TEACHING "HUMOUR COMPETENCE"

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Abstract

Humour competence, which can be defined as the capacity to recognize and understand humour, is an important aspect of semantic and pragmatic competence for advanced language learners. This paper will discuss the design, implementation, and outcomes of a one-semester programme in humour competence for university EFL students, using a combination of explicit teaching of humour theories and knowledge schema, teacher- and learner-led analysis of humorous texts, and student presentations. Both qualitative and quantitative findings from the course are presented. Results from a number of measures, including comparisons of participants' ratings of the humorous appeal of English jokes with ratings from learners who had received no humour competence instruction, and student use of course content-knowledge to analyse jokes independently, suggest that humour competence training during the course may have aided participants' appreciation of English humour. However, it is not clear that learners were able to satisfy a strict definition of humour competence – that of being able to distinguish humorous from non-humorous texts – at the end of the course. Reasons for this mixed outcome, which include methodological issues, are discussed, and possibilities for follow-up research are suggested.

1 Introduction

Research into humour in the language classroom tends to focus on how it is used, rather than on how it is taught, but since Trachtenberg's (1979) analysis of the joke-telling as a tool in ESL, a range of investigations into materials and methods for teaching humour have been carried out. These studies range from broad perspectives, such as Cook's (2000) argument for the potential of creative language play in language learning, though guidelines on materials selection and activity design in the work of, for example, Medgyes (2002) and Gardner (2008), to detailed studies in which humorous texts are used to reinforce the teaching of specified language items or skills, such as vocabulary (Blyth & Ohyama, 2010) or reading comprehension (Hayati, Shooshtari, & Shakeri, 2011). Humorous texts may also be used to raise learners' metalinguistic awareness (Lems, 2013), or to teach cultural content, as in Rucynski (2011). Despite this growing body of research, the skills needed to understand and appreciate humour do not feature prominently in many second or foreign-language curriculums, but there seems to be an increasing recognition that they should do so. Most recently, Bell (2014, p. 672) has argued that:

> Both the use and understanding of humor represent a formidable linguistic and cultural challenge to language learners, yet it is crucial that they meet this challenge, given the important role humor plays in human interaction.

This paper is the third in a series of ongoing investigations into ways that this challenge can be supported. Whereas two previous studies – Hodson (2011), investigating student creation of newspaper cartoon captions, and Hodson (2010, 2012), reporting on a study of student joke-retelling – have focused on learner output, this paper will turn to the understanding of humour through discussion of the implementation and outcomes of a one-semester programme in humour competence for university EFL students, using a combination of explicit teaching of humour theories and knowledge schema, student presentations, and teacher- and learner-led analysis of humorous texts.

2 Participants, research objectives, and definitions

2.1 Participants

Data obtained from several groups of students is included in this study. The primary group (group A) comprised 32 third-year students, studying English as a foreign language, in the literature department of a private university in Japan. All students were Japanese, with 21 females and 11 males. Data for comparison was also obtained from a larger group of 124 learners (group B; 108 female and 16 male students) in five first-year EFL classes, majoring in international relations and cross-cultural communication, information and media studies, and nursing, at a public university in Japan. A third group (group C) consisted of 11 native speakers of English (seven male and four female) from the USA, studying Japanese language and culture as exchange students at a private university in Japan.

2.2 Objective of the current study

The study aimed to address the following research question: are language learners, when provided with specific instruction in theories of humour, information about the forms and structure of humorous texts, and controlled exposure to a variety of such texts, able to display "humour competence"?

2.3 Definition of humour competence

This study follows Attardo (2002, p. 161), in defining "humour competence" as:

> the capacity of a speaker to process semantically a given text and to locate a set of relationships among its components, such that he/she would identify the text (or part of it) as humorous in an ideal situation. This humor competence is analogous and in fact part of the semantic competence of speakers: being able to recognise a sentence as funny is a skill equivalent (but not identical, of course), for example, to being able to recognize a sentence as synonymous with another sentence.

3 Class procedures and materials

3.1 Course goals

Students taking the class were provided with the following statement of course goals:

> The goal of this course is to use English humorous texts to provide advanced speaking, listening, reading, and writing practice. You will develop your knowledge of how English humour works, and of the role it plays in English-speaking culture.

