From Preference to Understanding: Student Perspectives on Humour in English Language Teaching

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This research investigates the function of comedic elements within English as a Foreign Language pedagogy. The study comprises two distinct phases: the initial segment examines learners' perspectives regarding the integration of humorous components into English language curricula, whereas the subsequent phase analyses English major students' understanding of English comedic discourse. The preliminary investigation employed a comparative methodology, analysing data from 91 respondents comprising 57 primary-school students and 34 university students. Results demonstrate a pronounced inclination among participants towards incorporating comedic elements within the educational setting. This tendency is notably manifested in learners' anticipations that teachers will employ humorous strategies in their pedagogical practice and utilise educational resources containing comedic content. Participants delineated two primary advantages of incorporating humour: the establishment of a more favourable learning environment coupled with enhanced retention of academic material, and the development of more productive and stimulating teacher-student interactions. The subsequent phase concentrates on comedic comprehension among tertiary students, all of whom demonstrated C1 proficiency levels and were assumed to possess adequate cultural and linguistic competence for target language humour interpretation. Notwithstanding the present limitations in sample dimensions and institutional coverage, these preliminary findings are intended to provide a framework for future investigative endeavours. This framework has been designed to justify the appropriate use of humour in ELT classroom and the selection of jokes relevant to the language proficiency of the receivers, with a view to enhancing English learners' ability to use the language in real contexts.

Keywords: humour, teaching English, primary school learners, university students, comprehension

INTRODUCTION

The term 'humour' is defined in a multitude of ways. As it serves multiple purposes, the research is spread in a variety of disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, biology,

computer sturdies, linguistics, sociology, etc. However, the distinction made by Attardo (2020) between the term 'humour', 'mirth', 'laughter' and 'smiling' reflects the idea that humour can be considered an umbrella term for the stimulus, which is simply anything that can cause mirth (the emotional response) and overt, physical responses commonly associated with humour (laughing and smiling). It is therefore inaccurate to consider humour and laughter as synonyms, given that humour does not always result in laughter, even a smile. Kaur (2021) places emphasis on laughter as a visible aspect of humour. In alignment with four overarching concepts of language, logic, identity, and action, Weisi and Mohammadi (2023) put forth a tripartite categorization of humour, encompassing linguistic, existential, and physical dimensions. Their approach centres on verbal humour, defined as the construction of a humorous message through the strategic deployment of linguistic techniques such as puns, irony, and sarcasm. Verbal humour is regarded as a constituent of linguistic play, categorised as any non-serious manipulation of language, discernible in forms such as jokes and anecdotes (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016).

In the Slovak educational context, despite the long-standing recognition of the beneficial role of humour in the classroom, its integration into teaching practices remains limited. There is a notable absence of studies that focus on humour in education. However, some studies (Hanesová et al., 2024; Hanesová & Lipárová, 2025) focus on large-scale questionnaires that sporadically mention the influence of humour on the learning environment, albeit without any intention to measure it. The focus group in those studies comprised pupils in the initial stage of primary education (grades 1-4, age 6-10), whose responses indicated a negative stance towards both present language education and education in general. These respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of diversity in activities, the reliance on textbooks and workbooks, and the emphasis on grammar, which they felt was at the expense of practical skills.

There is thus a pressing need to address the topic in the Slovak educational context, mainly in language education. The objective of two studies is to provide insights into exploring:

➢ students' experiences of the use of humour in their real life and in the English language at higher secondary and university levels,

➢ Student teachers' perception of English humour and their ability to comprehend it.

In order to analyse the data, it was necessary to formulate research questions that would enable conclusions to be drawn. The first study was guided by R1 questions, and the second by R2 questions.

R1Q1: What are the experiences of students with regard to the use of humour in everyday life?

R1Q2: What are students' experiences of the use of humour in the English language classroom?

R1Q3: What are the students' opinions regarding the utilisation of humour in English language teaching?

R2Q1: To what extent are English jokes comprehensible and amusing to university students of English?

R2Q2: What factors impede the comprehension of English jokes – linguistic or cultural awareness?

The research questions were constructed with reference to existing theoretical knowledge within this field, with the objective of gathering empirical data.

Review of Literature

Humour plays a distinctive role in the field of education, being regarded as an efficacious and esteemed instrument for pedagogical purposes (Jeder, 2015). In addition to the beneficial effects of humour on the teaching process, the judicious and effective utilisation of humour can foster a sense of trust between educators and their students. As Jeder (2015) posits, the deployment of humour facilitates the establishment of connections and the creation of a convivial ambience. Furthermore, when educators employ humour in a constructive manner, it enables them to transmit vitality to their learners. Ruch's (2007) conceptualisation of humour as an individual's capacity to discern humour or to elicit laughter has broad applicability in contexts of social reunion. In the context of education, any act or material that elicits laughter from teachers and students can be considered humorous (Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszcyk & Smith, 2006). Nevertheless, the use of humour in education is not solely for the purpose of eliciting laughter. It can also be employed as a pedagogical method to engage students and facilitate concept development (Lomax & Moosavi, 2002).

