

CHAPTER 18: MULTIMEDIA, HUMOR AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: CHANGING ROLES AND PERSPECTIVES

İhsan ÜNALDI 

Mehmet BARDAKÇI 

1. Introduction

The question of providing comprehensible input in L2 instruction has been discussed for a long time. The main idea is that as long as the target language input is understood by the learner, language learning takes care of itself. The idea was developed by Stephen Krashen and his assumption is that the learner does not have to fully understand every word or phrase in the input. If the target language is provided in a meaningful context and is rich enough, acquisition will take its course. Although it might sound clear and straightforward, the idea of comprehensible input is not without criticism, which is outside the scope of the current chapter. Nevertheless, no one would argue against the merits of providing L2 learners with meaningful and rich contexts.

Since its emergence in the 1980s, the idea of comprehensible input has evolved, and today there are other issues to be discussed. Back in those days, particularly in the foreign language instruction context, the main source of comprehensible input was regarded as the language teacher. The fast and global digitalization has made authentic language available for L2 learners all around the world. With reference to L2 instruction, concepts and roles have been changing deeply. A short chat with any teenager about where he or she is exposed to English will reveal that films, sitcoms (situation comedies), digital games, and TV shows are the main sources of input. With regard to providing comprehensible input, English language teachers have been outperformed by Hollywood films, sitcoms, and TV shows.

2. Some of the factors affecting L2 acquisition

There are many aspects of L2 acquisition, and the effectiveness of the process is affected by many factors. The intersection of multimedia (a generic term for media, such as films, TV shows, music, digital games, and the internet) and L2 acquisition is not a new topic of discussion but has started to attract more and more attention. However, while trying to integrate multimedia into L2 acquisition process, there are many things to consider. In this section of the

current chapter, these two concepts will be considered under the topics of authenticity, audio-visuality, motivation, intercultural competence, pragmatic competence, and social aspects.

Using authentic materials in language teaching has been common sense among theoreticians and practitioners as well (Gilmore, 2007). Authentic materials are produced in order to fulfil some social purpose in the language community. The producer of the material does not have a specific learner group in mind during the process of creation. Through the use of authentic materials, learner motivation can be improved by exposing them to real language and cultural aspects of the target language; moreover, such materials relate more closely to learners' needs in addition to providing the instructor with a more creative approach to teaching (Peacock, 1997). Some claim that it is actually not the material itself that should be authentic but what is done with it. However, one thing is sure that made-up language with no communicative purpose does not help L2 learners in any way. We can discuss that multimedia provide language learners with authentic language samples because the language used in multimedia is real to certain extents. At this point, this assumption needs to be taken with a grain of salt. Normally, language samples in multimedia cannot be regarded as spontaneous. They are drafted, written, and rewritten by teams before they meet the audience. The natural course of language works with false starts, hesitations, interruptions, slips of tongues and occasional mispronunciations. However, film scripts are written in perfect English with perfect dialogues. They might provide L2 learners with accurate models of phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexicon, but when it comes to the most important layer of language, pragmatics, the authenticity of multimedia becomes questionable.

The audio-visual nature of multimedia also acts as a facilitator in the L2 acquisition process. It is common sense that learning begins through our five senses. Upon hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, or smelling, we consciously or unconsciously start the learning process. At its very basic level, learning is actually connecting the new sensory inputs with the already available ones. It makes sense to suppose that the more senses are involved in the process, the deeper and longer-lasting learning will become. Therefore, many experienced L2 instructors try to involve as many sensory inputs as they can while trying to teach a subject. In this respect, audio-visuality is inherent in multimedia, which means you can see and hear what is going on in most cases. More than only one sense being at work, the learner is more likely to be more involved. In addition, multisensory inputs are more likely to provide the learner with a meaningful context, which will facilitate learning both in the long and short term. Any kind of learning related to L2 is sure to be more effective if it takes place in a meaningful context. The core

principle of learning, the connection process of the unknown or new with the already available, is at work at this point. The context where the conversations are taking place actually provides what is needed to understand the individuals involved in these conversations.

Apart from the points related to multisensory input provided by multimedia as mentioned above, there is another issue which is also important in L2 instruction. The suprasegmental features of languages especially that of the English, which is known to be a stress-timed language, are among the parameters that have to be dealt with by the learners of that specific language. Compared to other languages, English is more sensitive in this aspect. The analysis of the following sentence with regards to intonation and stress will make the point clear.

-They don't want to join us this evening.

