

[laughs]:: Paralinguistic features in square brackets, colons indicate start/finish

.../.....\ ... Simultaneous speech

.../.....\ ...

? Rising or question intonation

= Continued speech

L Lecturer

S Student

Ss Students



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## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the functions of instructors' humorous verbalizations with regard to their instructional implications in academic ESL classrooms. As the data have demonstrated, the use of humorous language play in L2 learning environment provides a wide range of opportunities for acquiring/learning both L2 form and meaning and understanding form-meaning connections, particularly the non-literal meaning of utterances, as well as the cultural nuances inherent in most humorous exchanges. Although the present data do not evidence the learners' development of linguistic and cultural knowledge, it is evident that language-based humor in L2 classrooms can make the embedded linguistic and socio-cultural information in the target language accessible to L2 learners, which can eventually contribute to their development of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). It is also implied that to understand and appreciate verbal humor in a second language, learners need to master specialized terminologies for jokes and gain the knowledge of humor communication in the target language. In the same token, data suggest that L2 instructors too need to be linguistically and culturally competent in order to construct effective instructional humor. As Bell (2005) argues "successful construction of humor requires sophisticated linguistic and cultural knowledge in order to carefully select and place appropriate linguistic and extra-linguistic cues" (p.204)

It was also noticed that some humorous attempts were not appreciated by the students. The reasons might lie in their inability to understand the figurative

aspect of humorous language and/or in the culture-specific nature of humor. Additionally, as our previous study indicated besides linguistic and cultural information, updated knowledge of the current events in the given context determines the way people understand and participate in humorous communication (see Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011).

Overall, the data suggest that humorous verbalizations in L2 learning environment can function as devices for constructing and broadening L2 learners' knowledge of language form, meaning, and cultural understanding. In other words, use of verbal humor such as word plays, funny examples, puns, jokes, riddles, etc. highlights the linguistic and cultural information in the target language and provides opportunities for the learners to have access to new aspects of L2 resources (e.g., semantic, syntactic, phonological and pragmatic information). By the same token, as communication in a second language requires understanding both serious and non-serious interpretation of the utterances, humor functions as a mechanism that makes the input related to non-serious side of the language accessible to the learners. In light of this view, then, instructors' use of verbal humor can be perceived as an instructional tool to rehearse both the use and usage of the language, besides the fact that humor elicits greater student involvement via its attention-gaining nature which can eventually prime increased L2 learning.

Transcription conventions

+ + Pause of up to two seconds

YEAH Capitals indicate emphatic stress

[h] Laughing exhalation

(( )) Detailed information

expansion of cultural understanding.

Instances of culture-related humor in the data included instructors' sharing funny experiences, cracking cultural jokes, and telling personal anecdotes. Humor surfaced when instructors shared with students how misunderstandings happened, particularly in interactions with newcomers in and out of the campus. For example, one male instructor told his experience of supervising a female student who used to come to supervision sessions along with her husband and that the husband used to keep talking and ask questions more than the wife (the student). In another session, he talked about another female student who used to bring her three year old kid to supervision sessions. The instructor extended his humorous comments by saying that "*I liked to play with the kid rather than give supervision to the mother*". Having amused the class, the instructor acknowledged that although the students' behaviors seemed funny to him at first, later on he found that according to those particular students' religion/culture, it was not appropriate for a female adult to be alone with a man who is not '*mahram*' to them. Mahram is an Arabic term meaning somebody (of the opposite sex) very close to you by blood or marriage.

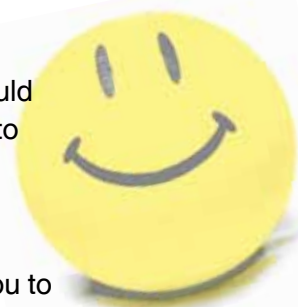
These examples indicate that cultural knowledge is evoked by humor and if classroom humor is related to the target language culture, it can greatly benefit learners' cultural understanding and eventually their sociocultural competence in L2. Several other examples in the data support this understanding. For instance, in extract (6) below the instructor is explaining to an undergraduate class how a host would treat a drop-by guest differently in Malaysian and western

cultures and how a guest would/should behave in a different way according to each culture.