In contrast with the positive framing of humour, mentioned in the previous paragraph, humour can be seen as a subjective phenomenon, with individuals exhibiting a range of understandings and perceptions of it (Meyer, 2000). Meyer's (2000) framework identifies four functions of humour in communication and can foster connection or alienation depending on how it is used. Given that humour is a communication that is centred on the receiver, it is possible that many teachers may be reluctant to engage in humour exchanges within their classes (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). Civikly (1985 as cited in Bakar & Kumar, 2019) identified the key variables involved in humour, including the speaker, the audience, the topic-message, the setting and feedback. In an educational context, the speaker is typically a teacher, while the students constitute the audience, engaging with the subject matter (i.e., the topic) within the classroom setting and providing feedback.

Humour in education

The literature on the use of humour in education highlights several pertinent aspects of humour, such as types, functions, effects of humour on students, teaching and learning processes and students' evaluation (Bakar & Kumar, 2019). It can be concluded that most studies focus on students' perceptions of using humour in education, and its functions and effects, mainly gaining and retaining student's attention, understanding and recalling the subject matter (Wang, 2014; Nesi, 2012). Other studies investigated the benefits of humour in comprehension and learning improvement and knowledge retention (Ziyaeemehr, Kumar & Abdullah, 2011) or in making the content matter more

interesting (Kember & McNaught, 2007). However, the studies posit that humour is incorporated into learning and teaching processes spontaneously rather than used in a planned way, not viewed as an intended teaching strategy (e.g. Lovorn & Holaway, 2015).

A number of studies have been conducted on the sources and teaching tools that can be used by teachers to improve teacher-learner interaction and learning outcomes (e.g. Chabeli, 2008). These studies emphasise crucial factors, one of which is the teacher's attitude, openness, willingness and empathetic disposition, which allows for the establishment of a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. The forms of humour can be complex manifestations that are associated with behaviours (e.g. joking, teasing and humorous stories) or simple phenomena such as irony and hyperbole, which can be reduced to the utterance stratum (Schmitz, 2002).

In an educational setting, humour can be defined as an act performed through linguistic or non-linguistic means by any of the participants, occurring in various forms and serving different purposes (Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011). According to Schmitz (2002), humour can be defined as any utterance or action that is perceived as amusing and elicits laughter. In this context, humour can be defined as a two-component phenomenon: cognitive (entailing the mental processes involved in both the creation and perception of an amusing stimulus) and affective (viewed as the affective response in the enjoyment of that specific stimulus). Several empirical studies conducted in classroom settings have demonstrated that when the design of lessons and materials integrate affective engagement, it can help students to foster deeper learning (Osacdin & Prudente, 2025). And humour is essential as an engagement tool in communication and learning (Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011).

Humour in language learning

The communicative approach to language teaching prioritises the development of communicative competence, which encompasses a range of competencies, including sociolinguistic and pragmatic abilities, in addition to linguistic competence. Linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of the code, whereas sociolinguistic competence pertains to the social rules of language use. It implies the ability to use the target language appropriately, both in terms of meaning and form. Pragmatic competence enables the learner to reconstruct the meaning of a text in which some information may be absent. In consistency with the linguocultural study (Pavlova et al., 2022), focused on developing the ability to perceive and understand different mentality, humour enables to students to see the differences and similarities in the studied linguocultures.

In addition to the linguistic, sociolinguistic and cultural applications of humour in language education, Schmitz (2002) posits the benefit of humour in the practice of language discourse patterns. The concept can be further developed to suggest that exposure to humour prepares language learners to understand and react to the authentic elements of discourse, while interacting communicatively in real-life situations (Schmitz, 2002). Given that humour is an integral component of authentic communication, it is pertinent to integrate humorous elements into role-plays, interviews and written performances. This approach enables learners to become familiar

with the use of humour in discourse and to gain insight into its patterns of usage. Provine (2000) puts forth the proposition that laughter is frequently restrained during discourse when it functions as a punctuation mark, delineating phrases and creating a punctuation effect in language. Nevertheless, it is imperative that the use of such a device be preceded by a clear objective. In the preparatory phase of a lesson, it is essential to address questions pertaining to the methodology, temporality and rationale.

