Using Humor to Enhance Language and Culture Instruction

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Using Humor to Enhance Language and Culture Instruction Outline

I. Why use humor?
   - lit review
   - real-life anecdotes

II. How can we use humor?
   - sample lesson plans
   + Q&A I

III. What next?
   - sample research projects
   - future research

IV. Q&A II
Seminar Goals

Participants will acquire a deeper understanding of:

1. the benefits of using humor in ELT
2. current research trends investigating the role of humor in ELT
3. practical methods for using humor to enhance language and culture instruction
4. the role of understanding humor in cross-cultural communication
5. potential risks and cultural considerations when using humor in ELT
About me
My Teaching Approach and Passion

Integration of language and culture/content

Surprising Japan!

Video Interviews with 14 Professionals Working in Japan

New Ways in Teaching with Humor
POLLs: Tell me about you

1. What is your current teaching context?
2. Where are you originally from?
3. Why are you interested in this topic (humor)?
4. What is the biggest benefit of using humor in ELT?
5. What is the biggest reason for not using humor in ELT?
Current Teaching Context

- ESL
- EFL
Where are you from?

- North America
- South America
- Europe
- Asia
- Africa
- Oceania
Why are you interested in this virtual seminar about humor? (main reason)

1. I already use humor in my classroom, but I’d like to get new ideas.
2. I’m interested in using humor more in my classroom, so I’d like to get new ideas.
3. I’m skeptical/concerned about the use of humor in language teaching, so I’d like to learn more.
What is the main reason for using humor in ELT? (just your impression)

1. Building rapport with students
2. Making learning more fun/interesting/memorable
3. Reducing student anxiety
4. Providing insights into the English language
5. Providing insights into English-speaking cultures
Why might teachers avoid using humor in ELT?

1. Lack of confidence in own personality / sense of humor
2. Curriculum restrictions
3. Just don’t know good methods / techniques
4. Cultural concerns
5. Don’t think it’s so necessary / important
Why use humor in our teaching?

Humor is a teacher’s “most powerful resource.” (Cornett, 1986)
Possible Educational Benefits of Humor

- Motivate students (Ruggieri, 1999)
- Increase student confidence (Boerman-Cornell, 1999)
- Retain student attention (Glenn, 2002; Hill, 1998; Morrison, 2008)
- Improve the overall classroom atmosphere (Kher et al., 1999; Neuliep, 1991)
A growing trend...
An even more effective tool?

Categories of humor:
1. universal humor
2. linguistic humor
3. culture-based humor

(Long & Graesser, 1988; Schmitz, 2002)

But...

SO MUCH HUMOR IS LANGUAGE AND CULTURE-BASED?

THAT MAKES IT EVEN MORE POWERFUL FOR ENGLISH TEACHERS
Misconceptions About Humor in ELT

Tonight's English as a second language class has been cancelled.
Humor Misconceptions

1. The teacher needs a good sense of humor. Using humor just means the teacher “telling jokes.”
2. Humor is something only advanced students can understand.
3. Humor is only for “having fun.” (no other learning outcomes)
4. Humor makes the class less serious. The students might take the teacher less seriously.
5. Teachers who use humor use it all the time.
The funny teacher myth
(Tosta, 2001, p. 2)

“The funny teacher...
...is not a clown figure.
He is...
...a serious, conscientious professional who believes in the meaningfulness and effectiveness of having fun while learning. Thus, he...
avways tries to provide his students with opportunities for a pleasurable journey through learning, promoting the use of humor in his class.”
My personal humor journey: A tale of two survey results

Teacher 1:
• “I like the teacher’s humor. It made me more interested in English.”
• “Thanks to the teacher’s humor, I could feel more at ease speaking English.”

Teacher 2:
• “The teacher should stop telling jokes from his country. The students just get confused.”

But...
A failed “humor” lesson

The intention:
Share the hilarity of an American sitcom with students in an Intensive English Program

The result:
Silence
What went wrong?
Analyzing failed use of humor

1. Clips too long—lack of comprehensible input
2. No connection with class/lesson content
3. Lack of specific learning outcomes
4. Assumption that if students understand the language, they will understand the humor
5. Assumption that others find the same thing as funny as you do...
In other words...

“There is nothing so unfunny as explaining humor in detail.”
(Kristiansen, 2001)
Guidelines for using humor

“It {using humor} should give learners the impression of being spontaneous but yet be an integral part of the course instrumental in building language skills, and never an incidental or ‘by the way’ activity.”

(Schmitz, 2002, p. 95)
Using *The Simpsons* in EFL Classes

Most teachers of English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) would agree that our job is not just to teach language, but also to teach culture. Indeed, Krasner (1999) argues that it takes more than just linguistic competence to be proficient in a foreign language. Byram and Risager (1999) also describe the language teacher’s role as “a professional mediator between learners and foreign languages and culture” (58). While it is not a problem to accept this dual role, the complication lies in choosing what type of cultural content to include in our lessons. First, we have to decide whether a cultural component means focus since 1989, *The Simpsons* is now the longest-running animated series in American TV history. It focuses on the misadventures of nuclear power plant employee Homer Simpson, his wife Marge, and their three children—troublemaker Bart, teacher’s pet Lisa, and pacifier-sucking baby Maggie. Set in the mythical town of Springfield, the show is a humorous parody of the American family. Some teachers may feel that it is not serious enough, considering that it is a mere cartoon. However, the show is an American institution that can be used in the English language classroom as a springboard for exploring American culture. Whether you want...
But what else makes humor so difficult to comprehend?