Depending on the intonation, this sentence will have different meanings. For example, if we emphasize the word *they*, it might mean that we are the ones wanting to come together, but they do not want to do so. If the word *want* is emphasized with a couple of further remarks, we might understand that they do more than wanting, they are actually eager to see us. If the emphasis shifts even further from the word *they* to the phrase *this evening*, it might mean that they will probably join us another time. The only way to comprehend what is meant in such an utterance is to hear and see the speaker; otherwise, ambiguity might set in.

One of the most important aspects of any kind of learning is actually motivation. It is also the real driving force behind L2 acquisition. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is often mentioned in related literature. Extrinsic motivation is related to what others want while intrinsic motivation is about what the learner wants. If the learner is acting on an expectation of a reward at the end of an achievement, it means that the learner is extrinsically motivated. On the other hand, if the learner is involved in learning without an expectation of an external reward, then we can talk about intrinsic motivation. Most of the time, intrinsic motivation is regarded as superior to extrinsic motivation because as soon as the reward at the end of learning is removed, the learner is likely to be frustrated. As long as the learner is actively involved in the learning process and has a say about the learning process, intrinsic motivation starts budding. Moreover, if the material that is being used in the process is interesting and uplifting, this kind of motivation becomes even more decisive over the learning outcomes. When we consider multimedia within the framework of intrinsic motivation in the L2 context, there seems to be a clear overlap between the two. Generally speaking, multimedia deals with the aspects of human nature in relation to society, which makes it interesting enough for any

individual. Trying to create connections between the story and the characters in a film and one's own personality and his or her life is likely to yield intrinsic motivation.

The next point to be mentioned in the current framework of the discussion is intercultural competence. People might consider themselves as somehow open-minded when it comes to interacting with cultures other than their own. However, intercultural competence, or intercultural communication skills, is not as simple as it sounds as knowing and doing are different things at their cores. It is almost always possible to create mental images of other cultures through reading, but the spice of reality only comes in through real people who belong to those cultures. After all, actors and actresses in films are real people with real cultural backgrounds. Even when they are pretending to be 'other selves', they cannot strip down all their cultural identity and become a culture-free self. No matter what situation he is in, Brad Pitt will unconsciously laugh, cry, look or fall in love like an American. There should be some level of individual intuition that makes people living in different cultures act differently. It remains just an intuition until the language learner starts developing intercultural competence through certain means. Multimedia, one of these means, have the potential to create a sense of the target culture as they involve countless situations full of cultural references that belong to the target language. For example, it is very rare to find language teaching materials that expose L2 learners to colloquialism, which refers to ordinary or familiar conversations which are sometimes unacceptably informal. Whether we accept it or not, socially unacceptable utterances are core parts of daily conversations. The L2 acquisition process could be deemed incomplete without enough exposition to some level of colloquialism. Multimedia is teeming with colloquialisms, even with too much of it, one could claim.

Another concern about L2 instruction is pragmatics. The concept of pragmatics, which is often contrasted with semantics, basically deals with pre-existing knowledge in natural conversations. In the course of languaging, we make decisions and choices. Why we choose one word or phrase over another, or why we say something the way we do and discard other options of saying it are all parts of pragmatic knowledge. Most of the time, when people are conversing, there is much more going on than meets the eye. For example, terrorist attacks hit the headlines frequently, and it is a topic of discussion among people. However, in these conversations it is very unlikely to hear people giving definitions of terrorism or trying to persuade other people about how bad attacking other people is. This is inherent in human nature and is somehow related to the *theory of mind*. In this theory, it is presupposed that individuals are aware that other individuals have their own minds, and they act on similar principles. It

might seem rather straightforward, but this is actually like one of the human skills that we have to acquire and develop. For example, imagine that a mother brings home some chocolate to make a cake. Her son sees her put the chocolate into a blue cup and he goes out to play. While she is making the cake, the mother takes the chocolate and puts it into a green cup this time. The boy comes back and wants to eat the chocolate. The simple question here to be asked is which cup the boy is going to look for the chocolate. The answer would be *the blue cup*. However, until the ages of four or five children cannot acquire this skill and separate their own minds from the others' and believe that the boy is going to look for the chocolate in the green cup (Wimmer, 1983). Only after this certain period can pragmatic development start in children, and this is the case for the native language. As for the L2 acquisition process, this kind of development seems to be much more complex and is a topic of concern. Pragmatics, in this respect, studies non-native speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language (Kasper, 2001). Generally, L2 learners experience *pragmatic failures* which is defined as "the inability to understand *what is meant by what is said*" (Thomas, 1983, p. 91). Take the following natural conversation between a father and his son as an example:

Boy: *Daddy, I can't get this thing open!*

Dad: *Didn't we have a screwdriver laying around somewhere?*

Boy: *I'll get it!*

The father's utterance looks like a question but actually is not. Fueled with too much grammatical or semantic orientation, EFL learners might get confused with this kind of conversing because most of the course books impose a pragmatic-free understanding of English grammar. Suppose that this is a gap filling activity in a language learning class, and the learners are supposed to fill in the part of the conversation where the boy says *I'll get it*. If it is a learning environment where pragmatic concerns are missing, the learners would most probably come up with answers like *No we didn't* or *Yes we did*.

Last, but of course, not least, the social aspects of language learning have been a prominent topic of concern since the late 1990's. It has been suggested that language is better learned when learners try to negotiate over concepts and meaning (Ellis, 2010). In order for the L2 acquisition process to be complete, some level of socializing is more than necessary. In this respect, the common ground between the language instructor and the learners on which teaching and learning is to be placed is also worth mentioning. It is reasonable to assume that the more the learners feel alienated from a subject, the less they will learn. Let alone L2 learners, it is sometimes difficult, even for native speakers of English, to find common topics to talk about.

At this point, as the main parts of popular culture, films, sitcoms, and TV shows are likely to assist L2 instructors as they have become far more than just a common interest for people from various social groups.

As multimedia becomes more affordable and accessible, more and more people are beginning to enjoy what modern popular culture has to offer. We believe that, among the elements that form this culture, sitcoms hold a distinct place in the context of L2 acquisition process as they involve humor, one of the universal features of the human nature.

3. Theoretical Considerations about Humor

Providing an exact definition of humor is difficult; however, it can be shortly defined as anything that is funny, comical, or amusing. Bell (2012) defines humor as a “specific communicative mode in which something is uttered with the intent to amuse” (p. 238). It has both psychological and physiological effects on human beings. Referring to psychophysiological research Berk (2001, p. 324) states that the process of humor has “three elements: (1) the stimulus (humor), (2) the emotional response (mirth), and (3) the physical response or behavior (laughter)”. And also referring to quantitative and qualitative research evidence, he lists eight psychological benefits of humor, (a) reduces anxiety, (b) reduces tension, (c) reduces stress (d) reduces depression (e) reduces loneliness (f) improves self-esteem (g) restores hope and energy (h) provides a sense of empowerment and control.

Many researchers, either in psychology or in education, have studied humor and have concluded that humor does have beneficial aspects as it protects people from sadness and boredom, and put them in an optimistic mood. Humor theory dates back to ancient times; philosophers like Aristoteles and Plato discussed the concept of humor and its effects on human behavior. However, the first theory emerged in the 18th century known as the Superiority Theory. Later, with the development of positive psychology, Release or Relief Theory of Humor came to the scene. Then, contemporary humor theories incorporated different fields such as psychology, linguistics, sociology, and cognitive science. The Incongruity Theory shifted the perspective to a cognitive view of humor and its analysis (Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017). Theory of Humor has evolved over time as scholars from different fields have studied and contributed to our understanding of humor; why we laugh, why we find things funny, and they have tried to understand its functions in cognition, social interactions, and communication. There are three main theories that try to explain the functions of humor:

Superiority theory: Although it was named in the 18th century, this theory is attributed to Plato, Aristoteles, and Hobbs (Kulka, 2007). According to this theory, humor arises from a sense of superiority, that is the feeling of being intellectually or morally superior to others. Jokes often involve the ridicule or absurdity of others, making the audience feel superior. Although it can be questioned in terms of moral and social values, it is believed to serve two important societal functions: maintaining social class as laughter and reinforcing group unity (Martineau as cited in Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

Release or Relief theory: Developed mainly in the 19th century onwards, this theory deals with the positive psychological and physiological benefits of laughter. This theory is attributed to psychologists Herbert Spencer and Sigmund Freud. Relief theory suggests that humor serves as a psychological release of tension or emotions like aggression or anxiety. In other words, according to this theory, negative emotions such as stress, nervousness and anxiety could be reduced by laughing (Bakar & Kumar, 2019). The physiological positive affects also mentioned by many scholars. In their study Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2009) state that “The physiological benefits of laughter most closely align with this theoretical perspective as many negative health conditions are exacerbated by stress, and laughter has been shown to reduce the symptoms of such conditions” (p. 351).