They were also given a brief explanation of the procedures and texts that would be used, along with a general rationale for the course:

> English humorous texts, which include written and spoken materials such as jokes and funny stories, and audio-visual materials such as cartoons, movies, and TV comedies, provide plenty of scope for challenging English practice in all skill areas, and can help you to improve your grammar, vocabulary, and cultural knowledge. You will be introduced to a variety of humorous materials for discussion, and asked to keep a humour journal to record your responses and opinions. Later in the semester, you will find, present, and even create your own humorous materials to share with the class.

3.2 Course schedule and class procedures

The course consisted of 15 weekly lessons, each of 90 minutes duration. In the first six classes, students were introduced to a variety of humorous materials, and two sets of meta-skills needed to deal with them: 1) awareness of the varying extents to which materials require linguistic and content knowledge to be understood; and 2) knowledge of three basic theoretical approaches to humour (the ambiguity theory, the relief theory, and the superiority theory). In weeks 7 to 14, eight groups of students made presentations on selections from seven different types of humorous text: one-liners (two groups), cartoons, puns, bar jokes, idiot jokes, ethnic jokes, and satirical cartoons. In week 15, students were asked to give a brief written analysis of two humorous texts from a set of six jokes and two cartoons representing these seven text-types. Supplementary activities included two joke-rating surveys, and a test on information presented in the early classes. Table 1 summarizes activities and materials used each week.

Table 1. Week-by-week course schedule and class content

week	activity 1	content 1	activity 2	content 2
1	T presentation	One cartoon One joke	Individual S preparation	Funny experiences from students' lives
2	T presentation S group discussion	Linguistic and content knowledge needed to understand cartoon and two jokes		
3	T presentation	Theories of humour: incongruity theory	S group discussion	Five jokes
4	T presentation	Relief theory; superiority theory	S group discussion	Five jokes
5	T presentation	Carnegie Hall joke	S joke rewriting	Carnegie Hall joke
6	Introduction to humour test; allocation of S groups; S rating of jokes		T presentation	One-liners
7	S group	One-liners (1)		

	presentation			
8	S group presentation	One-liners (2)	T presentation	Cartoons
9	S group presentation	Cartoons	T presentation	Puns
10	S group presentation	Puns	T presentation	Bar jokes
11	S group presentation	Bar jokes	T presentation	Idiot jokes
12	S group presentation	Idiot jokes	T presentation	Ethnic jokes
13	S group presentation	Ethnic jokes	T presentation	Satirical cartoons (football World Cup)
14	S group presentation	Satirical cartoons (football World Cup)	S rating of 12 follow-up texts, including jokes	
15	S individual joke analysis	Choice of eight texts		

4 Student tasks

4.1 Introductory joke rating

In week 6, students were asked to rate how funny they had found each of the introductory humour texts (13 jokes, and one cartoon). In order to allow comparison with data from groups B and C, a five-point scale modelled on Stock and Strappavara (2002), with humour ratings of 1 (not funny), 2 (not very funny), 3 (mildly funny), 4 (funny) and 5 (very funny), was used. The humour ratings were illustrated with small faces showing expressions ranging from a frown to a broad grin.

4.2 Follow-up joke rating

A similar exercise was carried out in week 14, using a set of 12 new joke texts. These texts were chosen to represent joke types that had been dealt with in student group presentations: puns and one-liners (five texts), bar jokes (two texts), idiot jokes (three texts), and ethnic jokes (two texts). Four texts (one from each of the four joke types) were re-written to remove their humorous content. Students were instructed to rate how funny they found each of the texts, and were given an additional instruction that they should put a cross by the number of any text that they thought was not actually a joke at all. Students were thereby made aware of the presence of distractors among the texts, although not of their number or nature. Cartoons were not included in this rating task, as it was considered that they could not easily be modified to remove humorous elements.

4.3 Final joke analysis

In week 15, all 32 students in the class chose two joke texts to analyse from a choice of eight texts representing the seven text-types presented in class. The texts were selected from materials made available for group presentations, but not actually chosen by the students

making those presentations in class. The task was to answer the following questions about each text:

> What linguistic and/or content knowledge do we need to understand [the text]?
> Is it easy for you to understand? Why, or why not?
> How can we explain the humour in this joke/cartoon? (If you can refer to one or more theories of humour, please do.)
> Do you find it funny? Why, or why not?

Students did not have access to their class notes during this activity, but were allowed to use dictionaries, look things up on the internet, or talk freely to friends.

