

**EFFECT OF HUMOR ON MOTIVATION IN FOREIGN
LANGUAGE LEARNING**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on motivation in Foreign Language Learning (FLL) and humor's positive effects. Initially, motivation is introduced and defined. Motivation drives human behavior within a classroom. It is then applied in an L2 setting. Many variables affect motivation; individual differences also play a very determinant role. Moreover, motivation tends to decrease throughout time. Therefore, it is necessary to sustain it throughout FLL. Research shows it can be enhanced through positive stimuli. We attempt to verify this hypothesis by using humor. Humor is defined in chapter 2. Additionally, theories of humor and its development in children are illustrated. This introduces an issue involving humor: the problem of whether or not we should bring it into *any* FLL setting. Humor can easily be produced, but its understanding is more problematic. If appropriately presented, humor brings about benefits in hospitals and other work places. This writer suggests using instructional humor, defined as relevant humor, in the language classroom environment. It should ease learning and sustain L2 motivation. However, empirical research has failed to confirm this hypothesis.

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Introduction

As a first year *foreign language* teacher I asked myself, how can American students doze off for the whole class period (they are physically there, but their eyes tell you their minds are somewhere else)? Why do they skip class? Why do they get bored so easily? What strategies should teachers employ to stimulate and maintain a student's decent motivational state? I am quite sure teachers wish to have the magic answers to all of these questions, yet they do not do anything to spur the interest of their students toward the subject matter. Teachers may be very competent with the topic they teach, yet may not know how to make it interesting. Often, they worry too much about making sure they are *on time* with the curriculum. As Gardner (1985) suggests, "what would happen if love of learning [...] became a priority in schools," (17) rather than the curriculum? That is, what if teachers tried to do away with such madness and teach their subject matter, a foreign language in this case, with passion and enthusiasm? What if teachers became entertainers, using humor as a strategy to spur and sustain students' motivation?

This writer proposes what follows: use humor not as a teaching technique,¹ but rather as *the* spice to add and employ in the foreign language classroom to peak students' interest and keep them motivated. Once motivated, students would engage in the proper (motivated) behavior apt to reach their ultimate goals, namely passing the foreign language course. Motivation is considered to be the key in terms of language learning because it drives behaviors. In other words, motivation *is the kick*, which stimulates the accomplishment of our actions. A motivated individual is a person who shows a certain degree of interest toward a subject.

¹ It is important to notice that the humor strategy could work for some students, yet not for others.

The success of motivation in terms of foreign language learning can be abstractly predicted, but when it is involved at a more concrete level (the actual classroom environment) then motivation might be harder to achieve because it is not the only variable influencing the human mind. Attitudes (i.e., interests), orientations (i.e., reasons) and the environment also play a good role in determining people's behaviors. For this reason, we keep any postulations at a more abstract level, so as not to neglect the existence and the influence of other variables, as we will see at a later time.

In order to accomplish such a demanding task, this writer will start her exploration by giving an overview of general motivation (in order to understand its basic functions) which will be broadened to the second language (L2) field (in chapter 1). We will then turn to humor research (chapter 2), exploring some of its issues and its likely positive benefits (chapter 3) also in relation to foreign language learning. An experiment will accompany this research (chapter 4) so as to validate the assumption advanced by this author, which will furnish the data necessary to conclude the analysis.

1. Motivation

1.1 Introducing Motivation

Nowadays, being monolingual might be a comparative disadvantage as the number of people who speak at least two languages is on the rise. Languages' usefulness has been recognized in several contexts, for instance, business and hospitals.

As Hakuta (1986) suggests *humorously*, “a Martian [landing] at a random location on earth would conclude, after observing the linguistic environment, that the inhabitants are bilingual.” (6) Knowing that there are no Martians available to us (at least not right now), then, Dornyei's (1994a) statement will do: “The vast majority of nations in the world are multicultural, and most of these are multilingual, and [...] there are more bilinguals in the world than there are monolinguals.” (274) When we speak of bilingualism, we tend to refer to people who actually *acquired* a first language (L1) at a young age, and *learned* a second language (L2) later on in life – often in a classroom setting. In this regard, the majority of individuals in America usually experience the difficulty of taking at least one foreign language course to fulfill their college major's general requirements. Most of the time, they perceive a certain degree of difficulty in the learning since, as Gardner (1985) suggests, “North Americans are often considered to be poor learners of second languages largely [...] because [they believe that] there is little need for learning another language.” (3) Even this pre-service immigrant teacher, without much experience in teaching a foreign language, noticed that Americans do have a hard time learning an L2 in school, regardless of America's incredibly rich bilingual environment. Thus, one tends to attribute their lack of success, rather than ability, to the fact that, “modern languages are not rated highly for their usefulness and are seen as among the least enjoyable subjects by

many pupils.” (Stables & Wikeley, 1999: 23) Americans’ general lack of motivation tends to engender a likely failure of the course in some extreme cases. Then, as Gardner & Lambert (1972) suggest, the following question comes to us spontaneously: “How is it that some people can learn a language quickly and expertly while others, given the same opportunities to learn, are utter failures?” (1) For instance, what makes an American foreign language (FL) learner differ from any other second language (SL) learner is the context in which learning happens, and which creates different motivational states. In the former, motivation is inferior, while in the latter, the motivational trend is very high. This happens because, for instance, an Italian student learning English immersed in the L2 community is forced to speak L2 in order to survive (e.g., call 911 for an emergency). On the contrary, a foreign language student (e.g., an American learning Italian) finds barely any chances to enter in contact with the L2 community. Thus, their motivation to learn a foreign language is *typically* low. Teachers do accept this as a plausible excuse, but they refuse to accept students’ general nonchalance toward the subject matter.

1.2 What Is Motivation?

Generally speaking, we say that people could be more or less motivated in doing something. This something - reaching a goal - includes all kind of things: a desire to gain extra money or simply the desire for freedom. (Dornyei, 2001a: 1) All goals are meant to shape behavior. In fact, motivation is believed to be concerned with three fundamental characteristics: “[it] explains why people decide to do something, how hard they are going to pursue it and how long they are willing to sustain the activity” (7) in order to succeed with the goal. In other words, motivation illustrates people’s enthusiasm, their

commitment and their persistence in the goal's accomplishment. Thus, these same features will determine students' success or failure (Dornyei, 2001a: 5).

Even if motivation generally refers to people's own reasons for doing something, Nicholls & Thorkildsen (1995) suggest that "motivation in education has tended to be the specialty of psychologists with a penchant for abstract theory and technical approaches to change." (1) In large part, motivation has been studied in the psychological field so as to indicate the causes of changing behaviors. Such studies would be very profitable in terms of L2 learning because teachers could actually use the data available to better understand and ultimately enhance students' motivation. Thus, behaviors are part of that process of *conation*, which is in fact directed toward an alteration and a consequent attunement of the behavior itself, involving a strong desire, a conscious choice, and nonetheless effort. Effort does indicate that the individual has recognized the goal's worthiness.

Motivation has been analyzed according to different aspects. According to Dornyei (2001a), beyond the meaning of motivation spoken of "in casual conversation." (1) We can look at it more formally as the force that drives "human behavior." (ibid) For instance, one individual would openly express his/her *desire* (that conative aspect mentioned above) to lose some weight, (e.g., *I am really motivated in loosing some weight*). Thus, this individual would engage in the proper behavior that would lead him/her to accomplish such a goal. On the other hand, a researcher would explain that humans tend to act the way they do because of specific causes, as we will see.

While students hardly recognize the existence of such a term, motivation represents for us teachers, and for researchers of the past decades as well, the key term of the learning process, the process through which experience modifies pre-existing

behavior and understanding. Thus, motivation becomes the central focus of both “fields of psychology and education” (Dornyei, 2001a: 2) utilizing, again, psychological insights to explain the more complex educational ones.

Motivation is better observed than explained, just “like the concept of gravity.” (7) We do understand what gravity can do to a falling object, but when it comes to be explained, unless one is a scientist, it becomes a hard thing to accomplish. So, as Weiner (1992) suggests, in order to understand motivation and in order to apply it in an L2 context, we will have to move very slowly:

I [should] slowly present the building blocks of [motivation], and finally present the overall conception. The reader therefore must exhibit patience and accept being led by small steps, without immediately looking for the [conclusive] significance of the issue under consideration (159).

We will first define general motivation and we will illustrate its early theories later.

1.3 The Definitions

Several definitions have been given to the term of motivation. For this reason, this author will use the most pertinent for this thesis’s purpose. Using simple words, motivation corresponds to the ways to convince students they can or should do what someone else has already declared important. That *someone* else is the school board, college or university that requires foreign language study, neglecting the student’s opportunity to choose.

Technically speaking, Webster’s Dictionary (1971) defines motivation as “the act or process of motivating [or] a motivating force or influence [or] the condition of being motivated.” (1475) A very general and broad definition attributed to motivation was given by Oxford & Shearin (1994), who define motivation as “the power to attain the

goal which is reflected in the motivational orientation.” (Oxford & Shearin, 1994: 14) Weiner (1992) defines it as the reason(s) “why human and subhuman organisms think and behave as they do.” (1) Dornyei (2001a) defines it as “an abstract, hypothetical concept that we use to explain why people think and behave as they do” (1) while Brown (1994) defines it as “the extent to which you make a choice about (1) goals to pursue, and (2) the effort you will devote to that pursuit.” (34) Generally speaking, motivation should give us the reason why people engage in certain behaviors or - in other words - motivation ought to lead individuals to engage in certain behaviors with the purpose of reaching a certain goal (e.g., work extra hours [action behavior] to gain extra money [final goal] = motivation). In other words, uniting all these definitions, we would obtain a unique concept which sees motivation as *that abstract stimulating force/cause that makes an individual do something he/she is wishing to accomplish.*

More technically speaking, Keller (1987) refers to motivation in terms of attention (A), relevance (R), confidence (C) and satisfaction (S) creating the model known as ARCS model (2).

To better understand the term *motivation*, we refer to the metaphor brought to our attention by Nicholls & Thorkildsen (1995) which saw motivation as a *football team*.

The coach of a football team tries really hard to teach his players how to “get the ball into the end zone.” (1) In order to score, the players could enter the end zone toward the left or toward the right. Then, at this point, which one should they favor? In other words, what strategies should the teacher be using in order to get their students to work and learn? Let’s keep in mind that there is not a universal teaching technique that can be employed in each classroom. Rather, there are several strategies that can be applied in a

classroom in order to match a student's exigencies.

1.3.1 Attitudes vs. Orientations vs. Motivation and Achievement

Most of the time, the term *motivation* is confused with the terms attitudes and orientation and is less frequently associated with the term of achievement.

According to Webster's Dictionary (1971), attitude represents that "disposition" (141) which expresses a certain "opinion rather than belief." (ibid) For instance, *she thinks portabella mushrooms taste bad; she is unlikely to buy portabella mushrooms at the grocery store.* According to Allport (1954), attitude is defined as "a mental and neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a direct or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related." (45) In other words, what an individual thinks about something/someone will affect the individual behavioral outputs. It is very hard to give a precise definition of attitudes since it has been argued by some researchers that attitudes change according to individual differences (e.g., ethnicity). Furthermore, according to Gardner (1985), "attitudes are related to behavior, though not necessarily directly." (9) Important as that is, even though we can predict behavior, individual differences in attitudes – discrepant from person to person - lead us to think that these predictions may not always match the general hypothesis. Thus, "some attitudes might be more relevant than others." (ibid) That is, in terms of language contact, if an individual shows a positive attitude toward the Italian language for instance, (e.g., *I think it is useful studying Italian*), and a dislike for the German language, then he/she will show interest toward the Italian community and whatever is related to it. On the contrary, this individual ends up learning German

because his/her job requires the knowledge of German language, rather than Italian. This greatly explains why attitudes do not necessarily arouse motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997).

Orientations, on the other hand, do arouse motivation. This is how orientations differ from attitude, where the former is defined by Webster's Dictionary (1971) as the "awareness of a [general] existing situation" (1591) (e.g., *the market asks for knowledge of the German language*), while the latter is conceived as a disposition. However, we cannot confuse orientations with motivation since the latter expresses the inclusion of a goal (e.g., learning a foreign/second language), which would represent one's will. On the other hand, orientations are the "reasons for" (116) doing something (i.e., learning a foreign/second language because of its usefulness in the market or simply at work). Then, the question to ask is: Why does an individual want to have a goal? What is individual's orientation?

The term motivation in pedagogy is seen as the combination of the time an individual employs in accomplishing what he/she truly desires, showing very positive predispositions. A better definition of motivation (related to both general motivation and L2 motivation) sees included three items which ought to work in concert: desire, effort, and positive attitudes. This statement has also been similarly supported by Weiner (1992), who maintains that motivation includes "latency of behavior [how long it will take to a person to start acting]; intensity of behavior [and] persistence of behavior." (2) If an individual has positive attitudes and desire, but does not put any effort in order to accomplish and satisfy his/her goal, then we cannot really talk of a motivated individual. Gardner (1985) brings to our attention that "many of us want to be millionaires, but if this

desire is not associated with a concomitant effort – or drive to achieve the goal we are not really motivated to become millionaires.” (Gardner, 1985: 11) This statement further supports the idea according to which motivation ought to represent the grouping of manifold variables which are dependent from one another (e.g., one cannot put forth effort if there is no desire). Many variables seem to be affecting the trend of the individual’s motivation and each variable could act more or less powerfully on a behavior (e.g., individual X’s desire to learn a language could be stronger than individual Y’s even though it will be individual Y who will end up learning a foreign language because of his/her specific orientations).

Achievement is, to conclude these series of definitions, the successful focus of the goal that is being accomplished (e.g., a foreign language is learned) or, according to Webster’s dictionary definition (1971), achievement is “successful completion: accomplishment, fulfillment” (16) of a goal because of “exertion, skill, practice, or perseverance” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language). Thus, achievement is one of the building blocks of motivation. For instance, in terms of L2 learning, Gardner (1985) conceives as goals, “vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation [...] speaking, understanding, reading [or/and] writing.” (12) Such goals can be successfully accomplished because an individual shows not only a strong desire to accomplish fruitfully the learning, but also invests time and effort. Thus, successful goal achievement happens if attitudes include specific and relevant reasons for accomplishing a goal. Thus, achievement reflects fully motivated behaviors.

1.4 The Theories

Motivational psychologists, basing their knowledge on older formulations, found their own way of approaching behavior and consequently motivation. In this way, all the theories are similar, for they tend to develop discussions around the same topic – *explain why people behave the way they do*. At the same time, they differ in the way in which they attempt to find common causes which would lead clustering certain features – rather than others with a group. These theories (i.e., social, cognitive, behavioral and so forth) do explicate the causes of behavior and consequently of motivation, but they accomplish this by following their own views and analyses without taking into consideration the development undertaken by the other theorists and their theories (Dornyei, 2001a). This caused the birth of countless additional speculations on the matter which explicate the developing of certain human behaviors in specific contexts, but not in others. Listing them would mean occupying extra pages of this thesis whose main focus is to study foreign language students' motivation, rather than to furnish a complete literature review on motivation - whose fundamental influence on L2 contexts certainly cannot be denied.

Luckily, two metaphors attempted to fully present the general idea of human motivation theories: the machine and the God-like metaphors.

1.4.1 The Machine and the God-Like Metaphors

A more fascinating illustration of the theories on general motivation is attributed to Weiner's research (1992), which exemplifies general motivation theories through the employment of the machine and the God-like metaphors. These metaphors successfully attempted to orderly group the theories on motivation, together with their main

exponents, as shown in Table 1 and 2 as follows:

Table 1

The Machine metaphor
1. Psychoanalytic (Freud)
2. Ethology (Loren, Tinbergen)
3. Sociobiology (Wilson)
4. Drive (Woodworth, Hull)
5. Gestalt (Wertheimer)

Table 2

The God-like metaphor
1. Expectancy-value (Rotter, Lewin, Atkinson)
2. Attribution (Heider)

The machine-like metaphor, which prevailed all throughout the first half of the twentieth century, sees human beings, as Leonardo Da Vinci maintained, as “*marvelously constructed machine[s]*” (Leonardo Da Vinci, found in Weiner, 1992: 19) in the way in which they behave, or function, in order to reach an innate goal (i.e., eat). This will lead human beings to reach his homeostatic equilibrium - responsible for people’s hedonistic pleasure. In other words, people behave in order to satisfy their *drives* - which differ from Freud’s more unconscious *instincts*. However, as Weiner (1992) points out, a man and “other aspects of human behavior must be examined with other metaphors” (151) in order to have a complete picture of why human beings behave the way they do. That is, this

metaphor explains human behavior by covering one area only. Thus, it seems necessary to implement other views in order to complete our general picture on the history of general motivation.

The God-like metaphor brought the machine-like metaphor to its decline because it saw the man as a machine only. In fact, humans are not machines - but they do attain hedonistically a goal in order to achieve the highest pleasure. They do this not because of innate instincts, but rather because humans possess higher thinking abilities and make choices consciously. It is in this perspective that the expectancy-value theories assumed relevancy – for this thesis’s purpose – since they generally indicated that “the pleasure or some other more specific positive affect [...] is [consciously] experienced when goals are attained.” (Weiner, 1992: 221) However, certain goals cannot be attained at all times because of one individual’s own attitude toward a specific matter. This is why one ought to: 1) transform attitudes into motivations (the latter including a goal) by 2) inserting a *positive* incentive as reinforcement (i.e., positive stimulus) that ought to 3) incite a specific action (i.e., behavior) 4) apt to attain the goal’s accomplishment (e.g., learning). We should bring to attention the fact according to which the stimulus tends to *generally* be perceived as positive since “organisms seek to maximize pleasurable stimulation and to minimize painful experience.” (ibid) More in particular, humans purposely choose to experience pleasure over pain because of its positive benefits brought to the mind and to the body, thus stimulating the accomplishment of a goal.

Unfortunately, stimuli are not valued as positive all the time, since, as Weiner (1992) suggests, “*persons differ from each other in their construction of events.*” (226) That is, “individuals perceive the same objective stimulus situation in a different manner”

(Weiner, 1992: 226) and as a consequence their behaviors will also differ. Each person is unique. Humans are scientists by being able to perceive stimuli from the world and give these stimuli their own interpretation by giving them “meaning.” (228) (i.e., value) In other words, humans would *attribute* a value to the stimulus which, again, tends to be perceived generally hedonistically.

In conclusion, both metaphors seemed to have helped to understand basic general motivation, even though particular emphasis was put on human beings’ appraisals, and their hedonistic purpose. This represented the key determinant for general motivation which foreshadowed our main focus: the L2 motivational field.

1.5 On L2 Motivation

Now that a literature review has been given on general motivation, constituting the base we are going to take off from, it is now finally possible to enter the field of motivation concerned with foreign language learning. Let’s keep in mind that most of the models that are about to be presented (Dornyei, 1994a, 2001a, 2001b) are the result of several studies in the field which, on the other hand, demand validation, the main concern of Gardner & Tremblay (1994).

1.5.1 Definitions of L2 Motivation

Several definitions have been advanced in the L2 motivation field. They attempt to explain, using down-to-Earth terms, the causes that make an individual engage in L2 learning, rather than having the individual ask questions like, *Why should I study this?*

According to Gardner (1985), L2 motivation can be understood as the “amount of

effort the individual expands in order to learn the second language.” (Gardner, 1985: 53) *Socially-educationally* speaking, it can be understood as the “effort, want (desire), and affect associated with learning a second language” (147) or more precisely, as Gardner & Trembley (1994) suggest, the “desire, intensity and attitudes” (526) toward L2. Oxford & Shearin (1994) refer to it as “the extent of active, personal involvement of second language learning.” (12)

1.5.2 The Old vs. the New Models of L2 Motivational Theories

Between the years 1960 and 1990, all the theories of general motivation were gathered and applied in the L2 setting through a *socio-educational model*. According to Gardner (1985), the model focused on “the idea that languages are unlike any other subject taught in a classroom in that they involve the acquisition of skills or behavior patterns which are characteristic of another cultural community.” (146) Languages require the learning of certain grammar rules and certain aspects of language which are culture-based, specific of a culture that is. In fact, according to Gardner (1985), the accomplishment of L2 learning would be deeply affected by “the individual’s attitudes toward the other community [and its] beliefs.” (146) If an individual does not accept the values and even the language that belong to the other community, more than certainly this individual would be better off learning another language (if not abandoning the L2 field). On the other hand, if the L2 learner manages to accept the L2 culture, and whatever is involved with it, then this individual is more moved in learning a foreign language because of either an *integrative* motivation or an *instrumental* motivation.