Incongruity theory: This theory is credited to Cicero, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard (Kulka, 2007) and it advocates that humor stems from the perception of absurdity or the unexpected clash of ideas, events, or words. When the mind resolves these incongruities, it makes the individual laugh. In other words, according to the incongruity theory, an individual laughs at things that are surprising or violating a commonly accepted pattern—slightly different from the norm, of course it should be nonthreatening. Cognition is important in incongruity theory since the individuals need to have the knowledge of typical patterns to be able to detect these differences (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009).

There are also other theories of humor such as *Script-based semantic theory*, which focuses on linguistic humor such as puns or wordplay; *Benign violation theory*, when something is perceived as a violation of social or moral norms but as non-threatening or benign; Incongruity-Resolution Theory, humor results from the resolution of the irrationality. Although there are several theories on humor, studies in the literature generally take the first three theories into account.

4. Humor in L2 Instruction

In the related literature on teaching, it is very well established that providing an engaging and entertaining learning environment is of great importance since it can significantly affect student motivation, retention, and overall learning outcomes. Another commonly accepted idea is that when students find the learning process or activities enjoyable, they are more likely to take part actively and voluntarily and apply new information. Much research has been done applying different techniques to create engaging and entertaining learning environments such as storytelling, gamification, game-based teaching, using music, humor in the class etc. and has shown that learners who experience positive emotions and enjoyment during their studies tend to exhibit better self-regulation skills, persistence, and problem-solving abilities (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021; Huy Hoang & Petraki, 2006; Printer, 2021; Saleem, et. al., 2022). These techniques are crucial for language learning, where learners often encounter challenges and complexities. By incorporating elements of enjoyment into language teaching, educators can help students develop the resilience and skills necessary to navigate the intricacies of language acquisition successfully. Researchers have identified that teachers who integrate humor in the teaching process are generally positively rated both by their colleagues and students (Garner, 2006).

Dörnyei (2001) also considers humor as a motivational teaching practice and mentions the importance of integrating humor in teaching to establish an enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Regarding the use of humor in L2 instructional contexts, it could be defined as teacher- or learner-triggered efforts to provoke laughter and amusement in the classroom. As Huy Hoang and Petraki (2006) state, these efforts can arise from the interactions, materials, or the content, and ultimately lead to laughter or smiling. Consequently, the significance of creating engaging and fun learning environments goes beyond the immediate classroom experience; it lays the foundation for a positive attitude toward language learning.

5. Humor as a Language Instruction Tool

Humor can be used as an excellent teaching tool because, not only it prevents classroom boredom and monotony but also it introduces lateral aspects of language such as irony, sarcasm, mockery, elision, ellipsis, and euphemism. It can be used in teaching vocabulary, phonetics, culture and even in teaching syntax and grammar (Guindal, 1985). Humor also serves as an invaluable tool in L2 instruction in various ways:

Motivation, participation, and retention: Humor can help teachers take learners' attention and make the language learning more enjoyable. Thus, it can affect both classroom atmosphere and student motivation. When the learners find the lesson amusing, they will be active participants in the class; moreover, this will lead to a higher level of motivation. Think about yourself, you may not remember a text when you first read or listen to it but when you hear a humorous anecdote you can easily remember and tell it to your friends. That's why we can say that humorous content is generally more memorable and thus humor can help retention. Through the use of humor, L2 learners can recall the vocabulary, grammar, and also cultural issues more effectively (Çopur et al., 2021).

Stress reduction: Learning a new language is a complex and stressful activity for anyone. Humor can be used as a tool to create a stress-free, relaxed, and supportive classroom atmosphere. "Students who perceive an instructor as high in humor orientation were more likely to initiate communication with that instructor. Moreover, students are more apt to discuss personal concerns with a high-humor orientation instructor, which leads to a more meaningful teacher-student interpersonal relationship" (Huss & Eastep, 2016, p. 42). Consequently, reduced anxiety can improve learners' willingness to communicate.

