Students' Perceptions of Conversational Jokes and Their Enhancement at The Department of English, Kohat University of Science and Technology (Kust)

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Abstract

The research aimed to assess the capacity of non-native ESL students at Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) to understand English humorous texts, such as conversational jokes, and to explore the factors influencing their ability to recognize and appreciate humor. Employing humor theories, particularly the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) developed by Attardo and Raskin (1991) and further elaborated by Attardo in 1994, 2001, and 2017, the study discovered that the comprehension of English jokes among non-native students is closely linked to their linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and cultural competencies. The analysis revealed that English jokes are deeply intertwined with linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural elements, which often diverge significantly from what is familiar to Pakistani students. To grasp English humor effectively, students need to cultivate not only linguistic abilities but also cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness. The findings indicated that students frequently struggled with humor due to its reliance on cultural references such as jargon, slang, idioms, and metaphors. Additionally, the study underscored that humor that depends on language features requires both an understanding of the target language's linguistic elements and the students' pragmatic skills. Various factors were identified as influencing students' ability to understand humor, including their intercultural competence, familiarity with the target language's culture, and their linguistic, pragmatic, and strategic skills. These competencies are crucial for interpreting the language and connecting it to relevant cultural and contextual elements, which are essential for recognizing the incongruities that humor often relies upon. Moreover, the research highlighted that humor perception involves psychological and emotional aspects, resonating with Freud's theory of release. The study concluded that engaging with English humor effectively requires not only cognitive skills but also appropriate emotional engagement and regulation, particularly given the diversity of humor genres and their potential conflicts with students' cultural backgrounds.

Keywords: Humor Competence, SSTH, GTVH, Script Opposition, Conversational Jokes.

Introduction

It is difficult to decode the actual tone of humor in English language because the rapid paces of conversation often prevent the speakers of other languages. In humor, non-native speakers are often positioned as "outsiders" (Bell, 2006). In the spoken text, non-native learners may not absorb the required sense of humor because humor in any language needs social, cultural, and linguistic competence. These contextual competencies may bring semantic distance between the spoken text and the non-native learners due to which the interpretation bounces over mind and makes the cognitive shifts fail. Mark Twain (1907) says, "Humor in English is hard to appreciate, though, unless you are trained to it. The English papers, in reporting my speeches, always put "laughter" in the wrong place" (p.2). He emphasized that many English Language Learners (ELLs) struggle with comprehending English Language humor due to linguistic and cultural challenges, and there is a lack of training chances for it in the regular TESOL curriculum. In the context of joking, we have had a glimpse into the 'culture of the language learner' (Davies, 2003). The researcher will encapsulate the perception of comic collision of or oscillation between two frames of reference. The two frames are the native English jokes in stand-up comedy which possesses the comic tone of humor discourse and the non-native learners of English at Kohat University of Science and Technology. What patterns of comic discourse in this cross-cultural and interactional sociolinguistic environment are possible to analyze is the grabbing interest of this study. This stroke of spontaneity often keeps the non-native speakers or

learners as outsiders due to which they cannot detect "what the speaker is flouting with which maxim of quality". However, this point of complexity should not be a serious excuse for the learners of 'L2'. However, research shows that non-native speakers could shift from the role of Outsiders to insiders as they used more humor and developed more friendships (Strawhorn, 2014).

From the previous research studies, it is clear that non-native learners are not that competent in their perceptions of jokes. Iranian learners have a lower ability to perceive humor than native speakers (Farnia et al. 2020). Due to the high-flown context of jokes, non-native learners are usually passive participators. Non-native speakers are completely or partially Outsiders as they usually play the role of passive listeners (Strawhorn, 2014).

Apart from the understanding of conversational jokes, humor in general also proves fruitful results in the classroom environment. Thus, it might be possible that by incorporating the element of humor, English language teachers may make their teaching more effective instead of relying on the traditional teaching style in the English language classroom (Nayyar & Zeeshan, 2017). Humor can also enhance the learning ability of students in the English Language Classroom (Abdullah & Akhter, 2023). Teachers who combined humor with encouragement and praise created a social environment that was conducive to Foreign Language Education (Dewaele, 2018).

