

Name (in Romaji):	→
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THEORIES AND PRACTICE ABOUT HUMOR AND LEARNING

PART 1: THE THEORIES

Research into humor is very long and complicated. To simplify the task of understanding what humor is, let us explore both the theoretical foundations that explain why humor is funny and why it can be effective when teaching or learning a language.

To begin with, there are three prominent theories of humor that are worth exploring: the incongruity theory, the superiority theory, and the relief theory.

Incongruity Theory

This theory says that humor happens when something is surprising or different from what we expect. For example, a joke is often funny because the ending is unexpected. According to Morreall (1983), our brains enjoy the challenge of noticing and understanding these differences.

In language learning, students may laugh when they see unusual grammar or hear a strange cultural expression. This surprise makes them think more deeply. When students actively try to understand something unexpected, they are more likely to remember it. In this way, humor can help improve memory and understanding.

Superiority Theory

This theory is very old (it comes from the ideas of Plato and Aristotle). It says that we laugh when we feel smarter or better than someone else. For example, we might laugh when someone makes a mistake or acts silly.

Of course, in the classroom, this kind of humor needs to be used carefully. It can be hurtful if someone feels laughed at. However, self-deprecating humor — when the teacher jokes about their own mistakes — can be useful. It makes the teacher seem more friendly and human. This can help students feel more relaxed and comfortable, which is good for learning.



Relief Theory

This theory comes from the work of Sigmund Freud (1928). It says that humor helps us release stress or feelings that we usually hide. In other words, laughing is a way to feel better when we are nervous or worried.

In language classes, students often feel shy or are afraid of making mistakes. If the teacher uses humor, the classroom becomes a more relaxed place. This makes it easier for students to speak, try new things, and learn without fear. Humor helps students take risks, which is important when learning a new language.

DISCUSSION TIME

1. Discuss ways or examples of how incongruity theory can help students remember language.
2. Explain why superiority theory should be used carefully in the classroom.
3. Give example ways by which teachers can use humor to reduce students' stress or anxiety.

QUIZ 1

1. What is the main idea of incongruity theory?
 - a. Humor helps us relax and feel less stressed.
 - b. Humor is funny when it is different from what we expect.
 - c. Humor makes us feel better than others.
 - d. Humor is only for advanced learners.
2. According to superiority theory, why do people laugh?
 - a. Because they are surprised by something
 - b. Because they want to remember grammar
 - c. Because they feel smarter or better than another person
 - d. Because they are relaxed
3. Which humor theory is connected to the ideas of Sigmund Freud?
 - a. incongruity theory
 - b. superiority theory
 - c. relief theory
 - d. memory theory



4. Which of the following is an example of relief theory in the classroom?
- A student laughs at a classmate's mistake.
 - A teacher uses a joke to help students relax before a test.
 - Students enjoy a confusing grammar rule.
 - A pun is used to teach vocabulary.

PART 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE BENEFITS

Learning a new language can be very stressful for many students. They may feel nervous about making mistakes, speaking in front of others, or understanding a different culture. These pressures can cause a lot of anxiety. However, using humor in the classroom can help students feel more relaxed and reduce their stress.

According to Sullivan (2000), humor is very powerful for lowering anxiety and creating a better learning environment. When students laugh, their bodies release endorphins, which are special chemicals that make people feel happy (Berk, 2001). These endorphins help students feel less stressed and improve their mood.

When students are in a good emotional state, they are more willing to speak, try new things, and join activities. They are also able to focus better on the lesson. In addition, humor can help build a feeling of community in the classroom. Students feel closer to each other and are less afraid to participate. They feel like they are part of a team rather than being alone.

Reducing stress is very important for learning a language. When students are relaxed, it is easier for them to remember new words, grammar, and ideas. A relaxed mind is much more open to learning.

DISCUSSION TIME

- Why do you think learning a new language can be stressful for many students?
- How can humor help students learn better in the classroom?
- Have you ever experienced a funny or relaxing moment in class that helped you learn?
Please share it.



