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幽默在臺灣大學英語課堂

Humor in the Taiwan EEL University Classroom

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摘要

這篇論文調查幽默如何在台灣大學英文課程中被使用。總共有十二堂語文技巧課程，六堂是由外籍英文老師授課，而另外六門是由臺灣籍教師授課。兩段的記錄影片是在台灣北部兩所公立大學所錄製。此論文是在探討學生和教師使用的幽默量、最常使用的幽默類型、以及幽默如何被運用在臺灣的大學英文課程中。相反於刻板印象，根據紀錄影片幽默被學生和教師廣泛普遍的使用於課堂上。此外，可以從課堂中找出十一種幽默類型。學生和教師都會使用到的幽默在有趣聞、流行文化或學生生活的話題、機智、文字遊戲、詼諧的評論、以及各種素材等…分析顯示出幽默在臺灣大學英文課程裡有兩個基本功能：作為課堂管理的目的和教學工具(教導語言學，應用，文化等方面的語言)。此論文提供實例說明幽默在臺灣大學的英文課程裡的種類和形式。建議運用定性研究方法，更深入地探討幽默的數量、種類和功能，將會更明確的了解幽默在各式各樣的臺灣英語教學情境裡的數量、種類和功能。此外，根據不同的國籍教師授課的英文課程情境下，也許更多的研究能檢示出台灣和其他國家文化使用幽默的差別。

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the use of humor in the Taiwan University English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. A total of twelve EFL skill classes—six classes taught by Native English speaking instructors (NEI) and six classes taught by a Taiwanese Instructors (TI) — were video recorded two times at two public universities in Northern Taiwan. The paper examined the amount of humor used by the students and instructors, the most common types of humor, and how humor was used in the Taiwan EFL university classroom. Contrary to the stereotype, humor was pervasive and used extensively by both instructors and students throughout all the classes recorded. In addition, eleven types of humor used by instructors and students were identified. Examples of humor used by both instructors and students include personal anecdotes, references to popular culture and student life, comedic comparisons/contrasts, wit, word play/code switching, tongue-and-cheek comments, and third party humor, etc. An analysis of the functions of humor in the Taiwan EFL University classroom revealed that humor has two basic functions: for classroom management purposes and as a pedagogical tool to teach the linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural aspects of the language. This paper provides illustrative examples of the types of humor and the way humor is used in the Taiwan University EFL classroom. It is suggested that more research examining the amount, types, and functions of humor in other Taiwan EFL classroom contexts, as well as other content courses, using ethnographic research methods will allow for a broader picture of the amount, types and functions of humor across a wide variety of EFL classroom contexts across Taiwan. In addition, in light of the different nationalities present in the Taiwan EFL classroom context, perhaps more research could be conducted examining the difference in humor used by Taiwanese students and instructors and other cultures.

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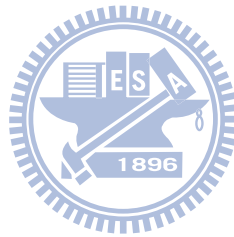
To all my professors, I would like to give many thanks for instilling in me the theories and research methods that encompass the field of TESOL. I firmly believe that I have become a better teacher and researcher because of the TESOL department at NCTU. In particular, I give my greatest debt to my advisor Dr. Yu-Chih Sun for her support and patience over the last couple of years. I would like to thank her giving me guidance—not only in regards to being a student but also in life—and the freedom to wonder where ever my research takes me. It has truly been a rewarding educational and life experience to work with her. I would also like to give thanks to my committee members Dr. Johanna Katchen and Dr. Fang-Ying Yang for their hard work and detailed comments that added to the final vision of this thesis. I would like to thank Dr. Katchen for all support and encouragement over the years and all the hilarious meetings in her office. This

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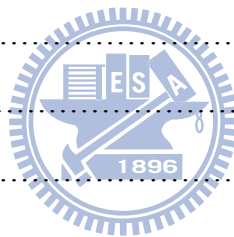
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Over the last three decades, humor research has become prominent in a wide variety of disciplines. Scholars from multiple fields have been investigating humor from a wide variety of perspectives. In fact, humor research has become so pervasive that there is even a regular journal entitled "Humor: International Journal of Humor Studies" that is dedicated to the investigation of humor theories and humor research methodologies. Specifically, research on classroom humor has become increasingly prolific. For example, numerous studies have documented the positive effects of humor in classrooms, (i.e. Adams 1974, Askildson, 2005, Berwald 1992, Bryant and Zillman 1989, Gorham 1998, Gorham and Christophel 1991, Loomax and Moosavi 1998, Friedman, Friedman and Amoo 2002, Wandersee, 1982). However, until recently, humor research within the context of the Foreign Language classroom has received relatively little attention. Currently, there are many misunderstandings and misconceptions postulating the use of jokes and humor in foreign language classrooms, but there is a lack of empirical evidence that documents how humor is actually used within foreign language contexts not only by teachers, but students as well. This thesis intends explore humor within the EFL classroom in Taiwan from a sociolinguistic perspective in hopes of fulfilling this gap.

1.2 Motivation for Present Study

My interest in language teaching, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and, more precisely humor arise from my own experience as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Taiwan and in my interactions with many non-native English speakers (NNS) in Taiwan and China. First, as a language educator in Taiwan and China, I have shared a similar experience as to what Trachtenberg (1979) experienced in her English as a Second language classroom: the huge difference in students' personalities when speaking their native language as compared to their second language. Of course, Trachtenberg (1979) admits that the students' speech behavior in their native language was far more natural and spontaneous than their speech behavior in English. But, according to her, the biggest difference in the students' personalities was humor. This, too, is something that I have observed in classrooms in Taiwan and China over the years. And, for me, like Trachtenberg (1979), the biggest difference is humor. It is almost like students have two different personalities (they are two different people). This has piqued my interest in pedagogical humor in language learning (L2) classrooms as, I feel, that to ignore the humor element in the target language (TL), is to deny a part of one's social identity in the language learning process. As Trachtenberg (1997) puts it: "the projection of a sense of humor is in fact a key element that must be encouraged if the student of English as a second language is indeed to be himself in an English speaking milieu," (p. 90).

In addition to the experience in the classroom, in my interactions with NNS in Taiwan and abroad, I have experienced and observed what Harder (1980) called "reduced personality." This, according to Harder (1980), is when NNS are ascribed a lower than normal status in conversations with NS because of their language ability. He claims that this comes as a result of NNS using non-target like discourse patterns. According to Harder (1980), this can include the

learners' inability to use and understand jokes and humor. In his words "being a foreigner entails not understanding jokes and therefore having a choice between sitting quiet or being a simpleton who asks for an explanation," (p. 262). This is something that I have witnessed many times in my own NS-NNS interactions here in Taiwan and abroad: the NNS' inability to use and understand L2 humor causing them to be left out of lively, interesting, and knowledgeable conversations resulting in the projection of a boring, uninteresting, and, perhaps, inept personality. In addition, I have also noticed that I have been a "reducer" of personalities in my own right in interactions with NNS attempts at humor. For example, there have been times in which I did not appreciate the humor of my NNS friends and acquaintances, the humor of classmates, and even the humor from my instructors. Finally, there are also times when I "toned down" my own humor in interactions with NNS for fear they would not understand or might be offended by it.

Furthermore, the topic of my thesis also seemed to garner interest from many of my Taiwanese students and friends. After hearing about my topic, many of them told me stories about not be able to understand American humor. For instance, most of them told me about not being able to enjoy popular Hollywood movies because they did not understand the humorous parts, or feeling embarrassed on vacations in the United States because they were the only ones not laughing hysterically when the tour guide told a joke.

All these stories have inspired me to investigate the role of humor in the intercultural context of Taiwan, with particular emphasis on the university EFL classroom. An understanding of this, I believe, is necessary for EFL practitioners and those interested in intercultural communication. Findings from this study may enable practitioners to further explore humor in foreign language classrooms and perhaps add to the increasing amount of research that is

investigating how humor is in used L2 classrooms. It is not my intention to argue for the inclusion and/or exclusion of humor in the EFL classrooms or to impart "facts" that should be incorporated into pedagogy. My intention is merely to develop a dynamic description of the types of humor and how they are employed in EFL classrooms. This, I feel, will allow for specific insights which may help illuminate pedagogy and interaction within an intercultural context.

1.3 The Present Study

The present study heeds Schmitz' (2002) call for a closer examination of the role that humor has in foreign language classrooms. The purpose of this study is to examine the use of humor in the EFL classroom, in particular, the EFL university classrooms in Taiwan from a sociolinguistic point of view (Hymes, 1972). I intend to classify and determine the different kinds of humor that are used by non-native English speaking instructors (NNS) and native English speaking instructors (NS) and students. I will also examine how often humor is used. The results of the study will lead to preliminary decisions on the role that humor has in the foreign language classroom in Taiwan. My research questions are as follows:

1) How much humor is used in the Taiwanese University classroom?
2) What types of humor are used by students and instructors?
3) What are the functions of the humor and is there any evidence it is used as a pedagogical tool?

I videotaped twelve EFL skills classes at least two times at two public universities in

Taiwan. Six classes taught by Taiwanese instructors (TI) and six class taught by native English Speaking instructors (NEI) participated in the study. The amount of humor was documented, twelve types of humor were put forth, and a functional taxonomy was presented. Also, the study examined if humor was used in any way as a pedagogical tool.

1.4 Organization of the Study

This thesis in made up of five chapters. Chapter One explains the motivation for the study Chapter Two will review the pertinent literature regarding humor research. This will include theories of humor, humor in Taiwan, contemporary definitions of humor, the types of humor, and the social functions of humor. I will then discuss past relevant findings that specifically refer to humor in classroom contexts. The specific methodology of this paper will be discussed in Chapter Three. The reason for choosing the methodology, the design of the project, the participants, the procedures of collecting information, and the data analysis will be addressed. In Chapter four, I will present the empirical findings if of the study. Chapter Five will conclude the study with a summary of major findings, pedagogical implications, limitation of study and suggestions for future research.
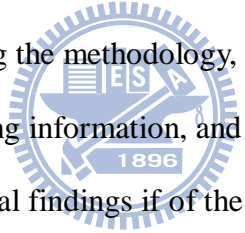
CHAPTER TWO
LITERTURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Although humor as been a topic that has fascinated humans for centuries, it was only in the last quarter century that it blossomed into a serious interdisciplinary and multifaceted field of study. Scholars from anthropology, sociology, education, linguistics, communications, management, and psychology have investigated the various aspects of humor and joking. Needless to say, despite the breadth of scope, the following discussion, by necessity, is a very limited review when compared to the huge amount of literature that exists on humor. It merely provides background information which, I feel, is relevant for the formulation of this thesis. The main caveat of this thesis is that the literature is for the most part derived from Anglo-Saxon contexts, as humor research with specific reference to Taiwan is lacking. Thus, I limited my discussion to literature that, I feel, would be directly relevant to the topic of my thesis.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first section intends to be a general overview of humor research. This will include research that explores various definitions and types of humor. I will also review the social functions of humor. The next section will discuss the research that specifically refers to classroom humor: reviews on classroom humor taxonomies, and studies that examine the functions of classroom humor and finally, I will conclude this section by discussing research that documents how humor can be used as a specific illustrative tool to teach specific aspects of the target language. I will begin by discussing the theories of humor.

2.1.2 Theories of Humor

There are various theories of humor that have been put forth by scholars. For the most part these theories have been broadly divided into three theoretical perspectives: superiority/disparagement theories, arousal/relief theories, and incongruity theories.

Superiority or disparagement theories are based on the notion that we enhance our feelings of superiority by laughing at the imperfections and errors of others (Norrick, 1993). Zillman and Cantor (1976) point out that there is an element of hostility in that we tend to laugh more at a disliked target than a liked target.

Arousal/ relief theories propose that laughter is a result of a sudden psychological and physiological shift in which nervous tension and repressed energy are released (Norrick, 1993).