Problem Statement

Humor is something everyone experiences, no matter where they live or what language they speak (Martin & Ford, 2018). However, humor can be different depending on the language and culture. For people learning a new language, understanding and enjoying humor can be challenging because they need to understand both the language and the culture (Mitchell et al., 2010). For example, students learning English at Kohat University watch English TV shows, use social media, and stream videos. They are trying to understand jokes and humor from English-speaking cultures that are very different from their own. To get the jokes, these students need to learn not just the language but also the social and cultural clues that make the jokes funny.

There are not many studies about how students understand humor, especially Pakistani students at Kohat University. This study looks at how well these students get English jokes, what skills they need to do this, and what problems they might face. The goal is to find out if students in the Department of English at Kohat University understand the humor in English jokes and if they get the jokes' tone. The researcher wants to know if they find the jokes funny or not. If they don't get the jokes, the study will try to find ways to help them understand and enjoy humor better. It's important to know that just because someone speaks a language well doesn't mean they understand all the social and cultural aspects of humor (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).

Significance of the Research

The purpose of this study is to investigate how KUST students who are learning English as a second language comprehend and value hilarious English writings. In order to do this, the study divides the primary aim into many smaller objectives: (a) Finding out how well students can understand humorous English content, like jokes, and examining how language proficiency and cultural knowledge affect students' capacity to detect and enjoy humor in English conversations; (b) Determining the difficulties and roadblocks that prevent students from understanding and enjoying English humor in conversational jokes; and (c) Seeing if attitudes towards humor and language and cultural knowledge are influenced by each other.

Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) students studying English may vary in their understanding and appreciation of conversational jokes in English. Proficiency in English and knowledge of the target culture significantly affect their ability to grasp these jokes. Barriers such as limited exposure to English-speaking cultures, differences in linguistic structures, and unfamiliarity with colloquial expressions can hinder their comprehension and enjoyment of English humor.

Additionally, this study addresses the complexity and fast-paced nature of spoken jokes, aiming to equip non-native learners to engage with the dynamic aspects of verbal humor. Spontaneous humor tends to be more common, as scripted humor is often considered less sophisticated and less valuable (Williams et al., 2018). With the help of this study, they will realize all those sensitive barriers of humor in English which may lead to ethnic biases, cultural and religious subjectivity, gender discrimination, racial prejudices, vulgarity towards individuals, and most importantly resentment for any special groups. This negative perception of jokes may stir huge skirmishes among different social groups. To minimize such chances of misconception, the learners need an in-depth evaluation of the spoken text because discourse is the critique of the text in a language.

Research Questions

- What are the students' perceptions of conversational jokes in the English language at the Department of English at Kohat University of Science and Technology?
- What could be the possible strategies to enhance students' perceptions to decode the conversational jokes?

Research Objectives

- To identify the students' perceptions towards conversational jokes in the English language at the Department of English at Kohat University of Science and Technology.
- To explore all the possible strategies to enhance students' perceptions of conversational jokes in English Language.

Literature Review

A quote, attributed variously to Mark Twain, E.B. White, and more recently comedian Barry Cryer, stating that "analyzing a joke is like dissecting a frog: no one laughs, and the frog dies," often appears in both popular and scholarly discussions about humor (Triezenberg, 2008). The word 'humour' came into use much later than many other words. It originally meant something different from what we think of today. It comes from Latin and used to mean 'fluid' or 'moisture.' A long time ago, the word was connected to a medical theory by Hippocrates, who believed there were four 'humours' in the body: blood, lymph, yellow bile, and black bile (the last one was called 'black humor'). For many years, 'humour' was used to describe a person's mood or temperament (Bhikha & Glynn, 2017). It wasn't until the 18th and 19th centuries that the meaning of humour changed to what we know today (Nijholt, 2018). In French, there are two words: 'humour' and 'humeur.' 'Humour' refers to being funny or amusing, while 'humeur' is about mood or temperament (Escarpit, 1960). According to The Cambridge Dictionary, humour means "the ability to be amused by something you see, hear, or think about, which makes you smile or laugh, or something that makes you feel this way" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022a).