Communication and culture: Current methodologies try to teach not only the language but also the target culture. Humorous texts generally provide real-life examples and also contain cultural references and wordplay. In real-life, when humor takes place, it includes the aspects of real-life communication such as tone, stress, timing, and context. Learners might come across humor while interacting in L2, but they might suffer from anxiety about understanding and engaging in the humor (Shively, 2018). Thus, Rucynski and Prichard (2021) suggest that teachers should help students become familiar with the humor of target-language speaking cultures and this will improve their intercultural communicative competence. They also explain the importance of L2 humor competence as:

L2 humor competence is an integral component of becoming proficient in a foreign language. This involves not merely appreciating the humor of foreign cultures, but also understanding how it is used. The timing, frequency, and purpose of humor greatly vary from culture to culture. When people use humor, there is often incongruity between the literal and intended meanings of their words. English language learners with a high level of humor competency have the ability to decode the message and to identify the true

purpose of the humor (e.g., just making a joke, criticizing a person or situation) (Rucynski & Prichard, 2021, p. 3).

In today's digital era, through internet, social media and TV platforms, English language learners will come across a great amount of humor. Making sense of humor in a target language is also essential in developing media literacy and critical thinking skills.

Çopur et al. (2021, p. 281) summarize the uses and benefits of using humor in language classrooms basing on the previous research findings:

- humor in classrooms is often relaxing.
- humor may be facilitative in terms of language learning by helping participants to recall the lesson or topic at a later time.
- students can freely practice and discuss humor without being afraid.
- humor provides learners with the opportunity to appropriate and experiment with language as well as taking the risk of making mistakes.
- humor increases opportunities for interaction, which creates space for learning.
- humor can create an interactive environment in classrooms as it has the potential to yield spontaneous and unplanned interaction.

6. Types of Humor

Although humor can provide a good service in education by bringing fun and entertainment to class, it is subjective and a receiver-centered communication (Meyer, 2000). For this reason, Deneire (1995) warns that humor should be used with caution both in the class and other public contexts. Garner (2006) also states that the use of humor could be most effective when it is appropriate to the students, the topic, and the place. These discussions, of course, need to be based on research findings. We believe that the first thing to be considered in discussions about the use of humor in L2 contexts is the categorization of humor. There have been several attempts to classify humor, both in general terms and in L2 context. For example, Schmitz (2002), after analyzing the related literature on the use of humor in L2 settings, organized humorous discourse into three groups as (i) universal or reality-based humor, (ii) culture-based humor, and (iii) linguistic or word-based humor. This categorization was formed to serve as a pedagogical framework for L2. Berger's study (2012) was another attempt to classify humor but in general terms; the result was 41 humor types as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Humor Types

1. Absurdity	Nonsense, a situation that goes against all logical rules
2. Anthropomorphism	Objects or animals with human features
3. Bombast	Talking in a high-flown, grandiloquent, or rhetorical manner
4. Chase	A pursuit or chase of someone or something
5. Clownish behavior	Making vigorous arm and leg movements or demonstrating exaggerated irregular physical behavior
6. Clumsiness	Lacking dexterity or grace
7. Coincidence	A coincidental and unexpected occurrence
8. Conceptual surprise	Misleading the audience by means of a sudden unexpected change of concept
9. Disappointment	A situation that leads to (minor) disappointment
10. Eccentricity	Someone who deviates from the norms, an odd character
11. Embarrassment	An awkward situation in which someone gets a sense of discomfort, uneasiness, or shame
12. Exaggeration	Making an exaggeration or overstatement; reacting in an exaggerated way
13. Grotesque appearance	Someone who has a bizarre or monstrous appearance with striking features
14. Ignorance	Someone acts or behaves in a foolish, naive, gullible, or childish manner
15. Imitation	Mimicking someone's appearance or movements while keeping one's own identity at the same time
16. Impersonation	Taking on the identity of another person, intentionally or unintentionally
17. Infantilism	Playing with the sound of words
18. Irony	Saying one thing and meaning something else or exactly the opposite of what you're saying
19. Irreverent behavior	Lacking proper respect for authority or the prevailing standards
20. Malicious pleasure	Taking pleasure in other people's misfortune; victim humor
21. Misunderstanding	Misinterpreting a situation
22. Outwitting	Outsmarting someone or the establishment by retort, response, or comeback
23. Parody	Imitating a style or a genre of literature or other media
24. Peculiar face	Making a funny face, grimace
25. Peculiar music	Funny, unusual music
26. Peculiar sound	Funny sound, unexpected sound, as in cartoons
27. Peculiar voice	Funny, unusual voice
28. Pun	Playing with the meaning of words
29. Repartee	Verbal banter, usually in a witty dialogue
30. Repetition	Repetition or replay of the same situation
31. Ridicule	Making a fool of someone, verbally or nonverbally
32. Rigidity	Someone who thinks along straight lines, who is conservative and inflexible
33. Sarcasm	Biting remark made with a hostile tone; sarcasm is always a verbal put-down
34. Satire	Making a fool of or poking fun at well-known things, situations, or public figures
35. Scale	Very large or small sizes of objects that surpass people's logical expectations
36. Sexual allusion	Making a reference or insinuation to sexual or naughty matters
37. Slapstick	Physical pie-in-the-face humor often involving degradation of someone's status
38. Speed	Talking or moving in very fast or slow motion
39. Stereotype	Stereotyped or generalized way of depicting members of a certain nation, gender, or other group
40. Transformation	Someone or something takes on another form or undergoes a metamorphosis; before/after
41. Visual surprise	A sudden unexpected visual/physical change