Incongruity theories propose that humor is experienced when we perceive and react to similar/dissimilar stimuli. For example, the oxymoron "jumbo shrimp" could possibly stimulate laughter or a smile in that it combines two contradictory terms (Graham, Papa, & Brooks, 1992). Suls (1972) presented a two-stage incongruity-resolution model that describes the cognitive process involved in the humor comprehension of the incongruity. The first stage involves the recognition of the incongruity. That is, the discrepancy between what is expected to happen and what has actually occurred in the event. The second stage represents the problem-solving task the learner goes through in order to solve the incongruity. It is at this stage that incongruity becomes meaningful.

Obviously, these theories are not that comprehensive and the ways in which they interrelate are somewhat complex, but they do provide a basis for the majority of research on humor. Needless to say, it is not my intention in this thesis to delve into why something is funny or not. Instead I will be concentrating on humor, and how it occurs within the context of the EFL university classroom in Taiwan.

2.1.3 Humor in Taiwan

In China and Taiwan, humor has been given little respect. According to Yue (2010), this is mainly because traditional Confucian ideals emphasize proper and civil manners in all social interactions. Yue (2010) mentions that once in 500BC Confucius executed humorists for having "improper performances" in front of high ranking officials. Liao (2003) mentions that in Taiwan, humor is rarely academically studied. However, over the last ten years more and more humor research has been sprouting up.

The term for humor in Chinese was translated by Mr. Lin Yutang (林語堂) in 1923 from huaji (滑稽) to youmo(幽默) as he was trying to promote the use of humor in Chinese society (Kao 1974). Youmo (幽默) basically describes humor that is thought of in the west as clever, witty, ironic, and just generally funny (Kao 1974). He contended that youmo (幽默) should contain a thoughtful smile and not explicit laughter—or a high class type of humor. To the contrary, Huaji— considered the earliest form of humor and literally translated as "滑," meaning "slippery" or "smoothen"; and the character "稽," meaning "trick," (Yue 2010, p. 404)—was deemed low class, despicable behavior that causes laughter. For example, laughing at someone slipping on a banana peel tends to be more huaji (滑稽), while more respectable, verbal humorous interaction tends to be youmo (幽默). Liao (2003) puts forth that many Chinese deem youmo as a Western influence. However, Yue (2010) contends that humor has had a long tradition in China similar to that in the Western world.

2.1.4 Defining Humor

The difficulty of defining humor is well documented in the field. Nevertheless, many definitions do exist. Broad definitions of humor include "something that makes a person laugh or

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smile," (Ross, p.1). This definition overlaps with both Long and Graesser (1988). Apte (1985) approaches humor from an anthropologic perspective and offers three definitions: "1) sources that act as potential stimuli 2) the cognitive and intellectual activity that are responsible for perception and evaluation of these sources leading to humor experience and 3) behavioral response that are expressed as smiling and laughter," (p. 13-14). In agreement to this thesis, the first definition presented by Apte (1985) will be adequate in that I will be focusing on student and teacher humor within the EFL classrooms.

More recently, most definitions of humor center around two kinds: the SLA definition and the sociolinguistic definition. For L2 researchers, the term "humor" is used in conjunction with Cook's (2000) idea of "language play" (cf. Bell 2005; Tarone and Bonner 2001). For Cook (2000), language play is a combination of three features: 1) linguistic patterning of forms, 2) semantic reference to imaginary worlds, situations, characters, and events, and 3) pragmatic contextual meanings. In essence, these all include a wide range of activities, including jokes, songs, rhymes, verbal dueling, tongue twisters, puns and riddles, narratives and fictional stories, and play languages. According to some practitioners (cf. Bell 2005), obviously not all of these activities can be considered humorous all the time. As Bell (2005) points out, songs and rhymes may fall outside of the category "humorous language play," (p.71) in that these they do not necessarily invoke laughter.

Sullivan (2000), too, defines humor as "play" that is "accompanied with laughter" (p. 122). This play, according to Sullivan, includes, "teasing and joking, puns and word play, and oral narratives (p. 122).

Sociolinguistic definitions tend to define humor from two different perspectives: the point of view of the speaker and the point of view of listener/audience (Holmes, 2000). In

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regards to the former, something is humorous only when the speaker intends it to be humorous. Contextual, paralinguistic, and prosodic clues are important in determining mirthful intent. This definition can also include failed attempts at humor. The latter definition focuses only on the audience's interpretation. From this perspective, many practitioners propose laughter is the key auditory clue that determines if a stimulus is humorous or not. According to Norrick (1993), laughter can include a conventional "*aw*" or mirthless "*haha.*" Norrick (1993) adds that other things may elicit laughter, such as embarrassment and nervousness. The second definition usually excludes failed attempts at humor.

Finally, some researchers (i.e. Martineau 1972) use both speaker intention and audience interpretation in their definition. However, the speakers' intent must evoke an appropriate response.

In this thesis, I will include audiences' response, for the most part laughter, and speaker intent. I will discuss more precisely the definition that I will use for this thesis in Chapter 3.

2.1.5 Types of Humor in Literature

In this section I will briefly review some of the taxonomies of the types of humor that have been developed by researchers. For the most part, I am merely concerned with the form the humor takes. Literature abounds with discussions of such humor taxonomies and reviewing them all would not be very useful. So, basically, I chose a few that would appear to be more beneficial for pedagogical purposes.

Vinton's (1989) taxonomy of humor is as follows:

(1) puns

(2) goofing around

(3) jokes/anecdotes

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(a) humorous self-ridicule

(b) bawdy jokes

(c) industry jokes

(4) teasing

(a) teasing to get things done

(b) bantering—the great leveler

Although Vinton (1989) places jokes and anecdotes together, some researchers keep them apart (cf. Norrick, 1993). According to Norrick (1993), jokes differ from anecdotes because they end in a punch line; their aim is to elicit a single mirthful response from the listener/s. Anecdotes, on the other hand, have no punch line and, in contrast to jokes, offer several propositions that can elicit laughter from listeners. Norrick (1993) also proposes that jokes are more of a performance ; whereas, anecdotes are personal and tend grow out of personal experience.

Narratives differ from anecdotes in that they are funny stories about events that are *not* personal to the speaker (Norrick, 1993). These stories can be funny in their own right or the speaker may adopt a funny perspective on them (Norrick 1993). Narratives also have no punch line, and may offer several propositions that can elicit laughter.

Norrick (1993) places puns in a wide category of wordplay that also consists of spoonerisms, allusions, hyperbole, mocking and metaphors.

Norrick (1993) describes irony and sarcasm as basically the same thing. Definitions of irony/sarcasm include saying something different or the exact opposite of what is literally meant.

Norrick (1993) and Sullivan (2000) do mention teasing quite frequently; however, Boxer and Cortex (1997) discuss teasing more extensively. They describe teasing as a humorous statement directed at someone present in the conversation. This could either be directed at the

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speaker or the listener. They also mention that teasing occurs on a continuum from "nipping to biting." Nipping tends to bond individuals, whereas, biting can offend.

Hay's (1995) taxonomy of humor in spontaneous conversations presents some more categories of humor that are not identified by Norrick (1993) and Sullivan (2000). These include insults and self-depreciation. Insults occur when the speaker puts someone down. The humor usually occurs because the insult is unexpected. Self-depreciation occurs when the speakers puts him or herself down.

Finally, Morreall (1983,) presents a full taxonomy of humor that for the most part is based on incongruities. Most of these categories can be placed into the aforementioned categories. The only possible exception is mimicking. Mimicking is defined as copying something or someone closely with speech or gestures for humorous effect.

Fillmore (1994) provided a taxonomy of humor in academic discourse that includes amongst others, tongue-in-check comments and the use of inappropriate registrars. The former refers to comments that are not intended to be taken seriously. The latter refers to use of colloquial language mixed with academic language and vice versa.

In the context of Taiwan, Liao (2001) mentions that Taiwanese generally prefer three types of humor, wit, self-depreciating humor and word play. Xue (2010) explains that Chinese humor can be mostly characterized as joke-telling and funny show performing.

Later, I will outline the taxonomy used for this thesis. Some of it will be drawn from the literature and further modified to suit the Taiwan EFL classroom context.

2.1.6 Social Functions of Humor

The functions of humor can be studied from various points of view. However, in order to fully understand the functions of humor in the Taiwan University EFL context, it is best to borrow the framework set by Urios-Aparisi and Wagner (2008), which is drawn from the field of

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pragmatics. They basically posit that in order to gain a full understanding of the functions of humor in the context of the classroom, it is important to investigate humor in the context of classroom discourse (Urios-Aparisi and Wagner 2008; from Kottoff 1998). Thus, the humor found in the classroom context tends to show similar characteristics to the humor used in our daily lives. With this in mind, the video-recordings for this research took place in weeks six though ten of the 2007 fall term. Therefore, in some cases there was time for the teacher-student, student-teacher, and student-student relationship to develop, and as a result the instructors and students were probably able to become more aware of each other's emotional, social, and values systems in regards to humorous interactions (Urios-Aparisi and Wagner 2008; from Kottoff 1998).

Therefore at this point it is important to understand the difference between the primary and secondary functions of humor (Attardo 1994, 323). The primary function of humor is to achieve communicative goals and be social. Attardo (1994) pointed out that humor has four basic social functions: social management, decommitment, mediation, and defunctionalization. Social management maybe specifically suitable for the classroom context as it can facilitate interaction and achieve social control. That is to say, humor can not only reinforce social bonds and strengthen in-group relationships, but also be a social corrective. In the context of the EFL classroom in Taiwan this is particularly crucial as humor can be deemed a "face-saving device" to correct inappropriate or unacceptable behavior by fostering and creating common ground.

By decommiting, the speaker can carry less responsibility and deny any serious or harmful intention. By probing, the speaker can test and explore the reactions of the listener then determine if he/she wants to detract from the statement.

Attardo (1994) also points out that humor is used as a mediating device to guide

discourse, especially when critiquing someone or something or when taboo topics are discussed.

Similarly, Martineau (1972) identifies three social functions of humor: *consensus, conflict, and control.* *Consensus* humor narrows the social distance between individuals and initiates the development of social relationships. *Conflict* humor allows us to introduce and foster conflict in an acceptable form. Ridicule is a key component of conflict humor. *Control* humor allows us to influence the behavior of others by expressing what cannot be expressed otherwise.

Pogrebin and Poole (1988) also identify three functions of humor. The first is *solidarity*: laughing at each other or at the same things shows we share a mutual understanding and a common perspective. Humor is also used as a strategy to *explore* and *test* attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of others in a non-threatening manner and without losing face. The third function of humor identified by Pogrebin and Poole (1988) is *coping*. Humor used in this way helps deal with circumstances outside our control. Fink and Welker (1977) also propose that humor is used as face-saving technique in embarrassing situations.

Also, Liao (2001, from Dai and Lao) pointed out that Taiwanese generally like to use self-depreciating humor and word play as it is entertaining and creates rapport. She also mentions that humor tends to be a pleasant reprimand.

In summary, research on humor is vast and I have only briefly covered some relevant material. It can be seen that some of the material is somewhat confusing and overlapping and there is need for more research in spontaneous and cross-cultural settings. As Norrick (1993) points out:

"Comparative studies of [humor] based on different social groups representing various
ages, professions, races, and so on would certainly reveal other preferences in
[humor].….The classroom…and other environments would surely yield interesting data."

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The next section will look more closely at classroom humor.

2.2 Classroom Humor Research

So far, I have presented some of the theoretical frameworks of humor, discussed the contemporary definitions of humor in Taiwan and the West, and have highlighted some of the types and functions of humor that have been presented in literature. I want shift away from these topics and now focus on what the literature says about humor in classroom contexts.

Historically in Taiwan, effective classroom management and teaching has perceptually been deemed strict and serious in nature, and that the use of humor in the classroom was considered low-class (Liao, 2003). Kao, (1974, xxiii) explains that when Chinese tell jokes, they tend to use the metaphor pen-fan (or "spew the rice"), whereas people from the west tend to see humor as "hold the belly." According to Liao (2001, 17) this may mean that Chinese view humor as merely "meal-time entertainment" (p. 17), and it should not be considered in serious and formal situations, which may include educational contexts, and in particular, classroom contexts in Taiwan.

