"Creating fun": Humor and Storytelling in Communicative Foreign Language Teaching

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Contents

Abstract[1]

Though much literature exists on the use of humor in the foreign language classroom, the majority

of it focuses on very specific types of humor, and exists mostly in the form of pedagogical manuals.

This thesis uses a theoretical framework derived mostly from Krashen's theories of second

language acquisition to review different language teaching methods and the ways in which humor

can be used to make them more effective and investigates through interviews the ways in which

language educators attest to using humor in their own classrooms. It concludes that, though

dynamic and unpredictable, humor is doubtless an asset in the foreign language classroom and

educators should seek to use it in order to make students more comfortable and lower their

Affective Filters while learning a second language.

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1. Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Formal foreign language (FL) education[2], that is, classroom education in a language that the language learner does not speak as a first language (L1) has not, historically been pedagogically different from any other type of education. Although general consensus among second language acquisition (SLA) theorists is that language is not learned or acquired the same way other information (say, mathematics) is, the two have historically been taught in ways that are more similar than they are different. This thesis will first review literature and concepts central to its theoretical framework, particularly the hypotheses of Stephen Krashen, as well as relevant approaches to FL teaching, and the ways humor can be incorporated into these approaches.

1.1 Krashen, Acquisition, Input, and the Affective Filter

Much of the theoretical framework for this thesis relies on the five hypotheses of Stephen Krashen: The Acquisition-Learning Distinction, the Monitor Hypothesis, the Natural Order Hypothesis, the Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. Those that are most relevant to this work are his Acquisition-Learning Distinction, Input Hypothesis, and Affective Filter Hypothesis.

1.1.1   The Acquisition-Learning Distinction

Krashen distinguishes between acquisition and learning, in terms of second language, in a number of ways. Most simply, he specifies that acquisition is a subconscious process, similar to the way in which children learn and become proficient in their first language, and users of languages that have been acquired rather than learned are able to make acceptability judgements

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[2] The terms 'foreign language education', 'second language education', and 'world language education' are used interchangeably by different researchers and theorists to mean relatively the same thing. In this thesis, I have chosen to use the term 'foreign language education' – regardless of whether the language is spoken in a 'foreign' country, it is foreign (that is, unfamiliar) to the learner, and thus still a foreign language.

through whether something 'feels' right, rather than through conscious knowledge of the rules. Learning, on the other hand, Krashen defines as "knowing about" language—it is often the result of studying grammar, and is also referred to as 'formal knowledge'. Someone who has learned rather than acquired a language is often more able to verbalize the rules, and knows 'why' they do what they do in a language (Krashen 1982: 10).

1.1.2   The Input Hypothesis

Krashen's Input Hypothesis, while simple, is extremely important for SLA. In order for a language acquirer to progress from one 'stage' of proficiency to the next, or from stage i to stage $i + 1$, the Input Hypothesis states that the acquirer must be provided input that contains examples of $i + 1$. The examples of stage $i + 1$ must be comprehensible to the acquirer to the point that they do not have to focus on the technical elements of the input, and can instead focus on the meeting while subconsciously acquiring $i + 1$. Krashen also emphasizes that, given enough comprehensible input, $i + 1$ will end up in the input by default. The final tenet of the Input Hypothesis is that speaking fluency is not something that can be explicitly taught or instructed, and rather "emerges" after the acquirer is given adequate comprehensible input (Krashen 1982).

1.1.3   The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen (1985) defines the Affective Filter as "a mental block that prevents acquirers from fully utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition." That is, in order to gain proficiency in a language, an acquirer must be "open" to the input provided on top of simply understanding it. A low Affective Filter—that is, low inhibitions with regards to language acquisition—is correlated with high language acquisition, and vice versa. The criteria which Krashen states are correlated with a low Affective Filter in second language acquisition are: high motivation, high self-confidence, and low anxiety (1982).

1.1.4   Criticisms of Krashen

Krashen's theories have not gone unnoticed since their publishing, and they also have not gone uncriticized. The Acquisition-Learning Distinction faced criticism from many angles: First, McLaughlin (1978: 317) argued that it was impossible to tell "whether subjects are actually operating on the basis of 'rule' or 'feel'". Other criticisms were levied on the idea Krashen (1982) articulated that "Learning Does Not Become Acquisition," with one being that Gregg (1984: 81) claiming from his own personal experience that he had memorized elements of Japanese grammar exclusively through explicit learning with minimal input. Additionally, Krashen's theories were criticized for the evidence provided, or lack thereof: most of the justification for his hypotheses came from individual case studies rather than larger, more scientifically sound ones (Lichtman & VanPatten 2021: 286). The input hypothesis has also been criticized on the basis that it is used to acquire overt grammatical "rules" or structures, but its basis, that "exposure to input is necessary for SLA," is part of the fundamental basis of every theory about SLA, and theories akin to the Input Hypothesis are common in SLA research (Lichtman & VanPatten 2021: 297). Overall, Krashen's theories have remained important to the instructional side of FL teaching more than the academic side of SLA scholarship, but his theories and theories that resemble his have remained foundational to the field, though they've been fine-tuned in the forty years since their original publishing (Lichtman & VanPatten 2021).

1.2 Grammar-Translation and the Origins of FL Teaching

Particularly in the Western world, FL education has its roots in Latin education, with writing proficiency taking precedence over speaking and understanding proficiency (Richards & Rogers 2001), as the language hasn't been spoken for around a millennium—Classical Latin for nearly two millennia (Sala & Posner 2021). The method employed in these European 'grammar schools,'

so-called because they focused on learning and drilling grammatical forms, became the Grammar-Translation method, which sought to teach living languages as Latin had been taught—through rote memorization of codified grammar rules and translation of written texts. Little importance was given to speaking proficiency by the Grammar-Translation method (Richards & Rogers 2001). As a result of the prevalence of the Grammar-Translation method within FL teaching, a large part of foreign language curriculum in the Western world still has at its roots the principles that reading and writing take precedence, and listening and speaking are afterthoughts. Of course, new methods of teaching foreign languages have come about in the last century that are focused on more than just literacy.