4.5 Presentations and humour journals

In weeks 7-14, groups of four students made presentations on sets of humorous texts. Each presentation was preceded, in the previous week, by a teacher presentation on the theoretical background to each joke type, including information on common structural features and themes. Student presentations were followed by in-class oral feedback and, if necessary, teacher clarification and amplification of issues raised during the presentation, but the presentations themselves were not recorded for analysis.

Throughout the course, students were required to keep journals, both to keep notes on lectures and presentations, and to record their reactions to the jokes and cartoons introduced in class. The degree and quality of journal completion, which varied very widely, was taken into account in determining final course grades, but this study does not include analysis of journal content. However, copies of journal content were kept for future reference.

5 Findings

5.1 Introductory joke ratings

The 14 introductory texts were rated, on average, at 3.38 (between mildly funny, and funny). 11 of these texts, all verbal jokes with no visual element, had previously been rated by the 124 learners of group B, and by the 11 native speakers in group C. Group A's average rating of 3.37 for these 11 jokes was 15% higher than that of group B, and all but one of the 11 jokes was rated more highly by group A. There was a positive correlation between ratings of the 11 jokes by group A, and the ratings that those jokes had received from group B: r = .74. However, there was a negative correlation between group A ratings and the ratings of native speakers (group C): r = -.49. Group B ratings had also been negatively correlated to native speaker ratings of the 11 selected jokes: r = -.26.[1]

5.2 Follow-up joke ratings

26 students took part in this second rating exercise, and each of the 12 texts received an average of 24 ratings. The average humour rating was 2.68 (rising to 2.81 when ratings for the non-joke texts are removed), compared to 3.38 per text in the first rating exercise.

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[1] The correlation between group B's ratings of the full set of 22 jokes, and those of the group C native speakers, was -.06. Given the widely disparate sizes of the three groups, such comparisons should be treated with caution.

14 students correctly identified text 4 as a non-humorous text (giving it a rating of 1.48: the lowest of any text in this study), with 12 students correctly identifying text 10 (rating 1.87). Only 2 students correctly identified text 10 as a non-humorous text (rating 3.09), and no students identified text 6 (rating 3.27). In contrast, text 9 was incorrectly identified as non-humorous by 15 students, and there were also five incorrect identifications for text 3, and one for text 2. In total, there were 28 correct and 21 incorrect identifications. On average, each student identified a total of 1.88 texts as non-humorous, and only correctly identified 1.08 of the four non-humorous texts.

5.3 Final joke analyses

There was considerable variation in student choice of materials for this activity, with 20 students choosing text 2 (one of the one-liner jokes), but only two choosing the bar joke, and none at all choosing the satirical cartoon.

Student analyses were coded in the following categories: 1) Did the analysis specify that **linguistic** knowledge, **content** knowledge, **both** kinds of knowledge, or **neither** kind of knowledge was needed to understand the text? 2) Did the analysis refer to the **incongruity**, **superiority**, or **relief** theory of humour, or to **none** of these theories? 3) Did the analysis make reference to any of the following structural elements of the joke: **misunderstanding**, **narrative**, **one-line**r, **pun**, **set-up/punchline**, **situation**, **stereotype**, or **two meanings** of a word?[2] Tables 2 to 4 below show the distribution of responses in these categories.

Table 2. Types of knowledge identified as necessary to understand humour texts (in 64 joke analyses)

Linguistic knowledge	24
Content knowledge	29
Both linguistic and content knowledge	7
Neither linguistic nor content knowledge required	4
Total analyses	**64**

Table 3. References to theories of humour (in 64 joke analyses)

Incongruity theory	10
Superiority theory	14
Relief theory	2
No references to theories of humour	38
Total analyses	**64**

Table 4. References to structural elements of joke texts (in 64 joke analyses)

Misunderstanding	5
Narrative	1
One-liner	3
Pun	4
Set-up/punchline	7

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[2] The **two meanings** category was applied only to analyses that did not specifically use the word "pun".