Types of Humour

Jokes (Canned Jokes)

A "canned" joke is a type of joke that you often hear people telling in conversations or find in joke books. It's considered one of the simplest forms of verbal humor. Usually, a joke has two parts: the setup and the punchline. The setup introduces the joke, and the punchline is the surprising or funny part at the end that makes people laugh. According to Sherzer (1985), a joke has these two parts: the setup and the punchline. Attardo and Chabanne (1992) explain that the punchline is the final part that surprises the audience or points out something different from the setup (Attardo, 1994, 2001; Suls, 1972). Wordplay is a funny trick where humor comes from the way words sound or their meanings, like puns. A pun is a joke where a word or phrase has two different meanings, and the speaker uses this to make people laugh, or the audience notices it and finds it funny (Wilson, 2021). Freud (1905/1960, p. 39) said that jokes often come from words that have more than one meaning. This can mean using a word in a clever way by mixing or comparing its different meanings. Irony happens when someone says something that means the opposite of what they really mean. For example, if someone says "What a wonderful day!" on a rainy, cold day, that's irony (Martin & Ford, 2018, p. 30). People often mix up sarcasm and irony. Grice (1975) said irony is when a speaker says something that breaks the usual rules of how to speak clearly and politely. According to Grice, irony usually shows a negative or critical attitude (Ruiz et al., 2013, p. 1). To understand irony, you need to know about the rules of conversation and how people usually cooperate in talks. Korkut (2005) distinguishes three primary types: "discourse parody," which focusses on the language used by specific philosophical, social, religious, or ideological groups; "genre parody," which mocks the norms and tropes of some literary genre; and "text parodies and personal styles," that may target specific work of literature, phrases, or authors' styles (2005, pp. 15-17).

The word "satire" comes from the Latin word "Satura," which means "a full plate" or "a dish with lots of different fruits." Satire is a type of humor that points out problems or inconsistencies in people or society by making fun of them (Ruiz et al., 2013). The goal of satire is not just to elicit laughter, but to provoke laughter that aims to reform. It typically targets pretense, falsehood, hypocrisy, or vanity, which the satirist seeks to criticize. Spoonerisms, or speech errors, are another form of humor where letters or sounds are swapped within a word or between two words, either accidentally or intentionally. "A verbal error in which a speaker unintentionally transposes the initial sounds or letters of two or more words, sometimes to humorous effect," is spoonerism, according to the Oxford Dictionaries. Spoonerisms fall into three primary categories according to Vousden et al. (2000): There are three types of errors that people make: 1) anticipation errors (like saying "bake my bike" instead of "take my bike").

Self-disparaging or self-deprecating humor involves the speaker making critical or uncomplimentary remarks about themselves. This form of humor often serves to display humility, make the listener feel more at ease, or create a sense of empathy with the listener. It can reveal a speaker's self-confidence and their readiness to make light of their own faults or shortcomings, suggesting a positive self-image (Norrick, 1993). A retort is a quick, witty, or sharp reply, often in response to an insult, criticism, or provocative comment. It usually involves a clever or pointed comeback. Retorts can be used to defend oneself, counter an argument, or simply engage in a verbal exchange with a touch of humor or sarcasm.A retort is a funny answer, usually witty or cutting, issued in reaction to someone else's comment, according to Dynel (2009) Teasing has been described in numerous ways by different scholars. Some suggest that teasing can involve aggression (Alberts, 1992), while others highlight that it balances aggression with affection (Brenman, 1952). Teasing often involves a mock aggression where the teaser's intent is not to insult but to playfully challenge or dramatize someone's behavior in a light-hearted manner (Dynel 2009, p. 1293). Teasing can evolve into a back-and-forth exchange called banter, where both parties engage in a humorous dialogue. Norrick (1993, p. 29) describes banter as "a rapid conversation of humorous lines oriented toward a common theme, primarily for mutual entertainment rather than topical discussion." Banter is characterized by the quick delivery of successive witty retorts, creating a verbal "ping-pong" effect between participants (Chiaro, 2009). Register clash occurs when elements from a higher register are used in informal speech (upgrading) or when elements from a lower register are used in formal writing (lowering or bathos). This humor technique relies on the incongruity between the style and the content being communicated (Attardo, 1994, 2001). A meme, particularly an "internet meme," refers to the rapid spread and adoption of an idea, phrase, image, or piece of cultural content online (Lankshear & Knobel, 2019). Memes can be phrases, pictures, songs, or videos that quickly gain popularity and are shared widely across the internet.