1.3 Content-Based Instruction and Input-Driven Teaching

A number of pedagogical methods seek to provide comprehensible input for students. These methods, which focus on students understanding the meaning rather than maximizing formal knowledge about the language, are collectively classified as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Richards & Rogers 2001: 151). Among these are methods such as the Natural Approach, laid out first by Californian teacher of Spanish Tracy Terrell in 1977 and expanded upon with Krashen in a 1983 book (entitled "The Natural Approach") (Richards & Rogers 2001: 178), and methods which Richards and Rogers (2001: 205) categorize as "content-based approaches," that is, approaches to language teaching that use the target language simply as the medium of instruction, not the content being instructed. Instead of explicitly teaching about different tenses and grammatical constructions, content-based, input-based, and communicative approaches to language teaching seek to expose the learner to these constructions enough times that, to use Krashen's terminology, they will "sound right". Here, I will discuss different content- and input-

based approaches to language instruction and discuss the ways in which the employment of storytelling as an instructional strategy can contribute to the success of these strategies.

1.3.1 The Natural Approach

Krashen and Terrell's Natural Approach emphasizes the importance of meaning in SLA over grammar, and much of the theoretical basis for the approach is detailed in the prior sections on Krashen's Hypotheses. Much of the justification for the Natural Approach comes in what Krashen and Terrell (1983: 55) refer to as the "Great Paradox of Language Teaching," which itself is essentially a concise statement of Input Hypothesis and Acquisition-Learning Distinction: "Language is best taught when it is being used to transmit messages, not when it is explicitly taught for conscious learning." The approach doesn't force students to speak before they are ready in order to alleviate some anxiety and lower the Affective Filter somewhat, and gives beginning students input that seeks to advance their communication skills, both orally and textually. Students are posed questions of increasing complexity, beginning with yes/no questions, then moving to either/or, and then to questions which students are expected to answer using words they have heard in prior Natural Approach lessons (Richards & Rogers 2001: 186) At its base, the Natural Approach seeks to provide students with comprehensible input at the $i + 1$ level, be that lexically, syntactically, or semantically.

1.3.2 Content-Based Instruction

Similar to the goals of the Natural Approach, Content-Based Instruction (CBI) also satisfies Krashen and Terrell's Great Paradox, in that it provides lessons *in* the target language, not *on* the target language, perhaps even more so than the Natural Approach. One example given by Richards and Rogers (2001: 206) is immersion education. Immersion programs originated in Canada in the 1970s to provide Anglophone students with a French-language education, and in doing so

presented students with entire school days' and years' worth of meaningful input. Content-based instruction has become more common since the inception of the Canadian method: A 2011 search by the Center for Applied Linguistics found roughly 1,350 dual language immersion programs in the US (Center for Applied Linguistics, n.d.), and a follow-up search by Arias & Fee (2018) five years later counted more than 2,500 such programs (Watzinger-Tharp, Tharp & Rubio 2021).

1.3.3   TPR and TPRS

Total Physical Response (TPR) was developed by James Asher, a professor of psychology at San Jose State University in the 1960s and 1970s and seeks to associate language learning with motor activity. Asher justified this method with the claim that young children acquire their first language primarily through commands linked with physical actions, and second language teaching should seek to mirror this process. In TPR, students are given commands such as:

Hold	the cup.
	the book.
	the soap.
Look for	the soap.
	the comb.
Comb	your hair.
	Maria's hair.
Brush	your teeth.
	your pants.
	the table. (adapted from Richards & Rogers 2001: 77)

which aim to introduce new vocabulary words and sentence structures through commands which are then followed through with the physical action described. Other variations on TPR lessons and activities may include asking students to point to certain objects or people [Eduardo, point to the towel] (from Richards & Rogers 2001: 78), giving students the opportunity to "turn the tables" and give similar commands to the instructor or other students, and introducing a written element to the commands by writing them on the board before acting them out (Richards & Rogers 2001: 73-79).

TPRS (originally standing for Total Physical Response Storytelling and later changed to Teaching Proficiency through Reading and storytelling, occasionally abbreviated as TPR-Storytelling), is a method developed by high-school Spanish teacher Blaine Ray in the 1980s, after using elements of TPR and the Natural Approach in his classroom (Lichtman 2018: 8). Ray found that TPR was successful as long as it could hold students' attention, but at some point, they would get bored. The primary goal of TPRS, as with the Natural Approach and TPR, is to provide students with as much input as possible in a given amount of time, through teacher speech and reading.

A typical TPRS lesson has three steps: "(1) Establish meaning, (2) ask a story, and (3) reading" (Lichtman 2018: 11). Establishing meaning is a step often based in TPR: Lichtman (2016: 12) gives the example of establishing the meaning of the Spanish verb *bailar* 'to dance' by asking students to dance, and then asking different students *¿Bailas mucho?* 'Do you dance a lot?' to compare them to a character in a story who dances a lot. The storytelling step is referred to as "asking a story" because the story is not predetermined; students are filling in the details as they go. Lichtman (2018: 14) gives the following example of a TPRS story outline:

- the story involves a problem;
- the story goes to more than one location to solve the problem;
- and the story has an eventual solution.

What the problem is, where the location is, and what the solution is are details filled in by the students as the story is "asked." Once the details of the story are set, students may be asked to do a number of activities around the story, including activities that seek to review the story and give students more input, like listening to the teacher retell the story with errors that students then correct, or ones that encourage students to produce output, like retelling the story while acting it out in small groups (examples adapted from Lichtman 2018: 16).

Though the legacy of Grammar-Translation is still present in language teaching, newer communicative approaches to FL instruction seek to interrupt this legacy and make language teaching more engaging to students. Due to the communicative and more fluid nature of these methods, they are also ripe for the infusion of humor into teaching, both through planned lessons and more spontaneous methods.

1.4 Humor and Relevance to SLA

I will begin this section by defining humor in relatively broad terms. Long and Graesser (1988) define humor as "anything done or said, purposely or inadvertently, that is found to be comical or amusing." Attardo (2020) makes the distinction between the term *humor* as "an umbrella term for the stimulus," *mirth* as the emotional response, and *laughter* and *smiling* as the "overt, physical responses typically associated with humor." It is worth noting that humor does not exclusively refer to joke-telling, but simply anything that can cause mirth, laughter, and smiling in the classroom.

The second language classroom, and any situation in which one is acquiring another language, places acquirers at a high risk for increased levels of anxiety as a result of the fact that their cognitive ability is on a level with which their linguistic aptitude in the target language simply cannot keep pace (Wagner & Urios-Aparisi 2008). Per Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis, a higher Affective Filter can occur as a result of increased anxiety. One potential use of humor is to create a relaxed environment in the language classroom, thereby lowering students' Affective Filters.