Situation	10
Stereotype	2
Two meanings	11
Total references to structural elements	**43**

Students' stated reasons for finding the text funny were also categorised, as follows: funny because the situation was **absurd**; funny because the joke was **easy** to understand; funny because the text was an **ethnic** joke; funny because the joke was about an **idiot**; funny because the joke's situation could be **imagined**; funny because the joke addressed a **popular topic**; funny because what happened in the joke was **unexpected**; or funny for **another or unspecified** reason. Reasons for not finding a text funny were categorised thus: not funny because the situation was **absurd**; not funny because the joke was **difficult**; not funny because the joke was **easy** to understand; not funny because **ethnic** jokes are unpleasant; not funny for a **personal reason**; not funny because the joke's structure was **too simple**; and not funny for **another** or **unspecified reason**. A final category was used for students who stated that the text was **not funny but interesting**. No student gave more than two reasons for either text. Tables 5 and 6 show the distribution of responses in these categories.

Table 5. Reasons for finding a humorous text funny (in 64 joke analyses)

funny because absurd	5
funny because easy	10
funny because ethnic	1
funny because idiot	22
funny because imaginable	3
funny because other/not specified	11
funny because popular topic	1
funny because unexpected	5
Total reasons given	**58**

Table 6. Reasons for finding a humorous text not funny (in 64 joke analyses)

not funny because absurd	1
not funny because difficult	2
not funny because easy	1
not funny because ethnic is unpleasant	1
not funny because other/not specified	1
not funny because personal reason	1
not funny because too simple	2
not funny but interesting	2
Total reasons given	**11**

49 out of the 64 analyses (77%) showed that the students had successfully understood the humour in the joke text, with the remaining 15 analyses revealing that the humour had not been fully understood, or had been misunderstood. In ten of these cases, students still stated that they had found the joke funny. Table 7 below shows the rates of understanding for the seven texts that students analysed.

Table 7. Rates of understanding of humour in seven jokes (in 64 joke analyses)

Text number	Joke type	Understood	Not understood	% understood
1	One-liner/pun	8	1	89%
2	One-liner	20	0	100%
3	One-liner/pun	3	3	50%
4	Cartoon	4	2	67%
5	Bar joke	0	2	0%
6	Idiot joke	11	0	100%
7	Ethnic joke	3	7	30%
All jokes		**49**	**15**	**77%**

5.4 Comparisons

Of the 32 students in the group A class, 26 completed both of the joke rating exercises and the introduction to humour test, as well as the final analysis exercise. There were no strong correlations between their scores on the test and their average ratings of the complete set of 22 joke texts[3] (r = .04), between their test scores and their correct identifications of non-humorous texts (r = -.05), or between their ratings of 22 jokes and their correct identifications of non-humorous texts (r = .12).[4] There was also no strong correlation between the 26 students' humour test scores and their understanding of humour in the final analyses (r = .2).

6 Discussion

6.1 Joke ratings and humour competence

The fact that group A rated the 11 introductory texts more highly for humour than group B had done, and that the spread of ratings was not greatly divergent from that of group B, provides some support for the possibility that explicit humour training received by group A may have been effective in promoting joke appreciation among members of that group. However, the lack of any clear correlations between group A's joke ratings, and their performances on the test, identification, and analysis exercises means that it is not possible to make any claims about humour competence from this data alone.

6.2 Humour identification and humour competence

Given that Attardo's definition of humour competence is "the capacity of a speaker to process semantically a given text and to locate a set of relationships among its components, such that he/she would identify the text (or part of it) as humorous in an ideal situation," the degree of group A's success in identifying non-humorous texts in the second rating exercise may appear to be the best measure of their humour competence. If so, the results are not particularly encouraging. In an ideal situation, we might expect that humour-competent learners would

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[3] Group A's 22 joke texts comprised the initial set of 13 jokes and one cartoon, plus a second set of eight jokes (to which four non-humorous distractors were added. Of these, 11 jokes were shared with a different set of 22 jokes rated by groups B and C, in a separate study.

[4] These findings are consistent with the absence of any obvious correlation between the whole of group A's scores on the test of humour knowledge and their appreciation of either the 11 jokes also rated by group B (r = .11) or the full set of 14 introductory humorous texts (r = .14).

have identified all, or at least most of the four non-humorous texts – especially given that they were aware that some texts in the exercise may have been non-humorous – but in fact each student identified only 1.08 texts correctly, and the numbers of misidentifications (21) and correct identifications (28) were not that different. However, the exercise may not have presented such an ideal situation. Examination of the four non-humorous texts may give some insight. The first such text (no. 4 in the exercise) was a one-liner:

I used to be addicted to soap, but now I'm not.

