HUMOUR IN THE PRE-SESSIONAL CLASSROOM:

THE PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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DECLARATION

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have documented the roles of humour in different aspects of our lives, from making friends, maintaining relationships to impressing dates. So far, however, relatively little research has been carried out on the effects of humour in education, and even less on the use of humour in English language teaching. Having used the existing literature to help define 'humour' and its functions both generally and in education, this thesis sought to examine UK pre-sessional teachers' use of humour in their teaching. It also set out to understand the perceptions of the teachers and students about the impacts of teacher-initiated humour on the pre-sessional classroom in UK higher education. This study was exploratory and interpretative in nature, mostly adopting a qualitative research design. The research data are drawn from three main sources: classroom observations, which have rarely been used to investigate humour in the classroom, semi-structured interviews with teachers and student focus groups. The study was conducted in a UK university pre-sessional course, with ten teacher participants and twenty-five student participants. The investigation identified that a large majority of the teachers used humour at some point on their teaching of the course and most of them were aware of the positive effects that humour might bring into the academic English classroom, such as building teacher-student rapport, boosting students' confidence and improving students' ability to retain information. Although many of them welcomed the use of humour, some teachers still expressed doubts about whether humour was essential, or even useful, in teaching academic English. Their doubts were usually due to time constraints and the goal-oriented nature of the course, as well as a consideration of the students' previous educational backgrounds. The findings from the students indicated that they greatly valued a

friendly learning environment and that they supported and appreciated their teachers'
attempts to use humour to maximise their learning. The teacher and student
participants also discussed the boundaries of humour and their experience with the
appropriateness of humour. The findings of this study have a number of important
implications for teacher education and training, English for academic purposes
materials writing, and the induction programmes provided for pre-sessional English
teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FLOWCHARTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

EAP   English for Academic Purposes

EFL   English as a Foreign Language

* This term usually refers to people learning English in a context where English is not generally the medium of communication (Watkins, 2014). For example, a Thai student having English classes in Thailand is probably a learner of EFL. The term is extended to cover short stays in an English-speaking environment when the learner is not a long-term resident in that country. Therefore, a Thai student who comes to the UK for a four-week summer course is also an EFL learner.

TEFL   Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TESOL   Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

ELT   English Language Teaching

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

HE   Higher Education

PGCE   Postgraduate Certificate in Education

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the current study

> You don't have to worry because you're in good hands. All of us are experts in language. We all can speak several languages. For example, I myself can speak four: English <paused>, American English, Australian English, Canadian English. Oh, and I'm also Scottish, so maybe five?

My interest in the use of humour in English for academic purposes (EAP) developed while I was taking an EAP course during my time as a MA student in the UK. The very well-received funny quote above was from my EAP tutor at the time on our first day of the course. She continued to make a couple of jokes as she introduced the syllabus and the course structure. I was surprised at first as in my home country (Vietnam), teachers usually keep a serious atmosphere and rarely attempt to be funny at the beginning of a new course. The rationale for this avoidance of humour is that teachers need to be firm and establish a sense of authority or the students would feel more comfortable than they should and show little respect for the rest of the course. However, in contrast to this belief, I remember having an instant liking for my tutor and respecting her even more for her confidence and her good sense of humour. I also still remember the welcoming atmosphere that significantly relieved my anxiety and social awkwardness.

Further into the course, I realised that the language classrooms in Vietnam and in the UK bore considerable differences, particularly in terms of teacher-student

communication and relationships. In Vietnam and many other Asian and Middle Eastern countries, this relationship reflects the hierarchical structure of the society. In these countries, teachers are often considered the authority figure, the fount of knowledge that students are expected to acquire and obey (Lewis, Romi, Qui & Katz, 2005; Phan, 2005; Shin, Lee & Kim, 2009; Ahmad, 2015). Consequently, humour may be seen as a threat to the power and professional image of the teachers (Su, Su & Goldstein, 1994; Oda, 2006). In English-speaking countries, such as the UK, teachers are often seen as a facilitator and the teacher-student relationship is also more flexible (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Hagenauer, Gläser-Zikuda & Volet, 2016), which may encourage teachers' use of humour in the classroom.

Many psychosocial factors, or affective filters, such as motivation, anxiety and self-confidence can have a great impact on second language acquisition (Krashen, 1981). By reducing stress and nervousness, teachers can create an encouraging learning environment, improve students' confidence and make learning more enjoyable. Humour has been proposed as one of the teaching strategies that may help create this environment, thanks to many of its positive effects on mental health (Gelkopf, Gonen, Kurs, Melamed & Bleichet; 2006; Walter, et al., 2007; Tsoi, et al., 2008), physical health (Berk, Felten, Tan, Bittman & Westengard, 2001; Brutsche, Grossman, Müller & Wiegand, 2008; Mora-Ripoll, 2010) and also on social relationships (Rodrigues & Collinson, 1995; Fominaya, 2007).

Humour is present in virtually every aspect of our lives, from our daily conversations to the entertainment programs on television, the cartoons in newspapers and magazines and constant sources of jokes and funny quotes on the internet. However, the use of

2

humour is a complex matter since humour is an integral part of a language and culture. The perception that something is 'funny' also varies among generations and individuals. Although humour has been the subject of study in various disciplines, including education, little has been done on the use of humour and its effects in the language classroom. In particular, no previous study has investigated teachers' use of humour and its effect in EAP, as far as I am aware. The next sections will introduce the current study by providing the context of the research – the UK pre-sessional course – and outlining the research purposes as well as the structure of the thesis.

1.2. The pre-sessional course in the UK

With English being considered the leading language for the dissemination of academic knowledge (Crystal, 2012), a large number of international students move to English-speaking countries, including the UK, to obtain their higher education degrees every year. For instance, in 2017-2018, there were 458,490 non-UK students, accounting for approximately twenty percent of the total number of students studying at UK higher education institutions (UKCISA, 2019). While some of these students may have considered English to be their first language, it is fair to assume that for the vast majority English would be a second language. This situation creates a high demand for universities and private language schools to develop comprehensive EAP courses, such as pre-sessional courses to provide students with further language support so that they can achieve their full potential in their chosen academic field.

A pre-sessional course usually aims to equip international students whose first language is not English with the necessary language and study skills needed to follow

a course in higher education (Turner, 2004). Generally, pre-sessional courses are high stakes, not least because progression is not always guaranteed. These courses may vary in length and are often staffed by teachers on short term contracts. Pre-sessional courses understandably put a strong emphasis on academic skills, such as citing, giving presentations, essay writing and so on. However, the British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP) have also specifically mentioned in their accreditation handbook that in the pre-sessional course, "students will have access to a social and cultural programme to help them settle into their new learning environment" (BALEAP, 2018). The pre-sessional course may be the international students' first contact with the university system in the host country and potentially the host culture, yet it is often reported that the social and cultural aspects of the course are generally neglected to give time to more academic matters. Consequently, within the limited research done in this context, it has been established that students still struggle to adapt and integrate into the British universities and society during and after the course (Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010). Many of them report having difficulties in listening and understanding spoken English, as well as initiating a conversation and making friends with home students (Copland & Garton, 2011; Dewaele, Comanaru & Faraco, 2015). The data from the international students in these previous studies suggest that institutions and universities should take more responsibility in creating opportunities and a more effective environment for these students to familiarise themselves with British culture and society, considering the relatively high cost of the course.

1.3. The purposes of the current research

Having been excited about the use of humour in classes where I had been a student, I set out to explore the perceptions of pre-sessional course teachers and students about the use of humour in the classroom. In addition, I also wanted to investigate the effect of teacher-initiated humour, including such things as whether humour helps to create positive affective contexts for learners to work in. The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- To identify how and to what extent language teachers in the UK employ humour in their teaching in university pre-sessional classes.

- To examine pre-sessional teachers' perceptions about the effects of the use of humour in EAP, including such things as whether humour helps to create positive affective contexts for learners to work in.

- To examine international students' perceptions about the roles of humour in language teaching and their responses to the lecturers' application of humour in the pre-sessional class.

These objectives were later developed into research questions, which will be presented at the beginning of the Methodology chapter.

1.4. Overview of the thesis chapters

The overall structure of the study takes the form of six chapters, including this introduction. A summary of the remaining chapters is as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2 – Literature review

This presents an overview of various definitions, different theories and classifications of humour. It also reviews the relevant research on the impacts of humour on different aspects of our lives, particularly the use of humour in education. The chapter ends with a discussion of the relationship between teachers' cognition and their teaching practices because it is assumed that what teachers know, think and believe about teaching, and in this case specifically the use of humour in teaching, will impact on their practice.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

This chapter is concerned with different research approaches and the choices made in this current study. It starts with the research questions of the study then continues to discuss the options that researchers have, followed by the specific methods adopted in this study. The chapter then provides a detailed account of the different stages of the research, from the pilot study, the recruitment of the participants, and the data collection through to the data analysis. The chapter also includes a section on the specific context of the study as well as elaborating on the biographies of the participants, where appropriate.

Chapter 4 – Findings and Discussions

The findings and the discussion of those findings are combined in order to allow the reader to follow the detailed connection between the two, while avoiding unnecessary repetition. It starts with the data gathered during the classroom observations and the semi-structured interviews with the teachers and then continues to draw together the findings from the student focus groups.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This summarises the key findings of the study and discusses the implications of the findings for teacher education and also course design and material writing. The contributions to knowledge of this research, and particularly to the literature of humour and EAP, are also presented in this final chapter, along with the implications for future research and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to critically review the relevant research literature on humour, and humour in the classroom in particular. The chapter first gives an overview of various definitions of humour and the connection between humour and one of its major indicators – laughter. The chapter continues with the discussion of four major theories explaining the mechanism of humour and its classifications, which form the basis for the choice of definition and categories in this present study. From this the role of humour in different aspects of our lives (health, communication and education) is considered. Last but not least, since this study is partly concerned with the teachers' perceptions of humour in language teaching, the final part of the chapter highlights the factors that can have great influence on teachers' cognition – what they know, think and believe about their practice in the classroom. The discussion identifies the gaps in research on humour in the language teaching classroom, which the current research has attempted to fill.

2.1. The definitions of humour

Humans are inherently able to recognise and appreciate humour, yet it has been a great challenge to precisely understand and analyse humour in its various forms and meanings (Tisljar & Bereczkei, 2005; Martin, 2016). The word 'humour' comes from the ancient Greek theory of *four humours*, or four body fluids (blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile humour) that were thought to be responsible for human character and well-being (Ruch, 1998; Carroll, 2014). In a more modern sense, humour sometimes refers to one's state of feelings or mood, as in good humour or out of

humour. However, over the past century, the word 'humour' has been mostly used with the connotations of funniness and amusement.

Many researchers have agreed that humour is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses several components. Martin (2007) and Carroll (2014) suggest that the term 'humour' contains both cognitive and emotional elements. The cognitive aspect involves the activation of incompatible interpretations of a situation in a non-serious, playful frame of mind, which makes something 'funny'. Carroll (2014) gives the example of a joke with such a puzzling punchline and interpretation:

> Beth calls her friend James, who is on the motorway on her cell phone. Beth tells James to be careful, because the radio says there is a nut on the motorway driving in the wrong direction. James says, 'Yeah, there are hundreds of them.' (p. 66)

The punchline prompts the readers to question how there could be hundreds of people driving in the wrong direction on a motorway, to then finally realise that James is actually the 'nut' who is driving against the traffic and is not at all aware of the situation. The emotional element of humour, or "mirth" (Martin, 2016, p. 502) refers to the activation of the pleasure circuit in the limbic system – the nerve system in the brain concerned with basic emotions and needs – which makes humour enjoyable. Another well-known definition of humour is from Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield (1991), as they state that humour is "intentional verbal and nonverbal messages, which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behaviour taken to mean pleasure, delight, and/or surprise in the targeted receiver" (p. 206). On the other hand, Ruch (1998) suggests that humour may refer to a state of amusement

or cheerfulness or a trait (i.e. sense of humour). Specifically, according to Mindess (1971) and also Ruch (1998), *sense of humour* may refer to different aspects, including a behavioural pattern (a tendency to laugh frequently), an ability to create humour and amuse others, an ability to understand and appreciate humour, and an attitude (a positive attitude towards humour and people with the ability to create humour). In the same vein, Eysenck (1972) and Babad (1974) agree that *a sense of humour* has three possible meanings: conformist meaning (people who laugh at the same thing that we do), humour reproduction (people who are easily amused and laugh a great deal) and humour production (people who can amuse others). However, one does not necessarily possess all three aspects. Despite its common usage, humour has been used in different disciplines to mean different things and the difficulty defining humour makes it hard to research and evaluate.

Many researchers have developed different methods to assess the response towards various styles of humour (Eysenck, 1942; Cattett & Luborsky, 1947; O´Connell, 1969). Ruch (1980) created the 3 WD (Witz-Dimensionen) Test of Humour Appreciation, one of the most established tests of its kind, which aims to obtain the ratings of funniness and aversiveness (rejection) of three most common factors of cartoons and jokes, which were identified in previous factor analytic studies, such as Herzog and Larwin (1988) and Ruch and Hehl (1986b). Two of these factors, incongruity-resolution humour and nonsense humour are related to the structure of the humour rather than their content. Incongruity-resolution humour refers to when the incongruity introduced in the joke is completely resolved, for example, by a punch line and this will be further discussed in section 2.3.2. On the other hand, in nonsense humour, the incongruity is not completely resolved and one is left with the feeling of

absurdity. A joke from American comedian and host Ellen Degeneres is a good illustration of nonsense humour:

> […] That whole fitness thing runs in my family though I think. My grandmother started walking five miles a day when she was sixty. She's ninety-seven today and we don't know where the hell she is (DeGeneres, 1986)

The third factor of humour in Ruch's study is content-oriented, namely sexual humour. Although jokes and cartoons with sexual themes may also incorporate either incongruity-resolution or nonsense structures, they also appear to form a distinct content factor. Through many subsequent studies, Ruch and his colleagues (Ruch & Hehl, 1983; Ruch, 1984; Ruch & Hehl, 1986a; Ruch, 1988; Ruch et al., 1991) have investigated the connection between the preference for these three dimensions of humour and personality variables, which were developed in 'The five factor model of personality' report by Tupes and Christal (1961). One of the major findings is that people who are described as 'conservative' and 'intolerant of ambiguity' give incongruity-resolution humour much higher ratings in terms of funniness, compared to nonsense humour. In contrast, nonsense humour is enjoyed by experience seekers and people who are susceptible to boredom and repetitive experience. These people are reported to seek stimulation through the mind and senses, via means such as art, travel, unconventional lifestyles and so on. On the other hand, the enjoyment of humour with sexual content, regardless of its structures, is found to positively correlate with toughmindedness, sexual permissiveness and disinhibition. Similarly, Johnson (1992) and later Carretero-Dios and Ruch (2010) use an extended version of Ruch's test (1992) to measure six dimensions of humour appreciation, consisting of two

structure related types of humour (incongruity and nonsense humour) and four content related humour types (sexual, black, women disparagement and men disparagement).

Pioneering as they are, these tests carry several limitations including the sole focus on the appreciation of jokes and cartoons, excluding other forms and aspects of humour, such as puns, riddles, physical humour and so on. Furthermore, using a collection of jokes from a particular culture and setting as a test to determine one's sense of humour internationally may produce biased and inaccurate results (Svebak, 2010). To address these limitations, Svebak (1996) developed a self-report questionnaire to measure three dimensions hypothesised to be essential to one's sense of humour. These dimensions include:

- *sensitivity to humorous content and messages*. For example: "Would you say that you have much cause for amusement during an ordinary day?"

- *attitude toward humorous people and situations.* For example: "Persons who are always out to be funny are really irresponsible types not to be relied upon."

- *openness to the expression of mirthfulness and joy.* For example: "Do you sometimes find yourself laughing in situations where laughter is quite out of place?"

Similar methods of measuring sense of humour have been developed by Thorson and Powell (1993), Feingold and Mazzella (1993) and McGhee (1999), yet these questionnaires have the tendency to reflect socially desired responses (i.e. people tend to respond in a way that indicates they have good sense of humour) (Martin & Lefcourt, 1984; Ruch & Heintz, 2014). To avoid the shortcomings of self-report measures of sense of humour, Martin and Lefcourt (1984, 1996) created the Situational

Humour Response Questionnaire focusing on the participants' response to a variety of particular situations rather than direct the attention towards their own assessment of their sense of humour. This questionnaire also emphasises the behavioural and experiential aspects of humour, such as smiling and laughing, as well as overt amusement, instead of accessing the vaguer concept of *humour appreciation*. An example question from this study can be seen below:

> "If you were watching a movie or TV program with some friends and you found one scene particularly funny, but no one else appeared to find it humorous, how would you have reacted most commonly?
>
> a) I would have concluded that 1 must have misunderstood something or that it wasn't really funny.
>
> b) I would have "smiled to myself" but wouldn't have shown my amusement outwardly.
>
> c) I would have smiled visibly.
>
> d) I would have laughed aloud.
>
> e) I would have laughed heartily."

Two subsequent studies to validate the use of this questionnaire also find the correlation between overt appreciation of humour and humour production: individuals who reported to smile or laugh in situations that were not obviously or necessarily funny were more likely to actively produce humour rather than just passively receive it. Although the questionnaire offers an alternative way to measure sense of humour and attempts to address the existing shortcomings of self-report questionnaires, it is criticised for defining and measuring humour based on laughter frequency (Thorson,

1990; Martin, 1996). The relationship between humour and laughter is discussed in the next section.

2.2. Humour and laughter

Laughter is an innate human behaviour and is spontaneously emitted from infants as one of the first social vocalisations, even from deaf and blind babies who never perceive and learn from the laughter of others (Rothbart, 1973; Lefcourt, 2000; Provine, 2000; Polimeni & Reiss, 2006). Human babies may laugh when presented with unexpected stimuli in a non-serious and non-threatening context (McGhee, 1976; Addyman & Addyman, 2013), such as when playing peek-a-boo with their mother or being tickled. This behaviour, however, is not exclusive to humans. Chimpanzees and other great apes have been observed to display a relaxed open mouth and have produced vocalisation which can be referred to as laughter when being tickled or during play (Van Hooff, 1972; Vettin & Todt, 2005; Davila et al., 2009). However, unlike human laughter, which is more discrete and vowel-like, great apes' laughter is breathy and panting, and occurs virtually only during physical contact or threat of such contact, such as playful chasing or wrestling (Provine, 2001; Davila et al., 2009). Adult humans' laughter, on the other hand, often occurs in social contexts, even in the absence of physical contact (Provine & Fischer, 1989; Devereux & Ginsburg, 2001). Studies done by Provine (1996) and Vettin and Todt (2004) find that most conversational laughter follows banal comments rather than deliberate attempts at humour, suggesting that laughter may have a social function of smoothing conversation and fostering communication, rather than merely a response to humour. Similar laughter can occur in social situations as a response to stress, anxiety or

awkwardness (i.e. a nervous or awkward laugh). Several lines of evidence also suggest that laughter is contagious and laughter itself is a sufficient stimulus to elicit smiles and laughs (McComas, 1923; Pearce, 2004; Provine, 2016), hence the common use of *laugh tracks* to increase audience's laughter and their rating for the humour attempts in sitcoms. Despite being a universal human behaviour, laughter is no exception to the conformity with social and cultural norms, which can inhibit or elicit laughter in social interactions and influence its form, frequency and intensity (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Ziv, 2010). For example, a soldier who displays an *army laugh* – he laughs when his commander says something meant to be funny – has used laughter as a sign of adherence to social hierarchy, rather than as an indicator that the comment or joke was actually funny.

2.3. The theories of humour and laughter

2.3.1. The superiority theory

> Two hunters are out in the woods when one of them collapses. He doesn't seem to be breathing and his eyes are glazed. The other guy whips out his phone and calls the emergency services. He gasps, "My friend is dead! What can I do?" The operator says "Calm down. I can help. First, let's make sure if he's dead." There is a silence, then a shot is heard. Back on the phone, the guy says "OK, now what?" (Business   Insider, n.d.)

In the view of superiority theorists, we laugh at the character of the hunter because of his foolishness. In light of this theory, laughter is a sign of the pleasure that is taken from the foolishness of others, with the assumption that we are better than they are.

The association of humour with the amusement at the expense of others, which received the most support from philosophers in the seventeenth century, might be responsible for the public opposition to humour and laughter at the time (Morreall, 1997; Smuts, 2010). In his *Philebus*, Plato asserts that we laugh at the vice of self-unawareness, in which people deceive themselves to be wiser, stronger and braver than they really were (Davidson, 2013). Thus, for Plato, humour contains an element of malice and abuse, as we laugh at the foolishness of others. Similarly, Cicero (2001) and Quintilian (1903) also state that humour and laughter are signs of triumph and derision over those who are not merely different but also inferior. The superiority theory is articulated in its clearest form in *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes (2005). In this book, Hobbes claims that laughter comes from recognising others' flaws and weaknesses, which in turn reinforces our own sense of superiority. We may, for example, laugh at someone slipping on ice or putting salt instead of sugar in their coffee as we may feel that they are clumsier than we are. Hobbes also adds that the target of humour can also be our former selves from a present and supposedly wiser perspective. This is evident in the case of laughing at ourselves for tripping over the steps or locking ourselves out of the house. In the modern world, much 'aggressive' humour or 'moron jokes' aims at humiliating or stereotyping certain groups that are considered *inferior*, for example, Polish jokes as told by Irish or British, Ukrainian jokes by Russians, or *blonde* jokes. The superiority theory has also been applied in comedy and sitcom to generate laughter (consider, for example, the well-known UK sitcom Blackadder) as well as self-deprecating humour, which essentially gives the listener the amusement of being superior.

Although superiority theory offers explanation for much laughter, it also suffers notable limitations. The major issue with this theory is that feeling superior is not the necessary condition that accounts for all humour. In other words, we do not need to find someone or something silly or inferior in order to find the situation funny, and even when we are, or feel, more superior, we do not always find it funny. For instance, walking past a homeless person, who is more disadvantaged, does not bring any joy or amusement. In these situations, "we are in greater danger of weeping than laughing" (Hutcheson, 1750, p. 11). The popularity of this theory started to decline in the eighteenth century following criticism and the introduction of other humour theories, including the incongruity and relief theory.

2.3.2. The incongruity theory

The incongruity theory has been the most influential theory in the study of humour and laughter (Morreall, 1983; Raskin, 1985; Perks, 2012). Aristotle, in his book *Rhetoric* (1926), sketches the first analysis of this theory. It is noticeable that although he is influenced by his mentor Plato's distrust of humour, Aristotle still reserves a place for humour as "stimulation" of the soul, which could potentially put the audience in "a mood of good will" (Aristotle, 1926, p. 15, 16). Although Aristotle does not use the word incongruity, he suggests that it is the unexpectedness that brings the amusement, and one way to create humour is to set up an expectation in the audience and then violate it. In other words, a situation or experience may be considered humorous if it contradicts one's cognitive framework or vision of how the world should be (Palmer, 1993; Attardo, 2010). Aristotle gives an example to demonstrate this point (1926, p. 411):

> "And he strode on, under his feet—chilblains."

He explains that this verse might create humour because it does not finish with something that the hearer would expect, for example, *sand* or *the road*. Aristotle further argues that jokes that make use of the slight changes in spelling or word play could also bring the same effect. This approach of humour introduced by ancient philosophers is in fact similar to modern techniques used by stand-up comedians, which consist of a build-up and a punch line. The build-up creates the expectation and the punch line is set to be incongruous or violate it. A joke by Welsh comedian Tommy Cooper is a good illustration of this technique:

> "I said to the gym instructor: 'Can you teach me to do the splits?' He said: 'How flexible are you?' I said: 'I can't make Tuesdays'."

Although surprise is an important element of a successful humour attempt, it must somehow fit the fact (Aristotle, 1926). In other words, *resolution* must be presented with the surprise or the statements would merely be absurdity (Shultz & Horibe, 1974; Palmer, 1993). I have presented the previous joke by Tommy Cooper in two other forms to demonstrate this point:

> 1. "I said to the gym instructor: 'Can you teach me to do the splits?' He said: 'Can you do a standing hamstring stretch?' I said: 'I can't make Tuesdays'."
> 2. "I said to the gym instructor: 'Can you teach me to do the splits?' He said: 'How flexible are you?' I said: 'My hip flexor is okay, but I think my hamstrings are quite stiff'."

In the original joke, "I can't make Tuesdays" does not fit well with the idea of "flexible" in the gym – being able to bend to do the *splits.* The presence of incongruity is explained by noting that *flexible* could be interpreted in more than one way. In the first edited form, the incongruity remains while the resolution is removed, which makes the joke become incomprehensible. The second version is not a joke as the punch line is congruous with the previous statements. Another necessary condition for the appreciation of incongruous humour is that the perceiver must feel unthreatened and unchallenged by it (Morreall, 1997; Carroll, 2014). For example, if a total stranger makes a funny face to a small child, the child is likely to be frightened. However, if the child sees the same funny facial expression from a family member, the child is apt to giggle. Similarly, regarding the creation of humour, Aristotle (1926) notes that comedy should not draw attention to the pain or suffering experienced. In other words, the audience must consider the incongruity as an opportunity to enjoy the absurdity, rather than a source of anxiety or fear for themselves or other people, including the fictional character (Carroll, 2014). For instance, when someone is killed or harmed in a comedy or a joke, it is generally a character that has not been developed, or perhaps we do not see at all, and the audience are often spared from the gruesome details of the victim's demise in order for the comic amusement to remain.

2.3.3. The relief / release theory

The relief theory attempts to explain humour through a psychological process which involves a tension-release model that may make a situation perceived as funny and produce laughter. Herbert Spencer seems to be the first to offer the theory along these

lines, although his theory is thought to lean towards explaining the mechanism of laughter rather than humour. Spencer's theory (1911) is heavily influenced by the nineteenth century view of the nervous energy – the mental energy which behaves like water, flows in certain channels in the mind, eventually builds up pressure in the presence of tension, excitement or expectation and must be released by physical means – laughter. Spencer does not consider his theory as a competitor to the incongruity theory but rather attempts to explain how laughter is produced followed certain perceptions of incongruity. The central idea of Spencer's theory – laughter serves as a release for tension – can explain certain situations that involve laughter. For example, a waiter carrying multiple glasses slips over, but manages to balance himself again and avoids the embarrassment. In a split second, his tension built up from fear of falling or dropping the glasses may be released into laughter – out of feeling relieved. This theory can also be found plausible in a technique well used by performers and stand-up comedians – selecting one member of the audience to join them on stage at a gig. Tension is built up among the audience until the 'victim' is selected. The burst of laughter from the audience may be the result of this tension being released upon recognising that they have 'escaped' the selection.

Similar to Spencer, Freud (1960) develops a more complex version of the release theory by providing three sources of laughter: jokes, the comic and humour, which all involve the saving of energy that is then released through laughter. In Freud's theory, "a joke is made, the comic is found and humour is a form of emotional provocation" (p. 239). In jokes, the energy used to suppress the aggression, such as sexual or hostile feelings is discharged through laughter. In the comic, the leftover of the cognitive energy meant to solve the intellectual challenge is released. Finally, in humour, when

a situation expected to be strained turns out to be trivial, the emotional energy saved from the transformation is then released through laughter.

The release theory is not one without criticism. The notion of nervous energy and the process of energy saving in this theory is scientifically unclear. Furthermore, many examples of humour do not involve the working-up or saving of this energy, especially the humour of pure incongruity. Laughter, in this theory, is portrayed as merely a physical channel to discharge some form of energy and the fact that it can also be a sign of pleasure is ignored. As argued by Carroll (2014), when we are presented with a riddle or told a joke, it is the curiosity and desire for closure that are built when we are waiting for the punch line. When the answer or punch line arrives, these expectations are satisfied, rather than being released, and laughter often follows as a sign of enjoyment. Another criticism of this theory comes from Morreall (1983), who targets the notion that laughter is the release of excessive energy produced as a result of strong emotion transformed into weak emotion. He takes 'prank' – a form of humour that starts as weak emotion and reaches its peak of emotion at the time of laughter – as an example of humour that does not fit into Spencer and Freud's hypothesis.

It has been pointed out by Morreall (1983) and Raskin (1985) that to think the three traditional theories of humour are in competition with each other is mistaken. These theories have characterised and explained humour from different angles – the incongruity theory focuses on the stimulus of humour itself, and the other two concentrate on the feelings of the creators and receivers of humour. Therefore, they do

not contradict but rather supplement each other to provide a more complete view of the complex phenomenon of humour.

2.3.4. The violation theory

Veatch (1998) attempts to explain the perception of humour through what he calls "the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions" for the recognition and appreciation of humour. These conditions are described as follows (p. 5, 6):

- V: the violation of "subjective moral principle" (i.e. one's expectation of how things should be is violated)

- N: The situation fits in the receiver's ideas of being normal

- Simultaneity: The N and V present at the same time in the mind of the perceiver.

