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TEACHING METHODOLOGY

## THE ROLE OF HUMOUR AND FUN IN PROMOTING SPEAKING

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Humour has always been seen as enhancement to classroom teaching and learning. Over time, the problem of humour caught the attention of many thinkers. In language teaching, a teacher can easily see that the learners are often motivated greatly when humour is used in classroom. The effective use of humor is generally viewed as a positive factor in the classroom and it is often identified as a teaching technique for developing a positive learning environment. In the following article the role of humour is shown in promoting speaking through some elements of humour. The results of the work have been calculated and displayed via diagrams and tables.

**Keywords:** humour, foreign language teaching, funny stories and jokes, increasing motivation, experiment, teaching technique.

It is of utmost importance for English teachers to find effective pedagogical tools to help students enhance speaking abilities, among other skills they also need to develop. They must be able to find out the ways of how to make speaking easier and fun for the students to learn. In this case, teachers have responsibilities to guide the students during the learning process and to give them motivation to improve their speaking skills.

The use of humor is generally viewed as a positive factor in the classroom and it is often identified as a teaching technique for developing a positive learning environment. In this context funny stories and jokes are used widely to ensure the positive and excited atmosphere in the classroom and the development of student's speaking skills.

Current methodologies in foreign language teaching are not only based on communication alone, but also on the culture of the people where that particular language is spoken. Culture in this context is defined differently by researchers (Csajbok-Twerefou, 2010). In this context we understand culture

as a summary of geographical location, language(s), political and social life, etiquette, traditions etc. of a nation.

Jokes, anecdotes and funny stories often describing traditions, habits or norms of inhabitants of a particular country are national in nature. Also, many countries have their funny characters, such as Moricka in Hungary or Vovka in Russia around which jokes are invented. In many situations, national humour often underlines the weakness of the state; humour of subcultures makes jokes on the weakness of the subculture, etc.

Jokes and anecdotes of a culture or nation may be used in language teaching classes because they are humorous and describe everyday life of the native speakers very well. Ginman and Ungern-Sternberg observed that “humour can be used to lighten up the class and to provide variety” and therefore advisable to use them in all levels of language teaching (2003:73).

Humour has a special role in the classroom being considered as an effective and appreciated tool for teaching. Studies on this issue (Krashen, 1963) indicate the importance of using humour in the process of capturing and maintaining students’ attention, in creating a positive relationship between teachers and learners, in reducing stress and tension in the classroom, facilitating learning and supporting a good retention, developing creativity and streamlining teaching in general. Therefore, when students observe that the class is organized in a humorous way, that is students and teachers laugh together, those who are often shy to talk will relax and laugh as well. Students in a “lightened” atmosphere will forget about their problem of being afraid to talk in class. While laughing, they have already “contributed”, they have done the first step, stop thinking about their worries and will be able to speak without any fears.

Humour is a major psychological tool that can help students cope with fear and stress, enhance their sense of well-being, boost self-image, self-esteem, self-confidence, as well as alleviate anxiety and depression.

Humour may be injected in various phases of the teaching process. It can be used as an ‘ice breaker’ or to reduce stress and facilitate creativity. Starting each class with humour helps students relax and create positive atmosphere. Humorous breaks during a lesson promote learning by allowing the brain a ‘breather’ to process and integrate lesson material. Short, simple jokes are most appropriate for the introduction and transitions while longer pieces are best at the end of the lesson. The studies show that humour becomes most effective when it is appropriate to the situation, especially when the jokes or anecdotes

used directly related to the class at hand. Humour in the classroom can take many forms like *jokes, puzzles, puns, funny stories, humorous comments* and other humorous items like *magical tricks* (Attardo,1994).

Attardo indicates other benefits of using humour in the classroom, such as:

- retrieving information from previous lessons,
- retaining information more easily,
- humour being a smart way to stimulate children for knowledge,
- as a catalyst between students and teacher,
- as an energizer of the intellect.

Usually, the teacher calls to *jokes, funny analogies, puns, allusions, comic or irony, and also teasing, even sarcasm or ridicule*. Unusual or unconventional associations, role-plays, gender stereotypes, appeal to fantasy / imagination etc. are also ways of building humour in the classroom. Funny questions addressed even in the oral examinations or tests may be used by the teacher to relax and alleviate the atmosphere.

We had an experimental lesson aimed at answering the following questions:

- to what extent the respondents are able to comprehend the humorous text that has been read;
- to what extent the respondents are able to recall the content of the text;
- whether the students' speaking skills are developed through funny stories and jokes.