However, over the last ten years or so, research in Taiwan has suggested other things. For example, Liao (2003) found that students in Taiwan at the university, high school, junior high and elementary school levels rank humor as a "key quality" of being a good teacher, especially in the EFL classroom. Ho and Lin (2001, from Yue) sampled 1039 junior high schools student and seemed to find that situational humor production and humorous coping skills had a moderating effect on anxiety, insomnia, and social dysfunction. The results of the research mentioned above certainly do add to the growing body of research on classroom humor in Taiwan. Thus, it is the hope of this paper to contribute more by gathering qualitative and quantitative data on the use of humor in the Taiwan University EFL classroom. However, before

that, I would like to discuss past methods of classroom research.

2.2.1 Methods of Classroom Research

Past methods of studying humor in classrooms have been based on three kinds: experimental studies, field studies, and questionnaires and surveys.

The most prominent experimental studies of classroom humor are perhaps Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) and Ziv (1988). Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) investigated the effects of humorous examples on students' comprehension and retention of lecture material. In this study, students were exposed to four versions of a 20-minute videotaped lecture: one serious lecture where no humor was present, one presented with humor related to the concepts of the lecture, one presented with humor unrelated to the concepts, and one lecture with a combination of non-related and related concept humor. A test of comprehension and retention was then given immediately after the lecture. Results of the study indicated that the use of humor did enhance retention of the concept related subject matter. Ziv (1988) undertook two semester-long experiments intending to explore the influence of humor on learning outcomes in higher education venues. In the first experiment, Ziv (1988) used two sessions of a fall introductory statistics course in which in one of the sessions, the experimental group was exposed to relevant concept humor whereas the other session, the control group, was exposed to no humor. The teacher who participated in the study underwent special training on using humor as a teaching strategy the summer prior to teaching the course. At the end the semester, Ziv (1988b) compared the final exam scores of each class. Ziv found that the experimental group had higher test scores.

The most prominent field research that examined humor in the classroom is perhaps Bryant et al. (1979) and (1980) and Nussbuam et al. (1985). The former study unobtrusively tape-recorded 70 undergraduate university classes: whereas, the latter study video-recorded 57

undergraduate university classes. The purpose of these studies was to show how often humor was used and what types of humor were used.

Numerous studies have also used questionnaires to examine humor (i.e Gorham and Christophel, 1991, Askildson 2005). The questionnaires vary in their approach. Some are looking specifically at types of humor used in classrooms, how often humor is used by instructors or ask for descriptions of instructors who the respondents thought were funny.

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the above methods of collecting data do not really shed light on how humor is actually used in classrooms. Even more striking is the paucity of research on classroom humor that has actually used video-taped data.

2.2.2 Taxonomies of Classroom Humor

Research on classroom humor has documented various classification schemes of humor. Bryant et al (1979) and Bryant et al (1980) identified six-categories of classroom humor: jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, funny comments, and "other." The "other" category was expanded to include visual and vocal humorous attempts such as a prolonged sneeze or mimicking of animal sounds (i.e. a professor making Donald Duck sounds). They also examined if the humor was sexual or non-sexual, hostile or non-hostile, if the humor "distracted from the educational point" of the class and if the humor was prepared or spontaneous. They also accounted for all participants that were involved in the teachers' humor; whether it was the instructor; a student in the class, another person, or none, and whether the humor disparaged the instructor, a student in the class, or another person and/or group.

Downs, Javadi, and Nussbaum (1988) in their study of college teachers' use of verbal communication in the classroom used a different scheme to classify humor. They classified and coded the teachers' use of humor into a verbal coding scheme developed by Nussbaum,

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Comadena and Holladay (1985). This coding scheme places each humor attempt into one of five different types of "play offs." That is, the teachers' humorous comment was "played off" or directed toward the (1) self, (2) students, (3) others not in class, (4) course material (5) other object or thing. Two other categories were added that determined if the humor was relevant or not relevant to the course content. The results of the study indicated that there was an average of thirteen humorous attempts per fifty-minute lecture. Results also indicated that most humor "played off" the course material and was related to the course.

Contrary to the previous coding scheme that was deductively derived, Gorham & Christophel (1990) inductively developed a taxonomy scheme of humor incidents in the college classroom by using a grounded theory constant comparison method. In this study the student-participants were asked to observe the teachers use of humor over five class meetings and record the incidents as they happened in a diary. After the five class meetings the diaries were collected and each incident was transcribed and combined to generative categories for analysis. The results indicated 13 different types of humor that were used by instructors. Six of the thirteen categories were referred to as "brief tendentious comments directed at" (1) an individual student, (2) the class as a whole, (3) the university, department, or state, (4) world events or personalities or at a popular culture, (5) class procedures, or the topic, subject of the class, (6) at the self. The next four categories consisted of personal or general anecdotes or stories related to the self, or subject/topic of the course. The last three categories consisted of jokes, physical or vocal comedy and other. Results in the study found that humor directed at the topic, subject of the course, or class procedures were mostly used.

Neuliep (1991) further developed yet another scheme for teachers' use of humor in the classroom after surveying 388 high school teachers in Wisconsin. In open-ended questions,

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teachers were asked to describe their last use of humor in class. From this, Neuleip (1991) inductively derived a 20-item category scheme of the teachers' use of humor in the classroom. The taxonomy included five major sections: 1) teacher-targeted humor, 2) student-targeted humor, 3) external source humor, 4) untargeted humor, and 5) nonverbal humor. Within these sections, Neuliep listed six types of teacher-targeted humor: unrelated-related self-disclosure and embarrassment self-disclosure, related and unrelated teacher role-play, and teacher self-deprecation. Four types of student-targeted humor were also categorized: teasing in a non-hostile manner, teacher giving the student a friendly insult, a student role-play, and the teacher identifying a student error and joking about it. Untargeted humor included awkward comparisons, joke telling, punning, and exaggerations told by the teacher. External source humor included historical humorous events, third party humor that was unrelated or related to the content, and natural phenomena humor. The last category was non-verbal humor that was delineated as: affective display humor (i.e. teacher making a funny face) and physical body humor.

All these schemes add wonderful insight into the teachers' use of humor in the classroom; however, they are still somewhat limited. For example, in Bryant's et al. (1979 & 1980) six-category scheme, 38 of 234 humorous attempts were categorized as "other" and no further description of those humorous attempts was given. This, perhaps, indicates that the taxonomy may not be extensive enough. In addition, Bryant's et. al. (1979) study was conducted over one class session. The Nussbaum (1985) and Gorham (1990) studies were different in that one was deductively derived and one was inductively derived, however both of the taxonomies do not focus on the content of the humor and/or how the humor was used. All of the taxonomies, as Schmitz (2002) suggests, perhaps are not representative of foreign/second language classrooms

as these classes presumably have students and instructors from the same culture. Schmitz (2002)
concludes that some of the humor items may not be appropriate for the second/ foreign language
classroom. Moreover, few studies have investigated the use of student humor.
Currently, there is no research in Taiwan offering taxonomies of humor in the classroom.

2.2.4 Frequency of classroom humor

There are a few quantitative studies that have documented the amount of humor used in
classrooms. Bryant et al. (1979) found that university teachers used humor on average of 3 times
per 50-minute class—the most being 17. Nussbaum et al. (1985) found that university teachers
used humor on average of 13 times per 50-minute class. Bryant et. al (1980) study found that
teachers who used humor more often received high scores on the teacher evaluations.
To date, there appears to be no qualitative or quantitative studies that look at the amount of
humor used in any classroom context in Taiwan.

2.2.5 Functions of humor is the classroom

The preceding classification schemes present various different methods of analyzing
humor in the classroom. However, the most extensive amount of research on classroom humor
focuses on the effect that humor has on the general classroom environment, and how that
correlates with learning outcomes. To date, there is still much debate on both of these issue.

Some practitioners argue that humor has an effect on classroom "affective factors," which
in turn leads to increased student learning. The most significant research on this matter places
humor within a larger set of communication behaviors, known as *immediacy behaviors.*
Specifically speaking, *immediacy behaviors* are a set of non-verbal and verbal communication
behaviors that enhance the closeness and reduce the social and psychological distance between

individuals, (Anderson, 1979). Originally, the concept made no specific reference to educational contexts; however, recently, there have been a number of studies that have evidenced immediacy having a positive effect on student cognitive learning and affecting learning outcomes in classrooms (Anderson, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Gorham and Christophel (1990); Richmond (1987). Specifically, Gorham and Christophel (1990) found that more immediate teachers used more humor than nonimmediate teachers and the teachers' use of humor was related to learning. Gorham and Christophel (1990) conclude that because teachers are likely to use humor "to reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to entertain, and to convey good will," the student teacher relationship is enhanced resulting in positive cognitive learning outcomes.

Welker (1977) also suggested that humor can serve as an "attention getter" and can be used to create a relaxed atmosphere within the classroom. Welker (1977) suggested one of the best ways to establish this trait is for the teacher to demonstrate the ability to laugh at his/her mistakes. Welker (1977) points out "to err is human" and in many cases "to err is to be humorous."

Many language educators have proposed that humor has a substantial place in L2 classrooms, in particular, the communicative classroom (i.e. Askildson, 2005, Berwald 1992, Deniere 1995, Toasta 2002, and Trachtenberg, (1979). Deniere (1995) discusses at great length the fundamental differences between traditional classrooms and foreign language classrooms: the foreign language classroom, in contrast to traditional classrooms, is a highly interactive context in which learners are expected to communicate in a language which, for the most part, is novel and unfamiliar in front of their peers. This, as some researchers point out, may lead to an excessive amount of tension, anxiety, and low-self esteem that may consequently hinder learners' language production. This point has been of significant study in L2 research. For example, Krashen's

(1982) "Affective Filter Hypothesis" asserts that anxiety and tension can "keep the input from getting in," (p. 25) Thus, he adds, "the newer methods, the more successful ones, are the ones that encourage a low filter. They provide a relaxed atmosphere where a student is not on the defensive." As a result, many researchers postulate humor can be helpful in this context. Furthermore, as Deniere (2005) points out, through humorous situations created by teachers, students and/or materials, learners will be able to construct ideas and behaviors in creative and original ways, thus enhancing projecting their identity in the TL.

For this research I will draw from the above functions to explain the functions of humor in the Taiwan EFL university classroom in a similar fashion to Urios-Aparisi and Wagner (2010). In their study they used the above functions of humor in the context of the "World" language classroom. In their study, they found that humor played a significant role in classroom management. In this regard, they found that humor was used to defuse behavioral or language mistakes made by students, to call on students, and to get their attention. I will use a similar model in my study.

2.3 Humor as a Pedagogical Tool in the Language Classrooms

In this section I will briefly examine some of the literature that describes how humor can be used as a pedagogical tool in foreign language classrooms. Most of this research is merely perceptual and does lack empirical evidence. However, more and more studies are popping up that are showing specifically how humor could be used as a pedagogical tool, specifically Ackildson (2005), Deniere (1995), Berwald (1992) and Trachetenberg (1979), among others. This research does represent a basis for exploring the use of humor in L2 classrooms in Taiwan. The literature mainly focuses on humor to present and explain the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of the target language. Most research that discusses how to use to humor in the L2 classroom tends

to illustrate how jokes can be used as a tool to teach the discrete structural aspects of the target language. They point out that the humor in jokes often depends on the phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic elements of a language. For specific descriptions please see Deniere (1995) and Ross (1998, Chapter 2).

Berwald (1992) also explains how teachers can use jokes in the foreign language classroom to reinforce syntactic, phonetic, and lexical aspects of the TL. He offers numerous examples of how to take simple English jokes and translate them into French. In addition to the syntactic, phonetic and lexical elements, Vizmuller (1979) suggests that jokes and humor in the classroom environments provide both cognitive and creative benefits for language learners as they allow students to divert from the formulaic expressions that they are used to in the language classroom. The cognitive aspect refers to recognizing the ambiguity; whereas, the creative aspect focuses on the creation of the incongruity.