Shively (2103, p. 932) identified **SEVEN** reasons learners couldn’t understand humor (Spanish homestay context):

- Misunderstanding word meaning
- Misunderstanding pragmatic force
- Not noticing playful frame (of a joke)
- Not noticing incongruity (of a joke)
So why should we make humor part of the language learning curriculum???
Role of Humor in Social Interaction / Cross-Cultural Communication

“It is now widely recognized that effective communication requires much more than knowledge of linguistic forms” (Bell, 2007, p. 28).

But...

Understanding humor “requires a broad base of linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and cultural knowledge” (Shively, 2013, p. 931).
Humor in Social Interaction

ELLs’ lack of humor understanding can lead to:

• marginalization (Bell, 2006)
• embarrassment (Wulf, 2010)
• social isolation (Lems, 2013)
Role of Humor in Social Interaction

“Knowing a language, and being able to function in communities which use that language, entails being able to understand and produce play with it, making this ability a necessary part of advanced proficiency.” (Cook, 2000, p. 150)
Real-life humor use in social interaction:
Put yourself in your students’ shoes
Story 1: On the bus in Oregon

**Situation:** I rush to get something to eat just in time before getting on a long-distance bus.

**Driver to me:** I’m glad you had time, but why didn’t you get anything for me?

**Situation:** The bus is about to depart and the driver realizes the capacity is only about 10 percent.

**Driver to passengers:** “No fighting over the seats!”
Story 2: On the streetcar in Portland

Me: “I just realized you passed my stop and now we’re going over the bridge. Can I get off now?”

Conductor: “Sorry, but it’s too dangerous to let passengers off here. And we like to have repeat customers.”
Story 3: Student Homestay Experience

“I was about a week into my homestay in England... One night I bumped into my host father late at night in the kitchen. When he saw me, he had a shocked expression and said, ‘Who are you???’ I froze for a moment and then just said, ‘I’m Kenji.’”

English level of the student???
• 700+ (proficient) TOEIC score (before homestay)
“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...a **safe place** to **ask** and **experiment** with it.” (Bell, 2009, p. 250)

But...
ELT Context:
Extra benefits, but also extra risks...
Risks of Humor in ELT

Humor can also be...

• Inappropriate for certain levels (Deneire, 1995)
• A double-edged sword (Askildson, 2005)
• Distracting and demotivating (Quock, 2007)
• Culturally inappropriate (Reimann, 2010)
• Discomforting or offensive (Forman, 2011)
• Insensitive (Wang, 2014)
Divisive Risk of Humor

“Laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line.”

(Lorenz, 1963, p. 253)
Proper Use: Humor in ELT Context

Humor should be...
✓ Understandable
✓ The appropriate content for the “audience”
✓ “purposeful and not merely entertaining”

Appropriate and inappropriate humor:
“....just because humor is perceived as appropriate does not necessarily mean that it always increases student learning.”
(Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin, 2010, p. 3) (general education context)

But....
But **HOW** to use humor???
How to use humor???

“The advantage of humor is that it can be used with any language teaching approach or method, be it the Communicative Approach, Total Physical Response (TPR), or Suggestopedia.

But...

There are drawbacks in incorporating humor into textbooks. Humorous discourse ‘institutionalized’ in this way runs the risk of becoming stale very quickly for many humorous texts can become outdated in a matter of months.”

(Scmitz, 2002, p. 94)
Teaching **with** humor or **about** humor?

**Teach with humor to...**
- Reduce anxiety
- Increase student motivation
- Improve classroom atmosphere
- Make learning more memorable

**Teach about humor to...**
- Provide insights into language and culture
- Improve cross-cultural communicative competence
- Increase critical thinking
- Make learning more memorable
Humor Sample Lessons

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
New Ways Series Format

Level/Context:

Aims:

Class Time:

Prep Time:

Resources:

Procedure:

Caveats/Options:
Sample Lessons

I. Humor and Language Development
II. Wordplay and Puns
III. Comics and Cartoons
Q&A Break
IV. Jokes and Joke Telling
V. Sitcoms and Movies
VI. Internet Resources and Digital Literacy
VII. Parody, Satire, and Sarcasm
Humor and Language Development
Lesson by Lisa Leopold
Funny Misplaced Modifiers

Level/Context: Advanced university learners

Aims: To develop learners’ grammatical competence

Class Time: Dependent on class size / ~ 45 minutes

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Resources: Handouts of sentences with misplaced modifiers
Procedure

1. Present every learner with a funny misplaced modifier on a slip of paper.

2. Have learners read their example aloud to the class and explain what makes it funny.

Examples:

- I gave olives to my friend that I stabbed with my fork.
- Mrs. Jones was proud that on her first hunting trip, she was able to shoot several animals as well as her husband.
3. Teach learners that in order to convey the correct meaning, modifiers must appear close to what they modify. Present several other examples of misplaced modifiers, including adjectives or adjective clauses...