Gardner & Lambert (1972) introduce the influential terms of integrative

motivation (i.e., learning a language because one simply likes it) and instrumental motivation (i.e., “getting ahead in one’s occupation” Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 3). These terms were the result of an experiment undergone at the universities of McGill and of Western Ontario (Canada). This experiment gave empirical proof to the theory they elaborated according to which “[learners’] motivation to learn is thought to be determined by [the learners’] attitudes toward the other group in particular and toward the foreign people in general and by [the learners’] orientation toward the learning task itself” (ibid) which can be in fact instrumental or integrative.

Gardner’s socio-educational model creates the base of L2 motivation. However, Oxford (1994) and other researchers conceived this model as being too influential because too “overwhelming” (512) or exhausting. In other words, they thought that the model impeded the flowering of any other theories on L2 motivation.

Dornyei (2001a) introduces a newer approach according to which L2 motivation is based on three elements: 1) “the language level” – which involves integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner *et al.*, 2004: 3); 2) “the learner level” – which involves “self-confidence” and “need for achievement” (ibid), i.e., students’ traits, and 3) “the learning situation level” – which relates to the characteristics of the course and of the teacher. (Dornyei, 2001a: 19) This model is largely - but constructively - criticized by Gardner & Tremblay (1994) who see a preoccupying lack of “construct validation” (366).

1.5.3 Nine Traits as Foreignness’ Determinants

From this moment on, we will mainly tend to refer to the term foreign language learning (FLL), rather than L2 learning, with the purpose of: 1) maintaining the distinction between *foreign* and *second* language learning neatly separated, and 2) reminding the

reader of one of the main foci of this thesis.

Adult foreign language is *foreign* according to Bley-Vroman (1989) *simply* because of nine traits:²

- 1) Lack of success – there is in fact a chance which keeps a learner from learning a second language especially if foreign (even though everyone always learns a first language successfully). “Not everyone with an opportunity to learn chess will become a world-class chess player [...]” (44) Thus, similarly, not everyone exposed to a second language will become fluent in L2 whose mastery seems to be exclusively dependent upon “human cognitive learning capacities.” (ibid) Language learning is a very conscious process and even if much effort is employed in the learning, an individual still has chances to fail. In fact, success is more unlikely to occur.
- 2) General failure – is the most common and consequent phenomenon occurring in foreign language learning. Success, or mastery, is very rare (chances for this to happen amount to about 5%!). When it does actually happen, it often tends not to be attributed to successful foreign language learning, but rather to language acquisition (ibid).
- 3) Variation in success, course, and strategy – again success is not guaranteed, thus, the achievement of the course may vary as well, as much as the strategies used by the learners. According to Chambers (1999), learners “find themselves in the strange position of learning a new terminology for items which they can describe perfectly well in the mother tongue” (Chambers, 1999: 8).

² Note that the eighth one, originally postulated by Bley-Vroman (1999), was substituted by *foreign language instrumentality*, hypothesized by this writer. The latter was in fact thought to be more relevant to this thesis’s purpose.

4) Variation in goals - different individuals have different goals in terms of language learning. Some may focus more on “grammatical correctness” (Bley-Vroman, 1989: 46), others on phonology and so forth. Most of them “are generally long term” ones, (Chambers, 1999: 9) for instance, integrative ones, namely the exchange with a student from the foreign language country.

5) Fossilization (the term was coined by Selinker, 1972 found in Bley-Vroman, 1999) – learning stabilizes at a certain point in time without showing considerable growth. “Fossilized learners are the despair of language teachers: Nothing seems to have an effect.” (Bley-Vroman, 1999: 47) For instance, English fossilized learners will still make the same mistake over and over again, e.g., *she goed*. On the contrary, acquisition does not stop, but within this frame, language remains rather plastic, or elastic, until acquisition is successfully reached. Thus, *she goed* is corrected and changed into *she went*.

6) Indeterminate intuitions – i.e., “the performance may be incomplete.” (ibid) That is, learners might possess specific knowledge on a variety of rules or “strategies” (ibid) employed to satisfy “communicative goals” (ibid) (e.g., call the plumber). Thus, their performance will never equalize the just right native speakers’ one because of the lack of *indeterminate* judgments (e.g., grammatical judgments).

7) Importance of instruction – “instruction matters in foreign language learning.” (ibid) The learner’s proficiency depends also on how good and organized instruction is and how useful the tasks are. If “the learner [...] does not participate in the activities [proposed he/she] does not learn.” (Chambers, 1999: 8) The

learner needs in fact to participate and practice the language in order to learn it. Such practice is accomplished through specific tasks which involve “training, automatising, habitualising, consolidating” and so forth. (Chambers, 1999: 8) These elements - of course - are not relevant in acquisition (e.g., a child who is acquiring a language does not need to repeat to himself/herself that *the* is the English definite article which precedes a noun). Additionally, instruction in foreign language learning does not follow a “linear progression” (ibid), but it is more “cyclic or spiral.” (ibid) For instance, if the textbook presents the *present* tense of the *essere* (to be) verb in section A, it does not mean that section B will illustrate the *present* tense of the *avere* verb (to have), so as not to confuse the students with similar items.

8) Foreign language instrumentality – foreign language learners are more instrumentally driven rather than integratively,³ thus an exchange program, as already mentioned, might not arouse any particular interest.

9) Role of affective factors – “personality, socialization, motivation, attitude” (Bley-Vroman, 1989: 49) seem to have an effect on foreign language learning. They are actually considered to be “essential” to it, but on the other hand they are hard to measure! (ibid)

1.5.4 Worthy Reasons for Learning a Foreign Language in the U.S.A.

Not all Americans believe in the worthlessness of learning a foreign language. On the contrary, the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) declared

³ At least in higher education programs, while this does not happen for school children whose instrumentality is the same as grades and praise, as described in Dornyei (1994b).

the year 2005 as the year of foreign languages, illustrating on the internet, at the page <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3782>, the resolution proposed by Dodd and officially approved by the Senate. According to this resolution, knowing a foreign language would constitute a very useful tool to employ in several working fields. Additionally, the resolution includes some good orientations that teachers could make students aware of together with spurring their interest toward FLL.

1.5.5 Individual Differences and Time

Motivation is organic and very dynamic - rather than static - for two reasons: 1) because of individual differences (Philips, 1970; Schumann *et al.* 2004), and 2) because of time (Dornyei, 2001a).

Philips (1970) faces the issues of individual differences in terms of ethnicity. The research reported by Philips (1970) brings to our attention the example of how Indian students: 1) lacked motivation, 2) refused the authority figure of the teacher,⁴ and 3) indirectly asked for different learning strategies to be applied. The Indian students were shown to possess different beliefs from the average Americans. Indian students cannot be motivated in accomplishing certain tasks if it is the teacher who is asking them to, while group-work was successfully accomplished. The cause lays in their background especially. However, this also happens because of the parental influence which determines the attitude they assume in front of the learning situation (302-17).

On the other hand, Schumann *et al.* (2004) speak of “neurological differences” (2), with reference to Gardner’s multiple intelligences, rather than individual differences.

⁴ In this regard, games would play a good role in accepting the authority figures (e.g., the teacher). See Cook (2000) and Clark (1970) for further details on this matter.

For Schumann *et al.* (2004), the world is incredibly heterogeneous because of persons' different brain structures. There are people who have red hair and people who have brown hair. There are people who like reading and there are people who like singing. There are people who like studying math and there are people who like studying a foreign language. There are people who learn proficiently a foreign language and there are people who learn one poorly. Individual differences would be based on these differences and on humans' hypertrophy, that is, an individual's particular ability, or intelligence, shown on a particular field. Not all individuals are linguistically skilled; this means that an individual could be more proficient in imitating sounds, but not in translating words. An individual could excel in math, yet, not in a language. "[...] Brains vary just as faces do, and the environment selects on brains just as it does on faces." (ibid) Thus, an individual generally reacts differently to a stimulus with respect to another. Keeping in mind the hedonistic value we discussed earlier, individuals generally tend to perceive stimuli in a positive way. However, let's keep in mind that we are all different, thus, a stimulus could be evaluated as positive by an individual, but negatively by another.

Individual differences, as we have seen, play a fundamental role in students' L2 motivation and especially in the American foreign language classroom. Obviously, we cannot focus on individual differences since this would mean studying and analyzing each singular student and developing a theory for each one of them. This would be a hard practice to engage in. What we can do and we are actually doing is focusing on one aspect, namely analyze motivation in terms of ARCS.

While learning, L2 motivation is not always at the same level, but it varies all throughout the period of time in which the subject is engaged in the learning. Time

determines the shift that Dornyei, (2001a) identifies with the term *maintaining* (71). Motivation changes over time⁵ and is more or less involved with the interests of an individual according to his/her “hierarchy of needs.” (Maslow, 1970 quoted in Dornyei, 2001a: 8) If the learner does not see the learning of the foreign language occupying a high relevance in his/her hierarchy of needs, motivation is not maintained, and “the natural tendency to loose sight of the goal, to get tired or bored of the activity and to give way to attractive distractions or competing action tendencies will result in the initial motivation gradually petering out.” (Dornyei, 2001b: 127) In other words, foreign language learning should represent for a student a very important goal to be accomplished and should deserve very much attention.

1.6. Accepting the Goal and the Challenge: A Step Forward into L2 Motivation

We are now finally ready to provide some useful insights concerned with motivation in the foreign language classroom.

1.6.1. The FLL Reality: Too Confusing

At the time the student walks in the classroom, he/she is equipped with just enough curiosity to come in, sit down and listen to the *foreign* words the teacher is speaking. At the time they hear what is expected throughout the course, their anxiety trend tends to increase. For instance, every year’s syllabus for Elementary Italian (IT 1500) and

⁵ Gardner *et al.* (2004) empirically supported the idea according to which what is changing is not motivation, but rather the effort (understood as motivational intensity) employed throughout a course. Such statement would contrast what his colleagues and he proposed supporting in fact the notion that if intensity, or desire or attitude [then effort] come to miss, we see an individual not being fully motivated (Gardner *et al.*, 2004: 4).

Intermediate Italian (IT 2600), at Youngstown State University (YSU) provides a great amount of information related to the objectives (speak, understand, read, write in the language) that could quite confuse the students: auditing grades (AU), withdraws (W), credit (CR) vs. no credit (NC), adding dates, dropping dates, grading scales, attendance etc.

According to Dornyei (2001b), “make the strange familiar” (55) is certainly the very first step teachers ought to undergo in order to make students more comfortable with FLL. Teachers ought to explain to students what is expected by giving them examples and eventually making comparisons if necessary. Thus, teachers are the ones who ultimately “set [...] specific learner goals” (81).

It is very important that teachers specify and clarify the objectives of the course at the very beginning. Clarity is one important element in communication. Moreover, it makes students more comfortable with the learning experience. If a goal is misunderstood, because of lack of clarity, then misunderstanding and its consequences are more likely to take place. For these reasons, a goal should be “clear, measurable, challenging [and] realistic.” (84) In this way, a goal, in order to be accomplished, has to be guided. One of the teachers’ other duties, in fact, is to guide the students toward the attainment of the more “proximal subgoals” (Dornyei, 1994a: 276) perceived by the extrinsically motivated students as *the* main focus of FLL’s general (e.g., do good in a test, “the [marker] [...] of progress” *ibid*). It is very important that the students accept all the goals of the course, “regardless” (Dornyei, 2001a: 51) of whether they like them or not. The goals could be extrinsically short-term ones, namely exams, or more rarely

intrinsically long-term ones,⁶ namely reaching language proficiency.

Making the strange familiar helps students evaluate and accept the goal in a positive way in order to reach the extrinsic subgoals first (i.e., get a good grade), consequently reaching what is more instrumentally relevant (i.e., get a good job).⁷

1.6.2 The Process-Oriented Model: Avoiding *If Instances*

Any reason or orientation is relevant if: 1) it is preceded by goal acceptance, and 2) it is followed by the formulation of the intention. Dornyei (2001b) summarizes these stages in more details in what he calls the *process-oriented model* (42) involved with L2 motivational field throughout time. According to this process,⁸ positive evaluations of a goal (e.g., FLL) are at the base of any motivated behavior. Let's keep in mind that this process was the result of several studies; however, it was never validated.

When there is the formation of an intention, an individual shows to have accepted and perceived a goal as *positively* relevant to oneself.⁹ This stage is also known as *preactional phase* or *choice motivation*. Intention formation leads to the consequent *actional phase*,¹⁰ also known as *executive motivation*, according to which the student will

⁶ The terms intrinsic/extrinsic were described by Ryan & Deci (2000) as “doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable” and as “doing something because it leads to a separable outcome,” (55) respectively, for instance, maintain a high GPA. See also Bénabou (2003) and Brown (1990).

⁷ However, Dornyei (1994b) suggests the idea that some foreign language learners are more extrinsically motivated rather than instrumentally motivated because “job or salary-related motives” [are] very often not too relevant” (22) because they represent a long-term goal attainment.

⁸ See Dornyei (2001b) for more details.

⁹ If a subject is experiencing a positive emotional state, he/she will unlikely experience any others. In this way, the motivational maintenance system (MMS) is activated supporting only the strongest state based on the commitment to a goal or, as Halisch & Kuhl (1987) suggest, “to a specified action.” (284) This is why it is very important that students sense positive feelings.

¹⁰ The actional phase depends on how strong and organized preactional stage is.

gather the resources that will be employed to accomplish a goal.¹¹ Once a goal has been accomplished, the individual establishes during the *post actional phase*, or critical retrospection stage, whether a goal is successfully reached. If success is perceived, then there is consequent dismissal of the original intention and the formulation of a new one. (Dornyei, 2001b: 85-100) We can conclude, keeping this model in mind that, *the more a goal is accepted positively, the more an individual is motivated, thus the more chances to successfully accomplish a goal (e.g., learn a foreign language).*

On the other hand, *if* there is no positive relevancy of a goal, or in other words, *if* there is no positive evaluations of a goal, then motivation will more unlikely occur. This is why it is necessary that teachers must carefully avoid any *instances* that would generate *if instances*. In other words, teachers must avoid any happenings that tend to bring effects that would somehow affect FLL negatively. Instead, teachers should favor positive ones, once they become aware of them.

1.6.3 Maintaining Motivation

According to Dornyei (2001a) motivation does not only need to be created, but more importantly it needs to be maintained since students tend to doze off in the classroom, and tend to ultimately skip the class. Chambers (1999) provides some evidence which points out some sort of diminishment in enthusiasm. Maintaining motivation is thus the very problematic dilemma teachers wish to magically solve.

For some reasons, unknown to us, students' interest toward a course, specifically

¹¹ There is in fact some delay before actual action takes place; this fraction of time is called *initiation of intention enactment*, that is, find the right time to engage in action which can be delayed because of distractions.

the foreign language course, tends to diminish considerably. According to Chambers (1999), “pupils appear disgruntled.” (81) This means that their reasons to learn a foreign language decrease in relevancy, or worthiness. To my big regret, this writer herself noticed a certain degree of reluctance in students. During this writer’s first experience as a pre-service teacher at Youngstown State University in the Fall 2003, Italian (IT) 1550, Elementary Italian, she noticed students, as Dornyei (2001b) suggests, “[losing] sight of the goal, [getting] tired or bored [and getting attracted to] distractions.” (60)

Dornyei (1994a, 2001a) gives great attention to this core stage, suggesting ways for maintaining motivation in order to avoid *if happenings*. Some of these strategies were perceived by this writer as crucial and are reported as follows:

1) “Making learning stimulating and enjoyable” (72) or, in other words, increase the attractiveness of the course content (Dornyei, 1994a). In order to keep students highly motivated, teachers should break the “monotony, make the tests more interesting and increase the involvement of students.” (Dornyei, 2001a: 73) Teachers should alternate lectures to more down-to-earth material, such as bringing in magazines, CDs containing songs, and the like, to make the tasks more varied.

2) “Presenting tasks in a motivating way” (78) or, in other words, “increase students interest and involvement in the tasks” (Dornyei, 1994a: 281) on which students base most of their learning. For this reason, tasks should be interesting so that students get more involved in getting the proper exercise needed. Tasks should allow “exotic” (Dornyei, 1994a: 281) aspects of the language or “fantasy, intriguing, personal [elements]” (Dornyei, 1994a: 281) of it (e.g., teachers could

introduce a task concerned with a specific type of food). Students most often tend not to look at the task as a useful thing, rather the opposite. What they should understand is that tasks are meant to reinforce a topic, to apply the teaching to the practical use of a language and to keep a certain language plasticity. Like anything else, if language is not practiced, then it is more likely to atrophy (just like a muscle does if it does not get its proper exercise) or to be forgotten. According to Dornyei (2001a), the best way to explain to students the importance of a task is by explaining its “utility.” (76) They can do this by foreshadowing an important topic, for example, in order to make students guess what is next and provide the “strategies” (ibid) so that students can accomplish the task correctly. More importantly, tasks allow “competition [and] humor” (ibid; see also Keller, 1987) even though some scholars believe that humor might be polluting for the classroom environment.

3) Increase “course-specific motivational components” (Dornyei, 1994a: 277) namely “interest” (ibid), and “satisfaction” (278), the latest also supported by Keller (1987) through his ARCS model. If the student is interested in what the teacher has presented, then he/she is more likely to be satisfied with the course and the material.

According to Dornyei (1994a), it is very important to “arouse and sustain curiosity and attention” (281) in order to “decrease student anxiety” (ibid) and increase “group-cohesion” (279). The focal point is that we have to lead students toward positive evaluations of the foreign language experience in order to make it worthy, or relevant. This could be accomplished through the introduction of positive stimuli which would

support those ways that Dornyei (1994a; 2001a) suggests to maintain motivation.

1.7 The Neurology of Motivation

A great deal of contribution to the subject of L2 motivation is brought through the work of Schumann *et al.* (2004) who attempt to illustrate L2 motivation from an *inner* point of view.

This writer wanted to include this view to remind researchers that neurobiology does indeed contribute to research. In fact, neurologist views are most of the time forgotten in the SLA research. As Schumann and his colleagues (2004) maintain, “[...] such claims often reflect an overriding ignorance of underlying neural mechanisms, a dismissive attitude about the neurosciences that must end.” (xii) Both L1 and L2 learning are cognitive processes which are “mediated” (ibid) by the brain. “Therefore, neurobiology is as central as linguistics to our enterprise [and if] SLA [ignores] this information [it] deliberately [imposes] a handicap on its endeavors.” (ibid)

Of course SLA neurology speculates on what is going on the brain. The brain accumulates lots of information every day. It amazingly expands by absorbing new reports and this is probably why it will be impossible to have a certain and precise documented work on how it exactly functions. The brain learns along with its researcher and vice versa. The more the researcher learns, the more the brain evolves and expands.

1.7.1 We Love Dopamine!

At the time of birth, there are thousands of neural connections which strengthen at the moment in which the new born starts to interact with the surrounding environment.

Thus, the richer the environment, the tighter the neural connections, the more ways an individual will have available to perceive the world - or a foreign language – developing a value that is considered to be by Schumann *et al.* (2004) “the basis for all activity [in fact] we perceive, move, cognize, and feel on the basis of [this] value.” (24) In order to determine the value of an experience (i.e., worthiness or relevancy), a social situation or an educational one, individuals evaluate stimuli.

Stimuli are positively evaluated if the scale they adopt is principally based on the “novelty, pleasantness, and relevance [of] the individual’s goals or needs [...]” (25) The evaluations, or “appraisals” (26) if positive, “generate emotions such as joy, happiness, [and so forth] and these emotions lead to action tendencies, such as, the readiness to undertake mental or motor behaviors in relations to stimulus.” (ibid) In other words, if the scale adopted is based on positive stimuli, then a motivated behavior will more likely occur (but not necessarily).