Trachtenberg (1979) specifically suggests how riddles and narrative jokes can be used as mini grammar, lexical, and speech pattern lessons. For example, she explains how riddles and joke questions can be used to reinforce positive and negative interrogative forms. For example, "*What has four legs and flies? A garbage truck,*" (p.93). Not only does this joke present the interrogative form, but it also demonstrates the lexical ambiguity of the word "flies." Additionally, Trachtenberg, (1979) discusses how the beginnings of narrative jokes can be used to teach typical native-English speaker speech patterns. As she stresses, the opening of jokes must have a precise form, for example:

> *A guy walks into a psychiatrist's office ...*
>
> *A man is driving down a freeway ...*
>
> *An old lady is walking along the beach ...*

(Trachtenberg, 1979, p. 95).

Trachtenberg (1979) admits that there are many different forms narrative jokes can take, but she suggests that teachers should be aware of the "verbal strategies" that these jokes offer. For example, they are often told in the present tense, they offer the use of demonstratives, and the exact description of the person and situation.

Language instructors also posit that the use of humor in language classrooms can enhance learners' culture competence in and pragmatic knowledge of the target culture. Berwald (1992) expounds the importance of humor when teaching language and culture. In particular, he explains that using humorous examples of cultural *faux pas* in the language classroom is a great way to learn about the target cultures' unwritten social rules. Berwald (1992) himself states "the humor caused by the clash of cultures serves as an excellent teaching device that can prepare students to function in another setting," (p 189). Berwald (1992) also suggests the use of comics and humorous advertisements as a great way to transfer cultural clues to students.

Trachtenberg (1979) specifically contends that jokes and humor represent a culture and when used in an L2 classroom, can serve as important conveyors of the target cultural values. Trachtenberg (1979) argues that some jokes may be considered too culture-bound, Schmitz (2002) argues that theoretically all jokes and humor could be considered appropriate in the classroom in that jokes and humor serve as a mirror of the target culture's socio-cultural norms and values and by introducing humor in the classroom, students can reflect critically on the humor of the target culture.

Deniere (1995) contends that humor is an important part of communicative competence and that learners should learn what situations are suitable for joking and what topics are appropriate to joke about in the TL. In order to do this, learners must have a certain amount of

cultural knowledge. Humor, he argues, fosters in-group relations and is often geared at out-groups. As a result, it is extremely difficult for language learners to learn the humor of the target culture. Deniere (1995) proposes in order to construct and understand humor in an intercultural context, language learners need to learn to appreciate differences between cultures and to view the target culture as the people of the target culture do. Specifically he proposes learners need to be aware that: "1) every culture has its own internal coherence, integrity, and logic, 2) all cultures are equally valid and 3) all people are at least partially culture bound,"(p. 295). He mentions this is not particularly easy, and learner must overcome many obstacles. However, as Harder (1980) puts it "in order to be a wit in a language, you have to be a half wit."

Practitioners have also put forth that humor can be a formidable tool to teach socio-pragmatic concepts of the target language. Specifically, Askildson (2005) draws on Berwald's (1992) examples of funny cultural *faux pas* as an effective way to teach the pragmatic norms of the target language. He mentions that by observing violations of norms, learners will become aware of the norms themselves. Askildson (2005) offers a rather humorous example:

"An illustrative example in an English context might include a humorous

anecdote of a newly arrived immigrant to the United States who is casually asked,

"How are you?" by an American colleague—out of simple politeness and with

the cultural expectation of a short or one word response, if any at all—but

responds with a ten minute saga of his/her minor problems of the day," (p. 53).

This example of humor, according to Ackildson (2005), allows students to "enjoy a comedic episode through teacher assisted understanding of the proper and expected pragmatic use of a

greeting," (p. 54). Moreover, Trachtenberg (1979) explains that beginnings of oral narratives can also be used to teach the common opening lines of jokes such as *"Did I ever tell you about ..."* or *"Did you ever hear that one about ...?"* in which the listener must respond with a "no, go ahead tell me," or "yeah, I heard that one." By giving these examples to students, students can became aware of native speaker joking interactions in which "go ahead" gives the speaker the message to proceed and tell the joke. Alternatively, "yeah, I heard that one," gives the indication to move on the something else.

To sum up, previous research on classroom humor has yielded several classification schemes that have shed light on the types of humor that are used in classrooms contexts. Past research has also evidenced that humor is used quite often in university classrooms. Needless to say, there appears to be some degree of uncertainty as to how humor actually benefits classroom contexts. For instance, it is still unclear if humor assists in the retention of new information. Numerous studies have been conducted; however, because of unsystematic researcher methods, it is hard to have a consistent understanding of how humor affects learning outcomes.

A majority of the research on classroom humor tends to focus on the effect that humor has on the classroom "affective" environment. Immediacy, which is a behavior that enhances the closeness between two individuals, currently appears to be the most significant framework in which researchers investigate humor in classrooms. They posit that humor used to reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to entertain, and to convey good will enhance the student teacher relationship, resulting in positive cognitive learning outcomes.

Closely linked to the immediacy framework, some EFL practitioners have documented that classroom humor has the ability to get students' attention, relieve tension, make learning more

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fun, and make the class more positive.

There are also discussions in literature about how too much or inappropriate humor can have negative effects on the classroom "affective" environment.

In regard to L2 classroom humor research, empirical studies are still lacking. The literature for the most part offers examples of how humor can be used in language classrooms to sensitize learners to the linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic aspects of the target language. However, currently, there is very little research available that actually offers examples of what types of humor and how humor is used in L2 classrooms. Thus, numerous researchers are calling for a more comprehensive examination on how humor is used in L2 classrooms (i.e. Deniere 1995; Schmitz 2002).
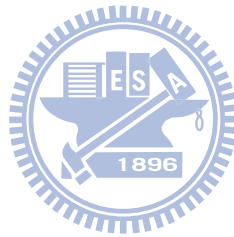
CHAPTER THREE
METODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This section will discuss the methodology that employed in my study. The main goal of my study is to identify categories of humor that are employed in the EFL classrooms in Taiwan. More specifically, I hope to explore what types of humor that are employed in the EFL classrooms in Taiwan by instructors and non-native English speaking students. In addition to identifying the types of humor, I will also examine how humor is accomplished inductively and in accordance with the literature review.

3.2 Participants

All students that participated in this study are, for the most part, ethnic Taiwanese and were in their first or second year of university study. They had been learning English for at least six years.

The instructors participating in this study are aged 25-52. Four had earned doctorates from American universities. Eight of the instructors had earned master's degrees: four of which had been earned in Taiwan; two had been earned in the USA; all instructors had at least 3 years of experience teaching English in Taiwan.

I approached, in person, all twelve instructors and asked them if they could help me with data collection for my research. I told them that video recordings of classroom interaction were needed and that I was looking for NEST and NNEST classes to video record. I discussed the problems and constrictions that I was having and asked them if they could think of anyone that would not mind helping me. According to Hay (1995), this method has many advantages. Firstly, many of the instructors know me or were approached by someone who knows me and therefore

were more comfortable about discussing the project than if approached by someone they did not know. Secondly, I knew most of the instructors which made it easier for me to transcribe their humor. I was not in the classroom at the time of the video recordings.

3.3 Procedures of Collecting Information

For this study, consistent with the current trends in humor research that I have adopted more ethnographic research methodologies, such as using audio and/or video tape recordings of spontaneous speaking instead of questionnaires or surveys, (Holmes, 2000). Recording in the classroom can be very difficult, particularly if you are trying to be as unobtrusive as possible to allow for more naturalistic data. In setting up the recording equipment, I arrived at the class as early as possible. If there was a class before the class that I was recording, I set the video camera up before that class. Then I told the instructor of that class that I was not recording their class and it was for another class. This only happened twice, as most of the classes I was recording were back to back, say one from 8-10 in the morning and the other was 10-12, or there was no class before the class I was recording. The video camera was placed in the back of each classroom. During the break time of the classes a student of the class was responsible for switching the cassette in the video camera; this was arranged prior to the class.

The data were collected from two public universities in northern Taiwan. A total of 12 two-hour undergraduate English courses were recorded twice in week's six to eight in the fall of 2007. This resulted in a total of 48 hours of data. Five of the classes consisted of English majors and rest had students with various other majors. Table 1 presents the list of classes recorded.

Table 1 List of Recorded Classes

Name of Class	Instructor	No. of students	Total Hours
English Conversation	Taiwanese Instructor	30	4
English Conversation	Taiwanese Instructor	30	4
English Conversation	Native English Speaker	30	4
English Conversation	Native English Speaker	20	4
English Four Skills	Taiwanese Instructor	20	4
English Four Skills	Native English Speaker	20	4
English Four Skills	Native English Speaker	20	4
English Four Skills	Native English Speaker	30	4
English Four Skills	Taiwanese Instructor	30	4
English Four Skills	Taiwanese Instructor	30	4
English Presentation	Native English Speaker	20	4
English Presentation	Taiwanese Instructor	30	4

I was able to record all classroom speech events. The classroom speech events included: teacher-student discussion, teacher lecture, student presentation, and student role plays. At first, I thought it would be difficult to record student group discussions. However, it was quite easy as most of the time the instructor of the class walked around the class engaging in discussions, as a result I was able to record and decipher the interaction.

3.4 Participant Knowledge of the Study

Three of the twelve instructors were aware that I am interested in humor, although they did not know exactly what I was looking for. In fact, during the interview session of my research, I

asked the instructors about being videotaped. One instructor said "I was totally unaware of the recording, once you're teaching you just start teaching, plus I still don't remember what days you were recording." Another instructor said "I have been recorded so many times, it has become natural for me, and in fact many students have recorded my class this term." And the final instructor stated "I am not sure what you are looking for, I forget, oh yeah something about student interaction." I responded "no humor," to which the instructor responded "oh, I thought you changed your topic." The rest of the instructors and all of the students in all the classes were unaware of my exact topic. Basically all students and instructors were told that the data I was collecting was for research investigating classroom interaction. After all the recordings were complete, I gave all the participants a more complete description of the project. The signature statement is as follows

All the instructors mentioned that the video recordings did not affect or create any problem or havoc in their classes.

3.5 Data Analysis

Here, I will discuss how I will identify the humor. For the most part, the definitions overlap with the definition defined in the literature review.

3.5.1 General Laughter

To identify humorous instances in the EFL classroom, I was for the most part interested in identifying laughter; however, it is important to remember that, as Achakis and Tsakona (2005) point out, the absence of laughter does not always mean the absence of humor. This is in accordance with Liao (2001) who mentioned that Taiwanese tend to not laugh out-loud that often. However, this was not the case in this study as laughter was for the most part present, and at time,

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there was very loud laughter. In my data, I considered it humor if there was some laughter (Holmes, 2000) For instance, if the instructor made a comment to one student and that student laughed, I counted it as a humorous incident. If the teacher made a comment to a group of students and only some students laughed, this too was counted as a humorous incident. If a comment was made to the entire class and most or all of the students laughed, I counted it as humorous incident. Finally, if a comment was made to the entire class, and some of the students laughed, then I counted it as a humorous incident.

3.5.2 Intent of the Speaker

With laughter, I also took into account the speakers' tone of voice (Holmes 2000). For instance, sudden changes in pace, pitch, and/or rate of an utterance and use of a laughing or smiling voice were taken into consideration. The use of a video-recorder assisted in identifying mirthful facial expressions and as well as other paralinguistic features that I observed. I also paid attention to speaker laughter as it could indicate humor, (Jefferson 1979) Furthermore, I took into account marked lexical choices and/or unusual voices as they may indicate an intention to be humorous, (Bell, 2005). Norrick (1993) and Hymes (1974) both suggest that if the speaker refers to an utterance by its folk name and/or uses certain formulaic expressions this can signal attempts at humor. For example, using phrases such as "That was really funny," or "I was just kidding" can also indicate humor.

3.5.3 Point of View of the Researcher

Holmes (2000) points out that the point of view of the analyst is also an important consideration when identifying instances of humor. That is to say, when working with audio and

videotape data, the analyst's identification of instances of humor becomes increasingly prolific. The ability to stop and play back data for further analysis allows for a more objective view of the humor. I am fully aware that the above methods may not be comprehensive enough; I believed they were adequate enough to allow me to correctly identify humorous episodes in the EFL classroom in Taiwan. Moreover, as Bell (2005) asserts, I was fully aware that my own cultural bias and preferences may have caused me to misinterpret humorous attempts, or select instances of humor that were not intended to be mirthful by the speaker(s) and/or any participants' involved.

