

T.N.Maximenkova

*Ye.A.Buketov Karaganda State University  
(E-mail: tanyasapr@mail.ru)*

## **Jokes in teaching English as a Foreign Language**

The article reveals the idea that Jokes as the way of teaching can be used in various ways. The basis for every nation's humour lies in its historical, socio-cultural and linguistic background. In order to get to know a nation's sense of humour one is forced to search much deeper. The article assumes that Jokes can be modified into compositions, essays, translations, poems, pictures, dramas, role-plays, games, questions and answers etc. in order to make lessons both interesting and smart.

*Key words:* jokes, humour, teaching, native language, foreign language, children, teaching vocabulary, teaching grammar, teaching material.

Children learn new languages very easily, almost too easily. Most adults find foreign languages quite difficult. They must toil and struggle and put in long hours of hard work to make even small gains in their ability in a new language. But a child seems to just pick it up out of thin air. To a child, it is all play and no work. And, to make it even more frustrating for the adult learner, the results of a child's language play are superior to the results of an adult's language struggle. It does not seem fair.

One commonly held theory to explain this phenomenon is this: God has given young children a magical ability to learn new languages. This ability slowly disappears, and is completely gone by the time an adult begins the task of learning a new language.

This theory is attractive for two reasons. First, it explains the phenomenon. Children learn a new language easily and adults do not because, according to the theory, the magic is limited to childhood. And second, this theory helps adult learners to accept their fate. With the magic gone, they find it a little easier to buckle down to their difficult studies, knowing that now there is no other way for them to learn a new language.

The beliefs that languages, for example, English, are hard for adults to learn are to disappear, because a new method of teaching foreign languages is offered. Using the method of teaching jokes will give you the possibility not only to master the language but also to study and understand both culture and mentality of the country you study the language of. Using jokes in your teaching process can help all the students (children and adults) not only to get knowledge but also to have fun which leads to improving one's health as well.

The point of my topic is to stress the importance of humor as a means of enhancing student's motivation to learn English. It was Dulay and Burt who first introduced the concept of affective filter. Afterwards it was Krashen who noted that a low affective filter corresponded to high motivation, self-confidence, and a lack of anxiety [1; 121]. He explained that the Affective Filter Hypothesis implied that our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter. In this respect, humor can help lowering that affective filter, reducing anxiety in the class, and encouraging students' desire to take part in what is being said in the class. Jokes are a lot of fun but in a good proportion. Students can profit from the language contained in jokes if we select them carefully and grade their level of difficulty. And several skills can be practiced: listening, speaking, and reading.

Sometimes students do not feel self-confident speaking English. As Malinowsky says that a common complaint among teachers today is that «My students won't talk» [1; 148]. To avoid the frustrations of a noncommunicative conversation class, teachers should work at setting up the students for «real communication». I keep on asking myself how can I promote that «real communication» [1; 149] and motivate students to listen and speak in English. I know I have to involve them in the dynamics of the class. As Abello Contesse points out: «Student-student interaction (also known technically as 'interlanguage talk') in small groups is thought to offer a number of advantages: it reduces the dominance of the teacher over the class, it promotes collaboration among learners, it offers a more comfortable, relaxed atmosphere, it enables the teacher to work more as facilitator or consultant, it can promote learner responsibility and autonomy.../... but its crucial advantage is that it can increase the quantity of student talking time (STT) in the classroom» [2; 223]. Claire stresses the importance of humor: «The nature of the subject- humor- insures enthusiastic student involvement in in-class conversations. No other subject generates such lively participation, covering

so many different linguistic skills» [2; 267]. Maurice states that humor can easily be seen as a way of activating motivation and directing attention, but it can also be used in other events as well, from stimulating recall to eliciting performance and providing feedback. He further on argues saying that telling jokes is a specialized skill that few EFL learners really need; however, the subskills that aid effective joke-telling can be important in other ways of communication [2; 304]. Students can profit from the language contained in jokes if we select them carefully and grade their level of difficulty. And several skills can be practiced: listening, speaking, and reading. As Valmaña Iribarren points out that at the end of the semester I realized that the students not only had improved their listening skills but also had learned to select jokes and read them to others appropriately and fittingly. Poljaveric summarizes her whole experience with jokes as teaching materials in her English classes: «The pupils learned without being aware of it. They had to think and react quickly, which is not easy. In a very few minutes they had to select what was important to include and to discard what wasn't. They had to concentrate on the vocabulary, grammar, etc., and they did it without tension or fear. It was a game, and, as we know, learning through games is spontaneous and natural» [2; 307]. Leal points out how jokes can be used during classes [2; 310]:

by making the students listen to and understand the punch line of the joke, by providing them with part of the joke and asking them for their own end. For example, we give them the following: « Girl: I was ill when the school play was performed. Did it have a happy ending? Boy: Or the student can choose the answer from three possible options (A, B or C),

Pictures can help to understand the content of a joke. Another technique to be used could consist of translating jokes into English (we have to be careful with translations, though).

The method of jokes is the one to have been already checked. As teachers point out that at the end of the semester they realized that the students not only had improved their listening skills but also had learned to select jokes and read them to others appropriately and fittingly.

As well it is of extreme importance that a joke the teacher uses in teaching English as a foreign language is in some connection with the new material the teacher is about to introduce. The above statement can be supported with two arguments. The first argument can be presented in the form of the following joke:

Teacher: John. Give me a sentence beginning with 'I'.

John: I is the...

Teacher: No, John. You must say «I am» not «I is.»

John: All right. I am the ninth letter of the alphabet.

(Hutchinson 1985, 86)

This joke is presented in the course-book *Project English 1* which has been used in Slovenian primary schools for some years. That particular page introduces ordinal numerals. The joke is completely relevant to the given situation and therefore appropriate to this context [3; 58]. It shows a practical usage of the ordinal numeral 'ninth'. The students can use it as a guiding activity to the game which follows and at the same time they can relax and laugh for a while. In this way their attention becomes stronger. However, some jokes do not seem to be relevant in any way to the situation in which they are introduced. Here is an example which supports this argument:

Customer: This restaurant must have a very clean kitchen.

Waitress: Thank you, sir. How do you know?

Customer: Everything tastes like soap.

(Hutchinson 1987, 52)

This joke is on the page which deals with family relationships [3; 64]. There is also an introduction to non-defining relative clauses, and adjectives expressing feelings. But none of these seem to be connected in any way to the joke. When students read this joke they cannot find any relevant connection with the context. Their attention is then shifted to a completely different situation and their thoughts can easily wander elsewhere. As a consequence the students can lose their concentration and therefore a teacher has her work cut out for her for the remaining part of the lesson.

A foreign language teacher can take two possible approaches to introducing a joke in language teaching:

The first approach concentrates on a more profound purpose and that is to teach students how the English sense of humour works.

The second approach deals with a rather straightforward use of jokes in the teaching of vocabulary and grammar.

*a) Teaching how the English sense of humour works*

The basis for every nation's humour lies in its historical, socio-cultural and linguistic background. In order to get to know a nation's sense of humour one is forced to search much deeper.

It is a world-wide belief that the English people have a strange sense of humour. But to oppose this statement it's time to scan jokes properly. I strongly oppose this statement. Further on, I would like to add it's upright to say that such a statement is used only by the people who know very little about the English language.

In contrast to the Slovenian language which is an inflectional language, English is an analytical language. In other words inflections are scarce, grammatical meanings must be expressed by alternative means like periphrastic constructions, word order etc. As a result of this the English language is abundant in idioms, phrases, homonyms and homophones. Most of the English jokes are based on such play on words.

So what can a teacher do to improve the students' understanding of the English sense of humour? As a starting point a teacher can try to introduce jokes which are closely related to the English cultural and historical background, giving emphasis on the words her students are already familiar with. Once this stage is reached she can gradually proceed to improving their understanding by various activities. The most appropriate ones would be multiple choice exercises and exercises involving mixed lines of a joke. The former can be based on the principle that a joke would lack a punch line and the students' task would be to choose among three possibilities: the right punch line, a straightforward ending and a completely unsuitable ending. The latter could, on the other hand, be based on the concept that a three-lined joke would have the mixed order of its lines so the students would need to put them in the right order. These activities can make the students more aware of the role of the humour in ambiguous words and in this way they can enrich their vocabularies and simultaneously participate in an active language practice [3].

