

**Jocularity and Language Familiarity: Reframing Humour as a Pedagogical Strategy in the English Language Classroom**

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**Abstract**

English language learning in the Indian classroom is frequently marked by anxiety, inhibition, and fear of linguistic inadequacy. The traditional methods stress the need for skill acquisition and grammatical competence; affective factors are always given minimal importance. This paper argues that jocularity, understood as the purposeful integration of humour into instruction, serves as an effective pedagogical strategy to reduce learner anxiety and enhance language familiarity. It also analyses how humour goads a cognitive engagement, cultural consciousness, and communicative competence in students. It further examines classroom practices and classifications of humour that support meaningful language acquisition. The study concludes that humour is not a peripheral teaching aid but a central component of learner-centred pedagogy in English language education.

**Keywords:** Jocularity, Language Anxiety, English Language Teaching, Classroom Humour, Communicative Competence.

**Introduction**

In multilingual societies such as India, English language classrooms often reflect a complex interplay of aspiration and apprehension. English language being lingua-franca, it serves as a medium for academic and professional development. Mastery of English demands proficiency in the four core skills—Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing—along with exposure to linguistic theory, semantic nuance, and cultural context. The linguistic insecurity undermines student's learning and performance.

Within this framework, the role of the English language teacher extends beyond instruction to include emotional scaffolding and motivational engagement. One instructional strategy that effectively addresses these affective dimensions is jocularity, or the strategic use of humour in pedagogy. When incorporated thoughtfully, humour reduces anxiety,

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promotes learner autonomy, and creates an environment conducive to experimentation and interaction. This paper examines humour as a pedagogical resource that enhances learner familiarity with English and redefines the classroom as a collaborative, low-anxiety learning space.

### **Language Anxiety and Classroom Dynamics**

Foreign language anxiety has been widely recognised as a critical barrier to second language acquisition. Learners experiencing such anxiety often avoid participation, exhibit cognitive blocks during assessments, and demonstrate physiological symptoms of stress. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope define foreign language anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (128).

Research shows that conventional corrective practices, when delivered without affective sensitivity, may exacerbate learners’ fear of failure. In contrast, humour functions as an emotional buffer that normalises error and reframes mistakes as part of the learning process. Berk and Nanda’s study on jocular instructional methods reveals that humour significantly improves student attitudes while producing a measurable reduction in classroom anxiety. Their findings support the view that humour contributes not merely to engagement but to emotional resilience in academic settings. Krashen argues that emotional variables such as anxiety and self-confidence directly influence language acquisition, noting that “comprehensible input cannot be utilized by learners when the affective filter is high” (31).

### **Humour, Memory, and Meaning-Making**

Humour possesses distinctive cognitive properties that make it especially effective in educational contexts. Humorous experiences tend to be encoded more deeply in memory due to their emotional and sensory richness. Recollection of a humorous classroom episode often involves visual imagery, auditory cues, and affective recall, thereby reinforcing learning outcomes. Ziv observes that humour enhances learning by increasing attention and retention, stating that “students taught with humour recalled significantly more material than those taught without it” (90).

For language learners, humour also facilitates exposure to pragmatic and cultural dimensions of English. Jokes, anecdotes, and situational humour require sensitivity to context, tone, and implied meaning—skills essential for communicative competence. However, humour in pedagogy must remain intentional and disciplined. As Tosta cautions, the effective use of humour does not reduce the teacher to an entertainer; rather, it reflects pedagogical seriousness grounded in learner engagement and instructional purpose.

### **Pedagogical Applications of Classroom Humour**

The integration of humour into language instruction yields several pedagogical benefits. It fosters a supportive classroom atmosphere, encourages peer collaboration, and increases learners’ willingness to participate orally. Moreover, humour provides a gateway

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to exploring idiomatic expressions, figurative language, and semantic ambiguity. Wanzer et al. caution that instructional humour is effective only when it is “appropriate, relevant, and clearly connected to course content” (204).

One particularly effective application is humour-based error analysis. Rather than presenting errors as failures, teachers can use dramatization, role-play, or familiar cultural references to highlight common mistakes. Bell notes that humour competence in a second language requires “sensitivity to sociocultural norms, contextual cues, and shared background knowledge” (138). According to Muñoz-Basols, error awareness enhances learners’ ability to self-monitor and refine their linguistic output. When error correction is embedded within humorous activities, students demonstrate greater attentiveness and reduced defensiveness, leading to improved language accuracy.

### **Typologies of Classroom Humour**

The pedagogical versatility of humour is reflected in its various classifications. Shade identifies four primary categories of classroom humour: figural, verbal, visual, and auditory. Each category activates distinct sensory and cognitive channels, thereby accommodating diverse learner preferences. Complementing this framework, Chee categorises humour into textual, pictorial, action-based, and verbal forms, emphasising its adaptability across instructional methods and age groups. These typologies underscore humour’s capacity to function as a multi-modal instructional strategy rather than an incidental classroom occurrence.

### **Conclusion**

The findings and discussions presented in this paper affirm that humour occupies a central position in effective English language pedagogy. The ability to interpret and generate humour in a second language reflects advanced linguistic awareness, cultural literacy, and communicative confidence. More significantly, humour reshapes the emotional climate of the classroom, transforming it into a space where learners feel secure enough to take risks and engage meaningfully with the language.

By reducing anxiety and encouraging active participation, jocularity enhances both motivation and retention. It enables learners to view language acquisition not as a rigid academic task but as an interactive and enjoyable process. Consequently, humour should be recognised not as a supplementary teaching technique but as a core pedagogical strategy that humanises instruction and strengthens language familiarity in English classrooms.

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