With no confusion, we understand that learning should be enhanced at the moment in which the student positively evaluates it. In other words learning takes place when the student regards something as being relevant – or worthy. Hence, if the student evaluates positively the learning situation – or even a strategy used in the classroom – because he/she sensed a pleasant feeling (for instance, interest, satisfaction, joy, novelty, pleasantness, happiness, and the like) then dopamine (DA) is released into the *substantia nigra* facilitating the learning. (32) Therefore, if the DA chemical is not released¹² there would be no learning and consequently, no motivation involved. In fact, in order to release DA there has to be a specific and clear goal, which has to first be accepted, and then has to be positively evaluated by the students.

¹² McClelland (1987) preceded Schumann *et al.* (2004) founding.

Teachers, but also students, should be exposed to these notions in order to learn and remember, as Schumann *et al.* (2004) suggest, those “actions that result in increased DA activity in order to repeat those actions to increase learning [and] those situations/actions in which there was depressed DA, [avoiding] those situations.” (32)

Motivation does depend by a chemical release since it is in our innate biological nature. However, we are not here to bring further validity to Schumann *et al.*'s (2004) theory even though it will be employed to additionally support this writer's hypothesis (advanced in chapter 3).

Conclusion

A noticeably long introduction to human motivation was given in order to launch us into the L2 motivational field. Motivation was briefly introduced by bilingualism and the fact that 9.3 percent of Americans speak both their native language and another language fluently. On the other hand, 90.7 percent made us wonder the reason why some people are utter failures in terms of foreign language learning (our focus) as opposed to second language learning.

In order to apply this unstable variable in the L2 field, it was necessary to understand some general concepts and theories involved with general motivation. This stimulated the mind of researchers in the psychological field whose results were utilized in the educational field, creating a myriad of hypotheses around what makes a person be more or less motivated. Not surprisingly, general motivation has been the focus of many theories advanced by a great variety of fields (psychology and education are two of the many) creating a complicated net of implications rather than validated explanations.

Weiner (1992) faced the issue by simply dividing the theories into two main fields: a mechanist view (which conceived a person to be a machine driven by homeostatic instincts) and a more cognitive view (which conceived a person to be a cognitive thinker responsible for his/her own actions apt to reach hedonistic pleasure).

Gardner departed from general motivation theories, developing the most influential theory related to the second language motivational field. However, his model was conceived, by some researchers, as too overwhelming because it blocked the blooming of other thinking on the L2 motivational field. Other influential thinking was furnished by Gardner & Lambert (1972). Additionally, Dornyei (2001a) gave a more modern understanding on the matter; however it was never validated.

Before taking any further steps into the L2 motivational field, this writer thought it was necessary to put particular emphasis on individual differences and time. They seem in fact to tremendously play a determinant role in the motivational trend.

Dornyei (1994a, 2001b) and Schumann *et al.* (2004) gave the most significant contribution to the L2 motivational field who suggested that learning can be enhanced by transforming it into a positive stimulus as a way to maintain motivation. The latter, seems in fact occur by avoiding if instances, favoring indeed those ways that Dornyei (1994a; 2001a) hypothesizes to sustain motivation.

2. Humor

2.1 The Definitions

Humor has become nowadays the object of research by specialists, including psychologists, anthropologists, linguists and teachers. This subject was considered by scientists some decades ago, as Durant & Miller (1988) suggest, “as being too enjoyable to be treated” seriously (6). Moreover, according to Sheppard (1977), “the humor researcher has long been plagued by the many types and definitions of humor,” (227) which differed from theory to theory, and from individual to individual causing Levine (1969) to suggest that “no pattern of human behavior is so full of paradoxes.” (1) Similarly, Robinson (1991) notes that the complexity of the issue is clear enough by just looking at the “myriad of related terms” (10) used to describe it, namely “wit, satire, punning, clowning, teasing, joking, comedy pantomime, banter, sarcasm, cartoons etc.” (ibid) Moreover, historical and social variation further complicates the definitory issue. In fact, as Attardo (1994) explains, “the very things that people find humorous seems to change.” (7) The conclusion is that “most authors simply avoid the issue by not defining it” (ibid) since by doing this, they would “draw artificial boundaries between the humorous phenomena” (10). For this thesis’ s purpose, we will use, according to common practice in the field (Attardo, 1994), the general term of “humor.” Our definition of humor, following Attardo & Chabanne (1992; see also Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1997) is that of a text (in the broadest sense, i.e., including cartoons, etc.) with the perlocutory goal of “making the audience laugh” (Attardo & Chabanne, 1992: 171). Needless to say, actual laughter is irrelevant: what matters is the intention of the text producer to cause a certain psycho-physiological reaction in the recipient of the text, namely the perception

of funniness.

In more recent times, the word humor assumed other undertones suggesting something now more abstract, something found, as McGhee (1979) suggests, “only in our minds [that we can perceive]”, but “[that] is not an emotion [nor] a kind of behavior” (6). In other words, humor would represent a process the mind undergoes (i.e., “a mental phenomenon” Attardo, 1994: 10) and it would, often but not necessarily always, manifest itself “with a complex neurophysiological manifestation [identified with] laughter” (ibid).¹³

Humor is the product of a very complex process that both body and mind undergo and is thought to give us a break from life’s many problems. For instance, war nowadays might trouble our mind; through humor, we take a break, even though for few minutes, from such a reality as a way to recharge ourselves. In this regard, Adams *et al.*, (2001) look at humor as:

One of the most healthy, healing phenomena human beings have. It is a cognitive, emotional, and physical response to stress. It gives us balance and a perspective and provides a comic relief and survival from all the seriousness of living. (293)

Psychoanalytically speaking, Freud saw it differently and such a difference was illustrated by Sheppard (1977) as “a mental attitude used to alleviate suffering [...]” (227) Of course, and with no surprise, this definition covers humor only partially. Interestingly, Raskin (1985) sees humor as the mean through which “we express enjoyment [or pleasure’s perception]” (19).¹⁴

¹³ Laughter is not a reliable indicator of humorous intent. See Attardo (1994) for further details.

¹⁴ “Or not express something” (Raskin, 1985: 19).

2.2 What Is so Funny About It? The Theories

Raskin (1985) states that most humor theories are partial theories. This sentiment is also echoed by others. For instance, Durant & Miller (1988) maintain that “practically none of [the theories] cover the whole topic [of humor]. There is almost always a series of exceptions which can be made to what purports to be a comprehensive theory of [it].”

(10) Most theories developed around humor cover definite aspects of humor rather than others. This does not mean that these theories are totally unaware of the existence of the others, but rather they complement one another giving us a more complete picture on the matter. For instance, Attardo (1994), with reference to Lewis (1989), indicates that some researchers “[chose] to ignore the essentialist theories [which are primarily employed to examine the field of humor in linguistics] and [focused] on the teleological, sociological, and psychological theories instead” (5). This is not a bad state of affairs since, by doing this, the several theories “characterize the complex phenomenon of humor from very different angles.” (40) Hence, theories of humor (if not humor itself) are seen by Athey (1977) as a “glass slipper” (215) in the way in which any theory can *partially* fit in it. “A glass slipper is suitably fragile and every theoretical foot can fit into it to a certain extent” (ibid).

According to Raskin (1985) the theories on humor would be divided into three main types:¹⁵ “cognitive-perceptual,¹⁶ social-behavioral and psychoanalytical.” (31) Each

¹⁵ While Attardo (1994) indicates three broader divisions: “Essentialist, teleological [and] substantialist theories used in humor” (1).

¹⁶ Cognitive-perceptual suggests higher thinking involvement proper of adults (rather than children). This means that something needs to be perceived and elaborated in order to be ultimately understood. This is why we see included in this category the theories related to *incongruous*. Incongruity is thought to be the main basic feature of humor and is also thought to be considered helpful in terms of foreign language learning, as it will be illustrated shortly.

theory ought to immediately suggest its competence in the field and is summarized in Table 3 (Attardo, 1994: 94) and reproduced as follows:

Table 3

Cognitive	Social	Psychoanalytical
Incongruity	Hostility	Release
Contrast	Aggression	Sublimination
	Superiority	Liberation
	Triumph	Economy
	Derision	
	Disparagement	

Raskin (1985) together with Morreall (1983) provide an overview of the main theories proposed, which covers several fields, namely “physiological, philosophical [and the] psychoanalytical [ones].” (Raskin, 1985: 38) The latter, postulated by its main exponent Freud (1905/1960) and his “economy theory”, states that “[the] enjoyment [individuals experience through jokes] is no doubt correctly to be attributed to economy in psychical expenditure.” (120) That is, an individual’s enjoyment derives from the exploitation of a certain amount of energy. It should be noted that the economy theory is currently discredited (Attardo, 1994).

Morreall (1983) identifies the earliest theory on relief as being introduced with Shaftesbury in 1711 who stated that individuals tend to escape reality’s constraints through the employment of either “burlesque, mimicry, or buffoonery” (Shaftesbury, 1727, quoted in Morreall, 1983: 20). Such a theory would possibly overlap with Hobbesian theory, according to which people laugh “in scorn at those who have been constraining” (20), which led Alexander Bain (1875, quoted in Morreall, 1983) to

psychologically analyze “[the] constraints and the role of laughter in breaking free of them” (Morreall, 1983: 21). Raskin (1985), with reference to Mindness (1971), refers to humor in terms of “liberation;” (38) in fact, as Mindness (1971) maintains:

Every aspect of our existence, from the most trivial to the most profound, is molded by group expectations. It should come as no surprise, then, that the sight of a comic ignoring conventions excites us... because it provides us, vicariously, a moment of freedom from the prisons of our adjustments” (31).

We are prisoners of our own society and its rules. If we manage to take the chance to laugh at what controls us, we feel a little freer from such constrictions and we experience some degree of control over such demanding institutions. What humor does is to express, according to Monro (1951), something usually “inappropriate” (242) which Freud identified with “sex and hostility” (Morreall, 1983: 38) in particular. However, as Morreall (1983) suggests, “any taboo can set the stage for relief laughter” (38) especially if the latter happens to occur in a safe context (e.g. students cannot necessarily show their anger toward a teacher, but if they happen to hear that the teacher ‘was mugged’ they end up releasing an already-build-up energy caused by their feelings’ suppression). The relief theories’ basic principles are 1) the pleasure deriving from the release of an already-build-up nervous energy, which ensures homeostatis.¹⁷ This principle was already identified by Spencer (1911, found in Morreall 1983). It is opposed to 2) the pleasure deriving from the release of that energy caused by specific situations; for instance, “nonsexual, nonhostile jokes” (Morreall, 1983: 22) and their incongruities contained in the punch line. Incongruities would be noticed, using Morreall’s words (1983), when “the story takes an unexpected turn [and when] the emotional energy which has built up is

¹⁷ This term was mentioned in chapter one while arguing around the general theories of motivation.

suddenly superfluous and demands release [through] laughter” (Morreall, 1983: 22).¹⁸

More in particular, Raskin (1985) brings to our attention a more “contemporary psycholog[ical]” (40) analysis of the relief theory. Such a theory is based on the “arousal-safety theory” (ibid) according to which an individual produces laughter when he/she “evaluates the stimulus as safe,” (ibid) where safeness brings internal equilibrium (i.e., hedonistic). Something gives us pleasure at the moment in which we evaluate a stimulus positively. It is such a positiveness that helps us deal with the constrictions.

Thus, the view of humor proposed by the relief theories would account for the fact that an individual may perceive a humorous stimulus as a positive phenomenon. In fact, it tends to bring an individual to reach his/her homeostatic equilibrium – responsible for hedonistic pleasure.

2.2.1 The Incongruous

According to the incongruity theory, elaborated by Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer (Attardo, 1994), something is humorous when incongruity is perceived. Using Attardo & Chabanne’s words (1992), incongruity is perceived when “a complete break with predictability” (169) is noticed or, in Forabosco’s words (1994), “when one receives an information which differs from the cognitive model” (12). In the popular doctor’s joke introduced by Raskin (1985) and quoted here to better illustrate the concept,

“Is the doctor at home?” the patient asked in his bronchial whisper. “No,” the doctor’s young and pretty wife whispered in reply. “Come right in.” (Raskin, 1985:32)

the incongruity can be easily identified with the doctor’s wife’s response “come right in” which signals the evasion from the basic cognitive model which would impose the

¹⁸ This is why we can compare the relief theory to the incongruity theory.

doctor's wife to answer with, for example, "you can try again later". Instead, she answers with what is not expected (element of surprise) which creates the incongruity. According to McGhee (1979), the presence of the incongruity would in turn let an individual perceive something as "unexpected, out of context, inappropriate, unreasonable, illogical, [and] exaggerated" (10).

As we know, when a speaker is confronted with humor, laughter is not produced at all times. In fact, not everybody appreciates humor in the same way. A person may in fact perceive the incongruity of a joke and see the humor because he/she understood that the speaker introduced him/her in a joking context, what Raskin (1985) calls "*non-bona-fide* communication" (125). In other words, a non-bona-fide communication occurs when the recipient is aware the text about to be heard is not truthful because the speaker is either not telling the truth or "play acting" (101) or telling a joke. However, this same person may decide not to laugh at it because of his/her own values and beliefs. The lack of laughter may indicate an individual preference or contextual inappropriateness. For instance, a person reading the doctor's joke might not perceive the incongruity simply because: 1) he/she did not get it or because non-conjugal affairs may not be considered a humorous target¹⁹ in their L1, or 2) are instead considered "tabooed" (Attardo, 1994: 213), or 3) the recipient is not in the mood to laugh at a joke presented at the wrong time.

Having defined the concept of incongruity, we now turn to Raskin's script-based semantic theory which plays a fundamental role in perceiving the incongruous element of a text.

¹⁹ See Ziv (1988b) for more details.

2.2.2 The Script-Based Semantic Theory

According to the script-based semantic theory, the lexicon represents the knowledge of the individual about the meaning of word in the form of scripts (a.k.a., frames). A script is, according to Raskin (1985):

A large chunk of semantic information surrounding the word or evoked by it. The script is a cognitive structure internalized by the native speaker and it represents the native speaker's knowledge of a small part of the world. Every speaker has internalized rather a large repertoire of scripts of common sense which represent his/her knowledge of certain routines, standard procedures, basic situations etc., for instance, the knowledge of what people do in certain situations, how they do it, in what order etc. Beyond the scripts of common sense every native speaker may, and usually does, have individual scripts determined by his/her individual background and subjective experience and restricted scripts which the speaker shares with a certain group, e.g., family, neighbors, colleagues, [ethnicities,] etc., [and usually] with the whole speech community of native speakers of the same language. (81)

Thus, the lexical elements in a sentence and the combinatorial rule process will help the individual "to derive the meaning of the sentence out of the meanings of the words which make up the sentence." (76) Most of the time, a single word can activate different associations or scripts. In other words, recalling the doctor's joke, the word *doctor* generally recalls the words *hospitals, health, prescription, fear* etc., while the word *lover* recalls the words *sex, unfaithfully, lie, etc.* This means that the script for doctor and lover represents for an individual the common knowledge he/she has learned through society (i.e., everybody knows who a doctor is, where we can find him/her, what his/her role is etc.). Additionally, these scripts could include a more personal meaning because of previous experiences or because of the individual's background. Obviously, the more meanings one is aware about a word, the bigger one's own understanding and the more the chances to make connections between or among items. "The more scripts one has internalized the deeper one's comprehension inaccessible to the non-initiated." (Raskin, 1985: 97)

According to the script-based semantic theory, a text becomes humorous if:

Both of the conditions in (108) are satisfied.

- (108) (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
 (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (Raskin, 1985: 99)

We now turn to children's humor as a way to understand how higher thinking skills (e.g., perceive an incongruity) come to exist.

2.3 Children's Humor

A great deal of attention should be given to how humor develops in the individual at early stages of L1 learning. In other words, we are going now to focus on an individual's cognitive abilities, which are thought to be responsible for humor's perception and production. As McGhee (1979) suggests, "for centuries, virtually no attention has been given to how the capacity for humor develops in the very young child" (46). Understanding how cognitive abilities develop would help us to understand humor's birth in human beings since we all laugh at/because of something. In fact, "the capacity for humor is built into the nervous system," (64) it is in our DNA, though, it varies, again, because of individual differences²⁰ and according to the maturity of humor's addressee. Recalling Forabosco's (1994) concepts of "*bifase*" and "*monofase*" humor will help us to understand a small portion of the main differences according to which children's humor varies from adult's humor.

The meaning of an incongruity changes according to the child's age. For instance, for children of age seven or eight calling a spoon a *fork* is already reason for laughter

²⁰ Interestingly, no sex differences seem to interfere at any age. See Kagan (1971) for more details.

while a child of age 10 does not find this reason to be particularly amusing or laughable probably because it is not mentally challenging. One important fact that should not be omitted is that some studies (Sheppard, 1977) showed that there would exist “a relationship between humor levels and age” (227). Again, calling a spoon a fork is funny up to a certain age; obviously, humor would be more sophisticated by degrees of a child’s cognitive growth, in fact, “[...] the humor of adolescence differs from the child’s in its ability to incorporate self-reference, to apply a metaphorical interpretation to events, and to discover social truths in humour or satire” (ibid). A humor that derives from a solved not-too-hard riddle is more satisfactory to the self because he/she underwent some type of analysis which brought a certain degree of effort employed in the resolution. Using Wright’s words (1977), “the degree of complexity in humor enjoyed by the child follows closely his/her stage of cognitive development [...]” (234) Hence, as Sheppard (1977) suggests, “with increasing development one finds not merely a linear increase in understanding, but qualitative advances in the ability to relate humorous events to personal experience and to seek a generality of meaning in humor” (225). The closer an individual gets to adulthood, the higher his/her cognitive thinking which will let him/her perceive the humor and relate it to what he/she knows and will eventually help him/her get some logic out of it.

2.3.1 Children as Cognitive Thinkers

Two different levels of perception,²¹ which initiate humor, are presented (Raskin, 1985)

²¹ Bariaud (1977) and McGhee (1979) introduce two levels which would be identified with “reality and fantasy,” (Bariaud, 1977: 230) respectively. The former would “serve as a reference [and would need to be ignored] to accept the existence of the incongruous on the level of play and of unreality” (ibid). It is unclear whether Bariaud’s two levels and Raskin’s can be considered as the same thing.

by recognizing the two ambiguous meaning of the words taken into consideration. The two levels respectively provide, as McGhee (1979) suggests: 1) “a normal set of circumstances, [and, 2)] the less probable[,] some sort of incongruous situation.” (76)²² Children, as opposed to adults, develop this capability at age seven, when that is, they “[start detecting] linguistic ambiguity.” (ibid) During this last stage, number four, children would be capable of:

- 1) Pulling together and contrasting the incongruous elements of the situation, (2) comparing the incongruous situation with the normal [...] one, and (3) giving a motivational interpretation of some character of the cartoon joke” (75).

2.3.2 Infants’ Smiles

The meaning of a smile changes according to the child’s mental growth. For instance, a child is observed to be smiling (rather than laughing) one week after his/her birth during his/her sleep. As McGhee (1979) indicates, his/her first “wakeful smile” (48) is noticed two weeks after birth, especially after feeding.²³ A “fully alert smile” (49) is noticed at the end of the first month and is caused by the combination of the mother’s voice and some “tactile [stimulations, namely] tickling” (ibid) of the infant.²⁴ Only between three and four months they are capable of a more *conscious* smile, caused by recognition. In other words, the infant “[recognizes] a face as being familiar” (McGhee, 1979: 49) because memory starts to develop forming schemas.²⁵ At first though, infants tend to smile to any unmoving faces, while it is only between five and six months infants

²² This is why incongruity can create some problems at a semantic level, especially if cognitive abilities are not fully developed and if scripts are not available. See 2.4.1.1 for further details.

²³ These types of smiles would be identified by Greig (1923) with the terms *mechanical smiling* as opposed to *expressive smiling*. The former works on a more unconscious level, the latter at a more conscious one.

²⁴ See Greig (1923) for further details.

