

RESEARCH ARTICLE



HUMOUR IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Humour is an integral part of man. It is an important modern tool to inspire the students of English language. It is the power of fuel engagement to students to learn more. It would bring an effective environment in English language classroom. It helps to reduce tension, improves classroom climate, increases student-teacher relationship and facilitates learning. The English teacher can use different kinds of humour in the class room to motivate the students to learn more. But the humour is strictly restricted to laugh with students but not laugh at them. It should not affect an individual, group, personality, nation or culture which would result in a variety of negative consequences in the classroom. And even the students may turn away from the entire field of study.

The present article, primarily emphasises on the nature and scope of humour and it's characteristics. Secondly, it discusses the kinds of humour and it's fruitful effects in the class room. Thirdly, it illustrates the applications of humour with various funny anecdotes, riddles and puns. Some of them are learnt from teachers during school days. And some others are drawn from books and real life situations. Finally, it discusses the limitations of humour in the class. Humour should be within the purview of context. It should not go beyond limits. Inappropriate humour increases the distance and loses its value and effect. Finally, the guide lines for teachers to use humour in English class is elaborated.

KEY WORDS

Humour, motivation, effective environment, applications of humour, inappropriate humour, anecdotes, unprofessional.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Humour: Nature and scope

Human life is a mixture of pleasures and pains. They are like the two sides of the same coin. Man expresses pains through sorrow and depression where as he shares the pleasures with different kinds of humour. Humour is the integral part of man. Life without humour is passive and boredom.

Even in sorrow, smiling utterance would give a great relief. That is the greatness of humour.

The great writers present real life situations in their writings to make them perpetual. Even in tragic works, there is plenty of humour. Many literary works like Shakespearean dramas and Hardy's novels illustrate this. In the films, the directors use humour to enlighten the audience. In normal life,

the common man uses plenty of humour. Sometimes he quotes proverbs, cracks jokes and narrates funny anecdotes. Humour indeed is like salt and pepper in a delicious food.

1.2 Benefits of humour

Humour inspires hopes, lightens the burdens and keeps the mind alert. It is a powerful antidote to stress, pain, and conflict. Nothing works faster to bring your mind and body back into balance than a good laugh. According to psychologists, laughter relaxes the whole body. It can decrease stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies. Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

There are physical health, mental health and social benefits from humour. As far as physical health is concerned, it boosts immunity, lowers stress hormones, decreases pain, relaxes muscles and prevents heart diseases. Coming to mental health benefits, it eases anxiety and fear, relieves stress, improves mood and enhances resilience. Regarding social benefits, it helps to strengthen relationships, enhances team work and promotes group bonding.

2-HUMOUR IN THE CLASS ROOM

2.1 Importance of humour in class room

Many researches tell that learning through humour is very effective and such learning is memorable for a long time. Creating humour may not be job of the teacher. But teaching through motivation is part of his profession. There are different types of motivation. Motivation through humour is absolutely an effective means of teaching. As the writer introduces humour in his works, the director focusses attention on comedy in the films, the teacher needs to introduce humour in the class room. But the humour should be confined and related to the subject. And it should not affect any individual or community at any cost.

William Arthur Ward very aptly says, "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires." Some teachers are professional and teaches in a routine and mechanical way. Some teachers are memorable throughout life. They teach with inspiration. The children of today are the citizens of tomorrow. The dedicated and good teacher can alone mould the future of children in a fruitful way.

2.2 Great sayings on humour

Chaiasson (2003) said, "It's important for the teacher to create a positive atmosphere" for learning. 'Humour, by decreasing anxiety and stress can,

contribute to this positive classroom, to class unity and learning'. Many researches reveal that humour reduce stress, improving attention, enhance learning and create a positive emotion. Humour, in the form of jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, comments builds an effective bond between the instructor and students. Humour is a powerful tool. It can bring new hopes, aspirations, enthusiasm and optimism among students.

Kaywin Cottle aptly says, ' Because I know that a good laugh eases tension, increases creativity, I will do almost anything to get the class rolling with laughter...' Mary Kay Morrison admits, ' If you're listening just auditorily in a class room, one small part of the brain lights up, but humour maximizes learning and strengthens memories'.

The main goal of every teacher is to achieve the target by imparting full knowledge in the subject by using humour as fuel. Pamela Matway, a teacher in West Harward says, 'Humour must be used in the classroom'. It helps them to motivate and remember the ideas.