To some extent, Veatch's theory of the conditions on the perception of humour are similar to the 'surprise' and 'resolution' elements in the incongruity theory. However, while the incongruity theory mainly focuses on explaining why something may be perceived as funny, the violation theory also suggests why an intended joke fails to entertain or may even become offensive depending on how committed the perceiver is to the violated principle, as shown in table 1 below:

Table 1. Veatch's three-level scale (1998, p. 177)

Level	Logic	Commitment	Perceiver		
			Gets it	Is offended	Sees humor
Level 1	not-V	none	no	no	no
Level 2	V and N	weak	yes	no	yes
Level 3	V and not-N	strong	yes	yes	no

At level one, the perceiver is not attached to the violated principle in any way, thus not recognising the humour involved and not finding it funny. At level two, one has a "detachable" attachment to the principles and recognises the presence of a violation. However, this attachment is not strong enough to outweigh the 'normality' interpretation of the situation and this theory claims that this state is associated with the perception of humour. At level three, one has strong, "non-detachable" attachment with the violated principles, thus being able to recognise them, but fails to perceive the violation as normal. Therefore, at level three, one may perceive the humour attempt as unpleasant or offensive. For example, feminists often do not laugh at sexist jokes, as they are seriously committed to the violated principles that such jokes consist of.

The violation theory does not require a single, correct interpretation of a funny situation or joke. Veatch suggests that there may be more than one violation in a joke, and different people may see different violations in the same joke, thus laughing at different aspects of the same situation, depending on the personal values or principles they are committed to. The violation theory is a relatively new theory about the mechanism of humour and is often received without much criticism. However, perhaps one limitation of this theory is that Veatch takes 'subjectivity' as a fundamental

element for his theory, which may be too ambiguous to allow for robust further research (Cochrane, 2017).

2.4. The classification of humour types

Different researchers have classified humour into different categories, depending on their interests in various aspects of humour in various contexts. After thoroughly reviewing the literature of humour and its functions in psycho-social well-being, Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) have introduced four humour styles regularly found in daily life, including affiliative humour, self-enhancing humour, aggressive humour and self-defeating humour. Affiliative humour is humour that is used to facilitate relationships, put others at ease and reduce interpersonal tension. Self-enhancing humour refers to a humorous outlook on life, or the use of humour as a coping mechanism to maintain a positive perspective in the face of stress and adversity. In contrast, aggressive humour relates to hostile humour that aims to manipulate, insult or alienate others. Self-defeating humour involves amusing others at one own's expense to gain approval and sympathy. This type of humour may be a means to hide one's emotional neediness and/or negative feelings about oneself. Although these types of humour are relatively independent of one another, the boundaries are not absolute and some degree of overlap is expected. For example, affiliative humour meant to unify and improve group cohesiveness may involve making fun of opponents or outsiders who are disliked. Similarly, self-enhancing humour may derive from the pleasure or amusement of observation or imagination of the failure of one's adversary. However, it should be noticed that the aggressiveness elements in affiliative and self-enhancing humour are subtle and do not pose much

threat to important relationships with others, such as family members, friends and colleagues (Martin et al., 2003)

In the realm of education, Bryant, Comisky, Crane and Zillmann (1980) developed one of the first taxonomies of classroom humour categories used by college teachers. In their study of college teachers use of humour, students were asked to audio-record one day's lessons and subsequently listen to these recordings again to identify the segments of their teachers' lectures that appeared to have been intended to be funny. Bryant et al. (1980) identified six types of teacher-initiated humour, including jokes, riddles, puns, humorous comments, funny stories and others. However, since Bryant et al.'s categorisation of humour was constructed after their collection of examples of humour through the analysis of audio recordings, it is likely that examples of physical humour and the use of materials containing humour were overlooked. This is a potential weakness and certainly means that their classifications would not be sufficient for classroom contexts where physical humour and humorous materials might be expected to be present, such as in a language class.

In light of the findings reported by Bryant et al. (1980) regarding the differences in students' responses to humour, Gorham and Christophel (1990) set out to examine the relationship between teachers' use of humour and students' learning. They suggest a list of thirteen types of humour, based on its form, its target and its relevance to the topic discussed in the classroom, ranging from brief tendentious comments (directed at self, a student, the class, the subject and so on) to personal and general anecdotes related/unrelated to the lesson, jokes, physical or vocal comedy and others. In the same vein, Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk and Smith (2006) aim to investigate the

appropriate and inappropriate uses of humour by teachers. They have identified seven main types of humour with a total of fifty-three sub-categories, based on the functions and targets of the use of humour in a university, such as related and unrelated (to the class material) humour, self-disparaging humour, disparaging humour: student target, disparaging humour: 'other' target, unintentional or unplanned humour and potentially offensive humour (sexual jokes, drug-related jokes/comments and so on). As abundant and detailed as their classification appear, the large number of categories of humour may become impractical and difficult to manage.

Since humour is a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in different contexts and given that researchers also may have varying aims, there is a rationale for different categories of humour to be adopted. These may be either pre-determined before the research is carried out, or decided afterwards, based on the data collected. Alternatively, categories may be a combination of both processes.

2.5. The functions of humour

2.5.1. The health benefits of humour

The notion that humour and laughter can improve both physical and mental well-being is not a new one. Ancient Greeks, for example, prescribed a visit to a hall of comedians as a compulsory part of the healing therapy (Kleisiaris, Sfakianakis & Papathanasiou, 2014). Cousins (1979) anecdotally reports how watching humorous movies and TV shows as a consistent adjunct to his medical treatment helped him to cope with the pain and suffering from ankylosing spondylitis, a degenerative disease involving the

inflammation of the spine. However, there was a lack of empirical evidence supporting the positive psycho-physiological impacts of humour until the twentieth century when researchers started to investigate these mechanisms. Influential studies on various physiological changes during humour appreciation and the production of laughter have been published since then, including reducing cortisol and catecholamine levels and enhancing the production of antibodies (Hubert & de Jong-Meyer, 1990; Berk et al., 2001), increasing ventilation and muscle activity (Brutsche et al., 2008; Mora-Ripoll, 2010) and improving blood flow and cardiovascular endurance (Miller, Mangano, Beach, Kop & Vogel, 2010; Hayashi et al., 2016). Humour may also affect health through the positive emotions associated with humour and laughter. There has been growing research into the uses and application of psychotherapy frameworks involving humour as an intervention with children, adults and medical patients (Reddy, Williams & Vaughan, 2002; Joshua, Cotroneo & Clarke, 2005; Christie & Moore, 2007; Koller & Gryski, 2008; Tanay, Roberts & Ream, 2012). The use of humour and laughter in the treatment for patients with chronic and serious mental illness, such as major depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder and so on have been widely accepted, thanks to their mind relaxing, tension reducing and communication encouraging nature (Gelkopf et al., 2006; Walter, et al., 2007; Tsoi, et al., 2008; Rudnick, et al., 2014).

2.5.2. The functions of humour in communication

Humour and laughter can be found in many communicative settings, yet previously the majority of humour research focused on an individual's perception and interpretation of humour. Over the past twenty-five years, greater attention has been

given to humour as an interpersonal tool in communication (Lynch, 2002; Ramsey, 2016). Martineau (1972) and Meyer (2000) have proposed the basic rhetorical functions of humour in social settings, which are *identification, clarification, enforcement* and *differentiation*. We will look at each of these in turn.

2.5.2.1. Identification

One valuable function of humour is to connect the speaker with his or her audience and create communicative bonds with them (Meyer, 2000). High-status individuals' use of humour may minimise the psychological distance between them and their subordinates, allowing a more truthful relationship (Greengross & Miller, 2008; Stewart, 2011). In their studies of the role of humour in psychotherapy, Poland (1971) and Richman (1996) conclude that integrated and spontaneous humour initiated by the therapists can help show their humanness, break down the usual barriers existing within the psychiatric institutions and overall improve the therapeutic process. Similarly, several studies have concluded that humour is an effective tool to deliver unpleasant and emotional messages in a more indirect and face-saving way (du Pré, 1998; Ragan, 2014; Schöpf, Martin & Keating, 2017). However, the speaker should also consider the appropriateness of using humour in these cases, depending on the extent of impact the situation may have on the listener to avoid giving the impression of being disrespectful or insensitive, if the news were very bad.

Furthermore, self-deprecating humour is often used to ally the communicator with their audience and make that audience feel less inferior, in the sense that they are brought up to a more equal relationship with the speaker (Chapel, 1978; Kuiper &

Leite, 2010). Self-deprecating humour refers to the ability to gently make fun of one's own faults and limitations. Many studies have shown that leaders who have good sense of humour, and more specifically, who are able to laugh at their deficits are usually perceived as humble, honest and down-to-earth by their teams (Ziv, 1984; Meyer, 2000; Gruner-Domic, 2011; Hoption, Barling & Turner, 2013). However, this notion may vary with culture, as most of these studies were conducted in the US where the power distance within the workplace and the society is reported to be relatively low (Smith & Hume, 2005; Botero & Van Dyne, 2009)

It should be noted that self-deprecating humour is very different from self-defeating humour, which often "involves denigration of the self and repression of one's own emotional need" (Martin et al., 2003, p.52). Comments from English comedian Andrew Lawrence about his own appearance is a good example of self-defeating humour:

> "I'm never quite sure how to start a gig, to be honest. A lot of the time I come on and just acknowledge the fact that I've got ginger hair, a creepy face and a voice like a sex offender. I feel like if I don't do that, audiences are sitting there, a little bit baffled and confused thinking, "What's going on in the comedic sense? God's given this man so much to work with and yet he's using none of it. How could this be?" (Lawrence, 2010)

Self-deprecating humour, on the other hand is non-hostile and aims to elicit positive emotions while still maintaining the speaker's sense of self-acceptance (Martin et al., 2003). The *identification* function of humour is also used to improve group unification and cohesiveness, provided that the use of humour aims to enhance one's self-esteem

as well as other members in the group (Sprowl, 1987; Samson, Lackner, Weiss & Papousek, 2012). Humour aimed at outsiders in an insulting manner, from the superiority theory point of view, might be an appropriate response to threats from outside the group. On the other hand, humour directed at members of the group in a playful manner may aid the feelings of acceptance and belonging (Greatbatch & Clark, 2003).

2.5.2.2. Clarification

The speaker may also use humour to "encapsulate their message into short, memorable phrases or short anecdotes", which promotes better understanding of their message and encourages the recall of the mentioned events by the audience (Meyer, 2000, p. 319). This use of humour often involves the application of incongruity-solution theory and contains the surprise element. Advertisers have utilised this function of humour for decades to grasp an audience's attention and deliver the information about their brand and promotions in a creative and memorable way (Spotts, Weinberger & Parsons, 1997; Chan, 2011). Politicians have also learnt that a humorous line or comment is more likely to be picked up by the media and reaches the general audience much faster than a thorough speech or policy presentation (Morreall, 2005) and that "humour can have a serious intent" (Tsakona & Popa, 2011, p. 1). Former US President George Bush, who managed to avoid a pair of shoes hurled at him during a news conference in Iraq in 2008, joked about the incident afterwards: "If you want the facts, it's a size ten shoe that he threw." Most of the articles reporting the incident focused on Mr. Bush's humorous response, creating the impression that Mr. Bush was not seriously affected by the insults as well as making the incident itself appear less embarrassing

for him. In other words, his remark served to deliver his attitude to the incident and simultaneously relieve the tension surrounding it. In terms of education, researchers have found positive correlations between the use of lesson-related humour and students' content recall and retention (Aragon, 2003; Boyle & Stack, 2014), which will be discussed further in section 2.6.4.1.

2.5.2.3. Enforcement

Humour is also usually used as social correctives by delivering criticism while still maintaining some level of identification with the audience (Meyer, 2000). Politicians, activists and stand-up comedians have been using this function of humour as "a velvet weapon" (Meyer, 1990, p. 1) to subtly speak against their opponents, raise awareness to a particular problem or just simply criticise what seems to go against their beliefs of the norms. Michael McIntyre, a British comedian, has humorously expressed his confusion over modern public bathrooms, particularly the tap: "Now, people have literally no idea how to access water from modern taps. You have lines of people doing tai chi trying to work it out!". Another famous example of the enforcement function of humour came from former US President Ronald Reagan in a news conference in 1986, in which he addressed how the long history of government-imposed embargo and conflicts had affected American farmers: "I think you all know that I've always felt the nine most terrifying words in the English language are: "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help."" The speaker can get his or her audience to laugh at the incongruity presented and avoid appearing as a "bitter, angry critic" (Meyer, 2000, p. 320).

The enforcement function is also found in humour involving children. These funny episodes, although eliciting amusement and mirth, emphasises the children's 'innocent' violation of norms because they have yet to learn these. Children's letters to God (Hample & Marshall, 1991) are a good illustration of this function of humour, for example "I am American. What are you?" (p. 55) or "Thank you for the baby brother but what I prayed for was a puppy." (p. 59) Similarly, children often come up with interesting questions that can put the adults in a funny yet tricky situation, such as: "How do daddy and mummy make babies? Next time you make another baby, can I watch?" These instances reflect the lack of common knowledge or social perspective of the children and the need for correction and/or teaching from the adults.

2.5.2.4. Differentiation

The final function of humour, and perhaps the harshest one, is to distance oneself, or one group from another. The use of this function may range from mild comparing and contrasting to extreme sarcasm and aggressive jokes. By pointing out the opponent person or group's differences (which are often perceived as defects or failures), the speaker aims to enhance his/her own or his/her group's credibility, intelligence and value, which can be linked to the superiority theory (see section 2.3.1.) Examples of this function include the comparison between British and American English, as illustrated in an English chat show:

> "They've taken the English language, but they looked at some of it and thought: "No, no, I think we need a bit more explanation here." So things like *pavement*, they can't work with pavement, so they changed it into *sidewalk*. They needed to know where

> they were going to be walking so that they wouldn't get run over. […] Glasses for your eyes, they call them *eyeglasses*, they needed to know where to put them on the face […] And my favourite one without a doubt, do you know horse riding in America? […] No, *horseback riding*. They have to specify…the area of the horse."
>
> (McIntyre, 2015)

The differentiation function may also serve as a clear 'boundary' between members of the group and the outsider(s), often through the funny comments or references that only insiders can understand, for instance, in-jokes. This further emphasises the privilege of the group membership and at the same time, resists the presence of non-member individuals. This dual effect is often referred to as *the paradox of humour'* (Meyer, 2000).

2.5.2.5. The paradox of humour

The identification and clarification functions of humour usually generate agreement, thus tending to unify the communicators. On the other hand, the enforcement and differentiation functions often rely on the disagreement and differences among parties, thus being more likely to create division (Meyer, 2000). However, it may be inevitable that humour meant to unify a group can send the wrong message to people outside the circle, creating a sense of alienation within the organisation as a whole. In other words, "laughter forms a bond and simultaneously draws a line […] produces simultaneously a strong fellow-feeling among participants and joint aggressiveness against outsiders" (Lorenz, 1963, p. 253). This is particularly true to people who belong to minority groups in the area or country they choose to work or settle in. Humour among friends

and colleagues tends to be drawn from social norms, history and culture, which can significantly vary around the world. When immigrants find themselves regularly not being able to comprehend the local humour in daily interactions and on means of entertainment, such as TV shows and movies, their social insecurity may be increased and they may be less willing to communicate and build relationships with the natives, and stick to their own community (Shifman & Katz, 2005). Since legal and social efforts have been made to eliminate racism and discrimination as well as promoting cultural diversity, aggressive or hostile humour aimed at the minorities may have moved from public domain into private interest. Individuals may publicly appear to conform to expected attitudes while still discreetly engaging in humour that segregates those from different cultural and social backgrounds. This situation calls for better understanding of everyday intercultural communication, especially in large corporations and universities where strategic efforts have been made to recruit staff and students from different ethnic backgrounds. Merely gathering people from different cultural backgrounds may encourage the spread of abusive humour in the private realm covered by a masquerade of tolerance (Miczo & Welter, 2006). This again emphasises that humour can be destructive, hurtful and alienating, as well as a force for cohesion.

2.5.3. Humour and genders

"I wondered why it was that when a man tells a joke and women don't laugh, we are told we have no sense of humour, but when a woman tells a joke and men don't laugh, we are told we are not funny." (Jenkins, 1985, p. 135)

It is necessary here to differentiate between the two terms 'sex' and 'gender'. Sex is a term referring to the biologically based categories of male and female. Gender, on the other hand, is a term related to the social construct and psychological features associated with these biological states (Deaux, 1985), and refers to "the amount of masculinity or femininity found in a person" (Oakley, 1991, p. 116). Thus, gender allows for multiple perspectives, rather than just a binary distinction. People may present themselves in ways that are typically associated with their gender identity – a sense an individual has for him/herself as male or female (Stoller, 1994), but this may vary with other context factors (who they are with and so on).

A great deal of previous research into humour has focused on comparing and contrasting the usage and appreciation of humour in males and females. Men and women often perceive the world in different ways, thus probably having different joking interests (Kramarae, 1981). Roy (1960) was one of the first to examine the use of humour in male-dominant workplaces. In his study, he reported how aggressive mocking and incessant teasing were used by four male machinists to form an informal group culture and cope with the monotony of their jobs. In the same vein, a detailed examination of the use of humour in an exclusively male workforce of 250 in an English lorry producing factory by Collinson (1988) found that the ability to create and accept insulting nicknames, humiliating pranks and jokes were associated with a shared sense of masculinity, for "only 'real men' would be able to laugh at themselves by accepting highly insulting nicknames […] and being the object of humour." (p. 421, 424). This joking culture was also the way these shop-floor workers expressed their self-differentiation from the 'white-collar' staff and managers. They perceived their uncompromising banter as "a symbol of freedom and autonomy", in contrast with the

clean, polite and reserved "twats and nancy boys in the office" (p. 422). This comment highlights both the misogynistic and homophobic attitudes implicit in being a 'real man', although we should remember that the study is dated. For females working in these male-dominant industries, such as firefighting, civil engineering and construction, demonstrating that they are "a good bloke" (Watts, 2007, p. 261) by being able to "have a laugh and take a joke" (p. 264) is a means for them to resist the outsider status. In these settings, sarcasm and leg-pull are often the most common forms of humour, as "Some men, feeling threatened by the increased (though still minority) participation of women in the industry, use humour to resist engaging with women on a professional level to ensure that men continue to benefit from the 'patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 2002, p. 142).

The use of aggressive humour, which is based on the superiority theory, was also observed in secondary male pupils in "blowing competition" in a qualitative study done by Kehily and Nayak (1997). 'Blowing competition' refers to "hotly contested verbal duals between two invariably male opponents, usually in lunch periods away from the intervention of teachers" (p. 72). These exchanges often consist of mocking and insults of the females that are close to their opponents, such as their mothers or sisters. The ability to control the emotions and produce a better and funnier 'counter-attack' is thought to demonstrate their sexual power and masculinity. Humour is also found to be a strategy used by male pupils to maintain their dominant position in the classroom, by intentionally 'goofing around' or being a 'class clown' to stay in the limelight and silence other speakers in the class (Coates, 2007; de Bruyn, Cillessen & Weisfeld, 2012).

In contrast to reported men's frequent use of aggressive and self-enhancing humour at the cost of others (see section 2.4.), women are observed to be more collaborative with their humour. Women tend to use self-deprecating humour (see section 2.6.2.1.) to joke about themselves or their past experience to establish common ground, promote intimacy and facilitate social support within the group (Carnes, 2001; Kotthoff, 2006; Coates, 2007). Therefore, women's humour tends to often consist of anecdotes and relies on the context, providing acceptable outlets for aggression, reducing the awkwardness or anxiety prompted by the situation and healing old embarrassment. Men's humour, on the other hand, tends to be formulaic and detached from the surrounding context, which requires their audience to understand the punch-line and 'get the joke', giving a performance quality to their humour (Jenkins, 1985; Ervin-Tripp & Lampert, 1992; Crawford, 2003; Coates, 2007). In an analysis of the humour used by males and females in various single-sex conversations, Coates (2007) also concludes that both genders use humour to create and maintain solidarity in different ways. Male speakers build a shared sense of masculinity through competitive talk and friendly but adversarial humour while female speakers tend to seek shared understanding by establishing common themes and tell funny stories arising from these themes, including past stories about themselves.

A systematic analysis of sixteen spontaneous conversations to compare New Zealand males and females' use of humour in single-sex and mixed groups by Hay (2002) reveals that the group composition also has a significant impact on the types of humour used. Interestingly, her study reveals that the male and female participants dedicated similar proportions of their humour to insults and vulgarity in single-sex conversations, which is contrary to the previous studies reporting that these types of

humour are mostly enjoyed by men. However, both genders were observed to considerably reduce the use of aggressive and offensive humour in mixed sex exchanges, although the females used slightly more joking insults or friendly teasing aimed at the opposite sex than their male friends. Hay (2002) explains that this shifting may be due to the expected gender behaviours – that men should not use vulgarity and be disrespectful when there are "ladies in the room" and it is unladylike for women to use expletives, so they tend to avoid this around men (Folb, 1980; Limbrick, 1991). It is also found that women used significantly more story-telling humour than men in single-sex conversation and men increase their use of this type of humour in mixed sex exchanges, possibly to accommodate the female participants' preference.

The gender of the speaker is also suggested to influence the way their use of humour is perceived. A thorough discussion on the subject was presented by Evans et al. (2019), in which 216 participants evaluated four video recordings of male and female retail store managers reporting store performance to a group of regional managers. The results indicate that humorous males are perceived as having better performance and higher leadership capacity than non-humorous males while the opposite is applied to females. In addition, men's use of humour is more likely to be evaluated as 'functional', whereas the same humour used by women tend to be considered 'disruptive'. In other words, in a work-place context, men are suggested to benefit from their use of humour while women are penalised for it.

Similar findings are reported in Bryant et al. (1980) in which correlation coefficients were computed between the lecturers' frequency of use of humour and their students' evaluation of them. The teachers were evaluated based on three factors: appeal,

competence and delivery. The appeal factor consists of items such as being entertaining, witty and appealing. Competence refers to the characteristics of being informative, informed and intelligent. The delivery factor is concerned with voice quality, speaking quality and being personable. It is found that the male teachers in Bryant et al. (1980) used more humour than their female counterparts and their overall frequency use of humour is positively related to their appeal, competence and delivery evaluation. On the other hand, only the use of hostile humour is associated with an enhanced appeal factor for female professors. One explanation for this rating is that their use of aggressive humour indicates their assertiveness and authority, which makes them appear more equal to their male colleagues. In addition, distracting students from educational points with humour is not merely tolerated but is positively correlated with enhanced appeal, but only for male lecturers. Conversely, female teachers' whose humour was perceived to be unrelated to the lesson received significantly low scores on all three factors. These studies suggest that the potential benefits of using humour may be negatively affected by the female stereotypes, such as lack of experience in using humour, having lower dedication to work and lack of rationality (Fiske et al., 2002; Schneider & Bos, 2014; Zotos & Tsichla, 2014)

2.5.4. Humour in education

2.5.4.1 Humour and students' cognitive development

A number of researchers have investigated the potential of humour in education and many benefits have been well documented. Psychological-educational studies have reported that the hippocampal section in the human brain, which is commonly

understood as an innovation detector and responsible for the formation and retention of memory, tends to take on a central role upon the encounters with humour (Vrticka, Black & Reiss, 2013). In other words, information is significantly easier to be recalled when it is presented with the help of humour. Many studies conducted in classroom settings confirm students' abilities to remember and recognise past knowledge considerably improve when they are exposed to lectures or messages which contain subject-related humour (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Hill, 1988; Ziv, 1988; Hackathorn et al., 2011; Seidman & Brown, 2013).

One of the most cited studies is that of Garner (2006) who investigated the role of humour in learning and information retention in a university setting, particularly on the topic of statistics, "one of the most dreaded courses in college" (p. 178). Ninety-four undergraduate students were randomly assigned into two groups and were asked to watch a series of three forty-minute lessons presented by the same lecturer. The experiment group, however, was presented with the version in which the lecturer employed course-related humour. The students were then asked to evaluate the lessons and took a recall assessment exercise. Results from this study show that the lectures containing humour received significantly higher ratings for overall opinion of the lesson, how well the content was communicated and how well the instructor performed. Most importantly, the subjects in the experiment group were also reported to score considerably higher in the recall and retention post-test, compared to the control group, who viewed the lectures without humour.

In studies involving language teaching, humour has been suggested to be a helpful teaching strategy to create linguistic awareness in the second language classroom,

which is slightly different in nature compared to other subjects. Whereas in other disciplines (such as mathematics, statistics or history), language is the means to transfer the content, in language classes, language is both the content and the means (Petraki & Nguyen, 2016). Schmitz (2002, p.101) maintains that "English has a large stock of phonological jokes that bring together different meanings of a specific word or relate different word sense that sound alike". Employing linguistic humour in second language teaching, as Deneire (1995) and Medgyes (2002) believe, may help students become sensitive to the syntactic and the semantic differences within a language and between different languages, thus being able to communicate more effectively in the target language. The examples below demonstrate how linguistic humour can be incorporated into language teaching:

- Phonological humour – the humour is in the phonemes, or the similarity of the sounds:

  Mr. Brown: Max, explain to me what is the meaning of syntax.

  Max: It is the tax you pay when you go to the church? (Mind your language, series 1, episode 11)

- Morphological humour – the humour is in the form of words

  What did the rabbit give his girlfriend?

  A 24-carrot ring (Dunn, 2007, p. 81)

- Lexical humour – the humour is in the meaning of the word

  Man in restaurant: I'll have two lamb chops, and make them lean, please.

  Waiter: To which side? (Clark, 1968, p. 191, cited by Oaks, 1994, p. 378)

- Syntactic humour – the humour is in the structure of the sentence

  Waiter: We have almost everything on the menu.

  Customer: I can see that. Will you please bring me a clean one? (Sánchez Roura, 1995, p. 212)

In the same vein, the use of fun language play, such as puns in cartoons and comics can increase learners' awareness of language and comprehension as it exposes students to ambiguity, which is common in language, in a safe and interesting way (Lucas, 2005; Lems, 2011; Pollack, 2011), as one participant in Lucas (2005) commented:

> "It's better with cartoons, because you laugh, you learn, you get the point quicker. Have they tried to teach with cartoons?"

Deneire (1995) also emphasizes the importance of humour in the teaching of culture inside the language classroom, claiming the anecdotal humour derived from cultural diversity can serve as an excellent indicator of unseen cultural boundaries of the target language, as well as gaining an insight of appropriate humour in different contexts. Additionally, he suggests using authentic and funny materials in the target language as a means to deliver cultural hints to students, as they can "convey a great amount of cultural and pragmatic knowledge about a language within a very small space or short period of time" (p.193). In agreement with this view, Azizinezhad and Hashemi (2011) and Özdoğru and McMorris (2013) believe that teaching a language through humorous materials is a delightful strategy to familiarise the students with certain practices, beliefs, manners and traditions of the target culture and create intercultural

42

understanding. This is especially applicable to international students studying in English speaking countries, who often express frustration, embarrassment and feelings of alienation when they fail to understand and participate in conversations that contain humour with native speakers (Bell, 2007; Gu, Schweisfurth & Day, 2010; Zhang & Xu, 2011). The language classroom is a safe and supportive place to facilitate these students with a taste of the target culture sense of humour and also to encourage them to experiment with language play so that they can create and maintain social relations with other English speakers.

Research into humour also pays attention to its indirect benefits in education. The majority of the research uses rating or frequency scales, interviews and questionnaires completed by learners to investigate the effects of humour in classroom settings. The basis for these studies begins with the common idea that laughter can encourage communication and act as a conversation starter, tension breaker, or healing intervention (Huss, 2008). Among educational psychologists, there is a consensus that the learning process is most effective when it is conducted with positive emotions and in a supportive environment (Dart et al., 2000; Glenn, 2002; Rushton & Juola-Rushton, 2008). Also, humour and laughter have been proved to decrease anxiety, reduce stress, lower defences, boost confidence, and enhance self-motivation (Berk, 1996), create a more secure and open classroom environment (Askildson, 2005) and increase alertness and creative thinking (Petry, 1998).

These advantages of humour have been supported by a number of studies from various fields. In social science courses, for example, some discussion topics, such as philosophical orientations, prejudices of society and culture, and political or religious

affiliations, can be extremely mentally challenging or emotionally draining. In order to defuse tensions, the majority of professors in a study conducted by Lovorn and Holawayn (2015) are reported to introduce the topic with light-hearted imagery, video clips, or scenarios as well as incorporating funny examples into their lectures. The participants in this research acknowledge that this strategy seems to counteract the pervasive nonverbal and verbal tensions in the class and encourage students to consider alternative perspectives of the given problem. In Marshall's survey conducted in 2002, all of the respondents rated the use of material, such as Calvin and Hobbes, The Far Side, The Simpsons, and Seinfeld, as examples in library instruction as 'successful', with eighty seven percent finding it 'highly useful'. They noted that these humorous examples keep students alert and engaged, creating a more comfortable learning environment and minimising library anxiety.