Bell and Pomerantz (2016: 96) give the following list of what humor in the language classroom, when used prudently, can accomplish:

- Help teachers and students manage competing identity threats
- Diffuse tensions and mitigate face threats
- Critique and/or redraw relations of power
- Increase student interest and enjoyment
- Restore harmony

Identity threats occur when various identities, either personal or group, are perceived as coming under attack. Face threats, on the other hand, are threats to an individual's self-image. Although talk about the language classroom is generally serious and without humor, the language classroom itself is full of humor, in the forms discussed below, among others (Bell & Pomerantz 2016: 73). Knowledge about these types of humor, as well as ways to accommodate and involve them in the language classroom, may lead to more effective and engaging FL pedagogy.

1.4.1   Language Play

Bell and Pomerantz (2016) define language play as "any manipulation of text that is done in a non-serious matter for either public of private enjoyment. Language play is inherently metalinguistic in nature, in that the source of humor is the manipulation of language. Language play, say Bell & Pomerantz, is a way for L2 users to show competence and metalinguistic awareness—that is, conscious awareness of structures and the ability to manipulate them in order to create something humorous. In Example 1, Student 1 shows enough proficiency in Spanish to recognize that *quizás* 'perhaps' (pronounced in *standard Mexican Spanish[3] as [kiˈsas]) is somewhat phonetically similar when said in enough of an American accept to the English expression 'kiss-ass.' Student 2 responds by playing with the Anglicization of Spanish by pronouncing conventional Spanish onomatopoeia for laughter, *jajaja* [xaxaxa] or [hahaha] as it

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[3] The asterisk is used here as it is used by Lippi-Green (2012): to mark that there is in fact no such thing as a "standard" version of any language, recognizing that the idea of a standard language is often used to maintain cultural capital and cultural hegemony of the group that speaks the variety of language considered "standard" in any given language. In this instance, *standard Mexican Spanish refers to the variety of Spanish that is most commonly taught in Spanish foreign language classrooms in the United States.

would be pronounced according to English spelling conventions [dʒɑdʒɑdʒɑ]. The language play

in this exchange shows metalinguistic awareness about the similarities, differences, and perceived

overlap between Spanish and English phonology and orthography.

Example 1

Setting:	High school Spanish class. Student 1 and Student 2 (both male) are best friends. Student 2 has just given several correct answers in response to the teacher's question.

Student 1:	Stop being such a perhaps
Student 2:	Huh?
Student 1:	(laughing) You know, a quizás [kis as].
Student 2:	Ja, ja ja [dʒa, dʒa, dʒa] very funny.

(Bell & Pomerantz 2016: ix)

1.4.2   Humor as a Safe House

In the foreign language classroom, as in any classroom, power imbalances and dynamics

between teachers and students can lead to discomfort. 'Safe houses,' as described by Pratt (1991),

are an educational concept characterized by "social and intellectual spaces where groups can

constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of

trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression." Safe houses are

often constructed by students in educational settings where hierarchies and imbalances of power

may cause discomfort, and the act of building a safe house allows those on the less powerful end

of the power imbalance to feel more in control. Humor, particularly humor that is unsanctioned by

the educator, can function as a safe house by giving students an opportunity to express themselves

in an educational situation where this may not have previously been the case. Example 3 shows

high school students using the target language—Spanish, in this case—to create a safe house

wherein they ridicule the lesson, adding laughter to what one student implies is a lesson so dry it

bores even the researcher. It is worth noting that in lines 4 and 11, Ravi's utterances are

ungrammatical in Spanish. Humor, when being used as a safe house, does not often serve to further

the user's L2 competence, since in cases like Example 2, the purpose is primarily to ridicule and

satirize the material being taught.

Example 2

1	Prajesh	she's ((the researcher)) like bored
2	Ravi	this is the bane of my existence
3	Fatima	((laugh))
4	Ravi	((sarcastic)) *me gusta este clase* ('I like this class')
5	Rob	((laugh))
6	Ravi	((sarcastic)) *muy interesante las discusiones* ('very interesting discussions')
7		↑does she ((the researcher)) have to write down everything we say
8	Prajesh	↑ *que es la diferencia entre una república y una* *democracia* ('what is the difference between a republic and a democracy')
9	Ravi	((to Fatima)) speak into it ((the microphone)) and say I like beans
10	Fatima	*frijoles* ((laughs)) ('beans')
11	Ravi	*me gusta frijoles* ((laughs)) ('I like beans')

(Bell & Pomerantz 2011: 153)

Much of the humor used here by Ravi ridicules the lesson. The safe house is constructed very

early by Ravi, first by acknowledging that he thinks even the researcher looks bored, then by

stating that "this" (presumably either the class or the activity) is the "bane of my existence." Fatima

encourages it by laughing, and Ravi then begins to work in some level of L2 language play into

his safe house, particularly in lines 4 and 6, sarcastically stating in Spanish how intellectually

stimulating he finds the course material. After a failed attempt by Prajesh to get the discussion

back on track, the humorous safe house and parody of the lesson continues, this time veering into

the absurd: the target of the humor changes from ridiculing the class to simply the word "beans,"

both in English and Spanish. Here, humor is used to critique the relations of power in the

classroom: The students use humor as a safe house to liven up what they feel is an otherwise dry, humorless, and unengaging lesson.

1.4.3   Teachable moments

Another way humor can be used in the foreign language classroom is for more explicitly educational purposes. When conducted in the target language, this type of humor often serves to create a rapport between teacher and student, and in doing so lower students' Affective Filters. At the same time, this type of humor can correct errors by turning them into "teachable moments," where a student's error, instead of being reprimanded or ridiculed, is turned into a point of "laughing *with*, not *at*" and a takeaway is extracted. In Example 3[4], which takes place in a university Spanish course, a male student (MST) uses the word *culo*, which Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2008) translate as "bum," but varies in level of vulgarity depending on where in the Spanish-speaking word it is used. The instructor (INS), amid laughter from students, brings attention to this variation, and makes it clear that although this was an error, the student is not being singled out and punished for it—instead, the error has become a moment of learning about cultural and dialectal differences between countries where the target language is spoken. It is also worth noting that every utterance by the instructor is in the target language, providing students with comprehensible input while making an impromptu lesson out of this error.

