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INTRODUCTION

When I mention my interest in using humor in the English language classroom, the types of questions I get show common misconceptions about the role and potential of humor in our field. *Does that mean you act like a stand-up comedian in front of the class? That only works for teachers with a good sense of humor, right? Isn't that only for really advanced students?* Of course, the answer to all these questions is no. Fortunately, we now have this book to illustrate this.

While the main aim of this book is to show the *how* of using humor in the English language classroom, it's important to start with the *why*. When it comes to the role of humor in English language teaching, much emphasis is placed on motivation and interpersonal benefits. The reality is that learning a foreign language is an extremely difficult endeavor that can result in a great deal of stress, anxiety, and shyness among learners. To complicate matters, for many students the study of English is a requirement rather than a choice. In such a challenging environment, it is easy to see why Cornett (1986) referred to humor as "one of our most powerful instructional resources" (p. 8). Used effectively, humor can make language learning more interesting and more memorable. In addition, a fun class atmosphere can greatly reduce the pressure of speaking in a foreign language. Ideally, the proper use of humor can also increase student motivation to study English.

Fortunately, the connection between language teaching and humor goes much deeper. After all, humor can be used to make learning more memorable and improve class atmosphere in almost any subject. When we consider Byram and Risager's (1999) description of the language teacher's role as "a professional mediator between learners and foreign languages and culture" (p. 58), the potential for humor in the classroom becomes even more evident. A great deal of humor is either culture bound or language bound, giving the language teacher a virtually endless supply of classroom material. Humor researchers including Gardner (2008) and Bell (2009) have thus argued for the use of humor as a tool for providing valuable insights into both language and culture.

Creating a positive classroom atmosphere and providing students with ample linguistic and cultural instruction are all part of the ultimate goal of our profession—equipping our students with the language skills and confidence to communicate smoothly and proficiently in English outside of the classroom. Krasner (1999) and Bell (2007) have argued that it takes more than just linguistic mastery to be proficient in a foreign language. When it comes to authentic cross-cultural communication in English, a deep understanding of English humor is essential. Humor is an integral part of communication, but researchers (e.g., Ziv, 1988) have found that some of the biggest cultural differences are based on uses and perceptions of humor. Communicating with someone from a different culture is greatly aided by an understanding of that person's style of joking, along with

cultural references to humorous movies or TV shows. Because of the social isolation one might face when not understanding the humor used in social situations, Lems (2013) stresses that "an important part of learning a new language is learning to enjoy its jokes" (p. 26).

This brings us to the *how* aspect of using humor in the language classroom. I began this introduction by describing common misconceptions regarding the use of humor. Fortunately, there are also a great number of language teachers who make humor an integral part of their lessons. When giving presentations about humor in language teaching at conferences, I have been pleasantly surprised by the number of fellow teachers who have come up to me to make comments such as "I'm so glad to find someone else doing this!" or, more succinctly, "Finally!" So when the call for contributions for this book was posted, I was also overjoyed at the positive response. The end result you have in your hands is nearly 100 submissions from around the globe.

The lesson plans compiled in this book provide the reader with the whole gamut of possibilities for using humor in English language teaching. You can find ideas for beginning to advanced students, 5-minute activities to start a class on a humorous note to multiday projects, and silly English puns and jokes to activities for examining controversial social issues. What all these lessons have in common is that they all use humor to enhance the English learning experience and provide English language learners (ELLs) with the linguistic and cultural knowledge they need to become more proficient users of the language. Lesson ideas in this book are divided into the following categories:

I.   Humor and Language Development

II. Wordplay and Puns

III. Comics and Cartoons

IV. Jokes and Joke Telling

V.   Sitcoms and Movies

VI. Internet Resources and Digital Literacy

VII. Parody, Satire, and Sarcasm

Obviously, many submissions fit more than one category. However, each submission was placed into the section in which that type of humor was most implicitly used. The book starts with ideas for a more general use of humor in the classroom and then proceeds to cover a range of more specific genres of humor.

The first—and biggest—section, Humor and Language Development, introduces lessons that integrate humor and language teaching. In other words, in

this section you will find lessons in which the authors have creatively modified traditional language learnings tasks to give them a humorous component. This will give you many wonderful ideas on how to enhance the development of the four skills acquisition of their learners.