²⁵ A grouping of elements related to objects, places and even persons. See Piaget (1952) for more details. Such schemas would be necessary for the child in order to recognize an incongruity. In fact, according to Bariaud (1977), an object appear to a child to be *funny* looking because “the child [possesses] the mental schema corresponding to the usual appearance of the object” (230).

discriminate his/her mother's face's proper features. Fascinatingly, children seem to show better their ability to smile if moderately challenged²⁶ mentally²⁷ - even though there is still no "conscious awareness." (50) According to Kagan (1971), "[an] infant smiles to a face because it recognizes it, [and] not because he has been reinforced by an external agent for issuing this behavior" (154).²⁸

We cannot yet really speak for children of the same type of humor adults are amused by, even though it is thought that children's first laughter is shown at four months.²⁹

2.3.3 The Triggers Responsible for Cognition

Children are ready to develop their cognitive abilities once they start mastering fantasy and make-believe behaviors (McGhee, 1977, 1979) generated by curiosity toward the novelty. In its turn, the novelty is believed to lead to the discovery of new items and events whose features, if not encountered before, will be added to already existing schemas (or new schemas will eventually be created) thus expanding children's

²⁶ According to Kagan (1971), challenge leads to "a state of resolution [which follows] assimilation of a discrepant event or solution of a difficult problem." (158) Hence, the child smiles. On the other hand, if there is no effort (or challenge), the child does not smile. Additionally, as McGhee (1977) suggests, "[...] humor appreciation should be associated with some optimal moderate amount of cognitive challenge to comprehension." (200) Hence, as Wright (1977) suggests, "if the joke strains comprehension, or is too easily understood, amusement is less" (234).

²⁷ If a new object is presented to the child, the child does not smile unless the same object is repetitively introduced to him/her (thus creating a schema for that specific object). On the other hand, continuous presentation of the same object leads the child to accuse some form of boredom. When the child becomes bored, he/she has assimilated the schema for recall in the proximal future.

²⁸ The recognition process is preceded by the uncertainty process. The latter causes the accumulation of tension which is released through smiles. Smiles indicate that the process of assimilation is in its turn completed. See Kagan (1971) for more details.

²⁹ Laughter can be compared to smiling in children. In fact, the data available suggest this comparison (Greig, 1923). Commonsensically, smiling becomes laughter when sounds are added. Thus, smiling precedes laughter, but neither phenomenon happens right after birth (but only some times after). Obviously, their occurrence change from child to child.

knowledge.³⁰ According to McGhee (1979), children are ready to perceive the first incongruities once they “understand the real order of things.” (56) Incongruities are created by perceiving specific events “[being] at odds with reality,” (61) but only when the child realizes that the events exist in fantasy” (ibid).

2.3.4 Stages 1, 2 and 3

During stage 1 (at around 2 years of age), laughter is caused by playing with objects or mimicking activities, for instance, pretending a pen is a phone. In stage 2, such pretending is named. When asked “what are you doing”, the child will respond “telephone mommy”. Moreover, during this stage, the child is particularly amused by name switching (i.e. call a cat, a dog). Though, laughter appears only when it is the child doing the switching in order “to be sure of the fantasy nature of any given incongruity” (McGhee, 1979: 71).³¹ In stage 3, the child clearly shows “advances in language development” (73) by developing a “conceptual thinking capacity” (ibid) according to which words *finally* refer to clusters of objects or events. During this stage, children base their laughter on both “rhyming of words and the creation of nonsense words [...],” (75) even though they are not totally consciously aware of what is being said, and on “incongruous appearance of things” (73) (i.e. a cat with two heads etc.).

Exploring L1 child’s humor development may provide us with insights into L2 development, provided that we keep in mind the fundamental differences between the two domains of inquiry. We turn now to L2 humor.

³⁰ See McGhee (1979) for more details.

³¹ If the adult does the switching, then the child tends to show some sort of confusion, unless there is metacommunication (e.g., let’s pretend that...). This happens because he/she is not able to determine whether what was said by the adult is true or false (i.e., possible or not possible in reality).

2.4 Understanding a Joke in a Foreign Language

There is scant research out there on humor in L2 and most of it is based on analyses of types of the humor among Non Native Speakers (NNS) rather than on the stages of its acquisition. From the few sources we have available (Broner & Tarone, 2001; Schmitz, 2002; Deneire, 2002; Davies, 2003), and that we will describe shortly, we can say that L2 humor is produced, understood and expanded even at early L2 stages by the NNS (Broner & Tarone, 2001; Davies 2003) – even though the types and levels of appreciation and perception differ (Deneire, 2002; Schmitz, 2002).

However, according to Deneire (2002), understanding humor in L2 would constitute a very sophisticated phenomenon that an early L2 learner would not be able to undergo because of his/her limited lexicon and linguistic competence: “the understanding of jokes in a foreign language reflects a fairly high level of proficiency.” (291) In fact, “at the beginning [...], students tend to equate one word with one meaning and often fail to perceive ambiguous meanings, even though these mechanisms exist in their own language.” (290-291) Early L2 learners might recognize one meaning of a word, but not its possible other.

2.4.1 The Issues Involved with Humor in Foreign Language Learning

Two issues are involved with humor’s exploitation in foreign language learning: the availability of scripts together with whether the humor should be introduced at *any* level of second language learning.

2.4.1.1 Script Availability: The Keys Determinant for National Styles of Humor

As Greig (1923) suggests, something is funny because *we* make it funny. For instance, someone who slips on a banana's skin might be funny for one person, but not for another. Funniness is then determined by personal beliefs or the beliefs of a culture. If we fail to know such beliefs, we will unlikely perceive the funniness shared by a group. This is why humor "often balks at national [frontiers]" (71) or in other words, this is why, for instance, Italian humor could fail to be understood by Americans.

People laugh because of the scripts of their own nationality,³² which are sometimes known and shared by a person or another group that does not belong to that same community (e.g., a foreign language classroom according to Schmitz's 2002 ideas). Thus, if such a cultural knowledge (other than a linguistic one, according to Deneire's 2002 beliefs) is not shared, then laughter cannot be guaranteed. Using Monro's words (1951), "... humour depends on a fixed background of conventional beliefs, attitudes, behavior." (241-2) This is why a community, the Italian one for example, tends to laugh more about the well-known *carabiniere* figure and not at all about the Poles.³³

Using Deneire's words (2002), "the contexts [in which jokes occur], usually called scripts or schemas, may sometimes be shared across cultures (for example, taking the plane or a bus), but they are usually language specific." (293) Again, if a joke is humorous for an Italian, (for examples, see jokes 1 and 2), it might not be for an

³² Even though there are universal scripts translatable and understandable in all languages. See Schmitz (2002) for more details. Let's not forget that the mechanisms of humor are universal (Attardo, 1994), but the scripts specific to a culture change yielding one's specific culture's funniness. Thus, specific humorous forms of a culture (e.g., knock-knock jokes and Italian *colmi*) cannot be translated easily. See Attardo (2002) for more details.

³³ Americans find jokes about Poles to be very humorous.

American, and vice versa.³⁴ This happens because scripts are not matching or are not being activated because the word in consideration is not culturally shared or known (thus, there is no semantic processing).

Let's try with these jokes,

- (1) There is a man selling apple seeds down the road. A *carabiniere* stops by and asks the man why he's selling apple seeds.
The man answers: - "Makes you smarter if you eat them!" -
The *carabiniere*: - "How much are they?"
The man: - "5euro each"
The *carabiniere*: "I want to buy three!" and hands the man 15euro. After eating them he shouts out loud: - "For that price I could have got 8kg of apples and have a whole bounch of seeds!!!"
The man: - "See!!! You are smarter already!"
The *carabiniere*: - "Give me three more"
- (2) A *carabiniere* asks his *carabiniere* friend: - "Do you know what *pourquoi* means?"
His friend replies: - "Why" -
- "Well, I was just wondering about it" -

If the hearer (or in this case reader) of these jokes supposedly is an American (or a an Italian foreign language learner) with no knowledge of the Italian culture, this same American individual will unlikely find this joke funny because he/she might not know that a *carabiniere* is a person who is part of one of the Italian police corps and, for some reason,³⁵ they are considered to be dumb. *Carabinieri*, identified by Ziv (1988) as “the police under the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior,” (152) are often the target of Italian aggressive humor³⁶ because they are considered to be dumb “jerks” (ibid)

³⁴ Joke (1) was introduced in my foreign language (FL) classroom. The word *carabiniere* was substituted with the word *man* in order to avoid what Raskin (1985) calls “[allusions].” (46) According to Raskin (1985), an allusion makes a joke “incomprehensible or unfunny to those who are not familiar with the material alluded to” (ibid).

³⁵ Ragusa & Roversi (2002) believe that this stereotypical humor is generated by Italian ethnic humor, not directed at other ethnicities, but rather at groups within Italy itself (Ziv, 1988b), namely the Southerners, or *terroni*. Interestingly, most of *carabinieri* are Southerners. See also Davies (1990) for more details.

³⁶ As opposed to American aggressive humor which targets virgins and homosexuals and is often used, according to Ziv (1988b) to “relieve [...] frustrations” (178) and elevate an individual’s state of being. See

making them “the laughingstock of popular entertainment from puppet shows to the movies.” (Ziv, 1988b: 152) Additionally, if the American individual who is reading the joke has no knowledge of the European monetary system, of the measurement system (i.e. Kilograms) and no knowledge of French, he would not know that, 1) the current currency being in force is Euro and not Lira any longer, 2) that 1pound (lb) is equal to 16ounces (oz) and equal to .4536kg, and that 3) French *pourquoi* corresponds to the English *why*.³⁷

Forabosco (1994) explains this phenomenon by speaking of *dynamic* and *cognitive mastery* of a matter where the former refers to the specific or general knowledge an individual shows to have (briefly introduced above), while the latter refers to the fact that the "non-comprehension of a text is due to the lack of linguistic resources or informative references." (49) Thus, an individual has to be competent in both pragmatics (our knowledge of the world) and semantics³⁸ (our knowledge of a language), in order to be able to finally perceive the incongruity.

2.4.1.1 The Debate between Deneire and Schmitz

Teaching a foreign language means teaching also and not only the grammar that lies at the base of L2, but linguistically speaking, it means teaching also the scripts which often

also Davies (1990) and her distinctions between stupidity (under which the script *carabinieri* falls for Italians, and *poles* for Americans) vs. canny (for instance, the *genovesi* for Italians, *Yankees* for Americans).

³⁷ Thus, if we attempt to translate these terms into the Target Language (TL) (i.e. *carabiniere*, *kilograms*, *pourquoi*), as it happened every now and then to this writer during her experiment, the terms may lose their humorous purpose. See Attardo (2002) for further details.

³⁸ Ignored by Chomsky and his grammaticality vs. ungrammaticality, long criticized because, as Raskin (1985) suggested, "[it] ignored completely all the other abilities provided by competence." (50) Additionally, it barely took into consideration Katz and Fodor's sentence in isolation, which was also vividly criticized because it required an individual to analyze the sentence out of its context (and only linguists can do this because they are trained). A sentence in isolation "[failed] to explain what a particular sentence means [since an individual] never encounters [such a thing]" (62-63).

are culture specific. Such qualitative teaching of L2 can be enhanced through the employment of humor in the pedagogic environment as a means to have students aware of language variety. However, Deneire (2002) and Schmitz (2002) argue whether humor should be introduced at any foreign language learning level.

According to Deneire (2002), “the use of humor in teaching has been advocated as a tool to make students sensitive to the structural and semantic differences between different languages.” (291) If such an awareness is emphasized, then students will more likely succeed in understanding L2 humor. Thus, if students lack what Forabosco (1994) identifies as the aforementioned dynamic and cognitive knowledge³⁹ the student will not be able to perceive the humor in L2. Moreover, Deneire (2002) specifies in more details that the success depends on “a fairly high level of linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competence” (291) speaking of the existence of a “humor competence.” (ibid)⁴⁰ This is probably why most foreign language students fail to understand the humor contained in some jokes (and this usually happens at early stages of foreign language learning, when there is no high mastery of the language by the learners, culture awareness least of all; though at these stages, as Broner & Tarone, 2001 and Davies, 2003 will show, it is possible to produce humor).

Interestingly, Deneire (2002), with reference to Carrell (1984) points out how FL learners process information in different ways:

Most beginning Foreign language learners (or poor readers in their first language) have a tendency to process information word by word (bottom-up processing), and thus usually fail to activate the necessary schemata for an appropriate understanding of the text. Other readers tend to impose their own cultural schemata, thus distorting the intended meaning of the text.” (294)

³⁹ See also Deneire (2002) for further details.

⁴⁰ Raskin postulated humor competence taking into consideration Chomsky’s grammatical competence and Hymes’s communicative competence.

In other words, L2 beginners (or even poor readers in L1) tend to fail to understand a text for two reasons: 1) they either analyze the word outside of its context first, then they look at the whole unit (failing to involve no previous knowledge), or 2) they analyze the text on the base of what they already know with the risk of not understanding the text or even creating out-of-place meanings. According to Deneire (2002), students fail to do this because they are not aware of structural and semantic differences between languages, in fact, he suggests:

In order to perceive and understand humor in intercultural contact, the learner needs to become acculturated in the other group; he or she needs to recognize, legitimize, accept, and appreciate the fundamental differences between cultures, and be ready to bridge these differences in order to “feel” as people in the other culture do. Being 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, the learner will be armed to switch from one mode of thinking to another one in different cultural contexts. There is no doubt that reaching such a stage necessitates extended exposure to the foreign culture and the overcoming of many hurdles, negative reactions, stages of cultural anomie, sometimes even complete rejection of the other group’s values.” (295)

Thus, in order for learners to understand a text, learners ought to assume a second identity so as to perceive the values and scripts of L2 culture. For instance, one could not understand why Italians drink espresso right after lunch or dinner (even though this is not necessarily a value, but a habit proper of Italian culture).⁴¹ Thus, one could introduce this habit to the L2 learner as a way of expanding his/her knowledge of L2 culture. Deneire (2002) believes that this stage would be appropriately taken care of in advanced learning where the learner can employ the appropriate tools (i.e., a higher mastery of the L2) necessary for the accomplishment of such a demanding goal (i.e., assume a second identity). Humor “is often directed against outsiders in intergroup communication [and it] makes it difficult, sometimes impossible, for the latter to enjoy the humor of the target language” (295) unless one is aware of the scripts specific to a culture. If the L2 learner

⁴¹ Ziv (1988b) states that “a full study of Italian humor is also in many ways a study of the Italian way of life” (133) even though “there is still no systematic study [on it]” (154).

does not have the appropriate tools (e.g., knowledge of at least one extra meaning of a word), then he/she will more likely fail to participate and be part of L2 humorous happenings. This occurs because the L2 learner is not sharing the specific L2 (humorous) scripts required in a context.

Schmitz (2002), on the other hand, proposes the opposite. He supports the idea according to which it is useful to introduce humor at even early stages of foreign language learning (and translating). This would make students aware of the cultural possibilities even before they come in contact with the target language's community. "Bearing in mind that there is so much to learn about specific languages and their respective cultures and so little time in most courses, it would not be wise to hold humor *entirely* in abeyance until later stages." (96) Though, Schmitz maintains that the humor, in order to accomplish such a thing, has to be carefully selected, making sure there is plenty of vocabulary available to students along with "the different readings or possible scripts" (102). More importantly, "learners do not always develop joke and humor competence in a foreign language immediately, but with sufficient input in the form of humorous texts this competence can be nurtured for steady development during the course of study. (ibid) Thus, if we follow Schmitz's thinking (2002), we see that if humor is appropriately introduced at early stages of foreign language learning, there will be a chance of avoiding Deneire's (2002) "hurdles, negative reactions, stages of cultural anomie, sometimes even complete rejection of the other group's values." (Deneire, 2002: 295) According to Paulos (1980), such a rejection can be easily avoided if the individuals are asked to engage in the "acceptance of certain values [which] is necessary to an appreciation of humor" (26).

2.4.2 Humor in Second Language Learning: From Hypothesis to Reality

McGhee (1979) earlier in this chapter brought to our attention the significance of L1 humor by focusing his analysis on the development of children's cognitive abilities. This writer noticed some similarities between his investigation and the work of Broner & Tarone (2001), as we will see. Additionally, Davies's (2003) study further supports the existence of L2 humor.

Broner & Tarone's (2001) study involved fifth-grade American-English students in a Spanish full-immersion classroom. The study analyzed 13 hours of interaction during a period of 5 months with 3 children only. All the sections (of the duration of an hour) were appropriately recorded through a lapel microphone attached to the children's shirt and connected to a wireless transmitter. The activities, carried out without too much interference from the researchers, focused on "creative writing [...], geometry [...], arts and crafts, and statistics." (368) The analysis of these sections showed the presence of early humor's production, characterized by sound play⁴² (rhymes; i.e. *Ricola...Tricola*) and the creation of nonsense words (i.e. *cello-female-embryo*) both of which would be the product of respectively phonological and semantic language play.⁴³ (Broner & Tarone, 2001: 371) Through language play, hence amusement,⁴⁴ the learner "internalizes and retains as distinct the language varieties characteristic of different roles and registers and

⁴² "Leonard and Ben make jokes with the rhymes that make them laugh." For instance, "Me gusta mi Corazon... Pee Pee." (Broner & Tarone, 2001: 370) Additionally, their humor would reflect typical instances of sexuality (see *pee pee*) considered taboo. Such instances are expressed by children through laughter as a *relief*. See McGhee (1979) for more details.

⁴³ Language play (meant to amuse or entertain in this case, rather than to rehearse) constitutes one important element leading to humor. See respectively Cook (2000) and Lantolf (1997) for further details.

⁴⁴ According to Broner & Tarone (2001), "fun is an experience of positive affect that is often associated with laughter" (364).

can use them as desired” (Broner & Tarone, 2001: 371).⁴⁵

Davies’s (2003) study focused instead on conversational joking (a key for collaborative discourse, in its turn, a product of proficient communicative competence) involving English language learners (from Arabia, France, Indonesia, Japan, Spain and Thai) engaged in “ongoing extra-class groups” made of usually 6 participants with American-English native speakers (NS). The study did prove the existence of humorous happenings in a social context in which, again, the NS helped the NNS build “under certain circumstances [...] conversational joking discourse⁴⁶ with native English speakers, using scaffolding [and having] limited sociolinguistic resources.” (1381) These exchanges, not only “[illustrated] the development of a shared culture of the language learner as revealed through the content of the humor,” (ibid) but also helped the NS to perceive, start a joking frame and eventually extend it. In other words, “in this situation, the learners are given an opportunity not only to learn how to engage in the joking activity, but also to experience its social meaning in American society” (ibid).⁴⁷

2.5 I Did Not Get It: My Right-Hemisphere Must Not Be Functioning Today...

Most of the results come from the field of cognitive neuropsychology which showed, through clinical analysis, how humor calls for the work of both right and left hemispheres. Thus, it greatly contributes to its study by shedding light on humans’ cognitive abilities. Many results, related to brain’s functioning, come from the

⁴⁵ Thus, as Broner & Tarone (2001) suggest, “the more advanced the learner, the more capable the learner is of participating in [language play]” (365). For this reason, we can hypothesize, that advanced learners are more capable of producing, perceiving and understanding humorous forms.

⁴⁶ This type of discourse was based on NNS’ reminiscences; for instance, NNS were asked by NS “Can you think of any funny things or misunderstanding that happened to you when you first arrived in the United States?” (Davies, 2003: 1370) as a way of purposely leading them toward humorous contexts.

⁴⁷ In this regard, Davies (2003) pointed out that “the joking highlighting the apparently arbitrary nature of idiomatic expressions in language [seemed to be] a major problem for language learners” (1371).

investigation of individuals affected by particular abnormalities.⁴⁸

A very important point to be remembered is the one maintained by Durant & Miller (1988) and reported as follows:

Brain damage can leave a patient severely impaired in one area of cognition, such as understanding jokes, but leave the same individual normal or almost normal in other areas, such as understanding the syntax of sentences or how words refer to objects in the world. (18)

In fact, if one area of the brain is damaged and is impairing one particular cognitive ability (e.g., speech) it means that the particular area of the brain is (supposedly) controlling a particular ability: “For example, if patients with damage to the right cerebral hemisphere uniformly demonstrate a deficit in understanding jokes, then that region is probably required for processing relevant to humour comprehension” (ibid).⁴⁹

A first neurological approach to humor sees humor itself thought to be located in the right side of the brain since right hemisphere damaged (RHD)⁵⁰ patients have shown, as Durant & Miller (1988) suggests, “to misunderstand sarcasm and indirect requests,” (19)⁵¹ but not only.⁵² Though, we cannot really talk of an area of the brain specialized in humor since humor itself is made up of several abilities which involve different areas of the brain. However, we can certainly sustain (even empirically as we shall see) that the right-hemisphere “may play a critical role in understanding and appreciating humor”

⁴⁸ Individuals hit by a stroke and aphasic individuals. See Fabbro (1999) for more details.