Example 3

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*MST:    No copies tu culo.
*INS:    Copiar, no copies. Ok ¿Quién hizo esto?
[Students laugh]
*MST:    J.
*INS:    ¿Qué significa esto? [pointing at the board]
*MST:    You know like… at the copy machine some people go crazy like that [gesture]
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[4] There is a decent amount of context missing from this example in the original source – it appears that the class is listing ways to use a photocopier, but this is not explicitly stated. The example, however, still shows a good use of humor to dissolve a potential conflict and turn it into a teachable moment.

*INS: No copies tu culo, ok, bien. Está bien.
[Students laugh]
*INS: Está bien…
[Students laugh]
*INS: Esta palabra no es muy… apropriada…
*MST: It's in the radio
*INS: Se usa…sí, en España, se usa mucho culo como tushy.
*INS: En Latinoamérica es muy fuerte, muy grosero.
*INS: En España está bien.

Translation
*MST: Don't copy "your bum".
*INS: Copiar, no copies. Ok. Who did that?
[Students laugh]
*MST: J.
*INS: What does that mean? [pointing at the board]
*MST: You know like… at the copy machine some people go crazy like that [gesture]
*INS: "Culo" is 'that' [pointing at her own behind]
*INS: Don't copy "tu culo", ok, well. It's okay.
[Students laugh]
*INS: It's okay.
[Students laugh]
*INS: This word is not very… appropriate…
*MST: It's in the radio
*INS: you use… well, in Spain, you use a lot "culo" like "tushy".
*INS: In Latin America it is stronger, more impolite.
*INS: In Spain it is okay.

(Wagner & Urios-Aparisi 2008: 216)

Here, the instructor takes an attempt at humor by a student and, instead of turning it into something to be reprimanded, and discusses the fact that the word *culo* has different connotations and different levels of appropriateness in different Spanish-speaking countries. Students' laughter at the fact that talk of bums and tushies is rarely considered school-appropriate, as well as the instructor's use of a student's utterance of what may be a bad word as a segue into a discussion about the different uses of that word in different countries, make this a good example of a humorous teachable moment in the language classroom.

1.4.4   Humor as Content

TPRS and communicative language teaching feature ample opportunities to bring humor and banter into the FL classroom. With TPRS, the wide-open section of a lesson described as "asking a story" allows students to fill in details as absurd or personalized as they can. In general, when the object of the lesson is to communicate in the target language, many opportunities exist to personalize the classes or the lessons to the sensibilities of the students, or to introduce things that they may find funny or engaging. This may be more difficult in content-based courses, but is still possible, though mostly through banter and tangents, and still serves as input in the target language, though these tangents may not fulfill the non-linguistic goals of the content-based course.

1.4.5   Critique of Existing Literature

Although much literature exists on the uses of humor in the FL classroom, as well as humor in the classroom in general, much of this literature focuses on specific types of humor: the brunt of work by Bell & Pomerantz focuses on language play or on humor that often exists outside of the bounds of content that would be considered educational, while other work focuses on the semantics of humor and humor processing within the classroom environment. I also noted that most of this research did not often consult educators about what they felt was most successful, and instead focused on case studies of specific uses of humor.

2.   Research Questions

As much of the literature focuses on more specific uses of humor and theorizing it, I sought to use this existing theory as well as literature on methods of FL instruction to inform my research, the goal of which is to answer the following research questions:

1. How do middle school- through university-level foreign language educators use humor in their teaching?
2. How do these educators imagine humor in their classroom, and what is their relationship with it?
3. Does storytelling play a part in these educators' uses of humor? If so, what?

3. Methods

In this study, I conducted eight 30–60-minute interviews with middle school- through university-level second language educators based around Philadelphia. These educators were selected through a not-at-all randomized process wherein I emailed educators I knew, and asked if they could refer me to language educators that may have helpful insights on this topic. To lead, I asked them the following interview questions:

- What does a typical lesson in your classroom look like?
- How do you feel about humor and laughter in your classroom? Is it something you encourage? Discourage? Neither encourage nor discourage?
- Are there any lessons you use that your students have found particularly funny?
- Do different groups find different things funny? Do you try to customize your teaching to make it engaging (through humor or otherwise) to different groups of students?
- Tell me a story of a time that you felt like laughter or humor helped students learn in your classroom, if you can think of one.
- Do you use storytelling in your teaching?
- If yes, are the stories told funny? What do you feel is the goal of the storytelling?

From there, I analyzed the interviews, created profiles of each educator based on what they told me about their teaching methods, and set aside common themes that appeared in a number of interviews.

4. Educator Profiles

This section will by briefly profile each educator with whom I spoke, and include quotes from their interviews that I feel summarize their views on and pedagogical methods regarding humor and storytelling in FL teaching. Educators were given the option of having their responses pseudonymized or appearing in this work by name, so some of the educators I interviewed are

named and others appear under a pseudonym, others asked that only their first names appear in the work, and others are credited by full name.

Margaret

The first interview I conducted was with Margaret Somerville, who is a middle-school Latin teacher at Friends Central School in Narberth, PA, immediately to the west of Philadelphia. Interviewing a Latin teacher for a project on language acquisition may seem fairly dubious, and Somerville herself says that "the focus when I'm teaching Latin is not on learning how to speak the language; it's learning how to read and analyze texts, and translate texts from Latin." Interestingly, though, Somerville adapts many input-based and humor-centric pedagogical strategies to her Latin class, albeit conducted about Latin but in English.

Since her classes are beginner-level Latin classes, Somerville's classes focus on the written word and use a modified version of the Grammar-Translation method, with teaching strategies adapted from more contemporary language teaching methods such as TPRS. To introduce her middle-schoolers to new grammatical structures and vocabulary words in Latin, Somerville will create what she calls a "class story": She projects a document on the board, and will ask students for different parts of speech; "I'll say, 'Okay, I need a subject for this verb. I need a direct object for this verb. Can you give me a possessor? Can you give me a prepositional phrase?'" The result, says Somerville, are sentences that are "beautifully crafted grammatically, but because of the vocabulary we're learning turn out to just not mean very much of anything… it's almost like Mad Libs." Somerville's classes go on to do different activities with the story they've created, like illustrating them or acting them out. These often-nonsensical sentences can teach the same types of lessons as traditional Latin, but they help cut through the banality of learning an ancient language: "There's the element of nonsense in it that just makes it a little bit more fun than making

a sentence about the farmer who's plowing his field or whatever… The randomness of vocabulary in standard grammatical structures is what lends an element of humor."