In the second language classroom, students have to perform the tasks and communicate in a language that they have not yet mastered. This fact seems to further reinforce an already stressful classroom situation, establishing a distinct form of language classroom anxiety (Krashen, 1985; Horwitz et al., 1986). According to Krashen (1985), a student's feeling of anxiety builds up an affective filter, a mental block, which hinders an individual's ability to acquire comprehensible language input he or she receives. Thus, humour, with its stress lessening, anxiety reducing, and relaxation/comfort producing effects, can be employed as a relevant and supportive pedagogical tool in language classroom (Deneire, 1995; Garner, 2006; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015)

2.5.4.2 Humour and the teacher-student relationship

The teacher-student relationship bears several similarities to other interpersonal relationships: it involves initial meeting, adjusting, negotiating and resolving any conflicts so that both parties can reach the goals they wish to achieve (DeVito, 1986). However, this relationship is unique due to two differences, as Frymier and Houser (2000, p. 2) note "it lacks the equality typically associated with friendship and has a time constraint not typical of friendships." The relationship between teacher and student influences the learning process both directly and indirectly. A positive teacher-student relationship facilitates the learning environment, which in turn can affect cognitive learning. Students may still be able to learn with a tense relationship with their teacher but are less willing to apply the knowledge (Frymier & Houser, 2000). Hofstede (1980) suggests that many countries in Asia and the Middle East, such as China, Korea, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and so on, have high power distance societies, which is demonstrated by the high hierarchy in the workplace and great distance between social strata. This may explain the high power distance in the teacher-student relationship in these countries, as observed in Bush and Haiyan (2000), Davies and Ikeno (2002), Alshaya (2003), Richardson (2004) and Nguyen, Terlouw and Pilot (2006) studies. On the other hand, in the UK and other English-speaking countries, such as the US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, the teacher-student relationship is perceived by many international students as friendlier and more open (Novera, 2004; Al-Harthi, 2005; Zhang & Brunton, 2007; Gu, 2009; Prowse & Goddard, 2010).

Several studies have found that humour attempts initiated by the teacher have great influence on the social relationships between teacher and learners (Kher, Molstad & Donahue, 1999; Booth-Butterfield & Wanzer, 2010; Banas et al., 2011; Sidelinger, 2014). When humour is incorporated as part of the teaching strategy, a caring and flexible atmosphere is built, and communication between student and teacher becomes easier and more open. This reduces the authoritarian position of the teacher, allowing the teacher to be a facilitator/guider of the learning process (Watson & Emerson, 1988).

The same finding has been identified in several studies on humour as a pedagogical tool to foster learning, in which participants responded that humour could be a bridge that connects and strengthens social relationships between learners and teachers (Wanzer, 2002; Garner, 2006; Chabeli, 2008; Özdoğru & McMorris, 2013; Petraki & Nguyen, 2016) and could even increase attendance in class (Devadoss & Foltz, 1996; Deiter, 2000; Brewer & Burgess, 2005). Content-focused humour is also reported to create the impression that the teacher is well-prepared and has made an effort to deliver the lesson in a more enjoyable manner (Garner, 2006; Victoria, 2019). Further studies reveal that humour has positive influences on students' social relationships with not only the educator, but also one another. When learning in a positive environment of a humour-enriched, students are more supportive to one another when conducting peer evaluations (Lovorn & Holaway, 2015) and more likely to accept corrective criticism and developmental feedback (White, 2001; Ruch & Heintz, 2016). However, the majority of the studies cited above were conducted at Western institutions, mostly in the US, and the nationalities of the students were not specified.

Interestingly, research done by Sidelinger (2014) and Sidelinger and Tatum (2019) indicates that lecturers with a good sense of humour tend to get away with miscommunication and instructional dissent more easily than their unfunny colleagues. Their appropriate, relevant use of humour may redirect students' attention and moderate students' negative attitudes of the lecturers' inappropriate conversations in the classroom. Students who perceive their lecturer's use of humour as relevant and appropriate are also more likely to use rhetorical dissent (e.g. "I tell my teacher when I disagree with him/her so I can do better in this course.") than aggressive or vengeful dissent (e.g. "I hope one day my teacher gets fired as a result of my criticism of him/her.")

Overall, humour can be considered as a dual-advantage pedagogical tool. When appropriately employed in class, it can act as a "hook" to help students pick up the content faster and remember it for a longer period of time. In the language classroom, it can also be used as an amusing strategy to raise learners' awareness of different linguistic aspects and familiarise them with the norms and culture of the target language. In addition, teacher-initiated humour assists in the creation of an encouraging and relaxing learning environment, thus reducing anxiety and building rapport between teacher and students and it strengthens the unity of the whole class.

2.5.4.3 Problems with using humour in the classroom

Having been advocated by much past literature, not all use of humour produces positive results. Jokes that target one or more students or certain groups based on their ethnic group, religion, political affiliation, sexual orientation, or appearance are

believed to be destructive, leaving serious backlash and should never be used in any educational context (Wanzer, 2002; Chabeli, 2008; Lovorn & Holaway, 2015). On the other hand, the use of humour can be sophisticated because it is highly personal, subjective, and contextual (Garner, 2006). Things that seem amusing or funny to one person can turn out to be offensive or dull to others, especially if the teacher and students in the class do not share the same language and/or cultural background. This is the case in most of the English language classes in the UK, in which teacher and students themselves come from different cultures. The international students often express frustration with respect to the use and understanding of English humour (Bell, 2009). In particular, Asian students often experience culture shock and culture fatigue, considering jokes as a kind of knowledge test. They are reported to be more reserved and constantly in fear of losing face, thus being more sensitive to sarcasm and funny remarks, which seem to be less threatening in Western cultures (Cheng, Leong & Geist, 1993). Therefore, the use of humour which aims to decrease anxiety and unite members of class may sometimes have the opposite effect. There are several instances from second language classrooms where the teachers fail to employ humour that is comprehensible for the students (i.e. the students do not understand the humour due to their lack of proficiency in the target language). In these cases, students may feel left out, confused and discouraged (Senior, 2001; Wanzer, Frymier & Irwin, 2010; Strong, 2013). Davies (2003) also challenges the idea of employing humour in the language classroom as she believes students coming from openly authoritarian cultures are usually not familiar with the idea of humour in the classroom and may resist the teacher's attempt to reduce the power distance between them.

Another possible problem regarding the use of humour in class is its frequency. When overused, humour may hinder learners' concentration and understanding, as reported in a study by Fisher (1997). Two groups of participants were presented with two versions of a short taped general astronomy show with the same main content, but one of them contained a fair amount of humour instances. The post-test revealed that the group given the humorous version had less recall of the material and scored lower on the test than those who saw the non-humorous one. This result raises educators' awareness of 'the optimal dose' of humour to be used in class to avoid turning it into distraction, which Bryant et al. (1980) suggest being three to four times per hour or lecture in the higher education context of their research. However, we should remember that it is hard to be prescriptive about the amount of humour that is appropriate in any given class because there are bound to be many contextual variables, such as age, motivations for learning and so on.

2.6. Teacher cognition and teaching practice

Since this current study investigates the perceptions of teachers towards the use of humour, it is necessary to review the literature on classroom discourse and teacher cognition and how they may influence teachers' practice in the classroom. Borg (2003) refers to teacher's cognition as "the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching – what teachers know, believe, and think" (p. 81). In the fifties and sixties, under the influence of behaviourism and Direct and Audiolingual methods (ALM), teachers' main goal was to make learners' use of the target language become an automatic response. The highly structured drilling of ALM fostered a parallel teaching pattern that required little cognitive work from the teachers (Burns, Freeman & Edwards,

2015). Research on process-product model which focused on the teaching behaviours that would result in effective learning was prominent. The idea was that teachers could be programmed to teach in certain ways universally to optimise and synchronise the teaching-learning procedure. In the seventies, this view started to be challenged. Educational researchers became more aware of the complex relationship between teachers' cognition – what they think and believe, and their teaching practice – what they do inside the classroom. In other words, teachers are not robots that thoughtlessly apply curricula designed by others. Teachers always have their individual preferences and reasonings, and these influence the decisions in their own teaching practice as well as the classroom discourse.

2.6.1. Classroom discourse

Classroom discourse has been the centre of educational research for the past fifty years. The classroom represents an institutional context in which participants work together to achieve pedagogic goals of teaching and learning. Therefore, classroom discourse is often characterised as goal-driven, with the overall focus on transactional or task-oriented talk (Walsh, 2006; Garton, 2012; Evison, 2013). It is through this 'message-oriented' communication that we convey and access new knowledge, acquire and develop new skills (Brown & Yule, 1983). This communication, however, is more complicated in the language classroom context, since linguistic forms become both "the vehicle and object of instruction" (Long, 1983, cited in Walsh, 2006, p.218). More specifically, in EAP courses, the need to achieve academic goals – for students to successfully extend their linguistic competence to deal with requirements from future departments – is often made explicit.

In addition to being shaped by institutional expectations and goals, spoken academic discourse is also influenced by the roles that teachers and students adopt in the classroom. Perhaps the most established sets of teacher-student relationships are the

dual matrix of expert-novice and server-client that operate simultaneously (Mauranen, 2001; Evison, 2013). The former set of roles reflects the asymmetrical relationship between teachers and students. In most classroom settings, teachers have the power to control the patterns of communication by managing the topic of the interaction and turn-taking, deciding who can talk, when and for how long (Garton, 2012; Walsh, 2013). Students typically take the cues from their teacher and respond accordingly, in the form of verbal response, an action or a change in focus. For every contribution made by the student, the teacher often makes two: the lead and the follow-up. This pattern of interaction was characterised by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) as IRF exchange: Initiation – Response – Feedback. In these exchanges, students' turns often contain fewer words and their contribution is often seen as "inferior discursively" (Evison, 2013, p. 6).

In the language classroom, this expert-novice relationship is further demonstrated by the teachers' conscious modification of their spoken language, such as using a more restricted code with slower pace, making greater use of emphasis and pausing. These deliberate modification strategies are often employed to model the language and to assist students with their comprehension (Walsh, 2013). Although less frequent than teacher-initiated exchanges, there are times when the interactions are fashioned by students' questions. These are often confirmation checks (i.e. if the student's understanding of the teacher's meaning is correct) and clarification and information requests. Interestingly, these learner initiatives usually begin with an explicit labelling of the speech act (e.g. Can I ask a quick question?), possibly to reduce the abruptness of the interruption and to avoid appearing to challenge the teachers' 'expert' status and their input (Hyland, 2009; Garton, 2012).

The important role played by relational talk and personal elements in classroom discourse, despite its overall focus on institutional goals and task-oriented talk, has been highlighted in a number of studies (Koester, 2006; Burns & Knox, 2011; Cekaité, 2013; Rymes, 2015). In an academic setting, language is not only used to convey factual information but is also used to establish and maintain relationships, negotiate roles, exchange turns in the conversation and so on. As mentioned above, in addition to the expert-novice relationship, tutors and students also adopt the roles of servers

and clients, which are constituents of the "marketing cultures of lecture discourse" (Evison, 2013, p. 6). This 'server' role requires tutors to mitigate the authority of their 'expert' status and simultaneously, the 'client' role gives learners more sense of democratisation, especially in the case of higher education (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; Hyland, 2009). As we have seen in sections 2.2. and 2.6.2., humour and laughter clearly play a role in relational talk and communication. Humour can be used both as a means of exerting power through superiority, or as a means to build communities, reduce power distance relationships and smooth conversations.

The effect of the dual roles that teachers and students have in the classroom is reflected in a shift from reading style delivery to more interactive lectures, seminars and small group teaching, as well as tutors' adoption of multiple strategies to improve interaction and interpersonal closeness (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997). These strategies include the use of audience inclusive pronouns and questions, stance markers, deixis, idiomatic language and so on (Csomay, 2002; Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2009; Waring, 2013). A recent study by Heron and Webster (2019) involved scaffolding talk in pre-sessional and in-sessional courses also reports that EAP tutors establish and maintain rapport by using praise, linking the material to personal and academic experiences as well as asking for alternatives and partially accepting incorrect answers as part of error correction.

The study of classroom discourse has provided invaluable insights into the complexity of the relationship between interaction and learning, which help teachers reflect on and improve their professional practice. These studies, however, tend to be linguistic descriptions and the majority of them do not include the participants' views and how they were interpreted by them. As the number of international students studying at English-medium universities rapidly increases, there is a need for more research into various aspects of cross-cultural pragmatics and the perceptions of the participants about the complex relationship between teachers' language, classroom interaction and students' learning.

The communication in the classroom may also be influenced by teachers' cognition and their beliefs of the appropriate teaching practice. Teachers' cognition and practice

are affected by a number of factors, including their past learning experience, teacher education, teaching context and teaching experience.

2.6.2. The impacts of teacher personal learning experience on teacher cognition and practice

Teachers have learnt about teaching even before they enter any teacher education and training by observing and evaluating their own learning experience, the phenomenon termed as *apprenticeship of observation* by Lortie (1975). In a project done by Bailey et al. (1996), seven MA in English language teaching (ELT) students and a teacher trainer were asked to reflect on how their previous learning experience influenced their current teaching philosophies and practices. Several factors that made their own learning experience positive were reported to form the characteristics that they believed a good teacher should have, such as the teacher should be caring and committed, as well as having clear expectations of their students. The authors of this study felt, quoting a similar study by Freeman (1992), that "the memories of instruction gained through their 'apprenticeship of observation' function as de facto guides for teachers as they approach what they do in the classroom" (p. 11). Further details on how previous learning experience impacts teachers' classroom practice were reported in the studies of Johnson (1994) and Numrich (1996). Johnson (1994) offers insights into the struggle pre-service teachers had in an effort to establish a teaching practice that reflected their beliefs instead of falling back into applying the teacher-centred methods they received during their formal education, as one participant put it:

"It's been really frustrating to watch myself do the old behaviours and not know how to 'fix it' at the time. I know now that I don't want to teach like this, I don't want to be this kind of teacher, but I don't have any other experiences. It's like I just fall into the trap of teaching like I was taught and I don't know how to get myself out of that model. I think I still need more role models of how to do this, but it's up to me to really strive to apply what I believe in when I'm actually teaching." (p. 446)

Numrich (1996) in his study conducted with novice teachers finds that teachers' decisions to employ or reject certain teaching strategies were heavily influenced by their impression of the effectiveness of these as language learners. For example, integrating culture and giving students the need to communicate were employed by one-third of the teachers, as they felt that these strategies greatly benefited them as language learners. In contrast, nearly half of the teachers avoided error correction as it had severely damaged their confidence and motivation to study the target language.

Studies of practising teachers provide additional support for the belief that prior learning experience can shape teachers' cognitions and instructional decisions. Woods (1996) reports an interesting case of an ELT teacher whose beliefs of teaching and learning a foreign language was influenced by his own journey of learning French. Years of formal classroom-based learning did not help him to use French effectively, yet six months working at a company of French speakers enabled him to do so with much confidence. This experience led to his preference for a communicative approach over grammar-based techniques in teaching second language. Similarly, Ebsworth and Schweers (1997) suggest that teachers' learning experience can be an influential factor in their professional lives, and some of them even trusted and relied on what worked

for them as language learners more than techniques and theories reported in academic research, as one participant commented:

> "My own education included very formal language study including memorization, reading, writing, and grammar. Now I'm using a communicative approach, but I won't completely abandon the teaching that worked for me. Grammar helped me and I can see that it also helps my students. I have confidence in my own experience" (p. 252)

2.6.3. The impacts of teacher education on teacher cognition and practice

Most teacher education, particularly in the field of language teaching, is knowledge-based education that informs three areas: *what teachers need to know*, *how they should teach* and *how they learn to teach* (Johnson, 2009, p. 11). Unfortunately, many teacher education programs adopt the assumption that the sets of disciplinary knowledge, usually in the forms of general theories and methods that these courses provide would be applicable to any teaching context (Freeman, 1993; Ball, 2000). Therefore, studies on the impacts of teacher education on teachers' cognitive development and teaching practice tend to produce contradictory results. Almarza (1996) investigated the impact of a teacher education program on four pre-service teachers on a PGCE course. She finds that behaviourally, all four students implemented the techniques they were taught in their course into their practice teaching, partly because they felt the need to conform to the expected standard teaching practice. However, through the discussion of their work during this practice, their agreement with the suggested teaching techniques appeared to vary, depending on the beliefs they had about language teaching prior to

the course. For example, Beth – one of the participants – expressed her doubts with the inductive approach in teaching grammar, which was encouraged during her teacher training. She believed that the explicit, top-down approach she was taught as a language learner was a more effective and systematic way to teach grammar and engaging in the teaching practice during the training program further reinforced this view. However, she still decided to use the inductive approach on this occasion, as expected by her mentors. The author concludes that although teacher education may play a powerful role in shaping the student teacher practice during the practicum, it does not considerably change their pre-existing beliefs. In contrast, the pre-service teachers in Debreli's (2012) study were reported to experience changes in the beliefs that they initially held throughout the nine-month training program. This was demonstrated by teacher 1 and 3 statements before and after the training that although they had previously believed games and group-work were effective ways of teaching a foreign language, they found it difficult to employ these activities in their classrooms during the training, which consisted of a large number of young pupils.

2.6.4. The impacts of teaching context on teacher cognition and practice

Context is an important factor when researching the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their practice. The term *context* includes the size of the class, the layout of the classroom, school policies, students' ethnic, educational background and so on. Studies have confirmed that these factors can prevent teachers from adopting the approach that reflects their preference and beliefs. Borg's (1998) study which involved five EFL teachers in Malta investigated how their complex, personal pedagogical systems affected the way they taught grammar. The findings suggest a mismatch

between what teachers believe and how they actually teach in the classroom. For example, it was reported that one participant's decision to employ formal and explicit instruction did not imply that he believed such practice would facilitate effective learning. The teacher in this study, however, chose to teach grammar deductively since he felt that his students expected this approach and would respond positively.

Another piece of research by Shin (2012) offers insights into the struggle of novice teachers in South Korea to implement what they felt to be an effective teaching approach into practice. Education policy makers have invested a large amount of resources into the Teaching English through English program (TETE), which aims at using English as the medium of instruction. Despite the government's effort, TETE did not meet expectations, as was the case with previous innovations. Novice teachers with native-like English proficiency had abandoned using English in their classrooms within a short period of being appointed to their schools. The findings reveal that although these teachers were willing to teach in English and were competent to do so, there were many factors that stopped them, such as students' inability to understand, difficulty in preparing for school exams, lack of student participation and so on. Notably, the school culture or *teacher socialisation* was cited as one of the major reasons for them reverting to the use Korean to teach. The idea that novice teachers should embrace the unspoken rules and culture created by senior teachers as quickly as possible and gradually adopt their teaching style is deeply embedded in Korean collective culture. Thus, these novice teachers' use of Korean and a teacher-centred approach were the complete opposite of what they considered to be effective teaching. Similar results were found in Pennington and Urmston's (1998) project involving five Hong Kong novice teachers who were trained in and expressed a strong preference for

a communicative approach at the beginning of the teaching career. However, less than a year after finishing their bachelor degree, they were reported to virtually revert to the traditional grammar-based teaching method due to large class sizes, exam pressure, lack of materials and the school culture.

Further demonstration of how contextual factors of the school that the teachers work can interfere with what language teachers do is provided by Spada and Massey's study (1992). In particular, a participant of the study – Alice was teaching in a private school and was given flexibility in what she could do in the classroom. This gave her the opportunity to employ the teaching techniques that she learnt in her teacher education creatively and without restrictions. On the other hand, Neil, although graduating from the same degree program as Alice, was recruited by a public school that was known to have serious discipline problems. Thus, Neil could hardly follow his lesson plan and usually spent most of his classroom time managing student behaviours.

2.6.5. The impacts of teaching experience on teacher cognition and practice

Research has shown that teacher cognition and their classroom practice exist in a mutual relationship: what teachers believe may shape their practice and is in turn shaped by their reflection on this practice, or *experience*. Nunan (1992) maintains that experienced teachers have acquired the routines associated with managing the class, thus often being able to focus on the content of the lesson, compared to novice teachers who tend to be more concerned about classroom management. Richards (1998) also highlights that experienced teachers are more likely to engage in improvisational

teaching than inexperienced teachers, who tend to feel more secure following the lesson plan. He argues that "as teachers develop their teaching skills, they are able to draw less on pre-active decision-making (the type of planning that occurs prior to teaching) and make greater use of interactive decision-making as a source of their improvisational performance" (pp. 117–118). Also, Feryok (2010) and Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver and Thwaite (2001) conclude that experienced teachers' beliefs tend to be reflected more clearly through their teaching practice. They usually have more experientially informed beliefs that are more deeply embedded with practice, compared to novice teachers whose ideas and cognition are more likely to change (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991).

2.6.6. The use of humour in English language teaching (ELT)

The use of humour as a pedagogical tool is rarely mentioned in formal teacher education. As a result, teachers need to rely on their own learning experience and perhaps, experiments when employing humour in their practice. Also, due to the lack of empirical evidence and formal discussion in their training, teachers may not be able to thoroughly understand the term *sense of humour*, thus hesitating to use humour as they think they are not able to 'create' humour, or do not possess a sense of humour at all (Bell, 2009). In addition, there may be many contextual factors that prevent teachers from employing humour, such as time constraints, academic culture, disciplinary issues and so on. Although there have been a number of studies about the application of humour, the majority of them focus on general education. Within the limited amount of studies about humour in the language classroom, participants in these studies often share the same mother tongue and/or cultural background, which makes the need to

use humour in the target language significantly decrease. Furthermore, as discussed in section 6.3.3, concerns over cultural issues and fear of being unintentionally offensive may negatively affect teacher perceptions of humour. Therefore, this present study attempts to gain insights into the use of humour in a context where there is a variety of first languages, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds, as in the case of academic English courses in the UK. The international students participating in these courses are likely to face higher levels of adjustment problems due to cultural barriers (Gebhard, 2012). The advantages of citizenship that these students have in their home countries are lost (Brown, 2008) and they have to accept a new status as members of a minority group (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008). Moreover, previous studies have mostly examined either students' attitudes towards teacher-initiated humour or teachers' reasoning for using humour in the classroom. With the intention to provide a more complete picture of this issue, this research investigates both teachers' and students' perception of the effectiveness of humour as a pedagogical tool in a second language classroom, offering insights into the possible consensus or mismatch between the two. The next chapter will discuss the specific methods by which the research and analysis were conducted.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will look at the options that researchers have when conducting research and will then explain the choices made in this current study. It starts with a discussion of the ethical considerations of educational research. The sections that follow review quantitative and qualitative research approaches and provide justifications for the largely qualitative design of this study. It continues with the rationale and description of the research methods used to collect the data, followed by a discussion of the issues associated with these methods. I then provides a description of the participants in this study and how the data obtained from them were analysed. The chapter ends with the context statement of this current research – a vital element to consider when using qualitative data.

In order to identify how and to what extent language teachers in the UK employ humour in their teaching in university pre-sessional courses in the UK and the effects of the use of humour, as well as examining the international students' responses to, and attitudes towards their lecturers' use of humour, I will address the following questions:

1a. To what extent do UK pre-sessional teachers use humour in their teaching?

1b. What types of humour do UK university pre-sessional teachers use in the language classes?

1c. In which contexts do they use humour and for what purposes?

2. What are UK university pre-sessional teachers' perceptions of the roles of humour in the pre-sessional classroom?

3a. What are international students' perceptions of the roles of humour in language courses?

3b. How do they respond to their teachers' use of humour in the pre-sessional classes?

3.1. The definition and classification of humour types in this study

This present study is concerned with the use of humour initiated by the teachers. Therefore, humour attempts created by the students were taken into consideration only as either direct responses to their teacher's use of humour or the effect of these attempts. Humour that emerged from circumstantial or surrounding factors, such as a loud conversation in the corridor, were not considered either, as these did not originate from the teacher. However, the teacher's attempt to make a funny comment about that conversation would be counted as a humour instance. As discussed in section 2.2., although laughter is one of the indicators of the presence of humour, it is not the only sign of humour appreciation (Martin, 1996). Thus, for this current study, I have chosen Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) definition of humour:

> [A teacher's] intentional verbal and nonverbal messages, which elicit laughter, chuckling, and other forms of spontaneous behaviour taken to mean pleasure, amusement, delight, and/or surprise [in the students].

I chose this because an element of amusement is included in their definition ("pleasure, amusement, delight, and/or surprise") rather than relying on laughter as the only indicator of humour. In this current study, the amusement generated in the classroom

was identified by the students' facial expressions, body language, their verbal responses as well as the heightened atmosphere of the lesson.

A list of humour types was created prior to the conduct of this study as the basis for the observations. It was expected to be expanded and refined during the collection of the data. The list was adapted from Bryant et al.'s (1980) classification of humour based on its forms. I selected Bryant et al.'s (1980) categorisation of humour for this study as this is one of the first and most comprehensive humour classifications in an educational context, which has been modelled and cited in many subsequent studies over a number of years. These examples include studies that were themselves influential, such a Gorham & Christophel (1990), Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2009), Wanzer, Frymier and Irwin (2010), Martin and Ford (2018). Also, I believe that Bryant et al. (1980)'s classification of humour types is highly applicable to EAP classrooms, compared to other categories of humour (see section 2.4.) that are unlikely to be used in this context. However, to avoid the possibility of overlooking potential types of language classroom humour, as mentioned in section 2.4., I have added two new categories of humour to ensure that I would be able to capture as many examples of humour as possible in the pre-sessional lessons. Table 2 presents Bryant et al.'s (1980) classification of humour types and my adapted version.

Table 2. The categories of humour

Bryant et al. (1980) category	Adapted category
- Joke: a relatively short prose build-up followed by a punch line	- Joke (no adaptation)

- Riddle: a message presented in the form of an information question with an answer provided in a humorous punch line	- Riddle (no adaptation)
- Pun: structurally or phonetically similar words or phrases having two or more meanings were used in such a way as to simultaneously play on their multiple meaning	- Pun (no adaptation)
- Funny story: a series of connected events or the activities of a single incident as a tale	- Funny story (no adaptation)
- Humorous comment: A brief statement containing a humorous element but failing to fit into one of the previous categories	- Funny comment ● Funny comment directed at oneself ● Funny comment directed at student ● Funny comment directed at materials ● Funny comment directed at others
	- Physical humour (e.g. facial expression, body language)
	- Funny material (e.g. funny clips, pictures, texts, examples and so on)
- Others	- Others

Jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories and funny comments fit the definition of humour by Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield's (1991) (see above) in that they are "[teachers'] intentional verbal messages" intended to elicit laughter and amusement in the students. I have added 'physical humour' to the categories with the consideration

64

that this type of humour could be useful, since the teachers and their students did not share the same first language and verbal communication might be difficult at times. This category also fits the chosen definition in that it includes the "non-verbal messages" that teachers employ as attempts at humour, which was overlooked in Bryant et al. (1980)'s classification. Also, I have added the category of 'funny materials' after the pilot study to reflect a prevalent type of humour in that study, which would otherwise have been missed. These humorous materials conform to the definition of humour adopted because they are often purposefully selected and presented by the teachers, and can therefore, be considered as part of the teachers' messages that are intended to amuse the students.

Furthermore, I have added the targets of the 'funny comments' category to Bryant et al. (1980) categorisation (i.e. the people that the comment was directed at) because the dynamic of an EAP classroom can be a personal one and the targets of the humour attempts might be immediate and present. Given the various functions that humour can be used to achieve, this seemed to be important data. Although being slightly more specific than the original classification, the adapted version may still be unclear in some cases. For example, the category of funny comment directed at others can include many targets, such as inanimate objects, the weather, other staff and even an absent student, which can also arguably fit in the category of funny comment directed at student.

3.2. The ethics of educational research

The awareness of ethical concerns in educational research is reflected through the

growth of relevant literature and ethical guidelines on research practice from various professional bodies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Ethical issues may emerge from the kinds of problems investigated, the context of the research, the nature of the informants, the types of required data, the methods used to collect valid and reliable data and what is to be done with the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This means that, as many authors suggest, ethical decisions must be an integrated part of research and need to be carefully considered through each stage of the research procedure (Kvale, 1996; McDonough & McDonough, 1997; Sikes & Piper, 2010; May 2011). According to the *Code of Human Research Ethics* detailed by the British Psychological Society (2014), there are three basic principles that need to be adhered in a research involving human participants, as follows.

3.2.1. Informed consent

Participating in the research should be voluntary and subjects must give their informed consent to participate in the research. Diener and Crandall (1978, p. 57) have defined informed consent as "the procedure in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions". There are four elements consisted in this definition: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension (Diener & Crandall, 1978; Reynolds, 1979; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). 'Competence' implies that consent must be given by persons who are competent to make such decisions, which means such consent should not be obtained from minors or people with psychological impairment. 'Voluntarism' indicates that the subjects are free to choose to participate as well as exercising the right to withdraw from the study. 'Full information' entails the

participants are fully informed of what will happen when they take part in the research, including any possible risks. 'Comprehension' implies that the respondents fully understand the nature of the research and its procedure, thus the consent form must be clear and understandable yet detailed enough to ensure that they are informed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011; Check & Schutt, 2012).

3.2.2. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity refer to researchers' duty to protect the participant's identity. This responsibility involves not disclosing any personal information that can potentially identify the subject and ensuring that the data collected about the participant are appropriately anonymised so that it cannot enable third parties to trace back to the respondent (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2000). Any violations should be discussed and must be made with the agreement of the subject. The essence of the promise of confidentiality and anonymity is the extent to which researchers keep faith with those who agree to help with the study. Potential respondents, especially on studies with sensitive topics, are more likely to refuse to participate if researchers fail to provide a credible assurance of these principles (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2000) have suggested various techniques to allow ethical dissemination of data without the breach of confidentiality and anonymity as follows:

- removal of identifiers (e.g. names, addresses, details of workplace, etc.)
- simplification of report categories (e.g. year instead of specific date, profession but not the speciality, etc.)

- the construction of 'average data' rather data on individuals

- deliberate insertion of errors into the subject records while keeping the aggregate data unchanged

The decision on techniques to manage the confidentiality and anonymity in social research may depend on the nature of the research, the discussed topic and the potential harm that might arise from participants being identified (Wiles, Crow, Heath & Charles, 2008). For example, a researcher may feel it is necessary to omit some aspects of their data or an individual's case, or they may go as far as changing certain characteristics to 'disguise' the participants or avoiding publication altogether in extreme cases to protect the identities of their participants. Clearly, the measures taken correlate with the risk identified. In the case of this study, only the removal of identifiers (the first bullet point in the list) was deemed necessary.