In addition, it is essential to consider the other three aspects, namely universal appeal, cultural difference and personal taste. Some jokes, stories, or comments are perceived as universally appealing, whereas others are culture-specific. The stimuli that elicit laughter in one cultural context may be perceived as incomprehensible in another. The results of the study investigating the perception of British humour by English native speakers in the UK and the USA indicate that American English L1 users perceived British humour as less amusing and were less able to comprehend the ironic and sarcastic aspects of British humour than British English L1 users (Chen a& Dewaele, 2021). It is plausible that this discrepancy may be more pronounced in the case of Slovaks, who are typically regarded as direct communicators, and the British, who are often perceived as indirect communicators. Conversely, an investigation into the specific forms of humour associated with a particular language and culture can yield profound insights. An understanding of cultural humour can facilitate learners' comprehension of the social and cultural context of the language (Rianita, Sari & Yandra, 2023). The third aspect, as proposed by Medges (2012), pertains to the notion of humour as a subjective, person-bound phenomenon. It is not uncommon for individuals to find it challenging to relate to what others find humorous. This may be due to a number of factors, including personal experiences, emotional states, or a shift in perspective.

Humour and its relevance to the language proficiency level

The Companion Volume to the CEFR (2020) asserts that learners at level B2 can express themselves in an appropriate manner in a language that is socio-linguistically appropriate to the situations and people involved. This capacity to navigate linguistic variations and exercise greater control over register and idiom encompasses the use of humour. Consequently, the C1 level is characterised by the utilisation of humour. In light of the aforementioned considerations, the study adopts a more comprehensive approach, encompassing two distinct research groups, only one of which aligns with the CEFR descriptors indicative of the capacity to comprehend and utilise humour. It is a requirement that university students reach the C1 level, as their language competence at this level enables them to teach English in primary and secondary schools after graduation. Rucynski and Prichard (2021) put forth the proposition that learners must enhance their intercultural communicative competence if they are to become proficient in the humour of English-speaking countries. Such learners are thus able to decode the message and identify the true purpose of the humour. This capacity allows them to differentiate between the act of making a joke and the act of criticising a person or situation (Rucynski & Prichard, 2021). At the C1 level, language learners are typically considered to have reached a sufficient level of maturity. The study related to adolescent maturity indicates that cognitive capacity is reached at adult levels around

age 16, whereas psychosocial maturity is attained beyond age 18. Cognitive capacity is the underlying foundation for logical thinking, whereas psychosocial capacity encompasses an individual's capacity to regulate their emotions and actions in response to external stimuli (Icenogle et al., 2019). This does not imply that humour cannot be incorporated into the curriculum at an earlier stage through the utilisation of pedagogical techniques such as the incorporation of humorous anecdotes or the reading of brief, amusing narratives. However, it is of paramount importance to establish the rationale and objectives for the introduction of humour (Rucynski & Prichard, 2021). One of the objectives is to familiarise learners with the various conventional practices associated with the utilisation of humour in social interaction (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016).

At higher proficiency levels, students are expected to encounter irony and sarcasm, which is a common form of humour used in English-speaking countries. Such instances may occur while reading literary prose or watching videos, or when travelling abroad or meeting native speakers. Verbal irony can be defined as the use of sarcasm, which is regarded as a positive form of language with a negative impact, and jocularity, which is viewed as a negative form of language with a positive intent (Rothermich & Pell, 2015). Nevertheless, the induction of sarcasm and irony necessitates the implementation of specific strategies that are aligned with the underlying principles of the CEFR. The younger generation is adept at identifying image macros on social media platforms that critique social issues and offer witty commentary on daily events. As humour is an integral component of a joke, it is anticipated that C1 proficient learners will be able to comprehend English punch lines, despite the fact that punch lines often serve to reveal the twist in a joke. Medgyes (2012) posits that jokes can be perceived as an intellectual challenge, and therefore individuals with a higher level of mental agility and ambiguity tolerance are more adept at discerning a punch line.

METHOD

In the research design, it was crucial to consider the phases of two studies based on the theoretical framework to obtain empirical data that would enable the formulation of conclusions related to the role of humour in ELT in the Slovak educational context. In both survey-based studies, a quantitative research method was employed to quantify respondents' attitudes and responses. The initial study was predicated on an enquiry into the experiences of students with regard to the utilisation of humour in their real lives and in English language classes at higher secondary (primary school) and university levels. The subsequent study set out to explore university students' perception of English humour, and their ability to comprehend it. Apart from quantitative research, the second study necessitated qualitative data analysis.

The respondents were selected for convenience, with the first survey being conducted at a university and a primary school, and the second at the university only. The respondents addressed in the initial study were comprised of two heterogeneous groups with regard to age, level of education and maturity. The primary objective of the present study was to compare the attitudes of English learners regarding the utilisation of humour in both their real-life and educational contexts. To this end, a questionnaire were administered to a sample of lower-secondary education learners enrolled in

primary school and university students pursuing a master's degree programme. The sample comprised 57 pupils from the primary school and 34 first- and second-year students in their master's degree programmes, for a total of 91 respondents. The survey was disseminated to 100 students (60 attending primary school and 40 enrolled at university). Consequently, the recoverability of the research instrument was 91%.

