Humor has a large role to play when it comes to engaging students in a classroom environment. By facilitating student laughter with appropriate jokes, quips, and visual humor, a teacher can make the learning experience immensely gratifying for their students. Studies have shown that humor improves the in-class experience by diffusing the tension and can even serve as a mnemonic device to help learners prepare for tests.

It is true that there have been some misgivings about the appropriateness of using humor in foreign language (FL) classrooms owing to the concern that learners may fail to appreciate a joke without the necessary cultural context or linguistic proficiency. However, given the universal nature of humor, it is suggested that humor should be employed as a potential strategy even in FL classrooms, albeit accounting for the students' linguistic capabilities. But, are all humor strategies likely to be equally effective? And do students' attitudes towards humor generally influence how they perceive certain varieties of humor?

In order to find out the answer to these and other concerns, a duo of researchers—Prof. Peter Neff from Doshisha University, Japan, and Prof. Jean-Marc Dewaele from Birkbeck, University of London, UK—performed a study that sought to answer the following questions: Do FL students have any preference for certain humor strategies? How are their attitudes towards classroom humor influenced by FL proficiency, FL enjoyment, frequency of humor use and the perception of the role of humor in learning a language. The findings of their study were published online on 15 June 2022 in the journal *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*.

In this study, the researchers surveyed a total of 243 FL learners in 24 different counties. A little over half of the participants were studying English as their first FL with the remainder studying other languages. The researchers used a five-component survey as the primary tool for assessment. These five components involved demographic data and background information, components to measure FL enjoyment (FLE), attitudes toward humor in the classroom, and responses to eight different humor strategies.

The survey, which all 243 participants completed, revealed that students preferred spontaneous verbal humor along with cartoons and memes the most, while visual humor, such as making humorous faces and using props, were the least preferred humor strategies. Prof. Neff explains, "What this suggests is that students like their humor to be spontaneous and enjoy verbal humor more than any humor that employs element of artifice, which may be perceived as childish." Additionally, role play as a form of humor ranked somewhere between the most and least liked strategies.

The strongest predictor of preference among the eight humor strategies was the general attitudes towards the usage of humor on *language learning*. "Students who appreciated humor in their language classes clearly accepted the view that language
learning should not be a dry and humorless enterprise. Rather, it should be a process characterized by play, laughter, challenge, and experimentation where teachers would joke when things went wrong rather than admonish using demotivating comments,” say the authors. The second strongest predictor of preference for cartoons, puns, role plays and spontaneous comment strategies was FLE.

These insights reveal something interesting: students do not want their teachers to become the center of attention by using humor. Rather, humor should only function as a social lubricant that helps facilitate the attainment of educational and social goals.

Laughter, if used conscientiously, can not only lighten the classroom atmosphere but even facilitate learning itself.


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