⁴⁹ Though, as Durant & Miller (1988) suggest, “different forms or aspects of humour require different skills.” (18) Additionally, this hypothesis is supported by Svebak (1982) according to whom, “a coordination of otherwise separate processes is typical in humor appreciation [...]” (Svebak, 1982, quoted in McGhee, 1983: 18, found in McGhee & Goldstein, 1983 Vol. 1).

⁵⁰ According to Durant & Miller (1988), RHD patients are different from left hemisphere damaged patients (LHD) who “are typically aphasic; that is, they have marked disorders of language [...] [giving] the impression of being very aware of their social environment. When talking to an LHD patient, one typically has the sense that brain damage has seriously impaired the person’s linguistic abilities, but it has not drastically altered the underlying personality [as in fact has RHD patients]” (20).

⁵¹ As Durant & Miller (1988) suggest, these are just “[generalizations]” (21) since, and again, it is practically impossible to prove what is going on in the brain.

⁵² See Durant & Miller (1988) for more details.

(Durant & Miller, 1988: 19).

The experiment carried out by Brownell *et al.* (1983) identifies coherence as being one of humor's most significant skills.⁵³ The study presented a control group, made up of adult men less than seventy years of age who suffered no substantial brain impairment, and the experimental group, formed of twelve RHD right-handed men less than seventy years of age who were hit by a stroke. Both groups were asked to choose the most appropriate answer among optional endings so that it would render the given text humorous. The text taken into consideration is shown as it follows, but its punch line is lacking:

The neighborhood borrower approached Mr Smith one Sunday afternoon and inquired,
"Say, Smith, are you using your lawnmower this afternoon?"
"Yes, I am," Smith replied warily. (21)

The two groups were asked to choose among the three options available to them, namely a punch line, (1) (the designated one), a straightforward ending indicated with (2) and a non sequitur⁵⁴ indicated with (3).

- (1) "Fine, then you won't be wanting your golf clubs. I'll just borrow them."
- (2) "Do you think I could use it [the lawnmower] when you're done?"
- (3) "You know, the grass is always greener on the other side." (22-3)

This study assessed by Brownell *et al.* (1983) showed that the RHD men scored worse than the controls group. RHD men had a hard time choosing between (1) and (3). Though, they clearly understood (2) confirming to have preserved some of the elements necessary in a joke. However, they were not able to assign a new or different meaning to

⁵³ This same coherence was thought to be, by Durant & Miller (1988), a "requirement of jokes." (24) In this optic, as McGhee (1983) earlier suggests, "surprise and coherence are important [elements] in humor based on incongruity" (29).

⁵⁴ A surprising ending which is incoherent with the events preceding it. It can be neutral, but also humorous. See Durant & Miller (1988) for more details.

a final frame or punch line.⁵⁵ Durant & Miller (1988) bring to our attention a similar study carried out by Bihrlé *et al.* (1986), which arrived at the same results. The only difference was that the control group was formed by LHD patients who were exposed to captionless four-frame cartoons so that they could be tested as well. Moreover, Gardner (1981)⁵⁶ notices that right-hemisphere⁵⁷ impaired patients “[would be] unable to figure out the underlying architecture or composition, the nature of, and relationship between, the various parts and character of a story. Instead, each part stands alone, a single brick unrelated to any other – or to the entire edifice” (76). Researchers hypothesized then the localization of (humor) coherence in the right side of the brain (even though other areas, placed in the anteriors of the frontal lobes, have not yet been examined). Thus, the ability of one to understand a joke (in both L1 and L2 as well) depends on his/her ability “in revising an interpretation of a punch line to achieve a coherent understanding of the whole joke,” (Durant & Miller, 1988: 32) apparently localized in the right hemisphere. As a consequence, and again, the more an individual shows to have developed sophisticated cognitive abilities (speaking of mentally healthy individuals), the more he/she will show mastery in the understanding of jokes - and ultimately in producing jokes.

Furthermore, McGhee (1983) points out, with reference to another study, that “the right hemisphere may be characterized by a greater degree of interconnectedness among

⁵⁵ Though, such an inability was also noticed at a non-humorous level. See Durant & Miller (1988) for more details.

⁵⁶ According to McGhee (1983), the study assessed by Gardner (1981) indicated that “right-hemisphere patients [...] chose [...] a significantly lower percentage of correct choices of the funniest caption from among [...] possible captions [...] and a greater percentage of non sequitur endings as funniest.” (29) “The non-sequitur lacked meaningful coherence” (*ibid.*). See McGhee (1983) for more details.

⁵⁷ Though, according to McGhee (1983), “not all right hemisphere patients show the behaviors described [...]. These deficits are most common among patients with large lesions in the frontal areas of the right hemisphere” (27).

different regions than the left hemisphere.” (McGhee, 1983: 25) Such a feature would importantly differentiate right from left hemisphere in humor comprehension making the former⁵⁸ “play a central role in producing awareness of incongruous relationships [...]” (27)⁵⁹ The right hemisphere does play indeed a very important role in the comprehension and appreciation of humor just because of the presence of more white matter. This *extra* helps the right hemisphere better “perform the insightful integration of the key elements of information that must be meaningfully linked before the humor can be understood and appreciated.” (30) Such greater ability would also be proved to exist by the “greater interconnectedness of neurons, [making] it better suited to perform this function than the left hemisphere.” (ibid) This of course is not suggesting that, again, humor itself is merely perceived by the right hemisphere, but conjunctly with the left one. In this regard, Tucker (1981) suggests that “the human brain must be considered something of a binary system, with two functionally differentiated information-processing subsystems.” (19) In fact, according to McGhee (1983), once an individual hears or reads a joke, “incoming information is continually related to what has been said and to what is expected to follow” (30) by the left hemisphere. On the other hand, while one has to come to perceive and understand an incongruity, the right hemisphere comes into play accomplishing such

⁵⁸ However, as McGhee (1983) suggests, right-hemisphere patients “appear able to reach only the first of the two stages of processing required for full appreciation of the humor depicted” (29), namely the IR two-model stage. See Attardo (1997) for further details. Interestingly, “right-hemisphere damage may be most disruptive of the ability to appreciate unfamiliar humor, while tending to leave intact memory for old humor. This view was based on right-hemisphere patients’ ability to still tell previously memorized jokes and to distinguish familiar foils (e.g., ‘Why did the chicken cross the road?’ ‘To get to the other side’) from unfamiliar ones” (29).

⁵⁹ However, according to McGhee (1983), right-hemisphere patients show to have lost such an awareness showing “a severely disturbed sense of humor, including inappropriate laughter, inappropriate humor production, and sharply reduced humor comprehension” (28) other than showing the impossibility of detecting incongruous or out of the ordinary elements.

a task.⁶⁰ Interestingly, “increased joke complexity may reduce humor not so much because the insightful integration of key elements is itself more difficult, but rather because it places the individual in a predominantly analytical or left-hemisphere frame of mind.” (McGhee, 1983: 32) In fact, according to Levine (1969), “understanding a joke is an intellectual achievement, yet reflective thought destroys the humor” (1).

Conclusion

In this chapter we briefly introduced the idea of the difficulty of defining humor since attempting to give an exhausting overview of the fields it covers would go well beyond the limits of this thesis. We settled on the prelocutionary definition of Attardo & Chabanne (1992) as a text intended to be perceived as funny. Similarly, we brought attention to the existence of a plurality of humor theories while signaling the presence of the one that was perceived as most useful for this thesis’s purpose, namely the relief theory. The incongruous element was also briefly illustrated because it is relevant to the foreign language learning process since it ought to lead to the mastery of higher cognitive thinking skills. The introduction of humor was considered to be appropriate in advanced levels of L2 learning by some researchers. Conversely, others thought its introduction to be useful even at earlier stages of learning since it would bring more L2 culture awareness. To better understand this phenomenon, humor was here investigated in relation to the higher cognitive abilities it calls for in L1. Such examination brought this writer to see certain similarities between L1 and L2 and the cognitive abilities both languages require in order to perceive humor. Humor was also shown to involve both left and right brain hemispheres, indicating its highly intellectual function.

⁶⁰ However, there would be some hemispherical differences between man and women. See McGhee (1983) for further details.

3. Humor in the Classroom

3.1 Advancing the Hypothesis

This writer hypothesizes that humor ought to greatly contribute to enhancing the learning experience by transforming it into a positive stimulus,⁶¹ so as: 1) to maintain motivation by avoiding *if instances*, and 2) to favor the ways Dornyei (1994a, 2001a) hypothesized to be responsible for sustaining motivation.

Forabosco (1994) makes us aware that, by now, “[la] caratteristica dell’umorismo è riuscire a trasformare fonti di dispiacere in fonti di piacere [...]” (51) (*A characteristic of humor is being able to transform sources of displeasure into sources of pleasure*). Thus, this writer hypothesizes that since FLL is normally conceived as a threatening, not-useful and an unpleasant experience, humor ought to transform it into a positive one. In this way, individuals ought to look for it because they tend to reach their hedonistic status. We also know that if the stimulus is not positive, then, Dornyei’s (2001b) process-oriented model⁶² would not be successful; hence, learning would not be successful. In other words, knowing that:

- 1) “Learning is [...] more dependent upon motivation,” (Schumann, 1999: 39)
- 2) Motivation can be maintained by: a) avoiding if instances, and b) favoring those ways that ought to sustain it
- 3) “Motivation is based on [positive] appraisal[s]” (35) that individuals tend to attribute to a stimulus in order to consciously reach their hedonistic status
- 4) Positive appraisals⁶³ depend on the pleasantness and the novelty of stimuli

⁶¹ However, some sort of boredom was detected during this writer’s investigation since the novelties soon become the routine (as similarly mentioned while speaking of children; it seems in fact that continuous presentation of the same object, or material in this case, leads to boredom. This is not a bad state of affairs after all. See McGhee (1979) for further details). Not surprisingly, Berk (1998) points out that in 1997 “UCLA’s Higher Education Research Institute indicated in a national survey of more than 250, 000 freshman at nearly 500 universities that a 30-year-record high 35.6% of the student said that they were frequently bored in class” (84).

⁶² See section 1.6.2.

⁶³ According to Schumann (1999), “the [positive] feeling may cause the individual to attend to the stimulus, to make an effort to comprehend and acquire information contained in the stimulus situation, and to revisit the stimulus in the future to learn more.” (42) Neurologically speaking, such a “state is created in the body

5) Positive appraisals help the release of DA,⁶⁴ responsible for learning then teachers ought to introduce humor so that students would feel safe and satisfied. Adams *et al.* (2001) indicate that “in this context, humor can be an empowerment tool because it gives us a different perspective on our problems and, with protection and control in our environment” (293). Humor gives us a certain degree of control over our lives, allowing us to see the world from (a) different (humorous) angle(s) conceived as disruptive by some *old bores*.

3.2 Risus Abundat In Ore Stultorum – Going Against the Old Bore

A long time ago, humor was considered to be unprofessional rather than entertaining. As one can opine, such archaic views on humor have not yet changed much. Humor is still seen superfluous to the intellectual learning experience.

There are teachers who still believe in the idea according to which being humorous corresponds to being foolish, especially in an (intellectual) academic environment. Hence, as Shade (1996) suggests, humor is considered to be “unscholarly” (990) since the role of education is not to entertain, but to teach. In this regard, Korobkin (1988) suggests that “traditional subject matter and lessons were supposed to keep students interested. To entertain [did not mean] to educate” (154). He continued, in fact, that students ought not to need any forms of entertainment in order to be interested in a subject matter since the subject matter itself ought to keep them greatly interested, active and motivated. Moreover, according to Morreall (1983):

proper via the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine system and the musculoskeletal system. This bodily state is an emotion which is communicated back to the brain as a feeling that helps the individual decide which mental or motor action to take with regard to the stimulus” (ibid).

⁶⁴ See section 1.7.1.

The traditional attitude of teacher toward laughter and humor [...] has been that they are frivolous activities that pull us away from what is important [...]. Life is fundamentally serious business – certainly whatever is important in life is serious business. If laughter and humor had any place at all, then, it was not in the classroom but outside somewhere, perhaps as a device for refreshing us to return to our work with more eagerness. (Morreall, 1983: 88-89)

Morreall wants to convey the idea according to which humor would not be appropriate in work environments (e.g., school or a business). Instead, humor's only function would be to help take a break from our duties so as to go back to work with renovated energies.

Again, since humor ought to regenerate our energies by moving the attention from one focus (e.g., studying) to another (e.g., did you hear what happened today to Mr. X?), it would be practically impossible to have both humor and learning concerned with a same focus (e.g., L2 learning) since the attention is not gathered around one matter, but spread to others simultaneously. "If there is laughter in the classroom, then learning cannot possibly be occurring" (ibid).

As a consequence, because of the aforementioned ethics, Shade (1996) suggests that "we only tell certain jokes in certain circles [...]. To some people, being a grownup or an adult means acting sober, somber, earnest and serious at all times!" (35) In fact, the one who produces humor in non-appropriate contexts (e.g., classroom) would show signs of being immature. As Korobkin (1988) advocates, we ought to always show ourselves as "serious professionals," (154) thus, not "trivial, foolish, or ignorant" (ibid) in order to keep a certain image of ourselves. Let's not forget that "laughter, like crying, is the body's natural response to stress" (104) and let's not forget that we live in a world whose main features are stress and pessimism, as a matter of fact, "a pessimist forgets to laugh!" (95) Let's think then in laughing terms, let's try for one time to treat laughter ... seriously. As Meyer (1997) suggests, "humor is pervasive in all human communication;

in meetings, in politics,⁶⁵ at home, and at work, humor may be welcomed as a unifying and relaxing force [...]” (Meyer, 1997: 189). In other words, let’s go against the old bore. Let’s fill our lives and all of its contexts (e.g., work place) with stimuli apt to reach one of the most natural phenomena our mind undergoes, namely humor and laughter.

Wandarsee (1982) brings to our attention the fact that, luckily, “[today] the social norms of schools have changed to recognize the value of an instructor who has a sense of humor. Humor, if judiciously used, can enhance classroom learning.” (212) Not all the teachers are old bores, but rather they recognize the helpfulness of humor (if well used) in the classroom environment. As Korobkin (1988) advocates, credit needs to be given to the fact that, “humor in an [...] environment can create an atmosphere where learning can flourish!” (91) Humor ought to create a more relaxed atmosphere where learning is enhanced by humor’s powerful effects. In fact, “shared laughter is a powerful way to reinforce learning, and it helps to make tasks less laborious and threatening” (154).⁶⁶ If one ought to laugh more because surrounded by laughing people, then, one ought to learn more in an environment where everybody learn together.

However, humor’s use and employment is all up to the teacher. If teachers do decide to use humor, he/she will have to ensure that this phenomenon has “[no] negative associations that classify [...] as mere misbehavior, as wasted time or as causing the loss of face or credibility” (154). Whether we want it or not, humor could discredit the figure of the teacher by making him/her look less credible, or less serious, leading to bad

⁶⁵ For instance, Cook (2000) tells us about “the angry dueling exchange between Tony Blair and John Major [which] was halted and defused by a humorous intervention from the Speaker of the House of Commons, Betty Boothroyd: Order, order! I think there are a lot of members of this house who have got a good deal of pre-electional tension. This intervention raised laughter from both sides, momentarily uniting them in the joke. [...] Boothroyd uses “pre-electional tension” to suggest the phase “pre-menstrual tension”, often invoked by men to explain emotional and unreasonable outbursts by women” (72).

⁶⁶ See also Ziv (1976) for further discussion.

behaviors on behalf of the students. More importantly, Korobkin (1988) also suggests that:

Teachers are in a position to create the kind of learning atmosphere that invites healthy laughter over the humiliating laughter of derision. Only teachers are in a position to encourage the kind of healthy clowning that adds to the sense of group cohesion rather than detracting from it. And only teachers can establish classroom codes of behavior which allow humor to become both a teaching tool and a skill which promotes the enjoyment of learning (154).

We certainly cannot make someone learn, but we can more than certainly invite someone to learning. We are hypothesizing here that humor ought to safely invite a student to engage in a more relaxed learning experience, where there is not necessarily laughing *at*, but laughing *with* as a way of teaching and learning by example.

If we think about it, one important element of humor is with no doubt intelligence as much as creativity, leading some psychologists to believe that humor “is an expression of creativity of even giftedness.” (ibid) They believe that the same paths used to create humor or perceive humor involve the employment of high cognitive abilities (e.g. language play as we will see). Thus, at this level, there is no reason for teachers to fear the use of humor in teaching. On the contrary, managing successful resolution of an incongruous element presented in an L2 learning context, namely the foreign language classroom, the student will show to have mastered higher L2 cognitive thinking skills.⁶⁷ Of course, there is not a right way to teach, and there is no right technique to apply to teaching. Rather, there are good suggestions to employ in the field; humor ought to be one of them.

A study reported by Wandarsee (1982) showed how students consider humor to be a helpful tool:

⁶⁷ However, as Forabosco (1994) suggests, incongruity could cause, “perplexity, curiosity, anxiety, [and] fear [...]” (14).

95% of the 270 students queried thought that humor helps to make presentation of material more effective. Three main reasons [...] were identified: 1) it eases the tension between student and teacher and helps to establish rapport; 2) it maintains attention; and 3) it creates interest in the class⁶⁸ (Wandarsee, 1982: 213).

After all, if humor worked for *Sesame Street* as a mean of “blend[ing it with] other entertainment features [namely the television] with more formal educational content,” (ibid) why should it not work in classrooms as well?⁶⁹

3.3 Success of Humor in Hospitals and in Work Places

Humor proved to be successful in both hospital environments and in work place environments. These positive occurrences support the idea that, if humor indeed worked powerfully in these extremely busy and serious environments, it ought to work in classroom environments as well. Classrooms are as serious as these, and humor if well employed could be used in these settings to good effect.

3.3.1 Humor as Medicine of the Body

Psychoneuroimmunology, also known as the mind-body medicine⁷⁰ is the new science which aims to find some possible relations between the mind and the body. It seems possible, according to Adams *et al.* (2001), that “a merry heart doeth good like a medicine.” (281) In other words, what makes a person be happy is reached through the use of humor.⁷¹ “Humor therapy is not a static regimen of memorized jokes and number of chuckles per hour [but indeed] comes out when therapists decide to let their humorous parts join the interaction with a patient.” (ibid) In other words, humor therapy is the effort

⁶⁸ See also Ziv (1976) for further details.

⁶⁹ Others disagree and point out that the evidence on the effectiveness of humor in the classroom is far from being established. See Attardo (2005: personal communication).

⁷⁰ See Micozzi (2001) for further details.

⁷¹ See also McGhee & Goldstein (1983 Vol. 2) and Robinson (1991) for further discussion.

an individual employs in order to “put mirth into a patient encounter or hospital setting.” (Adams *et al.*, 2001: 284) The research on this new type of medicine has not yet received much focus since most of the studies are still being carried out. Thus, such a new type of remedy is relatively new to the field of medicine which vividly criticized this remedy as much as all the new types of alternative medicine. Until 1970, medicine looked down on humor considering it “unprofessional or uncaring or even as beneath the standard of care” (291). With time though, the excitement created around this new issue has “broken down many of the customary prejudices against humor, which have previously characterized humor as frivolous, unimportant, or vulgar and reprehensible” (288). Above all, the results have quieted all the bitterness sprinkled around by traditional medicine. In fact:

Many uses of the opportunity for using humor and mirthful laughter have been instituted and operated successfully.⁷² Physician Patch Adams is one of the luminous pioneers in this humor movement where humans attempt to improve the quality of their lives, both in health and at times of diseases (ibid).

With Adams’s joy, the patients, their relatives and even the staff at the hospitals gave totally positive feedback on humor⁷³ therapy’s applications on both physiological⁷⁴ and neurological levels, keeping the program more than alive.

⁷² See also Cousins (1979).