Although Somerville's goal is not spoken proficiency as it is in many foreign language classrooms, humor and input-based pedagogical methods in her classes stull essentially serve the same ends: to lower students' Affective Filters through play and humor and give them something else to focus on while learning the target language or material.

Angela

The second interview I conducted was with Angela, a Hebrew-language teacher who teaches outside of Philadelphia. She has taught every possible level of Hebrew at the school where she teaches, from complete beginners (both kindergarten-aged and older) through twelfth-graders (aged 17 and 18) who are native Hebrew speakers. She was born in Russia, grew up in Israel, has lived in the US for 22 years, and is a fluent L1 speaker of Hebrew and Russian (though she noted that she cannot read or write in Russian).

Angela emphasized the cultural element of humor, and discussed how this can be a double-edged sword in some ways: On the one hand, she says, humor can be a positive when it conveys elements of Hebrew-speaking, Israeli, or Jewish culture that would not otherwise be conveyed, but on the other hand, if something is funny because of a cultural background that students are lacking, it "can be an obstacle, rather than promoting [acquisition]." However, she expanded on this element of humor potentially lost in translation and discussed that the ways in which it can be an opportunity for cultural learning as well as purely linguistic learning: "You explain what the humor is about, and why it's funny, because you teach a foreign language, and one thing that can be funny to one culture might not necessarily be funny in another culture. So, you're also expanding it to making connections the culture: Why is it funny in our country?"

Angela also discussed the value of storytelling and listening to stories, particularly those told by a native speaker of a language, and discussed the ways in which she as an educator and storyteller uses what she calls the "art" of storytelling to enhance students' listening: "There's something very unique about stories. First of all, the way that you address stories in class – it's *storytime*. The whole lesson runs differently. Students should not write anything. Before COVID, we could put them on the floor—you know, like, real storytime. Even the seniors and upper school students enjoyed the different atmosphere; the different setting, and for the teacher to really read the story for them. When you read a story as a native speaker, you use a different tone of voice…you play it, you know? To tell a story, it's an art. To be a storyteller, it's an art. So, one of the things that's very important is to read it correctly. The students, when they read a story by themselves, they don't read it the right way to really enjoy the details—if it's a conversation, if it's an atmosphere. So, when a teacher reads a story with all those elements around it, it really brings the students to a different atmosphere, it helps them understand the plot better and to relate to that better. So, the conversations that are happening during storytelling are very different than just reading informative text. I think that the beauty of storytelling is that students can really connect to the language. And they don't need to see anything in front of them to pick up the plot. And it's amazing how many students are surprised at the language level that they observe by just hearing a story--not seeing any text--and will be able to talk about it, analyze the details. And they're very impressed with their skills. But I think just the atmosphere of telling a story by a native speaker— if they're doing it the right way…it's a performance—it has such a beauty, and the language is being observed in a different, much more meaningful way."

Manar

The third interview I conducted was with Manar Darwish, a lecturer and coordinator of the Arabic Program at Bryn Mawr and Haverford colleges. She primarily teaches first and second year introductory- and intermediate-level Arabic, and spoke to the value of humor as intercultural learning as well as using humor to make students feel more comfortable when beginning in a new language and an unfamiliar territory.

An example Manar gave of using humor and storytelling to relay a cultural concept that may be unfamiliar to students has to do with teaching beginning Arabic students the phrase *in sha Allah* (sometimes written as *inshallah*)*,* which literally means 'God willing,' but she finds humor in teaching its many uses: "If we're saying *in sha Allah*, and we're introducing *in sha Allah* to students, we say 'in the Arab world, kids, when they are little, would say 'oh, Baba[5], can I have candy?' and their parents would say '*in sha Allah*, *in sha Allah'*. And so sometimes kids would get fed up with *in sha Allah* and say, 'Could you say yes, and not *in sha Allah*?' Because on the one hand, *in sha Allah* is supposed to mean God willing, and you're putting the trust in God and everything, but sometimes kids start to realize by age six or seven that your parents, when they tell you *in sha Allah*, mean, like, 'sure, I'll do that.' And then they hope you forget. And so, relating incidences like that in teaching definitely brings in the culture, makes the mood in the classroom lighter, and hopefully helps the students retain information."

Much like Angela, Manar discussed the potential pitfalls of humor getting lost in translation, and even between Arabic speakers, humor being difficult to understand depending on the dialect or sociocultural milieu from which the humor originates, especially given the linguistic and

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[5] 'Father' in Arabic.

dialectal diversity under the umbrella of the Arabic language: "There are about, depending on who's counting, let's say 23 different Arab countries. And within each country, even—in Egypt, for example, if you grew up in Alexandria, you might use different vocabulary, or speak a little bit differently; pronounce words a different way from if you grew up in Cairo, and if you grew up in Upper Egypt, in the south, you might still sound different when you speak…so the dialects might vary even with in the same country." She discussed how this affects her as a native speaker of Egyptian Arabic, reading textbooks that intend to introduce humor in the Jordanian dialect of the language, and how these difficulties in translation and intercultural understanding make teaching humor difficult: "As a non-Jordanian, I look and it's like, 'what's funny about this?' So, humor can be a tricky thing, especially at the introductory level, since, like any art, it has to be understood in its cultural context."

Lina

My fourth interview was with Dr. Lina Martinez Hernandez, a Visiting Assistant Professor of Spanish at Haverford College. Lina grew up in Bogotá, Colombia, and moved to the US after completing her B.A. to study at the University of Pennsylvania. At Haverford, Lina has taught courses ranging from beginner Spanish through content-based 200- and 300-level (advanced classes, often with native speakers intermingled with L2 speakers), and we discussed how she uses humor and storytelling across these different levels, with a particular focus on humor that is specific to students' situations as college students. She started by saying that, although humor is something she values, she finds it more difficult to incorporate into her teaching since the COVID-19 pandemic: "I feel like there's a heaviness that we're carrying now, that it's difficult to manage all of the different things that go on with reality at a large scale, and more of the reality at Haverford

at a smaller scale, and then integrate humor, but I do see that there's still space for humor as an

emotional release, and humor as a bonding experience."