Have learners identify what the modifier should modify and revise the sentence accordingly.

4. Have learners apply what they learned to revise the sentence they received at the beginning of class for accuracy, and check their responses as a class.
Procedure: Game

5. Divide the class into three or four teams. Present teams with a handout of 10–15 humorous misplaced modifiers. Teams should work as quickly as possible to revise the sentences, and the team that finishes first should call “Stop!”

At that point this team will read aloud their revisions and earn one point for every correct sentence.
Caveats and Options

1. The game may be played in a Jeopardy format, where differing point values are assigned to each question according to its difficulty. Each topic area might cover a different type of modifier.

2. The game may be played using a deck of cards with a different point value assigned to each question.
Resources

Humor and Language Development Summary
Wordplay and Puns
Lesson by Feifei Han
Learning New Words via Puns

Level/Context: Upper intermediate+

Aims:
• Learn new vocabulary
• Understand English puns
• Practice oral skills in storytelling

Class Time: 45 minutes
Prep Time: 30 minutes

Resources: English puns; sample stories using puns
Procedure

1. Explain the definition of puns.
2. Give students an example of a pun using words that they know. For example, “ketchup” and “catch up” (see sample story next slide)
3. Show students one of the new words that they are going to learn in class, for example, hijack.
4. Explain the meaning of hijack (to stop and steal a moving vehicle).
5. Tell students a pre-prepared humorous story in which the pun of hijack is used.
Sample Story Using Puns

One Sunday, Ms. Tomato and her three little pretty daughters were well dressed up in red. They were walking towards downtown for a tomato reunion party.
While walking, the youngest girl often stopped and picked up some flowers on the side of road. Little by little, the little tomato was lagging far behind. When Ms. Tomato saw the youngest girl was far away from her two sisters, she was angry and yelled to her:
“You’d better catch up, otherwise, I’ll make you ketchup when we get back home.”
Sample Story Using Puns

• Jack went to meet his dad at the airport last night. His dad was so excited to see him, and as soon as he saw Jack he shouted loudly, “Hi, Jack!”

• To his surprise, a group of police ran towards him and arrested him, as they thought he attempted to hijack an aircraft
Procedure

6. Write on the board a few words that are new to students and explain the meaning of these words. (see examples next slide)

7. Divide students into a number of groups according to the number of new words.

8. Assign each group one or more new words, and encourage students to think of puns for each word and to make up a funny story from them.

9. Ask a representative of each group to tell the story they have made up in front of the class.
Sample Puns/Stories

possible puns: assault – a salted

A possible joke:
Daddy Peanut and Mommy Peanut went to the market to buy groceries. The Daddy Peanut bumped into a big Walnut. The Walnut was very angry and punched the Daddy Peanut. The Daddy Peanut stared at the Walnut, and shouted:
“If you assault me again, I will make you a salted walnut!”

possible puns: finished - Finish

Possible joke:
In the college library, Student A was reading a book. Student B wanted to borrow the book. So he politely asked Student A, “Are you finished?” To his surprise, Student A replied with a smile, “Very good guess, but I’m not, I’m Danish.”
Wordplay and Puns Summary
Comics and Cartoons
Lesson by Ildiko Porter-Szucs
Teaching Culture through Comic Strips

**Level/Context:** Beginning to advanced, 10 years or older

**Aims:**
- Develop awareness of cultural conventions
- Recognize when cultural conventions are violated
- Create one’s own comic strip illustrating a cultural topic

**Class Time:** 20-60 minutes (depending on whether students act out their scenarios)

**Prep Time:** 5-10 minutes

**Resources:** Sample cartoon strips, syndicated cartoon strips
Procedure

1. Elicit from students information on customs or cultural situations in the target culture that could lead to misunderstandings. Briefly discuss the source of misunderstandings.

2. Introduce a comic strip with the words in the speech bubbles covered up.

3. In small groups, have students fill in the missing text in the speech bubbles.
Procedure

4. Distribute the comic strip with the text in the speech bubbles.
5. Elicit from students what cultural expectation lies at the heart of the situation depicted in the comic strip.
6. Discuss the various ways in which the utterances can be interpreted.
Caveats and Options

1. Encourage students to act out their scenarios to their classmates.

2. A possible homework activity based on Step 1 is to have students create their own cartoons on a cartoon-authoring website such as Pixton (www.pixton.com). Next, they can share their cartoons with the class.

3. Syndicated cartoons, such as the daily cartoon from The New Yorker, are likely to contain vocabulary, grammar, and concepts that are inaccessible to students with limited language proficiency.
Hello, neighbor! How are you?

I feel old.

My knees hurt...

I have heart problems...

...my grandchildren are too busy to visit me.
Why, thank you! Happy Halloween!

Trick or Treat!
Resources
Comics and Cartoons Summary (followed by Q&A I)
Q&A I Break
Jokes and Joke Telling
Lesson by Richard Hodson
How Do You Get to (Somewhere Other Than Carnegie Hall)?