In Berger's categorization in Table 1, we can see that there are 41 types of humor. Most of these humor types can be regarded as universal; most of these situations or performances would put

smiles on anyone's face in any culture. Although some researchers questioned the merits of humor typologies claiming that "...typologies cannot be relied upon to illustrate how humor is used in interaction" (Bell, 2009, p. 243), we believe that the relationship between the L2 acquisition process and humor typologies needs to be analyzed. At this point, we might ask certain questions especially for the verbal humor types. For example, can these types of humor be used at any L2 proficiency level? Are they sensitive to L2 proficiency levels? Are they at the same difficulty level for L2 learners? How would L2 learners from different cultures regard them? The related literature lacks answers to these questions and many other related ones.

7. Discussion

In general terms, the integration of humor into the teaching and learning process is not a no man's land. For example, Berk (2002) lists five areas that are beneficially affected by the use of humor as: (1) professor-student connection, (2) classroom atmosphere, (3) student responsiveness, (4) test performance, and (5) student attendance. However, using humor in a balanced manner is essential for maintaining an effective and respectful classroom atmosphere. As in any lesson plan, the first step is determining the objectives and learning outcomes of the lesson and the purpose of including humor should be in line with learning objectives. In this framework, some strategies to use humor in classroom have been proposed by scholars and they can be summarized as follows:

- Set objectives
- Align humor with the content
- Set boundaries of the lesson
- Avoid offensive humor
- Be careful about the cultural sensitivities
- Observe student reactions
- Encourage communication
- Take students preferences into account
- Be careful about timing
- Reflect and adapt

To sum up, humor should support the content of the lesson and be used to reinforce key concepts, vocabulary, or language skills. To keep your professionalism and authority in the class discuss your expectations with your students at the very beginning. Be aware of cultural differences and avoid sensitive topics to prevent any misunderstandings of anything that can

negatively affect the classroom atmosphere and pay attention to the reactions of the students. If you recognize any discomfort or offence, change your approach, and even apologize if necessary. Use humor in the appropriate time in an appropriate manner. Finally, reflection is a vital element in teaching; thus, reflect on your use of humor. If you think that you are doing badly or receive any negative feedback on your use of humor, adjust or use it less.

Obviously, the points made above are about humor as a tool for the instructor and education in general. When we consider the use of humor in L2 contexts, we can say that humor provides many advantages, some of which were discussed previously. However, some problematic aspects of humor have also been discussed. For example, Schmitz (2002) mentions certain risks about the use of humor in L2 textbooks as the discourse in which humor is used might be outdated. The same discussion holds true for the integration of sitcoms or other TV shows into the L2 instruction process. After all, sitcoms and TV shows get their materials from recent and everyday events. In addition to this, Bell (2011) believes that culture-specific aspects of humor might prevent L2 learners from making sense as they might lack specific knowledge required to do so, and this claim can also be regarded as reasonable for sitcoms and TV shows.

Another point that needs attention is how different cultures regard humor. Now we have enough scientific evidence to claim that the attitudes of Eastern cultures towards humor are not as positive as Western cultures (Jiang et al., 2019). For example, Freud (1928) believed that humor is a type of defense mechanism, and it has been suggested that Western cultures associate humor with positivity (Apte, 1985). On the other hand, it has been reported that some Eastern cultures devalue humor. For example, Rudowicz and Yue (2002) claim that Chinese people do not believe that humor is one of the desirable personality traits. The attitudinal differences among different cultures make the use of humor in L2 contexts a more complex issue. In this respect, Schmitz (2002) argues that L2 learners should deal first with universal humor, which is more straightforward compared to the other two. Then they can move on to cultural humor, which will require more effort on the learners' side, and linguistic humor should be the last group that should be dealt with by L2 learners as it involves many other challenges.