The second objective was to investigate the perception of English humour and whether English major students achieve its comprehension at level C1. The sample for research 2 was selected using a convenience sampling method and comprised 45 university students enrolled in English-major master's degree programmes at the university. It was assumed that these students should attain English language proficiency at the C1 level. In November 2024, the participants were presented with a questionnaire designed to elicit their understanding of jokes in English, in alignment with the theoretical framework. The survey was distributed in person to 27 students; however, due to an unforeseen disruption during the seminar, it was necessary to send the remaining 18 students the survey via Microsoft Teams.

The requirement for informed consent was applicable to all participants. Students were informed about the concept of anonymity, given that data were collected via two different methods in the first study. In the initial study, data was collected through Google Forms and paper formats submitted via box collection. In the second study, the second approach was the only one employed.

The initial questionnaire (see Appendix A for an example) was developed by the authors of this study using Google Forms. The survey administration software enabled online editing of the survey, which was made available to primary school students on 21st October 2024 and closed in a week later. The survey for university students was open from 26th October to 6th November 2024. The survey comprised 17 closed-ended questions, incorporating a 5-point Likert scale, addressing students' experiences with humour in everyday life and in English classes and examined their perspectives on the use of humour when learning English at school. In the primary school setting, the questionnaire was administered in the students' native language, Slovak, with the objective of ensuring comprehension among the younger respondents, who may not possess the necessary English language proficiency.

The second questionnaire, conducted on 26th November 2025, comprised a series of questions, initially inviting participants to provide their own definition of humour in response to a compulsory open-ended question. Subsequently, the students were presented with six jokes (see Appendix B). They were then required to provide an open-ended explanation of their understanding of each joke. Furthermore, participants were invited to evaluate the degree of humour in the jokes using a Likert scale (not funny at all – not so funny – I don't know – quite funny – very funny). It is important to note that the jokes were sourced from a variety of different contexts and categorised in a number of different ways. Nonetheless, the respondents were not provided with the information on the sources and types. Instead, they were required to guess the types in optional open-ended questions. The employment of irony in the survey was deliberate, with the objective being to facilitate a comparison of the respondents' comprehension of the joke

before and after viewing a video in which a British teacher of English elucidates the characteristics of various joke types, accompanied by illustrative examples. Therefore, the participants were instructed to view the video following the completion of the questionnaire, after which they were invited to articulate their comprehension of the ironic nuances. The researchers immersed themselves in the data, coding segments and performing independent evaluations. They then compared their judgements and reached a consensus on the final decision.

The surveys contained questions that were discussed with the teachers of respondents, who confirmed that the questions had been appropriate and had measured the underlying concept (validity). Reliability was ensured by piloting the questionnaire (pre-survey trials at the beginning of October 2024 by 16 selected students at primary school and 11 university students in their seminar). It was determined that minor alterations would facilitate the distribution of both surveys to a more substantial number of students. In order to ensure the reliability of the results, a second round of surveys was conducted at the beginning of December 2024. The second survey round comprised 45 respondents who had previously participated in the first survey and 23 in the second.

The first study's data analysis technique employed was descriptive statistics, a method that was made possible by the automated nature of Google Forms. The system was configured to generate all the pies and charts for each question and each participating group, thus enabling a comprehensive description of the respondents' answers. The second study's data were described using both statistical and qualitative methods (framing the descriptive codes into categories after multiple reading of students' performances and judgements against the criteria). The researchers then proceeded to evaluate the students' responses against the established criteria, based on the codes. Following this, they compared their respective assessments to reach a consensus conclusion.

FINDINGS

This section presents the data obtained from the aforementioned studies and provides an analytical interpretation of the statistically obtained data. Furthermore, it evaluates the second survey responses against designed criteria.

Students' attitudes towards the use of humour in ELT

The first survey enables an interpretation and comparison of the results between the two student groups. The data are divided into three categories: experiences of humour in everyday life, encounters with humour in ELT, and opinions on the use of humour in ELT. It should be noted that the survey items were not presented to the respondents within the predefined categories, nor were they ordered in a manner that would facilitate comparison.

The initial category pertained to the respondents' experiences with humour and the frequency with which they encounter the phenomenon in their everyday lives. A total of 86 students (94.5%) indicated a preference for laughter, with an average duration of 52 seconds among the student cohort and 34 seconds among the U students. Additionally, 67 students (73.6%) reported the use of humour, with an average duration of 38 seconds