The Semantic Script Theory of Humor (SSTH)

Raskin's Semantic Script Theory (1985) says that each joke can be understood in two ways. He introduced the ideas of "overlapping" and "opposing." "Overlapping" means the joke can be read in two different ways at the same time, while "opposing" means the meanings are completely different (Raskin 1985). According to Raskin, a joke's meaning is called a "script" (Attardo, 1994). Humor happens when a joke switches from one idea to another unexpectedly. Attardo (1994) agrees with Raskin: a joke is funny if it fits two contradicting scripts (Attardo, 1994, p. 205). Even though Raskin's theory was important, it still connects to the main humor theories and doesn't cover all types of humor.

The General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH)

Raskin's script-based SSTH was substantially reevaluated in 1991 by Attardo and Raskin in the form of the General Theory of Verbal Humour (GTVH). One may think of the GTVH as an improved and enlarged variant of the SSTH. This theory describes a joke using six different kinds of Knowledge Resources (KRs), with a special focus on linguistic humour. In addition, Raskin's theory's script opposition (SO) is reinforced by five more knowledge resources added to the GTVH, which expands upon the SSTH. Attardo and Raskin (1991, p. 312) list the following six Knowledge Resources (KRs):

Script Opposition (SO): This component, introduced in Raskin's SSTH, focuses on the clash between two scripts or ideas considered incompatible, resulting in a humorous contrast.

Logical Mechanism (LM): This aspect addresses the incongruity perceived by the audience in the humorous content, allowing them to discern which script is intended through the Script Opposition. As Attardo (1994) explains, the Logical Mechanism "accounts for how the two senses (scripts) in the joke are combined" (p. 199).

Situation (SI): This describes the things, activities, and implements that make up a hilarious story. "Any joke must be 'about something' (like changing a light bulb, crossing the road, playing golf, etc.)," according to Attardo (2002).

Target (TA): The target of the joke, as noted by Attardo and Raskin (1991, p. 301) and Attardo (2002, p. 178), could be a person, group, behavior, or ideological stance that is mocked or critiqued. Essentially, the target relates to the punchline, although some jokes may not have an obvious target, making this KR optional.

Narrative Strategy (NS): This KR, often viewed as analogous to the concept of "genre" in literary theory, pertains to the syntactic-semantic structure of a joke. In simpler terms, a joke must be told through a specific form such as idiomatic expression, slang, proverb, simple narration, dialogue, or riddle (Attardo, 1994, p. 224).

Language (LA): The linguistic elements required for a text's "verbalization"—that is, for its proper presentation and the "positioning" of its functional features—are covered in this Knowledge Resource. Within the confines of linguistic form, language functions as the joke's essence (Krikmann, 2006, p. 37). The texts and other language components utilised in a light-hearted story are included in LA.

AS for the literature review is concerned, we have many prolific researchers who dig the fertile and dynamic ground of humour in which Bell, N. D. (2007) carefully highlighted the offences created from humor in English between native speakers and non-native learners and find out the strategies of overcoming the challenges often created in the intercultural communication. Shively (2013) presented a case study of an American student, Kyle, studying abroad in Spain and viewed his experiences in L2 (Spanish in this case) humor acquisition through the lens of language socialization. Shively first reviewed current and historical literature on the role of humorous language play during L2 acquisition and reported that humor is and should be used as a tool towards improving the classroom atmosphere and that the ability to use humor is essential to overall linguistic competence.

Rod E-Case et al. (2018) published the article "Overcoming the Challenges of using Humor in Non-native Instructional Discourse". The research has been done in the North American University Classrooms in which the "International Teaching Assistants" are the participants. How the participants encounter humor discourse from the native conversation is the crux of this research. Askildson (2005) conducted a qualitative study to investigate language learners' and language teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of using humor in the language classroom. In the study, Askildson reviewed evidence that humor usage is a proven method for lowering students' affective filters, creating a more relaxed atmosphere, reducing tension and increasing student interest in subject matter.