3.2.3. Participants' interest and dignity

Participants in research should not be exposed to risks of harm which are greater than what they encounter in their normal lifestyles (The British Psychological Society, 2014). Researchers should be aware of the possible physical and psychological impacts of their investigation, such as creating distress, embarrassment or self-doubt, on the participants. Therefore, the participants must be fully informed of their rights to refuse to answer any questions, withdraw their participation and subsequently request that their data be destroyed. Sensitivity and caution are essential and researchers must respect the subject's knowledge, insight, beliefs, values and experience, including their disability, religion, gender and so on (Sikes, 2006).

3.3. The quantitative and qualitative research approaches

Research methodology in education is often divided into two major types: quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data is often represented by numbers and associated primarily with statistics (Denscombe, 2007). In other words, quantitative research is the explaining of a phenomenon through the collection of numerical data and the analysis of this data using mathematically based methods (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002). Quantitative research takes the view that research is used to uncover the existing reality (May, 2011), thus inclining to test existing hypotheses to produce a standardisable explanation for a phenomenon. Muijs (2010) suggests that quantitative data can offer answers to four main types of research questions:

- A research question that demands a quantitative answer (i.e. How many?)
- Numerical shift that can only be investigated using quantitative methods (i.e. Is there an increase or decrease in the number of the studied subject?)
- A research question on the correlation between two or more variables.
- A research question that aims to explain a phenomenon (i.e. What factors are related to the studied subject?)

Qualitative research, on the other hand, is characterised by a concern for individuals. This approach is often informed by a more interpretive paradigm, which seeks to understand the "subjective world of human experience" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 17). Qualitative researchers begin with individuals and aim to explore their understanding, feelings and perceptions as they believe these can affect and/or shape one's interpretation of the reality (Krauss, 2005). Qualitative methods provide a means

of accessing unquantifiable facts about people or their personal traces (i.e. their diaries, letters, photographs and so on) (Berg, 2001). Qualitative research works directly with experience and understanding to create new theories and usually examines a smaller sample compared to the large-scale surveys used in quantitative research. Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) highlight that qualitative approach is a more suitable option if the researchers intend to:

- explore a concept or problem in-depth, especially if it is complex and involves intangible factors.
- develop hypotheses and theories.
- examine the meaning of a circumstances or event from the perspectives of the particular population it involves.

One of the major differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods is the degree of flexibility built in their research design (Bernard, 2017). In research using quantitative methods such as questionnaires or surveys, participants are usually asked identical and closed-ended questions in a fixed order. This approach offers a large amount of quantifiable responses that can be meaningfully compared across participants and research sites. On the other hand, the more flexible design in qualitative research allows the participants to respond in their own words and their responses are often more complex and offer greater details (Bernard, 2012). However, this is not to suggest that qualitative research could be done without methodological rigour. Good qualitative research should be systematic and reproducible by subsequent researchers (Berg, 2001). While researchers may have strong epistemological and philosophical beliefs that inform their methodology, they can also begin with aiming

to solve a specific problem and/or wanting to explore a particular phenomenon. In that case, they may choose a pragmatic approach to research and adopt the methods that are best suited to solve their research questions (Muijs, 2010).

3.4. The qualitative research design in this study

In the research reviewed in the previous chapter, questionnaires were the most common data collection instrument to investigate the students' attitude towards their teachers' use of humour. Although this method allows researchers to collect the data in relatively larger quantities, it is limited in the extent to which it can shed light on the reasoning behind the participants' choices (Denscombe, 2007). This current research, on the other hand, aims to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of the teacher participants towards humour in the language classroom, not just 'what' and 'how much' humour they use but also 'how' and 'why'. Another aim of this study is to explore the students' opinions and their experience (of the teachers' use of humour), the sort of knowledge which is believed to be highly subjective and difficult to reflect through the exclusive use of numbers (Kincheloe, 2008). Furthermore, as humour is a complex phenomenon that occurs in interactions within a context, qualitative procedures with a "focus on naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to experience" (Berg, 2001, p.10) allows researchers to record and examine people's opinions and emotions in greater depth. In addition, as elaborated later in this chapter, asking the students to complete a questionnaire about their lecturers' use of humour directly in the classroom may make both parties feel more intimidated. Therefore, a largely qualitative approach was deemed more suitable for this study.

3.5. The credibility, transferability and confirmability in qualitative research

Much qualitative research replaces the notion of 'validity' and 'reliability' in quantitative research with a different set of criteria. Among the suggestions of these criteria, *credibility*, *transferability* and *confirmability* are often used to access the quality in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1992; Mays & Pope 2005).

3.5.1. Credibility

Credibility refers to the factual accuracy of the account, the notion of 'truth' in research (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995), "the extent to which it is sincere and undistorted" (Wellington, 2015, p.214). In other words, the credibility of a qualitative research is established when it is able to interpret and portray the constructed views and realities of its participants. This can be achieved by using 'member checking', which seeks the confirmation from the respondents in the collection and interpretation of the data. Another way to ensure the credibility of research is enhancing its triangulation. There are four 'protocols' of triangulation identified by Denzin (2009):

- methodological triangulation – using more than one method to gather data
- data source triangulation – utilising different data sources within the same methods, for example using multiple respondents or collecting data at different times

- investigator triangulation – having multiple observers or analysts for the conduct and review of the findings

- theory triangulation – using multiple theoretical perspective to analyse the data

3.5.2. Transferability

This criterion indicates the applicability of a piece of research in other contexts. It is important to note that it is not possible for researchers to judge the transferability of their own study. Instead, it is their responsibility "to provide the data base that makes transferability judgements possible on the part of potential appliers" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that providing a 'thick description', where the emphasis is not just on 'what' happens, but also on 'how' it happens in connection with other aspects of its social context (Geertz, 2008), may help to establish the transferability of the study.

3.5.3. Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the neutral position of the researchers when collecting as well as analysing the data. In other words, confirmability indicates the level of confidence that the findings of the research are evidenced in the participants' views and words rather than the researchers' preference and agenda (Bryman, 2012). One of the techniques to ensure the confirmability is to use *audit trail,* which involves the researchers' detailed records of their data collection process and how they progress with their data analysis and interpretation. Another technique is to use *reflexivity,* in which the researchers take into consideration how their own background knowledge

and position can affect the research process (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002). The keeping of a research journal with the researchers' reflection on what is happening as well as their rationales for the decisions made during the research procedure may be a good solution to merge the mentioned techniques.

The credibility, transferability and confirmability of this current study will be discussed in section 3.9.

3.6. The methods of collecting qualitative data

There are several distinct methods that can be used to collect qualitative data, such as observation, interviewing, focus groups, unobtrusive measures and so on.

3.6.1. Observation

A large body of scientific literature has documented the inconsistency between what people say they believe or do and what they actually do (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2001; Terkel, 2011; Borg, 2015). The observation method can help to gather the data 'in situ', from spontaneously occurring social situations. This distinct feature offers researchers the opportunity to 'capture' what the participants' behaviours actually are and provides the reality check against what people report during interviews. Observational data demonstrates a strong contextual validity and offers a certain level of 'freshness' to the data collection as observed incidents are less predictable (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This method, also, allows the investigator to gather the data on the multiple settings of the context, including:

- the physical setting (e.g. seating arrangement, equipment),

- the human setting (e.g. the characteristics of the class, age, nationalities)

- the interactional setting (e.g. formal/casual, verbal/non-verbal)

- the programme setting (e.g. pedagogic styles, materials and resources)

(Adapted from Morrison, 1993, p.80)

Therefore, this method allows researchers to develop the familiarity with the context and witness the human interaction, which may contribute to the nuanced understanding of the breadth and complexity of the subjects' experience (Jorgensen, 1989). Additionally, observation offers researchers the opportunity to discover factors that are important for a thorough understanding of the research problem that were not noticed in the designing stage. Thus, what researchers learn from the observation will help them design better questions for other methods (such as interviewing or for the design of other quantitative method instruments, such as questionnaires) and give the best understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). Field notes and recordings from the observations can be used to assist any interviews afterwards for a more accurate recall of the events and enable both parties to enter and understand the situation being discussed (Patton, 2015).

Depending on the aim, the organisation of the observation lies on a continuum from highly structured to unstructured. A highly structured observation will have pre-determined categories of items or events that it is looking for and is usually used to confirm or reject a hypothesis. Semi-structured and unstructured observations are less specific in their agenda and therefore are "more hypothesis-generating than hypothesis-testing" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 457). The researchers' role

in the observation ranges from 'complete participant' to 'observer as participant' and to 'complete observer' (Gold, 1958; Denscombe, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Since observation includes both verbal and visual data, audio-visual recording device can be used in addition to field notes to provide more 'unfiltered' and less selective data entry than human observation (Simpson & Tuson, 2003, p.51). These recordings can also be heard/viewed again for closer scrutiny of data. Although video recording may offer more complete non-verbal data, such as facial expression and body language, being recorded by video camera can be very intrusive for some participants. Audio recorders, while being viewed as a less intrusive instrument, are unable to capture the settings of the place as well as the non-verbal reactions from the participants.

Although observation frequently claims to provide 'raw' and 'first-hand' data, there are several issues concerning the validity and reliability of this method. Firstly, there is a possibility of selective data entry or memory when no recording device is used (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Secondly, observational data tend to capture the 'behaviour' and describe what happened rather than the 'intention' that induced the behaviour (Denscombe, 2007). Additionally, being observed may bring up the observer effect or the reactivity, which means the participants may change their behaviour being aware that they are being watched (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

3.6.2. Interviewing

3.6.2.1. One-to-one interviewing

Interviewing is a good option when researchers seeks to explore more complex and subtle phenomena (Denscombe, 2007). The interview in qualitative research "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover the lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 1). Therefore, an interview should be seen as a "social, interpersonal encounter" and not just a data collection tool (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 421). This concept is further exercised in education research in which teaching and learning are believed to be founded in human interaction rather than merely the transmission of knowledge. Interviewing in this sense can be defined as "a conversation with a purpose" (Dexter, 1970, p.136), in which researchers elicit information from the participant(s) through the questions related to the study. Oppenheim (1992) argues that interviews have a higher response rate than questionnaire because the respondents become more involved and motivated, and have more opportunity to elaborate on their answers, especially when more difficult and open-ended questions are used. Interviews can often be used as one technique alongside others to enhance the triangulation of the research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

When placed on a continuum, the structure of an interview may vary from highly structured, questionnaire-driven format to an unstructured, conversational style, or anywhere between the two extremes (Denscombe, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Highly structured interviews involve tight control over the format, including the

wording and order of the questions and the range of the available responses. Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, emphasise the flow of thoughts of the interviewee by introducing the theme and letting the respondents develop their train of thought. This type of interview is useful when the investigator does not have enough knowledge about the phenomena to ask relevant questions. Semi-structured interviews, bearing certain similarities with both structured and unstructured interviews, are still guided by a clear list of issues to be addressed and specific information desired from the participant(s). However, a less rigid format allows researchers to adapt the questions to the situation at hand. This means researchers can change the order of the questions to suit the flow of the interview or provide assistance to the interviewee if necessary. Semi-structured interviews are popular in qualitative research as they ensure that the core issues are covered and still have the flexibility to explore new ideas emerging from the conversation (King & Horrocks, 2010).

When interviews are used as the sole data collection instrument, there may be a possibility of validity concerns. This is due to the fact that in interviews, the participants often report what they think they do, rather than what they actually do. Furthermore, the relationship between the researchers and the interviewees can sometime affect their responses (i.e. the interviewees may respond in the way they think the investigator would expect them to and not give an honest answer). These issues can be the results of social desirability or a wish to maintain certain personal images or relationships between the parties (Fowler, 2009). To address these problems, researchers are advised to adopt a neutral and non-judgemental interviewing style, starting with appropriate questions designed to build rapport and gain trust from the respondents. The interviewer also needs to be attentive and sensitive to the feelings of

their participant(s) and be able to tolerate silences during the interview to give more room for the informants to develop their thoughts and express themselves in the most comfortable way (Denscombe, 2007; Fowler, 2009)

3.6.2.2. Focus groups

Group interviews, or more specifically, focus groups, have grown in popularity in educational research. A focus group is an interview with a small group of people to examine their perceptions, attitudes and feelings on the topic being discussed. Having more than one respondent present can significantly increase the number of opinions and range of participants in the study (Denscombe, 2007). Normally, people do not have many opportunities to articulate their attitudes, opinions or motivations, especially if they have limited power or influence. Having the security of being with people who share many of their experiences and feelings, participants may be more willing to open up about their views. This is also an advantage of focus groups when used by professionals to explore the feedback from their target audiences. Some participants may not always be able to express their opinions immediately on a given topic, but it can become easier to form a clear opinion of their own when they hear what others feel and compare this to their own situation. This is another advantage of focus groups compared to one-to-one interviews (Morgan, 1993). This method can also provide multiple accounts of the same event, one can complete the other with additional details and results in a more reliable record. It is from the interaction of the group that the data is generated. In other words, the exchanges among the participants help them to state not only what they think but also clarify what their opinions and behaviours depend on and how it may differ in various circumstances. Focus groups

are particularly useful when researcher want to explore the issues in a new area as they are perceived by particular groups of people (Denscombe, 2007; Mann, 2016). Due to the selective nature in the sampling (i.e. collecting data from specifically chosen groups of the population) and the facilitator's role to moderate the discussion, focus groups are contrived in their settings, which can be both their strength and weakness (Berg, 2001). Although unnatural in the settings, focus groups allow the investigator to generate a large amount of data about a specific issue within a relatively short amount of time (King & Horrocks, 2010; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

On the other hand, there are several concerns that need to be addressed when using this instrument, such as the number of groups used and the number of respondents in each of them, as well as the influence of any dominant participants. As generally advised, there should be more than one focus group for a single topic to avoid the outcome being a direct result from the dynamic of the group (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). It is also generally recommended that each group should consist of six to nine people to allow a fair range of opinions and experiences and ensure the efficient management of the discussion (Morgan, 1988; Fowler, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, the role of researchers as a moderator can also help address the concerns over the organisation of the sessions. The focus group should be clear on its agenda and the interviewer needs to keep the discussion on track. Less confident respondents also need to be encouraged to contribute so that all individual voices can be heard (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hennink, 2013). Last but not least, "focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives — but don't" (Macnaghten & Myers, 2004, p. 65). Therefore, this method may be a poor choice for

highly controversial or personal topics that people usually do not feel comfortable discussing with strangers.

3.6.2.3. Transcribing interviews

According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), transcribing involves transforming and reproducing oral language, such as those from an audiotaped interview, to written text. In addition to spoken words, many authors have argued that the non-verbal language (e.g. silence and body language) and emotions should also be included in the transcription (Schegloff 1997; MacLean, Meyer & Estable, 2004). Since the way in which the interview content is perceived by the transcriber plays an important role in the form and accuracy of the transcription (MacLean, Mechthild & Alma, 2004), several scholars encourage researchers to transcribe their own interviews (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This practice can help to generate initial insights into what is going on in the data, which Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p. 200) refer to as "rudimentary analysis". There are two main kinds of transcription - verbatim or word by word, and selective transcription. When an interview is transcribed verbatim, it is believed that misrepresentation is lessened as it is closer to the actual speech (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). Additionally, verbatim transcription can also help researchers identify the underlying meaning of what was said, often through the repetition of certain words or phrases or interjections (e.g. hm, ah, duh and so on), whereas a briefer form of transcription may only provide the face value and miss these subtle hints (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). On the other hand, selective transcription reduces the likelihood of being overwhelmed by data and can save researchers a significant amount of time (Groom & Littlemore, 2011). Furthermore, in some cases,

non-verbal signals bear minimal significance to the content of the interview and can mislead the analyst, especially if the interviews are transcribed and analysed by different researchers in the team. Therefore, there are no standard rules on how to transcribe and researchers have to decide the level of transcription based on the level of their desired analysis (Drisko, 1997).

3.6.3. Unobtrusive measures

Unobtrusive strategies refer to the examination and analysis of human traces, with the most common being documentary sources. Documents are usually defined as a "written record of an event or process" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p. 249) and are produced in different forms, such as commercial media accounts (books, newspapers, magazines and so on), actuarial records (birth/death certificate, marriage certificate and so on) and private archives (letters, diaries and so on). In education, documentary research methods are used to gain understandings of three areas of knowledge: the past, the changes and trends over time and the current structures as well as long term trends (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Unobtrusive measures do not require the intrusion into the lives of the subject by researchers and often provide insight into the cognitive and psychological lives of individuals on the surface level (Berg, 2001). However, as there is often no communication between the investigator and the author of the documents, it is crucial to interpret their underlying values and assumptions in the context of their time, including any social, economic and political factors that may explain the contemporary meanings of the text being studied (Denscombe, 2007; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, researchers should verify the author, time and place of the production as well as taking into account

the bias and interpretation of the observer or author (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Additionally, there are authenticity and reliability concerns surrounding these strategies, particularly with the documentary evidence in education. These sources often record the paradigms and approaches adopted by the authorities and policy makers, thus presenting a top-down view and can be weak representatives of the experience of education of less privileged groups, such as those from lower socio-economic groups, females and ethnic minorities (Lagemann, 2002). Furthermore, legal and copyright issues should always be taken into consideration when unobtrusive methods are used, especially when the research involves documents containing information of individuals or institutions, as well as government and institute records (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011)

3.7. Pilot studies in qualitative research

A pilot study is a small-scale research project conducted prior to the full-scale study to test the methods and ensure that the research process would work in practice (Prescott & Soeken, 1989). Pilot studies give researchers ideas about potential problems with the data collection instrument or sample recruitment strategies, thus providing researchers with the opportunity to make necessary adjustments and improve the research plan for their main study (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). Additionally, pilot studies also help familiarise researchers with the cultural and local political context of the research sites as well as estimating the required time and cost for the main project (Arain, Campbell, Cooper & Lancaster 2010). In qualitative research that involves methods such as interviewing, pilot studies are useful, especially for novice researchers. The confidence and insights gained from the piloting should

help researchers with subsequent interviews, particularly in terms of schedule, timing and techniques (Holloway, 1997).

Qualitative researchers often encounter two main concerns involving the use of pilot studies. The first issue is about whether the piloting interviews should be conducted with the same participants as the main study. Interviewing the same participants may familiarise both parties and help them to behave more naturally in the main study (Janghorban, Latifnejad & Taghipour, 2013). However, this practice carries the risk of causing temporary loss of interest to the respondents due to a psychological phenomenon called *semantic satiation*, which results from the repetition of the same questions to the same respondents. Since the focus of qualitative research are the perceptions, understanding and feelings of the individuals, several authors have advocated of using different samples for the piloting and the full-scale study, although these respondents should be as similar as possible to the target population in the main project (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002; Ismail, Kinchin & Edwards, 2017). The second concern discussed in the literature is whether the data from the piloting should be included in the findings of the main study. As pilot studies are mainly used to test and find the flaws in the research procedures, the data obtained can be insufficient and unreliable. For this reason, their data should be used to refine the main data collection process rather than be treated as part of its findings (Lancaster, Dodd & Williamson, 2004; Padgett, 2008)

3.8. The data collection in this research

3.8.1. The pilot study

A small pilot study was conducted at a local private language school prior to the main data collection. The school provides a similar pre-sessional course for higher education, run as a franchise from the university. Students who successfully completed the course would be able to enrol in their degree courses. The piloting aimed to test the research procedure to examine the effectiveness of the data collection tools. There were two teacher participants, one was teaching the postgraduates and the other with the undergraduates and six students participated in two focus groups. I observed two lessons from each teacher and conducted the one-to-one interviews three to four days after the second observation. The focus groups with the students were carried out one to two days after their teachers' interviews in a vacant classroom. The completion of this pilot study led to a few small changes in the research design, particularly the observation sheet and the interview questions for the students. Information on the settings of the classroom, such as the layout, size and seating arrangement of the class, was added to the observation sheet to help capture the context of the lessons / incidents in more detail. Also, the interview questions for the students were slightly modified with simpler vocabulary items and syntax so that they could be more easily understood, as demonstrated in table 3.

Table 3. Modification in the questions for focus groups

Original question in the pilot study	Modified question in the main study
Before the course started, what had you expected your teacher to be like?	When you came to the UK, what did you expect from the course and your teacher?
Have you ever had any experience in which your teacher's use of humour was ineffective or inappropriate? How did it affect you?	a. Have you ever had any experience in which you don't understand your teacher's humour or don't find it funny at all? How did that make you feel? b. Have you ever had any experience in which your teacher's humour made you or your classmates feel uncomfortable? What did you think about your teacher after that?

Students in the main interviews were also given questions in written form in addition to the verbal form in case they felt more comfortable reading than listening to the questions. Again, the aim was to make the questions easy to understand. An option of getting some translators was also considered, although it was decided to be unnecessary later, as there was a larger number of students per focus group in the main study and they were able to help each other understand the questions. I have summarised the conduct of this pilot study in flowchart 1 below:

Flowchart 1. The pilot study
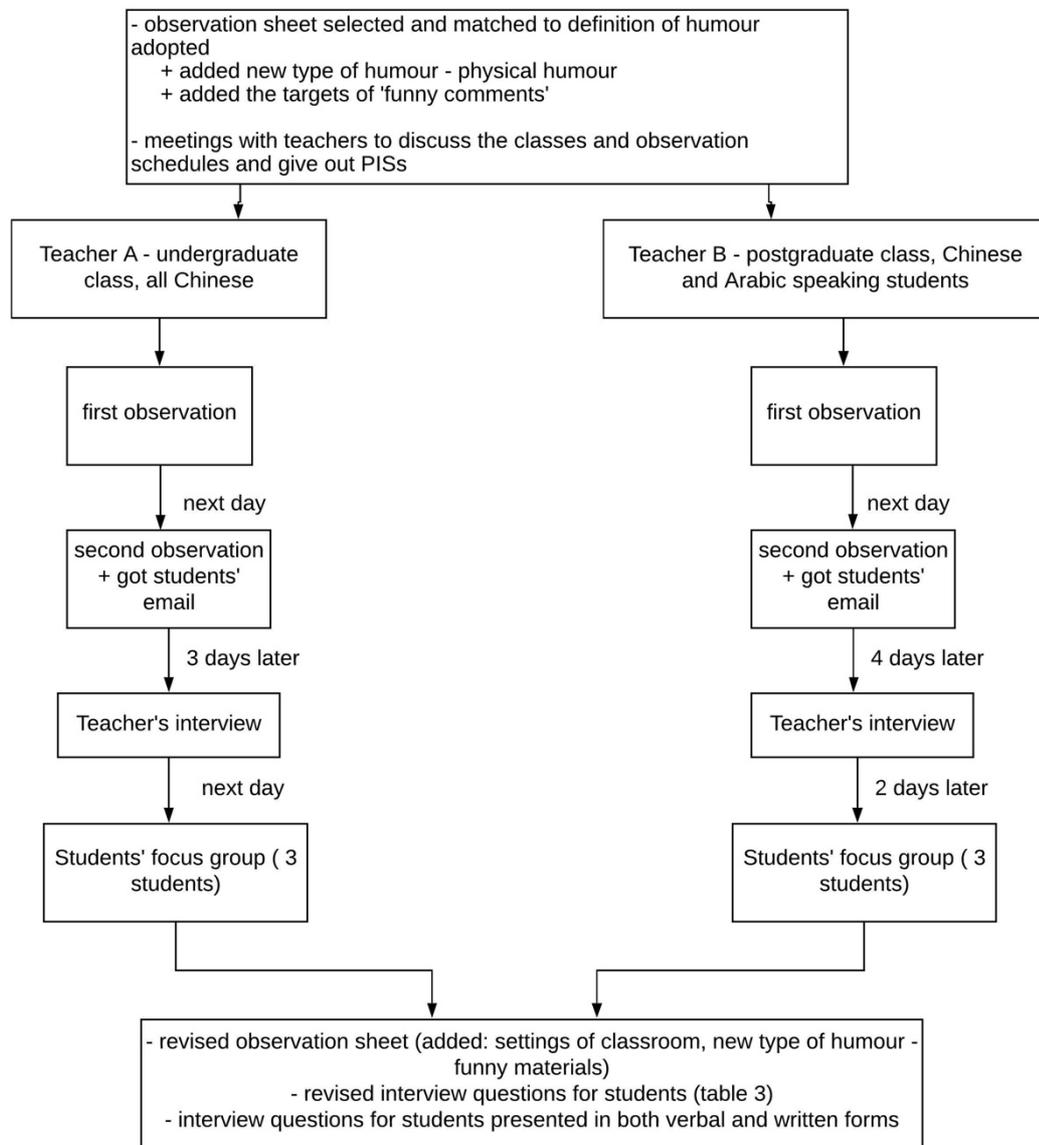
In order to collect in-depth data, observations, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used in the main study. The implementation of these methods is explained in detail in the following sections.

3.8.2. Observation

Since humour is a context-dependent phenomenon occurring under the form of 'interaction', I felt that observing the classes would be necessary to understand the context of the exchanges in which humour was used. Furthermore, as mentioned in section 3.5.1., the observation method allows me to gain insights into what the teachers actually do inside the classroom rather than what they report or think they do. Any relevant incidents which happened in the lessons could also then be used as the basis for other data collection methods, such as interviewing. In this research, semi-structured observation was used and I had prepared an observation sheet (Appendix 5) with a list of common types of humour. This structure allowed me to gather the data on the attempts of humour (if any), the reactions from the students and the settings of the class without a 'fixed' hypothesis. Thus, new ideas (e.g. new type of humour) not thought of before could be generated through these observations (McLeod, 2015). For example, the category of 'funny materials', which was not on the initial observation sheet, was added after it emerged from a teacher's observed lessons.

I also assumed a position of a 'complete observer' during these visits, sitting at the side of the classroom, as the study is concerned with what naturally happens in an academic language classroom. Almost all of the observed lessons (except one listening lesson that lasted sixty minutes) lasted ninety minutes and I stayed through the whole session in order not to disturb the teaching and learning process. Each tutor was observed twice within ten days so that I had a more general view on their teaching and communication style. An audio recorder was also used in addition to the field notes and observation sheets to ensure verbal and non-verbal interactions were captured

within their contexts. An example of the fieldnotes can be found in Appendix 6. I tried to take careful notes of every task used by the teachers as well as any extra materials, the setting of the room, the atmosphere of each phase of the lesson. The usefulness of the notes on the material and tasks used were exemplified in the interviews, in which the tutors were then asked for their rationale of using these and their perceptions of the activities' effectiveness. Also, the notes provided me with the context to elicit responses from the students about their attitudes towards certain teacher-initiated attempts at humour. These field notes significantly contributed to the 'thick description' and the interpretation and reporting of the data afterwards. I also took note of any questions that emerged during the observation which I thought would be necessary to discuss with the teacher but were not included in the 'guiding' questions for the interview.

The concerns associated with the observation method were minimised in several ways. On average, the interviews were carried out three days after the second observation and one week at the latest so that the lessons were still 'fresh' to be more easily discussed. In these interviews, my interpretations of the 'behaviours' witnessed on site as well as the intention and thoughts of the participants were verified to improve the triangulation of the study. The 'observer effect' was lessened due to the fact that the tutors and students were used to being observed throughout the programme by the course leaders and also other tutors as part of the continuing professional development (CPD). In addition, all the participants were reassured that they were not being judged or accessed on their performances through these observations and encouraged to behave as they normally did. The main focus of the study – humour, was later specified in the interviews. However, prior to the observations, this focus was generalised into

the 'affective factors' and 'cultural differences' in the language classroom to help reduce the observer effect and ensure the spontaneity of the lessons. During the brief discussions with the teachers before the observations took place, it was also agreed that video recording would not be used so the students would feel less intimidated during the observations.

3.8.3. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups

In this study, semi-structured interviews were used for the teacher participants and focus groups were used to interview the students. The lists of questions used in the interviews can be seen in Appendix 6. These questions served as a guide and the order in which they were asked was not fixed. This allowed me to move forward and ask follow-up questions if the interviewee mentioned a particular idea instead of returning to that topic later. The relatively less structured form of the interviews also meant that the natural flow of the 'conversation' was respected (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) and the respondents were given more time and felt more encouraged to recall and elaborate on their experiences of successful or ineffective uses of humour and their feelings towards these instances. More specifically, there were two lists of questions used in the tutors' interviews, depending on the nature of their observed lessons (i.e. if there were any instances of humour found). These demonstrated my attempt at adopting a neutral and non-judgemental stance in order to make the participants feel more comfortable in the interviews. It was important that there was no implication in the questions that there should have been humour in the lesson. In addition, the first question was a general one about the students' level, their majors and nationalities. This was followed by a question about the activities or tasks they enjoyed. These

questions were non-threatening and intended to put the respondents at ease to open up the conversational aspect of an interview.