### (6)

- 1 T: in Malay culture, people invite you to lunch or dinner when you are a drop-by but
- 2 you are not supposed to accept quickly am I right? [laughs] =
- 3 Ss: yeah [laugh]
- 4 T: = especially in their home they are about to have lunch and you happen to drop by,
- 5 they would invite you to share whatever they have, so after a few repeated
- 6 invitations ++ coaxing and all that you reluctantly join them, of course you are
- 7 very hungry you know [laughs]
- 8 Ss: [laugh]
- 9 T: = compare this to western who just ask you once. you say no, they say ok. [laughing]
- 10 and life goes on [laughs]
- 11 [laughter]

This humorous scenario, while attracts students' attention and elicits laughter from the floor (lines 8-11), creates an awareness of a subtle cultural dissimilarity between Malay and Western cultures. In this example, the instructor describes how in Malaysian culture, drop-by visitors expect to be treated when they happen to visit acquaintances around meal times. For the international students, who do not share the same cultural norms as Malaysians, it is obviously a new piece of information to know that people are not supposed to accept the host's invitation quickly (line 2) when they are drop-by visitors, while in similar situations in western culture such 'coaxing' (line 6) and standing for ceremonies to join the host for a meal is rarely expected.



9 S: she devoured the book ((an example from the handouts))

10 T: ah yeah well done she devoured the book, very expressive [laughing] so you

11 have not devoured the article that I gave you last week? ++ you spit on it

12 probably [laughing] you sat on it [laughs]

13 [laughter]

In lines 5-7, the instructor uses examples of metaphor such as *digest the idea* and *stew over the idea* to help students grasp the point. Following the instructor's examples, one student adds another example of metaphor, *she devoured the book*. Praising her example (line 10) the instructor extends it with another metaphorical expression, *so you have not devoured the article I gave you*, (lines 10-11). Then she continues teasing the students with several humorous

remarks, *you spit on it* and *you sat on it* (lines 11-12). Similar to example (4), the instructor's contextualization of the concept of "metaphor" through the use of several authentic examples is clearly an effective strategy to expand the meaning of

the concept in the target language. Besides, situating the point in an amusing play frame, which attracts attention and exposes the learners to the different interpretations and meanings of the concept, makes the point more 'noticeable' and easy to remember. These examples have served to demonstrate that humor can be used as

a strategy to facilitate access to different interpretations/meanings of L2 resources. Specifically in using figurative language, which commonly bears double meanings, use of humor draws the learners' attention to various aspects of the meaning including its serious and non-serious interpretations which can help the learners spot the differences between figurative and literal meaning.

### ● Highlighting Cultural Dissimilarities

A third origin of humor in language is the 'incongruity' in cultural dissimilarities. In addition to foregrounding form and reinforcing meaning (discussed earlier), use of humor highlights cultural dissimilarities between L1 and L2, the point that can be used as a strategy to impart cultural knowledge. With respect to varying values, views, and attitudes of the interactants, understanding

and appreciating L2 humor require being informed of the cultural knowledge and the different culture-specific nuances in an L2 beyond the essential linguistic input. Hence, exposing the learners to culture-related humor can shed light on the learners' sociocultural competence.

Particularly in multilingual and multicultural instructional contexts, like the setting of the present study which hosts an amalgam of different languages such as Malay, Chinese, Indian, English, Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Indonesian, and African, and various dialects of these languages, there are many occasions for instilling humor in language education and

**One of the most potent and strategic skills an instructor can draw on to facilitate L2 instruction and enhance the learners' communicative competence in a second language is the effective use of verbal humor**



- 3 Ss: [laugh]  
 4 = right? they look like water has gone inside them...this is immersion  
 5 Ss: [laugh]  
 6 T: ...I have told you this before, the Bangladeshi workers that come and work in our  
 7 petrol stations they don't have special Malay classes or English classes + Yeah,  
 8 but they learn the petrol language in one week. They work there, they hear people  
 9 talking, and they are able to ask you / merah (red)? hijau (green)?\=  
 10 Ss: /[laugh]\  
 11 T: =sepuluh ringgit (10 ringgit)? penuh (full)?  
 12 Ss: [laugh]  
 13 T: =they don't need classes+ they don't need classes++ it's an immersion  
 14 Ss: [laugh]

In this extract, the instructor makes a humorous analogy between "immersion" and children's going swimming and that they sometimes get drowned in water (line 4). To further elaborate the point she also refers to the Bangladeshi workers who work in Malaysian gas stations and acquire the Malay language from the environment through the phenomenon called "immersion" (line 13). Through several code switchings to the students' L1, which elicits rounds of laughter from the class (lines 9-12), she also gives examples of the language the workers acquire from the environment. Contextualization of L2 concepts in humorous contexts, similar to the examples provided above, is discerned to provide opportunities for L2 learners to notice new aspects of already established L2 meaning. As Bell (2005) notes, in such cases, where coherent amusing

language is used to present new L2 resources/concepts, chances for learning are enhanced and "when acquiring new meanings from context it is easier to learn a new word for a familiar concept than one for a new concept" (p.205).