*b) Teaching of vocabulary and grammar*

A joke is a suitable educational device. In this concrete situation it can be used in various ways. Here are just a few suggestions:

- to introduce a new topic or theme, tense, vocabulary or any other grammatical structure
- to unburden the students of tension which appears during such lessons that involve a great amount of concentration
- to prepare the students for more serious work involving various mental processes to conclude a lesson in a pleasant way and at the same time remind them of the newly gained knowledge etc.

Most of the teaching aids can be used to realize the above possibilities such as blackboard, cassette player, overhead projector, posters, photocopies etc. After a great deal of thinking the jokes can be used in various ways. They can be modified into compositions, essays, translations, poems, pictures, dramas, role-plays, games, questions and answers etc. A teacher can suggest students to find possible equivalents in the language they possess, challenge them with such tasks as organizing a joke competition, or even facing them with a more demanding preposition and that is to collect all the jokes they know and publish them in the school paper. If these suggestions do not offer enough possibilities for teachers then they could organize a didactic activity for getting more ideas from their own students called 6x6 (six people give six ideas in six minutes). Students will be more than willing to co-operate.

However, the best effect of introducing a joke in teaching of vocabulary or grammar can be reached when it is simply told. Every explanation or expansion spoils it. A joke should stay a joke otherwise its purpose may be questionable. And one last warning: a teacher should be extremely careful about telling jokes. Not every teacher is a good joke-teller so it is of high importance to extensively prepare oneself for such an activity. Even the most amusing and entertaining joke loses its significance if it is told at an inconvenient time and place. A good teacher, however, always distinguishes between an appropriate and inappropriate moment.

The advantages and benefits of using jokes for enhancing student participation can be found in the following:

- Jokes are short and can be told within the space of a few minutes.
- They are rule-governed...
- There is a wide range of speech patterns within the single genre of joke.
- Jokes are common to all cultures.
- Jokes embody a culture.

- Speech behavior that is learned by listening to, and telling jokes can be generalized to speech acts other than the joke.

- Jokes are funny. They relax the tension in the classroom.

Many researchers, and particularly Stephen Krashen, have written about the negative effects of anxiety on students' ability to learn [2; 96]. Using humour can play an important part in helping to relax students and help them overcome stress and nerves and so make them more receptive to learning. Humour can also help to improve the classroom atmosphere particularly for students who are worried about making mistakes or nervous about their speaking abilities. It is, however, very important that we learn with our students to laugh 'about' mistakes rather than at the people who make them. Here are a few ways to integrate humour into classes.

**Telling a joke:** Just telling a joke can be a great listening activity for your students and really there's no need to prepare anything. Every joke comes with its own comprehension task. If the listener laughs at the end of the joke then they have understood it.

**Translating a joke:** Students can translate jokes from their own country to retell in English. They can then either try telling them to me or their classmates or send them to one of the many joke websites on the Internet. It is possible that students collect the jokes together to publish in a small class joke book.

**Humour and prejudice:** Jokes and humour can form the basis of serious class discussions. Many jokes in many countries mask some quite negative underlying prejudices and stereotypes about people from different regions of the country or different sectors of the society. Exploring these prejudices can be a first step towards overcoming them.

**Quotes about humour:** Looking at quotes about humour can provide useful discussion for students. They can try to decide what they mean and which ones they agree with most, try to translate some from their own culture or even try to write their own. Here are some examples:

1. «He who laughs last laughs longest».
2. «Always leave them laughing».
3. «Friendship: a building contract you sign with laughter and break with tears».
4. «One can never speak enough of the virtues, the dangers, the power of shared laughter».
5. «Laughter is the shortest distance between two people».
6. «Laughter is not at all a bad beginning for a friendship, and it is far the best ending for one».
7. «If you can look into the mirror without laughter, you have no sense of humour».
8. «A person without a sense of humour is like a wagon without springs, jolted by every pebble in the road».

