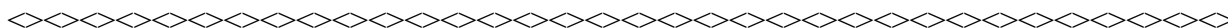


Name (in Romaji):	→
Student Number:	→
Class Day + Period:	→

RESPONDING TO JOKES IN ENGLISH

When someone tells a joke in your native language, how do you respond? On the lines below, list a few possible ways that you could respond. (Hint: think of different scenarios when jokes are told to you.) When finished, discuss your answers with a partner.



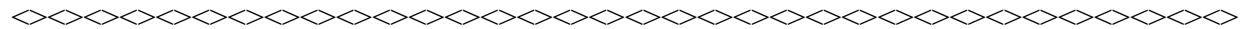
Joke telling is a very dynamic and complex process. Jokes require cognitive processing on the part of the listener. Carrell (1997) discusses this complexity. It requires the listener to possess not only **linguistic competence** but also **joke competence** and **humor competence**. This means that the listener must first know the language being spoken (at least parts of it) and understand what was said. Second, the listener must realize that the utterance is intended as a joke. At this stage the semantic scripts required for understanding the joke are activated. This processing must occur before the listener can use their humor competence to judge whether the utterance was funny. This processing is typically unconscious, but uncertainty can arise. If there is a problem with the listener's joke competence, they may ask, "Are you joking?" At the level



of humor competence, the confession of “I don’t get it” may follow. This entire situation is further complicated by the fact that humor performance is involved (Attardo, 2001). A listener may have sufficient linguistic, joke, and humor competence, but may fail at any stage to find a joke funny due to situational constraints, for instance, from fatigue, excessive background noise, time limitations, or because they have heard that joke multiple times before. All of this does not even take into account the fact that joke telling requires its own processes that tellers must pay attention to (e.g., intonation, pronunciation, vocabulary choice, timing). Thus, understand that under normal circumstances people may find certain jokes funny, but through no fault of their own they don’t laugh. The jokes are just not told very well.

References

- Attardo, S. (2001). Humor and irony in interaction: From mode adoption to failure of detection. In Anolli, L., Ciceri, R., and Riva, G. (eds.), *Say not to say: New perspectives on miscommunication* (pp. 367–387), IOS Press.
- Carrell, A. (1997). Joke competence and humor research. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 10(2), 173–185.








It is often said that one cannot teach comedy. A person either has a talent for telling jokes or does not. You do not need to agree with this statement. In fact, not a few people disagree with it (since many stand-up comedians require years to perfect their craft). That said, even if you do not tell jokes or do not want to improve your joke-telling style, you will nevertheless likely encounter English jokes or humorous situations with English speakers, and you must react to them in some way (especially if you have cleared the humor competence stage).

The following illustrates how native English speakers typically react to jokes. There are, of course, other ways, and some reactions themselves can be a form of humor.



How Native English Speakers Respond to Jokes

1  green	Full humor comprehension / finds it funny The following may be said (with no sarcasm): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Hahaha!” (typical laughter) • “That’s hilarious!” / “That is funny!” Physical reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Big smile / Loud laugh • Wiping tears away / Slapping the table
2  yellow	Full humor comprehension / finds it only a little funny The following may be said (with little to no sarcasm): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Heh heh.” / “Haha, nice.” (some laughter) • “Not bad!” / “I see what you did there.” / “That’s clever.” • “That’s so cheesy.” / “That’s a dad joke.” Physical reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smile • Chuckle
3  orange	Full humor comprehension / finds it unfunny The following may be said (with some sarcasm): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Yeah, I get it...” / “Meh.” / “Okay...” The following may be said using sarcasm: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Wow... Hilarious.” / “That’s the best joke I’ve ever heard.” The following are cringe (groan) reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Oof.” / “Yikes.” / “Ugh.”
4  red	Lacks full humor comprehension <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Wait, what?” / “I don’t get it.” • “Can you explain that?” / “Why is that funny?” / “I think I missed something.” Physical reactions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polite smile • Squint eyes
5  black	No humor comprehension (or possibly return humor) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blank stare or silence • “Oh, is that a science joke?” • Avoids it by changing the subject or otherwise ignoring the joke



***** HOMEWORK TASK *****

Read each response below. For each one, on the Answer Sheet:

- (a) Decide if it is an appropriate English response to a joke. Mark with a √ or an X .
- (b) Categorize it by number according to the list on the previous page.
- (c) Explain its use (e.g., tone). Also consider if and how sarcasm could influence the response.

A. “That was amazing!”

→ √

→ 1

→ The listener was impressed. Sarcasm = 1 changes to 3; shows mockery

B. “Uhhh... okay?”	L. “Haha... Wow.”
C. “What’s so funny about that?”	M. “Ohhhh! I get it now!”
D. <i>Blank stare</i>	N. (Fake laugh) “Ha. Ha. Ha.”
E. “That joke is trash.”	O. “I don’t get it, but I’ll pretend I do.”
F. “I totally get it!... Wait, no I don’t.”	P. “Was that supposed to be funny?”
G. “Hahaha... Wow, that was bad.”	Q. “You just made my day!”
H. “You really need better material.”	R. “Huh?”
I. “Haha, yeah... I think?”	S. “Boo! Try again!”
J. “Knock knock—who cares?”	T. “I’m confused and concerned.”
K. “That’s gold! Absolute gold!”	

Understand that there is some amount of flexibility and variation possible in the answers.

Bring the printed Answer Sheet with your answers to the next class.