The data were collected with intermediate students of Grade 9. This was a mixed ability group with 24 learners who were 14-15 years old and in their seventh year of learning English.

We have followed an *action research approach* as it offers a systematic and reflective way of introducing and evaluating improvement in teaching and learning. As described below, we have worked through a number of cycles of research in which we planned actions, implemented them, and evaluated their results.

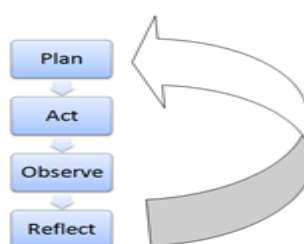


Figure 1. Action Research Approach

At first a *pre-test* has been given to students. The purpose of the test is to get data about the students' basic speaking skills and to ascertain that the students in both groups have the same English proficiency before the research. The example of the pre-test can be seen below:

Part 1. Ask the following questions in pairs.

- a) Where do you live/come from?
- b) Do you study English at school?
- c) What subjects do you study? Do you like it?
- d) Do you enjoy studying English?
- e) Do you think English will be useful for you in the future?
- f) Tell us about your school.

Part 2.

In the next part, you are going to talk to each other. A situation is that you won a competition to visit a new country. You're going to travel together for one week. Talk together about where you would like to go and decide which place you will choose.

Here are some pictures with some ideas to help you. Just think for a few seconds.



Then during the second stage, a funny story-based lesson has been designed and taught, using the story '50 dollars is 50 dollars'. The lesson consists of three activities, done before telling, while telling and after telling the story. The lesson aims to use the language of the story as a vehicle to develop learners' speaking skills. The post-telling stage involves role plays, with learners in pairs acting out in front of the class different episodes from the story. During the lesson some jokes and riddles of both English and American origin are used.

An outline of a lesson experimented on a group of students, an experimental group (EG), aimed at developing their speaking skills, is as follows:

*Class* – 9 (group 1)

*Aim of the lesson:* To develop students' speaking skills through humorous text; to enlarge students' vocabulary (with words and word collocations).

*Preparation*        Texts adapted from methodological guide :  
Whiteboard, dictionaries.

*Time*                25-30 minutes.

*The Way Out*

*John Brown, like most average Americans, is not very sure of his grammar. One day, just before New Year, he decides to give his wife a little surprise. He wants to make her a present of two geese. So he takes a sheet of note- paper and starts to write an order to a shopkeeper. And here the difficulty begins. Of course every schoolboy of ten knows that the plural of the noun goose is geese, because at the grammar lessons at school he often repeats: foot-feet, tooth-teeth, goose-geese and so on. But poor Mr. Brown can't remember the plural on the noun goose, although he knows very well that the plural of foot is feet and the plural of tooth is teeth, because they are ordinary everyday words. He only remembers from the school days that he must be careful with the word goose.*

*At first he writes: " Please, send me two geoses". He stops to read the sentence over loud. It doesn't sound right. So he takes another sheet of paper and writes: "Please, send me two geeses". Again the sentence doesn't sound right. He cannot remember the correct plural of the noun goose and he doesn't want to as his wife. Suddenly he gets a bright idea. He takes a new sheet of paper and writes: "Please, send me a goose". And at the bottom of the sheet he adds a postscript:*

*"P.S. Send me another one with it".*

The headline of the story is written on the board and the students brainstorm about what the story is about.

Then the story is read with students. There are frequent pauses to ask comprehension check questions. The new vocabulary is written on the board with their translations and transcriptions. With advanced students some extra word collocations and idioms may be written.

Then the pupils are engaged in speaking activities on their own. Firstly, they are asked to retell the story in turns, thus making sure that the text is completely perceived by them. Then the learners are asked to make their own stories based on the example of the story they have been introduced to.

During the next lesson, a humorous story is not used anymore. Instead an ordinary text has been chosen from general course book - "Oxbridge". And again the lesson consists of three activities done before telling, during telling and after telling a story. The lesson aims to develop students' speaking skills using the active vocabulary of the story.

During the pre-telling stage, the focus is on preparing the learners for the story by introducing key language. The telling stage includes a number of activities such as repeating words and phrases from the story, asking and answering questions and predicting story events. Finally, the post-telling stage consists of a number of activities - comprehension questions, true/false, etc.

An outline of a lesson experimented on a group of students, a control group (CG), aimed at developing their speaking skills, is as follows:

*Class* – 9 (group 2)

*Aim of the lesson:* To develop students' speaking skills through a text adapted from general course book of the 9th grade to enlarge students' vocabulary (with words and word collocations)

*Preparation* Text adapted from general course book:  
Whiteboard, dictionaries

*Time* 25-30 minutes.