The original form of this joke contained a pun on the word "clean":

I used to be addicted to soap, but now I'm clean now.

14 students correctly identified this text as non-humorous, and its rating was a very low 1.48.[5] 12 students correctly identified text no. 10, an ethnic joke (rating 1.87):

An Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman were marooned on a little desert island and were wondering how to escape. "Let's build a raft," said the Englishman. "No, let's build a boat," said the Scotsman. "No need to, we're saved," said the Irishman. "Here comes a ship."

In the original version of this joke, the Irishman says "the Titanic" instead of "a ship." Although there is no explicit identification of the Irishman as an "idiot" figure here, the humour of the joke derives from his stupidity or ignorance, and results from the later joke-analysis exercise, reported in 5.3 above, show a high student consciousness of this particular element of humour.

In contrast to these successful identifications, 15 students incorrectly identified text no. 9, an unmodified one-liner, "I'm glad I know sign language. It's pretty handy," as non-humorous and gave it a rating of 1.6, the second-lowest in the study.[6] The *absence* of linguistic ambiguity – the pun on "clean" – in text no. 4 seemed to have allowed students to determine that it was not a joke, but the *presence* of similar ambiguity – the pun on "handy" – was not enough to signal to students that text no. 9 was a humorous text. Furthermore, the other two non-humorous texts were not successfully identified. Text no. 6 was a bar "joke" specifically written for the exercise (rating 3.27, no identifications): "A duck walked into a bar and ordered a drink. The barman said, 'I'm sorry, we don't serve beer.'" Although students were not asked to give reasons for their ratings, some commented that they found the idea of a duck trying to order a drink intrinsically funny,[7] indicating that the construction of this text may have been a methodological error. The final text was no. 12

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[5] The lowest possible rating in the exercise would be 1.00.

[6] No other jokes were rated lower than 2.00 in either of group A's two rating exercises. In group B's rating of 22 different jokes (11 of which overlapped with texts in group A's first rating exercise), the lowest rating was 2.14.

[7] The BAAS's account of the Laughlab experiment suggests, perhaps a little flippantly, that "ducks are indeed the funniest animals" (2002, p. 98).

> An idiot was picking through the frozen turkeys at the supermarket, but couldn't find one big enough for his family. He asked a store clerk, "Do your turkeys get any bigger?" The clerk replied, "No sir, they're all dead."

The idiot's question was modified to read, "Do you have any bigger turkeys?" It received a relatively high humour rating (3.07) and only two correct identifications as non-humorous. Anecdotal evidence from in-class reaction suggests that the word "bigger" may have been enough for students to make a connection with "dead" and therefore reconstruct the incongruity of the original joke even without its linguistic ambiguity.

6.3 Final joke analyses and humour competence

6.3.1 Text choices, knowledge, and reasons for humour appreciation

Instructions for the final joke analysis exercise did not specify that students should choose texts that they actually found funny, but the vast majority did so. All 64 analyses tackled the question of what kinds of knowledge were needed to understand the texts chosen, but a much lower number (41%) made reference to theories of humour. 25 out of the 32 students in the group made reference to at least one structural joke element in their analysis (43 references in total) and 53 of the 64 analyses were able to give a clear and comprehensible reason why the text was found to be funny (or not funny). The presence of an idiot, or stupid person, in the joke was the most popular reason to find it funny (22 references), followed by the joke being easy to understand (10 references),[8] and the joke presenting something absurd (5 references) or unexpected (also five references).

6.3.2 Text understanding

It seems, then, that group A students were able, to a considerable extent, to appreciate humorous texts, and to use knowledge from the course to articulate their responses to them. However, this falls somewhat short of humour competence as defined by Attardo. In five of the 64 responses, the students' analyses showed that they had neither appreciated nor even understood the humour of the particular text; and in a further 10 responses, the analyses showed that, while the students claimed to have found a joke funny, they had not fully understood, or had misunderstood, its humour. Texts no 2:

> Drive-Thru McDonalds was more expensive than I thought... once I'd hired the car.

and 6:

> A police officer sees an idiot looking sad under a street lamp on the sidewalk. He asks what's wrong and if there's anything he can do to help. The idiot replies, "I lost my wallet." The officer asks, "Okay, where did you drop it?" The idiot says, "About a block away, but the light is better here."