Similarly, **Schmidt (2001)** suggests that conscious attention to form, or what is referred to as "noticing," is a necessary condition to L2 learning. **Emphasizing the role of attention, he notes that "the concept of attention is necessary in order to understand virtually every aspect of second language acquisition" (Schmidt, 2001, p.3)**

(line 1). Having received no response from the class, she starts teasing them by a metaphorical expression "your jaw dropped" (line 3) and through contextualization of the term in a play frame, she tries to implicitly get the meaning of "metaphor" across.

### (5)

- 1T: what is a metaphor? I ask you in exam, define metaphor ++  
 2 Ss: ((No response))  
 3 T: you see? your jaw dropped [laughs]  
 4 Ss: [laugh]  
 5 T: A::h that is a metaphor [laughing]++ or if you take ideas as food, we can say  
 6 'to digest the idea'++ do we say stew over the idea? or fry that idea [laughs]  
 7 ....see? you have not read it Go[h]d  
 8 Ss:[laugh]



demonstrate that expressions contextualized in humorous utterances provide occasions for the acquisition of new L2 knowledge. In light of this view, perhaps it would be sound to claim that playing with language form to construct humor serves to construct the knowledge of the form. This is because in order to understand and appreciate the employed humor, learners ought to attend the form and discover form-meaning relationships. In the following section we discuss the opportunities that verbal humor/language play offers for reinforcement of “meaning” in a second language.

### ● Reinforcing Meaning

A second source of humor in language is the incongruity inherent in idiomatic expressions and figurative speech. Most idioms in the target language are comprehended in regard to their specialized and figurative meaning rather than their literal meaning. In addition, most L2 idiomatic expressions often do not convey the same meaning as in L1. Hence, the incongruity between the usual and literal meanings of utterances within L2 as well as between L1 and L2 often become potential sources for the creation of humor - the point that can be used as an instructional strategy to reinforce and expand meaning in a second language. Examples supporting this understanding abound in the data. In (3) below, the instructor uses the idiomatic expression “in one piece” (line 2) meaning “not damaged or harmed” to construct humor.

#### (3)

1 T: so I will expect to see your input to the task later ++ ok when you come back  
2 after holidays. alright, please come back  
in one piece. what does it mean to

3 come in one piece? can you come in  
two or three pieces?[laughing]

4 Ss: [laugh]

5 T: = sometimes you do. at least in your  
mind, right?

6 Ss: [laugh]

7 T: ok when you come back we can start  
off the task...

As it can be understood from the instructor’s probing question *what does it mean to come in one piece?* (lines 2-3), on the one hand, he exploits this ironic expression in such a way as to draw students’ attention to a linguistic point. The instructor’s focus on the meaning of this expression can clearly help them remember the point. On the other hand, he uses funny alternatives of the expression (*come in two or three pieces*, line 3) to construct a sense of amusement and re-engage the students with the point being made which can help students to reformulate the concept of “come in one piece”. Such humorous language play, as Bell (2005) notes, can bring L2 concepts into metalinguistic focus. In line with this view, one of the interviewed instructors, who used humor in his teaching on a frequent basis, pointed out that “Intermingling language with humor is an effective way of teaching language”.

Additionally, in example (4) below, in an undergraduate sociolinguistics course, the instructor is explaining the term “immersion” (a method of teaching a second language which uses the target language as a teaching tool, surrounding or “immersing” students in the second language).

#### (4)

1 T: ... children like to go to the swimming  
pool and for some reason don’t want to  
2 come out [laughing]

- articles. another SOURCE will be ++  
right,
- 2 how do you spell source? s o u r c e not  
s a u c e ((spelling the words))
- 3 alright? it is just after lunch probably you  
are thinking about whatever
- 4 SAUCE you had [laughs]
- 5 Ss: [laugh]
- 6 T: or people who speak it in American  
English will say SOURCE /so:rs/  
7 ((pronounced with exaggerated  
American accent)), so I am talking  
about /so:rs/  
8 Ss: [laugh]