As I was also working as a teacher on the pre-sessional course, the relationship between the tutor participants and I was one between colleagues. This put me in the 'insider' position and allowed for fairly instant rapport to be developed. A major advantage of being an insider in this current study was the trust from the participants that I understood the context in which they were working. This rapport and trust would contribute to 'honest' answers to my questions and less defensiveness. They were under no pressure to give any 'expected' answers. I moved the conversation when she felt the tutors had contributed as much as they could to the question, but also tried to allow 'silence' so the tutors could have sufficient time to recall, reflect and develop their experiences or points. For instance, one teacher initially expressed her doubts towards the use of a more friendly approach for students from certain educational backgrounds, but after a moment of silence, she added that the quiet atmosphere in these classes made her feel uncomfortable at times, thus qualifying her initial response to some extent. I also listened attentively and asked the teachers to give examples where necessary or asked follow-up questions to clarify any inconsistency or ambiguity. This can be illustrated in the interview with a teacher who expressed a relatively strong view towards the treatment of international students received from their teachers. I then asked him to further explain this point, to which he recalled a specific incident involving another tutor in the course as an example.

The interviews with the tutors were conducted during the week after the second observations. In these interviews, I attempted to employ aspects of the 'stimulated

recall' technique (Gass & Mackey, 2000; Zacharias, 2012) by using field notes and audio recordings from the observations to help relive the lessons and prompt more detailed, thoughtful and accurate reflection from the teachers on their use of humour. This stimulated response procedure also aided in the verification of any unclear attempts at humour in the observed lessons. The interviews lasted approximately forty-five minutes to an hour and were audio recorded, mostly in a vacant classroom for privacy and quality of the recordings. These were transcribed verbatim. I also incorporate the notes of what were judged as the key parts of the respondents' body language (i.e. how they said what they said) into the transcriptions to portray the context of the incidents discussed in these interviews. These non-verbal cues could provide hints on the meaning of what was said, thus were crucial for the data analysis.

There were four focus groups with the students, with six or seven participants per group to optimise the advantages of a 'group interaction' (Morgan, 2006; Fowler, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The ground rules were set at the beginning of the focus groups, which advised the students against stating their real name, nationality, which class they were in and the name of their tutor in the discussion. These types of information were only revealed to me individually prior to these focus groups. The students effectively contributed to the group conversation, as they were well aware that these interactions were good opportunities for them to practice their English speaking and discussion skills prior to their exams. Besides, the theme of these focus groups was about their experiences with their tutors and their current course, which was familiar and presumably of interest to them. The presence of their peers from other classes seemed to stimulate their curiosity to learn about peoples' different learning experiences and opinions. Through their discussions, which often involved agreeing

or disagreeing with others' views, I was able to gain insights into their reasoning and underlying logic for their opinions, which could be difficult to induce during a one-to-one interview. This was evident in one of the focus groups in which two students from the same class appeared to slightly disagree with each other on the necessity of humour in a pre-sessional course. Through their brief exchange, I was able to see how a student's learning priorities influence their perception of the role of humour in the lesson.

They were also assured that their contributions would not affect their tutors' teaching or their course results, hence their honest and vocal responses. As some of them spoke the same first language, they were able to assist each other during the discussion, which I encouraged. In order to help the students understand and concentrate on the questions, some power point slides with the written form of the questions were used. The students and I sat in a semi-circle and I believed that this seating arrangement would encourage the interaction and gave all of the respondents a fairly equal 'position' in the discussion. I acted as a moderator in these focus groups, prompted the discussions with a list the questions (Appendix 6). In fact, the students needed these questions to guide them through as some of them still struggled to initiate or lead a conversation. I also used the data from fieldnotes and observation sheets to elicit and verify the students' attitude towards certain attempts at humour initiated by their teachers, especially the episodes that I had judged as humorous but had appeared to receive little to no reaction/response. These focus groups lasted approximately an hour in a classroom to utilise its facility and were audio recorded. The recordings from these focus groups were also transcribed verbatim. I also took note of the dynamic of the group as well as the respondents' body language in these sessions.

The data collection process is summarised in the flowchart below:

Flowchart 2. The data collection
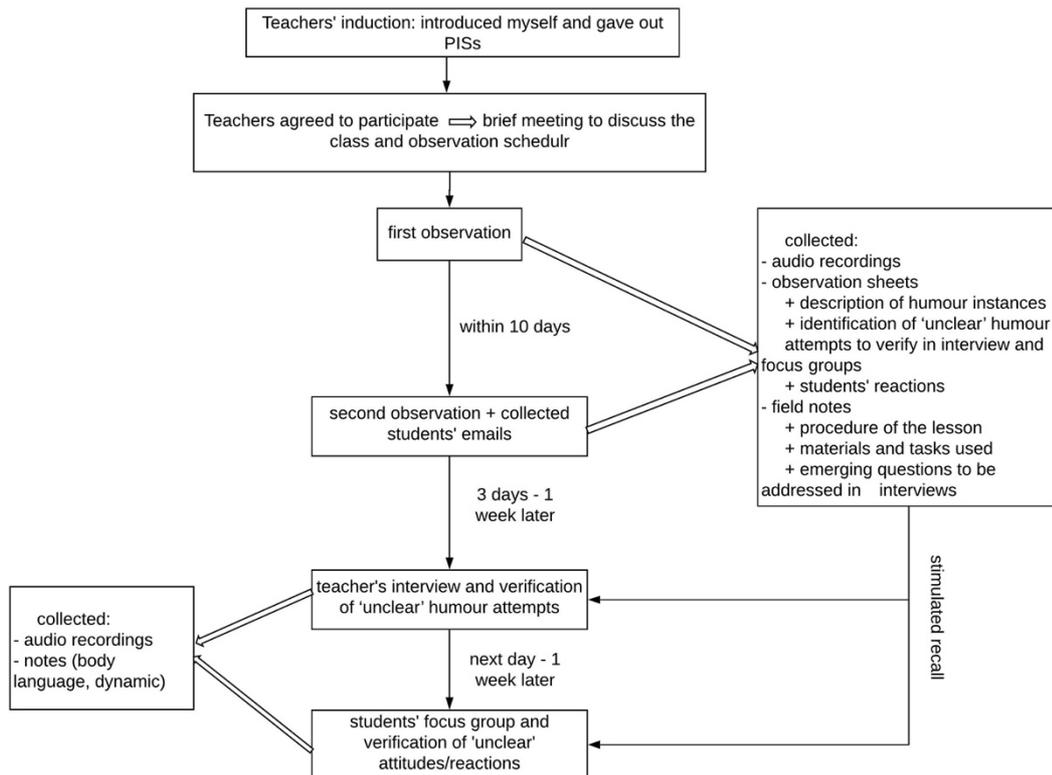
3.9. Ethical considerations

The study was reviewed and granted permission by the University of Portsmouth Ethics Committee (16/17: 36) (see Appendix 1). The participants were given the relevant Participant Information Sheets prior to the observations. All the participants expressed their willingness to be part of the study by signing an informed consent form

(Appendix 4) prior to the observation and interview, as well as having a brief discussion about the project verbally with me. At the beginning of the interviews, I informed the teachers about the specific focus of this study – humour – and checked if they were happy to continue as part of the study. All of the participants knew the nature of the research and their role in it, so that they could give truly informed consent. They were also presented with the necessary information (see Participant Information Sheets, Appendix 2 and 3), such as the right to withdraw from the study whenever they wanted or to decline to answer any questions in the interview. After each interview, I summarised the main points to check if the participants' views were accurately comprehended and presented. The respondents' personal information remained only available to me. The respondents in the interviews and focus groups were coded with number (e.g. T1, T2, S1, S2 and so on) to ensure the anonymity. The audio records of the observations and interviews could only be accessed by me. In addition, the participation in the research was well-supported by the university and the language school management. However, the list of participants in this project was not required, particularly the tutors, and the data obtained from them would not be reported to their course leaders. Similarly, all the students in the observed classes were encouraged to engage in the focus groups, but the list of the actual respondents were not revealed to their tutors.

The confidentiality of the data was guaranteed as the data are stored securely in password protected accounts, primarily the university drive. Data is not stored on memory sticks, or other insecure devices. The original consent forms will be retained securely for ten years from completion of the study. The research data will be retained

for ten years in accordance with the University of Portsmouth Retention Schedule for Research Data and will then be destroyed.

3.10. The credibility, transferability and confirmability of this study

I adopted several techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. Firstly, I used three different methods – observation, semi-structured interviews and focus groups to collect the data (methodological triangulation). There were multiple respondents in her research – ten teachers and twenty-five students, and two observations were conducted for each class to improve the data source triangulation. Secondly, I attempted to provide as much detail as possible about the settings of the classroom, the contents of the observed lessons, the seating arrangement and the context of the obtained data as well as her experience with the data analysis to ensure that subsequent researchers or teachers working in similar courses can relate to and apply her findings. Last but not least, after each interview, I summarised the main points to check if the participants' views are accurately comprehended. My supervisors also regularly reviewed, evaluated and provided feedback on her analysis of the data.

3.11. Participants

3.11.1. The teacher participants

The teacher participants of this research were tutors from the summer pre-sessional course at a university on the south coast of England. This kind of course aims to provide students with the opportunity to work intensively on the linguistic, study and

research skills that are necessary for higher education. All the teacher participants have either a higher-level TEFL/TESOL qualification (e.g. the Cambridge/Trinity Diploma) or an MA in TEAP/TESOL/Applied Linguistics. The tutors were at varying stages of their teaching careers, with their experience ranging from just over three years to over forty years. The group consisted of teachers predominantly from around the UK who used English as their first language. There were some teachers from outside the UK for whom English was a second language but these teachers had also developed familiarity with the UK higher education teaching context. The research was introduced to the tutors on the first day of their induction for the course and they were given both Teacher and Student Participant Information Sheets (see Appendix 2 and 3). They were contacted via emails afterwards with the electronic copies of the Participant Information Sheets and an invitation to participate in the study. Once they agreed, I contacted them for a meeting to briefly discuss the class and the schedule for the observations. Of the ten tutors who agreed to take part in the study, seven were female and three male.

3.11.2. The student participants

The study was introduced to the students through their tutors and I asked that the students were informed in advance about the observations. I introduced myself, the study and the focus groups in more detail at the first observation. The focus groups offered the students the opportunity to practice their speaking and discussion skills. Therefore, the students were encouraged by their tutors to participate in the project, but they were obviously free to decline the opportunity. At the end of the second observation, after the teacher left the classroom, I distributed some blank pieces of

paper around the classroom so the students could write down their student email (which consisted of numbers only) if they were interested in participating in the focus groups. Of the cohort of twenty-five students who agreed to participate, fourteen were female and eleven male. They were contacted by email and presented with an electronic copy of the Participation Information Sheet (see Appendix 2) again prior to the interviews. I then organised four 'workshops' – focus groups, with six or seven students in each group. The students' age ranged from eighteen to early thirties, with the majority of them being from China, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Their level of English ranged from 5.0 to 6.0 on the IELTS scale and they were trying to reach 6.0 – 6.5 for their degree course. Table 4 provides the details of the students.

Table 4. Details of students

Student	Gender	Level of the course	Nationality	Focus group
S1	Male	postgraduate	Jordanian	Group 1
S2	Female	postgraduate	Chinese	
S3	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S4	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S5	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	
S6	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S7	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S8	Female	postgraduate	Japanese	Group 2
S9	Female	postgraduate	Kuwaiti	
S10	Female	postgraduate	Portuguese	
S11	Female	postgraduate	Kuwaiti	
S12	Male	postgraduate	Saudi Arabian	

S13	Female	postgraduate	Thai	
S14	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	Group 3
S15	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S16	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	
S17	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	
S18	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S19	Female	undergraduate	Qatari	
S20	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	Group 4
S21	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S22	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	
S23	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	
S24	Female	undergraduate	Chinese	
S25	Male	undergraduate	Chinese	

3.12. Data analysis

I selectively transcribed the recordings of the lessons, focusing on the humour attempts and any exchanges among the members of the class. The field notes were also incorporated into the transcription to provide a more complete picture of what happened in the classroom and their contexts. The instances of humour used by the tutors were identified and categorised (see section 2.2.5.) and these instances of humour (if any) were used in the interviews as the prompts to elicit the thoughts and reasoning from the teachers. Students' reactions were also noted and classified to be used as the basis for the focus groups with the students. These reactions and the data

obtained from the focus groups were later analysed, compared and synthesised in the Findings and Discussion chapter.

I transcribed the audio recordings from the interviews verbatim. Although this was a time-consuming process, I believed that the thought process could be implied through a more detailed transcription which contained cues such as awkward hesitation or repetition of words or phrases. The transcriptions of the interviews with the teachers and the students' focus groups were subjected to thematic analysis. I believed that the amount of data collected were appropriate for manual analysis and by doing so, her comprehension of the data would be improved. This process started with identifying and coding the "text segments" that were related to humour and likely to be helpful to answer the research questions. They can be a word a respondent used to describe a feeling (for example, *awkward*) or several lines describing a particular experience in the past (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This 'descriptive analysis' was the first step of the three-stage analysis, which were iterative and needed to be revisited from time to time in a "data analysis spiral" (Dey, 1993, p. 53; Cresswell, 1998, p.142). At this stage, I attempted to understand the participants' accounts rather than try to interpret them (Kings & Horrocks, 2010). Therefore, the generated codes stayed relatively close to the data. Thirty-three codes were used in total. Table 5 shows examples of those used most frequently. A complete list is in Appendix 8.

Table 5. Examples of descriptive codes

Codes	Example of participant responses
Student expresses affection to their teacher	She's strict but she's also fun. I miss her class when I study with another teacher.
Students can laugh at their own mistakes	Sometimes I make mistake in class, like I use *he* for woman all the time. My classmates also make mistake. We all laugh but we [are] not embarrassed.
Students make jokes in English	They feel safe to try things, to try and be funny, something that is very hard for them to do in English, but they're willing to give it a go.
Students do not use much first language in class	90 percent of the time they don't speak Mandarin and Cantonese in class, which I think for monolingual pre-sessional class coming from China where they don't necessary speak that much English in class is quite rare.
Teacher seems more approachable to students	She's fun and friendly. I can ask her to explain if I don't understand. I don't ask questions at home [home country]. Maybe that's why my English is bad.
Teacher can explicitly express that she's upset with the class	Sometimes I can get a bit angry with them, but because they know that they know me, I already created this bond with them, so when I feel upset about something I can express it naturally with

	them without being scared that I would lose the rapport.
Teacher feels more comfortable when having to give negative feedback	[…] But also for me to feel confident and comfortable, like I'm much more confident to say something like: 'I don't think this is clear enough' 'Could you do this better?'
Teacher does not use humour with young graduates – they back off	If you have a class of very young undergraduates who are new to the university culture, and I know this from experience, if you've got them sitting around, if you get sort of right up close to them and kneel down, bring yourself to their level, you try doing that and you crack some jokes and they just…you could see them physically withdraw and their heads go down.
Teacher does not want to look unprofessional	I don't want them to think I'm unprofessional or not taking the job seriously
Too much humour - students feel more comfortable than they should	Too much joking around make the students feel more comfortable than they should, particularly at the beginning when you're getting to know them. They might feel too comfortable and start asking about your personal life for example.

Those codes which shared some common meaning were then grouped together under a more 'interpretative code' that captured it. This step is often referred to as 'analytic

coding' or 'interpretative analysis' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Charmaz, 2014). Table 6 provides a sample of this process. A complete list is in Appendix 9.

Table 6. Examples of more interpretative codes

Descriptive codes	More interpretative codes
Students make jokes in English	Humour and students' confidence (+)
Students do not use much first language in class	
Students can laugh at their own mistakes	
Teacher seems more approachable to students	Humour and teacher-student relationship (+)
Students expressed affection to their teacher	
Teacher can explicitly express that she's upset with the class	
Teacher feels more comfortable when having to give negative feedback	
Teacher does not use humour with young graduates – they back off	Humour and teacher-student relationship (–)
Teacher does not want to look unprofessional	
Too much humour- students feel more comfortable than they should	

Finally, the relevant codes were drawn together under the themes – in this study, the interview core questions. The major advantage for using these questions as the main themes is that it would be easier to compare and contrast the perceptions and attitudes towards humour of the tutors among themselves, and those from the students.

It is important to note that this coding and analysing process did not take place as a nice logical sequence. As with any analysis of qualitative data, certain pieces of the data can be difficult to categorise. For example, I found it particularly challenging to merge some of the descriptive codes into a more meaningful one, as they could fit in

several categories. To solve this dilemma, I listened to that specific part of the recording, examined the transcription with the note on the context again and revised the codes if necessary. For example, the code 'Teacher feels more comfortable when having to give negative feedback' was originally named 'Teacher gives feedback', which was too general and could fit in both 'Humour and teacher-student relationship (+)' and 'Humour as a teaching strategy' interpretative codes. I read the transcriptions containing this descriptive code again and decided that the teachers' attitudes towards the nature of the feedback needed to be clarified. After the improvement, I felt that it would fit better in the 'Humour and teacher-student relationship (+)', due to the attached emotional elements.

Although it was time-consuming, I believed this 'revisiting' process was important to produce the most thorough analysis. In addition, manual analysis requires a large amount of time and dedication. I was aware that counting the frequency of words has been suggested to be one of the effective ways to analyse data. However, this research focused more on the perceptions and meanings of what was said rather than the frequency of expressed words and I believed that the same opinion could be expressed in many different ways. Therefore, I did pay attention to how common an opinion or attitude was among the respondents, but she did not rely on the software to count how many times certain words or phrases were mentioned.

The results from the teachers' interviews were then incorporated into the findings from the observations. These two elements complement each other, thus offering a comprehensive view on the teachers' perception and their practice. Any related details from the students' focus groups about their teachers' humour attempts in class were

also included in this section (see section 4.1.). On the other hand, the findings from

the focus groups with the students were mainly presented under the research questions

(see section 4.2.). This method of organising data enabled the patterns, relationships

and comparisons to be presented conveniently and clearly, as well as returning the

readers to the driving concerns of the project (Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2005;

Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The process of analysing and synthesising data is

summarised in flowchart 3:

Flowchart 3. The data analysis

```
┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────────┐
│ observation         │      │ interview recordings │      │ focus group          │
│ recordings          │      │                      │      │ recrodings           │
└─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘      └─────────────────────┘
           │                              │                              │
           ▼                              ▼                              ▼
┌─────────────────────┐      ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ selectively         │      │ transcribed verbatim with notes on body language, │
│ transcribed based on│      │ dynamic                                           │
│ observation sheets  │      └───────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
│ and field notes -   │                              │
│ focus: interaction  │                              ▼
│ and body language   │                 ┌──────────────────────────────┐
└─────────────────────┘                 │ identified and coded relevant│
           │                            │ text segments                │
           ▼                            └──────────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────┐                              │
│ produced teachers'  │                              ▼
│ 'profiles'          │                 ┌──────────────────────────────┐
└─────────────────────┘                 │ produced descriptive codes   │
           │                            └──────────────────────────────┘
           │                                         │
           │                                         ▼
           │                          ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │                          │ grouped descriptive codes     │
           │                          │ with common meaning           │
           │                          └──────────────────────────────┘
           │                                         │
           │                                         ▼
           │                          ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │                          │ grouped codes with common     │
           │                          │ meaning                       │
           │                          └──────────────────────────────┘
           │                                         │
           │                                         ▼
           │                          ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │                          │ gave each group an            │
           │                          │ interpretative code           │
           │                          └──────────────────────────────┘
           │                                         │
           │                                         ▼
           │                          ┌──────────────────────────────┐
           │                          │ grouped relevant interpretative│
           │                          │ codes under themes             │
           │                          │ (research questions)           │
           │                          └──────────────────────────────┘
           │                                         │
           ▼                                         ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ answered research questions                                          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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105

3.13. The context of this research

The current study was conducted in a pre-sessional course of a university in England. It cannot be denied that pre-sessional courses have grown dramatically in recent years and become a multi-million pound enterprise in the UK, "due to the necessary 'importing' of overseas students, in order to boost the incomes of universities whose state funding has decreased" (Turner, 2004, p. 96). The pre-sessional course in this study had classes run from four to twenty weeks, depending on the students' entrance level of English, with twenty-five hours of classroom-based learning per week. Students needed to pay a relatively high fee, ranging from 1,450 GBP to 6,100 GBP and they had to pass the final test of the course to be able to enrol in their degree course. This high-stakes and intensive EAP course, therefore, could make a significant impact on a student's life and future career.

There were 270 students taking this pre-sessional course at the time of the study, coming from different parts of Asia, the Middle East and Europe, with a large proportion being from China. These students were generally new to the city and probably the country, with the majority of them arriving just one week, and some arriving just one or two days, before the start of the course due to visa problems. There were approximately twenty tutors working on the course. Most of them held a higher-level TEFL/TESOL qualification, such as the Cambridge/Trinity Diploma or an MA in TESOL/Applied Linguistics, and some held a certificate in TEFL/TESOL or PGCE. Some of the tutors had substantial experience of over ten years teaching EAP while the majority of the them had two to just under ten years of experience in the field. The teachers in this course were not permanent staff of the university and were employed on a short-term basis. These tutors, therefore, possibly also had to adapt themselves to

suit the teaching culture, the target learners and the timetable of the course. There was a weekly suggested timetable which outlined the curriculum that the teachers should follow to ensure that they covered the necessary contents and the students stayed on track.

The majority of the classes were in conventional classrooms, although several teachers had to use the lecture theatre, which was reported to be relatively inconvenient, especially for tasks that required group work and discussion. There was an in-house textbook used in this course, which consisted of material from several different EAP books and some material developed by one of the tutors and the course leaders. Apart from considering register analysis and teaching grammar and vocabulary, this textbook also attempted to address the differences in academic cultures and learning styles, for example, guiding students to think more critically or discussing plagiarism. The teachers also had access to extra materials, mostly for the listening and reading classes in the afternoon, on a shared folder on their work account. However, it was observed, and later confirmed in the data collection, that this textbook was not actually used very often in the lessons. One of the limitations of this textbook was that it did not have page numbers, neither was it organised in accordance with the suggested schedule, which made it very difficult for both teachers and students to navigate through the contents. In addition, in the sections that addressed topics that were considered challenging to international students, such as paraphrasing, plagiarism and citation, there were too few examples and exercises to help demonstrate and familiarise students with these concepts. The shared folder, on the other hand, was reported to be more useful, as it contained more visual (e.g. video clips, power points, images) and authentic materials (e.g. adapted academic articles, seminar topics).

This chapter has discussed the rationale of the methods used, the procedure of the data collection and analysis, as well as highlighting the context of the current study. In the next chapter, I will present and discuss the principal findings of this investigation.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results obtained from the classroom observations, the interviews with the teachers as well as the students' focus groups. In order to provide a coherent and easy-to-follow structure, the analysis of the data is also included in the chapter. The chapter aims to offer insights into the use of humour from the teachers' and students' points of view and compares these two sides to give a more complete picture of humour in the pre-sessional course in the UK.

4.1. Findings from the observations and the teachers' interviews

This is a relatively large section where I describe and present the data collected from twenty classroom observations followed by the findings from ten teachers' interviews. The students' comments which are relevant to the teachers' views are also included. The teachers' and students' codes presented in the previous chapter (i.e. T1 – T10 and S1 – S25) are used in the findings where relevant. If the students involved in the observed lesson were not in the focus groups, they are coded using the alphabet, such as student A, B, C, and so on.

4.1.1. Teacher 1 (T1)

4.1.1.a. First observation

The first observation with T1 was done with her 'second' class (i.e. she was not the main tutor of the class, thus teaching them three times a week) in their third week of a

ten-week course. There were thirteen Chinese undergraduates in this class and they were going on to business-related courses after the pre-sessional. They had certificated scores of between 5.0 and 6.0 on the IELTS scale. The students sat in groups of four, which was convenient for discussion and T1 randomly rearranged them before the lesson so they would not sit with the same people every lesson. The lesson was about 'critical thinking' and it started with a small discussion about its definition. T1 then asked the class to do the tasks in the textbook, compare their answers with their group members and report them back to her. During this time, she walked around to monitor and reminded them to use English to talk to each other. She then corrected their answers as well as giving them feedback on the language they used.

There was no instance of humour identified in this lesson. The students were focused and did what they were instructed to. Most of the conversations were initiated by the tutor, to which the class responded in relatively full answers.

4.1.1.b. Second observation

On this occasion, T1 was with her main class, which consisted of eleven postgraduate students who were mainly from China and Arabic-speaking countries. Their English ranged from 5.0 to 5.5 on the IELTS scale and they were in their third week of a ten-week course. The focus of the lesson was research design, the methodology section in particular. When T1 was checking the attendance and upon realising there was one student missing, she had a small interaction with one of the students who was present, as follows:

> T1: Where's your mate?
>
> Student A: I don't know.
>
> T1: How can you not know? He's your mate you have to keep an eye on him! <she
> was smiling while saying this.>
>
> Student B: Maybe he's facetiming (i.e. having a video call) with his girlfriend again!
>
> The class laughed.

When the late student (S1) arrived, T1 slightly teased him with a smile "Did you have a good chat with your girlfriend? How is she?" to which the student jokingly replied "She's happy to talk to me. And I'm sorry for being late". The rest of the class appeared to be entertained by the small exchange and some acted out a headshaking and made the 'tsk tsk' sound. It should be noted that there was no sign of disapproval, merely friendly teasing among the peers. Thus, the humour initiated by the tutor and the students' responses could be seen as a sign of being part of a group, or 'team', as T1 called them in the interview. The lesson continued with the students being asked to go through the sentences in the methodology part of a report and put them in the correct order. While walking around to assist the class, T1 noticed a student who seemed to be sleepy and so she asked him "Do you need a pillow?", which made him and the surrounding students smile. Throughout the rest of the lesson, T1 made another three funny remarks about the students in the class, as demonstrated in table 7.

Table 7. Some humour attempts in T1's main class

Type of humour	Context	The humour attempt	Students' reaction
Funny comment directed at students	There was a disagreement between two students about a statistic result of a task	T1 asked another student who appeared to be good with numbers: "C, tell me who's right. I don't have a calculator here but I trust you!"	The mentioned student smiled, the rest of the class giggled
Funny comment directed at students		You don't want to mess with C when it comes to numbers do you?	Half of the class smiled and half of them giggled.
Funny material (example)	A student asked about the difference between *few* and *a few*	When I invited a hundred people to my party and few people came, it means there were like…two people. But if a few people came, it means not many, but enough to not make me cry.	The class collectively laughed.

Overall, these comments received positive reactions from the students, indicated by collective laughter or audible giggles. It is also worth noting that these humorous exchanges involved the teacher using quite idiomatic language/metaphor (Keep an eye on him) with a focus on 'interactional' communication, which is not frequently modelled in the language classroom due to its unpredictable nature. The presence of interactional conversations in the classroom can possibly lead to a richer linguistic environment and it can be particularly useful for students planning to study in the UK, as it reflects the exchanges that students may engage in during their daily lives. Taking

part in such casual conversation may help students develop strategies to speak effectively and cope with a variety of situations (Harmer, 2007; Watkins, 2014).

T1 seemed to have good rapport with this class, as she later confirmed in the interview. The students were focused and seemed comfortable to discuss the tasks with each other and with their teacher.

4.1.1.c. The interview

T1 attributed the presence of humour in her main class (observation two) to being able to spend more time with them:

> "My main class you saw me with, had been with me some time and they've been working really really hard. They're really ambitious people, they know where they want to go, and they will push themselves […] It's like a team that builds, and you get to a stage where humour does come into it. You're just less reserved when you're around them and they're less reserved when they're around you."

"Ambitious" and "know where they want to go" link to the assumption often made about postgraduate students, which might have prompted T1 to be prepared to trust the students more and adopt a slightly less focused approach with this class. This quote also suggests that in her main class, humour was used to reinforce the existing relationship among the members. The fact that she used the word 'team' to describe this class indicates that the students had a more equal position with their tutor in the classroom. On the other hand, T1 suggested that less time spent with her second class "makes a great difference to the rapport with them". She also believed that since the

undergraduate students in her second class had "just come out from a teacher-centred environment [in China]", it was not advisable to approach them in the same manner as the postgraduates, especially at the early stage of the course:

> "I wouldn't try to get too close to them because from experience I know that if you do, they kind of back off. If you have a class of very young undergraduates who are new to the university culture, and I know this from experience, if you've got them sitting around, if you get sort of right up close to them and kneel down, bring yourself to their level, you try doing that and you crack some jokes and they just…you could see them physically withdraw and their heads go down."

This suggests that T1 deliberately chose to avoid attempts at developing a close teacher-student bond, including through the use of humour where she felt that this would be a cultural shock. T1 indicated that she was simply more interested in other aspects of teaching, as she commented:

> "I think a teacher's responsibility is to help students to develop their skills, not to entertain them. Rather than being humorous, I think we as teachers should make sure they [the students] reach the goals and make progress on their leaning journey. The purpose of this course is all about that – reaching the goals. In other courses, one of the agendas may be to entertain more."

T1 also reported to prioritise "assurance rather than humour" with this group, which was reflected in her close monitoring and checking up on the undergraduates while they were doing the tasks, compared to a more relaxed approach with the postgraduate class, in which she appeared to leave more room for their discussion with each other

and independent study. However, interestingly, T1 reported that she did not always enjoy the serious atmosphere in these classes and would try to "entertain" students who were likely to be interactive:

> "Sometimes, I find as a teacher, I do get a little fed up with the tense atmosphere and the people who are not accustomed to this educational system. It's just very demotivating to walk into a classroom where people come from a different educational culture, a very teacher-centred one, where they don't like to draw attention to themselves. You find yourself talking to a lot of tops of heads. So I may try to entertain one or two individuals who are more likely to be interactive, and just hope that others will see and follow and be engaged"

Here she clearly sees the potential for 'entertainment' to build what she sees as a healthier class dynamic. The differences in T1's approach with these two classes were further reflected by the students' remarks about their classes. While the postgraduate (S2) described T1 as "friendly", her undergraduate student (S3) said that T1 was "strict and traditional", without knowing that they were referring to the same teacher:

> "My teacher said funny things sometimes, about everything, the weather, the exercise in the book, or us. They're not big jokes, just small things here and there, but I quite like them" (S1 – postgraduate student)

> "I'm not sure if she's funny, maybe she is, but she's friendly. If you ask question, she'll come to your table and discuss" (S2)

> "My lecturer is quite strict, she smiles sometimes. I think she's not a typical English…err… British teacher, she's quite traditional like teachers in my country" (S3)

T1 made it clear that she deliberately chose a more reserved approach with the undergraduate class and the quote from S3 indicated that T1's attempt at creating such a classroom environment was successful. This quote, however, also shows that S3 had a pre-determined idea of a "typical British teacher", which is in line with the observations by Russell (2005), Kingston and Forland (2008) and Zhang and Zhou (2010) that international students often come to study in Western universities with certain expectations and even stereotypes of the academic staff. In this case, it seems S3 had expected a more lively classroom atmosphere and a more friendly approach. The students' slightly divergent opinions about T1 also appeared to echo the belief expressed by Powell and Andresen (1985) and Frymier and Wanzer (1998) that humour is considered part of a friendly and relaxed classroom.

4.1.2. Teacher 2 (T2)

T2 was observed twice with her main class. It was an undergraduate pre-sessional class with eleven Chinese students. Their English levels range from 5 to 5.5 on the IELTS scale.

4.1.2.a. First observation

I observed T2 for the first time during a listening-speaking lesson in the morning. The class was in their third week of the course. T2 used an English talk by an influential journalist and TV host in China and the students recognised the name immediately. Before playing the video, the teacher turned off the light and told the students that "It's not an opportunity to sleep", which made them giggle. The topic of the talk, which was about the changes brought by the younger generations in China, was engaging to the students. The material contained several humorous photos and anecdotes generating interest and amusement from the students. For example, at the beginning of her talk, the presenter recalled an amusing incident which had happened when she was hosting a major singing contest in Shanghai. Susan Boyle, the performing guest of the show, substituted the last line of 'Nessun Dorma' (an opera) with "green onion for free" in Chinese. Ms Boyle used this line as a joke because a fifty-year-old Shanghainese vegetable vendor who loved singing Western opera but did not know any foreign language filled in the lyrics with vegetable names in Chinese. The vendor rose to fame when a clip of her singing in the market was posted online. This introduction triggered collective laughter and the students then seemed eager to watch the rest of the talk.

Another example from the video was designed to illustrate the 'superficial life' of parts of the younger population in China. The presenter introduced a story of a Weibo (a mini-blogging service in China, similar to Facebook or Instagram) influencer who was famous for her posts and photos featuring clothing items and cars from luxurious brands. She later claimed herself to be the general manager of the Red Cross at the

Chamber of Commerce, which raised a huge backlash on the credibility of the Red Cross. The presenter's slides featured a photo of the girl in her expensive clothes posed like a model next to a Red Cross ambulance, which generated an outbreak of laughter in the class. The class took note of the issues mentioned in the video, such as employability, spending habits and naked marriage (i.e. getting married without having a solid material foundation) and later discussed these issues in groups of three or four. Seven humour attempts were initiated by the tutor in the discussions in the form of either funny comments directed at students or funny examples, as demonstrated in table 8.

Table 8. Some humour attempts in T2's main class

Context	The humour attempt from the teacher	Students' reaction
The class was discussing naked marriage	"So when you love someone a lot, you don't need anything, no food, nowhere to live huh?"	A female student said: "No! Women don't need a husband but we need food!" and another female student added "Me too!" and laughed
The class was discussing marriage and weddings in China	"Are you coming here to study so you can get a good job later and pay for your wedding?"	A male student (S4) replied with "Yes, Chinese people like to invite the whole village to their wedding so I have to spend a lot to get a wife!" and his male peers clapped their hands in agreement.
	"I've read somewhere that there are more men than women in China now. Do you think it's true? If that's the case then some of our boys may not be able to find a girlfriend!"	A male student pointed at his male peers and responded: "That's fine we can have each other". One of them jokingly replied: "Sorry not available!". The class collectively laughed.

	"Since you're here you can try finding a foreign girlfriend maybe?"	A male student replied: "Ah yes, they're pretty. But I need [to] speak good English first". Most of the students giggled, some showed a more neutral reaction
	"Now you even have more motivation! Excellent!"	The reaction ranged from smiling to audible giggling.
One student asked about the meaning of the word *freedom*	"When you're not in prison you have freedom. So you're all having freedom now"	One students replied with: "No, no freedom now teacher!" and most of the students giggled.
	"Okay, fifteen minutes and you'll have your freedom!"	Another student said: "Nooo I want freedom now I'm hungry I die!" The class collectively laughed.

The students reacted positively to T2's humour and tried to respond with their comments on Chinese culture and society. The humour attempt from the students drew on their shared cultural knowledge, for example, the men's financial responsibility in China, which might be difficult to understand or even appear offensive for someone from a different culture, but in this essentially monoculture group was appreciated. These humour attempts from the students were encouraged and the teacher picked up on them to extend the conversation by asking further questions, such as "How many people do you normally invite to a wedding?" or "I've heard the groom's family usually gives the bride some gifts, what kinds of gift are they?". Students also joined in the questioning of their peers. For example, one asked "In your province, do they eat duck in [the] wedding?" These spontaneous conversation exchanges seemed to be partly a result of the students being relaxed and comfortable in the class and confident in speaking English.

4.1.2.b. Second observation

The students were in their fourth week of the course and this particular class was in the late morning – before lunch time. The topic of the lesson was mobile phones and the teacher started the class with a funny question "How do you contact your parents? Do you send a bird to China?" The students reacted very well to this attempt of humour, with one student responding with: "Do you think we still have birds in China?", which resulted in a collective laugh. The lesson continued with a discussion about the pros and cons of mobile phones. There were four attempts at teacher-initiated humour in this discussion, with two humorous comments on how "humans will all have big thumbs and alien eyes in the future" as a result of using mobile phones intensively and "some people spend half an hour taking photos of their food for social media before eating". Two examples of physical humour were also used with these comments, including enlarging her eyes 'like an alien' to demonstrate human future looks and putting her palm up as a gesture to prevent anyone from touching the dishes and "Let me take a photo for my Instagram first". Before letting the students watch a conversation, the teacher explained new vocabulary using humorous examples. The class were engaged in this vocabulary learning and made an effort to maintain a conversation with their teacher, as in the following example, where T2 was explaining the word 'weird':

> T2: Do you feel weird without your phone? Like you're missing something and it annoys you. <T2 took the student's phone away>
> Student C: Yes, I miss my phone. Please give it back. <The student reached out both of his hands with an exaggeratingly agonised facial expression>

> T2: Aw it misses you too. If you play with your phone while I'm teaching I'll sell your phone on eBay!
>
> Student C: I'll call the police! <The student was laughing while saying this demonstrating that he was enjoying being part of the exchange>
>
> T2: Do you think the police will arrest me for taking your phone away because you're using it in class? No! They will say: "Well done teacher! Good job!"
>
> The whole class laughed, including the student involved.

This humour attempt both served as a means to teach vocabulary and also as a discipline reminder. The student involved and the class in general appeared motivated to participate in classroom exchanges, which might improve their conversational skills through the exposure to the host language. T2 had a good relationship with the class and the students seemed confident to discuss or ask questions in class. For example, the students appeared comfortable to seek T2's help with vocabulary and expressions when discussing the topics with their peers instead of reverting to Chinese. Although there were many attempts at humour in these observations, there was still a sense of discipline and focus in the class and the students were cooperative. This is what T2 aims for in her teaching, as later confirmed in the interview.

4.1.2.c. The interview

T2 indicated that the second observation was more of a typical lesson she would have with the students than the first one:

> "The one with the talk, they don't listen to talks for every topic. I just thought the students were familiar with the topic of the talk, the vocabulary was of their level and

> it was a good platform for discussion. I would say the second one is more typical. But if the focus is on reading or writing skills of course they might be a bit quieter."

T2 suggested that many students in her class were quite confident and the class was lively, compared to other classes in the course. Although T2 partly attributed her regular use of humour to the nature of the class, she also suggested that she did not 'plan' humour as it was just part of her own personality:

> "When I first started teaching, when I was observed by my director of studies, he said "Bring more of your personality to the classroom", and so I think I just naturally bring humour in, because it's the way I am"

When asked about the video clip used in the first observation, T2 reported that it was her deliberate attempt to generate interest in the class and provide a good basis for the discussion afterwards:

> "It's something they can relate to, instead of lecturing them and talking at them, saying "Oh this generation in China", which is a fact about what we were talking about then, "that they've developed economically, they've spent most of their money, globally probably on designer goods". If I said that to them, they would be like "Urg" and it goes over their head. Therefore, giving them a visual representation would work."

T2 believed that the rapport developed with the class through the shared laughter had a positive influence on her personally, creating 'motherly' affection with her students:

> "One time when I was dropping the students to another class, made sure they got to the class okay, I felt like I just dropped off my kids for their first day at school. Then one of them said: "Okay bye. I'll miss you", and I could feel tears coming to my eyes! I don't know if they can force that kind of fake laughter or affection or whether it's genuine, but I felt that it's genuine".

This observation from T2 shows that humour can play a role in creating and maintaining teacher-student relationship and serves as a means to connect the tutor with their class, as reported in previous studies such as Garner (2006) and Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez and Liu (2011). T2 also emphasised the importance of enjoyment in learning and believed that it had great impact on students' motivation and confidence:

> "I want to make learning vocabulary fun…give them some funny examples, something that actually goes into their head."

> "I'm not there to be their friends, but I want them to feel relaxed. We're in university, we're no longer teaching secondary school children. And I feel like I should make them want to come to the pre-sessional course, so they can enjoy it, so it's not something that they must do because they haven't reached the level yet. Because for some of them, maybe their other peers in China have already been accepted to the [main] course, they don't need to take this course. And I think I should make my students feel more relaxed, creating that positive learning environment, so they feel good being in the course, within reason not just have a comedy session every time."

It can be seen from T2's comment above that although she advocated the use of humour and gave prominence to the 'fun' side of learning, her idea of the need to balance 'fun' and 'serious' came across quite strongly. She later expressed a concern over the risk of being viewed as "unprofessional" by students. When asked about her idea of teaching and professionalism, T2 referred to T1 and T3 as "professional and serious" teachers, based on the impressions she had formed about them in the meetings and through peer classroom observations. Therefore, she appeared to be conscious about the frequency and timing of her humour:

> "I don't want them to think I'm unprofessional or not taking the job seriously. It depends, the timing of it. If you're making jokes all the time and they're not used to that at all in their home country, you'll become a clown teacher. You need to have that boundary; I'm not their friend and they know that."

It can be assumed from this quote that T2 was aware of the students' educational background in their home country and was still willing to incorporate humour in her teaching with this class. However, once again, we can see how she was also very well-aware of using humour in a principled way to maintain a successful 'leader' role in the classroom.

The interviewed students in T2's class particularly enjoyed the discussion of issues mentioned in the video in the first observation, indicating that T2's attempt to engage the students was successful.

> "It was fun. Did you see I actually spoke a lot?" (S4)

"She asked a lot of questions about our culture, I like that, I think she cares." (S5)

International students in previous studies (Andrade, 2006; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) have expressed concerns over communicative skills. Most distress was caused by the inability to communicate in face-to-face situations, which require immediate responses. These students often refuse to participate in classroom activities and avoid answering questions unless nominated by the teacher to speak. Therefore, for international students like S4, being able to actively contribute to a lesson ("Did you see I actually spoke a lot?") is considered an 'achievement' and one that she seemed proud of. This indicates that T2 was successful in creating a safe space for practicing and engaging the students, enough for them to try and step out of their comfort zone. The students also expressed their admiration for T2, which may confirm the genuineness of their rapport mentioned in the interview with T2.

"She's strict but she's also fun. I miss her class when I study with another teacher" (S5)

S5's comment indicates that T2 was successful in maintaining the 'humour boundary' as she set out to do.

4.1.3. Teacher 3 (T3)

T3 was observed with her main class on two different days of the third week of a ten-week course. There were thirteen undergraduates in this class, all were Chinese. The

students were supposed to have at least IELTS 5.0, but the teacher seemed sceptical over whether they all had reached this level by the start of the course.

4.1.3.a. First observation

This lesson on academic writing style took place in a standard classroom and the students sat in a U-shape. The class started with T3 asking the students to brainstorm the academic vocabulary they had learnt the week before, then moved on to a short quiz to check if the students had a good perception of academic writing. The lesson continued with a practice exercise on replacing informal words with more academic ones. During this task, the teacher gave an interesting remark on a mistake that students often made relating to the overuse of informal words in academic writing:

> "Students like to use the word "thing". This is a serious thing and that is a common thing, everywhere! I can see at least four "thing" in a paper!"

This remark resulted in some giggling, perhaps upon recognising their own actual overuse of the word, although some students showed a more neutral reaction. T3 then gave out additional writing exercises, asked students to work individually and corrected the answers at the end of the lesson.

4.1.3.b. Second observation

This lesson aimed to help students with their research posters, thus taking place in a computer lab room. T3 started the class with a half-threat half-joke warning: "Put your

phones away! If I see you with your phone, I'll collect it and [my name] and I can share the profit!" The students seemed to be amused, smiling while putting their phones in their pockets or bags. The lesson had a relaxed atmosphere, with the students discussing and working with their groups and the tutor walking around to monitor and giving them assistance. Whenever any student raised a question, she brought it to the attention of the whole class and explained it. There were another two attempts at humour during this lesson, both in the form of comments directed at students. It should be noted that these did not merely mean to be fun, but also acted as a 'discipline reminder'. In particular, when one student looked out of the window while the teacher was answering a query, she slightly raised her voice "[the student's name]! I'm the centre of attention, look at me only". The other example was when one student laid back on his chair for more than five minutes, she jokingly told him "How relaxing, how enjoyable!" The involved student did not take any offence and the class appeared to be amused, chuckling at her humour. These instances can demonstrate the use of humour as a strategy to improve students' attention, as some literature has suggested.

T3 seemed to have a close relationship with her students and knew them very well, as she revealed in the interview and as was confirmed by the students. The class was slightly quiet and they did not use much English to communicate in class. Some students appeared to struggle with their listening, indicated by their confused looks and the teacher's effort to repeat herself multiple times.

4.1.3.c. The interview

T3 reported that she quite liked her students because they were "obedient", although they were not very motivated and might not work hard enough. She also worried that "some of them may fail the course if they do not try harder". T3 also claimed that she would combine the materials with the students' experience to motivate them to communicate more. This was reflected through the observed lessons, in which she usually referred back to what students might have learnt in China, as T3 was familiar with the Chinese educational context. However, T3 admitted that her attempt for a more communicative class was not always successful, as the students seemed to "care about the tests and are always more alert when it's related to tests". She also reported that she would occasionally use humour when the students seemed distracted or tired, to "bring them back to reality", but academic learning was still her priority. T3 was sceptical about the use of humour in this specific class, as well as in the course in general, as she put it:

> "I don't think using humour is a wise strategy for this class. How much information can they retain after that? I don't think my class has reached the English level in which they can appreciate humour. And this course – it is very goal-oriented, or should I say test-oriented. My students need to do well and pass the course. We don't have time for jokes."

Again, we see here how the teacher equates the use of humour with potentially wasting time on a dense programme. T3 also appeared to indicate that humour might be a source of distraction rather than a teaching strategy to improve students' ability to retain information, which was different from T2 who saw it as an effective way to

teach certain lessons, such as vocabulary. However, further into the interview, T3 indicated her awareness of the need for 'enjoyment' in learning and expressed an interesting dilemma in her teaching:

> "I care about my students. Some of them might think I'm too strict, but the truth is I'm trapped between wanting my students to pass the exams and wanting them to enjoy the course. I feel bad that enjoy it or not, they still need to do well and pass."

T3 always works in EAP and she was not sure if her teaching strategy could be any different in other contexts. T3 revealed that she enjoyed humour in tutorials and other social situations, but as a teacher, she felt obliged to keep a "decent and professional" image. To some extent, T3 appeared to associate humour with the opposite of what she saw as the desirable characteristics of a teacher in an EAP context and deliberately chose to limit the use of humour to maintain this image as a result. In the observed lessons, most of her attempts at humour could also be interpreted as a means to discipline the students, further demonstrating T3's ideas of the teacher's authority in the classroom.

The students in T3's class agreed that she was more serious than fun but described her as "warm and caring" (S6). S6 revealed that he occasionally felt bored in class and indicated that he was "sick of the test thing". This seems to contradict T3's and the common assumption that EAP students are often highly motivated because there are specific goals to achieve and tests involved. However, the intensity and test-driven nature of this type of course can also demotivate students, especially when they are studying in a foreign country and face much frustration over language ability related

issues every day (Woodrow, 2006). S3 also asserted that he enjoyed interactions but his classmates did not seem very keen, and S7 supported this view. They attributed this to Chinese educational culture that "if your English is not good enough maybe you don't want to speak and lose face". Both students stated that the course was quite stressful and they felt that their personal performances were not good enough. S7 indicated that their level of English might be the reason for T3's decision not to use humour, as his comment illustrated:

> "She's a good teacher and she tries. But our listening is bad, maybe she tells jokes and we can't understand? I don't know."

The students' responses suggested that embarrassment and anxiety over language ability, which is widespread among international students, might be one of the reasons for these students' lack of willingness to contribute in the classroom.

4.1.4. Teacher 4 (T4)

4.1.4.a. First observation

On this occasion, T4 was observed with her 'second class' (i.e. she was not the main teacher of the class, thus meeting them three times a week) in their fourth week of the course. There were nineteen students in this class and they were all postgraduates. There was a variety of nationalities in this class and they sat in a circle for a small debate at the beginning of the lesson. Their level of English was approximately 5 to 5.5 on the IELTS scale.

Before the class started, T4 introduced me to the class with a jokey tone: "This is our guest for today. She is a nice teacher, please don't scare her". This introduction appeared to smooth my first encounter with the class as most of the students giggled and some smiled and greeted me. The class then started with a debate on using mobile phones in the classroom and the teacher walked around to observe and took notes. After the heated debate, the tutor tried to lighten the class atmosphere with two humorous remarks: "We need to open the windows to let the wind in, everyone's face has turned red and I can feel the heat! Phew!" and "Okay I'm a bit scared, can I speak now?" The students reacted by smiling or giggling, with some of them going from looking tense to more relaxed. The tutor continued to give some feedback on the debate, making another four funny comments, as shown in table 9.

Table 9. Some humour attempts in T4's second class

The humour attempt from the teacher	Students' reaction
"I'm glad that you respected each other in the debate, but sometimes you got carried away and raised your voice. It'll hurt your opponents' ears, yes, but it won't make your argument sound any better, so try to keep calm"	Most of the students had positive reactions, indicated by smiling or giggling. Some apologised to their peers, for example: "I didn't mean to shout, sorry" or "My bad I was a bit angry".
"Come on I know you know more than just "I think". I could count EIGHT HUNDRED "I think"! No actually EIGHT THOUSAND!"	The students looked amused and some of them nodded in agreement and there were comments such as "Oh yes, I forgot." "My mind was empty I couldn't remember any expressions I read yesterday."

"Sometimes you have to PRETEND that you agree with them first before ATTACKING them. Say something like I partly agree with you or I think it's true to some extent. You need a tactic here" and continuously snapped her fingers	The reactions ranged from smiling to laughing, with S9 commented "You [are] smart teacher".
"Thank you for our chairman's hard work today. You were such a gentleman. You can be tougher next time if you want. You're the chairman you have that power!"	The 'chairman' student giggled and said: "I should be [have been] tough. Nobody listened to me!". His classmates also giggled and there were responses such as "Yes you are too kind" or "No what you [are] talking about we respected you a lot chairman!"

The examples show how humour was used to soften critical messages and deliver them in a less threatening way. The students appeared to be receptive towards T4's feedback and the safe, friendly learning environment was maintained. Humour has been considered an effective enforcement strategy in communication, as it helps the speaker to level criticism while maintaining a positive connection, or identification with their audience (Meyer, 2000; Watson & Drew, 2017).

Before the lesson ended, T4 asked the class to choose two class representatives. One male student volunteered and the class looked at each other waiting for another one to take up the position. T4 clapped her hand, smiled and encouraged: "Come on girls! We also need a woman to represent the class not just one man! Come on come on don't be shy!" The female students seemed amused and looked at each other giggling and finally one of them volunteered. The rest of the class, including the male students, cheered on her decision.