When it comes to humor in relation to L2 proficiency levels, the picture is not that clear either. While some researchers believe that there should be a match between the humor types used in L2 contexts and the proficiency levels of the learners (Schmitz, 2002), some others see this attempt as a fallacy (Bell, 2009). According to Bell (2009), "... different types of humor are not categorically more difficult for learners of certain levels of proficiency. ... any type of

humor can be constructed at any level of sophistication...” (p. 245). However, research in neuroscience clearly states that, for example, puns are processed differently in the brain and require more complex neural connections (McHugh & Buchanan, 2016). When we consider that they carried out this study in an L1 environment, it would be safe to assume that it will be a much more challenging task for L2 learners to process puns in the target language.

The basic premise of the current chapter is that humor is one of the essential attributes of human nature. How different societies and communities regard humor might be discussed, but it is impossible to find a society or community without any sense of humor. The next and more specific premise in the current context is that anything related to human nature can and should be used in L2 instruction. The corollary that can be based on these two premises is that humor should be a part of L2 instructional process. However, currently we do not have enough evidence to show the practical aspects of using humor in L2 settings.

As L2 instructors and researchers, we are sure that the L2 input sources that learners are exposed to are far more different than the ones a couple of decades ago. Digital games on several platforms, social media, sitcoms, TV shows, and films, i.e., all types of multimedia, that can easily be accessed via the internet now form the bulk of the input that L2 learners are exposed to. For example, modern sitcoms have become an important part of popular culture. They depict real life situations in a humorous way. They are created for native speakers with no intention to be used as language teaching materials, which makes them authentic in nature. They are short compared to films, and the situations are easy to understand and relevant for most people, especially for teenagers. One thing is more obvious than the rest: the stories in sitcoms are narrated in humorous discourse. These features of sitcoms make them preferable to other types of multimedia. In addition to L2 learners, many people around the world watch full episodes of sitcoms in one sitting, which is a new concept among young people all around the world called *binge watching*. These new types of L2 input sources have actually changed the roles of L2 instructors; they are not the only language model for L2 learners anymore. In fact, the input that L2 instructors provide is insignificant compared to the input coming from different types of multimedia. Maybe the best option for L2 instructors now is to become the manager of these input sources and to find ways to integrate them into the L2 instruction process. Sitcoms have great potentials in this respect as they are fun to watch, authentic, short, and easy to understand. However, we must bear in mind that humor is not a concept that we can take for granted and integrate directly into the L2 instruction process.

REFERENCES

- Apte, M. L. (1985). *Humor and laughter: An anthropological approach*. Cornell University Press.
- Bakar, F., & Kumar, V. (2019). The use of humour in teaching and learning in higher education classrooms: Lecturers' perspectives. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 40, 15-25.
- Bell, N. (2012). Comparing playful and nonplayful incidental attention to form. *Language Learning*, 62(1), 236-265. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2011.00630.x>
- Berger, A. A. (2012). *An anatomy of humor*. Transaction.
- Bell, N. D. (2009). Learning about and through humor in the second language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 13(3), 241–258. doi:10.1177/1362168809104697
- Berk, R. A. (2001). The active ingredients in humor: Psychophysiological benefits and risks for older adults. *Educational Gerontology*, 27(3-4), 323-339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/036012701750195021>
- Berk, R. A. (2002). *Humor as an instructional defibrillator evidence-based techniques in teaching and assessment*. Stylus Publishing, LLC.
- Bell, N. (2011). Humor scholarship in TESOL: Applying findings and establishing a research agenda. *TESOL Quarterly* 45 (1): 134–159. <https://doi:10.5054/tq.2011.240857>.
- Çopur, N., Atar, C., & Walsh, S. (2021). Humour as a pedagogical tool in teacher-initiated repair sequences: the case of extreme case formulations and candidate hearing. *Classroom Discourse*, 12(3), 280-294. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2021.1910051>
- Dehghanzadeh, H., Fardanesh, H., Hatami, J., Talaei, E. & Noroozi, O. (2021) Using gamification to support learning English as a second language: a systematic review,