**Level/Context:** Low-intermediate+ / University, young adult, or adult

**Aims:**
- Create an original joke by rewriting the cultural elements of a well-known English joke
- Understand cultural symbols of one’s own culture

**Class Time:** 30 minutes

**Prep Time:** 10 minutes

**Resources:** Whiteboard, presentation, or handout to explain the original joke; handout or paper for student joke writing
Procedure

1. Introduce the original Carnegie Hall joke in a form suitable for classroom. Do you know it???
2. Explain or elicit the main structural elements of the joke:
   - **Location**: New York
   - **Destination**: Carnegie Hall
   - **Punch line**: Practice, practice, practice!
3. Explain or elicit the relationship between the destination and the punch line, and the double meaning of the phrase “get to.”
Procedure

4. Have students rewrite the joke, replacing the location and destination with elements from their own personal experience or cultural context and writing an appropriate punch line.

5. Have students tell their jokes to classmates, in pairs, groups, or as a whole class. Students can also write multiple versions.
Caveats and Options

1. Some students may need individual assistance in coming up with original destinations. A few hints about relevant cultural, educational, or sporting institutions in their own contexts may help them.

2. Depending on students’ level and the time available, you can give students free rein to rewrite any or all of the joke text from scratch or instruct them explicitly to replace the location, destination, and punch line.

3. The original joke text can be constructed in any number of ways to incorporate target language or vocabulary appropriate to the class. The text given here has a simple, repetitive punch line, but this does not need to be the case, and students can be encouraged to construct the punch line in any way that they choose.
A tourist in Hyogo Prefecture realizes that he’s lost, and asks a passer-by, “How do you get to Koshien Stadium?”

The passer-by replies, “Practice, practice, practice!”
Location, Destination, and Punch Line
Verb Variation

• A tourist in Tokyo realizes that he’s lost, and asks a passer-by, “How do you get to Tokyo University?”

• The passer-by replies, “Study, study, study!”
All Variation

• A tourist in Akihabara realizes that he’s lost, and asks a passer-by, “How do you get to AKB Theater?”

• The passer-by replies: “Cosmetic surgery!”
Jokes and Joke Telling Summary
Sitcoms and Movies
Lesson by Clarissa Codrington, Trisha Dowling, and Zuzana Tomaš
Why’s Everyone Laughing? A Sitcom-Based Speaking and Listening Activity

**Level/Context:** Intermediate to advanced; young adults and adults, academic and nonacademic

**Aims:**
- Enhance cultural understanding of humor through the use of popular TV sitcoms
- Practice speaking and listening skills

**Class Time:** 20-40 minutes

**Prep Time:** 10-60 minutes

**Resources:** Sitcom excerpts; graphic organizer
Procedures

1. Select a 3- to 8-minute segment from a sitcom appropriate for the age, level, and interest of your students.
2. Introduce the selected sitcom and explain the instructions for the activity.
3. Provide students with a graphic organizer (see sample later) and explain how to complete it.
4. Play a short clip from a popular sitcom.
5. Pause the video after a joke has been delivered and the audience begins laughing.
6. Using the graphic organizer, students write a brief explanation of why the segment is funny.
Procedure

7. Repeat Steps 4, 5, and 6 several times.
8. Ask students to compare notes in small groups.
9. Lead a discussion on humor in those segments that were difficult for students to explain. Elicit from students the extent to which the humor in the sitcom is similar to humor encountered in the students’ cultures.
10. For additional speaking practice and with any extra class time, you can ask students to role-play a possible follow-up segment from the sitcom. Students can vote for their favorite segments.
Humor Graphic Organizer Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video title</th>
<th>Explanation for humor in the segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Sample) <em>Home Improvement</em> Season 1, Episode 1: Pilot</td>
<td>(Sample) The audience laughs because the size of the drill is unnecessarily large for the job; Tim always tries to use too much power for each job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caveats and Options

1. Allow students to make suggestions for the sitcoms. (but preview for appropriate content!)
2. Provide students with written scripts when video is not available.
3. For written practice, ask students to reflect on the humor and culture in the target segment or write a script for a segment that may follow the scenes students have watched.
Sitcoms and English Development: Case of Yosuke Ushigome

“One other aid that really helped...— probably more than just with language, but also with culture and fitting in — was binge-watching British comedy....

But Ushigome is likely to have watched Peep Show like no one else.

Every episode I watched three times: First, just as it was, the second time with subtitles and the third time I stopped every time there was a punch line.”

Source:
Other Sitcom Ideas

*The Simpsons* and Social Issues

**Sample social issues**
- Gender issues
- Gun control
- Environmental issues
- Gay rights and homophobia
- Educational issues
The Simpsons and Cultural Stereotypes

Recommended article:
• The Simpsons in Japan: A Lesson on Stereotypes (http://iteslj.org/Lessons/Meilleur-Simpsons.html)

Warning
• Cultural stereotypes in humor CAN be a great springboard for cross-cultural discussion and research, BUT...
• Know your students and what is appropriate
Sitcoms and Movies Summary
Internet Resources and Digital Literacy
Lesson by Scott Henderson
Internet Memes to Learn and Practice English

**Level/Context:** High beginner and above; high school students and above

**Aims:**
- Learn the concept of Internet memes
- Learn and use new vocabulary and grammar
- Learn about joke set-ups and punch lines
- Learn and use appropriate format for creating memes
- Use own experiences to create memes

**Class Time:** 50-100 minutes

**Prep Time:** 30-60 minutes

**Resources:** Internet access; examples of various Internet memes; worksheet for matching and understanding memes
Procedure