Lina discussed the use of humor to resolve the tensions of learning a language at the beginner

or intermediate level while at an elite institution like Haverford, and the tension of having elaborate

and complex thoughts but being unable to express them: "In language acquisition, it's funny

because there's this…interesting situation where students are 18, 19, 20; but because they're

learning a language, it kind of creates an atmosphere of infantilization, you know? Like, you go

back to being a child in a way. Because you're learning how to name everything again, and you

may have these very deep and complex thoughts, but you still don't have the language knowledge

to express them with nuance and with depth." She discussed that a similar tension exists for

Spanish-speaking college professors in non-Spanish-speaking countries: "When you find yourself

having to teach basic Spanish, intermediate Spanish, there's a part of you that's like 'wait, but

what? No, I wanted to do this really intense research about…I don't know, economic systems and

their impact in literature, and here I am teaching about the present tense and how to say colors. So,

I think that, at that moment, you find the frustration of students who come with all these ideas and

eagerness to learn, and the limits of what they can do in class because of language. And then you

have the professors coming in with all their ideas and their complex thinking and their ego, and

then also finding that limit because you have to focus on developing the most basic skills to speak

a language. I think if there's no humor there, that just because a nightmare for everybody

involved."

Camille

After interviewing Lina and Manar, I interviewed two high school-level teachers. The first of

these teachers was Camille, who grew up in France and learned English in the UK, before

eventually finding her way to Pennsylvania, getting certified to teach, and teaching French at a public high school in the suburbs of Philadelphia.

Camille's class centers stories and storytelling in multimodal fashions that give students the option to center humor and their own creativity. Much of what she discussed in the lens of humor and storytelling involved asking students to create their own stories, or their own takes on stories that are discussed in class. One example she discussed was a novel her students had read in class, which involved a monster trying to scare the city of Paris. After reading this novel, Camille asked her students to rewrite the story and make videos of them performing their rewritten versions, with a twist: This time, the monster was out to get their own high school, "and they loved it. It just created fun. It was not me willingly exposing them to humor, they just created it—and I laughed! I watched their videos, I showed them in class and they really loved it, and everybody was laughing. It was great."

She also discussed the ways in which demonstrating her own fallibility, and using self-deprecating humor with her students helps to build rapport and make her students more comfortable in class: "It's kind of a private joke that I have with [my students], that I'm French, I'm different in certain ways, and they're American. Or, you know, I play on the fact that I'm older than them, and I say, 'Oh, you know, that's me being old, so I just—I cannot understand certain things,' and they'll say 'Oh, you're not that old!'" She emphasized that she makes sure her self-deprecation never gets dark, that makes pointed efforts not to cross certain boundaries, and that the purpose of this humor is to make students more comfortable—she wouldn't use it if it made students uncomfortable.

Sofia

The sixth interview I conducted was with Sofia, another Spanish teacher at a suburban public school who asked to be pseudonymized. She grew up in a Spanish-speaking Cuban family in Miami, and now teaches Spanish in the Philadelphia area. Sofia discussed the value of humor in making students more comfortable: "I like the class to have a very light feel, and for people to feel really comfortable. Getting people to speak a different language is challenging, so you want them to feel at ease, and one of the ways that I've always tried to do that is by using humor in class, in class discussions, and stuff like that." Similar to Camille's classes, Sofia focuses on students' creativity, and her students are often asked to write stories or write and perform skits in groups in order to learn and solidify class topics.

To demonstrate how her class brings humor into skits, she gave the example of one class, which embraced a minor character from one story they had read, who Sofia describes as a "disgruntled man on the plane," and brought him into every skit from then on: "It was called *el hombre gordo* ('the fat man') and *el hombre gordo* appeared in every single skit they did throughout the year. So, sometimes I feel like having those inside jokes in a class can really help with the comfort level of students—and there was one student that always played *el hombre gordo*, and we gave him an award at the end of the year for his portrayal—in every dialogue, he was so consistent."

Another way Sofia brings humor into her classroom is when teaching grammar, specifically the difference between the preterit and imperfect tenses. In order to show the ways in which the two tenses are used, she would orchestrate a heist in her class: "I used to ask a random teacher to come into the room. I would have this ridiculous little prop purse that had sparkles on it—it looked like something a four-year-old would carry around. I would be holding onto it—I'm like, 'I need you to come into the room and pretend like you're stealing it from me. Just come in and snatch it

and run out the door.' And I would give them, like, a mask to wear, and they would always, inevitably, try to use whatever broken Spanish they knew to say, 'Give me your purse,' or whatever. And I would tell the kids, 'We have to report this crime to the police. You have to do the report. The police want to know all the details, so you're going to have to describe what the person looked like.' So, trying to get them to use imperfect and preterit, and trying to make it something fun. And they would always crack up when one of their teachers—a math teacher, or a social studies teacher, or whatever—would try to snatch my snazzy purse."

She also discussed ways in which she introduces humor and ridicule to her students' skits, by giving them very random props from a box she has in her room—she gave the example of a giant toothbrush—that they then have to work into the plots of their skits.

Julien

Dr. Julien Suaudeau was born and grew up in France, and has a background as a filmmaker. He moved to the US in his adult life because his wife had a job at a university in Philadelphia, and first taught at a high school in southern New Jersey before starting his current job at Bryn Mawr College as a professor of French and Film Studies.

Julien talked about the way that he uses humor in his teaching, and said that the humor used in his classroom is "always improvised; it's never part of a lesson plan." He talked about how he brings in humor to create examples of the content discussed in class, and in particular he mentioned the ways in which he brings in things that are more relevant to the students—he gave the examples of memes, elements of pop culture, hashtags, and things that seem like they don't belong in a French classroom: "What is funny is that I am using this out of place, and I'm 'French-izing' them, if you will." He discussed an example that had occurred in an intermediate French class he taught, where he gave his students a writing prompt that both demonstrated the topic at hand (in this case,

how to use French's two past tenses, the *passé composé* and the *imparfait*): The sentence was "*il s'est reveillé; [Kanye] West pleurait.*" 'he woke up; [Kanye] West was crying.' This sentence, says Julien, provided an excellent setup for students to practice using the different tenses: "They just riffed on it with their own senses of humor. They introduced Kim [Kardashian], or different members of the family…and that was a spur-of-the-moment thing that happened to echo the grammar content of the day."

Julien added that he often finds that he connects better with students in serious, more vulnerable moments and in stories his students tell and write that pertain to their own traumas than in times where humor is used: "There's a degree of sincerity in exposing your vulnerability that I think is precisely what humor is meant to hide. It's a defense mechanism. In these stories, they're not using humor; they're not hiding behind it, because they want to share that experience."