2.3 characteristics of humour in class room

Joseph Gatt (2000) explains the great characteristic of humour in the class. In his own words, "It is the 'breathing-out of the soul'. When during the lesson the pupils only listen to the teacher, who may be teaching in the same tone, then it is as if they only breathe in and have no opportunity to breathe out. They need humor, which the teacher can find in very different places. Therefore the teacher must bring in humor during his lessons and this humor should result from the vitality and momentum of the lesson".

2.4 Benefits of humour in the class room

Many philosophers and scholars admit the great importance of humour in English class. 'Humour can motivate students, aid in their comprehension' (Ruggieri,1999), and build self-esteem (Boerman Comell). Humour is said to relieve stress (Lazier, 1991), help students discover universal truths (Mc Mahon) and gives them a sense of acceptance (Boerman-Comell; Hill,1993). Humour is a valuable tool in the process of teaching and learning. Anderson (1985) says that humour can be effectively used for increasing group dynamics, better class management, practising grammatical structures, increasing vocabulary and learning about the culture of the people.

Humour creates a positive classroom atmosphere. It helps to create a 'positive atmosphere' which encourages the learner's desire to take part in class conversations by decreasing anxiety and stress (Chaiasson, 2002). Humour increases motivation and self-confidence. "Humor can help the shy and/or

timid students to feel that they are a part of the class and to allow them to contribute or participate without feeling humiliated or vulnerable" (Chiasson 2002). This can act as a means of enhancing student motivation to learn English as well as stimulating recall to the materials taught. (Vadillo 1998).

Humour is an effective tool to encourage creativity on optical learning environment. It is closely related to memory. It is very easy to recall an event in a humorous context. It creates a cooperative atmosphere enabling students to help each other. It increases cultural knowledge.

3-KINDS OF HUMOUR

The teacher need not be a comedian in order to use humour in the class. Humour is used with a clear object to reach effectively to the learners.

3.1-Action/Games (Theatre, Video, Role play, Simulation, Contests)

"Young children learn without being aware of it when they are learning through games because it is spontaneous and natural. They have to think and react quickly in a game without tension or fear and for ESL games, they would have to concentrate on the vocabulary and grammar." (Vadillo 1998)

3.2-Textual (Stories and Jokes)

"As for stories, young children tend to enjoy humor books that were easier to read and they are more interested in humor based in characters' actions than humor of language and wordplay." (Shannon 1993). "Humor in the form of a joke should be the spice of a lesson but it should not over-stretch the attention of the class." (Gatt 2000)

3.3-Verbal (Puns, Word games, Acronyms)

"Young children often have difficulty interpreting kidding, they are dead-serious when they take the meaning of words literally because that is the only meaning they are capable of understanding; They tend to enjoy the humor of broad discrepancies such as slapstick humor as they cannot process subtle categorical discrepancies such as in acoustic puns and idiomatic expression (two different strands of thought tied together by a sound, which belongs to both words. E.g. alcoholiday). There are some risks however, for foreign learners in word play as the double meanings may not be apparent." (Gatt 2000)

3.4-Pictorial (Cartoons and Comics)

"Pictures used either on their own or with text help creates valuable stimulus in the classroom as it can help liven the story. When both text and picture are used together, it can help the young learner in the memorization of language structures." (Wieggers, Grooters & Tormo 1996)

4-APPLICATIONS OF HUMOUR IN ENGLISH CLASS ROOM

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four skills of learning English. The teacher can create enthusiasm and interest through funny stories, jokes, anecdotes and amusing real life situations to the students to impart effective learning. Humour helps to reduce stress, and to facilitate excitement, enthusiasm, laughter and high energy in a class room. Some of them are given below to use them in the class whenever necessary and relevant.

4.1 Importance of punctuation

4.1.1-The teacher asked the students to punctuate the following sentence.

A WOMAN WITHOUT HER MAN IS NOTHING

The boys punctuated it as:

A WOMAN, WITHOUT HER MAN, IS NOTHING.

The teacher then asked the girls to punctuate it.

They punctuated it as:

A WOMAN: WITHOUT HER, MAN IS NOTHING.

Quite interestingly, the teacher asked the boys, "why do you think, woman is nothing without her man?"

The boys wrote some words on black board related to female and explained them in detail.

WOMAN, FEMALE, SHE, HER, MRS

Without MAN, there is no WOMAN (WO+MAN), FE+MALE = FEMALE etc.

The teacher is surprised with their sarcasm and asked the girls, "why man is nothing, without her?"

Their explanation:

Without woman, there is no man because the word , MAN came from WO+MAN...The teacher smiles at their sarcasm and intelligence.

4.1.2 Another great example of punctuation mistakes is about a man who has received a beautiful letter from his girlfriend. In the letter, she tells how much she loves and adores John. After reading the letter, it is very clear to any one that she can't live without him. Or can she?