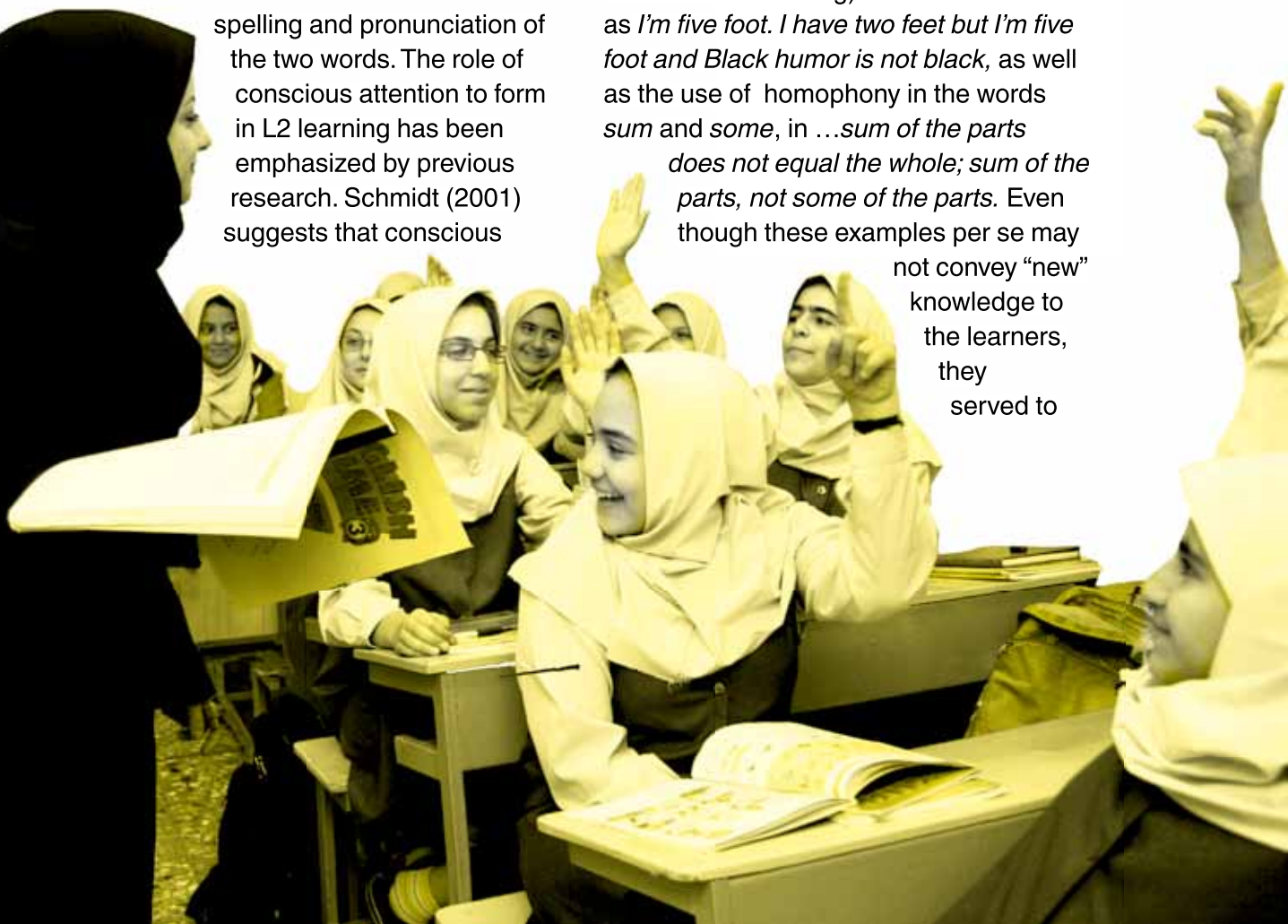
In lines 1-2, the instructor draws students' attention to the phonological similarity between the words "source" (British pronunciation) and "sauce" while putting it in a play frame (lines 3-4). At the same time, he highlights the difference between the American and British pronunciation of the word "source" through explicit explanation of the differences involved in

spelling and pronunciation of the two words. The role of conscious attention to form in L2 learning has been emphasized by previous research. Schmidt (2001) suggests that conscious

attention to form, or what is referred to as "noticing," is a necessary condition to L2 learning. Emphasizing the role of attention, he notes that "the concept of attention is necessary in order to understand virtually every aspect of second language acquisition" (Schmidt, 2001, p.3). In the same vein, the role of LP in raising learners' awareness of L2 forms has been acknowledged by several humor researchers (e.g., Bell, 2005; Sullivan, 2000; Tarone, 2000). Consistent with previous research, the present data suggest that verbal humor that involves playing with and focusing on linguistic information can be a useful device to make L2 knowledge noticeable thereby facilitating access to L2 resources and priming L2 learning.

Further examples of humorous incidents in the data that involved form-related language play were the use of pun and homonymy (words with the same spelling but different meaning) in utterances such as *I'm five foot. I have two feet but I'm five foot and Black humor is not black*, as well as the use of homophony in the words *sum* and *some*, in ...*sum of the parts does not equal the whole; sum of the parts, not some of the parts*. Even though these examples per se may

not convey "new" knowledge to the learners, they served to



that occurred in classroom interactions may contribute to L2 learning. Based on an inductive analysis of the corpus, 124 spontaneous humor instances were identified and classified under three sub-categories labeled “foregrounding form”, “reinforcing meaning”, and “highlighting cultural dissimilarities”. Informed by the employed CDA framework for analysis these sub-categories represented the strategies used to fulfill instructional functions.