In Iran Farnia et al. (2020) "Cross-cultural Studies of Perception of Humor by English Native Speakers and Iranian EFL Learners" in which the comparative lens has been taken between the native speakers and the non-native Iranian learners. The research clearly points out that Iranian learners have lower ability to percept humor than native speakers. Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011) reviewed the findings of a number of previous studies on the benefits and functions of using humor within a world language classroom. They stated that the use of humor has been shown to reduce student anxiety, mitigate face threatening acts, increase student motivation and enhance teacher immediacy. From the university of San Francisco, Strawhorn, M. D. (2014) " Insides Jokes: English Language Humor from the Outside " also contributed on the ground of Humor. The researcher tries to prove the non-native speakers completely or partially Outsiders as they usually play the role of passive listeners.

In Pakistan, Nayyar, R., & Zeeshan, M. (2017) published the paper "M.Phil Scholars' Views about the Use of Humor in English Language Classroom in Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan" in International journal. The paper focused on the importance of humor in English in ELT classroom. Abdullah et al. (2015) also contribute by publishing the research paper "Uses of Humor in an English Language Class" which focuses on how humor

enhances the learning ability of students in English Language Classroom. The research rightly indicates that how humor reduces the anxiety and boredom factors of students. Dewaele (2014) points out that teacher who combined humor with encouragement and praise, created a social environment that was conducise to Foreign Language Education (FLE).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Research Methodology chapter outlines a qualitative approach to exploring students' perceptions of humor in English. The study utilized semi-structured interviews with eight M.Phil students of the Department of English at Kohat University, exposing them to Jack Whitehall's stand-up comedy to gauge their responses. This study does not demand "how many students perceive and how many do not" but "Could students perceive the humor in conversational jokes in English or not" due to which it demands the qualitative method.

The researcher incorporated the collected data into the written script and subsequently have it evaluated using the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 2001, 2017). Firstly, the participants exposed to five jokes from Jack Whitehall's stand-up comedy show then their perceptions were analyzed using this model including the important elements like script opposition (SO), logical mechanism (LM), situation (SI), target (TA), narrative strategy (NS), language (LA).

Analysis and Discussion

Joke 1.

> The biggest difference I realized between us and our American cousins, right, when I went to California, was the attitude to drinking. Completely different. I heard sentences in California that I've never heard before in my life. Sentences like this. Oh my God. Oh my God. Did you see Larry? Larry had four glasses of wine with dinner. I think Larry may be an alcoholic. Yes, I know. Four glasses of wine with dinner in America, you're an alcoholic. Four glasses of wine with dinner in Britain, Four glasses of wine with dinner in Britain, you're the designated driver.

The joke uses script opposition by contrasting American and British drinking norms to create humor. It plays on the exaggerated American view that four glasses of wine is indicative of alcoholism, compared to the British perspective where it's seen as a typical amount for a designated driver. This incongruity highlights the absurdity of American overreaction through a British lens. The joke's situational context involves a dinner setting where the American response is depicted as overly critical, in contrast to the more relaxed British attitude.

Participants' reactions varied: Participant A and B were confused and did not understand the cultural references. Participant C understood the joke's basic idea but didn't find it funny, while Participant D grasped the structure but did not find it amusing. Participants E and F showed partial understanding and remained serious. Participant G recognized the humor but did not find it particularly funny, and Participant H understood the joke but did not laugh. This variation in responses reflects how cultural familiarity and personal sense of humor affect the appreciation of the joke.

Overall, the narrative strategy involves setting up an expectation and subverting it through cultural comparison, with exaggerated language reinforcing the cultural divide and enhancing the comedic effect.

Joke 2.

> I miss having a dumb phone. Do you know the phone I miss every day of my life? The Nokia 3310. Oh! There was a phone! Screw the iPhone with all of its apps and its maps and its GPS crap! The Nokia 3310 gave a man all he needed. Stopwatch, calculator, and snake. Stopwatch, calculator, and snake. Screw anything else!