*Oxbridge*

*Oxford and Cambridge are the most prestigious universities in Britain. People from all over the world come to get education here. Though both universities are independent they are very often called collectively Oxbridge.*

*Oxford and Cambridge universities are made up of a number of colleges. Each college is different. Each of them has a special name and its coat of arms.*

*Each college is governed by a master. The largest ones have more than 400 members, the smallest colleges have less than 30. Each college offers teaching in a wide range of courses. Each college has a chapel, a dining room, a hall, a library, room for undergraduates and rooms for teaching purposes.*

*The students' life is characterized by sporting activities and a large number of students' societies and clubs for any interest.*

*Besides the undergraduates have special weekly newspaper, which reports on everything of interest and the important events.*

The education system in different countries is discussed. The students brainstorm about the name of the text. Then the text is read with students and again there are frequent pauses to ask comprehension check questions. The new vocabulary is written on the board with their translations and transcriptions.

After the reading of the text from general course book, the students are ready for activities. The students take turns to ask questions based on a sentence of the text. The other student answers the question and then asks a classmate a question based on a different sentence. The exercise continues until all the sentences in the text are used.

The scoring system promoted by Harris (1979) has been used as a scoring test criteria. After the experimental lesson, a post-test has been administered to find out the value of the experiment, whether or not speaking ability of the learners improves. In this stage every student speaks based on the topic. After that, their speaking is recorded to analyze and compare between pre-test and post-test. The example of the post-test is below:

Part 1. Answer the following questions.

- a) When do you usually wake up and get up?
- b) What do you have for breakfast?
- c) How do you go to school?
- d) How many lessons do you usually have a day?
- e) What do you do after school?
- f) What do you do on weekends?

Part 2. These are photos from your photo album. Choose one photo to describe to your friend.

1.



2.



3.



You will have to start speaking in 1.5 minutes and will speak for not more than 2 minutes (12–15 sentences). In your talk remember to speak about:

- where and when the photo was taken
- what/who is in the photo
- what is happening
- why you keep the photo in your album
- why you decided to show the picture to your friend

You have to talk continuously, starting with: "I've chosen photo number ...".

The results of the data analysis from pre-test and post-test of the EG students' ability is shown in the following table:

**Table 1.**

**Results of the analysis (EG)**

Classification	Score	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	13-15	1	8,3%	2	16,6%
Very good	10-12	2	16,6%	3	25%
Good	7-9	3	25%	5	41,8%
Average	4-6	4	33,5%	1	8,3%
Poor	1-3	2	16,6%	1	8,3%
Total		12	100	12	100

Based on the table above the final score is showed in experimental research for pre-test- there were 2 (16,6%) from 12 students classified as poor, 4 (33,5%) classified as average, 3 (25%) classified as good, 2 (16,6%) students were classified as very good and 1(8,3%) student was classified as excellent for speaking ability. While in post-test, the table in final score showed that there was just 1 classified as poor and 1 (8,3%) student as average. There were 5 (41,8%) students classified into good, 3 (25%) students classified into very good class and 2 (16,6%) students are classified as excellent.

The results of the data analysis from pre-test and post-test of the CG students' ability is shown in the following table:

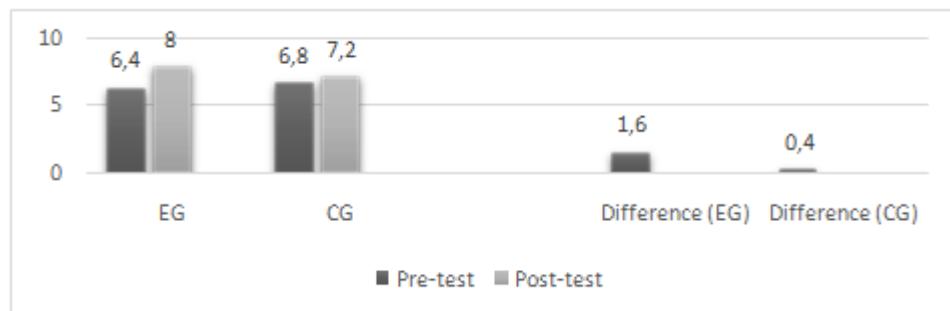


**Table 2.**

**Results of the analysis (CG)**

Classification	Score	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	13-15	1	8,3%	1	8,3%
Very good	10-12	2	16,6%	3	25%
Good	7-9	4	33,5%	4	33,5%
Average	4-6	4	33,5%	3	25%
Poor	1-3	1	8,3%	1	8,3%
Total		12	100	12	100

Based on the table above showing final score in CG for pre-test, there was 1(8,3%) student classified into poor score level. There were 4 (33,5%) classified as average, 4 (33,5%) more students were classified as good, 2 (16,6%) students were classified as very good and 1(8,3%) student as excellent for their speaking ability. In post-test, the table in final score showed that there was still 1(8,3%) student classified in poor score level and 3 (25%) students as average. There were 4 (33,5%) students classified into good, 3 (25%) students classified into a very good class and 1(8,3%) student was classified as excellent. The diagram below shows the difference of the results of EG and CG.