It is an obvious choice to have a Wordplay and Puns section in a book on humor in the language classroom, as this type of humor is arguably the most inherently connected with the teaching of a language. Introducing different types of wordplay into your classes is an excellent way of providing linguistic instruction in a fun and creative way. Puns, for example, are often dismissed as childish, corny, or even "the lowest form of humor" (Lems, 2013, p. 26), but the range of lesson plans here reveals the higher level linguistic awareness necessary to comprehend many puns. So there are interesting opportunities for students of all English levels. For those who still believe that puns are a simple form of humor, try translating "Linguistic humor is punny as hell" (Raphaelson-West, 1989, p. 130) into another language!

The Comics and Cartoons section presents another form of humor that offers an interesting window into the language and culture of English-speaking countries for learners of all ages and levels. As with other sections in the book, this section offers a wide range of lesson plans. As an extension of the previous section, comics can be exploited as material for discovering puns and wordplay. At the other end of the scale, students can examine how newspaper cartoons are used in some cultures as a forum for social commentary and political satire. Finally, another model suggests giving students the chance to create their own comics.

You will find two types of lessons in Jokes and Joke Telling: lessons on helping ELLs understand jokes of the English-speaking world and lessons on giving students the language skills and confidence to tell jokes themselves in English. Jokes are one of the most culturally bound forms of humor, as the content, type, and frequency of joke telling greatly varies from culture to culture. Fortunately, this section offers a number of interesting ideas for making the world of English jokes more accessible for your learners. While it is often said that dreaming in a foreign language is a sign of progress, telling a joke in English for ELLs is a great accomplishment, as "the ability to tell a joke, to be a good storyteller, on the part of the learner permits the bonding of speaker and listener, of joke teller with joke receiver or listener" (Schmitz, 2002, p. 104).

Sitcoms and Movies makes it clear that English-language entertainment is watched and loved around the world and thus also serves as interesting material for English language classes. Scenes from such resources not only offer a glimpse into daily life in the English-speaking world, but also provide valuable clues into how humor is used and what people find funny in the respective culture. The use of laugh tracks in sitcoms is an interesting way to compare perceptions of humor. As my students have written in their journals for my Humor

and American Culture class, "I like the show and found it funny. However, the points at which I laughed were different from when the audience laughed." The English language classroom is a great place to break down scenes and develop student comprehension of English sitcoms and funny movies. Lessons in this section can provide students with a rich history of English humor, from the golden age of early sitcoms like *I Love Lucy* and *Leave It to Beaver* to the quirky sketch comedy of Monty Python to groundbreaking contemporary shows like *Modern Family*.

In recent years, English language teaching has been greatly enhanced by greater and greater access to the Internet. The number of students with smartphones and tablet computers makes English-teaching resources even more accessible. These resources of course include a treasure trove of humorous materials, resulting in this book's section Internet Resources and Digital Literacy. Just as ELLs might find that they are laughing at different times than the audience in English sitcoms, distinct differences can undoubtedly be found in the way in which people from different cultures use humor on social networking sites such as Facebook. This section thus provides useful guidance for students in navigating and comprehending the vast amount of English humor available on the Internet.

The humor genres in Parody, Satire, and Sarcasm were saved for the last section of the book as they can arguably be the most complex and controversial forms of humor. The latter two genres in particular provide further proof of Krasner's (1999) argument that linguistic knowledge alone is not enough to be proficient in a foreign language. Even though the vocabulary and linguistic forms in many satirical statements can be quite simple (think of George Costanza mocking Jerry Seinfeld with "Nice shirt!" when he wears the infamous puffy shirt), they can leave many ELLs completely confused, especially if sarcasm is not common in their native culture. Political or social satire can also prove to be quite complicated for students coming from cultures in which it is uncommon or taboo. Still, knowledge of these forms of English humor are important for the development of both linguistic and cultural knowledge.

As you can see, this book offers a little of everything. Schmitz (2002) claimed that "the advantage of humor is that it can be used with any language teaching approach or method" (p. 94) and this book is proof of the great potential of humor in the English language classroom. Whether you are an eager proponent or a wary skeptic of the role of humor in English language education, the great range of contributions to this book show that you don't have to be a comedian yourself to introduce your students to the fascinating range of the humor of the English-speaking world. Perhaps Bell (2009) summed it up best when she wrote, "Obviously we cannot prepare students for the spontaneous humor they will encounter, but we can provide them with new ways of thinking about and

trying to make sense of humor . . . and a safe place to ask and experiment with it" (p. 250). The English language classroom is that safe place and the possibilities are endless. Happy teaching!

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