Dear John:

I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy--will you let me be yours?

Jane

What happens to the letter, if it is punctuated in a different way?

Dear John,

I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours,

Jane

Which letter do you think John would prefer to receive?

4.2 Importance of space

GOD IS NOW HERE.

GOD IS NOWHERE.

4.3-Vocabulary through Jokes

The anonymous piece, "**My Resume**" uses word play throughout.

My first job was working in an **orange juice factory**, but I got caned, couldn't concentrate. Then I worked in the woods as a **lumberjack**, but I just couldn't hack it, so they gave me the axe. After that, I tried to be a **tailor**, but I just wasn't suited for it, mainly because it was a so-so job. Next I tried working in a **muffler factory** but that was too **exhausting**. Then I tried to be a **chef**, figured it would add a little spice to my life, but I just didn't have the **thyme**. I attempted to be a **deli worker**, but any way I **sliced** it, I couldn't **cut the mustard**. My best job was being a **musician** but eventually I found I wasn't **noteworthy**. I studied a long time to become a **doctor**, but I didn't have any patience.

Next was a job in a **shoe factory**; I tried but I **just didn't fit** in. I became a professional fisherman, but discovered that I couldn't live on my **net income**. I managed to get a good job working for a pool **maintenance company**, but the work was just too **draining**. So then I got a job in a **worked out center**, but they said I wasn't fit for the job. After many years of trying to find steady work, I finally got a job as a historian until I realised there was **no future** in it. I could have been a violinist, but I 'm too **high-stung**,

"A **bowler**, but It's not up my **alley**,

A **magician**, but the urge **vanished**,

A **librarian**, but I **shelved** the idea,

A **plumber**, but it was only a **pipe-dream**".

My last job was working at **star bucks**, but I had to quit because it was always the same old **grind**. So I **retired**, and I found I am perfect for the job.

The teacher should underline the words used for pun and writes down on the board. Then he reads aloud the first section that reflects on speaker's occupation. The students are asked to form the groups and explain the pun. The students can catch quickly and illustrate how silly the passage is.

4.4 The importance of Spelling – Presentation of true incidents from eminent people

Raghupathi Venkatarathnam Naidu is well known to the Indians as an eminent scholar, teacher and philosopher. He has worked as a principal in different colleges. He is a good teacher and also a man of wit and intelligence. He usually likes the girl

students as they are sincere and regular in attending for lectures. Some boy students hate him just because the principal is always in favour of girl students. Before taking any class, the principal usually gives an announcement (a circular) on the notice board.

One day, he made an announcement on notice board like this:

"I am going to meet the CLASSES today".

The boys saw this notice and immediately rubbed C from 'CLASSES' and watched the fun from a distance. Then it was looking:

"I am going to meet the LASSES today".

Later the principal saw this and understood that it was surely done by some boys! He got a little anger but appreciated the wisdom of students. Then he rubbed L from LASSES. Then it was looking:

"I am going to meet the ASSES today".

The boys saw this and realized that the principal was abnormally genius. Immediately they added suffix CL to 'ASSES'. Then it was looking as before:

"I am going to meet the CLASSES today".

Later the boys never played such wits on the principal.

4.5 Funny stories related to pronunciation

4.5.1 Situation: The teacher writes some English words on board. He is asking each student to read them aloud. The turn came to Ali.

Teacher: Now read the word on board.

Ali: Elecrtikity

Teacher: No...No.... it is electricity.

Ali: (Again) – Elecrtikity

Teacher: Go and bring your parents. I want to talk with them.

(Ali brings his father and mother to school)

Teacher with All's father: Why your son is pronouncing 'electricity' as 'elecrtikity'?

Father: He has no 'capakity'.

Teacher: What?

Father: (again says) He has no 'capakity'!!

Teacher with Ali's mother: Why Ali and his father are talking like that?

Mother: You are doing, 'publikity'.

Teacher: !!!!

(The teacher realised that the entire family has the same problem with pronunciation of words)

4.5.2 Situation: The teacher is showing the pictures of different birds and telling their names in English.

Next, he is showing each picture to each student and asking the name of bird in English. All the students are answering very well except Rafi. Basically, he is very poor in English. Now it comes to his turn.

Teacher:(showing the picture of a peacock) Rafi, what is the name of this bird?

Rafi: ? (He doesn't know ... a sort of tension and fear)

Teacher: Tell me ... quick ...!

Rafi: ????

Teacher: Don't you know? ...I know how to get answer from you !!