● **Foregrounding Form**

One of the natural places that humor is originated in language is due to the “incongruity” (see, Berlyne, 1960) found in playing with and manipulation of language

**Use of humor instances such as puns, wordplays, tongue twisters, alliteration and so on that entail playing with language form to construct humor can draw students’ attention to formal knowledge of the language**

form. The data suggest that verbal humor/ language play in ESL classes can be used as a strategy to bring form-based information to the foreground of attention. Use of humor instances such as puns,

wordplays, tongue twisters, alliteration and so on that entail playing with language form to construct humor can draw students’ attention to formal knowledge of the language. That humor attracts attention and increased attention can benefit student learning is well-recognized by previous research (see Davies & Apter, 1980; Schmitz, 2002; Ziv, 1979). Consistent with this assumption, verbal humor is considered to be a useful device for bringing linguistic information to the foreground of attention and to enhance

learning. As Bell (2005) summarizes most studies on metalinguistic aspects of humor have shown that “explicit talk about language form and use can be a powerful learning device” (p.206).

Several examples from the data provide insights into the role of form-related humorous verbalizations in L2 learning. In the following example, the lecturer addresses a common syntactic error committed by L2 speakers in a non-native context such as Malaysia when using the English expression “pulling somebody’s leg” (lines 1-2). In the excerpts below “T” stands for teacher/instructor, “Ss” for students and “S” for one student participating in humorous exchanges.

**(1)**

1 T: ....I’m just kidding I’m just pulling your leg, you know, what pulling a leg is? ++  
 2 leg is? ++  
 3 =You never say pulling legs, that’s Malaysian version [laughs] you only pull one leg don’t pull both[laughs]=  
 4 pull one leg don’t pull both[laughs]=  
 5 Ss: [laugh]  
 6 T = I don’t know why but don’t[laughs]  
 7 [laughter]

In this example, while putting it in a play frame, the lecturer underscores the correct usage (form) of the word “leg” in the English expression pulling sb’s leg (lines 1-2). He also reminds the students that some L2 speakers use the plural form legs instead of its singular form leg as a common mistake, emphasizing that students should be aware of such errors.

Similarly, in example (2) below, the instructor explicitly refers to the difference in pronunciation of the word “source” in British and American English.

**(2)**

1 T: ...one possible source is academic



humorous utterances were assigned codes representing the strategies that were used to convey humor. The analysis was informed by Fairclough's (1995, 2001) concept of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) which employs a sociological-linguistic approach to the analysis of communicative/discursive events conceptualized in three dimensions: text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. Based on Fairclough's 3-dimensional model, the first level of analysis in this study comprised identifying instances of verbal humor created through textual devices/means realized as semantic, syntactic, and phonological resources in the language. The second level encompassed certain strategies and functions, which draw on the textual knowledge resources to formulate and convey humor. Perhaps it is useful to note that the distinction between "strategy" and "function" is not always clear-cut. Hay (2000) suggests that "strategies can be seen as more precise descriptions of functions" (p.717). In effect, there is always some degree of overlap between strategy and function in reference to the use of verbal humor in discourse; however, what makes strategies distinct from functions is the difference in their level of abstraction. That is, strategies are identified as less abstract representations of functions.

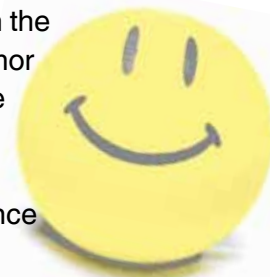
Finally, the third level involved different social, psychological and instructional "effects" of using humor which can impact different aspects of classroom discourse such as teacher-student relationships, classroom culture, instructor and student perceptions and eventually the overall language teaching/learning processes. It should be noted that the data for the present paper come from a larger study

that used qualitative and quantitative analysis to investigate different social, psychological, and instructional functions and effects of instructor humor as a discursive practice in an ESL context; however, the focus of this paper is on the "instructional functions" of verbal humor and the strategies used to fulfill those functions.

Although any humor used in ESL contexts might be of potential relevance to the target language use and/or its acquisition, as humor is a part of any language, "instructional function" is used to refer to introducing, rehearsing and illustrating the content/material related to the target language and culture through specific "word-based" types of humor that provide explicit or implicit opportunities for acquisition/learning of target language use and usage. Schmitz (2002) suggests that humor used in language classroom discourse can be categorized into three groups: universal or reality-based humor, culture-based humor, and linguistic or word-based humor. Universal humor is originated from "the context and the general functioning of the world", culture-based humor involves the cultural knowledge of the language, and word-based humor is created "based on specific features in the phonology, morphology or syntax of particular languages" (Schmitz, 2002, p.93). In light of Schmitz's grouping of humorous discourse, instructional functions of humor in this paper encompass the instances of word-based and cultural humor that can enhance (socio)linguistic and sociocultural competence of L2 learners.