1. Students match the picture to the meme name. (see next slide)
2. Explain vocabulary and meaning as necessary (e.g., first world, bad luck, success).
3. Use the examples of the three famous memes, or search the Internet and select other examples. Students can choose examples they like and give reasons for their choices, or they can explain which meme is their favorite.
4. Match the memes to the examples (see next slides), or find other examples on the Internet.
Well-known Internet Memes

Bad Luck Brian / Success Kid / First-World Problems
Meme Examples

Free pepperoni pizza at school today

I'm a vegetarian

I didn't study for the test

Still got an A+

I have so much food in the refrigerator

But I don't feel like eating any of it
Procedure

5. Students brainstorm in groups about their own first-world problems. Write all of the group ideas on the board. Students use these ideas to make a meme individually or as groups.

6. For homework, students think of their own lives and make memes about their own bad luck or success stories.
Matching Practice

1. My new winter jacket . . . is too warm.
2. My neighborhood . . . has so many good places to eat, and I can’t choose one.
3. My Facebook account . . . has too many friends.
4. I just bought the newest iPhone . . . the next model comes out next month.
5. Gets to school without being late . . . it’s Saturday, and he has no classes.
6. Writes a long essay for English class . . . leaves it at home.
7. Rides brand new bike to school . . . gets two flat tires.
8. I didn’t know the answer on a test, so I guessed . . . I got the right answer.
9. I forgot to bring lunch to work . . . our boss bought us all lunch.
10. I didn’t do my homework . . . my teacher forgot to collect it.
Caveats and Options

1. Give students short paragraphs with different situations to read. Have them turn the situations into memes.

2. Students create memes but they must use specific grammar structures, vocabulary, or topics being studied in class.
Caveats and Options

3. Students find pictures on the Internet and create their own memes. Here are two websites they can use: http://memegenerator.net and www.memecreator.org.

Numerous cell phone applications for creating memes are also available for free.

4. Students use their own pictures from their cell phones to create their own memes.
Resources

• http://memegenerator.net
• www.memecreator.org
• https://makeameme.org/
Internet Resources and Digital Literacy Summary
Parody, Satire, and Sarcasm
Lesson by Vander Viana and Sonia Zyngier

But first...
Language Use and Cultural Differences

*American*

**HELP!**

*English*

*Excuse me, Sir, I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but I wonder if you would mind helping me a moment, as long as it's no trouble, of course*

*Feel the difference*
Sarcasm and Cross-Cultural Communication: Real-Life Incident

**Matt Murton**: American baseball player in Japan

**Atsushi Nohmi**: Starting pitcher for Hanshin Tigers
Post-game Murton Interview

“Did you try your hardest when you made the throw?” — Japanese reporter (asking about a poor throw Murton made during the game)

“No, I hate Nohmi, so I wanted to give the other team a run (point).” — Murton (sarcastic reply; offended by the reporter’s question)

Obvious sarcasm, right?
Next day’s sports newspaper...

“I hate Nohmi, so I gave the other team a run.”
Irony in Everyday Language Use

**Level/Context:** Intermediate+; English language school, teenager to adult

**Aims:**
- Learn about the differences between literal and ironic utterances
- Employ resources that may enhance the irony of a situation
- Develop awareness of the appropriateness of irony in different contexts
- Identify instances of irony in everyday situations

**Class Time:** 30 minutes

**Prep Time:** 3 minutes

**Resources:** Slip of paper with two sentences on each
Procedures

1. Ask students to create a literal dialogue in which the sentences on their specific slip of paper (either A or B) could be said by one of the speakers. (see next slide for examples)
2. Pair students from the same group, and ask each pair to compare their answers.
3. Walk around, check their answers, and provide guidance as needed.
4. In pairs, have students choose one of the sentences and think of a context in which the chosen sentence would indicate exactly the opposite of the speaker’s intention.
5. Ask students to create a short dialogue and to practice it orally.
## Sample Sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Is this my grade? Fantastic!”</td>
<td>“You look great in this outfit!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“This party is really exciting, isn’t it?”</td>
<td>“What lovely weather!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You’re a big help!”</td>
<td>“I love the Yankees and their fans!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Procedures

6. Invite students to present their ironic interactions to the class.
7. After the presentations, ask students to consider (a) how different the dialogues they acted out are from the ones they created in Step 1 (e.g., mismatch between what the sentence means literally and the context in which it was said) and (b) which resources they used to enhance the ironic aspect of the dialogue (e.g., contextual features, intonation, facial expressions, body language).
8. Have students consider the contexts in which it would be appropriate or inappropriate to be ironic.
9. Allow students to personalize what they have just learned by asking whether they have ever experienced a situation in which they said or were told these sentences (or similar ones). During the discussion, get them to consider the effect that the use of irony had in the interaction and/or in the relationship among the speakers.
Caveats and Options

1. It is important to realize that not all students will be comfortable acting out in front of the class.

2. If you are teaching a multicultural class, Steps 8–9 can be usefully enriched by finding out the differences/similarities in diverse national groups.
Parody, Sarcasm, and Satire

Summary
Book Summary

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
Future Research: Humor in ELT
Future Research: Humor in ELT