(The teacher is severely caning Rafi and asking him to answer. Rafi is scared and requested him to stop caning)

Rafi: Sir, ... Peakaku ... sir,... Peakaku ...sir,... (peakaku in Indian regional language, Telugu : stop caning / stop beating)

Teacher: That's right answer. Now you see, you remember well !! (Peakaku has similar pronunciation with peacock)

4.6 Importance of silent letters - All are poor in using silent letters: There is an inspection in the school. The teacher writes a sentence and asks a student to read it.

" Rama is walking on the road." The student reads it along with I sound in 'walking'. Teacher: Wrong. (added w sound)

HM: The student has no knowledge. (added k sound)

Inspector: The boy is poor in learning. (added r sound)

4.7 Humour related to tenses: One day the Telugu (One of Indian regional languages) teacher explained tenses (present/past/future) with various examples. Finally, he wrote a sentence on board and asked Raju to tell what part of tense it is.

Sentence: (In telugu), "Nenu povuchunnanu". I am going.(English)

Student innocently answered (In Telugu): "Nuvvu poye kalam".. !!).You are no more (English)

4.8 Funny sentences

4.8.1 There are many funny sentences in English. Some of them are:

1- Generally, a sentence never begins with because because because is a conjunction.

2-If you understand, say, 'understand'. If you don't understand, say, 'don't understand'. But if you understand and say, 'don't understand', how do I understand that you understand!

3-I thought a thought. But the thought I thought wasn't the thought I thought I thought. If the thought I thought I thought had been the thought I thought, I wouldn't have thought so much.

4-She sells sea shells on the seashore, but the sea shells that she sells, on the seashore are not the real ones.

4.8.2 A Funny phone conversation (Unknown writer from Web)

A: Hello, are you there?

B: Yes, who are you please?

A: I 'm Watt.

B: What's your name?

A: Watt's my name.

B: Yes, what is your name?

A: My name is John Watt.

B: John What?

A: Yes, are you Jones?

B: No, I 'm Knott.

A: Will you tell me your name then?

B: Will Knott.

A: Why not?

B: My name is Knott.

A: Not what?

B: Not Watt, Knott.

A: What?

4.9 One word in all possible positions

(Invented by Prof. Ernest Brenecke of Columbia university)

1. ONLY I hit him in the eye yesterday. (No one else did.)

2. I ONLY hit him in the eye yesterday. (Did not slap him.)

3. I hit ONLY him in the eye yesterday. (I did not hit others.)

4. I hit him ONLY in the eye yesterday. (I did not hit outside the eye.)

5. I hit him in ONLY the eye yesterday. (Not other organs.)

6. I hit him in the ONLY eye yesterday. (He doesn't have another eye.)

7. I hit him in the eye ONLY yesterday. (Not today.)

8. I hit him in the eye yesterday ONLY. (Did not wait for today.)

5-RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES IN CLASS ROOM

5.1 One hundred words without a, b, c, d.

The teacher asks, " Can anyone tell 100 English words without using A,B,C,D in a short time?".... Some students tell some words. They tell the teacher that they can't tell 100 words in a short time.

Meanwhile, the teacher writes on the board:

ZERO, ONE, TWO, THREE, NINETY NINE.

The teacher tells that all words from Zero to ninety nine are without a,b,c,d....!!

5.2 All alphabets in one sentence

The teacher asks, " Is there any sentence with all alphabets?" (All letters from A-Z).

When the students are unable to answer, he writes:

PACK MY BOX WITH FIVE DOZEN LIQUOR JUGS.

(or)

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.

The teacher should encourage students to learn variety of English language through humour.

6.MINI MORAL, HUMOROUS STORIES AND RIDDLES FOR KIDS

target of ridicule, humour has a negative effect on the classroom climate. (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992).

The teacher must resist the temptation to refer to ethnicity, family, disability, appearance or any other identifier that a student might find offensive when couched in a humorous context (Harris, 1989). A joke that is at the expense of a group or individual may result in a variety of negative consequences in the classroom and can even turn students away from an entire field of study.

8.CONCLUSION

Humour brings linguistic awareness in English class room. It works as an effective bond between teacher and students. It maximizes learning and strengthens memories. It transforms the class atmosphere by sharing the playful strategies with others. It allows the students to express themselves without fear of ridicule and criticism.

With humour, the acquisition of English language becomes easy to the learners. Along with encouragement and praise, it is used by the English teachers to make their classrooms more inviting and conducive to learning. Ultimately, humour should be used to laugh with the students but not to laugh at them. Such humour helps the students to learn English language with laughter!

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