## Results and Discussion

The following sections present the data concerning how instances of verbal humor



devices/means (e.g., semantic, syntactic and phonological elements) in the language, verbal humor hosts various sociocultural and sociolinguistic nuances which L2 learners have to acquire in order to be able to communicate effectively with native speakers who share that knowledge. In light of this view, infusing verbal humor in L2 instruction at different levels (particularly for advanced levels) can benefit learners' L2 development and overall communicative competence (Hymes, 1972).

The present paper examines the instructional functions of instructors' verbal humor, in ESL classrooms with a focus on areas that L2 learning and teaching can benefit from closer examination. More specifically the paper addresses the question of: What instructional functions can humor play in the L2 learning environment?



## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants of this study were university lecturers and students who studied ESL at a Malaysian university. Both undergraduate and postgraduate classes were observed where courses such as sociolinguistics, genre studies, teaching principles, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and research methodology were taught. Participants were of different first language and cultural backgrounds comprising local ethnic Malays, Chinese, Indians, and international students of Iranian, Indonesian, African, and Arab ethnicities. The lecturers were all Malaysians and English was the second language. All the observed lecturers had completed their postgraduate studies in English-speaking countries and were competent users of English due to their

exposure to the linguistic and cultural subtleties of English in native contexts

### **Procedure**

Data sources for this paper comprised classroom observations, audio-recordings, semi-structured interviews with ESL lecturers, and the researchers' fieldnotes which provided useful nonverbal contextual cues in the identification of the "play frame" (shift to non-serious mode of conversation) and the interpretation of verbal humor. Ethical consent was sought from the faculty as well as the participant lecturers and students prior to conducting the study. The audio-recorded data were transcribed and coded manually in line with the principles of coding qualitative data and category construction (Creswell, 2007; Geisler, 2004; Merriam, 2009).

Keeping the research objectives in mind, it took several rounds of analysis to code and categorize the data. Individually coded and categorized transcripts were exchanged and the discrepancies were discussed until a reasonable concordance on appropriate categories was reached. In the first round, all verbal humor units (utterances) were identified. For this purpose numerous clues from previous research were used including laughter and/or smiling responses from the audience, paralinguistic, prosodic and discursal clues such as "unusual voices and pitch changes, very loud or quiet voices, and elongated sounds" (Bell, 2005). Also, speaker intended meaning that "seemed to express non-conventional meaning and created a non-literal word" (Broner & Tarone, 2001) were regarded as instances of humor in the data. In a few cases of doubt whether an utterance was intended to convey humor, we decided to exclude them from the analysis.

In the second round, the identified

language-related/verbal humor warrants a considerable attention in ESL classes.

Narrowing down to L2 contexts, there is a plethora of studies that support the effectiveness of humor in understanding a second language (Bell, 2005) and facilitating L2 learning (Bruner & Tarone, 2001). Humor can also be used to sensitize students to phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic differences within a single language or between a student's L1 and the target language (Deneire, 1995) and is even suggested as necessary for ESL/EFL acquisition/learning (Cook, 2002). Medgyes' (2002) work that explains how funny games, stories, jokes, puzzles, pictures, sketches, dialogues and so on can be fruitfully used for all levels of L2 learners provides additional insights into the role of humor in L2 education.

What becomes evident from this body of research is

that there are strong social, psychological and instructional grounds for the use of humor in language instruction, as briefly discussed above; however, research on instructional functions of verbal humor in ESL classrooms has received scant attention. A basic assumption that verbal humor offers opportunities to benefit second language learning and teaching derives from the view that communicating humor in a second language entails execution of various linguistic and cultural 'knowledge resources' (Raskin & Attardo, 1991) instilled in different

layers of the language, which become accessible to the learners through the use of verbal humor.