The participant's reactions to the joke about the Nokia 3310 reveal varied responses based on their understanding and personal connection to the humor. Participant A's confusion indicates a lack of grasp on the nostalgia and contrast between old and new technology, reflecting their limited experience with the Nokia 3310. Participant B laughed but had a blank look, suggesting an understanding of the basic humor but not a deeper emotional connection. Participant C's indifference points to a disconnect from the script opposition and narrative strategy, with the situation being too distant or irrelevant for them. Participant D's faint smile shows mild recognition of the joke's logic and critique of modern technology, but it does not elicit strong amusement. Participant E's hearty laughter reflects a clear understanding of the nostalgia, script opposition, and target of the humor, making the joke resonate deeply. Participant F's curiosity without laughter indicates an attempt to understand the humor but an incomplete grasp of its impact. Participant G's puzzlement and lack of laughter suggest a failure to comprehend the joke's logic, script opposition, and cultural references. Finally, Participant H's light laughter reveals partial understanding of the joke's narrative strategy and target, but without strong engagement or emotional impact. Overall, the reactions align with the general theory of verbal humor, showing how familiarity with the cultural references and personal connection to the technology in question significantly influence the effectiveness of the humor.

Joke 3.

> And in my family, my sister definitely gets it worse. Last year, my sister got engaged. That should have been a lovely moment for our family. And it was, for 0.5 seconds, until she then announced she didn't want to get married in a church. Oh, dear! Anyone would have thought she'd told him she'd voted Green. Did not go down well. They went, what do you mean you don't want to get

married in a church, Molly? If I'm paying for this wedding,you're not having it in a fucking bar. If I'm paying for this wedding, it will happen in a house of worship. If I'm paying for this wedding, it will happen in a house of worship. The look on his face when he finds out we booked a mosque.

Participants' reactions to the joke about the sister's wedding reveal a range of responses rooted in their understanding of the humor's structure and cultural references. Participant A's confusion and lack of laughter suggest difficulty grasping the twist between the expected church venue and the unexpected mosque, indicating a limited understanding of the familial and cultural dynamics involved. Participant B's smile, without laughter, shows partial recognition of the script opposition but a lack of deeper engagement, suggesting that while they grasp the basic humor, the cultural context does not fully resonate. Participant C's indifference highlights a disconnect from both the script opposition and the narrative strategy, reflecting an inability to relate to the familial expectations or cultural references. Participant D's faint smile indicates some understanding of the humor but not enough to elicit laughter, showing that while the basic setup is recognized, the punchline's impact is limited. Participant E's hearty laughter reflects a strong grasp of the joke's narrative build-up and twist, with a clear understanding of the cultural clash between the church and mosque, making the joke highly effective for them. Participant F's curiosity without laughter suggests an attempt to understand the humor but a lack of full engagement, indicating a recognition of the script opposition without the complete emotional connection. Participant G's puzzlement and lack of laughter point to a failure to understand both the joke's logic and cultural references, resulting in an ineffective humor experience. Finally, Participant H's light laughter shows a partial understanding of the script opposition and narrative strategy but lacks strong emotional engagement, reflecting some grasp of the humor without a deep impact. Overall, the varied reactions underscore how cultural familiarity and personal connection significantly influence the effectiveness of the joke's humor.

Joke 4.

The first thing that was weird about this gig is that I walked out. Charles and Camilla were sat in the front row in high backed chairs. I was thinking, you are aware this is real life, not Game of Thrones. Also, don't sit in the front row. The front row, as a comedian, is the get out of jail freecard. If the jokes aren't working, you talk to the front row. You ask them what they do for a living.I can't ask Prince Charles what he does for a living. He is the most famous unemployed man on the planet. What do you do for a living? Just sort of sit around, wait for my parent to die. Me too.

The participants' responses to the joke about Prince Charles and the "Game of Thrones" reference reveal varied levels of engagement and comprehension. Participant A struggled with the joke's logical progression due to limited English proficiency and a lack of understanding of British royalty's cultural significance, leading to confusion and no laughter. Participant B faced similar issues, with language barriers hindering their grasp of the script opposition and cultural context, resulting in a lack of engagement. Participant C understood the basic structure and satire but did not find the humor impactful, showing recognition of the joke's elements without a strong emotional reaction. Participant D followed the joke's logic and script opposition but remained unamused, indicating an understanding of the satire directed at Prince Charles without finding it funny. Participant E found the joke confusing due to unclear script opposition and cultural context, with significant language barriers affecting their ability to appreciate the humor. Participant F, like E, struggled with the joke's logical structure and cultural references, leading to confusion and no laughter. Participant G understood the joke's mechanism and script opposition but did not find it humorous, reflecting a recognition of the satire without emotional engagement. Participant H followed the joke's progression and understood the satire aimed at Prince Charles but did not find it entertaining, showing that while the narrative strategy was recognized, it did not provoke laughter. Overall, the varied reactions highlight how familiarity with cultural references and proficiency in language significantly impact the effectiveness of the humor, with many participants struggling to connect due to these factors.