⁷³ Even here, not all the humor can be beneficial. In order to work, humor has to be carefully chosen. For instance, according to Adams *et al.* (2001), humor must be applied in hospitals “with kindness, compassion, and empathy. For the most part, humor in medical practice should take the form of gentle amusement, twinkling eye contact, and only in the rarest situations, jokes.” (291) We have to remember that each individual is different and consequently, humor varies “according to culture, age, ethnic, or economic background, race, sex, and so on.” (290) Humor can beautifully create positive reactions, “but it can also backfire and create alienation.” (292) See also Meyer (1997) for further details. Nurse Patty, mentioned in Adams *et al.* (2001), shared a story happened to her and to two of her patients. The nurse reported the joke created by her first patient related to a noticeable scar and its resemblance with “Market Street” (ibid) in San Francisco, going “from Twin Peaks to the waterfront.” (ibid) Both the nurse and her first patient found this joke amusing and laughed loudly. On the other hand, when the nurse used the same joke with the second patient, who had a similar scar, she did not seem particularly enthusiastic about it. On the contrary, the patient was totally offended by the joke. This tells us that we should first get to know our audience (or patients) before telling any jokes. A hard thing to do in an educational environment!

⁷⁴ Adams *et al.* (2001) “have been able to demonstrate significant impacts of mirth and mirthful laughter in the cardiovascular, respiratory, muscular, immune, endocrine, and central nervous systems.” (280) See also Fry (1994) for further details.

For instance, Cousins (1979) showed the benefits of humor acting as a pain killer. In this regard, Adams *et al.* (2001) reported two studies which were respectively carried out by The Clemson nursing program and the Texas Tech Medical School.

The recipients of the first study were elderly people “in a long-term care facility” (282) who were divided into two groups. One group watched a comedy video every night for six weeks while the other watched a drama. After the patients watched the video, the nurses asked who wanted an analgesic. “There were fewer requests for pain killers from the comedy group” (ibid).

The recipients of the second study were similarly shown either comedy or serious material for just 20 minutes while another group was given “relaxation therapy.” (ibid) Once the researchers measure the pain thresholds of patients, using inflated blood pressure cuffs, the recipients who watched the comedy material “had the greatest pain tolerance of these groups” (ibid).

We live in a world dominated by isolation, depression, anxiety, and even boredom. This should automatically lead us to think of humor as the best medicine to fight against fear, frustration, unhappiness and anger. In this optic, Adams *et al.* (2001) also maintain that:

Now humor and laughter, with new knowledge and new attitudes about their values and benefits, increasingly spread their magic into areas of human experience that had previously not been visualized as appropriate places for their presence [namely workplaces and even classrooms (289).

The work of Adams *et al.* (2001) showed to be very useful in order to see humor, not as an enemy, but rather as a beautiful tool placed at people’s disposal at any time in every place, even in classrooms.

3.3.2 Humor as Medicine of the Mind: No More *Now Get Back to Work!* Threats

Again, humor is a beautiful tool to employ in one's life as a way to relieve one's psychological status. It ought to perfectly function as a mechanism of defense against the unforgettable and harmful words in the work place, *Now get back to work!*

Humor would in fact help one better cope with the stressful situations⁷⁵ one has to handle while at work. Using Martin & Briggs's words (1986), "a sense of humor permits one to better cope with the aversive experiences of life" (63) which tend to take us down. This means that the employment of humor, if well used, would help individuals take it easy in life and its environments. One is, with no doubt, the work place where a lot of stress can be accumulated. Humor can also be exploited as a marketing strategy or to persuade.

Interestingly, three studies have been carried out by Heinecke (1997), Meyer (1997) and Lyttle (2001), on marketing, in a Community Children's center and on business ethics training, respectively. The studies illustrate how the varieties of types of humor available can differently be employed in different work-place environments with great effects.⁷⁶

The study carried out by Heinecke (1997) simply grouped 10 of the most successful examples in marketing which proved humor's effectiveness in the field. According to Heinecke (1997), humor proved to be an amazing effective tool if well employed. One example that serves to illustrate humor's power in the marketing field is reported as follows:

PHOTO (BLACK & WHITE); TICOR TITLE INSURANCE SALES APPOINTMENT CAMPAIGN: It seems no one's ever waiting to hear from insurance salespeople. But that made no difference when 1,300 handpicked prospects received this simple personalized

⁷⁵ See also Kuiper *et al.* (1995) for further details.

⁷⁶ This further supports the idea according to which, the more careful the humor is employed in a specific context or environment, the more positive and more significant the results.

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greeting card requesting an appointment. And the results? All 1,300 agreed to an appointment! (Heinecke, 1997: 38)

Unfortunately, the photo that accompanied the humorous example could not be retrieved, but luckily, Heinecke himself suggested to this writer the link <http://www.cartoonlink.com>. Here, similar examples were found and are reported below. Note that they can be personalized with the presumable buyer's name (this writer's name and last name) as a way to additionally catch the attention of the customer.



"What I want you to do is swoop down to Elisa Sileoni over there, get her to agree to our terms and fly right back here."



"Folks, we'll get started just as soon as Elisa Sileoni gets here."

The study carried out by Meyer (1997) showed how humor constituted an ordinary daily occurrence among employees working as teachers at a Community Children's Center. The focus of the study was based on the analysis of "interactions among staff members and encounters between staff and children." (Meyer, 1997: 193) The humorous narratives of 18 of the 20 staff members conveyed hints about: "(1) work life in the organization, (2) good and bad events at work, (3) decision-making in the

organization, (4) conflict resolution,⁷⁷ and (5) humorous events at work” (Meyer, 1997: 193). The staff was under examination through a set of 19 interviews carried out during a period of eight weeks and followed an examination of the participants. The study brought to our attention three significant results humor produced:

1) “Valuing a sense of fun” (204) was assessed by the workers who also perceived a more pleasant environment to work in by recalling similar narratives which additionally created an increase in cohesiveness and unity in the organization (other than reducing stress and tension);

2) “Clear communication” (ibid) was an important value in the organization to emphasize; though, the use of humor indicated any possible miscommunication be considered as “no big deal” if not threatening. Hence, it showed, as Berger (1993) suggests, “that problems of communication are enormous” (158). For instance, Mr. X reminds Mr. Y to pick up Mr. X at 8pm (of the following day). If Mr. Y is momentarily inattentive, Mr. Y will not get that the pick up is for tomorrow, and not for that same day. Thus, Mr. Y will risk waiting endlessly for Mr. X on that same day.

3) Children’s awareness of teachers’ harmless superiority was the last result humor produced. Teachers laughed at children’s mistakes, without ridiculing them (e.g., *Ha ha, no, it is not goed, but went. Repeat: went*)

The last experiment,⁷⁸ carried out by Lyttle (2001) in the classroom setting, used “persuasion theory”⁷⁹ as a way to determine the actual effectiveness of humor responsible

⁷⁷ In fact, humor would not only unify members, but also divide them. See Meyer (1997) for further details.

⁷⁸ The experiment was exclusively concerned with the ethics awareness training meant to, 1) make workers more sensible toward events which might have ethical consequences, and to 2) encourage them to consult the offices in charge of these situations.

⁷⁹ According to this theory, “people who are in a good mood are less likely to disagree with a persuasive message” (Lyttle, 2001: 207).

for “increasing liking of the source” (Lyttle, 2001: 207) and “[increasing] trust in the source” (208). During the experiment, which used Dilbert’s comic strip, the 148 participants, between the ages of 18 and 20, had to answer to the issue proposed⁸⁰ by choosing one of the five possible answers available.⁸¹ In the four mini-cases created, the answers either 1) fully included ironic wisecracks as the fifth additional choice, 2) or included wisecracks but not Dilbert’s drawings offering the fifth choice “I prefer not to answer”, 3) or included Dilbert’s drawings but lacked wisecracks having as the fifth choice a drawing of Zeus on the very right corner of the page and a small arrow, 4) or included neither Dilbert’s drawing nor wisecracks, but had the figure of Zeus, the small arrow, and the response “I prefer not to answer.” The results showed that for each case, “removing all the humor reduced the gain score for reported intention to consult the Ethics Office”, (211-12), “removing the cartoons reduced the gain score for reported intention to consult the Ethics Office,” (212) “removing the wisecracks reduced the gain score for reported intention to consult the Ethics Office,” (ibid) and at last “removing either wisecracks or the cartoons reduced the gain score for reported intention to consult the Ethics Office.” (ibid) Thus, the results empirically supported⁸² the view of humor as a persuasive mean.

⁸⁰ “Your work in a purchasing department and have been asked to select a vendor for an upcoming purchase. One of the competing companies is owned by your manager’s spouse. Your manager told you that she wants you to make the decision all on your own, and to take care not to give any extra consideration to her husband’s bid. In your judgment, the husband’s bid has the best value. How are you going to handle this?” (Lyttle, 2001: 209)

⁸¹ “(a) select the husband’s bid and make the purchase, (b) talk to the Legal Department, (c) tell your manager you’re uncomfortable making this decision without first discussing it with the Ethics Office, and (d) select the second best bid and make the purchase.” The fifth response (wisecrack) is “Try to break up the marriage” (Lyttle, 2001: 209).

⁸² Even though the results were very small. Additionally, the experiment lightened the differences among the different types of humor. Visual humor would in fact be less effective if presented on its own. On the other hand, the humor that involves listeners was proved to be the most effective of all.

Not surprisingly, the three studies supported the ideas of positive humor's applications in the workplace even though it was employed for different purposes and in different contexts; but again, if it worked in hospitals and in work places, it ought to presumably work in the foreign language classrooms as well.

3.4 The Usefulness of Instructional Humor

We have seen that humor has a beneficial impact in hospital and work environments. We suggest, by analogy, to apply instructional humor in the classrooms. Instructional humor ought to teach by example, without diminishing the focus placed on learning. In fact, according to Berger (1993), "the use of appropriate instructional humor seems to enhance learning" (158) rather than diminish the value and function of the learning experience. Additionally, it seems to help students with new material⁸³ thought to be, as Shade (1996) suggests, "a threatening experience" (73).

As a consequence, instructional humor was the type of humor chosen by this writer because it was thought to be the best humor a teacher could possibly employ in the classroom. Instructional humor can be defined as the type of humor considered to be relevant to the learning experience.⁸⁴ However, it needs to be pointed out that in every

⁸³ In fact, as Shade (1996) suggests, "humor [appears to be] especially effective when introducing new material" (73).

⁸⁴ In this regard, Ziv (1988a) carried out two experiments on humor in teaching and learning in higher education programs. "The first study used relevant humor in a one-semester statistics course in an experimental group and no humor in a control group. One hundred sixty-one students participated, and the results showed significant differences between the two groups in favor of the group learning with humor. [...] The second experiment was a replication of the first one, using 132 students in a one-semester introductory psychology course. The students (all females) were divided randomly into two groups. Humor was used in one, and the same teacher taught the second group without using humor. Again, significant differences were found: The group studying with humor in teaching can influence student learning are given" (5).

type of humor there is an element of risk involved (e.g., a student might feel offended by a joke no matter how careful the teacher is).

This writer thought that by using instructional humor (as opposed to any humor delivered spontaneously in a *bona-fide* context or considered by Berk 1998 as *high-risk*), students have the chance of recalling the grammar rule they are required to learn by associating it with the joke that contained it (even though this joke had not necessarily produced laughter or enjoyment). In other words, the employment of humor would help students make associations between the funny joke and the new rule encountered as a way to remember it. Interestingly, the employment of humor in the classroom environment is shown to better work (Hill, 1988) if related to the material that is being taught to the students.

This writer is not the only one who emphasizes such a belief. Korobkin (1988) notices that “instructional changes are occurring and being encouraged in the college [classrooms]” (155). In this regard, Hill (1988) advocates that instructional humor eases “concept learning where anecdotes can facilitate comprehension [but not only as we will see later]” (21).⁸⁵ Jokes tell a story and usually listeners recall a familiar situation to them.

The *old* study carried out by Kaplan & Pascoe (1977) and the two studies carried out by Ziv (1988a) showed that statistically significant positive effects of humor were detected by those students exposed to the humorous lessons. For this reason, this writer hopes to be replicating such results as a way to support the research and applications in this field.

⁸⁵ See section 2.4.

3.4.1 A Quick Sketch of Humor's Benefits in Education

A great deal of benefits for humor's applications in education⁸⁶ have been listed in the humor literature tending to additionally and non-indispensably 1) spread the matter rather than shrinking it to few inclusive concepts, and 2) create repetition and redundancy.

Of course, overabundance and space did not permit listing them all,⁸⁷ although a very exhausting listing was furnished by Korobkin (1988) as a way to present the main ideas on humor's capabilities⁸⁸ and effects on the learning experience – and on the psychological level of course.

According to Korobkin (1988), humor in education would presumably increase:

- retention of material
- student-teacher rapport
- attentiveness and interest
- motivation towards and satisfaction with learning
- playfulness and positive attitude
- individual and group task productivity
- class discussion and animation
- creativity, idea generation, and divergent thinking"

On the other hand, humor would decrease:

- academic stress
- anxiety toward subject matter
- dogmatism
- class monotony" (155)

It should be stressed that Korobkin (1988) implicitly assumes that the benefits have not been proven to actually exist. Until research confirms them, it would be irresponsible to encourage teachers to introduce them in the classroom (Attardo, 2005: personal communication).

⁸⁶ However, as Hill (1988) suggests, humor is not a replacement for repetition as a teaching methodology," 21) but it is rather a strategy to use to get students involved (i.e., motivated) with the learning experience.

⁸⁷ This is somehow similar to the dozens of theories developed around the subject matter of motivation in chapter 1.

⁸⁸ Let's not forget humor's important social function. See Morreal (1983), Berger (1993), Fry (1994) and Allen (1989) for more details.

3.5 Humor in the Foreign Language Classroom: The Benefits

There is no need to bring research to support the idea according to which college and adult students perceive a certain degree of anxiety due to academic pressure. However, this writer would like to point out that during her current tutoring sessions, the 36- year-old tutee said “you know, there is no pressure now” several times. She wanted to convey the idea that, according to her, learning a foreign language is now a more positive experience because there is no pressure dictated by the curriculum.

Such anxiety is shown *generally* by those students who find themselves seated in a foreign language classroom in order to fulfill their general requirements, make it to the graduation ceremony and get employed.⁸⁹ In this regard, humor is conceived, by Oxford & Shearin (1994), as a mean of making “the L2 classroom a welcoming, positive place where psychological needs are met and where language anxiety is kept to a minimum” (Oxford & Shearin, 1994: 24).

At a more material level, humor would be particularly useful in the foreign language classroom since it ought to involve higher cognitive thinking⁹⁰ activities among which, hypothetically speaking, we see included: evaluation of stimulus, language play, and retention of material– especially new material – and its consequent recall.

With regards to the retention of material, and similarly to what has been earlier said on instructional humor, humor ought to enhance the retention of material when this

⁸⁹ More in particular, Schumann (1999) indicates that Anglophone North Americans “generally have no need to learn a foreign language beyond very limited school requirements frequently find an unpleasant appraisal of the language learning situation sufficient reason to abandon the enterprise” (76). For instance, student X enrolled in this writer’s Spring 2005 IT 2600 course (M-W-R-F, 8am-8.50am), after earning a low grade, made negative appraisals and decided to abandon the enterprise.

⁹⁰ Thus, a student’s affective filters must be low if this occurs. See Krashen (1985) for further details.

same material is presented, through humor, to the students who find it relevant. Therefore, humor showed to be relevant to both the students' interests (paying attention to what humor involves) and, as Shade (1996) suggests, "to the academic content trying to avoid all possible distractions" (5). As a consequence, Shade (1996) maintains that:

Humor may act as a catalyst and allow for unusual juxtapositions and connections to be made between various items of information. Therefore, it may enhance the storage of information by providing a necessary context into which seemingly unrelated items can be better organized. Humor may also increase the information retrieval process by providing specific, easy-to remember retrieval cues that can be stored along with material to be learned (74).

Again, humor can help the students make connections between the humorous element(s) and the grammar rule(s) as a way to 1) give more sense to the learning material, and 2) organize in memory a specific language rule (e.g., Italian double pronouns → *te la*) which is apparently different from another one (e.g., Italian definite article → *la*). If the storage (or organization) is enhanced, perhaps its recall is as well, simply speaking, by recalling the image of the humorous joke that contained the grammar rule, both stored in memory. In fact, according to Perret (1984), with humor:

A funny image appears in the mind of the listener [since] the real joke is in the image that each person sees. [...] Most memory systems convert abstract ideas to familiar images because they are impressed upon the mind more easily and are retained longer [thus recalling would be eased]. (12-13)

Humor's recipients, according to Perret (1984), create their own images in their minds that best represent the joke heard as a way of facilitating its retention and consequently its recall (e.g., if a recipient hears a joke about two persons falling off a building, the recipient will have in mind the image of the actual two persons falling off of it). Using Shade's words (1996), retention is increased by using humor as "a sort of visual

mnemonic⁹¹ device” (105) which is employed to promote the creation of images in our minds. Consequently, efficient storage of information will give the student the opportunity to recall the items in storage related to the foreign language by consciously selecting the most appropriate ones. McDonough (1981) suggests that by doing this, learners will be able to “reconstruct and revive meanings and material given in the foreign language.” (70)⁹² In this regard, Cook (2000) suggests that people tend to recall certain wording not made up of “the mundane discourse of everyday life, [...] but those marked by unusual, elevated [...] language, those reinforced by parallel structures such as rhythm and rhyme [...]” (199) In other words, we tend to recall more easily those texts which differ from the ones our ears are used to. Thus, this writer postulates that a slightly strange text (but not too strange) might help the recall.

Thus, the function of language play would constitute one of the triggers responsible for laughter and more in particular a specific form of humor.⁹³ If I say, “trentatrè trentini entrarono a Trento tutti e trentatrè troterellando” I will likely create some sort of reaction in the recipient (e.g., perception of the alliteration) which could be positive, such as a smile, or even negative, such as frustration. Hedonistically speaking, playing with language tends to be generally positive, and tends to decrease anxiety and enhance the language learning. According to Cook (2000) there is a general acceptance that play of a non-competitive kind is a way of inducing a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.” (183) Moreover, play is not a “sin.” (203) On the contrary, it is an

⁹¹ If memory’s item recall is more easily attained, than an individual is more motivated and less frustrated because he/she will more likely forget the material. It is also true that the number of items recalled in another language is, as McDonough (1981) suggests, “slightly smaller” (62) depending on what is being recalled. Thus, humor, if well employed, ought to help store the information in memory in a more organized manner. See McDonough (1981) and Hill (1988) for more details.

⁹² According to McDonough 1981, recall is eased not only by recalling images, but also by recognizing “similarity” (63) and “frequency” (64) of words.

⁹³ See Broner & Tarone (2001) for more details.

intellectual act the mind produces (as much as humor is)⁹⁴ which seems to be effective in language teaching⁹⁵ and in language learning in particular. Play's benefits would be several:

- 1) It is assumed that play would be meant "for relaxation or stimulation" (Cook, 2000: 124) or, in other words, "to burn off energy." (ibid) Recalling the term hedonic, human beings look for pleasure (rather than pain) thus engaging in (any) form of play that would help the individual reach the pleasurable element needed to keep internal (i.e., mental) and external (i.e., physical) equilibrium.
- 2) Play is determinant in social interactions. More importantly,
- 3) play is determinant in first language acquisition. Thus, this writer hypothesizes that it ought to be determinant in second language learning as well. In fact, as Cook (2000) suggests, "the notion that play is something which appears only at the later stages of language acquisition is believed by children's first language acquisition, and by a growing literature on the popularity and spontaneous appearance of language play at early stages of second language learning." (204)⁹⁶ If children have not yet mastered cognitive skills (responsible for any higher thinking), then these same children would not be able to engage in play, considered to be,

⁹⁴ I.e., once we come to master the ability of playing with L2 words creating laughter, or in other words, when we can perceive humor as a form of intellectual exploitation meant to help the L2 learner. Nolan (2000) indicates that "absurd humor, non-sense, and wordplay are examples of intellectual humor;" (35) as much as language play is.

⁹⁵ Though, play cannot be intended as "play as learning" (Cook, 2000: 182), but as "a play element *in* learning" (ibid). We do not want to disrupt the traditional strategies employed in a curriculum, but we cannot certainly neglect the existence of that "pleasurable" (193) activity which is play. Let's not forget that the word *school* comes from "the Greek for *leisure*" (203).

⁹⁶ See Broner & Tarone (2001) for further details.

again, an intellectual act. Piaget's theory of human's cognitive development speculates that such intellectual acts begin at age 11 (during the Formal Operational Stage), when L1 acquisition is very much advanced. Similarly, play would be possible in L2 learning when L2 is vastly developed to permit any form of play. It is true that,

4) play would additionally stimulate creative thinking (through creative thinking children start mastering cognitive abilities) leading to word play.