In this respect, in the six classes in which the Taiwanese instructors were present, two native Mandarin speakers helped me transcribe and identify humor. Basically, I watched the recordings myself in an attempt to find the humor, then they separately watched the videos and marked the time they felt there was a humorous incident. This was quite time consuming, however, when we came together to compare, our agreement was 100% the same. I then took their data and interviewed the Taiwanese instructors and students to double check the humor and it was 100% correct.

All humorous incidents by students and the instructors were transcribed and coded textually by the researcher. As there were NNS participating in this study, material presented in the NNS native language was transcribed by two (2) researchers who have the same native language. In addition, the material preceding and following the humor was transcribed to provide adequate context. To confirm that the humorous incidents were indeed humorous, the instructors and two students from each class were asked to review the material to determine if the material was indeed humorous. Because of limited time, not all humorous incidents were reviewed from each class. However, of the humorous incidents reviewed, the researcher was

accurate in 98 percent of the incidents.

With regards to coding each humorous incident, each event that has a response or intent that includes laughter, will be counted as one humor incident (refer to Holmes 2007). For example, the following transcript includes three humor incidents.

*INS: What is inside the red envelope..
*S: Money The red envelope…nice….and what
*INS: Money…money is good….Taiwan is so useful (smiling)
[*students laugh*]
*INS: in America you get gifts you don't really want [*instructor laughs*]…but in Taiwan you just get money very useful. In the US, you always get what your parents think it's useful like really warm sweaters that are very ugly you never want to wear but you because it's a Christmas gift you have to "yeah, thank you [*instructor laughs*]
[*Students laugh*]

With regards to third-party humor, which also tended to be long and drawn out, I only included it as one humor incident. This was basically because most of the third-party humor involved one basic punch line. However, if an instructor or student showed three separate funny pictures in a presentation, then I counted that as three incidents.

CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

4.1 Overview

In this section, I will present the results of my study. I will begin by looking 1) how much humor there is used in the Taiwan EFL university classroom? 2) What types of humor are used in the university classroom? 3) How is the humor used and is there any evidence that humor is used as a pedagogical tool?

4.2 Research Question 1

How much humor is used in the Taiwan EFL university classroom?

4.3 Results

Table three shows the number of humor events in each of the recorded classes. Obviously, there was more humor present in some classes than others; however, in all of the classes, humor was present with the most class having 101 instances of humor and the least having 15. Interestingly, two of the classes in the top three where taught by Taiwanese teachers.

Table 2 Amount of Humor in the Taiwan EFL University Classroom

Rank	Course	INS	Major/ Non-major	# of Students	Instructor Humor	Student Humor	Total
1	English 4 Skills	TI	Major	20	71	30	101
2	Conversation Skills	NEI	Major	20	61	25	86
3	English Presentations	TI	Non-major	30	31	40	71
4	English 4 Skills	NEI	Major	20	35	36	71
5	English Conversation	NEI	Non-major	30	55	10	65
6	English Presentations	NEI	Major	20	41	19	60
7	English Conversation	TI	Non-major	30	41	18	59
8	English 4 skills	NEI	Major	20	32	23	55
9	English 4 Skills	TI	Major	30	37	10	47
10	English 4 Skills	NEI	Non-major	30	27	9	36
11	Conversation Skills	TI	Non-major	30	10	11	21
12	English 4 Skills	TI	Non-major	30	9	6	15

INS=Instructor; NEI=Native English Instructor; TI=Taiwanese Instructors

Native English instructors accounted for a total of 251 instances of humor for an average of ten instances of humor per one hour class. The Taiwanese instructors combined for a total of 199 instances of humor for an average of eight instances of humor per one hour class. All teachers combined for a total of 450 incidents of humor, which makes an average of 9.3 humor incidents per hour. The students contributed for a total of 237 instances of humor, for an average of five instances of humor per hour. Overall, there were a total of 687 humor events in 48 hours which averages 14.3 humor incidents every hour.

Table four looks closer at the amount of humor by breaking the humor down to how

many occurrences per hour.

Table 3 Amount of humor Incidents per Hour

Rank	Course	INS	Major/ Non-major	# of Students	Instructor Humor	Student Humor	Total
1	English 4 Skills	TI	Major	20	17.7	7.5	25.25
2	Conversation Skills	NEI	Major	20	15.3	6.25	21.5
3	English Presentations	TI	Non-major	30	7.8	10	17.8
4	English 4 Skills	NEI	Major	20	8.8	9	17.7
5	English Conversation	TI	Non-major	30	13.8	2.5	16.2
6	English Presentations	NEI	Major	20	10.2	4.8	15
7	English Conversation	TI	Non-major	30	10.2	4.5	14.75
8	English 4 skills	NEI	Major	20	8	5.8	13.8
9	English 4 Skills	NEI	Major	20	9.25	2.5	11.75
10	English 4 Skills	NEI	Non-major	30	6.72	2.3	9
11	Conversation Skills	TI	Non-major	30	2.5	2.75	5.3
12	English 4 Skills	TI	Non-major	30	2.3	1.5	3.8

INS=Instructor; NEI=Native English Instructor; TI=Taiwanese Instructor

4.4 Research Question 2

What types of humor are used in the Taiwan EFL University classroom by instructors and students?

4.5 Results

Defining types of humor tends to be very difficult as there are many ways to categorize humor.

For the most part, I drew on the taxonomies that were discussed in the literature review as they

appear to be more pedagogically beneficial. That is to say, I am more concerned about how we as

teachers can learn to employ different types of humor effectively and also examine how students

use humor for the hope that we as teachers can give appropriate feedback. Thus, I was more

concerned with the quality and quantity of humor used. In some classes humor was used

throughout the class and in some classes humor was used very little and only under special

circumstances. Thus, for my data set, I chose the most common types of humor that were used in

all classes. I excluded the humor that was displayed only once and/or only evident in one class.

For example, in one of the presentation classes, there were a few "canned jokes" told by students,

however this only occurred in one of the classes, thus I did not include this in my category.

Canned jokes basically have a script and have to be told the same way all the time, they are

basically recycled and memorized (Liao, 2001). For example, one of the jokes was *"what is the*

biggest bra in the world, A 'Z' bra." There were a total of five canned jokes in the data set. I also

excluded humor that made references to the video recorder. For example, one instructor

proceeded to sing and dance in front of the recording.

Table 3 Types of Humor in the Taiwan EFL University Classroom

1. Tongue-in-Cheek Comments

2. Inappropriate Registrars

3. Personal Anecdotes

4. Comedic Comparisons and Contrasts

5. Self-effacing and In-Jokes

6. References to Contemporary/Popular culture

7. References to Student/University life

8. Code switching/Word play

9. Wit/Clever Responses

10. Third-party Humor

11. Role play and Non-verbal Humor

In the following sections, I will give some examples of each humorous device along with

a brief discussion about how the humor worked and the definition.

1. Tongue in Cheek comments

Tongue-in- cheek comments are a form of humor that dominated the data. This type is used to describe the playful banter, teasing or facetious comments made by instructors and students. Such is in the following:

Example 1

*INS: What did you do last night?

*S: um…I stay…stayed up late [*student smiling*]

*INS: [*in a playful voice*] You stayed up late? I assume you spent time with your….

[*Students laugh*]

In example one the instructor light-heartedly joked that the student was up late because she spent time with her boyfriend. This type of humor was very common in all the data as students and teachers often teased other students about their romantic relationships, imaginary or real.

In example two, the instructor tries to get students to speak English and not Chinese. Instead of using a "bald on" technique, he lightly teases them by saying he speaks Chinese more than they do and they should make more of an effort to speak English.

Example 2

*INS: And please speak in English..I shouldn't have to keep reminding you guys..you only have two English classes in a week, right? ..Three...What other class? Who's your teacher for that.. Well. That's only six hours a week that you need to speak English right and so that's 8 hours, 9 hours 10 hours..That's not so bad…I have to speak Chinese all most all the time. [*Instructor chuckles*]

[*Students laugh*]

I also included in this category comments that are not to be taken seriously or at face-value. Here the instructor introduces the new unit.

Example 3

*INS: Look a computer chip. Everything you have ever learned can be placed on one small chip. Of course, our speech teachers' knowledge would require TWO CHIPS [*smiling]* [*instructor laughs*]

  [*Students laugh*]

Obviously, the teacher here is simply kidding with the students by saying her knowledge will require two chips instead of one. Again, these types of comments were common throughout all the data

Students also used this type of maneuver quite a bit. For instance, in example four, the instructor writes the homework assignment on the board and the students made these comments:

Example 4

[*Instructor writing homework on the board*]

*S: I suddenly can't remember English.

[*Students laugh*]

Obviously, this is not a true statement and students were somewhat teasing the teacher at the end of class. There were numerous occurrences of this type of humor usually occurring at the beginning and at the end of classes.

2. Inappropriate registrars

This category was generated from what Filmore (1994) calls using an inappropriate register. As according to his research this tended to be a very popular humor maneuver used by academics. This is also evident in my data. In the first example, the teacher is explains the language of meetings and the appropriate way to disagree with someone. While explaining, the instructor uses the word "crap" in a humorous tone, which creates laughter.

Example 5

*INS: if someone in a meeting has an idea…and you think it's a rubbish idea….should you say…that's crap and don't do that.

*Ss: [*students laugh*]

In example six, the Taiwanese instructor talks to the students about staring too long at people from other countries without saying anything:

Example 6

*INS: You shouldn't to that, you have to talk
They will think what's wrong with you might get kicked in the ass by foreigners. [*Instructor laughs*]
[*Students laugh*]

In these three cases, the teacher is using overt colloquial language, even in some cases mild profanity or vulgar language with serious academic language. Generally, this was very easy for students and teachers to pick up.

3. Personal anecdotes

Anecdotes given by students and teachers were found in all the classes. For the most part, these were amusing stories about real people or events in the past. In some cases they are brief as in this following example given by teacher from Canada who tells the students something that often happens to him while living in Taiwan.

Example 7

*INS: I remember watching this television show and they go out and ask Taiwanese people what they thought about foreigners. 你覺得外國人怎麼樣?? It was pretty funny the things they said. 外國人都,有像貓, 外國人,都很胖 外國人都很吵
[*Students laugh*]

Translation

*INS: I remember watching this Television show and they go out and ask Taiwanese people what they thought foreigners. What do you think of foreigners? It was pretty funny the things they said. All foreigners look like cats, all foreigners are fat, all foreigners are noisy.

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Other anecdotes were long and drawn out and tended to be very personal. In example eight, the Taiwanese instructor introduces an activity for the students to use the past tense as she presents her personal story about taking her wedding photos.

Example 8

*INS: And of course according to the customs for the wedding we did take the [*instructor laughs*] photos but we didn't finish taking the photo cuz we absolutely hated to change a lot of different outfits so it's took certain photos and we say that's enough thank you very much and we left and they don't look like is anyway. [*Laughs*]

 [*Students laugh*]

*INS: [*Instructor laughs*] and we look like actors and actresses [*students and instructor laugh]* [*Instructor opens the wedding picture book*]

*Ss: [*Loudly*] wwohhhhhhhhh!!!!!

Example nine is a student example of an anecdote. Here, the student gives a presentation about her life in college and trying to find a boyfriend:

Example 9

*S1: Yes, I am single and available.[*Laughs*]

[*Students laugh*]

*S1: many others think that it is a miracle,[*laughs*]

 [*Students laugh]*

 S1: to be single for so so many years in [*name of University*]…but I am the miracle
[*Students laugh*]

* S: I have to admit that I used to have very high standards for choosing boyfriends such as tall [*holds up a piece of paper with the word handsome on it*] handsome [*holds up a piece of paper with the word "humorous" and then "plays basketball"*] humorous and plays basketball very well

[*Students laugh*]

[holds up all the pieces of paper] now this is meaningless [rips up all the pieces of paper]

S: the only important thing now is to be a male

[*Students laugh*]

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S: no I am kidding…this most important thing is to be a kind person

4. Comedic Comparisons and Contrasts

Incongruous comparisons often sparked of humor and made the content more memorable

 Example ten shows an example from a student who was gives a presentation about Rugby. At

one point in the presentation, he was explains the difference between American football and

rugby:

Example 10

> *S: football players wear something, but rugby players wear nothing
> [*Students laugh*]

The humor here came from when the student said "nothing," which evoked laughter because

"wear nothing" can also mean naked.