- Computer Assisted Language Learning*, 34 (7), 934-957.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09588221.2019.1648298>
- Deneire, M. (1995). Humor and foreign language teaching. *International Journal of Humor Research*, 8 (3), 285-298. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1995.8.3.285>
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2010). *Second language acquisition* (16. [print.]). Oxford Univ. Press.
- Freud, S. (1928). Humor. *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 9, 1–6.
- Garner, R. L. (2006). Humor in pedagogy: How ha-ha can lead to aha! *College Teaching*, 54(1), 177–180.
- Gilmore, A. (2007). Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 40(2), 97–118. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444807004144>
- Guindal, A. L. (1985). *Humour: An Excellent EFL Teaching Device [microform]*. ERIC Clearinghouse. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED287322>
- Huss, J. & Eastep, S. (2016). The attitudes of university faculty toward humor as a pedagogical tool: Can we take a joke? *Journal of Inquiry & Action in Education*, 8(1), 39-65.
- Huy Hoang, P., & Petraki, E. (2016). Do Asian EFL teachers use humour in the classroom? A case study of Vietnamese EFL university teachers. *System*, 61, 98–109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2016.08.002>
- Jiang, T., Li, H., & Hou, Y. (2019). Cultural differences in humor perception, usage, and implications. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00123
- Kasper, G. (2001). Four perspectives on L2 pragmatic development. *Applied Linguistics*, 22(4), 502–530. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/22.4.502>
- Kulka, T. (2007). The incongruity of incongruity theories of humor. *Organon F*, 14(3), 320–333.

- Larkin-Galiñanes, C. (2017). An overview of humor theory. In S. Attardo (Ed.) *The Routledge handbook of language and humor* (pp. 4-16). Routledge.
- Meyer, J. C. (2000). Humour as a double-edged sword: Four functions of humor in communication. *Communication Theory*, 10(3), 310-331.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00194.x>
- Peacock, M. (1997). The effect of authentic materials on the motivation of EFL learners. *ELT Journal*, 51(2), 144–156. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/51.2.144>
- Printer, L. (2021). Student perceptions on the motivational pull of Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS): a self-determination theory perspective. *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(3), 288-301.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2019.1566397>
- Rucynski Jr, J., & Prichard, C. (2021). Implementing humor instruction into English language teaching. *English Teaching Forum*, 59(3), 2-13.
- Rudowicz, E., & Yue, X. D. (2002). Compatibility of Chinese and creative personalities. *Creativity Research Journal*, 14(3-4), 387–394. doi: 10.1207/S15326934CRJ1434_9
- Saleem, A. N., Noori, N. M., & Ozdamli, F. (2022). Gamification applications in E-learning: A literature review. *Technology, Knowledge and Learning*, 27(1), 139-159.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10758-020-09487-x>
- Schmitz, J. R. (2002). Humor as a pedagogical tool in foreign language and translation courses. *Humor - International Journal of Humor Research* 15 (1): 89–113.
doi:10.1515/humr.2002.007
- Shively, R. L. (2018). *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*. Walter de Gruyter.
- McHugh, T., & Buchanan, L. (2016). Pun processing from a psycholinguistic perspective: Introducing the Model of Psycholinguistic Hemispheric Incongruity Laughter

(M.PHIL), *Laterality*, 21(4-6), 455-483.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1357650X.2016.1146292>

Thomas, J. (1983). Cross-Cultural pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 4(2), 91–112.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/4.2.91>

Wilkins, J., & Eisenbraun, A. J. (2009). Humor theories and the physiological benefits of laughter. *Holistic Nursing Practice*, 23(6), 349-354.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/HNP.0b013e3181bf37ad>

Wimmer, H. (1983). Beliefs about beliefs: Representation and constraining function of wrong beliefs in young children's understanding of deception. *Cognition*, 13(1), 103–128.

[https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277\(83\)90004-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(83)90004-5)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Assoc. Prof. Dr. İhsan ÜNALDI

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0009-3537

ihsan@nevsehir.edu.tr

Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University,

Department of English Language Teaching

İhsan Ünalı holds a Ph.D. in English language teaching. Currently, he is an associate professor at Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli University, Turkey. His areas of interest are corpus linguistics, non-native vocabulary, and testing & assessment.



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet BARDAKÇI

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-0071-0059

mbardakci@gantep.edu.tr

mbardakci@gmail.com

Gaziantep University, Department of English Language Teaching

Mehmet Bardakçı holds an MA and a PhD in English Language Teaching, and currently works as an associate professor of English Language Teaching at Gaziantep University, Faculty of Education. His work focuses specifically on teacher training, teaching English to young learners, critical reading and reasoning fallacies.

To Cite this Chapter

Ünalı İ., & Bardakçı, M. (2023). Multimedia, humor and language learning: changing roles and perspectives. In K. Büyükkarcı & A. Önal (Eds.), *Current studies in foreign language education*, (pp. 404-422). ISRES Publishing.