A very good example that supports this idea is the one maintained by Cook (2000) related to the fact that any person who learned L2 efficiently is able to engage in creative thinking and is able to deliver it (through a joke or a story) and would also be able to buy an airline ticket. On the other hand, we do not take for granted that any individual who is able to buy an airline ticket (using L2) is also able to tell a joke – or a story. In other words, if a learner manages to play with words, it means that he/she has reached a certain proficient⁹⁷ knowledge of the language he/she is using (either L1 or L2); thus the learner has reached a more elevated thinking capacity. Additionally,

5) play would be a more receptive and complete process meant to keep language's competence and performance strictly connected. In other words, play would create a connection between the "formal" language and its "social and psychological uses." (175) In this regard, such optimal play would help the L2 learner learn the proper grammar rules of the target language, but also understand the values and beliefs of the L2 community

⁹⁷ Though, Cook (2000) suggests that "play [...] can take place at all levels of proficiency" (204).

(often forgotten by teachers) as a way of stimulating and enhancing learner's motivation toward the learning experience which often takes place in the classroom environment - rather than outside of it. Ultimately, 6) play, a "resembling and ordered game," (Cook, 2000: 184) would help the learner accept the figure of the teacher, together with the acceptance of those "regulative rules" (185) which are "imposed and enforced, sometimes against the will of those involved, but they are not essential to the identity of the activity" (ibid). For instance, tasks are given to students so that they would practice the new material they encountered. However, if they do not engage in the tasks, they are still students enrolled in the foreign language classroom. Thus, play would be meant not only to accept and submit to the figure of the teacher, but also to accept the rules involved with learning (it is like reading out loud the instructions contained in the box of a board game so that all the participants are aware of the rules).

In order to perceive an experience, a social situation or an educational one favorably (or possibly negatively), individuals evaluate stimuli which, according to Schumann (1999), "lead to an emotional response" (28). We all perceive stimuli which act all around us to produce all sorts of reactions. As Adams *et al.* (2001) suggest, it is the individual himself/herself who decides to perceive a situation as threatening or challenging. The scale they adopt to positively evaluate a stimulus is principally based, as Schumann *et al.* (2004) advocate, "[on] novelty, pleasantness, and relevance to the individual's goals or needs [...]." (25) If a joke is told and is perceived as either

entertaining (because it produces a pleasurable effect which will help an individual engage in a specific behavior), new (because for instance it is incongruous) or of interest to an individual (as to be determinant for his own goals or needs), then this individual will more likely make positive appraisals (Schumann, 1999).

In terms of foreign language learning, Schumann (1999) points out that “positive appraisals [...] enhance language learning and negative appraisals inhibit second language learning” (32). Such statements are largely supported by studies undergone on motivation, “diary studies and autobiographies of second language learners” (ibid) and is also mentioned before in chapter 1.⁹⁸ Hence, the exploitation of humor ought to create positive reactions increasing language learning by humor’s recipients.

Conclusion

Humor’s positive effects were shown in studies undertaken in hospitals and in businesses (other than the work places) which hint at laughter’s effectiveness. If laughter worked in these places it ought to work in the classrooms as well – as long as appropriate humor is employed. In this regard, instructional humor, as opposed to any high-risk humor, seemed to be the most appropriate form of humor available in classrooms to ease learning. Humor would seem to have specific benefits that Korobkin (1988) exhaustively grouped even though they have not been proven to actually exist until research confirms them. Additionally, humor ought to have cognitive benefits if applied to the foreign language classroom, namely retention and recall of material, language play and evaluation of stimuli. The latter would be the key responsible for motivation. According to this writer’s

⁹⁸ See section 1.7.1.

hypothesis earlier proposed in this thesis, when a positive appraisal is made, an individual engages in behaviors likely to reach a fixed goal.

In conclusion, since humor that is evaluated positively seems to be associated with positive feelings and bodily reactions, it stands to reason that introducing humor in the classroom should extend these positive apperceptions to the totality of the classroom experience, including the materials being taught. It should be stressed, to ward off potential misunderstandings, that all the research linking positive effects to humor in the classroom is inconclusive (Attardo, 2005: personal communication). At best, we can hope that humor's pleasant associations will rub off, so to speak, on the classroom experience. Any further claims remain speculative at this time. In particular, no evidence has been advanced causally linking humor and learning.

4. Presenting the Experiment

The present experiment was done as a way to determine humor's true effectiveness on motivation in foreign language learning.

4.1 The Hypothesis

Based on the literature presented toward the end of chapter three, humor should enhance students' foreign language learning by helping the students themselves evaluate positively the FLL experience. Such positiveness would instigate the initiation of positively motivated behaviors apt to consequently engage in the accomplishment of their final goal/s (e.g., pass the foreign language course). Concretely, this means that it was hypothesized that the use of humor in the classroom would

1. increase learning, measured by test scores
2. increase motivation over time

4.2 Method

4.2.1 Subjects

The subjects involved in this study were students at Youngstown State University (YSU), Youngstown, OH, enrolled in an intermediate Italian foreign language course (IT 2600) in the Fall 2004. During this period, this writer taught both intermediate courses which covered chapters 10-18 of Lazzarino *et al.* (2002): course (a) (control group) went from August 23 through December 1, every Monday and Wednesday, 6.10pm-7.50pm, for 15 weeks; course (b) (experimental group) went from August 23 through December 3, every Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 11.00am-11.50am, for 15 weeks. The 15

students involved were between the ages of 18-55. The control group was composed of 4 students; the experimental group was composed of the remaining 11 even though only 8 were present at the time the surveys were given. None of them were Italian majors.

4.2.2 Design: Keller's Model

In order to establish humor's effectiveness, students' motivation was measured through the employment of CIS (Course Interest Survey), designed by Keller (1993) with a theoretical foundation represented by the ARCS model.

The study measured motivation by using four variables, according to Keller (1987), responsible for human motivation, namely attention (A), relevance (R), confidence (C), and satisfaction (S). These four factors, defined by Keller's ARCS⁹⁹ model, would in fact cause an individual "to become and remain motivated" (3). In order to measure these four conditions, the Course Interest Survey (CIS) was created in order to assess students' motivation with reference to a specific course. The CIS was appropriately validated and measured by Keller (1993). Reliability estimates based on Cronbach's alpha measure were obtained for each subscale and the total scale. They were:

Attention:	.84	Confidence:	.81	Total Scale:	.95
Relevance:	.84	Satisfaction:	.88		

Scores on the CIS were correlated with course grade and with grade point average. The results are reported in Table 4 as shown in the next page:

⁹⁹ The ARCS model was originally developed by Keller (1987) with the purpose of indicating the strategies to employ in instruction - rather than shaping behaviors. Interestingly, humor would appear to constitute a useful strategy to be employed in the classroom as a mean to enhance attention. See Keller (1987) for more details.

Table 4

	Course Grade	Point Average
Attention	.19	.01
Relevance	.43	.08
Confidence	.51	.01
Satisfaction	.49	.03
Total Score	.47	.04

As Keller (1993) indicates:

All of the correlations with course grade are significant at or beyond the .05 level, and none of the correlations with grade point average are significant at the .05 level. This supports the validity of the CIS as a situation specific measure of motivation, and not as a measure of general motivation for school learning” (2).

CIS consists of 34 statements whose response scale ranges from 1 to 5 (1= Not true; 5= Very true). Reverse items were included and which restated scales in a negative manner (1= Very true; 5= Not true). Two alternate scoring methods were available to the researcher in order to examine the CIS: 1) reporting the scores in terms of factors (ARCS) and total score, 2) averaging the scores in terms of ARCS and a total score.

The first possibility is accomplished by summing the scores for each subscale (ARCS) to set the total score. The minimum score on the 34 item survey is 34, and the maximum is 170, with a midpoint of 102. The minimum, maximum, and midpoint for each subscale vary because they do not all have the same number of items.

The second possibility for scoring is finding the average score for each subscale and the total. For each respondent, the total score on a given scale was divided by the number of items in that scale. This converts the totals into a score ranging from 1 to 5 and makes it easier to compare performance on each of the subscales.

The latter was preferred by this writer because since there are different numbers of questions in each section, this results in a standardized score.

4.2.3 Materials

The material (instructional humor) presented to the students throughout the course was comprised of 51 jokes (plus an image to conclude the series) which were used throughout the intermediate Italian courses. The jokes were grammatically connected to the material the curriculum asked to cover during the 15 weeks. Some of the jokes were modified by this writer as best as she could in order not to offend any of the students' backgrounds and to better fit this writer's exigencies. Some of the jokes had references to the Italian culture and habits and were not considered, by this writer, an Italian native herself, to be offensive to the Italian ethnicity. Moreover, some of the jokes were employed more than once because they seemed to fit different contexts.

Most of the jokes were picked from Ragusa & Roversi (2002). Some others come from the Italian web sites www.barzellette.it and www.bastardidentro.com and are reproduced below:

CAPITOLO 10

Futuro Semplice

(Ragusa & Roversi, 37)

Questa e' la trascrizione di una autentica conversazione via radio tra due navi avvenuta il 10 ottobre 1995.

NAVE 1 Per favore, dovrete deviare la vostra rotta 15 gradi a nord o non potrete evitare una collisione.

NAVE 2 Vi consigliamo di deviare la vostra rotta di 15 gradi a sud o non potrete evitare una collisione.

NAVE 1 E' il capitano che vi parla. Ve lo ripeto: dovrete deviare la vostra rotta.

NAVE 2 No. Ripeto, siete voi che dovrete deviare la vostra rotta.

NAVE 1 Questa è la portaerei Xxx. Siamo dotati di tre Destroyers, tre Cruiser e numerosi vascelli di scorta. Vi chiedo di deviare la vostra rotta di 15 gradi a nord o saremo costretti a prendere adeguate contromisure che garantiranno l'integrità della nave.

NAVE 2 Questo è il faro. Passo e chiudo.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 45)

- Ora ti racconterò una barzelletta che ti ucciderà dalle risate.

- No, no ti prego, sono troppo giovane per morire.

Usi speciali del futuro

(Ragusa & Roversi, 164)

Mia adorata Sara,

ti amo più di quanto le parole possano dire. Per questo ti scrivo che per provare il mio amore sarò pronto a scalare le vette più alte del mondo, per te attraverserò i deserti più desolati e le lande più fredde del Polo Nord.

Ti amo.

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P.S. Verrò a prenderti domenica se non piove.

Si impersonale

(Ragusa & Roversi, 20)

Alcuni credono che si debba prendere cura degli amici.

Alcuni credono che si debba prendere cura delle persone che appartengono allo stesso club.

Alcuni pensano che si debba prendere cura solo di se stessi.

Altri ancora pensano che sia compito del governo.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 264)

Una contadina va nel pollaio, mostra un uovo di struzzo alle galline e dice: - E' così che si lavora, cocche!

(barzellette.it)

Due cani si incontrano:

“Bau!”

“Miao!”

“Miao?! Come sarebbe a dire Miao?!!”

“Ma non lo sai? Al giorno d’oggi si è spacciati se non si conoscono almeno due lingue!”

Formazione dei nomi femminili

(barzellette.it)

Un tizio va dal dottore e chiede: "avete dell'acido acetilsalicidico?"

Il farmacista risponde: "Vuol dire dell'aspirina?"

E il tizio: "Si...mi scordo sempre il nome!!!"

CAPITOLO 11

Usi di ne

(bastardidentro.com)

Un signore di nome Franco sta prestando servizio di sicurezza presso il mercato, vede un vecchietto sopra un camion pieno di mele che le sta sbucciando e mette in un sacchetto i semi. Incuriosito Franco gli chiede:

“Mi dica, perché raccoglie i semi?”

L'uomo del camion sicuro di se:

“Ma lei non lo sa che i semi delle mele sviluppano l'intelligenza!?”.

Franco sempre più incuriosito gli chiede:

“E che cosa se ne fa poi dei semi? Li vende?”.

E l'uomo: “Certamente!”.

“E quanto costano?”

“5euro l'uno!”.

“OK! Voglio provarli: me ne dia tre”.

L'uomo prende 15 euro da Franco e consegna i tre semi. Franco se li mangia e poi pensa ad alta voce:

“Accidenti! Ma con 15 euro mi compravo 20kg di mele, le sbucciavo ed avevo molti più semi”.

E l'uomo: “Vede? E' già diventato più intelligente di prima!”.

“Ha ragione! Me ne dia altri tre...”

Usi di ci

(Ragusa & Roversi, 153)

Un giovane entra in un bar e ordina da bere.

Arriva un altro giovane e si siede accanto a lui. Dopo qualche bicchiere, il primo dice: - Tu hai l'aria di venire dalla città di Xxx.

- Infatti vengo da lì.

- L'occasione merita una bevuta!

E bevono.

- Il secondo chiede: - E tu di che città sei?

- Vengo dalla città di Xxx.

- Anch'io! Beviamo!

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E bevono.

- E in quale zona sei nato?

- Dietro la stazione.

- Anche'io ci sono nato!

E bevono un'altra volta.

- In che via?

- Via del Corso!

- Anch'io ci vivo!

E bevono.

- A che numero?

- 20.

- Anch'io!

Bevono e bevono ancora. In quel momento, squilla il telefono. Il barista risponde e dice : - Sì. Gli affari vanno benino. I gemelli Rossi si stanno ubriacando un'altra volta.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 156)

Quanti italiani ci vogliono per cambiare una lampadina?

Due. Uno per cambiare la lampadina e l'altro per grattugiarci sopra il parmigiano.

Pronomi doppi

(Ragusa & Roversi, 86)

Un signore va in chiesa a confessarsi.

- Mi perdoni padre perché ho peccato.

- Dimmi figliolo, qual'è il tuo peccato?

- Durante la guerra, ho tenuto nascosto un uomo in soffitta.

- Questo non è un peccato. Anzi, è un'opera buona che merita il paradiso!

- No, padre, invece credo proprio di aver commesso un peccato. Vede...mi sono fatto pagare da questa persona 200.000 mila lire al giorno.

- Bè..potevi farne a meno...Comunque l'hai fatto per una giusta causa.

- Allora mi assolve?

- Certo!

- Un'altra domanda, padre...

- Dimmi figliolo...

- Pensa che dovrei dirglielo che la guerra sia finita?

(Ragusa & Roversi, 135)

Un gobbo legge su un giornale un annuncio: "Medico guarisce tutte le malattie". Pieno di speranza, l'uomo va da questo dottore.

- Dottore, davvero guarisce tutte le malattie?

- Certo.

- Anche la gobba?

- Sicuro!

Detto fatto, il medico prende con le mani la gobba e gliela toglie. Entusiasta, il gobbo corre da un suo amico zoppo e gli racconta dell'accaduto. Lo zoppo va immediatamente dal medico prodigioso

Appena lo vede, il medico gli chiede: - Anche tu hai la gobba?

- No...

- Eccotela!

E gliela attacca.

Imperativo (tu)

(Ragusa & Roversi, 12)

Una ragazza al cinema: - Togli le mani dalla mia spalla! No...non tu. TU!!!

CAPITOLO 12

Aggettivi indefiniti

(Ragusa & Roversi, 102)

Effect of Humor on Motivation in FLL

Un'alpinista sta scalando una montagna. A un certo punto, scivola e ruzzola lungo un ripido crinale. Per fortuna riesce a fermarsi proprio sul bordo di un burrone profondo duemila metri. Cosciente che non riuscirà mai a risalire, l'alpinista comincia ad urlare.

- Aiuto! C'è qualche persona che può aiutarmi?

Nessuna risposta.

Urla più forte: - Aiuto! C'è qualche persona che può aiutarmi???

A questo punto risponde una voce possente: - Sì. Ci sono io.

- Aiutami per favore, sto precipitando. Ma dove sei? Non ti vedo!

- Non mi vedi perché sono Dio. Ora calmati e fa' come ti dico: buttati nel burrone e io manderò due angeli a prenderti al volo.

L'alpinista rimane immobile, poi urla: - C'è qualche altro???

(Ragusa & Roversi, 107)

- Ho delle notizie da darti.

- Comincia dalla buona.

- Sono tutte e due cattive.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 119)

Un gruppo di amici è in giro per la città e dice ad alcuni amici: - Guardate, sta arrivando mio padre.

- Dov'è?

- E' quello che ha in mano un sacchetto della spesa.

- Ci sono tre uomini che arrivano con i mano un sacchetto della spesa, Marco – dice Luca.

- E' quello con la maglia gialla.

- Tutti e tre hanno la maglia gialla.

- E' quello con il cappello.

- Tutti e tre hanno il cappello.

- E' quello con i baffi neri e la cinta nera.

- Tutti e tre hanno i baffi neri e la cinta nera.

A questo punto il Marco prende un sasso per strada e lo tira al padre e dice: “E' quello dolorante con la mano in testa, Luca!!!.

Pronomi indefiniti

(Ragusa & Roversi, 126)

- Dottore, quali funghi si possono mangiare?

- Tutti. Ma alcuni si mangiano una sola volta.

Negativi

(bastardidentro.com)

La moglie al marito: “Tesoro perché non giochi mai a pallone con i bambini?

Il marito: “Perché non rimbalzano bene”..

(Ragusa & Roversi, 19)

Lei: - Caro, preferisci le donne belle o quelle intelligenti?

Lui: - Non preferisco né l'une né l'altre, amore mio. Io preferisco te!

Imperativo (Lei)

(Ragusa & Roversi, 12)

Una ragazza al cinema: - Tolga le mani dalla mia spalla! No...non lei. LEI!!!

CAPITOLO 13

Condizionale presente

(Ragusa & Roversi, 19)

La mamma legge una favola al figlio per addormentarlo.

- Mamma, potresti smettere di leggere? Vorrei dormire.

Dovere, potere e volere al condizionale

Effect of Humor on Motivation in FLL

(Ragusa & Roversi, 13)

In un cinema c'è un tipo stravaccato lungo tre sedili. Passa l'uomo delle bibite e gli chiede: - Cosa vorrebbe? Un'Aranciata, una Coca-Cola?

- Un'ambulanza, sono caduto dalla galleria.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 204)

- Mi chiamo Pa... Pa... Pa... Paolo.

- Potrei chiamarti solo Paolo?

(Ragusa & Roversi, 102)

Alla dogana, il doganiere domanda: - Lei ha armi?

- No.

- Alcool?

- No.

- Droga?

- No.

- ...Ne Vorrebbe?

Condizionale passato

(known by this writer)

Ci sono due persone nel deserto che strisciano sulla sabbia assetati più che mai e improvvisamente vedono un signore che vende bevande e gli chiedono: "Due aranciate!" e l'uomo: "Mi dispiace, ma non ne ho più" e si allontana pensando "Magari avrebbero preferito due chinotti...."

(Ragusa & Roversi, 257)

Una sera di un tranquillo giorno, un uomo entrò in un bar in grande ritardo.

- Ho fatto a testa o croce per decidere se venire o meno. Testa, sarei venuto. Croce, sarei rimasto a casa.

- Ma sei arrivato in ritardo!

- Sí. Ho lanciato la moneta per mezzora ed erano tutte croci....

Pronomi possessivi

(Ragusa & Roversi, 120)

Un uomo va dal barbiere e chiede: - Quanti prima di me?

Il barbiere risponde: - Cinque.

L'uomo va via, torna l'indomani e chiede: - Quanti prima di me?

Il barbiere risponde: - Sei.

L'uomo va via, torna l'indomani e chiede: - Quanti prima di me?

Il barbiere risponde: - Cinque.

L'uomo va via e il barbiere dice al garzone: - Segui quell'uomo e vedi in quale casa si dirige.

Il ragazzo torna e dice: - La tua!

CAPITOLO 14

Pronomi relativi

(known by this writer)

Un uomo dice: - Potrei raccontare quella barzelletta del paziente a cui il medico disse che sarebbe bastato un cucchiaino ogni due ore. Quando lo operarono una settimana dopo: aveva lo stomaco pieno di cucchiaini.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 155)

Quanti italiani ci vogliono per cambiare una lampadina?