> After the presentation, the teacher made another comment about the differences between

Rugby and American football:

Example 10

> *INS: A funny comment on that in rugby when you score points you have to touch the ball
> down as a rule they call it a try t-r-y American football you don't have to touch it town, but
> they do call it a touchdown…can anyone explain this to *me*.
> [*Students laugh*]

In this example, in a presentation class the instructor discusses how important is to know your

audience when deciding what topic to talk about:

> INS: If I am going to talk with Buddhist I probably don't want to talk about the best place
> to go to kill animals.
> [*Students laugh*]
> T: yeah…see it makes sense. [*Laughs*]

Here the humor comes from the juxtaposition of Buddhism and that of killing animals. It is

perhaps that well known that Buddhiss have a high regard for animals.

5. References to contemporary/popular culture

In the data it was very common for teachers and students to make references to famous people or events in order to obtain a humorous effect. For the most part, this type of humor was simple for everyone to understand, tended to offer a break from the academic seriousness and drew the interest of the audience. In example eleven, the Taiwanese instructor uses two examples of famous people in Taiwanese popular culture. The first person mentions in 郭台銘 (Terry Gou) who is a Taiwanese tycoon and the other is a very famous model Lin-Chi Ling.

Example 11

    *INS: Do you wanna be rich like 郭台銘;….and marry 林志玲 [*instructor laughs*] or..

    [*Students laugh*]

In example twelve, the student gives a presentation about all the places she would like to travel.

Example 12

    *S: How I am going to go there, I should borrow the time machine from Doraemon.

    [*Students laugh*]

The humor here comes from when the student draws on a cartoon character from Japan called Doraemon. Doraemon is a robotic cat that can travel back in time.

6. Reference to student/university life

For the most part, this type of humor was basically a funny quip or comment made about something common in students' everyday lives. As perhaps with all university students, dating is a very important thing. In the data there were numerous comments made about dating, getting married, even sleeping and so on. In example thirteen, the instructor talks about how to give a professional PowerPoint slide/presentation, and then makes a reference to dating, which then

received a few chuckles.

Example 13

   *INS: Only if you are presenting yourself and trying to get someone to date with you, then you can use the cute icons

[*Students laugh*]

   *INS: Otherwise, be professional on your presentation.

Example fourteen comes from a conversation class when the teacher asks what a particular

student did over the weekend:

Example 14

   *S: In the library.

   *INS: Good student, studying

   *S: No sleeping. [*Student smiles]*

   *INS: See a good [*name of university*] student using the library as a hotel (LAUGHTER)…this is the libraries function that's getting some good sleep….the library has the right temperature….it's quiet it's peaceful everybody sleeps in the library…..if you walk in there, it's a hotel…the [name of university] hotel Nobody sleeps in the dormitory the library is for resting. Good for you so you slept and now you feel better feel better have more power…..will you go back? [instructor smiles]

   [*Students laugh*]

Here the humor coming from the understanding that many students go to the school's library to

sleep because it is cool, quiet and they do not have to spend money on air conditioning. Humor

in regards to students' lives is a very popular maneuver for instructors throughout the data.

7. Self-effacing and in-jokes

Throughout all the data there was often good natured laugh at the equipment, class materials,

location, and past events amongst the participants. One such example would be making fun of

the characters in the language learning material. For example, during their presentation students

would mock a video in which the presenter took off his glasses. This then became an on-going joke in the class as when some students would then take their glasses off in a similar fashion, this evoked a humorous response.

In addition, while banter and teasing at the expense of others was common in the data, self-effacing humor occurred quite often.   Here are some examples:

Example 15

*INS: This is what happens when everyone gets old like me…you have so many classes and you can't remember like me. [*Instructor smiles*]

Here the instructor is making fun of his age, while in example sixteen the instructor is making fun of their handwriting on the board.

Example 16

*INS: I cannot recognize my own writing

[*Students laugh*]

This type of humor happened quite often; students often poked fun at themselves, how they looked, about their English names, and their relationship status. For example:

Example 17

*S2: First of all, who am I going to be with of course, I will go with my boyfriend, but I don't a have boyfriend.[*Student Laughs*]

[*Students laugh]*

For the most part, this type of humor is easy to understand and adds a sense of community to the class.

8. Code switching/word play

Code switching was also used quite often for humorous effect. In all classes, Native English instructors would try speak Mandarin Chinese in an attempt to get a chuckle from students. In my data set, only one instructor claimed to be proficient in Chinese. The instructor here claimed

to be a beginner. In example eighteen, the instructor talks to the students about traveling around

Taiwan. Then, she asks the students what part of Taiwan they are from:

Example 18

INS: How many of you are from the north? South? North or south [*using hand gestures*] south is let's see north is 東北[*speaking Chinese*] south is [*mumbling*] [*tapping head*]

[*Students laugh*]

Ss: 南

[*Students laugh*]

INS: 南

[*Instructor and students laugh*]

Translation

INS: How many of you are from the north? South? North or south [*using hand gestures*] south is let's see north is northeast [*speaking Chinese*] south is [*mumbling*] [*tapping head*]

[*Students laugh*]

Ss: south

[*Students laugh*]

INS: south

[*Instructor and students laugh*]

Liao (2005) reports it is quite common for Taiwanese students and teachers to switch

between English and Chinese, Chinese and English, and Taiwanese and Chinese for humorous

effect. This point of view was supported in my data. Here the teacher switches between English

and Taiwanese when she is trys to give students further examples of what careers they would like

in the future, the word 黑手 (pronounced hei shou) translates to English as "black hands," which

is the name for a mechanic in Taiwanese .

Example 19

*INS: Do you want to restore antique cars…yeah restore cars…your hands are ….黑手.

[*Speaking Taiwanese*][*Instructor laughs*]

[Students laugh]

Translation

INS: Do you want to restore antique cars…yeah…yours hands are black hands

9. Wit/Clever responses

This type of humor was also common. It is explained as using clever, whimsical responses to

serious statements. In example twenty, the instructor includes a funny comment in response to a

student's answer what in Taiwan it is not appropriate to open umbrellas inside someone's house.
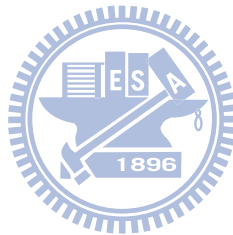
Example 20

S: Don't open umbrellas in the house

INS: Why not?

S: Ghosts

INS: Ghosts hide in umbrellas?

[*Students laugh*]

In example twenty, the instructor and students discuss what time the students woke up in the

morning. The humorous remarks came when one of the students said he gets up at twelve. Then,

the instructor responded "9:55." It should be noted that the time of this class was 10am-12noon,

which makes the comment humorous.

Example 21

INS: Who gets up early? So, what is early for you? Do you get up early what is early for

you?

S: Seven

S: Six

S: Six

S: Eight

S:Twelve

[*Student and teacher laugh*]

INS: [*laughing*] 9:55 before class

Example twenty-two is a good example of student wit. Here the instructor is discusses

with the class how to find good topics to write about and he was asking the students were they

have been recently:

Example 22

       *INS: You go to parks?

        S: [*smiling*] Parking lots, yes. There's a red car on the left,

      [*Students laugh*]

The humor here comes from the response from the instructors question if any students go

to parks, which the student replied parking lots. This sparked laughter from the class.

10. Third-Party Humor

Third-party humor (Neuliep 1991) is when the teacher and/or student(s) bring to class something

amusing that came from another source. This can include humorous video clips, power point

slides, and humorous pictures. For example, in one class students brought video clips of

humorous inventions; while in another class, a teacher brought in humorous commercials. Often

students used cartoon characters to represent something in their presentation and instructors used

cartoons or funny pictures to present content.

11. Role-play and non-verbal humor

Role play humor (Hay 1995, Neiuleip 1991) is a performance based humor. It is basically like

acting. This type of humor was most specific to the students and occurred in all classes. Here is

one example:

Example 23

S1: Hello everybody we are group 5 and were and now we are going to [*pause*] [*Students laugh*] introduce a very useful future thing to you and now we have to show you a little situation umm I'm mommy and this is my f(s)our years old daughter Weeendy and [*pause*][*Students laugh*] this is my very handsome husband [*Students laugh*] and he's and he's our ah ah robot babysitter [*Students laugh*] one day I took my little daughter to the department store For shopping [*indecipherable speech*]

S2 [*acting like a young child*]: Hey butterfly [*running away from mother*] butterfly [*Students laugh*]

S3: but it's too expensive [*indecipherable speech*] where is my daughter [student laughter]

S2: mommy wahhhhh [*student pretending to cry*]

S4: Have you ever into into this situation like me my daughter always always get lost so I bought so I bought a robot machine ding ding okay I found Wendy [Student laughter] mommy mommy I'm back hugging

In addition, in my taxonomy there were two forms of non-verbal humor: affective display and kinesics humor, such as anger, for humorous effect. This was found more or less in the role play humor. The former is used to describe specific facial expressions that convey emotions. The latter is used to describe rapid gesturing or aerobatic movements in an attempt humor the class. One such example in the data is an instructor who pretends to show the students a popular dance from when she was a child.

The above represents taxonomy of humor in the Taiwan university EFL classroom. Analysis showed that these twelve types of humor were used quite extensively in all classes. At this point, I would like now move on to how the humor was actually used in the classroom. I will cover this in the next section.

4.6 Research Question 3

What are the functions of humor in the Taiwan EFL University classroom

and is there any evidence that it is used as a pedagogical tool?

4.7 Results

Now, that we have looked at the amount of humor in the EFL classroom, and the different types

of humor used, I would like to shift the focus of this thesis to the functions of the humor. That is

to say, why and how humor is used, or what purpose does it fulfill in the Taiwan University EFL

classroom. Furthermore, is there any evidence that humor is used as a pedagogical tool?

Generally, the results of this study are somewhat similar to what was found in the literature

review. In this study, humor had two basic functions: 1) *the use of humor to present and explain*

content and 2) the use of humor for classroom management. In regards to the first function,

humor is used to 1) *present and explain content* 2) *explain cultural and pragmatic information* 3)

present personal and sensitive information and 4) *to motivate or to inspire student learning.* The

second function, was to use for classroom management to 1) *build rapport/immediacy* 2) *probe*

for more information 3) *mitigate mistakes (behavioral or linguistic)*, and 4) *to call on students*

and get their attention. As you will see in the examples below, there tends to be some overlap

between these functions. In the following examples, I will show how these functions relate to

the above mentioned functions.

4.7.1 Humor Used for Classroom Management

In example twenty four, the humor is used *to build rapport/immediacy*. The instructor of the

course talks to students about where students usually go when they are on dates. In this instance,

the instructor smiles and laughs as she mentions a popular place on the University campus

where the students at the university often have dates. The students then giggle at the fact the teacher knew of such information,

Example 24

    *INS: All the time you see people kissing by (laughing) [*name of certain place on the university campus*] lake.
    [*Students laugh*]

In example twenty five, the teacher attempts to *build rapport* by code switching English and Chinese. In this case the teacher is asking the students what they want to do in the future. The instructor uses the Chinese 賣雞排 which means to sell chicken on the side of the street or at a night market. It is quite a profitable business, but it usually is a result of not knowing what else you want to do or not being able to get a job. This is basic rapport building as it is a popular food among students and Taiwanese alike.

Example 25

    *INS: Do you wanna start your own business or do you wanna build houses…how many of you will 賣雞排?
    [*Instructor and student laugh*]

Examples twenty six and twenty seven also show how humor was used *to build rapport and immediacy* by self-effacement. There were numerous self-effacing comments by both instructors and students, in example three the instructor mentions to students that she wanted to be a flight attendant when she was young but she was not tall enough:

Example 26

    *INS: What did I want to be when I was young?
    *Ss: Yeah.

*INS: I wanted to be a flight attendant but I was too short [instructor smiles]

[*Students laugh*]

In example twenty seven, a student talks about the topic of another student's presentation regarding weight-loss and continues to make reference to her own weight issues in a self-effacing way.