That is, besides the primarily linguistic input transmitted through the textual

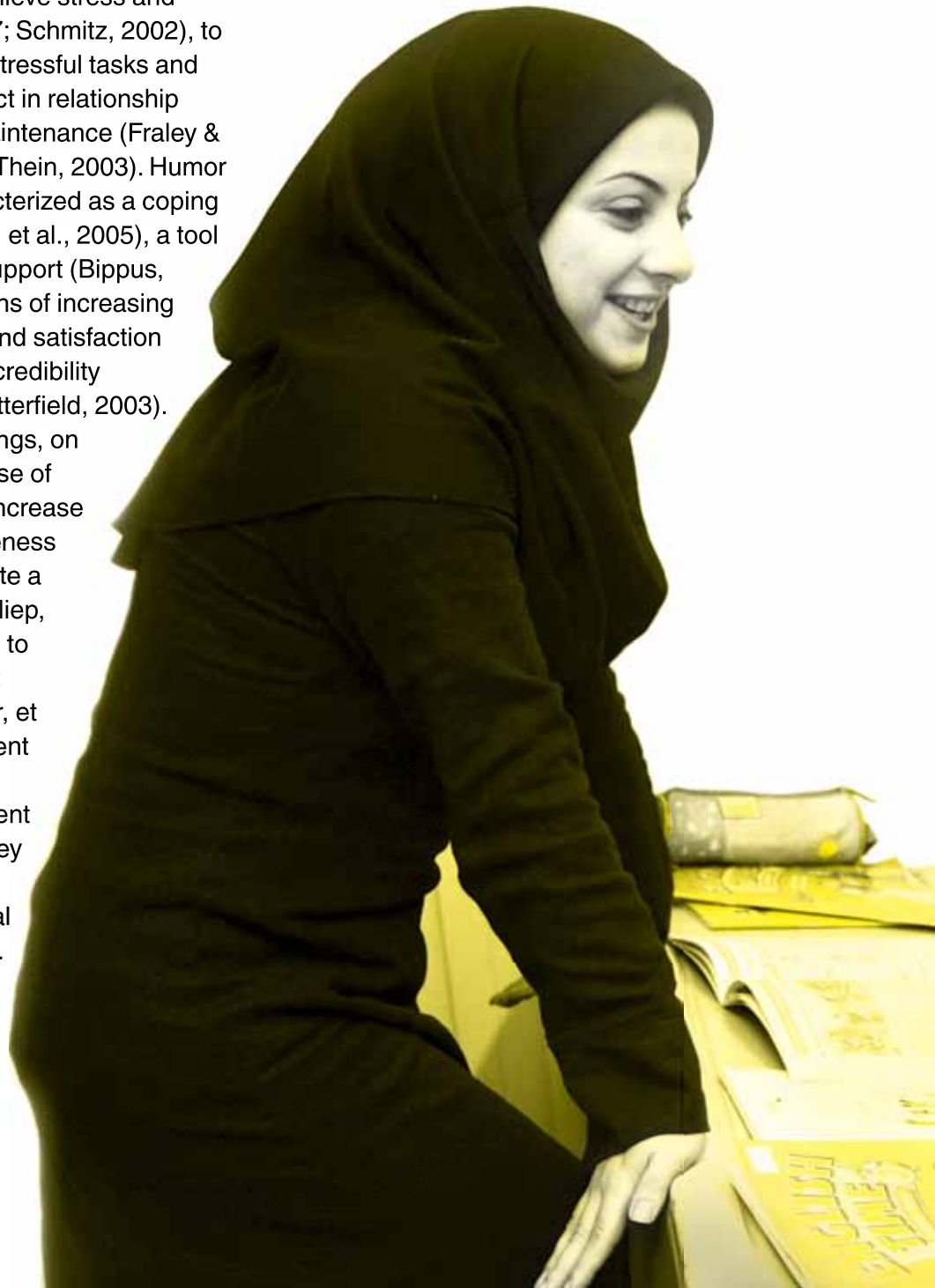


## Functions of Humor

Although humor has only recently received interest from SLA scholars, its history dates back to Plato and Aristotle (Morreall 1983; Raskin 1985). Previous research has looked into the role of humor from different perspectives: from its functions in social interactions to educational settings. In general social interactions, humor has been identified to function as a strategy to express and reinforce solidarity with the audience (Hay, 2000), reduce and relieve stress and tension (Martin, 2007; Schmitz, 2002), to buffer the effects of stressful tasks and as an essential aspect in relationship development and maintenance (Fraley & Aron, 2004; Priest & Thein, 2003). Humor has also been characterized as a coping mechanism (Wanzer, et al., 2005), a tool for communicative support (Bippus, 2000), and as a means of increasing patient compliance and satisfaction as well as physician credibility (Wrench & Booth-Butterfield, 2003).

In educational settings, on the other hand, the use of humor is thought to increase instructional effectiveness (Wanzer, 2002), create a more enjoyable (Neuliep, 1991) and conducive to learning environment (Davis, 2004; Wanzer, et al., 2006), draw student attention (Schmitz, 2002), increase student motivation (McCroskey et al., 2006), and clarify course material (Downs, et al., 1988). Similarly, effective use of humor related to course content

has been consistently delineated in previous research (e.g., Garner, 2006; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Schmitz, 2002; Wanzer et al., 2009; Ziv 1988). These studies suggest that humor is most likely to enhance acquisition/learning and retention of content. For instance, Ziv (1988) notes that the use of suitable, content-specific humorous examples may provide a student with a new perspective on the material that may lead to a novel cognitive insight. In light of this view,





# Verbal Humor in Learning Environment



## Introduction

The role of effective communication in a second language has received increasing attention from second language acquisition (SLA) scholars in recent years. One of the most potent and strategic skills an instructor can draw on to facilitate L2 instruction and enhance the learners' communicative competence in a second language is the effective use of verbal humor. It is now widely recognized that to communicate effectively in a second language (L2), learners are required to know much more than just the vocabulary and grammar of the target language. Besides linguistic knowledge, learners have to have acquired sociolinguistic and sociocultural input/skills to be able to comprehend and use a second language effectively in social interactions. As such, pressure is on academia to equip language instructors and educators with a repertoire of pedagogical skills to enable them to help learners develop the required knowledge resources in a second language. Instructor humor is among these skills that offers several beneficial functions to L2 instruction in language classes.