Allora, mio cugino Vincenzo conosce un ragazzo che ha un fratello fidanzato con una ragazza il cui padre ha fatto il militare con un certo Riccardo il cui cognato è stato a scuola con uno la cui madre aveva un negozio di scarpe. Una delle due commesse usciva con un ragazzo la cui mamma andava a messa con la moglie di un certo Guido che conosce un tipo con una sorella sposata con un elettricista, che lo farebbe per niente.

Effect of Humor on Motivation in FLL

Chi

(Ragusa & Roversi, 63)

Due pesci rossi nuotano nella loro boccia di vetro. A un certo punto, uno chiede all'altro: - Tu credi in Dio?
E l'altro: - Certo! Chi credi che ci cambi l'acqua tutti i giorni?

(bastardidentro.com)

Una signora sente suonare alla porta, va ad aprire e si trova di fronte
due uomini vestiti di nero.

"Chi siete?" chiede spaventata.

"Buongiorno signora" dicono quelli, "Abbiamo delle brutte notizie sul vostro cane."

"Cosa gli è successo? Sta male?" chiede Maria.

"No, peggio." rispondono i due.

"Si è ferito?" domanda ancora la donna.

"No, peggio."

"Si è rotto qualcosa?"

"No, no, ancora peggio."

"E' in coma?"

"No... peggio."

"E' morto?"

"No, peggio."

"Come peggio che morto?"

"Ma no signora stiamo scherzando, è che non sapevamo come dirle che è
morto!"

(barzellette.it)

Un granchio fa una corte spietata a una sardina, ma questa resiste con ostinazione:

- Non accetterò mai la corte di uno che cammina tutto per storto come fai tu. A me piace chi cammina
dritto!

Il granchio ce la mette tutta e, facendo sforzi terribili, riesce a presentarsi una sera alla sardina camminando
dritto come un fuso. La sardina, sconvolta, cede e vanno a cena insieme e trascorrono una stupenda serata
promettendosi a vicenda amore vero per tutta la vita.

La mattina dopo, lei incontra il granchio per caso e lo vede camminare tutto storto e, furiosa, gli grida
dietro:

- Ricominci a camminare di traverso? Vigliacco. Non mi ami già più!

- Ma sì che ti amo! - risponde lui - Solo che non posso ubriacarmi in continuazione...

Costruzioni con l'infinito

(Ragusa & Roversi, 66)

Perché i canguri odiano i giorni di pioggia?

Perché i bambini rimangono a giocare in casa.

(Ragusa & Roversi, 127)

Perché la gallina ha attraversato la strada?

CHARLES DARWIN Era il gradino evolutivo logico successivo alla discesa dall'albero.

ISAAC NEWTON Una gallina ferma tende a restare ferma. Una gallina in movimento tende ad attraversare
la strada.

BOB DYLAN (In musica) How many times has the chicken crossed the road...

LA SFINGE Dimmelo tu.

Nomi e aggettivi in -a

(barzellette.it)

Il papa, con l'aiuto di Dio decide di premiare un giovane che è sempre stato buono con tutti. Il papa gli
dice: - Voglio premiarti e potrai scegliere tra saggezza, ricchezza e bellezza. Il giovane ci pensa su e sceglie
la saggezza.

L'indomani racconta tutto agli amici del suo incontro col papa e del miracolo avvenuto. Gli amici vogliono una prova e gli chiedono di dire qualche cosa, e il giovane, sempre ottimista e più saggio che mai risponde:
- Era meglio se prendevo i soldi...

CAPITOLO 15

Passato remoto

(Ragusa & Roversi, 159)

Un amichetto racconta a Francesco di quando sua nonna morì.

- Sai, cadde dal quinto piano e volò in cielo dieci anni fa.

E Francesco: - Accidenti! Ma come fece a rimbalzare così in alto?

(Ragusa & Roversi, 167)

C'era una volta un famoso capitano che fece moltissimi viaggi su tutti i mari, vincendo tempeste e pirati. Era molto ammirato e benvenuto sia dalla ciurma che dagli ufficiali.

Il nostro capitano compiva ogni mattina uno strano rituale: prima di salire sul ponte andava nella sua cabina, spostava un quadro raffigurante un veliero, apriva la piccola cassaforte celata da quel quadro, ne estraeva un foglio di carta piegato in quattro, lo apriva, lo ripiegava, lo rimetteva dentro la cassaforte, richiudeva la cassaforte, risistemava il quadro e finalmente saliva sul ponte dove attendeva ai suoi doveri di capitano.

La scena si ripeté per anni e anni, e l'equipaggio, che spiava lo strano rituale, era curiosissimo di sapere cosa fosse scritto su quella carta. Si trattava forse della mappa di un tesoro? Un giorno il capitano morì. Dopo aver celebrato il funerale in mare, il secondo ufficiale e la ciurma si precipitarono nella cabina del comandante. Il secondo aprì la cassaforte, prese il foglio, lo lesse, impallidì e lo mostrò all'equipaggio. Sul foglio c'era scritto: "Babordo: sinistra. Tribordo: destra".

Numeri ordinali

(Ragusa & Roversi, 17)

Un signore e il figlio stanno visitando un centro commerciale. Camminando, la loro attenzione viene colpita da due splendidi pareti argentate che si aprono e si chiudono da sole. Il ragazzo chiede al padre: - Cos'è quella cosa, papà? E il padre, per la prima volta al cospetto di un ascensore, risponde: - Non lo so, figlio mio, non ho mai visto niente di simile in vita mia.

In quel momento, una vecchietta si avvicina lentamente, aiutandosi con un bastone, all'ascensore e preme un bottone. Le porte si aprono e la vecchietta entra in una piccola camera. Le porte si chiudono e i due, padre e figlio, vedono che si illuminano successivamente tutti i numeri sopra la porta, dal primo, al secondo, al terzo, al quarto, quinto, sesto, settimo, ottavo, nono e decimo, l'ultimo. Poi succede il contrario, i numeri si illuminano via via dal decimo, al nono, ottavo, settimo, sesto, quinto, quarto, terzo, secondo e primo finché le porte si riaprono e viene fuori una bellissima ragazza di una ventina d'anni.

Il vecchio la guarda stupito, poi dice al figlio:

- Corri a chiamare tua madre.

Volerci vs. Metterci

(Ragusa & Roversi, 92)

Quanti cantanti country ci vogliono per cambiare una lampadina?

Quattro. Uno per cambiarla, uno che canta quanto dolore al cuore gli ha dato la perdita della lampadina, uno che canta di come si è follemente innamorato della nuova lampadina, e uno che lancia il cappello in aria urlando "Yeaahhh!"

(Ragusa & Roversi, 8)

Quanti istruttori di aerobica ci vogliono per cambiare lampadina?

5. 4 la cambiano in perfetta sincronia e uno dice: - A sinistra, e a sinistra, e a sinistra, e a sinistra, e prendila fuori, e mettila giù, e prendila su, e mettila dentro, e vai a destra, e a destra, e a destra, e a destra...

(Ragusa & Roversi, 147)

Un signore torna dal golf tardi la sera e stanco morto. Appena si sdraia sul divano si addormenta e si risveglia a sera tardi. La moglie gli chiede: - Ma caro, come mai ci hai messo così tanto a tornare a casa? E come mai sei così stanco oggi?

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- Ti ricordi di Antonio? Il mio compagno di golf? Be'... è morto oggi alla quarta buca!
- Ma... è terribile!
- Dillo a me! Per tutte le altre quattordici buche, tra, trascina Antonio, raccogli la pallina, trascina Antonio, leva la bandierina, trascina Antonio, ritira...

CAPITOLO 16

Congiuntivo presente

(Ragusa & Roversi, 15)

Paolo ama teneramente la sua vecchissima nonna, e per Natale decide di regalarle un pappagallo parlante perché le tenga compagnia. Va in un negozio di animali e insiste per avere un pappagallo che non solo sappia parlare, ma possieda anche un vocabolario vastissimo. Il negoziante gliene mostra uno veramente sorprendente e Paolo lo compra a carissimo prezzo. La vigilia di Natale il pappagallo viene recapitato alla vecchia signora, e il giorno di Natale Paolo telefona alla nonna e le chiede: - Allora, nonna, ti è piaciuto l'uccello che ti ho mandato?

E la vecchietta, entusiasta: - Era squisito.

Verbi ed espressioni che richiedono il congiuntivo

(barzellette.it)

Due cani si incontrano.

"Bau!"

"Miao!"

"Miao?! Come miao?!"

"Al giorno d'oggi uno è spacciato a meno che non sappia almeno due lingue!"

Congiuntivo passato

(Ragusa & Roversi, 79)

- Dottore, dottore, non credo sia stata un'allucinazione! Vedo coccodrilli rosa dottore! Solo coccodrilli rosa!!!

- Ha visto uno psichiatra?

- No, solo coccodrilli rosa.

CAPITOLO 17

Congiunzioni che richiedono il congiuntivo

(barzellette.it)

Due cani si incontrano:

"Bau!"

"Miao!"

"Miao?! Come sarebbe a dire Miao?!!!"

"Ma non lo sai? Al giorno d'oggi uno è spacciato a meno che non sappia almeno due lingue!"

Altri usi del congiuntivo

(Ragusa & Roversi, 148)

Due signori stanno giocando a briscola. A un certo punto, al limite del campo passa un funerale. Uno dei due uomini smette di giocare, si toglie il cappello, si alza in piedi e si raccoglie in silenzio finché il corteo funebre non è passato.

- Non sapevo che fossi così gentleman, - dice l'altro.

- Comunque sia..siamo stati sposati per tretacinque anni!

Congiuntivo o infinito?

(barzellette.it)

Non capisco:

1) Come mai le donne preferiscono mettere il mascara tenendo la bocca aperta?

2) Come mai la Lemonsoda è fatta con aromi artificiali e nel detersivo per i piatti trovi vero succo di limone?

4) Quando producono un nuovo cibo per cani "più gustoso", in realtà, chi lo ha assaggiato?

5) Perché Noè non ha voluto che quelle zanzare affogassero?

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- 7) Conoscete le indistruttibili scatole nere degli aerei? Perché la gente non preferisce costruire tutto l'aereo con quella roba???
- 8) Perché le pecore non si restringono quando piove?
- 9) Se volare è così sicuro, come mai quello dell'aeroporto lo chiamano ... Terminal? Mah...

Capitolo 18

Imperfetto del congiuntivo

(barzellette.it)

Signore, Ti ringrazio affinché io provassi le difficoltà,
perché ho imparato l'arte di sopravvivere.
Ti ringrazio affinché io incontrassi l'arroganza,
perché ho capito il valore dell'umiltà.
Ti ringrazio affinché mi facessi conoscere la sofferenza,
perché ho diviso il pane della solidarietà.
Ora vorrei rivolgerti una preghiera:
...non sarebbe possibile una tregua?

Trapassato del congiuntivo

(barzellette.it)

Che io l'avessi davvero meritata era scontato! Evviva ! Mi hanno dato la patente ! Finalmente posso guidare la mia macchina senza dover stare ad ascoltare l'istruttore che ripete continuamente : « Attento ! Senso vietato", "Stai andando contro mano!", "Attento a quella vecchietta, frena, frena!", ed altre frasi del genere. Proprio non so come ho fatto a sopportarlo per due anni...

(barzellette.it)

In un paesino di provincia vive una giovane coppia di sposi, che però non riesce ad avere figli.
Confidandosi con il parroco del paese, questi gli suggerisce di affidarsi alla preghiera e di fare un viaggio a Lourdes e accendere una candela per ottenere aiuto dal Signore.
I due, approfittando delle vacanze, si recano quindi in pellegrinaggio a Lourdes e seguono i consigli del parroco.
Dopo poco tempo il parroco viene trasferito in un altro paese.
Dopo molti anni, ritorna in visita nel suo paesino e, ricordandosi della coppia di sposi, decide di andarli a trovare.
Quando bussa alla loro porta, gli apre un bambino di circa dieci anni e il parroco fra sé pensa: "Però, il consiglio che gli ho dato è stato utile!"
Il parroco allora:
- Ciao piccolo, sono in casa mamma e papà?
Il bimbo:
- No, sono fuori!
- Ma torneranno tardi?
- Non saprei di preciso, la mamma è andata con i miei due fratellini più piccoli dal dottore perché aspetta due gemelli...
- E tu sei in casa da solo?
- No! C'è mia sorella più grande che sta dando il biberon alla mia sorellina di 7 mesi!
- E tuo papà?
- Non sono certo, è partito ieri, credo fosse andato a Lourdes a spegnere una candela...

Correlazione dei tempi del congiuntivo

(Ragusa & Roversi, 155)

Un gruppo d'italiani sono in visita alle cascate del Niagara. A un certo punto, la guida esclama: - Ecco le cascate! E credo che se facciate un po' di silenzio riuscirete anche a sentire il rumore.

(source n/a)



Credo che abbiamo trovato Nemo ...

4.2.4 Procedure

The CIS was given twice in each course, once at the beginning of the semester (respectively on September 20, 2004 for the control group, and on September 17, 2004 for the experimental group), the other toward the end of it (respectively on November 22, 2004 for the control group, and on November 24, 2004 for the experimental group), right before the final testing. The students were asked to think of the material they learned up to that date and to indicate the truthfulness of the 34 statements proposed in CIS by keeping track on the answer sheet provided. They were asked to respond to the statements by trying to give true answers which would apply to them rather than giving the answers someone else (i.e., the instructor) wanted to hear. The answers were anonymous.

4.2.5 Results

The first hypothesis was that the use of humor would increase student learning, measured by test scores. This hypothesis was not confirmed. As shown in Table 5 in the next page, test scores for both groups were virtually identical.

Table 5 Exams Average (%)

	Class I (M-W; 6.10pm-7.50pm) NO HUMOR					Class II (M-W-R-F; 11.00am11.50am) HUMOR				
	Test1	Test2	Test3	Test4	Test5	Test1	Test2	Test3	Test4	Test5
Average%	82.38	81.50	77.13	84.63	84.50	80.94	81.54	80.36	87.81	81.45

Total Average Class I (%): 82.02

Total Average Class II (%): **82.66**

The second hypothesis was that student motivation would increase over time by the use of humor in the classroom. Table 6 shows that this hypothesis was not supported either. It shows student motivation in the humor group, measured by the ARCS model at Time 1 (beginning of the semester) and Time 2 (end of the semester).

It can be seen that in fact motivation decreased over time in many cases in the humor group.

Table 6 Humor: Time 1/Time 2 (Average Scores per Subscale: Range is 1-5)

Student	A	R	C	S	Totals Average
1B	4.37/3.25	4.67/3.22	4.87/4.25	4.78/3.33	3.7/3.5
2B	4.12/3.0	5.0/2.55	4.87/2.87	5.0/2.88	4.8/2.8
3B	3.12/4.87	3.0/5.0	3.5/5.0	2.89/4.55	3.1/4.8
4B	4.0/3.5	3.67/4.33	3.0/5.0	2.0/4.22	3.1/4.2
5B	3.25/5.0	4.11/5.0	4.75/5.0	3.89/5.0	4/5
6B	4.12/3.5	4.78/3.44	4.75/4.62	4.44/4.0	4.5/3.9
7B	3.5/3.25	4.67/3.55	4.25/3.37	4.22/3.33	4.1/3.4
8B	3.75/3.37	3.55/3.0	4.5/1.62	4.33/2.88	4/4.3

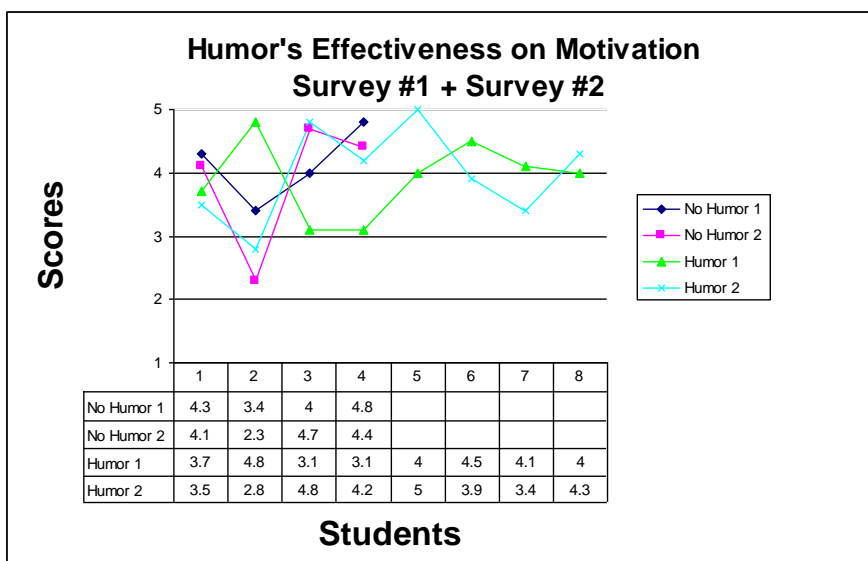
Table 7, shown in the next page, is given as a comparison. It shows the results at Time 1 (beginning of the semester) and Time 2 (end of the semester) for the control group (NO Humor). Again, the results are mixed, with there being decreases in motivation over time for several students.

Table 7 No Humor: Time 1/Time 2 (Average Scores per Subscale: Range is 1-5)

Student	A	R	C	S	Totals Average
1A	3.63/4.0	4.67/3.33	4.25/5.0	4.44/4.22	4.3/4.1
2A	3.63/2.87	3.33/2.33	3.87/2.25	2.89/2.0	3.4/2.3
3A	3.50/4.5	3.44/4.77	4.87/4.87	4.33/4.44	4/4.7
4A	4.87/4.25	4.87/4.44	4.87/4.62	4.55/4.55	4.8/4.4

Overall, hypothesis 2 was not supported. Use of Humor in the classroom seemed to have no effect on student motivation. The inconclusive nature of the data is captured by the following graph, which plots individual student average motivation scores at both survey times, in both conditions.

Graph 1



4.2.6 Discussion

The present study focused on humor as a way to sustain motivation in foreign language learning throughout a course. However, the results indicated no particular significance of humor effects on motivation.

Neither of the original hypotheses was supported. Because of its small scale, with relatively few subjects, the generalization of this study is uncertain. In order to assess humor's true effectiveness on motivation, it would be advisable to repeat the study with more subjects.

Results of the study were also partially determined by the model of motivation used. We need to keep in mind that motivation is a very complex phenomenon which addresses many variables. This study looked at only four of these variables, those which were taken into consideration by ARCS, leaving other ones nearly overlooked (e.g., learners' attitudes). Any study of motivation must also take into account individual differences. The problem is always the same: a strategy may work for one learner, but may not work for another one. A joke could create positive appraisals on behalf of certain foreign language learners, but not others. Further studies will perhaps discuss this concept of motivations.

Conclusion

Motivation appears to be a simple phenomenon to understand even though, once we approach it, several issues arise. Motivation is often confused with similar terms, namely attitudes and orientations, and involves additional variables this writer did not explicitly address (not only ARCS variables, but even desires for instance). Such variables seemed to play a very active role, deeply affecting the trend of individuals' motivation and additionally acting more or less powerful on an individual's behavior.

The copious research in the field indicated the chances of maintaining motivation in the foreign language classroom through the positive evaluation of stimuli.

Since humor was shown to be helpful, when well employed, in *serious* work place environments, this writer chose humor as *the* tool in the foreign language classroom environment because it seemed to create several positive effects (e.g. creating a much nicer and much more relaxed atmosphere to work in). However, humor seemed to be deeply affected by individual differences: if humor works for one L2 learner, it might not work for another.

This writer assumed this hypothesis which is that humor helps L2 learners make positive evaluations about the foreign language learning stimulus (and whatever is involved with it, e.g., taking quizzes) and transform L2 learners' attitudes, increasing their motivation, in order to reach their final goal (e.g., learn the foreign language, thus pass the foreign language course).

Unfortunately, the apparent logical hypothesis that the positive connotations of humor should carry over to the classroom environment, and specifically to learning, was not confirmed. On the one hand, this is surprising, since one would expect that a positive environment should lead to better performance. On the other hand, research on humor in the classroom has notoriously been inconclusive. Thus, this study follows along in this unfortunate tendency. It is possible, as suggested above, that personal differences are responsible for the inconclusiveness of data, in which case replicating the present study with more data would be appropriate. It is also possible that, in true scientific fashion, the hypothesis should be discarded. We can only conclude that further research is necessary to answer these questions.

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