Joke 5.

Americans, you basically do everything that we do, but you do it bigger, and you do itbetter. Like, we have stupid people here, but your stupid people are world-class. And that is notme saying, oh, all Americans are stupid. No, America also has the smartest people on the planet.What I'm saying is that when America does stupid, you do stupid. Like our village idiot is in apark shouting at clouds. Like our village idiot is in a park shouting at clouds.Yours is President.

In the context of the General Theory of Verbal Humour, participants' responses to the joke about the contrast between British royalty and a fictionalized scenario reveal various issues in humor appreciation. Participant A struggled due to limited English proficiency and unfamiliarity with British royalty, resulting in confusion and no laughter. Participant E also faced difficulties understanding the logical structure and cultural context, leading to a lack of comprehension and humor. Participant G grasped the joke's logical mechanism and satire but did not find it funny, while Participant D understood both the structure and satire but remained unmoved. Participant B was partially engaged, with language barriers and a lack of deep cultural understanding affecting their reaction. Participant C understood the joke's basic logic and satire but lacked emotional connection. Participant F was confused by the logical structure and script opposition, leading to partial engagement. Participant H understood the joke and its satire but did not find it amusing. Overall, comprehension issues, cultural unfamiliarity, and personal taste played significant roles in the varied reactions to the joke.

Findings

This research aimed to evaluate the ability of non-native ESL students at Kohat University to comprehend English humorous texts especially conversational jokes. It also explored the factors that may influence these learners' ability to recognize and appreciate humor. By analyzing data and applying humor theories (GTVH; Attardo & Raskin, 1991; Attardo, 1994, 2001, 2017), it was found that non-native students' understanding of English humor is closely linked to their linguistic, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and cultural competencies. The study revealed that English humorous texts are inherently tied to linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, and cultural aspects that often differ significantly from the language, culture, and humor familiar to Pakistani students. To comprehend English humor, students must develop not only linguistic skills but also appropriate cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic awareness. The findings indicated that the jokes used in the study were often beyond the students' comprehension, primarily due to their reliance on cultural references, such as jargon, slang, idioms, and metaphors. The study highlighted that language-dependent humor relies on both linguistic features of the target language and students' pragmatic competence. Moreover, the study identified several variables that might affect students' humor comprehension, including their intercultural competence and awareness of the target language's culture, along with their linguistic, pragmatic, and strategic competencies. These competencies enable students to understand the language and relate it to relevant cultural, referential, and contextual elements, which are crucial for recognizing the incongruity that humor often depends on. Not only humour competence prevent the non-native learners of English language to comprehend the native English conversational jokes but the tone is also delayed which may badly effect the comic relief of the learners. Although, they know the lateral meaning still they usually play the role of passive listeners.

Strategies to Enhance Non-native Learners' Perceptions towards Humor in Jokes

Incorporating explicit instruction on humor into English language classes, starting at the elementary level or above, can significantly enhance students' communicative competence and cultural understanding. Educators should evaluate the relevance of humor instruction based on course objectives and student needs. Developing a specialized humor course or integrating humor into culturally focused modules can be beneficial, though creating such curricula can be complex due to the subjective nature of humor. Resources by Bell, Pomerantz and Bell, and Hay can offer pedagogical guidance. It is crucial for students to engage with authentic language, including colloquial speech and slang, which can be facilitated through media like TV shows such as Friends and Modern Family, and by encouraging interaction with native speakers. For EFL students with limited direct interaction, online tools and English-language media can provide valuable exposure. Recognizing that a student's motivation and cultural background impact their humor acquisition, educators should tailor their approach to individual interests and contexts.

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