

Role of Humour in Second Language Teaching and Acquisition

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Abstract

Humour is an effective tool for second language teaching and SL classroom. Humour is an inextricable aspect of human discourse, language teachers may often utilize humour to facilitate dual beneficiary, both socially and psychologically. Humour is an authentic medium at all the levels of proficiency and for the presentation of a language. Simon Wiesenthal says, “Humour is the weapon of unarmed people”. Teachers are the real warriors have to won the war (effective teaching) with their weapons (teaching techniques). Humour should have been called as the ‘pedagogical instrument’ also as double sharpen knife, can harm or serve in the classroom atmosphere. L2 classrooms are life classrooms, where pupil tastes the essence of life ‘humour’, since humour is the food of learning. One English teacher can teach literature interestingly, the other teaches grammar, some others may be well versed in linguistics but every English teacher can teach well with the help of ‘humour’. This paper aims at presenting the role of humour in teaching English as a second language. Minimal attention was given to the effects of humour by language researchers; humour should begin with the fields of education and other related disciplines and perspectives.

Key words: L1, L2, SLA- Second Language Acquisition, ESL-English as Second Language, acquisition, humour, language classroom.

1. Introduction - Why We Need SLA

Preferable, positive atmosphere is required for acquiring or learning a second language. Humour is an effective tool for second language teaching and SL classroom. Humour is an inextricable aspect of human discourse, language teachers may often utilize humour to facilitate dual beneficiary, both socially and psychologically. A language teacher

can create comfortable, enjoyable learning situations. Edward de Bono states, “Humour is by far the most significant activity of the human brain”. Humour is a mood or state of mind which relax the ESL classrooms; the quality of being amusing or comic encourages the teacher to act vehemently and to teach SL (Second Language) effectively. Second language acquisition, second language learning or L2 acquisition is the continuous process through which the pupil learns L2. SLA (Second Language Acquisition) is a branch of applied linguistics. The skill of acquiring command over a newer language through the help of L1 (Mother tongue) or independent learning of a language in addition to the first language for specific purpose shortly referred as SLA. It is practicing in most nations, seemingly English as second language. Its progressing global scenario makes it predominant. “The term *acquisition* is used to refer to the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situations with others who know the language” (p.187).

2. Humour: A Preferable Tool

Humour naturally paves the way for the pupil to learn vocabulary, syntax and semantics in the Target language (L2), even though, it may be less preferred with limited utilization in most language classrooms. Since many language teachers in India demand disciplined classrooms, expect perfect silent and controlled classrooms, they make humour as something that should be avoided. This paper contends that humour is a preferable tool to be utilized in SL classrooms. Walter (1990) states that students who have laugh, express less diversion and outbursts (emotions). Interactive classrooms are much better for teaching rather than a passive classroom. Humour provides space for healthy discussions. “For good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument, debate...” says, Margaret Heffernan [1]. Humour is one such social skill, which we are lacking in nuclear society and family situation.

3. Focus on Humour in Classroom

Classroom is the place where teaching and learning have to be done tediously; most teachers had this sort of mindset. Such language teacher’s classrooms frighten the pupil. “Classroom in which laughter is welcome help brings learning to life” [1]. Target language humour is idyllic and engaging through which specific elements of language and culture can be taught. It was marked as immediate behaviour. Gorham and Christophel’s (1990) examination of humour manipulates immediate results. Humour is an authentic medium at all

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the levels of proficiency and for the presentation of a language. Learners want ability to communicate in a variety of language contexts. Pervasiveness and presence of humour help general education. Traditional grammar teaching classrooms and classical methods do not usually use humour in the classroom.

4. Humour in Syllabus

Around 1980's the placement of communication in the curriculum and syllabi reinforced implicitly the adoption and use of humour in the classroom. It was said, smile is a universal language, it speaks much better; it is a key to open good transaction of ideas; humour could be a tool used by the teacher to teach language effectively. Simon Wiesenthal says, "Humour is the weapon of unarmed people". Teachers are the real warriors have to win the war (effective teaching) with their weapons (teaching techniques) with language as the only armour. Until recently, minimal attention was given to the effects of humour by language researchers; humour should begin with the fields of education and other related disciplines and perspectives. In later times measurable effects of humour were evidenced by the L2 teachers. Anderson (1979) made an attempt to measure the efficacy and immediacy of humour in L2 classrooms. His findings listed three criteria, viz., student affect, pupil behavioural commitment and cognitive learning. Gorham's reports (p.46-52) that humour removes tension and aggression, elevates boredom and stimulates interest. Pupil and language tutor are well connected through humour.

5. Acquisition of SL

Generally SLA refers to language learning in addition to a first language (probably MT). The term 'acquisition' generally denotes nonconscious nature of learning. Neulip (1990) comes out with his findings regarding the use, effect of humour among language tutors. He says that humour is "a strategy for increasing student comprehension and learning" (p.354). Humour should view as the 'pedagogical instrument' according to him. And also serves as double sharpen knife, can harm or serve in the classroom atmosphere. The individuality of the teachers and pupils as well as their culture affects humour. Humour relaxes the serious mood in second language acquisition, and so students are ready to take risk of using the SL regularly without shy and inferiority feeling and build their individual confidence.