The students seemed to be engaged with the discussion and everyone made an effort to contribute. The teacher and the class and the students themselves had a good rapport and it was noticeable that they were not afraid to voice their opinions in English. Although this was not her main class and she saw them less often, T4 stated that she still felt close to them and enjoyed teaching them as much as her main class.

4.1.4.b. Second observation

T4 was observed for the second time with her main class in the fifth week of the course, which was also for postgraduates. There were ten students sitting in a U-shape and they mostly were from the Middle East and China. Their English levels also ranged from 5 to 5.5 on the IELTS scale.

It was an early class in the morning on 'note-taking' skills and T4 initiated two humour attempts before the class started. When one student, who often came to the class a few minutes later than the others, arrived at the class five minutes early, T4 appeared to be surprised and happily complimented him: "Oh [the student's name] you're early today! It's very good!" to which the student replied with a laugh "No teacher I'm early EVERY DAY!" Some of the students also chuckled at the exchange. Another humour example was her 'confession': "I'm very sleepy today, [I] only had four hours of sleep last night. If you see me falling asleep, please wake me up!" which made the class look amused and a student responded with "Totally understand teacher I'm with you!" In this example, T4 appeared to effectively gain the 'social acceptance' from her students by associating her problem with theirs (i.e. she also felt sleepy in an early morning class). Such humour evoked a very familiar issue to the audience, thus making the

speaker appear more relatable, as observed by Fine (1976) and Chang and Gruner (1981).

The tutor continued to discuss why students should take notes and two humorous comments were made about the content of the lesson and one on an interaction in the class. When one student yawned while a sample of a note was introduced, T4 jokingly told the class "B is yawning thinking "Oh my god, notes, I can't bare this"". The class was lightened and the student involved responded with "Yes teacher God will [be] sleepy too if he has to read notes" while shaking his head and the class went on laughing. This is another example of students following the teacher's lead and contributing their own humour in the lesson. T4's initial attempts at humour were seen as a signal, or 'permission' for the students to try and experiment with their English and create humour. Another example of T4's successful use of humour was "Some people don't need to take notes, like D (a student in the class), he's a genius he can remember everything just by listening. We're normal people so we need to take notes during lectures." The reaction ranged from smiling to giggling, with student D opening his arms and looking at his classmate with a proud face.

T4 then divided the class into two groups to play a game of organising the pieces of paper containing the steps of making notes into the correct order. The tutor walked around to monitor the activity and occasionally jokingly remarked on the students' behaviours, such as "No peeking [the student's name], my eyesight is very good. Just look at your team's note" and when a student asked her if his team was on the right path, she said "Nope I don't know anything now don't ask me!". The student appeared to be competitive and enjoy the activity.

Finally, the students took turns to answer the questions in a handout exercise. It was a particular student E's turn and she had not finished the task yet when a peer sitting beside her suddenly asked for further clarification on the previous question. Student E quickly used her phone to check the answer and the tutor noticed and humorously commented "Good teamwork, excellent strategy!" The students concerned did not seem to take any offence, replying "We're friends we need to help each other, teacher" and smiled.

The overall atmosphere was open and friendly and the students were comfortable with starting and maintaining a conversation with their tutor. T4 could be seen using several funny comments to tease the students in a friendly manner in the observed lessons, as cited above ("Some people don't need to take notes, like D, he's a genius he can remember everything just by listening."). They interacted well with T4 and appeared to enjoy her sense of humour, as later confirmed in the focus group.

4.1.4.c. The interview

T4 seemed to be delighted after being told that the focus of this research was on humour.

> "Ah, now we speak the same language! Okay, humour, interesting!"

She confirmed that the observed lessons were typical of a normal lesson she would have with the students, and that she always tried to make the class "as active as possible". T4 stated that she tried to create an active atmosphere in the class and made

the students feel comfortable and claimed to strongly believe in bringing "personality"

and "human aspects" to the classroom, and humour could be one way to do so:

> "I like to bring this human aspect into the classroom and I believe this is one of the
> most important factors to create an effective environment. You're a teacher, but you're
> also just one of them. I think humour is a crucial factor that can create this nice, non-
> threatening atmosphere that students feel relaxed."

T4 suggested that teacher's use of self-deprecating humour could improve students'

self-confidence and made the teacher appear more approachable:

> "Personally, I believe in order to create the bond with the students and gain their trust
> you have to show them that you're human and you can make mistakes, and more
> importantly you can laugh at yourself. Whenever I notice that I make a mistake, which
> I do quite often <giggled>, I just bring it to their attention and we laugh about it
> together. And we just really enjoy this friendly relationship which continues outside
> the classroom. It boosts their confidence and glues the class together as a whole."

These words from T4 accord with the previous research reported in the literature

review that self-deprecating humour could help connect the speaker with their

audience and make them feel more equal, thus could facilitate and nurture

interpersonal relationship. T4 also believed that once she became "likable" to the

students, she could encourage them to learn and her feedback was more welcomed:

> "They feel the responsibility not only towards themselves but also towards me. I hear
> this very often: "Teacher, I forgot to write my summary but I'm going to do it for you

tomorrow". I asked: "Why do you do this for me, it's your assignment, you're doing it for yourself" and they said: "But teacher you try very hard for us so I'm going to do it for you.""

This comment from T4 seemed to suggest that the use of humour could improve rapport and motivation and therefore lead to more efficient learning, as opposed to T1 and T3's view it could be a waste of time. An overview of the teachers' perceptions on the use of humour in the class will be discussed in section 4.1.11.

However, T4 mentioned that humour should be gradually introduced into the class, when the teacher was fairly certain about the students' "boundaries". T4 attempted to learn about the students individually through tutorials and introduced various materials to slowly enhance their tolerance towards different cultures and perspectives.

> "Some of them are sensitive, some are religious, they can take things personally so you have to behave accordingly"

When asked about the particular humour attempt from a student in the second observation, which involved the mentioning of 'God', T4 commented:

> "I think it shows that they feel comfortable with each other. I did not notice any offence. We actually feel comfortable talking about cultural and religious things in the break sometimes"

Clearly such a strategy relies on the teacher judging the 'boundaries' of all the individuals in the group very accurately, as some may not want to voice any offence they see in the joke. T4 was confident about her awareness of these 'boundaries' and

reported that she never had an incident in which she offended her students, based on their immediate reactions as well as their feedback in the tutorials. T4, however, revealed that her humour was not always successful (i.e. being entertaining enough to amuse students). When the class did not appreciate her jokes, T4 said she often attempted to reverse the situation and it worked most of the time:

> "When I realise that they don't find it funny, I would say something like "You guys are supposed to laugh because I just made a joke. Maybe it's just not my lucky day then." and they would laugh at it. At the very least it makes things less awkward for me."

On the other hand, T4 believed that bringing in her personality and creating a bond with her students meant she could freely express more negative emotions:

> "But I don't crack jokes all the time. Sometimes I can get a bit angry with them, but because I know that they know me, I already created this bond with them, so when I feel upset about something I can express it naturally with them without being scared that I would lose the rapport."

T4 seemed to be well-loved by her students, as S8, S9 and S10 expressed that they liked their teacher. S10's account also echoed T4's notion of the students' effort to study to 'please' their teacher:

> "Sometimes I'm lazy but I don't want to disappoint her [T4], so I try to finish homework." (S10)

T4's and her students' responses were consistent with the results from the studies done by Montalvo and Roedel (1995) and Montalvo, Mansfield and Miller (2007). They concluded that when the students like a teacher, they are more likely to try and please the teacher through both academic (putting more effort into assignments, paying attention in class, and so on) and non-academic behaviours (offering to do things for the teacher). Furthermore, according to these studies, students appear to try and please teachers who trust and respect them, which also seemed to be the case with T4's class, as reported in the focus group.

4.1.5. Teacher 5 (T5)

4.1.5.a. First observation

In this observation, T5 had a lesson about the research poster preparation and the speaking assessment of the course with his main class. The class consisted of twelve postgraduate students from various countries and they were sitting in a U-shape. The tutor had received a last-minute announcement that the students would need to prepare a mini presentation for their poster the day before, so he started the lesson with an 'apology' and some exaggeration:

> T5: Sorry guys but this is what can happen at uni[versity], all these last-minute things. But it can't be worse than a last-minute written assignment, right? WE WILL SURVIVE! <raised his arms in a victory salute>
> Students: Noooo! <sighed>. We still have a report draft to submit. Why [do] you do this to us? <exaggerated desperate faces>

> T5: No, it's not me who can decide! I can't change anything but I'm here today to
>
> help you with it. <smiled>
>
> Students: Please save us!

Some students giggled through this exchange while the others still looked worried. In this instance, T5 used humour as an aid to deliver unpleasant news. He also employed exaggerated verbal ("We will survive") and body language (giving a victory salute) to identify himself with his students and unite with them as a 'team'. This falls in line with the literature of the identification function of humour, which suggests that humour can be used to deliver an unpleasant message (du Pré, 1998; Ragan, 2014; Schöpf, Martin & Keating, 2017), and also to connect the speaker with his/her audience and create in-group solidarity (Meyer, 2000; Greengross & Miller, 2008, Steward, 2011).

The tutor then gave the class guidance on the language and content for the presentation and emphasised that it was not a difficult task considering their improved speaking skills. T5 appeared to be confident with his students' performance and tried to reassure them with encouraging compliments, such as "That's a good expression to use there, well done!", "I like that you're being very straightforward." and so on. The rest of the lesson was spent on practicing for the upcoming assessment. T4 divided the class into small groups and assigned each group to look up four to five items in the list of new vocabulary. He then moved his chair and sat with the groups in turn to assist them. He encouraged the students to guess the words using the surrounding words or sentences first and asked them to use the new word in a sentence when they finished. The class then moved on to the reading and T5 asked many questions to check the class's

understanding of the article. There were no humour attempts made in this part of the lesson.

T5 appeared to be friendly and my overall impression was that there was a pleasant atmosphere in the class and that the students were comfortable with his teaching style.

4.1.5.b. Second observation

I visited T5's 'second' class (he was not the main tutor of the class) during his lesson on the discussion section of an academic report. There were ten postgraduates in this class and they were on the seventh week of their ten-week course. This lesson also started with an attempt at humour from T5 when two Middle East male students arrived five minutes late:

> T5: <in serious tone> How many push-ups do you want to do?
>
> Student F: <also in serious tone but looked amused>: Twenty five, you want right here teacher?
>
> T5: Yes!
>
> One of the students took off his backpack and slightly bent his back while he was giggling.
>
> T5: <laughed> Nah I'm just kidding.
>
> Both of the students involved as well as some of their classmates chuckled.

This exchange can be seen as an example of a typical 'all-male' humour, which T5 revealed to be common in his teaching experience in the Middle East. Men's humour is often reported to contain 'challenge' ("How many push-ups do you want to do?",

141

"Yes!"), thus giving it the overt qualities of display or performance ("You want right here teacher?") (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Holmes, 2006). This type of humour is quite different from the self-deprecating humour mentioned by T4 and later T7, which is often based on personal experience and aims to provide a sense of inclusiveness and cooperation, the characteristics often found in women's humour (Jenkins, 1985; Crawford & Gressley, 1991).

The tutor then divided the class into small groups and asked them to match the sentences in the discussion section with their functions while he moved around and sat with each group to help. When he brought his chair to a particular group's table, one of them was about to turn their work around so he could see it more easily, to which he commented "It's okay my hidden talent is I can read backwards very well". The group seemed amused and smiled "Are you sure? We won't turn it for you if you can't read it later". T5 continued to joke "Okay let's compromise and turn it half way then. You guys are hard to please sometimes!" and they all laughed, indicating that his humour attempt was well received. The final example of humour was identified when T5 introduced a small contest among the groups:

> T5: I have a game related to this, oh sorry, not game, activity. You're not children.
>
> Student G: But we still love games teacher, you don't have to…um…what is the word? <tried to find a word to express himself>
>
> S13: disguise!
>
> Student G: Yes, you don't have to disguise it! <he was smiling, which indicated he was enjoying the conversation>
>
> T5: You can remember the word and use it now. Brilliant students!
>
> S13: Thanks to you teacher.

The class did not quite burst into laughter, but they appeared to be entertained and smiled at their tutor. There was a lively dynamic in the class. The students seemed to be comfortable with each other and with their tutor. They also appeared to use English in class with confidence.

4.1.5.c. The interview

T5 reported that the lessons in the observations were fair representatives of the lessons he normally had, although the lesson varied every day and there could be more communicative activities in other classes. T5 suggested that he believed in the advantages that humour could bring into the classroom, but he did not want humour to dominate the classroom because "there are things that need to be done". He also indicated that it was easier to employ humour in EFL contexts than in EAP:

> "In EFL, humour is part of the class because it's part of a culture and a language. However, in EAP it's more difficult to use humour because the focus is not only on the language but also on the study skills, and we don't have much time on this course."

T5's words at the end of this quote echo the concerns of T3. He also revealed that although he himself enjoyed humour very much, he expressed the concern over the possibility of being offensive or insensitive when humour was inappropriately used in the classroom, especially if the teacher was not familiar with the students' culture. T5 also admitted to being quite sarcastic around his friends and colleagues. After an experience of ineffective use of humour, he was more aware that sarcasm might not

143

be an ideal type of humour to use in the classroom, thus constraining his use of humour sometimes:

> "I remember in [named country] when I first started teaching at a teenage adolescent class, late adolescent, and of course I was more sarcastic than I am now. I can't remember the exact joke because it was a long time ago, but it didn't receive positive reaction. They didn't laugh and I think it offended some of them. It kind of affected the relationship for a couple of weeks and I had to try hard to win them back." [This quote has been edited to ensure that the respondent cannot be identified.]

On the other hand, he had never had such negative experience with his current classes and he believed the students were comfortable in his class and with his sense of humour:

> "I do think in order for students to feel comfortable and relaxed, humour does help. If I think the students are flagging, I might make a joke on the material. At the beginning, teachers should initiate humour first, just to give them the signal that it's okay, and the students will contribute to that atmosphere later. I think my classes are good with me. They're comfortable to ask questions, even if they think they [the questions] are silly."

T5's comment on how teacher's initiation of humour could elicit contributions from the students was evidenced in the observed lessons from T2, T4 and later T7. As lack of self-confidence and anxiety surrounding language ability are common problems faced by international students, teachers can employ a variety of techniques to encourage them to experiment and reduce their anxiety. Humour can be an effective

way to do so, as reported by Wanzer and Frymier (1999) and Bieg, Grassinger and Dresel (2017). The students in T5's class confirmed that they enjoyed his teaching, with S11 commenting that T5 "knows my culture and respects it, so I respect him very much". This contrasts with the experience T5 reported before, where he felt he had to 'win back' the class after a misjudged comment, suggesting he had learned a lot from that episode. S12 and S13 reported that they particularly appreciated the opportunity for conversations when T5 sat and discussed the lesson with each group:

> "Some teachers are like robot, but he's different. He doesn't joke all the time, just sometimes. I know British people are more…soft with humour? He's like that, not super funny but very pleasant. He walks around to make sure we're good" (S12)

> "He moves his chair around to sit and talk to us about the lesson. He gives hints and examples to explain a word, and it's fun like that. Some teachers just sit at their table and if you ask for [the meaning of] a word they show you definition from dictionary. I can do that myself! I like the way he gives funny and easy to understand examples." (S13)

S13's comment seemed to suggest that the use of examples containing humour made the lesson more memorable and easier to be retrieved, which was in line with the literature reviewed in chapter two. She demonstrated such an example below:

> "When he explained the word 'absent-minded', he said that 'absent' means not here, for example, Jenny is absent from class today. And so 'absent-minded' means your brain, your mind is not here, it goes holiday, so you don't pay attention and forget things. I like [it]!" (S13)

4.1.6. Teacher 6 (T6)

4.1.6.a. First observation

T6's main class was for undergraduates with certificated IELTS scores of 5 to 5.5 and the focus of the observed lesson was 'Seminars'. There were thirteen Chinese students and they studied in a lecture theatre, sitting in one row on the left side and two rows on the right.

The lesson started with a discussion about what a seminar was. It was noticeable that despite T6's effort to walk around and encourage the students to discuss the question, they were very quiet, probably due to the inconvenient class layout in a lecture theatre. There were two instances of humour attempts initiated by the teacher, one on the content of the lesson - "So what do we talk about in a seminar? British weather?" and the other on the material. These, however, were not very well-received by the students, reflected by the odd embarrassed giggle and later complete silence. The lesson continued with a preparation for the practice seminar on 'Cloning', which, according to T6, was "unfamiliar to the students and made it even more difficult to get them to talk". T6 employed humour one more time when she was explaining the definition of 'organism' "What is organism? Any idea? Well I'm not a scientist, but I think it means […]", which met with a more positive reaction from the students as some of them giggled. My impression was that the class was not bored of the lesson, as they still appeared to focus and did what they were asked to, but they were not particularly interested either. The students neither interacted well with their tutor as a whole nor had much communication among themselves.

146

4.1.6.b. Second observation

In the second observation, T6 taught a listening class in the afternoon, which lasted sixty minutes (the length of a standard listening class in this course) instead of a regular ninety-minute lesson. There were eleven Chinese students in the class, from both undergraduate and postgraduate classes. The lesson also took place in a lecture theatre and the students sat in two rows on both sides of the room. The topic of the recording was about a new means of transportation, which was a skateboard operated by toy batteries.

There were two humorous comments from the tutor, including one on the upcoming exam – "Are you EXCITED about your test next week?" – and the other one on her personal view "I must have lost my mind if I said I enjoyed walking to work in the morning! I'm just cold and tired and…and wet!" Her humour was generally welcomed by the students with many of them smiling or nodding their heads in agreement, although according to her, it was the second time she taught the class and she "did not know them very well". T6 then showed the class a talk about the skateboard, which featured a short advertisement for it. The advert contained a lot of beautiful scenery from San Francisco and appeared to capture the students' attention. Despite also having to study in the lecture theatre, they were engaged with the group discussion about the pros and cons of the new gadget, with some of them standing up and leaning forward to talk to their peers. T6 attributed this effective lesson to the interesting topic of innovation and the amusing recording, which she deliberately chose "to motivate the students".

4.1.6.c. The interview

T6 reported that the students in her main class (observation one) "work hard, do as they are told and take on feedback". Interestingly, T6 revealed that they were much friendlier in the individual tutorials and willing to share their problems with her, but this pleasant attitude disappeared in class. This revelation seemed to suggest that there was a peer pressure or cultural expectation to behave a certain way in a class, which will be discussed further in the Findings from the focus groups section (4.2.3.a). She suggested that the setting of the classroom was also a factor that contributed to the students' interaction problem:

> "I mean I have a nice relationship with them individually. In tutorials, they're very chatty and they even tell me about their lives and their troubles, but during lessons they're so serious and unresponsive. And the structure of a lecture theatre certainly doesn't help. They're already shy and with this type of classroom they become even more reluctant to join a discussion."

T6 indicated that she therefore had to adapt her teaching style with this class:

> "I started off quite light-hearted and used a bit of humour and tried to have a nice classroom atmosphere. But over time, it's kinda gone from that to 'do this do that', just me speaking at them because I know they won't respond to me. It's frustrating sometimes."

We can infer from this quote that as humour is a part of communication, it also relies on students' willingness to respond and contribute. In other words, a two-way

148

interaction needs to be established in the classroom for humour to develop. On the other hand, T6 thought that her other class (observation two) "was more engaged and responsive". T6 indicated that the difference between the two classes might be due to the fact that she "could have one-off lessons with more interesting topics" with the second class since they only studied listening skill with her once a week. T6 also suggested that when students seemed to be responsive, she "wouldn't initiate humour all the time but will probably wait for it to come from the students". In addition, T6 believed that humour in the classroom could bring certain benefits, such as improving students' mood and their ability to retain information:

> "I think laughter helps with mood and motivation. I also think it's useful in the sense that if something is funny, like if there's a good joke in the title of an article they have to read, or if someone says a funny comment about the content of the lesson, the class is likely to remember that, and so they're likely to remember the lesson."

However, T6 suggested that although she "preferred a light-hearted teaching style" herself, she was not sure if humour was essential in an EAP course:

> "I don't know if it [humour] is a must in EAP, because I believe that it depends on the teacher and their particular teaching style. In EAP, it's a bit tricky to decide. In general English, it's easy to be an entertainer because you don't have a serious goal that you're aiming for all the time. But in EAP, yes it's nice to have a bit of humour, but you need to know when to stop, when to focus and when to get serious about things"

It appears that T6 attributed the use of humour in EAP mainly to the teacher's preferred teaching style here, although she briefly mentioned the impact of the nature of the

students and the layout of the classroom before. T6's comment also seemed to echo T5's view that employing humour in EAP is more difficult than in an EFL context and that humour might distract students from their academic goals. Furthermore, T6 was concerned about the possible negative impacts when humour was overused in the classroom:

"Too much joking around makes the students feel more comfortable than they should, particularly at the beginning when you're getting to know them. They might feel too comfortable and start asking about your personal life for example, and it can take the focus away from the aim of the lesson. Students can come to class expecting it [humour] every day. They can come to class and expect it to be jokey and then if it's a serious lesson it kinda throws them off. I don't think it's a good dynamic."

The impact of humour on the discipline of the class was emphasised in this comment. Similar to T2 and T3, T6 appeared to stress the 'leader' or 'controller' role of the teacher in her class.

The two students from T6's main class confirmed that they had a good relationship with their teacher. Although they both expressed uncertainty about T6's humour (i.e. they did not really understand her attempts at humour), neither of them thought it had negative impacts on the teacher-student relationship:

"I think sometimes she jokes about the lesson, but I don't know…I'm not sure if it's a joke…Like it's not serious, but it doesn't make you like 'haha'" <laughed> (S14)

> "I don't always understand when she jokes, but it's okay, at least she tries to make us happy." (S15)

Perhaps their uncertainty about T6's sense of humour might also contribute to their reluctance to respond to her attempts at humour. The students also confirmed T6's remark on the structure of the classroom, as they commented:

> "I think my classmates and I are all shy. And I don't like our classroom. When you want to say something, like answer a question you have to speak loud." (S14)

> "I agree. There're always empty tables behind us and it makes me feel that the classroom is very big. And in discussion it's difficult to discuss because the table is long, or you have to turn back and look up to talk to people behind. Just very uncomfortable." (S15)

As previously discussed in the literature review, international students are a vulnerable student population. Their rapport with the teacher and their peers is delicate and can be influenced by different factors. Particularly with this group of 'shy' Chinese students, studying in a lecture theatre, which is not ideal for communicative activities could easily make them revert to the more passive learning strategy that they were more familiar with. The inflexible room layout could have possibly damaged the rapport and hindered the class's willingness to interact with their teacher and peers. The student from T6's listening class (S16), on the other hand, revealed that she did not see T6 very often and therefore did not know her very well. However, S16 reported that she enjoyed the lessons with T6, as she put it:

> "I like watching clips for listening more than just listen to the computer…like just listen and not see anything. I like the topic of technology, it's interesting. I think she [T6] is an active teacher and she asks lots of questions to discuss. I study in lecture theatre too. I don't like it, but it's not a long lesson so it's okay. (S16)

4.1.7. Teacher 7 (T7)

T7 was observed with her main class in the second and third week of a six-week course. There were fourteen Chinese undergraduates in this class and their English ranged from 5.0 to 5.5 on the IELTS scale.

4.1.7.a. First observation

When I first walked into the classroom, some students smiled and waved to greet me, although we had never met each other before. T7 noticed the encounter and giggled while telling them "She's our guest today she is not a new student. Why do you look so excited? You didn't greet me PASSIONATELY like that when we first met!" Her humorous comment was met with audible laughter from the whole class and it worked well to break the ice. Before the lesson started, one student asked the tutor if she could go to the department office to collect a document.

> S17: Can I go for one minute please? Just to the office for my bank letter.
>
> T7: Sure, you have fifty-nine seconds now.

Some of the students in the class immediately understood T7's attempt at humour and laughed. S17 looked slightly confused for a few seconds but looked amused when she

understood and jokingly replied with "Now I only have thirty seconds I should run!"
The rest of the class also appeared to be entertained and their reaction ranged from
smiling to giggling. The focus of the lesson was presentation skills, which, according
to T7 in the interview later, "was basically speaking and they preferred speaking rather
than anything involving writing". At the beginning of the lesson, T7 asked the students
to do a 'True of False" task in the textbook which gave them a general idea of what
made a good/bad presenter with the whole class. T7 used humour three times while
correcting the answers to this task, which were her attempts at acting out a 'bad'
presenter. For example, she tried reading a script with a flat tone and her eyes sticking
to the paper to demonstrate the "You should prepare a script carefully in advance and
read it in the presentation" statement in the task. These attempts were well-received
by the students, indicated by their collective laughter and some even wrapped the
hands around their stomach while laughing. In these examples, T7 was essentially
using the 'truth' in humour (i.e. something the audience themselves may have
experienced), as discussed in the literature review. Therefore, the students probably
found the attempts funny because they recognised these from their own attempts at
presentations, or those that they had watched. The class then continued with a
brainstorming of a to-do list to prepare for a presentation and T7 made another funny
piece of 'advice', which resulted in a short exchange with the students:

> T7: Close all your books, you need to use your brain!
>
> Student H <held her head and pulled a miserable facial expression>: But it's very
> difficult. I don't think I have a brain now.
>
> T7 <turned to the class and chuckled>: H said she might have dropped her brain
> somewhere in the class. Please return it to her if you happen to see it! She needs it for
> her brainstorming!

153

The class, including the involved student all laughed. At the end of the class, I witnessed another humorous conversation between T7 and her students.

> T7: It's your favourite time of the day! It's time to give you some homework!
>
> Students: Oh nooooo. Please be kiiiiind
>
> T7 giggled and assigned the tasks before the conversation continued.
>
> T7: When will I check it?
>
> Student I <continuously blinking her eyes>: Maybe next week?
>
> T7: Hah! You wish! Keep dreaming! I'll check it tomorrow! <She used a sarcastic tone but was smiling while saying this>
>
> Students: Oh nooooo. <Some acted out a sad face, the rest were giggling>

It can be seen from the exchanges that the students were quite comfortable speaking English with their tutor and they were confident enough to contribute their own attempts at using humour. The last few words from T7, despite the humour, reinforced her ground rules to ensure academic achievements were still maintained.

4.1.7.b. Second observation

The lesson was about seminar skills and T7 deliberately chose homework as the topic for the practice seminar, "because I knew they'd love to talk about it", as she jokingly revealed in the interview afterwards. Her prediction appeared to be correct, as the students' interest was generated when she introduced it: "The subject will be homework, the topic you all love", which made most of the class giggle. T7 then gave out seven pieces of paper containing the functions, such as 'giving opinion', 'referring to a source', 'agree', 'disagree' and so on, and asked the students to fill in at least nine

phrases for each of them. She intentionally put the papers in different places in the classroom, "so they [the students] could stand up and move around a bit". The students seemed to enjoy this strategy, discussed and urged each other to fill in the papers which had less than nine items. T7 then collected and corrected the papers with the whole class. During this feedback, she made five humour attempts, including an example of physical humour, as shown in table 10.

Table 10. Some humour attempts in T7's main class

Context	The humour attempt from the teacher	Students' reaction
T7 demonstrated a point in the 'Dos and Don'ts' in a seminar	T7 pretended to glare at the students to demonstrate a point "Don't just say I agree and awkwardly stare at people".	The class collectively laughed.
T7 gave feedback to an answer from the 'Referring to a source' paper, a student wrote "According to me"	"You can say *I think* or *In my opinion*, but not *According to me*! If you're a teacher then maybe <T7 was laughing while saying this>. No I'm just kidding, just don't use this.	The students either giggled or laughed.
T7 gave feedback to an answer from the 'Agreeing/Disagreeing' paper, a student wrote "I disagree a little"	"Who is this cute person? You can use it when you disagree with your parents too!"	The students looked amused and most of them laughed, although some showed a more neutral reaction
T7 gave feedback to an answer from the 'Agreeing/Disagreeing'	"If you try saying it in a different tone, like this "Yeah, you're right" <T7 demonstrated the phrase in a	The class collectively laughed; some students acted out the phrase in a sarcastic tone again.

paper, a student wrote "Yeah, you're right"	sarcastic tone>, it doesn't sound like you really agree, right? So, yes, can be used for both functions."	

Another well-received instance of humour is demonstrated below:

> T7: What can you add to the 'asking for opinion' paper?
>
> Student J <directly looked at the teacher>: What are you thinking about? (as a phrase to use to ask for opinion)
>
> T7: I don't know, maybe my dinner tonight?
>
> The whole class laughed.

It was perhaps the incongruity in both the student's answer and T7's response that made this exchange funny to the class. The teacher's purpose was to correct the slightly inappropriate phrase and this correction appeared much less threatening. The overall impression was that there was an easy-going atmosphere in the class and the students had good relationships with their tutor and with each other. Similar to T4, T7 also used funny comments to tease the students in a friendly manner, and they appeared to enjoy and tried to extend these interactions ("Now I only have thirty seconds I should run!"). Although T7 was friendly, there was still a sense of discipline and the students were clearly determined to do the tasks well. Noticeably, they rarely used Chinese to communicate among themselves and were confident speaking English, which was quite unusual for a mono-lingual class of students with intermediate level of English.

4.1.7.c. The interview

T7 indicated that she had a good relationship with the class and the students were highly motivated and got on well with each other:

> "I'm very lucky this year that I have a class that I really get on with and they have gelled really nicely as a group. They're happy to help and support each other, even with the two new students who moved from another class. It's nice to teach them because it's not stressful. They're not annoying, they are willing to learn and work hard and they are nice people."

T7 suggested that this rapport acted as a basis for more humour to spontaneously happen in the class:

> "The funny comments - I don't know if banter is the right word, but it's kinda this [banter] between us, increases as the course goes on and we've got to know each other. So in week one, it probably wasn't like that. But now they definitely make funny comments about me as well" <laughed>.

T7 reported that her use of humour came more from her personality rather than pedagogical reasons. However, T7 believed that humour could have positive impacts on the relationship with the students:

> "It's [humour] not an aim but as I said before, it's part of my personality, that's who I am. And to get on well with the group I think it's very important to bring your personality into the classroom, for them to realise that you're not a teaching robot, but you're a human being, because they can relate to that a lot more. And especially with this class, they're slightly older than the teenage groups that I've taught in the past,

157

you have to make sure that they can relate to you. When they realise that you too are a human being, it makes such a difference in the class. I think that's why we get on well, because I can let my personality come through in my teaching"

T7's comment appeared to echo T2 and T4's view that 'teachers should bring their personality into the classroom' and 'teachers as human beings'. T7 further explained her belief about using humour in the pre-sessional course:

"I don't think it's essential for a pre-sessional tutor to have humour, they [the students] could all pass the course with a teacher perhaps more serious. But I think it's makes the experience more enjoyable for both parties. It doesn't necessarily affect their [the students'] grades but perhaps how they get on with me can affect their experience and how comfortable they feel, and their confidence as well, which I guess in this sense humour does have an effect."

It is noticeable that although she starts by saying that humour has no direct impact on outcomes, she later identifies an indirect benefit in that it builds rapport and students' confidence, which in turn has advantages. T7 elaborated on the benefits of humour on her current class – including boosting the students' confidence to speak and experiment with English:

"Ninety percent of the time they don't speak Mandarin and Cantonese in class, which I think for monolingual pre-sessional class coming from China where they don't necessarily speak that much English in class is quite rare, and I didn't ask or force them to do so. I don't think they would do that if they didn't feel comfortable or confident or if the classroom was not a safe space. They feel safe to try things, to try

and be funny, something that is very hard for them to do in English, but they're willing

to give it a go."

Later, T7 stated that humour was also beneficial to her as a teacher:

"But also for me to feel confident and comfortable, like I'm much more confident to

say something like: 'I don't think this is clear enough' 'Could you do this better?'

When they're feeling safe and we have a good relationship then they're more likely

to respond well to feedback and change what they do."

However, T7 also warned against forcing humour "if it's not your personality" and

expressed concerns over the possibility of humour being offensive, confusing and

time-wasting:

"If they don't understand it and you have to spend time explaining it and you've got

a lot of things to do that day, you kinda waste time on it and it probably won't be

funny anymore <laughed>. Also if it's a group or culture that you don't know very

well, it could be easy to offend somebody or maybe it just wouldn't be that funny."

In order to minimise the risk of humour being offensive, T7 advocated the use of self-

deprecating humour as well as being conscious about 'humour boundaries', as she put

it:

"I'm good at knowing where the line is and I don't use humour that might offend

somebody. I tend to start with jokes being about me rather than about them so they

can start to understand my sense of humour, but in no way could I offend them. So

in week one, I probably wouldn't really joke with or about them, I just joke about

myself, which is quite easy to do <laughed>. And once they understand, we can be more friendly and I can expect some humour from them."

It was clear that T7 attempted to use self-deprecating humour to build what she saw as a healthy 'group' dynamic. In the observed lessons, the relationship among the members of the class appeared to have moved forward, as they started to joke about others and not just about themselves, including the teacher. In other words, the friendly teasing among them indicated that T7 was successful in creating the rapport with her students and eventually built a close 'community' in the classroom.

S17 from T7's class revealed that she thought her teacher was strict on the first couple of days but then realised T7 was not completely so.

"She gave clear rules and requirements like we need to do homework, no copy paste, no google translate, no phone in class. So I thought oh my god she is strict! But after a week, I see she's actually friendly and fun."

S18 reported that he particularly liked T7's 'disciplinary punishment'.

"We have this empty table in class, we call it 'penalty table'. If you're too noisy when she's teaching, or if she sees you use phone in class, you have to sit in that table for five, ten minutes. After that, she asks you "Are you my good student now?" <laughed> I think it works well, we know our mistake, and she never shouts at us."

S18's comment appeared to reflect the close relationship the students had with their tutor as well as with their peers. It's possible that it is the close rapport that might make

the students more accepting of the discipline. This will be further discussed in the Findings from the focus groups section.

Both students stated that they felt comfortable in T7's class, with S17 commenting that she felt more confident to ask questions.