among the PS student group and 29 seconds among the U students. A mere 2.2% of respondents indicated a dislike of humour (2 P), while 5 students (1 P, 4 U), representing 5.5% of the total sample, reported an instance where humour had caused them distress. The second question in this category was focused on the frequency with which the participants encounter humour in their everyday lives. The results indicated that 43.9% (40 students – 25 P, 15 U) encountered humour on a daily basis, 39.6% (36 respondents – 22 P, 14 U) often, 8.8% (8 students – 5 P, 3 U) sometimes, and 7 students (7.7%) stated that they encountered humour infrequently (5 P, 2 U). In terms of the evaluation of experiences with humour, 70 students (76.9%; 38 P, 32 U) indicated that it was a positive phenomenon, 14 students (12 P, 2 U), representing 15.4%, expressed uncertainty about its nature, 6.6% (6 P) reported no experience with humour, and one primary school student (1.1%) rated it as negative. It can therefore be concluded that respondents encountered humour on a regular basis in their everyday lives. The experiences they had of humour ae predominantly positive, and there was a generally positive attitude towards the use of humour and laughter in general. With regard to the comparison of primary school and university, there was only a slight difference between the two entities. Among students from the former, several reported no or negative experiences with humour, while no university student expressed such a sentiment. In addition, the results are comparable, indicating that respondents generally expressed a preference for humour. Specifically, 91.2% of PS students and 100% of U students selected this option.

A further set of questions addressed the frequency of instances of humour occurring during the process of learning English, the means by which such instances occur, and the ways in which students would prefer such instances to occur. The findings revealed that 20.9% (19 PS students) had never experienced humour in English language tuition (ELT), 25.3% (23 students – 13 PS, 10 U) did so seldom, 38.5% (35 respondents – 17 PS, 18 U) experienced it sometimes, 13.2% (= 12 students, from each school six) said they encountered it often, and only 2 PS students (2.2%) came across humour in English class always. In terms of the evaluation of the experiences, 10 students (10.9%; 9 PS, 1 U) rated it as poor, 22 respondents (24.8%; 21 PS, 1 U) reported no experience, 21.9% (20 students; 17 PS, 3 U) indicated uncertainty about their experience, and 39 participants (42.9%; 10 PS, 29 U) reported positive experiences with humour in ELT. With regard to the means through which students encounter humour, the most common response was that humour was introduced by the teacher. This was selected by 48.4% (44 students – 13 PS, 31 U) of respondents. The second most common response was that humour was introduced through a video, which was selected by 39 respondents (42.9%; 19 PS, 20 U). Twenty-six students (28.6%; 15 PS, 1 U) indicated that they encountered humour in the textbook, while 31 students (34.1%; 27 PS, 4 U) reported that they had written their own options. Eight primary school students reported that they had not encountered humour in ELT, while the remainder indicated that they had experienced it mostly from their classmates. Furthermore, 75 students (82.4 %; 44 PS, 31 U) indicated a preference for experiencing humour from the teacher, 57 students (62.6 %; 27 PS, 30 U) expressed a desire for it in a video, 46 respondents (21 PS, 25 U), representing 50.5 % of the total sample, indicated a preference for encountering humour in the textbook, and 7 students (7.7 %; 5 PS, 2 U) indicated a preference for

experiencing humour in ELT from their classmates or in activities. A single PS student indicated a lack of interest in experiencing humour in ELT. Furthermore, the desire to encounter humour in ELT was evident in items 16 and 17, with 28 students (30.8 %; 13 PS, 15 U) indicating a partial agreement and 31 students (34.1 %; 20 PS, 11 U) expressing a strong agreement with the statement 'I want to learn in class from materials that contain jokes.' In addition, 31 students (34.1%; 14 PS, 17 U) indicated that they 'strongly agree', while 29 students (31.9%; 13 PS, 16 U) indicated that they 'partially agree' with the statement that they work better when humour is included in ELT. Seventeen PS students (18.7%) indicated that they were unsure of the answer. Eight PS pupils (8.8 %) indicated that they 'strongly disagree' with this statement, while 6.6 % (5 PS, 1 U) expressed partial disagreement. With regard to item 12, the majority of the students concurred that the use of humour enhanced their motivation to learn English. Specifically, 35 students (38.5%, 15 P, 20) indicated a strong agreement, while 18 students (11 PS, 7 U = 19.8%) expressed a partial agreement. Six PS students (6.6 %) expressed strong disagreement, 13 students (14.3 %; 9 PS, 4 U) indicated partial disagreement, and 19 participants (= 20.1 %; 16 PS, 3 U) stated that they were unsure. It can be concluded that a significant proportion of students appreciate the use of humour in ELT. Indeed, 43.9% of respondents (40 students – 15 PS, 25 U) expressed strong agreement with this statement, while a further 21.9% (20 students – 15 PS, 5 U) indicated partial agreement. Conversely, seven PS students (7.7%) indicated a strong preference against the use of humour in the classroom. Fourteen students (15.4 %; 11 PS, 3 U) indicated partial disagreement with the statement, while ten students (10.9 %; 9 PS, 1 U) stated that they were uncertain about their stance on the matter.

