second language learning classroom environment. Medgeys, P. (2002) suggests that funny games, stories jokes, puzzles, pictures, sketches, and dialogues can be fruitfully used for all levels of second language learning. So, the instructor must know how to make a language classroom environment more affective and interesting. No learning is more beneficial than learning in an ideal environment, where the learning is always at the highest level and anxiety level at the lowest and this is possible only when the facilitator provide such an environment to his students in a way where they are free to share their thoughts without being afraid.

However, teacher should not spoil the sacred environment of the classroom because exchanging much jokes and focusing less on learning is extremely dangerous for the students. Therefore, negative and vulgar kind of humour should always be avoided by the teacher. Negative and vulgar kind of humour includes making fun of the students, to attack their families, ethnicity, insulting and humiliating the students. A teacher must know his/her prestige and the importance of holy, noble and prophetic profession of teaching. The present study shows that negative or vulgar humour ruins the students' personality as well as the classroom environment so that it should always be avoided. Moreover, vulgar humour and dirty jokes should not be allowed in classroom. Although the jokes and funny incidents are a part of English language classroom. As R. Bonjour states that private humour which takes students' out of topic should be avoided.

Literature Review

Humour is an instructional tool a teacher could use in the class to increase the effectiveness. In the various studies on humour in language, teaching and learning researchers have highlighted the useful potential of humour that how it enhances the students' learning ability and the way it brings a number of positive changes in students' attitudes. Garner writes, "Students indicate that humour can increase their interests in learning and research has demonstrated that students who have teachers with strong orientation to humour tend to learn more" (Garner, 2006, p.177). "Humour is a catalyst for classroom "magic", when all the educational elements converge and teacher and student are positive and excited about learning" (Kher, 1999, p.1).

In another study, Loomans writes about humour, "there are two distinct sides of the of the humour coin: the comic and the tragic, humour can act as a social lubricant or social retardant in the educational setting. It can educate or denigrate, heal or harm, embrace or deface, it's a powerful

communication tool, no matter which side is chosen". (Loomans, 1993, p. 14). According to Prosser, humour builds unity, relieve stress and enhance creativity. Humour helps the instructor enjoy teaching and empowers the learner to participate in the project (Prosser, 1997, p. 2). (Buckman cited in Psathas, 1973, p. 37) saying that "by asking people questions we discover what they are experiencing, how they interpret their experiences and how they themselves structure the social world in which they live" (Buckman, 2010, p. 64). The present study focuses on the importance of uses of jokes in an English language class to make the teaching/learning process more interesting and enjoyable one.

Impact of Humour and jokes on Students' performance in an English Language Class

The purpose of using jokes is to enhance students' learning ability, performance and proficiency in an English language classroom. A good and motivated teacher can only attract the attention of his/her students by sharing jokes with them and teacher who deliberately commits mistakes and the laughs at himself he is definitely providing his students a chance that they may not be shy and hesitant. However, jokes produce a stimulating and relaxing environment in the class for English language learners. When the students are enjoyably engaged in the class they learn in a better way and if a class can laugh together with one another, they are likely to learn better together. One of the most important advantages of jokes and humour is to help students feel more comfortable in their target language learning. A teacher can produce a loveable, friendly and frankly, atmosphere only through jokes and use of humour in the classroom in which students feel more free, comfortable and relaxed.

Furthermore, uses of humour and jokes bring many positive changes in the behaviour of the students. When a teacher creates such a relaxed, friendly and frankly atmosphere in the class, the students become more motivated to do well in the class. The performance, proficiency and fluency of the students become more effective. However, use of humour and jokes can be beneficial in order to gain the students' liking and win their attention. Such teachers are always popular among the students who provide them a convenient and easygoing environment. Gorham & Christopher claims that, if the teachers use humour in the classroom they are often doing so to reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to gain favour through self-enhancement, to convey good will or to accomplish some other prosaically goal (Gorham, J., & Christophel D. 1990, pp. 354-36).

Nevertheless, jokes and humour are incentive for students to learn and it enhances their language learning ability, eagerness and aptitude. Jokes and humour do not only help to memorize the stuff easily but for a long time too as things associated with funny incidents imprints on the minds of the students permanently. This is the reason that students' do not forget such teachers in their lives no matter how old they get. Many students think that teachers are strangers or outwardly beings, for the very same reason they do not open up in presence of such teachers. Therefore, it badly affects the language learning process somewhere in the mind as learning an English language a tough task in a multilingual country like Pakistan. However, a teacher who uses jokes, humour and puns in his lesson regarding what is he teaching can definitely help the students to learn it proficiently. Ziv investigated the effects on students' learning of teaching and reported that students appreciate and enjoy learning with a teacher who uses humour (Ziv, A. 1988, pp. 5-15.).

Everyone loves jokes and humour because they are invaluable source of entertainment and excellent vehicle for presenting, learning and teaching English as a second language. Use of humour could definitely be a gateway to understand and observe culture of English language. It could easily be observed that when a teacher enters in the language class and says the word “joke” only, students becomes attentive and that is how a teacher catches the attention of the students in a tricky way. Moreover, jokes could be used in a class to motivate the students so that they start taking interest in reading and writing activities. Baron states that, the use of humour can vent anger and frustration that might otherwise be destructive (Baron, R. A. 1978, pp. 189–197). Humour has the power to change the dull atmosphere of a classroom all of a sudden into lively and energetic environment it keeps awake the students in a dull and boring classroom.

Apart from all the social advantages and benefits there are a number of psychological and social benefits for the students too when a teacher frequently cracks jokes in the classroom. It helps to reduce frustration, boredom, tediousness and all the fears in the mind of a student having regarding English language. Many linguists agree that “Ego” is a hurdle in second language learning and mostly students do not feel comfortable in English language classes due to this factor. When a teacher produces such positive environment in an English language class, the students will surely not think much about their ego, definitely speak much, and think a little. Moreover, it will help them to learn English as a second language. In fact, humour is a double-edged sword, if it helps to construct, it can ruin or destroy a student’s personality too. Therefore, positive kind of humour should be used and negative kind of humour such as mimicry and mockery should be avoided so that the sacred environment of the classroom may not spoil. A negative kind of humour includes dirty jokes, sarcasm, mimicry and mockery to hit students’ ethnicity, to pass negative and vulgar comments, to make fun of the students can badly affect the students’ learning ability, enthusiasm and aptitude as well as his character. Inappropriate humour can clearly be destructive to instructor-student relationship and thereby a threat to professionalism and instructor credibility, prestige and popularity.

Conclusion

This research paper aims to highlight a full fledge picture of using humour in an English language class, concentrating the question how the students’ learning ability and aptitude can be enhanced by using the humour properly in the classroom. Uses of humour in an English language class is an instructional tool a teacher can use in the classroom to increase its effectiveness and enhance eagerness of the students of English language. There are many benefits and advantages associated with the use of humour in the classroom. When a teacher use humour in class, it can result in a number of benefits and advantages for both teachers and students of English language. However, negative, vulgar or harmful kind of humour such as sarcasm, mimicry and mockery should strictly be avoided as it leaves negative impressions and effects of the teacher on his/her students as well as it can bring negative results in the classroom.

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