According to *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 'humour' is the mental faculty of discovering, expressing or appreciating something that is comical, amusing or absurd. It is quality of making something amusing. Here are a few samples, which illustrate the ways how humour is expressed in language context, Schmitz, J.R. (2002).

- i. **Lexicon humour:** Q: River Ravi flows in which state...? Ans: Liquid state...!
- ii. **Linguistic humour:** In Holland, they call 'water'. The French called it l'eau. The Belgian who speaks both talks about...? Ans: Waterloo...!
- iii. **Syntax humour:** I propose a 'tax' on all individuals who destroy the English. We call it as....?! Ans: Syn'tax'...!

Above examples illustrate sensible humour. These examples use discrete language units. Humour provides a forum for instruction for discrete language, linguistics aspects along with cognitive benefits (certain levels) as suggested by Vizmuller (1980).

In addition to the linguistic, cultural and pragmatic application of humour in language learning, we can also familiarize our students with the patterns of L2. L2 teachers may adopt puns, role plays and oral instructions to discourse and thus express humour. Classroom is the appropriate place to use L2 humour for second or foreign language learners.

6. The Context of Humour

The context of humour is remodeled or changed. Humour in classroom does various applications. There is diverse humour. Humour through interaction is recommended. L2 teacher need to decide whether they should use conversational jokes, or written jokes from the text and literature or from other sources. Language teachers are often advised to adopt certain types of humour, which suit the learners' best. For instance, Schmitz (2002) divides humour as universal humour, culture based humour and linguistic humour. He claims that elementary level students can benefit from these types of humour. Universal humour is fit for intermediate students. Later grade pupil benefits from all the three types. Word play and word wizard are tough areas of humour, but once initiated remain prolonged for a long time in pupils' memory.

7. Construction of Humour and Culture

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Construction of humour in a collaborated classroom begins with the depiction of noise. Bang and noise always are always part of humour, teachers should be tolerant but should be able to stop when necessary. Culture in humour is important. Situational and conditional humours are important and usually form part of the textbook. Classroom is the site of experimentation. The ‘tense’ mood of teacher is unfit to teach ‘tense’ with humour. The cues should signal the pupils and engage them in the construction of humour. Creating humour in L1 classroom is easy and spontaneous, but it starts with some difficulty in L2. Hence the tutor should initiate, and familiarize their students with some random samples. Teachers may keep in their memory the statement of Barbara Walters, “a good laugh makes any interview or any conversation so much better” [2].

8. Facilitating Learning

Sense of humour is part of a good leader. L2 teachers should lead with humour. Identify humour in familiar stories. Utilize technology through visual and audio clips. Other modes may also be used. ‘Humour’ is often taken from comments, encouraging pupil to be open-hearted to pass and pick genuine comments. Some L2 teachers rush to complete syllabus and they push aside soft skills like humour and interaction. ‘Humour’ lessens the workload or makes it lighter; it acts as a bridge, links pupil and teacher, makes classes interesting, participatory and better understanding. Humour never intends ‘funny teachership’; instead it calls for full-pledged teaching.

9. Technology in Creating Humour

Technical aids like word processor, digital video, audio, internet, mail and software support the generation of humour. Humour lubricates the ways of ESL teaching. Humour allows the reserved, shy pupils to be active participants. With specific goals and motto humour fulfills teaching. For instance, a panel of cartoons creates humour, secondly provides space for pupils’ creativity. Repetition works out well, and drama or dramatic depiction is fruitful way.

10. Factors of Humour

Native and nonnative speakers adopt humour in their own language in various ways. Four factors may be considered when we discuss humour as part of teaching: class, teacher, subject and task. The amount and types of humour utilized depend on the teacher.

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Personality, mood, usage of humour, immediacy and amount of dialogue interaction also be considered. Humour plants positive effect, reducing anxiety levels, increasing focus and rapport among the co-learners in the classroom. Pupils' mood is another deciding factor. The teacher should be aware of two things, creativity and relevance, while creating a task.

It is teacher who locates the best way to reach and draw the attention of the pupils. Practical jokes without poking are positive jokes. Irrelevant jokes distract and disturb the classroom situation.

11. Humour: No Hurt Should be Caused to Any Individual or Group

Teaching pedagogy involves the student teacher interaction, between groups and educator. For role play, humour is the tool. Continuing interaction is better to exploit humour subject. General discussions, group discussions or debates increase interest. Hassmen (2008) states four main principles as: demand of information, demand for informed-consent, the demand for confidentiality, privacy and demand for the use of personal information. Humour is associated with subject content. Educational psychology demands that understanding and learning should occur freely, without hurting the feelings of others. Humour is just a way, a part of teaching subject and so it teaches to maintain good psyche and environment.

12. Conclusion

Vygotsky proposed that social interaction profoundly influences cognitive developments; biological and cultural developments do not occur in isolation. Social learning is life long process which cannot be taught, but train inside the L2 classrooms with 'humour' as a 'chalk'. L2 language learning may occur easily with the help of mass media, online language course, dictionaries and internet. Without humour, second language learning creates the L2 robots, not L2 users. Humour is food for learning.

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[1] <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/margarethe556959.html>

[2] <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/walter barbara.html>

ESL –English as Second Language.

L1- Mother Tongue

L2- Target Language (TL) or Second Language (SL).

SLA- Second Language Acquisition.

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