A number of differences between the two groups of students can be observed, beginning with the frequency of humour encounters in ELT. A significant proportion of PS students (n=10) reported that they had never encountered humour in this context, while two students indicated that humour was present in every class. In contrast, no university students selected either of the two aforementioned options. Furthermore, a greater proportion of PS students reported unfavourable experiences with humour in ELT. In the context of encountering humour in ELT, a greater proportion of U students than PS students reported experiencing it from the teacher. Conversely, a larger number of PS students indicated that their classmates served as the source of humour. Nevertheless, both groups indicated a preference for the incorporation of humour in their English classes, particularly from the teacher and in teaching materials. Learners' preferences for being motivated and performing better when humour and jokes are incorporated into classroom activities were predominantly affirmed. It is noteworthy that a considerable number of students expressed uncertainty or disagreement with the presented statements. The majority of these individuals were enrolled in primary school. It can thus be concluded that students at university had more favourable experiences with humour in ELT than those at primary school.

The vast majority of participants from both schools concur that the utilisation of humour in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) enhances the ambience. 67.3% (61 students – 29 F, 32 M) attested to this assertion with a strong affirmation, while 17.6% (16 students – 15 F, 1 M) offered a partial endorsement. This yields an overall affirmation rate of 84.9%. A mere four students from the primary school (4.4 %)

expressed strong disagreement, while seven students (7.7 %; 6 PS, 1 U) indicated partial disagreement. Three PS students (3.3% PS) indicated that they were unsure. Similarly, item 13 elicited strong or partial agreement, with 40 students (19 PS, 21 U = 43.9 %) in the former and 39 students (19 PS, 10 U = 42.9 %) in the latter. A mere six younger students (6.6 %) espoused the view that humour should be excluded from ELT, while a further six of them and one U student (7.7 %) adopted a more nuanced position, indicating that they believe it should be included to a limited extent. A total of 9.9% (7 PS, 2 U) of respondents indicated that they were unsure. With regard to the higher memorability of the subject matter, 64.8% of all participants believed that the use of humour would result in this outcome. Of these, 20.9% (19 students – 12 PS, 7 U) agreed partially, while 43.9% (40 students – 18 PS, 22 U) strongly concurred. A total of 5.5% (five PS students) expressed strong disagreement, while 15.4% (12 PS, 2 U) indicated partial disagreement. The remaining 14.3% (10 PS, 3 U) indicated that they were unsure. A further statement with which the majority of respondents concurred is that the use of humour in the English classroom would facilitate more positive teacher-student relationships. This was endorsed by 31.9% (29 students – 17 PS, 12 U) who expressed partial agreement and 40.7% (37 students – 16 PS, 21 U) who indicated strong agreement. Sixteen primary school students expressed disagreement with this statement, with nine of them (9.9%) disagreeing strongly and eight of them (8.8%) disagreeing partially. The remaining 8.8% (8 PS) indicated that they were uncertain as to whether they agreed or disagreed. The only statement with which a significant proportion of students (40.2 %) expressed disagreement was that their English teacher is funny. Of these, 25.3 % (20 PS, 3 U) indicated strong disagreement, while 16.9 % (13 PS, 2 U) indicated partial disagreement. A total of 16.9% of respondents (10 PS, 5 U) indicated that they were unsure. Nevertheless, 29.7% (27 students – 12 PS, 15 U) indicated partial agreement, while 12.1% (2 PS, 9 U) expressed a strong affirmation.

The opinions expressed by primary school and university students were largely similar, reflecting a general consensus on the statements presented. The responses of the primary school pupils evidenced a prevailing sense of disagreement and uncertainty. It is noteworthy that university attendees perceive their English teacher to be more humorous than those in primary school, whose responses were predominantly negative.

University students' comprehension of the use of humour in ELT

The data obtained from the second study were subjected to analysis based on a total of 45 submissions, representing university postgraduate students enrolled in their first and second years of master's degree programmes. The respondents comprised 37 females and 8 males enrolled in three study programmes: philology (10 students), English major (2 students) and English in combination with other academic disciplines (33 students). All of the respondents were enrolled in full-time studies and were expected to attend the same academic courses on stylistics, sociolinguistic and pragmatics, which provided an opportunity to encounter specific classifications of humour. However, the majority of students asserted that viewing a video enhanced their comprehension of English humour and facilitated the identification of specific categories through the classification system presented in the video.
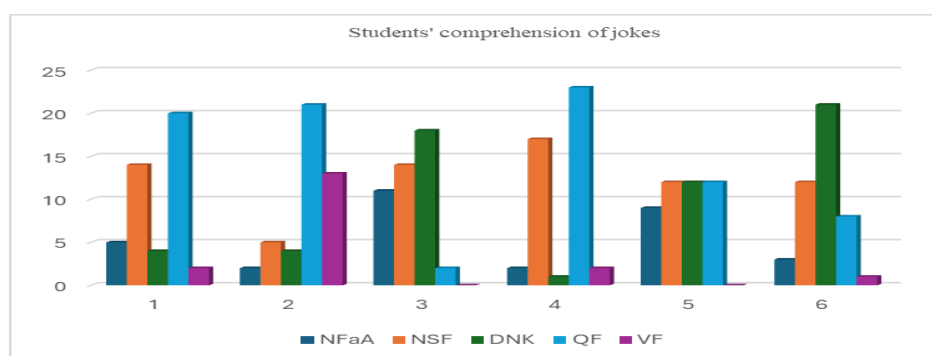
Figure 1
C1learners' comprehension of jokes