Example 27

S: As we talk about how to lose weight as you can see nothing works on myself. [*smile voice and laugh*s]

 [*Students laugh*]

Ss: No no…

[*Students laugh*]

 Example twenty eight shows how humor used as a way to *probe for more information and mitigate a mistake.* This information could be personal or just basic information. The instructor probes a student to elicit more personal information as she lightheartedly tries to get more information regarding what the student did on the weekend, with the intention of trying to find out if she had a boyfriend. She also corrects the student by changing "play" to have fun:

Example 28

*S: I often go to Taibei or Taizhong

*INS: You often go to Taibei or Taizhong to what?

[*Students laugh]*

*S: Play with

*INS: Play with who or have fun

[*Students laugh*]

*S: Have fun with my friends [*smile voice*]

*INS: [*in a funny voice*] Who are your friends?

*S: And visit [*indecipherable*]

*INS: Oh you know I said who are your friends

*S: My high school friends

*INS: High school classmates…are they all females

*S: [*pauses*] [*smiles*] Both

*INS: Females and males ahhhhhh do you happen to have someone who you like ahhh better. [smiling]

[*Students laugh*]

Example twenty nine illustrates how the teacher uses humor to try and get more information from the students. He is asks students about how greetings in Taiwan differ from other parts of the world. However, when the students give short answers he uses a humorous remark to get them to say more:

Example 29

*INS: Do you greet people in different ways?

*S: Yes [*5 seconds pass*]

*INS: [*smiling*] Ok give me some examples. You all said yes [instructor laughs], so you all must know [instructor laughs]

[*Students laugh*]

*Ss: Teacher, sometimes we greet teachers different.

*INS: OK. [*smile voice*] Great man!! Thanks

[*Students laugh*]

The following examples show how humor was used to *mitigate mistakes behaviorally or linguistically.* In example seven, the instructor explains that a blender is not used when making mashed potatoes. This incongruity causes laughter throughout the class.

Example 30

*INS: You know what a blender is right...it's something .like this….and it has a machine down here…you press a button as zzzzzzz right…but usually you don't use [*smiling and laughing*]a blender to make mashed potatoes.

[instructor and students laugh]

*INS: and you didn't say you have to peel the potatoes…you have to take the skin of the potatoes…..then you boil the potatoes and you poor water out…they are soft…you just the potato masher to mash them…you don't use a blender …but very good

In example thirty-one the instructor corrects a student's pronunciation is which a student said they like arts and crafts; the "ft" pronunciation sounds to the instructor like a "p" sound. So, instead of crafts, it sounds like crap.

Example 31

S: I study arts and crafts when I was young [*the instructor thought she said craps*]
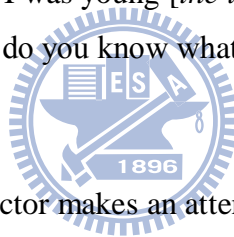*INS: How 'bout crafts or crap do you know what craps means. Crap is 大便 (da-bien)
[Instructor and students laugh]

Translation

S: I study arts and crafts when I was young [*the instructor thought she said craps*]
*INS: How 'bout crafts or crap do you know what craps means. Crap means feces
[Instructor and students laugh]

In example thirty two the instructor makes an attempt to try to get the students to speak up while they were discussing.

Example 32

[*Students talking and discussing, the teacher walks around smiling*]
INS: [*smiling*] You don't have to whisper (laughing)!! You can speak loudly [instructor laughs].
[*Students laugh*]

Example thirty three illustrates how the instructor used humor to *call on students* and *get their attention*. Here the students are discussing an article that the students have read. The instructor then calls on the student and gets his attention by using the student's nickname, after which the entire class erupts in laughter:

55

Example 33

 *INS: And why does it drive him crazy…ㄒㄧㄠˇ pearl.

 [*Students laugh*]

Translation

 *INS: And why does it drive him crazy…small pearl

 [*Students laugh*]

Example thirty three demonstrates the male instructor using an unusually high voice to get the

students to stop discussing in order to present their ideas to the class:

Example 34

 INS: [*In a funny voice*] Come back come back. Wake up, wake up [*instructor laughs*]
 Ss: [*In high voice*] Come back, come back. Wake up, wake up.

Example thirty five shows humor was used to not only *mitigate a behavioral mistake* (the

students chatting in the back of the classroom), but also to *call on students and get their attention*.

Here the instructor is trying to explain content to the students when he hears them talking in the

back of the room. Then in a humorous mode, he tries to get their attention.

Example 35

 *INS: [*smiling*] Hey you gals in the back Stop gossiping!!
 *S: How do you know we are gossiping?
 *INS: [*smiling*] That's one of the dumbest questions I have ever heard.
 [*Students laugh*]

In example thirty six, a Taiwanese instructor uses humor is a similar fashion to example nineteen.

Here the Taiwanese instructor need to correct students who kept speaking Chinese in English

class.

Example 36

 *INS: About your present life (indecipherable speech) what it's not easy what's have

wrong …. or do you have any problems? What kind of problems would you like to tell us? Okay, never mind.[*Looks at other student*] . 你要講中文 [*in humorous tone*]

*S: 我是..

*INS: [*interrupts student*] [*smiles*] ahhhhh 我還沒說好!

[*Students laugh*]

*INS: kidding continue and [*smile vice*] speak English!!

[*Students laugh*]

Translation

*INS: about your present life (indecipherable speech) what it's not easy what's have wrong …. or do you have any problems (problems) problems what kind of problems would you like to tell us?...Okay never mind.[*Looking at other student*] . You are speaking Chinese [*in humorous tone*]

*S: I…

[*Students laugh*]

*INS: [*interrupts student*] [*smiling*] ahhhhh I have not said you could.

[*Students laugh*]

*INS: kidding continue and [*smile vice*] speak English!!

[*Students laugh*]

4.7.2 Humor Used as a Pedagogical Tool

Example thirty seven illustrates humor used to convey *personal information and convey specific linguistic information.* For instance the instructor tells a story about her wedding. The purpose of the activity was for students to create a narrative with the same premise, how the instructor became married. Particular attention was given to using the past tense in order to talk about experiences in the past. Here is the example:

Example 37

*INS: And of course according to the customs for the wedding we did take the [*instructor laughs*] photos but we didn't finish taking the photo because we absolutely hated to change

a lot of different outfits so it's buy certain photos and we say that's enough thank you very

much and we left and they don't look like is anyway [*instructor laughs*]

[*Students laugh*]

INS: [*instructor laughs*] and we look like actors and actresses [*students and instructor

laugh*] [*instructor opens the wedding picture book*]

[*Students respond very loudly*] wwohhhhhhhh!!!!!

In example thirty eight, humor was used to *convey cultural and pragmatic information*. The

instructor smiles when he tells the students an anecdote about living in Taiwan, and the common

mistake made by Taiwanese; thinking that all foreigners living in Taiwan are Americans.

Example 38

*INS: I always get kids on the street they see me and awhhh pointing American, see then I
point at them and say Korean and they say no no I am not Korean. Well I am not American.
[*Students laugh*]

In Example thirty nine, the instructor uses humor to explain to the difference between being

called a girl or a woman, she laughs and smiles as she explains.

Example 39

INS: Some people do not like being called girls or boys.
Ss: Why?
INS: Because they are adults. But some people don't care. Call me a girl in makes me
feel young [*smile voice*][*instructor laughs*]
[*Students laugh*]

Example forty is an example of a Taiwanese instructor explaining *pragmatic information*

to his students in an English four skills class. In this case, the students do not understand the

phrases "to bite your tongue" and "to bit your lip." The instructor uses a humorous mode to

explain the phrases.

Example 40

> INS: Okay so the purpose of this workshop is about how to handle anger. Okay, how you
> can handle your anger how you can deal with or probably you can say to get along with
> your own anger, okay. Everyone ah have has times when you feel angry about something
> or someone and how you will deal with that, okay. So this is to bit you tongue bit your
> tongue means here there's another expression sometimes the people will say bite your lip
> you know lip (pointing to his lip) you have two lips …do you have two tongues? (no) no
> [*instructor laughs*]
>
> [*students laugh*]
>
> INS: Only one tongue so when you bite your tongue you don't really bite it, but what
> does that mean so someone asks you to bite your tongue, bite your lip can you
> guess…what does that mean?……when you feel upset about someone or something will
> you just say that directly or would you just make the complaint in front of the people or
> you would just bite your tongue…and just hold it?…..Okay….you want to say something
> but you don't really say it, okay. Do you know, do you understand what this phrase means
> so when you bite your tongue or when you bite your lip that means you want to say
> something but you don't okay hush bite your tongue or you bite your lip [*smile voice*]. It
> does not mean to actually bite your tongue.
>
> [*Students laugh*]

Example forty one is an excellent example of how humor is used *to convey cultural*

information. The instructor and students talk about cultural differences and the instructor asks the

students about dating in Taiwan, in particular, what would happen on a first date in Taiwan; if

there would be kissing on the first date.

Example 41

> INS: No kissing when you first meet someone..No kissing on the first date for first

kissing

S: No, no! [*students laugh*]

T: Ok boring [*instructor and students laugh*] In England if there is no kissing on the first date there is no second date….Okay, if there is no kissing on the first date, then there's a problem in England….Okay, first date not sure…second date he was shy, third date she might think he is gay…You look so shocked.

Example forty two is an illustration of student-initiated humor that *conveys cultural information*. In this role play, the students portray two people going on a date. While on the date, one of the students, insists on continuously talking about politics. In Taiwan, it is considered taboo to talk about politics. There is laughing and joking all throughout this role play:

Example 42

S1: No [mentioning name of student] it's our first date and we shouldn't talk about politics.

S2: Oh…well…well… Its politics it's the whole problem of the whole country it's an island problem, a very small island and…. China could attack us anytime

S1: I know, but I am just a small citizen of Taiwan and I don't think…It really doesn't concern me that much.

S2: Ahh…it matters….It matters from everyone. And the food should come anytime and the food and the food should come

INS: Ahhh

S3: [*student acting like a waitress*] spills drinks

S2 to S3: Oh you stupid!!

S1: [using student name] sit down

[*Students laugh*]

S2 It's ruined the whole feeling. ….lets go

S1: But Danny

[*Instructor and students laugh*]

Throughout the data, humor was used to *present content and explain content*, especially by

students in the form of third party humor. For instance, instructors and students showed funny video clips related to the content of the course. For example, they showed clips of funny inventions, humorous clips of natural disasters and funny commercials as they related to each of the units in the day's lessons.

Example forty three is another example of humor used *to present* and *explain content*, for example the teacher is talking about certain non verbal communication and he mentions the word "chin."

Example 43

S: What's your chin?
INS: This bit right here. [*Smile voice*] The bit we all only wish to have one of
[*Students laugh*]

In example forty four, the Taiwanese instructor and students have a lesson about shortcomings that people may have, the humor here comes from the fact that being too handsome and having charisma is probably not a real shortcoming; however, the instructor is merely giving an example in order to make sure the students have some idea of what they are supposed to talk about.

Example 44

*INS: Examine yourself to see what kind of shortcomings you what kind of problematic attitude or behaviors that you have because all these things might not really bad but must be influential in some way I mean for your life or for your academic study something like that your relationship with other people for example maybe you would think that ahhhh I am just too handsome that's problematic
[*Students laugh*]
*INS: Okay, I have too many girls around me [Students and instructor laughs].
Something like that.

Throughout the data set humor is used to *tell/present sensitive/personal information.*

Example forty five is an example of a student humor. Here he gives a small presentation about some experiences in his past. At certain points, he smiles and giggles as he explains that he once cheated on his girlfriend, which generates laughter from the class. More laughter occurred when the student explains that he was once cheated on by his girlfriend with his best friend.

Example 45

    *S: As to why I am different, personally I would say that I have had a very interesting life because I have experienced a lot of very painful experiences in this life, for example, um I was cheated by one of my girlfriends before [*student and students laugh*] and ah I almost got into a fight because of some rumors and I was betrayed by one of my best friends over some girl [*student laughs*]
    [*Students laugh*]

In example forty six, the instructor and students discuss ways to relieve stress and the students are having trouble figuring out ways to handle stress. The instructor then gives an example that he heard from one of his friends regarding using a picture of a loved one as a method to relieve stress.