As a reading activity you could try getting your students to each look for one joke on a website that they like, try to memorize it and then come to class and tell it. Be sure though that the site you choose has jokes which are suitable for the types of class that you have, as many have 'adult' content on.

If you have access to TV or video recordings of popular comedy programmes, these can form a fantastic resource for exploitation in the language class. They can be used in many ways, for general listening activities or you could just focus on one particular part and explore the humour. A lot of humour on TV is very rich in cultural references and this too can be an interesting, though very challenging area to explore.

Humour is said to be the best physical exercise — laughter relaxes all facial muscles, unwrinkles the forehead, the body receives more oxygen, and the breathing deepens automatically. One of the aims of foreign language learning is to get to know the nation's culture and to learn to respect it. Humour reveals the most hidden parts of a nation's culture. Laughter brings people closer together and therefore effects in the same way teachers and students.

I suppose using jokes in teaching foreign languages is a great step in students' and pupils' mastering the language, also in their understanding the culture of the language they study. I can conclude that the best way to stay clever and healthy is to use jokes in the teaching process.

One of the aims of foreign language learning is to get to know the nation's culture and to learn to respect it. Humour reveals the most hidden parts of a nation's culture. Only few teachers include humour systematically into the educational process. Most of them are certain that students can learn less if they are laughing. The truth is quite the opposite. Laughter brings people closer together and therefore effects in the same way teachers and students [4; 49].

These humorous activities introduced in this seminar paper which last just a few minutes can easily change the educational process. They can be used as an introduction to a lesson; a starting point for a discussion, creative activity or project work; a means of help to relax the students and prepare them for more serious work; a device which enables students to concentrate their attention to one topic and a pleasant conclusion of a lesson.

And as well, what is more rewarding for a teacher than to see the students leaving the classroom with a smile on their faces and at the same time knowing they learned new vocabulary, structure and function?

So, jokes, having been mentioned above, significantly enrich and diversify the process of teaching foreign languages. Intellectual, creative search comes up to take the place of monotonous work. It helps to create a personality of a new type, active, purposeful, directed on constant education and development. Thus, jokes favour the efficiency increase of the study process, its individualization, active pedagogical cooperation of teachers and students; create optimal conditions for creative use of information in students' independent cognitive activity. Joke application encourages the optimization of teaching management, efficiency increase of study process, saves teachers' time for the work with teaching material, simplifying its search, analysis, selection and gives an opportunity of application of new organizational forms of teaching.

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Т.Н.Максименкова

#### **Ағылшын тілін шетел тілі ретінде оқытуда әзіл-оспақты қолдану**

Мақалада шетел тілдерін оқыту барысында тілдік ойындарды қолданудың тиімділігі қарастырылды. Әр халықтың әзіл-оспақ әңгімелеріне сол халықтың тарихи, әлеуметтік-мәдени және лингвистикалық білімі негіз болады. Қандай да болсын халықтың әзілін зерттеп, түсіну үшін, оның тіліне терең үңілу керек. Автор анекдоттар тілді оқып үйренудің түрлі салаласында, мысалы, шығарма мен эссе жазғанда, мәтіндерді аударуда, өлеңдерде, драмалық қойылымдарда, рөлдік ойындарда, түрлі сипаттағы ойындарда, сауалнамаларда және т.б. қолданылатыны жайлы пікір айтады. Өз кезегінде бұл сабақтарды қызықты етеді, әрі танымдық мәнін арттырады.

Т.Н.Максименкова

#### **Использование шуток в преподавании английского языка как иностранного**

В статье рассмотрен широкий спектр использования языковых игр с привлечением юмора в процессе обучения иностранным языкам. Основой этому, отмечает автор, послужило мнение о том, что юмор несет в себе исторические, социально-культурные и лингвистические знания. Для того чтобы изучить чувство юмора того или иного народа, необходимо углубленно проникнуть в сам язык. В статье представлено мнение о том, что, например, анекдоты могут проявлять себя в разных областях изучения языка, а именно: в написании сочинений и эссе, переводе, стихотворениях, драматических постановках, играх разного рода, в том числе ролевых, вопросах и ответах и во многом другом. Использование юмора позволяет сделать занятие более интересным и в то же время познавательным.

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