The figure provides a clear illustration of the level of comprehension of jokes used in English-speaking countries. Joke 2, referencing the frisbee striking the individual, was deemed the most amusing (rated as 'very funny' by 28.88% and 'quite funny' by 46.66% of respondents) due to the students' familiarity with the literal and figurative interpretations of the word 'hit'. The second most humorous joke was that which referenced the burnt fire station, Joke 4, deemed to be 'quite funny' by 51.11% of respondents, and two students classified it as 'very funny'. It can be posited that when language learners are able to comprehend the language used in the jokes, it is to be expected that they will be able to laugh and identify the punch line. However, when they were unable to comprehend the content, students explicitly stated this in their responses, predominantly selecting the option 'I don't know', indicating that they lacked the necessary understanding. Further analysis demonstrated that factors beyond language also influenced comprehension. It is evident that the students lacked familiarity with cultural nuances in two instances. The first involved the mention of a school in the novel The Catcher in the Rye by D. J. Salinger, and the second pertained to the significance of weather in British culture. With regard to the book in question, its tone is frequently sarcastic and judgemental. Students conceded that they were not sufficiently acquainted with the book to be able to identify specific sentences taken from it. As they were unable to recall the name of the educational establishment (Pencey), they were similarly unable to identify the irony pertaining to academic achievement and the number of students who had been expelled. A mere 38.88% of the 18 students who were requested to complete the questionnaire at home provided an accurate response, with the majority of these students merely copying the explanation found on the internet. The hyperbole employed in the sentence pertaining to the parents (Joke 5) was elucidated by 55.55% of those engaged in the domestic work, although the majority of them had merely replicated the explanation sourced from the internet. It can be concluded that only those who consulted the Internet were able to provide an accurate explanation of the sentences.

The students demonstrated a balanced perception of the quality of the British joke referring to the weather, with an equal number of students (12, representing 26.66% of the total) selecting three qualitatively distinct options (not so humorous, uncertain, and

quite humorous). The British experience of weather is a cultural phenomenon shaped by a history of meteorological challenges, unpredictability and changeability. Despite the fact that students developed cultural awareness as a result of their academic studies, they did not place an undue emphasis on the idea that jokes can be related to the weather. The Slovak cultural context exerts a significant influence on the content of jokes related to the weather. These jokes tend to focus on human misunderstanding of weather forecasts, rather than on the more generalised aspects of weather that are common in British humour.

The students demonstrated an ability to recognize the type of humour presented in the videos, with the majority of responses occurring after viewing the material. Nevertheless, the terms 'sarcasm' and 'irony' were frequently referenced, as evidenced by their mention in relation to the 'burnt fire station' joke, which reached a 71.11% recognition rate among all respondents. The joke about the Frisbee was classified with even greater success, with 86.66% of respondents correctly identifying it. Nevertheless, when it came to quotations drawn from the aforementioned book, the students were unable to correctly categorise them without resorting to online sources.

DISCUSSION

The collated data enabled discussion and the formulation of conclusions pertinent to the research questions, which were developed in accordance with theoretical insights. The responses to R1Q1 indicated that the majority of students encounter humour on a regular basis, either daily or frequently, and perceive these experiences as positive. The overwhelming majority of participants (94.5%) indicated a preference for humour, and a significant proportion of students (73.6%) also employed humour in their own communication. The study revealed that students do experience humour in the context of EFL instruction (R1Q2), albeit to a lesser extent than in their everyday lives. Furthermore, a distinction was observed between primary school and university students. It has been demonstrated that primary school students encounter humour in English classes with less frequency than their university counterparts. Their encounter primarily occurs through their classmates, rather than their teachers. However, both groups of students expressed a desire for the teacher to utilise humour in their teaching. Furthermore, the use of humorous teaching materials is also perceived to be beneficial. The majority of university students asserted that the utilisation of humour in ELT fosters motivation and enhances performance, a finding that has been confirmed in other studies (Rianita et al., 2023). The questionnaire items focused on the views of students towards the use of humour in ELT (R1Q3). The results indicated that the attitudes were generally positive. The majority of students from both schools believed that humour should be included in the classroom as it would result in a more positive relationship between the teacher and students, as well as an improved atmosphere, in synergy with other research studies (Chabely, 2008, Bell & Pomerantz, 2016). In relation to the students' perceptions of their English teachers, it was noted that primary school students did not perceive them to be as humorous as university students did. As Rianita et al. (2023) also demonstrate in their research, a clear distinction emerges between English teachers and their natural use of humour at university compared to those teaching at lower stages of education.

