

What do L2 learners want  
from humor in the classroom?  
A review of studies of L2  
learners' perceptions.

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# Humor in the L2 classroom

- There is abundant work which advocates the use of humor to improve instruction in L2 language classrooms.
- ‘Humor in the classroom’ may be divided into two categories: Teaching with Humor and Teaching about Humor (Bell & Pomerantz 2016)
  - Teaching with humor refers to the use of humor to present materials.
  - Teaching about humor concerns improving student’s abilities to interact with humor.
- This review will mainly focus on Teaching with Humor.



## Aims of this review

- Analyze recent studies which have examined L2 learner perceptions of humor.
  - How are researchers measuring the learner perceptions?
  - What types of topics and factors are being focused on?
  - Do perceptions meet reality?
- Identify any trends or conclusions which may assist L2 instructors who are considering integrating humor into their classes.

## Previous work on Humor in the L2 Classroom

- Humor use and comprehension requires linguistic competence (Deneire 1995)
- Humor is a major component of inter-cultural communication (Adelsward & Oberg 1998, Bell 2007)
  - Interacting in foreign cultures is a major motivation for L2 students (Dornyei 1994)
- Humor helps create a classroom which is conducive to language learning (Askildson 2005)
  - Humor reduces the distance between teacher and student.
  - Student anxiety is decreased while interest is increased.

# Research

- Studies analyzing the impact of humor on learner's perceptions.
  - Comparative study of Persian EFL learners attitudes to humor (Rashidi et al 2014)
  - Humor as an EFL-teaching strategy (Al-Duleimi & Aziz 2016)
  - Investigating the potential of humor in EFL classrooms (Golunjal 2018)
  - Student perceptions towards teacher use of humor (Fata et al 2018)
- Studies also introducing humorous elements to L2 learners.
  - Impact of humor on student speaking ability (Farahani 2018)
  - Comprehension of humorous texts (Ersanli 2017)
  - Impact of teaching grammar through humor (Salehi & Hasebi 2014)
- Most of the studies were conducted with questionnaires handed out to adults currently studying a foreign language. Participants ranged from 50-400 students.

# Findings


- As to be expected, researchers focused on a variety of factors and topics.
- Most studies employed Likert-scale questionnaires and open-ended interview questions as part of a mixed-methods design.
- Common questions included:
  - Do you want your teacher to use humor in class?
  - Does humor reduce tension / make the teacher more approachable?
  - Does humor help you pay attention in class? / Does humor make learning a language more interesting?
  - Does humor assist in language learning?

## Findings (cont`d)

- The studies showed that students in a variety of environments had positive attitudes towards humor across all the areas of humor in the classroom.
- Students expressed the most positive attitudes towards humor reducing tension and making the teacher more approachable.
- Students had more slightly less positive attitudes towards humor making language classrooms more interesting.
- In studies where students were exposed to humor it was not always clear how that humor was implemented.



## Conclusions and Limitations

- While there is not conclusive evidence that humor produces results in the L2 classroom, nearly all studies encourage its use to accomplish certain goals.
  - However there is still no large scale comparative study of classrooms which employ humor and ones that do not.
  - In addition, there is little evidence whether teachers should focus on teaching with humor or creating humor-based materials.
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## Questions going forward

- Is there any evidence that humor can aid teachers who do not consider themselves to be humorous?
- Should humor-based materials become essential part of L2 language curriculums? If so, how?
- OR Can a humorous teacher make `dry` material more appealing/effective?

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