I. Culture-Specific Studies

Why?
• Understand and respect different perspectives and cultural appropriateness of humor
• Understand the differences to help “fill the gap” in English language classes

II. Empirical Studies on Humor Competency

Why?
• Identify best practices for helping ELLs to appreciate, detect, understand, and produce English humor
• Make humor a more research-based component of language education
Culture-Specific Studies: Perspectives of Humor in the Classroom
Sample Humor Research: Specific Cultural Contexts

- Aboudan, 2009: UAE
- Reimann, 2010/2015: Japan
- Forman, 2011: Thailand
- Olajoke, 2013: Nigeria
- Nguyen, 2014: Vietnam
- Salehi & Hesabi, 2014: Iran
- Ziyaeemerh & Kumar, 2014: Malaysia
- Neff & Rucynski, 2017: Japan
Consider the Cultural Context

British Science Association “world’s funniest joke” contest (2002):

• Japan not included in the study

• Why???

“It doesn’t seem like there is a custom or culture of humor in Japan.”—Richard Wiseman (organizer)
Japanese Response?

“Wiseman’s comment did not sound fair, because most Japanese don’t find English jokes funny and they don’t tell jokes in English. Even the funniest joke in the world did not make the Japanese audience laugh...”
Japanese Response?

“Many Japanese funny stories cannot be translated into other languages. This might explain the absence of Japanese jokes in the ‘world funniest joke’ contest, or counter one of the widespread stereotypes, ‘why don’t Japanese tell jokes?’”

(Oshima, 2013, p. 99)
Japanese-vs-Western Humor  
(Cultural Consideration of Humor)

✓ Humor restricted to specific occasions (Oka, 2006)

✓ Humor used in English four times more than in Japanese; never in formal situations (Takekuro, 2006)

✓ Humor usage depends on relationship between speakers (Takekuro, 2006)

✓ “Biting” or political satire used far less in Japan (Wells, 2006)

✓ Japanese prefer funny personal stories to “ready-made jokes” (Oshima, 2011)
Japanese Perceptions of Humor in the English Language Classroom

918 participants
– 1st and 2nd year students at 10 universities across Japan surveyed
– Fields of study included science (engineering), humanities (law, literature), medicine, and technology majors

(Neff & Rucynski, 2017)

Survey:
• 4 constructs
• 16 Likert-scaled items (6 point)
• 2 short response questions:
  1. Is a good sense of humor an essential trait for language teachers to have? Explain why or why not.
  2. Is humor used by Japanese and Western/English speakers dissimilar? Explain your thoughts.
Constructs

I. Role of humor in the language classroom (RHLC)
II. Comfort with humor in the language classroom (CHLC)
III. Humor and language proficiency (HLP)
IV. Humor and cultural understanding (HCU)
## Quantitative Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variables</th>
<th>Results</th>
<th>Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>No significant differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic discipline</strong> (natural/social science)</td>
<td>No significant differences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First language of instructor</strong> (Japanese/English)</td>
<td>Some differences</td>
<td>Higher results for those with “native” instructors (“Role of humor in LL classroom” / “Increasing cultural understanding”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English proficiency</strong> (low / int. / high)</td>
<td>Some differences</td>
<td>Highest for high proficiency group (“Comfort with humor in LL classroom” / “Increasing cultural understanding”)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sample Results: 6-point Likert Scale

Highest scoring item \((M = 5.03)\):

– I believe humor plays an important role in the language classroom. \((RHLC)\)

Lowest scoring item \((M = 3.40)\):

– People who have difficulty grasping English humor will also have difficulty with learning English. \((HLP)\)
Sample Results

Other high scoring items

– *I can relax more in language classes when humor is part of the lesson.*
  \((CHLC) \ (M = 4.96)\)

– *Understanding humor gives us insight into foreign cultures.*
  \((HCU) \ (M = 4.74)\)
A good sense of humor is an essential trait for language teachers to have. (RHLC)
Data patterns: Qualitative results

• Of positive responses, 2/3 related to:
  – Increase in motivation
  – Improves classroom atmosphere
• Common words: “enjoy” “desire” “interesting” “fun”
• Negative responses focused on humor being unnecessary for learning (little or no mention of not wanting instructors to use humor)
Qualitative Results Breakdown

Positive responses (4+)
- 37%: increases interest in English / motivation
- 26%: improves classroom atmosphere
- 13%: improves understanding of English

* more than one response allowed (open response)

Negative/Neutral (3-)
- 2%: not necessary for learning English
- 2%: teachers should not feel pressure to be humorous
Sample responses

Positive
• “If we feel English is enjoyable, we want to learn it.”
• “Humor leads to interest, and interest leads to getting better at English.”
• “I don't like English to begin with, so if a class is not enjoyable I don't want to take it”

Negative / neutral
• “A sense of humor certainly may be useful for running class, but to raise your English ability level, whether there is humor or not, you need the ability to explain things.”
Humor seems universal, but...
Humor used by Japanese and Western/English speakers is dissimilar. (HCU)
Data Patterns: Qualitative Responses

Of positive responses (4+), over 1/2 related to:
  – Differences in culture
  – Focus or content of humor
  – Speaker personality

English humor described as:
• “cynical” “black”
  “intellectual” “emotional”
• more taboo or controversial