The second study, which examined students' perception of English humour and their ability to comprehend it, was designed to collect data addressing two research questions. The data analysis demonstrated the high recognition rate of three jokes (2, 4, 1). The students' concerns were focussed on Joke 3, which was taken from a literary prose source. The term 'humour' is employed in three distinct scales in the Companion Volume to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2022). The Creative Writing scale contains it twice at level C1 in relation to the learner ability to incorporate it and C2 to exploit it appropriately. The Sociolinguistic Appropriateness scale incorporates humour in a single descriptor, in conjunction with four other descriptors relevant to the C1 level. Therefore, students' evaluation based on their ability to comprehend humour constitutes only one fifth of the overall evaluation of learners' abilities within the domain of sociolinguistic competence. The students demonstrated a balanced perception of humour as it is used in English-speaking countries (R2Q1). With regard to R2Q2, it was noted that responses to a joke were marked as 'I don't know', and on occasion, students offered remarks pertaining to their difficulty in comprehending the punch line. However, it was observed that several students did not provide explanations for their answers. The study thus revealed that 'I don't know' responses can be explained from a variety of perspectives, for example, it can be interpreted as uncertainty, a lack of context, avoidance, emotional detachment, or misunderstanding. The researchers evaluated this as an inappropriate comprehension of the punch line. The survey to be administered in a large-scale format must be precisely designed.

In line with the CEFR descriptor (Council of Europe, 2020), C1 target language users are expected to demonstrate an understanding of irony and implicit cultural references. The study revealed that some students required further exposure to idiomatic and metaphoric language, as well as culturally-induced texts.

CONCLUSION

In alignment with the theoretical framework previously outlined, the objective was to gather fundamental insights into the impact of integrating humour and enjoyment into pedagogical approaches and to ascertain reliable data regarding students' experiences with humour in both everyday contexts and in ELT. The assumptions were based on the general benefits of humour in language learning, including the reduction of anxiety, improvement of memory retention, promotion of a positive learning environment and increase in engagement.

The findings indicate that students express a desire to experience humour in ELT, citing current experiences of humour as occasional and predominantly limited to encounters with humour in teaching materials or with classmates, rather than with their teachers. It appears to be a rational approach to present the data during in-service teacher training sessions and introduce a series of activities designed to promote the integration of brief humorous narratives within ELT classes in primary schools. At university level, the topic of diploma theses that deals with humour as a required aspect in language education should be offered to support research in this area.

It is evident that university students have a a more sophisticated comprehension of the functions and virtues of humour. The second objective, which related to the quality of

English expected at C1 level, was achieved through the employment of a questionnaire comprising six jokes. It has been demonstrated that students exhibited a balanced perception of English. However, their inability to comprehend the figurative nuances of the language, as well as their deficiencies in cultural awareness, were also revealed. It is recommended that these findings be discussed in department meetings with the aim of increasing students' exposure to stylistic devices (e.g. metaphor, irony) in their master's programme. This would also serve to encourage students to develop their cultural awareness and to recommend suitable sources.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasise that the number of students involved in the studies is limited, which restricts the ability to formulate generalised conclusions. However, the studies do enable further research to be conducted, in which larger numbers of respondents will be addressed and their responses will contribute to the topic. In the Slovak educational context, further research is required to validate the utilisation of humour in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) and to quantify the impact of humour on learning outcomes. The capacity of C1 learners to comprehend and employ English humour in a nuanced manner is a subject that merits further investigation.

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APPENDIX A

Examples

9. Using humour improves the atmosphere in English class.

   I strongly disagree–I partially disagree–I don't know–I partially agree–I strongly agree

10. Humour should be included in English class.

   I strongly disagree–I partially disagree–I don't know–I partially agree–I strongly agree

11. The use of humour makes the subject matter more memorable.

   I strongly disagree–I partially disagree–I don't know–I partially agree–I strongly agree

APPENDIX B

Jokes

1 Danny: Hey, hi, I need a ladle. You got a ladle?   Monica: We have a ladle.

   Danny: Thanks, see you at the party.   Monica: Okay, great!

   Phoebe: Hey, guys, you know what Larry would say? He would say, **"See you ladle."**

2 I was wondering why this frisbee kept looking bigger and bigger. Then **it hit me.**

3 They give guys the ax quite frequently at Pencey. It has a very good academic rating,

   Pencey. **It really does.**

4 **Our local fire station burnt down last night.**

5 **I'm loving this gorgeous weather.**

6 In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, **my parents would**

   have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them.