

## Laughter in English as a Lingua Franca in university seminars

<http://englishagenda.britishcouncil.org/seminars/laughter-english-lingua-franca-university-seminars>



1. Setting the scene / definitions of humour
2. Background to the research
3. The research and results
4. Could students benefit from humour awareness training?
5. Conclusions
  - The nature of humour
  - The rise of English as a lingua franca in academia

Emma Greenhalgh

This talk focuses on the challenges that international students face when dealing with humour in the English language and culture.

### Session summary and objectives

Emma Greenhalgh outlines the research she conducted for her Masters degree into the challenges that international students face when dealing with humour in the foreign language classroom or in society. She calls for the design of training materials to help international students understand and cope with British humour more effectively. This seminar disseminates research the presenter conducted for her Applied Linguistics MA dissertation into the extent and function of laughter in university seminars and discusses possible implications for EAP teaching.

### Who is this session for?

- ELF and EAP teachers
- ELT teachers interested in humour as part of English language teaching
- English language teachers working in the tertiary sector or preparing students for international work or studies
- Teachers or students interested in applied linguistics research.

### About the speaker

Emma Greenhalgh works at Manchester Metropolitan University, and is a teacher, lecturer and specialist in EAP.

### Real life practice

Task 1: Consider the definitions of these types of humour:

#### Slapstick

This is a physical form of comedy. The humor in slapstick derives from exaggerating physical gesturing, movements, and situations. It's one of the sillier, simpler forms of comedy, famously used by Charlie Chaplin.

#### Satire

This is often difficult to follow and is often misunderstood. It is considered intelligent humour. It involves mocking the target person or subject and uses irony, sarcasm, and caricature. It focuses on social or political commentary.

#### Irony, sarcasm

This involves stating the opposite of what is true in order to make people laugh. It can be difficult for people (not only foreigners) to comprehend as unless you know the speaker well you will not know if the person is joking or not.

### Deadpan, dry humour

This is delivered with an impassive, expressionless, matter-of-fact presentation. The speaker shows no emotion when telling jokes. They focus on sounding monotonous and bored.

### Self deprecating

This is a form of humour in which people target themselves and their foibles or misfortunes for comic effect. The person focuses on belittling themselves, their own bad habits, being socially awkward, or on failing relationships, and so on.

Are any of these forms of humour popular in your culture?

#### Task 2

Read the short description about British humour below. Write a short text about humour in your country. Then use your text and the one above to get students to discuss humour and culture.

#### Text on British humour

1 British humour can be difficult for non-British people to understand or appreciate. It is often very 'black', satirical, ironic and critical of mainstream life, current affairs, or political figures or popular celebrities. Irony is evident in all walks of life. Sarcasm is widely used as well, but only tends to work amongst people who know each other well, 5 or when used by a popular comedian who is well known. As a result, sarcasm used outside of a familiar context may not necessarily be appreciated by all British people alike.

10 Furthermore, British people frequently use self-deprecating humour. This form of humour is used to bond with others, to draw a laugh from others, or to make others feel at ease. Although common in the UK, it is not necessarily a form of humour widely used in other cultures, where perhaps ridiculing yourself in front of others is less acceptable, and so can seem very strange to newcomers to British culture.

#### Top tips

1. Humour is a crucial communication competency. It is an intrinsic component of language and culture. Thus, it needs to be brought into the ELT classroom, where, when used well, it will create a relaxing and fun environment for language learning to take place, as well as deepening students' understanding of the English language.
2. For academics involved in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes that recruit students from overseas, it is very important to be mindful of the use of humour in lectures and tutorials. It would be a good idea to address the subject of humour within orientation or induction modules for international students starting a new course.
3. Although there are cultural roots to types of humour, it is also very personal; what makes one person laugh or feel comfortable is different from the next person. As a teacher, take the time to understand the humour that works best within your group of students. Be mindful of what might cause offense.
4. Be yourself in class. Humour will evolve naturally amongst students and tutors/teachers as the group bonds and develops a trusting relationship with each other.
5. If you are a native English teacher teaching overseas, be mindful about the use of humour in your English classes. What is typically funny in your home country may not be funny at all in the country you are working in.
6. There is a wealth of comic material available these days. Use international English language comedy films to introduce humour in an engaging way.

Join the discussion!

1. Do you think there is such a thing as 'universal humour' i.e. humour that appeals across cultures? For example, do you think humour popular with 14 year olds in Britain will appeal to 14 year olds across the world? Give examples to support your opinions.
2. Language and culture are interwoven. What advice can you share with other teachers about teaching humour in the English language classroom?