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[8] It might be argued that ease of understanding is an attribute of the linguistic properties of a joke, rather than of its humour, but the relationship between ease and humour appreciation is consistent with data from the group B study, which found a correlation of -.5 between difficulty and humour ratings of jokes.

were the most popular choices, attracting 20 and 11 analyses respectively. Neither joke relied on linguistic ambiguity, and neither was misunderstood. However, some of the other jokes did not fare so well. Text no. 3:

> Last night my girlfriend and I watched three DVDs back to back. Luckily I was the one facing the TV.

attracted three correct and three incorrect analyses, with the double meaning of "back to back" not being apparent to all respondents. Text no. 7 proved even more challenging:

> An Englishman, an Irishman and a Scotsman were trying to cross a shark-infested lagoon. The Englishman was first to cross and he lost an arm to a shark. Next, the Scotsman crossed and he lost a leg. Finally, the Irishman waded across the lagoon without a shark laying a tooth on him. "How did you manage that?" they asked him. "It was easy," smiled the Irishman, "I just wore a tee-shirt with 'England for The World Cup' written on it. Not even sharks would swallow that."

with seven students failing to understand the ambiguity in the word "swallow." Finally, only two students tackled text no. 5:

> A bear walks into a bar and says to the bartender, 'I'll have a whisky and ……… soda.' The bartender says, "Why the big pause?" "Dunno," says the bear. "I've always had them."

and neither understood it correctly. However, both students came up with their own interpretations of the joke. Instead of understanding "pause" as a pun on its homophone, "paws", they had read the joke as a pun on "pause" and "pose," ignoring the grammatical hint given in the bear's response, "I've always had them," in favour of a humorous image of the bear striking a pose.[9] Both here, and in the "turkeys" joke discussed in 6.2, above, students seemed to be re-interpreting the texts to make them (more) humorous.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Research question

It is clear from the data presented in 5.2, 5.3, and 5.4 above, that there is no quantifiable evidence to prove that this group of language learners displayed a high level of humour competence at the end of the specific instruction in theories of humour, information about the forms and structure of humorous texts, and controlled exposure to a variety of such texts provided by this course. Although their humour ratings of one set of jokes were higher than the ratings of a larger group that had not received this kind of instruction, the students were not able to distinguish humorous from non-humorous texts consistently, and to an extent that would satisfy Attardo's definition of humour competence. There is also no evidence to suggest that either students who performed more strongly in knowledge of course content (as measured either by their humour test scores, or by their references to joke structure elements in the final analyses) or students who tended to find jokes funnier, were more – or indeed less

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[9] "Pause" /pɔːz/ and "pose" /pəʊz/ are, of course, not homophones, but in the students' native language, Japanese, both would be pronounced as closer to /poːzu̜/.

– successful in understanding jokes in the final analysis exercise, or in identifying non-humorous texts correctly.

7.2 Limitations of the study, and areas for future research

In addition to its limited scale, the study has a number of clear limitations. As suggested in 6.2, above, there may have been methodological errors in the selection of materials for the humour identification element in the second round of joke rating, which piloting of items to be used might have prevented. Even in retrospect, native-speaker rating of these and other texts in the study may produce valuable insights about the texts used, particularly with regard to the difficulty of identifying the humour in jokes heavily dependent on puns and other linguistic ambiguity. More significantly, the lack of a pre-test means that it is not possible to determine the extent to which the course affected the degree of group A students' humour competence. Although this group of learners was not able to display humour competence to a level that appears significant, this level might have been even lower at the beginning of the course. Having similar groups of learners perform the same identification exercise without having taken other elements of the course might provide some basis for comparison. Similarly, having control groups of learners students analyse jokes and write about them without prior instruction in theories of humour, or information about the forms and structure of humorous texts, may help to provide a basis for estimating the original, pre-instruction knowledge base of this group, and thus indicate the extent to which the course might have affected it. Examination of the humour journals kept by group A students throughout the semester may also be useful here.

Despite these considerable caveats, it is clear that students who took this course were able to appreciate humorous texts – in some cases at a level consistent with, but higher than, students who had not taken the course – and articulate their reasons for this appreciation, even to the extent of building original or alternative humorous interpretations into texts. They may not have been humour competent according to Attardo's definition, but it is open to question whether the "ideal situation" required by that definition for the exercise of humour competence is actually obtainable in the context of an EFL classroom.

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