Japanese described as:
• more relying on wordplay or “gags”
• less focus on taboo topics
Summary of Student Interviews (Post-Survey Volunteers)

1. Very open to inclusion of humor in the classroom (from study abroad experiences, etc.), but...
2. Humor should not be overused, and...
3. Humor is just one tool, and...
4. Humor works best when connected to course content, and...
5. Agree that a teacher can be both humorous and serious, and...
6. Don’t need to understand every joke in class. Overall...
7. Students still lack confidence in own understanding of English humor, but want to improve understanding (for both language development and cross-cultural understanding).
Cultural Appropriateness of Humor

“...we believe it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide a careful, research-driven account of how humor works in particular contexts so as not to spread misinformation or stereotypes.” (Bell and Pomerantz, 2016, p. 149)
Future Research: Humor in ELT

I. Culture-Specific Studies

Why?
• Understand and respect different perspectives of humor
• Understand the differences to help “fill the gap” in English language classes

II. Empirical Studies on Humor Competency

Why?
• Identify best practices for helping ELLs to appreciate, understand, and produce English humor
• Make humor a more research-based component of language education
Humor Competency and English Proficiency

Role of Humor:
“Humor can...serve as a ‘test of proficiency’ (Cook, 2000, p. 204): Its successful comprehension and production often requires a broad base of linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and cultural knowledge.” (Shively, 2013, p. 931)

Call for Research:
“Can students be trained to detect, understand, and generate L2 humor more successfully? Being an accomplished L2 speaker involves not only using language for literal statements of fact, but also expressing oneself creatively, which includes humor.” (Wulf, 2010, p. 167)
Empirical Studies on Humor Competency and Training: Sample Project
Satirical News

Satirical news websites: very popular & frequently shared; mimic real news...

... but often mistaken as real
Sample Satirical News: The Onion

Starbucks Unveils $7 Wake-Up Slap
Subculture Example: 
*The Rising Wasabi* (Japan)

*Man Survives 78 Days On Wild Berries Looking For Shinjuku Station Exit 27K*
Japanese-vs-Western Humor
(Cultural Consideration of Humor)

• Humor restricted to specific occasions (Oka, 2006)
• Humor used in English four times more than in Japanese; never in formal situations (Takekuro, 2006)
• Humor usage depends on relationship between speakers (Takekuro, 2006)
• “Biting” or political satire used far less in Japan (Wells, 2006)
• Japanese prefer funny personal stories to “ready-made jokes” (Oshima, 2011)
Satirical (Fake) vs. Strange (True) News: Two Headlines

1. Japan governors wear ‘pregnancy vests’ to urge men to help at home
2. Osaka launches foreigner-only train carriages to curtail inconveniences
With Pictures

Pregnancy vests...

Foreigner-only train car...
The true article...

Japan governors wear ‘pregnancy vests’ to urge men to help at home
Original source of the satire...

“Japanese train conductor blames foreign tourists for overcrowding”—The Guardian

“Osaka train driver apologizes to Japanese passengers for ‘having many foreigners’ on board”—Japan Today
Osaka launches foreigner-only train carriages to curtail inconveniences
Reader Comments

Japanese:
“This post is not true. I’ve lived in Osaka for 23 years. I’ve never seen it.”

“This is obviously Photoshopped!”

Foreign:
“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.”
Japanese-vs-Western Satire

1. Japanese satire “typically mild” and less “biting”

2. “...much of what has usually been identified in Japan as satire is not really satire at all by European standards.”

(Wells, 2006, p. 204)
Cultural Comparison and Popularity (satirical news websites)

6 million Facebook likes (Feb. 2017)  Less than 15,000 likes (Feb. 2017)

NCAA Investigating God For Giving Gifts To Athletes

[Image of the ONION website]

[Image of Japanese text]
7 times the Onion was lost in translation (Washington Post)
Satirical News Rationale

Help ELLs to:
1. develop active and critical reading skills
2. build digital and media literacy
3. increase awareness of target culture (including humor comprehension)
4. avoid embarrassment (using social media or other contexts)

* Failing to understand satire and other forms of humor can be embarrassing and damaging (Rubin, Chen, & Conroy, 2015)
Humor Competency Training

Recommended in ELT curriculum to:
1. Gain benefits of comprehending humor and...
2. Avoid pitfalls of misunderstanding humor (Bell, 2010; Bell & Pomerantz, 2015; Hodson, 2014; Wulf, 2010).
Experiment 1
Detecting & Appreciating Satire
Participants

• 121 Japanese university students
  – high-intermediate to advanced
  – national university

• 52 US University students
  – state school in the northeast
Procedures & Analysis

22 Headlines and snippets (as shared on social media):
   12 Real (odd news)
   10 Satirical

½ US media:
   *The Onion / Yahoo Odd News*

½ Japanese English media:
   *RisingWasabi / RocketNews*
Satirical (fake) news OR odd (but real) news?