Ying Liu

The final interview I conducted was with Ying Liu, a lecturer of Chinese in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Bryn Mawr College. She teaches mostly first-year Chinese, in two different tracks: The intensive track meets five times a week, twice for lectures and the other three times for drill sessions with a different teacher, while the non-intensive track only meets for biweekly lectures. Dr. Liu discussed the ways she uses humor to illustrate certain concepts in her class, and put it succinctly that in her classes, "we use jokes all the time."

One particular use of humor Dr. Liu mentioned is a way she demonstrates at the beginning of her courses every year the importance of tones in Chinese, a tonal language: She asks her students to think of a sentence in English, and then replace all of the vowels with one sound (she asked me to name a sentence, to which I responded, "I am sitting at my computer," which then from her exercise became "ih im sitting it mih kimpihtihr" [ɪ ɪm sɪtɪŋ ɪt mɪ kɪmpɪtɪɹ]). She said, "This is what

I tell my students. We do this experiment in class, and then I tell them: If you don't get your tones correct, this is how it sounds like to native speakers. It's weird, but they can still understand you, right? You can guess the meaning. Even though you speak with the same vowel for the whole sentence, you can still guess the meaning. So, if you really want to do well in using this language, you should get the tones right. So, set a high standard for yourself, and then you'll be able to learn the language properly. So that's one joke, and my students always enjoy this joke."

Dr. Liu also described an example she uses as an example to illustrate the difference between two modal verbs that express the desire to do something, 要 (Pinyin: yào) and 想 (xiǎng), where yào is stronger than xiǎng. The example she used in our interview was that if she were asking her supervisor to meet: "When I'm making a request, I want to be very polite, so: 'I would like to come to your office; is that okay?' And if I use this one [*she points to* 要 yào], I accentuate the tones that make myself sound really pushy, and I ask them: 'Would I still be able to keep my job?' And some of my students would be very happy, and then they would laugh."

5. Common themes

Across the interviews, there were a number of commonalities in the ways that educators both use and hesitate to use humor. Many of these commonalities are summarized in the following sections.

All of the educators, when giving examples of humor, cited its ability to build a rapport with students and make them feel more comfortable, and all of the educators interviewed discussed how important that can be in a class conducted in an unfamiliar language. Though none of them mentioned Krashen's Affective Filter by name, they all alluded to a similar concept: that students are more likely to speak when they feel more comfortable in class, and humor, joking, and building

relationships between students and between students and teachers helps them feel more comfortable.

5.1.1   Humor as spontaneous

This was mentioned, at least in some way, by all educators interviewed. When I asked them about how they use humor in their classrooms, they each said something to the effect of the following: Humor is spontaneous. It's not something that can be planned for, and it's not something that can reliably be built into a lesson.

Certain educators, particularly Angela and Julien, expressed a certain reticence to discuss humor because of this—when I asked for specific examples of lessons that had been particularly funny, or times that their classes were particularly effective due to humor, they emphasized that humor is unpredictable, and were quick to emphasize that they didn't feel like they personally were particularly funny or good at telling jokes, and although they welcomed humor when it was present, they didn't feel as though they went out of their way to be funny when the opportunity wasn't necessarily there.

5.1.2   Inside jokes

In spite of its unpredictability and spontaneity, all the educators I spoke with seemed to agree that when humor does exist in a class, it's something that should be embraced. Certain educators—particularly Camille and Sofia—discussed this in the cases of inside jokes with students. Sofia gave the specific example of the one class that embraced *el hombre gordo*, and brought him into every possible skit, and Camille discussed jokes about her being older than the students, or not understanding things because she is French.

5.1.3   Humor to make the boring more interesting

This use of humor was more common among teachers of the lower levels, with concepts that were more difficult to explain or were explained through more overt methods rather than input-based ones. Julien and Sofia both discussed the ways that they made grammar lessons more interesting through jokes, with Sofia's example of the staged "robbery" or Julien's example involving Kanye West, to illustrate the difference between two analogous sets of tenses in each educator's respective language. Camille also mentioned using examples from Grey's Anatomy, a show that both she and some of her students had seen, to make grammar lessons more engaging simply by giving examples that are relatable to her students.

5.1.4   Humor in translation and as cultural learning

This use of humor seemed to be particularly relevant in non-Indo-European languages, as it was described at length by two of the three educators of non-Indo-European languages with whom I spoke. Angela discussed both the benefits and potential pitfalls of humor in Hebrew, by saying that on the one hand, jokes can be dissected to learn things about Israeli or Jewish culture, but on the other hand, jokes that rely too heavily on culture not shared or understood by the students may fall flat for that very reason. Manar talked about her own experiences not understanding American culture as an immigrant, as well as the way humor doesn't always translate from one variety of Arabic to another.

Incidentally, both of these languages—Hebrew and Arabic—are Semitic languages, but their being Semitic languages specifically has little to do with this phenomenon. Instead, it seems that this has to do with cultural differences: Arabic- and Hebrew-speaking cultures have many facets that are closely tied with the specific histories of those two languages, and are both closely tied to religions (Arabic with Islam and Hebrew with Judaism), and do not often have much in common

with the US. Angela discussed the culture brought to Israel from "small villages in Eastern Europe," as well as jokes about the plurality of nationalities that exist in Israel ("Polish people are cheap; Russians, they like to drink; and so on"), while Manar talked about the influence of Islam on the Arabic language through words like *in sha Allah* 'God willing' and *wallahi* 'by God' and the ways they are used in secular fashions.

5.1.5   Self-deprecating humor

The use of self-deprecating humor by the educator was particularly common among high-school-level language educators. Angela and Camille, both of whom learned English later in life, discussed framing themselves as the foreigner in the FL classroom. Angela discussed the ways in which she and other Hebrew teachers show themselves making mistakes in English to encourage students to take risks in speaking Hebrew; emphasizing that meaning can be understood even when utterances are ungrammatical or erroneous. discussed the ways she exaggerates her French-ness in order to create a rapport with the students. Dr. Liu discussed humor revolving on saying something to her boss that might get her fired in order to create humor and laughter in her classroom. Lina, Camille, and Sofia all discussed humor pertaining to their age, and self-deprecating based on their perceived inability to relate to their students through generational differences. All of these instances of self-deprecating humor came from teachers whose first language was not English, and this may be because, as Manar attested, humor in a second language is difficult to understand, and the educator framing themself as the butt of the joke is often a safe way to make students laugh.