Example 46

    *INS: Someone once told me, a good way to relieve stress would be carry around a picture of your girlfriend or wife or put as a screensaver, but I actually don't even carry a picture of my wife with me, much less use it as a screensaver. [*Smile voice*]If I did, I would be afraid that I would get sick of seeing her.
   [*Students laugh*]

In the final example, the teacher uses a humorous anecdote in order *to inspire and motivate students.* Prior to this, the students were asking the teacher about ways to improve their English. From the context, they felt frustrated because there was a speech contest in which the students from the non-English departments had to compete against students from the English department,

which apparently have better English skills. The instructor then very light-heartedly told them a story about a past student. The instructor used the phrase "clear background," meaning the student learned English while only living in Taiwan, which ignited laughter throughout the class.

Example 47

> *INS: There was a senior student who has a habit to do the "self talk" in order to improve his English. Every day, even no one is talking to him, he still talks to himself such as "Today is a lovely day" When he became my student his English was so good that I wonder either has been abroad or have foreign relatives, but I found out none of above reason are right. He has totally "clear background."
> *[Students laugh]*
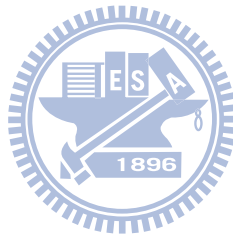
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The results from this study, though preliminary in nature, appear to indicate that humor occurs

frequently and does play an important role in the Taiwan EFL university classroom. Although,

the amount of humor used in the Taiwan EFL university class by both instructors and students

appears to be a lot as compared to the Bryant et al. (1979) and Nussbuam et al. (1985) studies,

more qualitative and quantitative research needs to be done, not only in more Taiwanese

University EFL classrooms, but in perhaps other content courses as well, such as business

courses, science courses, etc. An interesting note here is that in the interviews conducted after the

video-recordings, most of the instructors where "shocked" to find out how much humor they

actually used in class. The implication here may be that perceptual studies that are based on

questionnaires may not be the best method to study humor if we want to have a better

understanding of how much humor is used in classroom contexts. Therefore, more quantitative

and qualitative research investigating the amount of humor should be conducted in senior high

school, junior high school, and elementary school classrooms in order to gain more

understanding of how humor is actually used in different EFL classroom contexts in Taiwan.

The above results section also presented a 12-type humor taxonomy in accordance with

the literature review. However, data somewhat differed from most other taxonomies presented

before mainly because the Taiwan university EFL classroom tends to be very interactive. Past

research that has put forth humor taxonomies tend to be more from lecture-based courses that are

not very interactional. Contrary to this, the Taiwan University EFL classroom tends to be very

interactive with a lot of personal sharing, as seen from the examples. In this data, tongue-in-

cheek comments were used a lot by both students and instructors; this corresponds with the Fillmore (1994) and Nielup (1991) studies of humor in academic discourse. The use of inappropriate registers was also extensively documented in the above data; this also corresponds with the research results from Fillmore (1994) and Lee (2007). Anecdotes also occurred in all classes with instructors and students telling humorous stories that happened to them; this relates to the research conducted by Norrick (1993) who documents that anecdotes are a very common form of humor is daily conversation. Also, common in this small data sample was word play, in particular code switching. This form of humor was found in all classes with contributions from both teachers and students. In this small data set, Taiwanese instructors and students tended to engage in a lot self-effacing humor similar to the native English speaking instructors' humor. This research corresponds with Denire (1995) and Liao (2001). Wit was also common, which corresponds with Liao (2001) and a majority of the research from Western contexts. Also, Taiwanese students in the Taiwan University EFL classroom tended to perform numerous humorous role-plays. This finding aligns with Yue's (2010) research that put forth that Chinese love to use humor for performances. More research could investigate the differences between the types of humor used by instructors and students from different cultures.

It is important to keep in mind that this study was conducted at only two universities in northern Taiwan where students tend to be more intermediate and high intermediate in regards to their English level. Thus, to fully understand all the types of humor used in the Taiwan EFL university classrooms, more qualitative and quantitative data needs be collected in different contexts and with different levels. This small data set merely presents preliminary analysis. More research which examines the types of humor used in the Taiwan EFL university classrooms, as well as in high schools, junior high schools and elementary schools could shed light on what

types of humor can lead to an increased learning experience and if students are more humorous in the Foreign language classrooms. In addition, more research could shed light on whether there is a difference between Taiwanese instructors' use of humor and that of Native English speaking instructors. Examining this could be crucial as it may increase and enhance instructors pedagogically in the Taiwan contexts.

What has been shown in this data set for the most part is that humor has two basic functions in the Taiwan EFL university classroom: 1) to present and explain content and information, and 2) for classroom management purposes. In terms of the social functions of the use humor in the Taiwan university EFL classroom, many of the examples above can be placed in the categories listed in the literature review. In my data it is clear that social management and mediation played important roles as we saw in the above examples; particularly in regard to correcting students' errors, behavioral or linguistic, trying to get students to stop speaking Chinese and use English, and trying to get them to speak or elaborate. For the most part, the data in the small sample support current research in EFL classroom contexts (see Urois-Arairs & Wagner, 2008). Perhaps, more interesting is that it also appeared that humor was used quite extensively as a pedagogical tool. Throughout the data, instructors and students used humor to present and explain content, convey pragmatic and cultural information, and also personal and/or sensitive information. These findings correspond with Deniere (1995), Berwald (1992), Trachtenberg (1979), who wrote extensively about how humor could be used to demonstrate certain cultural and pragmatic information. This research shows a substantial amount of humor used in this way by not only instructors, but also students. For instance, the instructor's humorous example of dating in his home country and the other instructor mentioning the fact that certain people in Western cultures like to be called "girls" because it makes them feel young.

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Also, humor played a big role in student role-plays and narratives. For example, they created a lot of humorous role-plays about Taiwanese cultural faux pas. One consisted of a boy and a girl on a date talking about politics. The use of third-party humor to present content and/or convey cultural information was also used extensively throughout the data. These findings in this research offer empirical evidence supporting Trachtenberg's (1979), Berwald's (1992) and Deniere's (2005) suggestions for using humor in the language classroom.

There was some evidence that humor was used in teaching specific targeted linguistic features of the language as mentioned in the literature review (i.e., Askildson 2005, Deniere 1995, Berwald 1992, and Trachtenberg 1979). In the examples above, one instructor used humor to tell a personal story from her past in order to emphasize the use of the past tense. The students then had to make up their own story about how the instructor got married. Although this was one of the few examples, more research in different contexts could shed light on whether humor is used more often to teach specific linguistic aspects of the target language.

In addition, humor did appear to be the content of certain classes. That is to say, the instructors asked the students to try to be humorous in their role plays and/or presentations of content. This could be another avenue of research. The EFL classroom could offer the opportunity to study the humor Taiwanese students use in the target language and compare it to other cultures. Liao (1997) puts forth that Taiwanese students view themselves as less humorous than American students. More comparative qualitative research could examine this to see if it is true, while at the same time, shedding light on Taiwanese students pragmatic and humor development in the target culture.

Humor was also used to present sensitive and/or personal information, as we saw in the some of the above examples. Particularly when the instructor talked about the pictures of his

wife and the student talked about cheating on his girlfriend and then being betrayed by his best friends. This finding corresponds with Denire (1995) and Welker (1977), with respect to using humor as a face-saving device in embarrassing and/or uncomfortable situations. The EFL university classroom in Taiwan tends to be very interactive with a lot of people sharing information with each other often in an effort to get students to speak English.

One key finding in this small study was that humor in the Taiwan EFL university classroom was also used to motivate and encourage students. This was most evident in the example in which the instructor told a story about a student who developed good English without ever leaving Taiwan. This corresponds with the research conducted by Tosta (2001) and Medgyes (2002) as they mentioned that humor used to motivate and encourage should be an important part of the EFL classroom as the students in the EFL context can experience low self-esteem in learning the target language. The above example is particularly interesting in that the humor was used to show how different students learned the target language successfully.

Most, if not all, classroom humor research has documented that humor causes a "low-filter" and increases teacher-student and student-student rapport and immediacy (Deniere, 1995; Gorham and Christphol, 1990). The data in this research seemed to correspond with this research as instructors and students used various types of humor "to reduce tension, to facilitate self-disclosure, to relieve embarrassment, to save face, to disarm others, to alleviate boredom, to entertain, and to convey good will," Gorham and Christphol (1990). In particular, self-effacement humor was common in all classes. Liao (1998) explains that this type of humor is a popular way for Taiwanese to increase rapport and not offend others. However, NEI also used self-effacement humor in the above mentioned data. Code switching, wit and word play also were popular; this also corresponds with Liao (2003).

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Clearly, more qualitative and quantitative research investigating humor in other EFL classroom contexts needs to be done in order to fully understand the role and impact of humor in the Taiwan University EFL context. Perhaps more research looking into if certain types of humor can enhance student learning outcomes could be done and is, perhaps, more important. In this regard, it appeared that instructors used humor to convey cultural and pragmatic aspects of the target language; however, more research needs to be done to see how this impacts student linguistic, pragmatic and cultural competence in the target language. Also, the Taiwan EFL classroom is very interactive and could be used to develop more of an understanding of how Taiwanese use humor in an intercultural context; gathering enough qualitative data may shed more light on how Taiwanese use humor as compared with other cultures. This could add to the increasing amount of humor research being gathered to date, and to investigate if humor is truly "universal."

5.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this preliminary study seems to indicate that humor is prevalent and plays an important role in the Taiwan university EFL classroom. In addition, twelve different types of humor were identified. However, in order to make recommendations for the use of humor in the University EFL classroom in Taiwan, more quantitative and qualitative data needs to be collected with regards to different levels, contexts, and ages. In this small data set, certain types of humor have been identified; however, it is crucial to find out in which type of humor is used in different classroom contexts and what types can be used in order to assist in learner development. Also, in light of the different nationalities present in the Taiwan EFL classroom context; more research could investigate the different types of humor used by different

nationalities in the Taiwan EFL context. We could observe the different interplays that exist in the EFL classroom in Taiwan and determine if humor is more or less "universal" in nature.

It was also found that most instructors use humor as a pedagogical tool to present and explain content and to teach cultural and pragmatic information and for classroom management. In addition, humor used to teach targeted linguistic features in the target language was not frequent but did appear in this small study. Perhaps future research could examine how humor impacts student's linguistic and pragmatic development in the target language. These are just some of the questions that can be answered by collecting more data in the Taiwan EFL classrooms. More research looking at classroom humor in different EFL classroom contexts (i.e universities, high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools) will give us more of a general understanding of the overall role of humor in the EFL classroom context of Taiwan. More awareness and understanding of humor in regard to the types of humor used and the functions of humor in language classrooms across Taiwan's EFL contexts along with more qualitative and quantitative research methods in this area could perhaps lead to better teaching and student learning outcomes in the EFL context across Taiwan.

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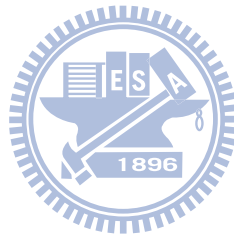
APPENDIX A
KEY TO TRANSCRIPTIONS

The conventions used for this thesis are largely based on the conventions used by Urios-Aparisi and Wagner (2008) for their study of classroom humor. The speakers in the data set were identified as INS for instructor and S for student. When the students were speaking at the same time, they are labeled with an Ss.
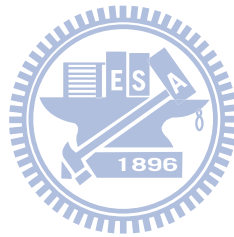
Paralinguistic and other non-verbal features

Descriptions of any paralinguistic and non-verbal features are contained in square brackets, i.e.:

[*Students laugh*]

Or

[*Instructor looks at student*]

APPENDIX B
SIGNATURE STATEMENT

I agree to permit the audio and video taping of this class to be used for educational purposes only. I also understand that all the information will be kept confidential and that everything will be done to protect my privacy