1. Driver uses seatbelt for beer, not 3 children
2. BREAKING NEWS: Husband cooks for wife
3. Study reveals: babies are stupid
4. Old man attempts to walk hamster on leash in Tokyo
5. Video game character wondering why heartless God always chooses ‘Continue'
6. Teen posts Facebook status about drunk driving, gets arrested
Answers: Satirical News

1. Driver uses seatbelt for beer, not 3 children
2. BREAKING NEWS: Husband cooks For wife
3. Study reveals: Babies are stupid
4. Old man attempts to walk hamster on leash in Tokyo
5. Video game character wondering why heartless God always chooses 'Continue'
6. Teen posts Facebook status about drunk driving, gets arrested
Guessing satirical or true

Likert-scale (1= satirical, 6=true)

• Participant variables
  – gender
  – time spent overseas
  – the number of friends in their SNS circle
  – how frequently they read English news
  – Etc.
Relatively difficult for ELLs

SATIRE

• BREAKING NEWS: Husband cooks for wife
• McDonald’s announces new mint after-dinner Big Mac
• World’s scientists admit they just don’t like mice
Relatively difficult for ELLs

REAL

• Choir singing may boost cancer patients' health, study says

• Cool cat delighting animal lovers as he regularly rides the train in Tokyo
Funny for ELLs (satirical)

• Gaijin tries natto, dead At 25
• McDonald’s announces new mint after-dinner Big Mac
Not funny for ELLs (satirical)

• BREAKING NEWS: Husband cooks for wife
• Study reveals: Babies are stupid
Study #1 Summary

• Japanese do have difficulty detecting satire, even if it is about Japan
• Proficiency is a small factor
• Past experience with satirical news (English or Japanese) is a factor
Experiment 2
Effect of Humor Training
What can help?

1. **Noticing Rhetorical Aspects of Satire**: Absurd; Not newsworthy, etc. (Rubin, et al., 2016)

2. **Awareness of Media, Social Issues**: Compare message of article with one’s knowledge of the world (Rubin, Chen, & Conroy, 2015)

3. **Reading Proficiency**
Participants

• Media exposure only (35 students)
• Media + humor training (36 students)

Both classes:
• Mean = 570 TOEIC
• Roughly 2/3 male
• 16 2-hour courses on reading skills
• Weekly assignment to summarizes online articles
Intervention
2x for 1 hour

1. Ss given a mix of satirical & offbeat stories
2. Ss guessed if real or satirical
3. Ss discussed their answers in groups
4. T offered hints
   > cultural & language points
   > features of satire
     * “local man” / not newsworthy
     * unbelievable
     * conversational language
     * mimics real news to criticize
2-Year-Old Unaware He’s Basis For 6 Couples’ Decisions Not To Have Kids

Oblivious to the judgments being passed on him every single day, local 2-year-old Caleb Gibson is completely unaware that he is the sole basis for six couples’ decisions not to have kids, sources said Friday.

True Satirical

If fake: Funny / A Little Funny / Not Funny / Don’t Get It

If fake: Not newsworthy / Unbelievable / Conversational / Criticizes: _____________
Summary of Study 2

• Exposure to media alone did not help.
• Training helped the Ss detect satire
• Training made the Ss more skeptical of real news
Conclusion

• Japanese learners indeed had trouble detecting satire, but...

• Humor training on satire can be useful
  – Media literacy
  – Intercultural competence
    (understand Western humor & viewpoints on issues)
      > less confusion, more connections / interactions?
Final Thoughts: Detecting Satire

Appropriate?
“….satire is different from cynicism and mockery. Its goal is not to denigrate, but to spark active thinking.”
(McClennen & Maisel, 2014)

Student Perspective:
“Young Japanese aren’t so interested in politics, so reading things like satirical news could get us more interested.”
Future Research: Humor in ELT

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Why?
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• Understand the differences to help “fill the gap” in English language classes

II. Empirical Studies on Humor Competency

Why?
• Identify best practices for helping ELLs to appreciate, understand, and produce English humor
• Make humor a more research-based component of language education
Webinar Summary and Conclusion (followed by Q&A II)
Teaching with humor or about humor?

Teach with humor to...
- Reduce anxiety
- Increase student motivation
- Improve classroom atmosphere
- Make learning more memorable

Teach about humor to...
- Provide insights into language and culture
- Improve cross-cultural communicative competence
- Increase critical thinking
- Make learning more memorable
Summary: Student Perspectives Review

1. Very open to inclusion of humor in the classroom (from study abroad experiences, etc.), but...
2. Humor should not be overused, and...
3. Humor is just one tool, and...
4. Humor works best when connected to course content, and...
5. Agree that a teacher can be both humorous and serious, and...
6. Don’t need to understand every joke in class. Overall...
7. Students still lack confidence in own understanding of English humor, but want to improve understanding (both for language development and cross-cultural understanding)
A Final Thought...

“Well-meaning interlocutors may avoid humor...and acts of linguistic creativity...presuming they are too difficult for learners to grasp...

Given the wealth of information that now exists about humorous language-in-interaction, language teachers...have abundant resources available to help students make use of non-serious, playful, and innovative language use.”

(Bell & Pomerantz, 2016)
A Final Thought...

Understanding humor is:  
“...a necessary part of advanced proficiency.” (Cook, 2000, p. 150)

Language classrooms are:  
“...a safe place to ask and experiment with it.” (Bell, 2009, p. 250)
Q&A II
Using Humor to Enhance Language and Culture Instruction

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* Feel free to contact me if you have additional questions or research ideas.