QUIZ 2

1. Which of the following best explains why language learners may experience anxiety in the classroom?
 - a. They lack interest in learning foreign languages.
 - b. They are often distracted by humor in class.
 - c. They fear making errors, public speaking, and unfamiliar cultural contexts.
 - d. They are overwhelmed by excessive homework assignments.
2. According to the passage, how does laughter physiologically support language learning?
 - a. It increases students' energy levels, allowing them to study longer.
 - b. It triggers the release of endorphins, which enhance mood and reduce stress.
 - c. It strengthens memory retention through repetitive movements.
 - d. It improves listening comprehension by stimulating brain activity.
3. What is one key benefit of humor in creating a positive classroom environment, as discussed in the text?
 - a. It allows teachers to avoid using traditional assessments.
 - b. It enables students to learn without needing to study grammar.
 - c. It fosters a sense of community and encourages active participation.
 - d. It reduces the importance of structured lesson planning.

PART 3: MEMORY AND RETENTION

One important benefit of using humor in language learning is that it can help students remember things better. Research shows that when information is given in a funny way, students are more likely to remember it than when it is given in a serious way (Schmidt, 1994). There are a few reasons why humor works so well for memory.

First, humor catches students' attention. When students find something funny, they focus on it more carefully. Paying attention is the first step to remembering something. Humor often surprises students and makes them feel happy, which helps the information stand out in their minds (Summerfelt, Lippman, & Hyman, 2010).

Second, humor encourages deeper thinking. Understanding a joke usually requires problem-solving and seeing connections between different ideas. This deeper thinking helps



students remember the information better by moving it into long-term memory (Schmidt & Williams, 2001).

Third, humor can create strong and unusual images in students' minds. For example, if a teacher uses a funny story or a pun to explain a new vocabulary word or grammar rule, students are more likely to remember it later (Ziv, 1988). These strong, funny images are easier to recall when needed.

DISCUSSION TIME

1. Have you ever remembered a word or grammar rule better because it was taught in a funny or unusual way? Please explain.
2. Why do you think humor might help with long-term memory more than serious explanations?
3. Can you think of a funny example or image that could help someone remember a difficult English word or phrase?

QUIZ 3

1. Why does humor help students remember information more effectively?
 - a. It helps students focus and promotes deeper thinking and strong mental images.
 - b. It allows students to relax and forget unimportant information.
 - c. It replaces the need for reviewing or practicing vocabulary.
 - d. It makes grammar rules unnecessary to learn.
2. What is one cognitive benefit of understanding a joke in the classroom?
 - a. It requires only surface-level memorization.
 - b. It involves solving problems and connecting ideas.
 - c. It helps students wake up once class is over.
 - d. It ends the need for students to ask too many questions.
3. Which of the following best illustrates how humor helps create strong mental images for memory?
 - a. Giving students weekly vocabulary quizzes
 - b. Asking students to write essays every class
 - c. Repeating new vocabulary words five times aloud
 - d. Using a pun or funny story to explain a new word



PART 4: PROMOTING CREATIVITY AND CRITICAL THINKING

Humor is naturally creative. It often requires seeing things from different points of view and making new and interesting connections. This creative side of humor can be used to help students become more creative and better critical thinkers. When students work with humor, they are encouraged to think outside the box, question usual ideas, and find new ways to interpret things.

For example, activities like making jokes, puns, or funny stories in English require students to use their language skills in creative ways. To do this, they need to think carefully about the meanings of words, play with double meanings (like puns), and understand cultural references (McGhee, 1999). These kinds of activities not only make classes more enjoyable but also help students gain a deeper understanding of English and how it can be used in different ways.

Humor also involves noticing and solving incongruities, or things that are surprising or don't match what we expect. To understand a joke, students have to find the hidden logic or recognize why something is funny. This requires important thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Morreall, 1983). Practicing these skills through humor makes thinking feel more playful and natural, but it still builds strong mental abilities.

In addition to helping creativity and critical thinking, humor also encourages students to have a more open and curious attitude. When students feel free to laugh and make jokes, they are more willing to ask questions, try new ideas, and take risks. This kind of positive attitude is very important for language learning because it helps students experiment with the language and learn from their mistakes without fear.

DISCUSSION TIME

1. How do you think creating jokes or puns in English could help you become a better language learner?
2. Do you agree that humor can improve critical thinking? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever learned something better because it made you laugh or seemed unusual?