5.1.6   Humor in the absurd

This was also a common theme in many of the responses: Language learning is inherently absurd, and humor is one of the most effective ways to address the absurdity present in language learning. Lina discussed finding humor in the absurdity of learning words for colors and playing

Simon Says at a university like Haverford. Margaret discussed leaving the door open in her "Mad Libs"-esque sentences for the absurd. Sofia mentioned the use of props in skits to create absurdity, with her example of giving students a giant toothbrush from her box of props and forcing them to include it in their story. The common theme in these areas seemed to be that language learning in itself is somewhat absurd, and embracing the absurd in the language classroom encourages students to do things that they would otherwise be uncomfortable doing, both linguistically and in general.

5.1.7 "Infantilization"

The idea of infantilization was one that was present both in discussions of humor and storytelling. Lina and Angela both discussed, in some ways, the suspensions of norms that would exist outside of the FL classroom, and the ways in which embracing the suspension of those norms allows students and teachers to bond and feel more comfortable in the classroom. Lina discussed the idea of infantilization with respect to learning things that are well below the level of intellect that students would have in other college-level classes—again, playing Simon Says is not something that would be done, and bonding over the ridiculousness of it and simply committing to it is necessary and creates an environment of mutual trust. Angela discussed this in the context of storytelling—as a high school senior, sitting on the rug for storytime is not something that is often done, but the nostalgia of it allows it to be an effective locale for input.

5.1.8 Dangers and boundaries of humor

A couple educators also expressed concern about boundaries and acceptability of certain types of humor in the classroom context. Angela, in particular, mentioned jokes that are common in Israel and are understood because of the cultural context, including jokes that played on stereotypes about different nationalities, but said these jokes "will not be observed correctly in the

States…because of the differences of culture of Americans and Israelis." Camille also mentioned that, when joking with students, she is always careful not to make students feel uncomfortable, particularly when using self-deprecating humor.

5.1.9   Storytelling as a vessel for input

Many of the stories mentioned in the interviews were funny, but not all of them: some were tangential, others were read out of books, others were made up on the spot with characters in order to illustrate grammatical or cultural concepts, and others still were personal anecdotes. The main connection between all of these instances of storytelling (or at least the ones where the stories were told primarily in the target language) is that the stories told by the educators serve to provide students with comprehensible input that would, either intentionally or simply through usage, introduce and familiarize new constructions in the target language.

6.   Conclusion

All of the educators I interviewed talked about the importance of humor and storytelling as a tool to make their students feel more comfortable. The ways in which they described humor were far broader and less linguistic in nature than those present in most of the literature on humor in the foreign language classroom, but they all attested to the value of these types of humor to lower students' Affective Filters, to make them feel more comfortable speaking and listening to the target language in class. Educators also discussed building relationships and rapports with students where joking around in the target language is acceptable and welcomed by the students, and where groups of students have inside jokes amongst themselves and with educators. All of the educators discussed the value of humor and of storytelling, and sometimes of the two together, in providing valuable input in the target language and at the same time making students feel more comfortable in class.

6.1 Recommendations for educators

All educators that I interviewed with talked about the importance of their students' comfort, and most of the instances of humor they spoke about alluded to, in one way or another, their students feeling more comfortable as a result of the implementation of that humor. It is important to note that humor in these cases does not necessarily mean 'canned' (that is, premeditated) jokes that students then laugh at, or even laughter, but it could also refer to anything that is not serious— when students are encouraged to take themselves less seriously in a language class, the element of 'taking oneself seriously' is in itself an engagement of the Affective Filter, and students taking themselves less seriously will lead to more willingness to take risks and a lower Affective Filter.

In following with these findings, I recommend that all educators take measures to make their classes less serious. Storytelling, and implementation of elements of the TPRS lesson framework, are both ways that educators can bring elements of canned humor into a class in a way that can still be engaging and still make students feel more comfortable, while also providing them with as much input in the target language as possible. Building a rapport with the students through humor also makes understanding what will make students laugh and keep students' attention easier for educators.

6.2 Cautions about humor

Bell & Pomerantz (2016) note a few limitations on the use of humor in the classroom. The use of dark humor, or humor around more taboo topics, is generally discouraged and caution is imperative if an educator should try to use dark humor in their classroom. Bullough (2012) makes this distinction between light humor, which he characterizes as humor that "facilitates cooperation, lowers tension, soften boundaries, encourages bonding, is exhilarating, energizing, and fun" (286), while dark humor "seeks self-protection and supremacy" and its goal is "seeking targets, and often

expressing discontent" (286). Bell & Pomerantz also caution against bullying students, which seems straightforward, but emphasize that often, what distinguishes bullying from teasing is repetition and imbalance of power between the doer and the recipient (Bell & Pomerantz 2016: 134). Overall, it is advised that educators use prudence when using humor that may be interpreted as offensive or "dark" in their teaching, and perhaps avoid dark humor and humor that exists at someone's expense altogether in favor of that which fits Bullough's characterization of light humor. It is also important to consider what is culturally acceptable where the language is being taught: Some cultural expectations hold that teaching is serious business, and some instructors fear that overuse of humor in the classroom can result in loss of credibility (Bell & Pomerantz 2016: 141). Additionally, it is important to note that (as evidenced in a few of the interviews) some educators do not feel that they are naturally funny people, and teachers have Affective Filters too—the fear of what Pomerantz & Bell (2016) call "failed humor" (143), when a joke does not land as intended, can cause anxiety in educators, and it is important to note that the language classroom is already an area of high pressure and potential anxiety.

6.3 Limitations of scope

The scope of this work is of course very limited. Due to a number of factors including the COVID-19 pandemic and the timetable of this project, it would have been very difficult to go into classrooms and physically observe educators using humor in their teaching. However, this means that my findings may have been more one-sided: I wasn't able to hear students' views on their teachers' use of humor, and was not able to see any of the applications discussed in the interviews in action. In addition, the fields of humor theory and second language acquisition are both rapidly growing, and both are full of hypotheses that are difficult to test or prove, so much of the theoretical basis for this thesis is lacking in empirical evidence (Bell & Pomerantz 2016: 73). There are also

often large gaps between theories of education and educational methods, and even as certain theories and hypotheses may be outdated in the academic world of language acquisition, curricula and teaching methods may still be based on them. Given the proper time and resources, and in a non- or post-pandemic world, I would like to observe different language teachers in their respective classrooms and see how they use humor, and how that use of humor affects their students, to gather more data towards the different uses of humor in the FL classroom. If this type of research can be conducted, it may result in resources that can help educators be more effective in their FL pedagogy, and may also inform further SLA theories.

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