**Figure 2. The mean score difference of EG and CG**

The given results show that the students of experimental group expressed themselves more freely than the students of control group. The main reason is that humorous funny stories created relaxed and comfortable atmosphere, thus making the students express their ideas and thoughts without hesitation and feel at ease.

Thus we can say that:

*Firstly*, the results obtained from analysis tend to confirm that there is a significant improvement of students' speaking skills through funny story based

lessons. During the lesson the students do not feel pressed and withdrawn at all. Furthermore, they are even persistent in making efforts to take part in discussions, tell their own joke and guess the answer of a riddle. Thus, students adopted a new strategy of leaning the target language that is going beyond the frame of the classroom setting and interacting with the teacher and classmates.

*Secondly*, humorous and language play input is of special importance because of the element of interest which is a highly crucial factor for foreign language acquisition and particularly for lowering the affective filter. When the affective filter is high, individuals may experience stress, anxiety, and lack of self-confidence that may inhibit success in acquiring a second language. In order to lower the affective filter, student work should center on meaningful communication rather than on form; input should be interesting and so contribute to a relaxed classroom atmosphere.

We support the idea that funny stories and jokes used in the classroom make learning more interactive and help students develop speaking skills easily that cannot be taught in a traditional lesson format. It is a tool to be used in the classroom. When used correctly it increases students' enjoyment and strengthens their understanding of concepts.

## ՀՈՒՄՈՐԸ ԵՎ ԶՎԱՐՃԱՆՔԸ ՈՐՊԵՍ ԲԱՆԱՎՈՐ ԽՈՍՔԻ ԽԹԱՆՄԱՆ ՄԻՋՈՑ

Հարությունյան Մ. Ա., Միքայելյան Ա. Ա.

Հումորը միշտ դիտվել է որպես դասընթացների դասավանդման և ուսուցման արդյունավետ մեթոդ: Ժամանակի ընթացքում հումորի խնդիրը գրավել է շատ մտածողների ուշադրությունը: Լեզուների դասավանդման ժամանակ ուսուցիչը կարող է հեշտությամբ տեսնել, որ սովորողները հաճախ մոտիվացված են, երբ դասարանում օգտագործվում է հումորը: Ուսուցիչների հումորի արդյունավետ օգտագործումը, ընդհանուր առմամբ, դիտվում է որպես դասարանում դրական գործոն, և այն հաճախ նույնացվում է որպես ուսուցման մեթոդ՝ դրական ուսումնական միջավայրի զարգացման համար: Այս հոդվածը ցույց է տալիս, թե ինչպես է հումորը զարգացնում բանավոր խոսքը: Աշխատանքի արդյունքները հաշվարկվել և ցուցադրվել են գծապատկերների և աղյուսակների միջոցով:

**Բանալի բառեր.** հումոր, օտար լեզվի դասավանդում, զվարճալի պատմություններ և կատակներ, մոտիվացիայի խթանում, զիտափորձ, դասավանդման հնարք:

## РОЛЬ ЮМОРА И ЗАБАВЫ КАК СРЕДСТВО СТИМУЛЯЦИИ УСТНОЙ РЕЧИ

Арутюнян М. А., Микаелян А. А.

Юмор всегда рассматривался стимул для улучшения преподавания и обучения в классе. Со временем проблема юмора привлекла внимание многих исследователей. В преподавании языка учитель может легко увидеть, что ученики очень часто мотивированы тогда, когда юмор уместно используется в классе. Эффективное использование юмора учителями обычно рассматривается как положительный фактор в обучении и часто определяется как метод обучения для создания позитивной учебной среды. В статье показана роль юмора через элементы речи, содержащие эти языковые элементы. Результаты работы были рассчитаны и отображены в виде диаграмм и таблиц.

**Ключевые слова:** юмор, обучение иностранному языку, забавные истории и шутки, повышение мотивации, эксперимент, способ обучения.

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