QUIZ 4

1. According to the passage, how does humor support critical thinking?
 - a. It helps students memorize grammar rules through repetition.
 - b. It encourages students to accept traditional ideas without question.
 - c. It requires students to analyze unexpected situations and find logical connections.
 - d. It reduces the need for evaluation and analysis in learning.
2. What language skills are used when students create jokes or puns in English?
 - a. Understanding of word meanings, cultural context, and double meanings
 - b. Just the skills of memorization and translation
 - c. Imitation of native speakers without the need for comprehension
 - d. Repeating vocabulary lists automatically
3. Why is a positive attitude important when learning a language?
 - a. It helps students avoid making mistakes entirely.
 - b. It motivates students to compete with others.
 - c. It allows students to take risks and learn from their mistakes without fear.
 - d. It keeps students from asking too many questions.

PART 5: BUILDING RAPPORT AND CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

One of the biggest benefits of using humor in the ESL/EFL classroom is that it helps build good relationships between teachers and students, and also among students themselves. Having a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere is very important for successful language learning. Humor can help by breaking down barriers and creating a feeling of friendship and respect.

To begin with, humor can make teachers more approachable. When teachers use humor, they seem more friendly and easy to talk to. This can make students feel less nervous and more willing to speak and participate in class. According to Gorham and Christophel (1990), using humor helps create a relaxed and open classroom environment. When students feel comfortable, they are more motivated to learn and more confident in using English.

Humor can also help teachers manage the classroom in a positive way. If there is a small problem, like students losing focus, a well-timed joke or funny comment can help bring their



attention back without being strict or harsh. This way, the classroom stays a safe and enjoyable place, where students feel respected and valued.

DISCUSSION TIME	
1.	How does a teacher's use of humor affect how students feel about participating in class?
2.	Can you think of a time when humor helped solve a problem or reduce stress in a classroom?
3.	Do you think a relaxed classroom is always better for learning? Why or why not?
QUIZ 5	
1.	According to the passage, how does humor help improve relationships in the classroom? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> It reduces the need for classroom rules. It helps students ignore problems and focus only on fun. It breaks down social barriers and encourages friendship and respect. It allows teachers to avoid lesson planning.
2.	What is one way humor can improve classroom management? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> By letting students talk whenever they want By using jokes to punish misbehavior By refocusing students' attention in a light, non-strict way By avoiding discipline and grading altogether
3.	Why might students be more motivated in a classroom where the teacher uses humor? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Because they receive rewards for laughing Because humor makes the teacher seem more friendly and approachable Because humor helps them avoid difficult assignments Because they don't need to participate as much

PART 6: HUMOR AND UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CULTURES

Humor is closely connected to culture. To understand jokes in a foreign language, it's often necessary to understand the culture behind the language. In ESL/EFL classrooms, humor can be a useful way to help students learn about cultural understanding. When teachers introduce students to humor from different cultures, they help students develop intercultural competence,



which is the ability to understand and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds.

For example, jokes, idioms, and puns often show cultural values, history, and ways of thinking. If students learn to enjoy and understand these kinds of humor, they also learn more about the culture of the language they are studying. This not only improves their English skills, but also helps them get ready to use English in real-life, international situations (Bell, 2007).

Also, talking about funny things from different cultures in class can start interesting conversations. These discussions can help students compare their own culture with others and become more open-minded and understanding. This kind of cultural exchange can help students see the world from different points of view and respect many types of human experiences and expressions.

DISCUSSION TIME

1. Why do you think understanding culture is important for understanding humor in another language?
2. Can you think of a joke or funny expression from your culture that might be difficult for someone from another country to understand?
3. How can learning about humor from other cultures help people become more open-minded?

QUIZ 6

1. What is *intercultural competence*, as described in the passage?
 - a. The ability to understand and communicate with people from other cultures.
 - b. The ability to memorize jokes in different languages.
 - c. The skill of speaking multiple languages without mistakes.
 - d. The knowledge of grammar rules in various languages.
2. How can humor help students prepare for using English in international situations?
 - a. By helping them memorize more adequate vocabulary more quickly
 - b. By teaching them cultural values and ways of thinking through jokes and idioms
 - c. By allowing them to avoid focusing on grammar and spelling rules
 - d. By making every situation feel like a joke that is to be laughed at



3. What is one benefit of discussing humor from different cultures in class?
- It encourages cultural comparison and open-minded thinking.
 - It helps students avoid difficult topics of conversation.
 - It makes all students agree on the same cultural values.
 - It eliminates the need to learn about other cultures.