Humor is an interdisciplinary phenomenon and has been defined based on its immediate context of use. This study focuses on 'verbal

humor', frequently referred to as 'language play' (LP) in L2 research. The two terms will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

LP has been viewed from two different perspectives in L2 research: (a) as a matter of "rehearsal" (Lantolf, 1997) which entails not necessarily fun but a means of developing linguistic skills, and (b) as "the use of language for fun and amusement" (Bell, 2005, p.195). Consistent with the first view, Cook (2000) notes that LP involves patterning and repetition of linguistic forms (e.g., rhythms, phonological and grammatical parallels), semantic meaning, and pragmatic use. In the same vein, Belz (2002) and Weir (1962) view LP as "the conscious repetition or modification of linguistic forms such as lexemes or syntactic patterns" (Weir, 1962, p. 16). For the proponents of the second perspective (e.g., Norrick, 1993; Holmes, 2000), however, humor comprises utterances intended as amusing by the speaker and the presence of linguistic and contextual clues is necessary to support this. Examples of verbal humor are identified as puns, alliteration, riddles, songs, rhymes and rhythms, teasing and joking, funny stories, tongue twisters, and oral narratives.

# Instructional Functions of Second Language



Ali Ziyaeemehr, PhD in TEFL, Ministry of Education  
Email: ziyaeali@yahoo.com

## چکیده

طنز مورد استفاده استادان، که در محیط‌های آموزشی به طیف گسترده‌ای از کاربردهای مختلف دلالت می‌کند، می‌تواند در یادگیری و یاددهی زبان دوم اهمیت ویژه‌ای داشته باشد. این مقاله به بررسی کارکردهای آموزشی طنز کلامی مدرسان زبان انگلیسی در کلاس‌های دانشگاهی می‌پردازد. داده‌ها از طریق ضبط صدای استادان در حین تدریس، مشاهدات کلاسی، و مصاحبه با مدرسان زبان انگلیسی جمع‌آوری شد. نتایج حاصل از تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها منجر به ایجاد سه مقوله عمده با نام‌های «تمایندن / برجسته‌سازی ساختار»، «تقویت معنی» و «برجسته‌سازی تفاوت‌های فرهنگی» شد که نشانگر کاربردهای راهبردی طنز در تقویت آموزش زبان دوم است. یافته‌ها نشان می‌دهند که استفاده از طنز کلامی در کلاس‌های درس آموزش زبان دوم فرصت‌هایی را برای تسهیل دسترسی به منابع دانش زبانی و فرهنگی که در بطن مبادلات کلامی طنزآمیز تعبیه شده‌اند - در اختیار یادگیرندگان قرار می‌دهد. علاوه بر این، مدرسان زبان دوم به منظور ایجاد درک لازم در زبان‌آموزان و تعامل مؤثر با آنان باید دارای توانش زبانی-اجتماعی فرهنگی مختص به زبان طنز باشند. استفاده از یافته‌های این پژوهش در حوزه‌های یاددهی و یادگیری زبان دوم مورد بحث قرار گرفته است.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** طنز کلامی، کاربرد طنز، بازی کلامی، توانش، انگلیسی به عنوان زبان دوم، منابع زبان دوم، برجسته‌سازی

## Abstract

Instructor humor, which serves a wide range of functions in educational contexts, can provide insights into second language learning and teaching practices. This paper reports on a study that investigated the instructional functions of instructors' humorous verbalizations in ESL academic classrooms. Data were collected through audio-recordings, classroom observations, and interviews with ESL instructors. The results of an inductive analysis led to a development of three major categories labeled "foregrounding form", "reinforcing meaning" and "highlighting cultural dissimilarities" indicating the strategies that served instructional functions. Findings indicate that using verbal humor in ESL classrooms offers opportunities to facilitate access to L2 linguistic and cultural knowledge resources embedded in humorous exchanges. Additionally, findings suggests that L2 instructors have to have specific (socio)linguistic and sociocultural humor competence in order to engage L2 learners in understanding and communicating effectively in a second language. Implications are explored within the context of second language learning and teaching.

**Key Words:** word-based humor, humor functions, language play, competence, ESL, L2 resources, foregrounding