PART 7: CHOOSING THE RIGHT LEVEL OF HUMOR

When using humor in the ESL/EFL classroom, it's important to think carefully about the students' language level. Humor can be a powerful teaching tool, but it needs to match the students' ability. If the humor is too difficult or unclear, it may cause confusion instead of helping.

For beginners, simple and visual humor works best. For example, cartoons, slapstick comedy (like someone slipping on a banana peel), and visual jokes don't require a lot of language knowledge. Teachers can use pictures, actions, and easy words to help students understand the humor. Exaggerated facial expressions or body movements can also help students enjoy the joke without needing advanced vocabulary or grammar.

Students at the intermediate level can understand slightly more complex humor, such as wordplay (puns) and short, simple funny stories. These types of humor help them practice basic vocabulary and sentence structures.

Advanced learners can enjoy more sophisticated types of humor, like satire, irony, and jokes that include cultural knowledge. At this level, humor can also be used to teach deeper meanings in language and culture. Teachers might use short comedy stories, stand-up comedy clips, or clever dialogues. These kinds of humor encourage students to think more deeply and use English in a more advanced and creative way.

DISCUSSION TIME

- Why do you think it's important for teachers to match the type of humor to the students' language level?
- What kinds of humor do you personally find easiest or most difficult to understand in English?
- How can humor help advanced learners go beyond basic grammar and vocabulary?



QUIZ 7

1. What is the main reason simple, visual humor is recommended for beginners?
 - a. It teaches more advanced grammar at a quicker pace.
 - b. It avoids using any foreign language use at all.
 - c. It can be understood without needing much language knowledge.
 - d. It uses cultural references that only beginners already know.
2. According to the passage, which type of humor is best suited for intermediate-level students?
 - a. Satire and irony
 - b. Complex political jokes
 - c. Wordplay and short funny stories
 - d. Physical comedy only
3. How can humor benefit advanced English learners in the classroom?
 - a. It helps them memorize more difficult vocabulary through repetition.
 - b. It provides advanced practice with writing formal essays.
 - c. It replaces the need for reading and listening practice.
 - d. It allows them to explore deeper cultural meanings and use language creatively.

PART 8: TYPES AND MEDIA**Jokes**

Simple jokes with clear punchlines are often very effective. For example, a joke about irregular verbs or idioms can review key grammar or vocabulary points while making the class more fun and relaxed. For instance: “What did the verb do when it went crazy? It *broke* down, then it *ran* away!” This joke can help students review “break – broke – broken” and “run – ran – run.” Humor like this helps students to feel more comfortable and improve their ability to recall what they’ve learned.

Puns

Puns are jokes that play with words that have multiple meanings or similar sounds. They are useful for teaching vocabulary and helping students understand how words can be used in different ways. Here is an example: “Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana.” This pun



shows how the same word (“flies”) can mean different things. Understanding puns helps students think about how language works in real-life situations and builds flexibility in their vocabulary.

Humorous Stories

Telling funny stories is a great way to keep students interested and focused. Humorous stories can make difficult grammar or sentence patterns easier to understand and remember. When stories include familiar situations or cultural topics, they also help students understand the culture behind the language and feel more connected to it.

Humor can be brought into the classroom and taught via many different forms. For example, short comedy videos — like clips from sitcoms, stand-up comedy, or funny commercials — can be used to show how English is used in everyday situations. Teachers can pause the video to explain jokes, talk about cultural background, or check students’ understanding. This type of activity also helps improve listening skills while keeping students engaged. Comic strips, including memes, are also wonderful because they are simple and visual. They are easy to understand and can help explain idioms, slang, or cultural ideas.

DISCUSSION TIME	
1. How can jokes and puns help students remember vocabulary or grammar more easily?	
2. What are the benefits of using funny videos or comic strips in language learning?	
3. Have you ever learned something in English from a funny story, video, or meme?	
QUIZ 8	
1. Why are puns especially useful in the ESL/EFL classroom?	
a. They teach formal grammar rules directly.	
b. They help students memorize spelling.	
c. They avoid cultural confusion.	
d. They show how words can have multiple meanings or similar sounds.	
2. What makes comic strips and memes especially helpful for students?	
a. They typically use formal English.	
b. They are based on textbook examples.	
c. They use no slang or humor.	
d. They are simple, visual, and can explain idioms or cultural ideas.	



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