> "She's very friendly. I can ask her to explain if I don't understand. I don't ask questions at home [home country]. Maybe that's why my English is bad. No, not bad! We always say "Nobody's English is bad" in our class <giggled>." (S17)

It is noticeable how S17 contrasts the atmosphere of the class in her own country with that in the UK. She also takes ownership of the class ('our class') and seems to talk about it with a sense of pride. We can also infer from this quote that T7's sense of humour was interpreted by the students as her being friendly and approachable, as suggested by previous literature.

4.1.8. Teacher 8 (T8)

T8 was observed with two different classes, both in their third week of a six-week course. There were fourteen students in the first class and thirteen in the second one and they were all undergraduates, with intermediate level of English. The lessons took place in a lecture theatre.

4.1.8.a. First observation

T8 started the class with a subtle attempt at humour in a form of a 'complaint': "A lot of students emailed me at eleven p.m. yesterday. I'm not working at a twenty-four-hour customer service centre you know!" Two students showed a neutral reaction but most of the class giggled or smiled. The lesson was about preparing for the upcoming speaking exam, and as all of them would enrol in business-related courses, T8 deliberately chose a business-related video to show them. The video was one episode of a reality show in which start-ups had to give a short presentation about their business ideas and convince five multi-millionaires to invest in their ventures. T8 asked the students to watch the clip and take note of the language they used in their presentation as well as the negotiation. The theme of the video was a relevant and useful one. However, the fast pace and various accents in the show were quite challenging for the students so there seemed to be a loss of interest by about halfway through the episode.

T8 then asked the students to work in groups to summarise the video in their own words and compare their notes of the language used. All of the students resorted to Chinese to discuss the task, with the only one non-Chinese speaking student (S19) looking slightly confused. T8 came to her group and reminded them "You see, she can't speak Chinese either. You have to speak English so she can join!" which made the group chuckle. S19 responded with "I'm learning Chinese now!" and the rest of the group giggled. T8 then asked the students to report their summary and continue to elaborate on the language for the presentation. He also discussed the body language and manners of the entrepreneurs in the video and the students seemed to be more attentive to this particular part of the lesson. After two-thirds of the lesson, one student

came in and apologised for being late and it appeared that he had asked for T8's permission in advance, which was confirmed by the tutor later in the interview. T8 jokingly 'welcomed' the student "Ah [the student's name], you're here. It's okay you're just a little bit late!", which triggered collective laughter, including the involved student. There was no other humour attempt identified for the rest of the lesson.

Although the students seemed shy and did not use much English to communicate, there was a comfortable atmosphere in the class and they were still willing to contribute to the lesson when asked to do so. The students sitting in the front rows appeared to be more focused than the ones sitting behind.

4.1.8.b. Second observation

In this observation, T8 was teaching his 'second' class and the focus was on reading skills. The class was divided into small groups to read different parts of an article about water, take notes, then exchange their notes with other groups. The students had to hand in their research report the night before, thus they looked quite tired and passive in this late morning lesson. The class consisted of Chinese-speaking students only and they used Mandarin in most of the discussions. T8 made an effort to walk around and encouraged them to use English, but the students seemed unbothered. Noticing that some of the groups did not discuss and just copied each other's notes in silence, T8 commented "I want to hear you talking, unless you've developed telepathy skills" which was met with silence from the students, probably because they did not understand the word *telepathy*.

Near the end of the lesson, the tutor made a joke on the content of the material, which was about the percentage of water in the human body and common objects "A Chinese cucumber is more Chinese than you are, because it's eighty-nine percent Chinese water and you're only seventy percent Chinese water". The students did not seem to find the joke too funny, with the reaction ranging from an isolated giggle to neutral faces. T8 apparently recognised his unsuccessful use of humour, continued with "You did not find it very funny, did you? Oh I've wasted my talent on you", which was more well-received as it triggered more laughter in the class. The situation might demonstrate the suggestions that unsuccessful attempts at humour could be retrieved immediately and become more effective instead of being simply ignored.

Overall, the students in this class did not show much enthusiasm for the lesson as a whole. T8, on the other hand, maintained a light-hearted and relaxing approach as well as having a sympathising attitude, as he explained in the interview "They were probably very tired and did not sleep well enough. There's no need to be harsh on them."

4.1.8.c. The interview

T8 reported that the students in both of his classes preferred to work independently to prepare notes and ideas before exchanging information with each other, rather than to communicate spontaneously. He also indicated that since all of the students were going to enrol in business-related courses afterwards, he tried to incorporate materials that were "relevant to the industry and not too academic" once a week. T8 revealed that he

believed strongly that the students should be treated with respect and that they felt comfortable in his class:

> "I treat my students as adults, as human beings, these young people, I've never shouted at them. I treat them with the respect that they deserve, but I expect that back as well. I always tell my students: "Please don't come to my class with a sad, angry looking face". It's very important that the people in my class feel comfortable, feel at ease and feel that they can be what they want to be, say what they really think."

T8 suggested that humour was an important factor that could contribute to a more positive learning environment.

> "If I see the funny side of something, I'll say it. We laugh together a lot. My main class is very shy, but gradually they come out of their shell with me. If there wasn't any humour in education, it would be too boring, even if you had the greatest interest in the subject. People can't interact without some sort of light relief, and light relief doesn't mean distract from the main content of the lesson at all.

Furthermore, T8 indicated that the use of humour in class could improve students' motivation and their progress:

> "Laughter is a good medicine for everyone anyways. Laughing and learning is a good combination. When you learn and you learn with laughter you also progress. It makes you want to continue, to come back. I've had lots of students coming back for the atmosphere of the class as much as they do for the content."

In these quotes, T8 emphasised the importance of 'joy' and 'fun' in learning, which is similar to the attitude expressed by T2. T8, however, argued that humour could "attract respect", which appeared to contradict the view expressed by others that it could be considered 'unprofessional':

"Laughter can attract respect, they can learn and laugh. You never forget a good teacher who makes you laugh. Learning without laughing is a failure. I don't want to be serious to prove myself. You don't have to be stern to be successful."

In this quote, T8 seemed to conflate 'good teacher' with 'makes you laugh'. Although having a good sense of humour is a desirable characteristic of 'a good teacher' in many students' surveys, subject-matter knowledge, teaching skills and other personality traits, such as being caring and enthusiastic, also usually top the charts (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; Fortson & Brown, 1998; Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). Humour, therefore, can be a useful addition to a teacher's repertoire of strategies, rather than a dominant factor in evaluating teachers. T8 elaborated on 'learning without laughing is a failure' by suggesting that humour might be underrated in academia and that lecturers in higher education might not be giving the international students the support that they needed. He drew on his range of experience at a variety of UK higher education institutions to argue that full time academic staff should use humour more to connect to international students:

"Humour connects all of us. Many people benefit from a lighter attitude. But some academics are blinkered. They lose the sense of humour, the human contact, and just get into their shells. They can be very serious, unkind, even horrible. And they forget that the students see them every day, but for them it's just the day-to-day run in the

166

university, people don't have that much amount of time to invest. It's just sad that they [the students] don't get the same attention from their teachers, and they're thousands of miles away from their families."

T8's comments on "serious, unkind, even horrible" teachers were based on one recent incident in which a tutor who was no longer employed in the programme was reported to use inappropriate language in communication with her colleagues and students.

T8 also reported that humour also motivated himself as a teacher and emphasised the notion of 'enjoyment' in the teaching-learning process:

"It [humour] makes it more interesting for me as a teacher, as a lesson provider, and a performer, if things have gone well. And not only people have learnt something, but they've enjoyed the experience and they've gone home with a smile on their face. And if you constantly do that, you know without somebody telling you that you've done the job well."

T8 also saw himself as 'a performer' when using humour, a characteristic often associated with male's humour, as observed by Jenkins (1985), Crawford (2003) and Coates (2007). Although T8 admitted that the students in the pre-sessional course did not always understand and appreciate his humour attempts, he was still content with the interaction in the class, as humour occurred to him very naturally and he had "been brought up with a lot of laughter".

"On pre-sessional courses they don't always recognise it [humour], but it doesn't matter. Because I've realised that down the line, the thing that I do is that I'm keeping

167

contact with them. And sometimes years later, for example I got this email saying that they suddenly realised: "Oh gosh that was really funny and I didn't realise at the time". So if you like, it's sort of a 'delayed reaction', which is also nice really."

It can be understood that T8 did not use humour with the sole purpose of entertaining students but also to provide them with more exposure to the language and elicit conversations, as were the cases with T4 and T7. Later, T8 also revealed that he would still use humour even if his attempts of humour were not always appreciated by the students.

"I'm not like if I don't get any laughter I would start to question my ability to create humour in the class. I just try to make them comfortable and confident. I guess humour is just something…very natural, it's like I've got a funny bone attached to my artery. And also it's how I've been brought up, with a lot of laughter. My parents, grandparents, my siblings, they're all very funny."

Students in T8's class indicated that T8 was a caring and dedicated teacher:

"On the first day of class, he said to us: "I'm your dad for six weeks, so if you have any problems, come to me.". He is very kind like that." (S19)

S20 also revealed that he enjoyed T8's introduction of puns in the class:

 "He taught us about pun, a play on word. He said it makes British people laugh. We have something like that in Chinese too, but I didn't know about [that] in English. I think it's very useful." (S21)

When asked about the particular example which involved 'Chinese cucumber' in the second observation, S21 claimed that he found it interesting, but because his peers did not seem to be too amused, he did not want to stand out by laughing out loud.

> "I think it's interesting. I think I did laugh or something, but not loud. I think my classmates don't understand it, it's strange if I laugh. Do you think so?" (S21)

The students also agreed that since the observed lessons were on the day after a deadline, they were tired and less motivated than usual. In addition, the video clip in the first observation was fast and required much attention, hence the quieter atmosphere in the class that day:

> "I think normally the class is more fun. That day everyone was just tired and we just wanted to sleep more." (S20)

> "I couldn't hear a lot from the clip. I like reality show in English but with subtitle. My English is not that good to watch it without sub[title] <giggled>. I think my friends were the same, we didn't write down enough to discuss." (S19)

The fact that the students themselves came up with the explanation for the quieter atmosphere in the observed class without being specifically asked was interesting. It appeared to me that it was the students' subtle attempt to shift the cause away from their tutor and save his face. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the rapport they had with T8.

4.1.9. Teacher 9 (T9)

T9 was observed with his main class on two consecutive days in the fourth week of a six-week course. These were not typical lessons, with the first being a presentation and the second being a feedback session. There were thirteen Chinese undergraduates in the class and they studied in a lecture theatre.

4.1.9.a. First observation

The students had previously prepared a presentation with their group of three or four to discuss their research projects and the observed lesson was the presentation day. The tutor gave some instructions on the order of the groups and timing, as well as encouraging the class to contribute to the discussion session after each presentation. During the first half of the lesson, the students did not pay much attention to their peers' presentation, thus the presenters' prompt questions were met with virtual silence. Therefore, T9 explicitly expressed his disapproval of their attitudes and specifically assigned that the groups took turns to ask questions to review their classmates' projects. There were three funny incidents in the presentations, which were completely unexpected and were initiated by the students themselves. For example, one student (S22) was presenting and suddenly forgot the English word for 'a cow' and decided to be honest about it "I'm sorry I forgot the name of the animal. It's a four leg, black and white and gives milk." The class and the tutor were apparently amused, collectively laughed, then confirmed if he meant 'a cow' in Chinese and gave him the word in English. S22 was not upset or embarrassed about this incident when it was raised in the focus group later. The other two humorous incidents included a student's comment when no one responded to her question in the discussion and another

student's confusion at his own presentation slide. The students involved in these episodes appeared to enjoy the friendly laughing with their peers, as they initiated the humour themselves and laughed first. Although this study does not examine humour initiated by the students, these funny incidents indicated that the students in T9's class welcomed and enjoyed the friendly atmosphere that humour brought into their classroom.

4.1.9.b. Second observation

In the observation, T9 asked each group to come forward and sit with him so that he could give them the feedback on their research and the previous presentation. The rest of the class did a textbook exercise individually. In the feedback, the teacher asked each student to self-evaluate their strengths and weaknesses reflected through their presentation before telling them his opinion. He was very attentive and the students were more willing to communicate, compared to the day before. There was no humour attempt made in this lesson.

The overall impression was that the class was quite shy and reluctant to speak, which led T9 to adopt "a stricter approach", as he revealed in the interview.

4.1.9.c. The interview

T9 reported that his class were "very shy, even more than shy" and "inactive and reluctant to say anything". T9 partly attributed this nature of the class to "the lack of diversity", although he remarked that his students were "generally motivated". It could

also be argued that having an observer in the class might also have contributed to the shyness of the students. Through various comments about his past and current Chinese students, T9 appeared to support the notion that they usually hesitated to interact with their teacher and peers in classroom situations:

> "They are reluctant to say anything and are not willing to come out of the comfort zones on their own."

> "I've seen the same situation in another seminar of a postgraduate class. Other students spoke a lot, and the Chinese students just sat there and stayed silent."

T9 also mentioned a difficult situation he had encountered in another European country to further support his observation of Chinese students:

> "In [named country] … in the university, some [gave nationality] students don't want to work with Chinese students, which causes a lot of tension and aggression in the class. Because Chinese students are less pro-active and they don't contribute much in discussions, the group with Chinese students could receive lower marks for their group work. It's just a very sensitive and challenging situation." [This quote has been edited to ensure that the respondent cannot be identified.]

Consequently, T9 decided to consciously adopt a strict approach for his class, as he put it:

> "This class started off too relaxed and I had to introduce stricter guidelines by giving
>
> them tasks in which they have to complete. If you leave them to their own devices,
>
> they won't achieve anything, and I'm not prepared to take that risk."

T9's comment also appeared to echo T1's view that humour should not be used with undergraduate students, as they might not be familiar with independent study and they needed a more formal framework to achieve the goals. He also appeared to advocate the view suggested by previous tutors that humour could potentially waste classroom time:

> "These students are away from home for the first time, so it may not be a good idea to
>
> introduce informality too early. Especially in the Chinese context, I think it's better to
>
> wait a bit longer to actually employ humour. I need to push them in the formal way to
>
> interact, improve their speaking and achieve their goals within a short timeframe. If
>
> the class is highly responsible and motivated, maybe there will be more room for
>
> humour."

Furthermore, T9 stated that humour "is indeed a risky technique", as he later commented:

> "If I know a lot about the culture, fair enough. If not, I will have to take some time to
>
> adapt my teaching style. A light-hearted approach sometimes– yes. Telling jokes or
>
> being jokey – no. They are from a different culture and humour doesn't always
>
> translate and is also contextual. It [humour] is indeed a risky technique."

It should be noted that T9's idea of being 'light-hearted' was not to entertain students but rather to let them study independently as a type of reward for their previous hard

work. As T9 explained later, after a presentation or assignment deadline, he would let the students do some tasks that did not require much effort, or independent work. He would also let them volunteer to contribute to the lesson instead of assigning someone.

Noticeably, T9 seemed to be interested in cultural diversity and cultural-related issues. He later shared his thoughts on this subject in the interview:

> "I've been to a lot of training and discussions on the theories of culture, and I teach cultural diversity in the university myself. What makes an institute successful is its inter-culture. If you understand cultural diversity, you can achieve a lot of things."

This seems to suggest that T9's experience and understanding of cultural diversity may have informed a teaching practice which limits the use of humour in the class, as humour is considered highly culturally dependant.

T9 stated that his stricter approach might be "the best approach for this class", as he put it:

> "They don't react negatively to the change. They aren't put off and they achieve weekly objectives. I've seen an improvement through the past four weeks."

However, this claim did not seem to match the opinions of all of the students in T9's class. In particular, S23's comment appeared to contradict that of her teacher:

> "He was okay at first, not fun but okay. Then he gets harder [stricter]. Sometimes he's angry he talks very loud like he's shouting. It makes us [feel] awkward." (S23)

174

S22 agreed with his classmate but expressed that he was not concerned too much about this. He also made an interesting remark on the lesson:

"I don't care if the class is fun or not - just need to pass the exam. But yes he's strict, but sometimes he's nice too. It depends on he's happy or not maybe? <giggled> He's like British weather. <laughed>" (S22)

The students also reported that T9 seemed to be more relaxed in individual tutorials, with S23 expressed that she much preferred him that way:

"I want him to teach in class like in tutorial. In tutorial, he speaks soft, like "What do you think about this?" "Do you have any problems?". In class, he's like "I want you [to] do this, I want you [to] do that" "This is not acceptable." He always says: "This is not acceptable." <imitated an order>" (S23)

S22, on the other hand, suggested that he understood T9's effort to encourage the class to practice speaking:

"If he asks a question or after discussion, he calls [specific students'] names to answer, because no one will raise hand to say it.

The differences between S22 and S23's views regarding T9's strict approach might be explained by S22's more goal-oriented mindset about the course, as he asserted earlier that he "just need to pass the exam". This suggests that some students prioritise academic goals over the 'fun' side of the lesson. Thus, humour should be appropriately used as a 'spice' rather than a dominant element in the classroom, as recommended by previous studies, such as Powell and Andresen (1985) and Palmer and Palmer (2003)

4.1.10. Teacher 10 (T10)

T10 taught a class of thirteen undergraduates, all were from China. I visited her class in the second and third week of a six-week course.

4.1.10.a. First observation

The first observed lesson was about referencing, which according to T10, was "a dry topic to teach". She started the class by asking if the students knew the definition of 'plagiarism' and 'referencing'. T10 then gave some examples of 'direct' and 'indirect' quotes, in-text citations and extracts from a bibliography as well as elaborating on how to cite books, journal articles and electronic sources. The students then practiced citing individually and did a task on paraphrasing and citing in groups or individually, depending on their preference. T10 walked around to assist the class and a subtle humour attempt was made during this time:

> T10: Do you want to work with someone?
>
> Student K: No, I'm very independent.
>
> T10 <smiled>: So you don't want my help either?
>
> Student K: No no no I don't mean it. <He was shaking his hand and smiling when saying this>

At the end of the lesson, T10 corrected the answers with the whole class. T10 presented the content of the lesson most of the time and the students were focused, although looking confused at times, probably due to the fact that referencing was a completely

new concept to them. They were slightly quiet at the beginning of the lesson but seemed comfortable to ask for the tutor's help while doing the tasks.

4.1.10.b. Second observation

T10 was observed the second time on the class presentation day. They took turns to present their research projects in groups of three or four. T10 asked the students to take notes of their classmates' project details so that they could discuss together after each presentation. In fact, the students were willing to contribute to these discussions by asking many interesting questions, demonstrating that they were indeed attentive. There was much laughter and giggling identified in this session as a result of the exchanges among the students. T10 made a funny comment in the discussion of a research project about 'Relationships' and it was the only example of humour initiated by the tutor in this lesson:

> S24: Do you have any advices [advice] to keep a good relationship?
>
> Student L: Well I'm not an expert about love but …
>
> T10: You'll never know enough about love to become an expert I'm afraid. I've been married for more than twenty years and still not sure if I know anything about love!

The class was amused, indicated by their giggles and nodding their heads in agreement "True, true! It's never enough" one said.

The class ended with T10 wishing the students a good weekend and they happily responded with the same message. Their enthusiastic contribution in this lesson was unexpected, as T10 expressed in the interview that she was also surprised because

"normally they don't talk that much". The students appeared to have a good relationship with each other and with their teacher. It was noticeable that there was a lot of smiling in this class, from T10 herself, among the students, and from the students towards T10.

4.1.10.c. The interview

Similar to T9, T10 reported that her main class "is not very active but they're motivated". Therefore, T10 tried to use a variety of activities in her lessons in order to encourage the students to communicate. T10 indicated that she did not pay much attention to her use of humour in the class. These attempts, according to T10, were probably just natural responses to the situation. However, T10 revealed that she always tried to maintain a relaxed and friendly classroom environment rather than being formal.

> "I always respect them [the students] and make them feel welcome in the class. They're not children so there's no need for any disciplinary strategies. With every lesson, there has to be an aim, but no strict path."

T10 also stated that she liked to share her personal anecdotes with the class in order to build rapport and improve students' confidence.

> "I like to share stories about myself, especially on how I learn a foreign language, how I make mistakes, which are often quite hilarious. I think it helps to build trust among the members of the class. Trust is important. I want to make sure they know they can

make mistakes without being judged. And when we're laughing, I want them to know

I'm laughing with them, not laughing at them."

Although T10 indicated that she was not particularly interested in humour, her use of

anecdotes about her personal experience of learning a foreign language appeared to

support the notion of bringing more human aspects into the classroom suggested by

T4 and T7. On the other hand, T10 warned against the use of "aggressive humour",

which involved using stereotypes and culturally insensitive jokes in the classroom.

Students from T10's class described her as easy-going and very patient. They reported

that T10 did not use much humour in class, but she was approachable and they enjoyed

the light-hearted atmosphere in her class. The students also suggested that T10's

encouraging attitude helped improve the class's confidence.

> "We don't laugh a lot in class. But she always smiles and nods her head when someone
>
> is talking. I'm not sure if she understands what I say but it makes me feel good." (S24)

> "She compliments us a lot. Like "Excellent" "Well done" "Very good". I think
>
> everybody likes compliment. It makes us happy." (S25)

4.1.11. An overview of the teachers' perceptions of humour in the pre-sessional course

This section is intended to compare and contrast the pre-sessional tutors' views on the

use of humour in the course. Additional insights, not already discussed, into different

aspects of classroom humour reported in the interviews with the teachers are also included.

4.1.11.a. Teachers' perceptions of the use of humour in the pre-sessional course

There are four teachers who reported regularly using humour in their teaching (T2, T4, T7 and T8) as it was part of their personality. Three of them, the exception was T7, believed that it was necessary to use humour as a teaching strategy in the pre-sessional classroom. These four tutors also believed that teachers should bring more of their personality and human aspects into the classroom, as these elements would contribute to a healthier classroom environment, and humour could be one way to do so. Furthermore, T2 and T8 emphasised the view that there should be 'enjoyment' and 'fun' in learning, which in turn could generate interest and intrinsic motivation for the subject. T4, T7 and T8 also suggested that using humour might benefit the teachers, as humour made it easier for them to give negative feedback or express dissatisfaction, and the teaching itself became more relaxed and interesting. In other words, humour is thought to be part of a healthy and relaxed teaching environment, which may help the teachers to maintain their interest as well as reducing their own tension and in turn that can have positive impacts on their mental health (Austin, Shah & Muncer, 2005; Ho, 2016). T2, T4, T5 and T8 believed that humour could also be initiated by the teachers to motivate students to get through challenging topics. This idea was evident in T4's note-taking and T5's report-writing class, in which humour was effectively used to boost the atmosphere and create a more motivating learning environment. This finding is consistent with that of Kuiper, Martin and Olinger (1993), Abel (2002) and

Moran and Hughes (2006), who conclude that humour can be used as a strategy to cope with stressful or unfortunate situations. Other benefits of using humour, including creating a comfortable atmosphere, boosting students' confidence, improving students' ability to retain information as well as building rapport were also mentioned in the interviews.

On the other hand, T1, T3, T5, T6 and T10 stated that although humour was useful at some points, they did not use it frequently due to several concerns. According to T3, T5 and T9, using humour could potentially waste classroom time on a dense programme. In contrast, T4 and T7 argued that the appropriate use of humour could strengthen the teacher-student bond and this could encourage students to learn and experiment, thus improving the learning efficiency. Another reported problem of using humour was that the teacher could be portrayed as 'unprofessional', as indicated by T2. This idea was also supported by T3 and T6, who added that using too much humour might also have negative effects on the discipline of the class. However, T8 seemed to be sceptical of these views, suggesting that humour was underrated in academia and that humour could actually attract admiration. Interestingly, T1 and T9 suggested that they deliberately avoided using humour with their undergraduate classes, since they believed these students were more familiar with the formal approach and they might not be able to achieve their goals if humour was introduced at this early stage. In addition, most of the teachers agreed that attempts at humour could turn out to be insensitive or offensive, especially in a multi-cultural class. Therefore, the majority of the teachers suggested that teachers should be aware of the 'boundaries' and avoid aggressive humour in the classroom. Although it appeared that some teachers were

prepared to take more risks than others, all of the tutors saw appropriate timing as crucial to the effectiveness of humour.

Many teachers in this study (T1, T3, T5, T6, T7 and T9) also contrasted EAP with other teaching contexts, specifically EFL, to elaborate on the difficulties with using humour in pre-sessional courses. Perhaps the key difference between these two contexts lies in the orientation of the courses. EFL in private language schools often has only a loosely defined syllabus, allowing teachers the freedom to adopt and adapt material and focus on the process of learning. EAP, on the other hand, is often associated with fixed syllabuses and a need to cover all the content – a focus on the product of learning. In other words, EFL is language-driven whereas EAP is more skills-driven. Given the intensity and goal-oriented nature of the pre-sessional course, it is obviously easier for the tutors to stick to a pre-defined lesson plan rather than follow emergent language and cultural issues, which interactional communication and humour often induce.

It is striking how diverse the teachers' views on the use of humour is. These views varied from seeing humour as a diversion to acknowledging it as actually contributing to learning. Several factors might have influenced the teachers' perceptions of humour as a teaching strategy, such as their personal learning experience, their teaching background and perhaps the recognition of their own personal strengths. The teachers who considered 'a sense of humour' as part of their personalities (T2, T4, T7 and T8) probably found it more comfortable to use humour in their classes. In addition, the tutors' ideas about the roles of the teachers in the classroom might also impact their attitudes towards humour. The majority of the teachers having the undergraduate

students cited the possible negative impacts on discipline and concerns over students' academic achievements as the reasons for their hesitance towards using humour. A possible explanation for this might be that undergraduate students are often considered less mature and less autonomous compared to the postgraduates. Therefore, these teachers appeared to see themselves as the 'leader' or 'controller' and using humour with this group can possibly reduce the teacher's sense of authority in the class. Compared with the undergraduate students, the postgraduate students might have been put in a more equal position with the tutors. In these situations, the tutors might see themselves more as a 'facilitator' or a 'motivator' in the classroom, and thus humour became a communication strategy to build rapport among the members of a 'team'. Although the postgraduate students might have shared the same education system as the undergraduates in their home country, this factor was not mentioned in the teachers' interviews. It is possible, therefore, that the tutors might have perceived previous learning experience as a less challenging factor when using humour with the postgraduate groups.

With regard to the differences between male and female teachers' uses of humour in these lessons, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions partly because there is relatively little data on the male side of the equation and so comparisons are problematic. However, it appears that self-deprecating and anecdotal humour are popular among the female tutors, which are often used to affiliate themselves with the students, improve students' confidence and improve the group cohesion. This observation is in line with the literature which suggests that female use of humour is usually associated with encouragement, collaboration and healing (Carness, 2001; Kotthoff, 2006; Coates, 2007). Several female tutors (T1, T2, T4 and T7) also used

funny comments to tease their students in a friendly manner, which might demonstrate the rapport and solidarity between the teachers and the members of the class, further supporting the observation by Hay (2002) that women also used joking insults and friendly teasing in mixed sex conversations. On the other hand, competitive talk and joke telling, which are often associated with male humour, were identified in T5's and T8's lessons, respectively. It is encouraging that certain patterns still emerge, even within a small sample of this study and further research in this area might well yield interesting results.

A common view amongst the tutors was that humour is not often discussed in formal training for teachers, as the tutors in this study commented:

> "We've had some chats here and there about cultural differences, but not about humour…never had CPD on it. But it's a soft skill, isn't it? […] It's difficult for me to be the one who decides that [whether humour should be included in CPD]. I think it'll be up to…let's say the head of the school or the course director" <laughed> (T2)

In this quote, T2 appeared to classify the ability to use humour effectively as a 'soft skill', presumably to suggest that humour could be included in teachers' CPD, alongside other soft skills such as communication skills and team working. This view also appeared to be echoed by T5:

> "We kinda learn about humour mostly through conversations to be honest, learn what they [students] find funny, what makes them laugh. I don't think I've had any training on how to use humour…No…But I think there should be some training for new

> teachers…humour, cultural differences, what to say and what not, for example, if
>
> they're new to the culture, mostly to raise awareness and help them adapt." (T5)

Some teachers suggested that humour could be part of a CPD or workshop about cultural differences (T4 and T10) or communication skills (T7 and T8) to improve teachers' willingness to experiment with different teaching strategies, including using humour, as demonstrated by a quote from T8:

> "It's very rare, it's not very often that you get that sort of training. I attend the IATEFL
>
> [an annual ELT conference] every year and I think they may have that kind of
>
> workshop [about humour]. But when you have in house training, it's very unlikely
>
> that you get that sort of training, unless somebody in your staff would specialise in
>
> that. […]. But there should be at least more discussion. Maybe it will come up when
>
> you discuss how to talk to students, how to become a better practitioner." (T8)

Again, these responses from the teachers suggest that more information and discussion about the use of humour in the classroom might be welcomed.

4.1.11.b. Teachers' perceptions of the source of classroom humour

Most of the tutors responded that humour should come from both sides – the teachers and the students. T6 added that the attempts at humour also depended on the relationship between both parties, and it could be awkward if humour only came from the teacher with little to no response from the students. T2, T4, T5, T7 and T8 all suggested that at the beginning of the course, humour should start from the teachers as a signal that the classroom was a safe space, and the students could contribute their

own humour later. T4 and T7 also indicated that a good way to introduce humour into the course was to start with humour about the teachers themselves so the students would feel more relatable and there would be less chance to offend anyone.

On the question of using material as a potential source of humour in the class, the teachers reported that it was difficult to find materials that contained humour in EAP, especially paper-based ones. T2 and T8 stated that they often exploited more authentic materials (i.e. those not designed for teaching), such as video clips, as a platform for the discussions of 'dry' topics. This view was evidenced in their observed lessons, in which T2 used an English talk from a popular Chinese television host as a basis for a discussion about the recent changes in China while T8 used an episode of a British reality show with a business-related theme to prepare the students for an upcoming speaking exam. T4 gave a slightly different reason for using various types of material, mentioning that these might improve students' tolerance towards different cultures and perspectives. She believed the use of these materials helped her students to have a better understanding of their peers' cultures, thus becoming closer and more humour could be initiated by the students thanks to this relationship.

Another suggestion from T6 and T8 was that instead of trying to find funny materials, teachers might want to focus on materials that could generate genuine interest in the topic. They argued that when students were keen to discuss a topic, the atmosphere became lively and humour would naturally occur. This point was supported by the observed lessons of T2 and T6, in which they successfully used the visual materials (video clips) as a platform for further discussion. T8's similar attempt of using authentic material in the first observation, however, was not entirely well-received by

the students, due to the fast pace and various accents in the clip. These different outcomes suggest that this type of material should be gradually introduced in accordance with students' level of language, with the use of pre-task activities, such as brainstorming, vocabulary teaching or an additional aid, such as subtitles.

4.1.11.c. Spontaneous and planned humour

The majority of the tutors stated that their attempts at humour were natural responses to the situation and they did not plan humour in advance. This could explain the frequent use of funny comments on the course materials or classroom interactions between the tutors and the students. Interestingly, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7 and T8 reported that their use of humour might be a result of previous 'trial and error'. They elaborated that since humour was part of their personality and upbringing, it was natural for them to notice which types of humour would work for certain audiences. This view was reflected through their use of funny anecdotes about their personal experience of the discussed topic in the classroom, which appeared to engage the students and make them feel more connected with their teachers, as confirmed in the interviews (see section 4.2.2). For this reason, T1, T2, T4, T5, T6 and T8 believed that teachers could learn to use humour in the classroom through experience. This view is in line with the theory proposed by Powell and Andresen (1985) that a sense of humour also includes the ability to appreciate and reproduce witticism, which requires observation and practice, thus it is no different than other elements in the teachers' repertoire of skills. The tutors also agreed that for humour to occur naturally in the classroom, teachers should be more well-informed about their students. In particular, T2, T3 and T5 commented that there should be more training on how to approach, communicate and

support international students from different educational backgrounds and of different levels of English. T1, T5, T9 and T10 suggested that in the induction week prior to the pre-sessional course, there should be discussions about the target students' culture, their educational background as well as their expectations, although these expectations may be influenced by many different sources, as will be discussed in the Findings from the focus groups. In addition, T3, T8 and T10 indicated that there should be more formal training on people skills, especially on how to deal with international students in teachers' education.

4.2. Findings from the students' focus groups

The student participants in the focus groups were international students taking the pre-sessional course. The majority of them were from China, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, and their English level ranged from 5.0 to 6.0 on the IELTS scale. Twenty-five students volunteered to participate in four focus groups by providing their university emails at the end of the second observed lesson. The focus groups took place between one and two weeks after the second observation. The students' comments that were relevant to their teachers' views have been included in section 4.1. This section is intended to elaborate on useful additional insights from the focus groups that were not reported in section 4.1.

4.2.1. Students' educational background and expectations before coming to the UK

The majority of the students in the focus groups reported that they started to learn English in secondary school. All of them indicated that English was taught in a "traditional way" with the focus on grammar and little to no attention was given to communicative skills. Noticeably, just over ninety percent of them (twenty-three students) suggested that they did not enjoy learning English as a subject at school, and the other two students remained neutral. More than half of them (sixteen students) even expressed frustration at learning English in high schools, as demonstrated by some of the comments below:

> "Even my teachers back home did not speak much English in class. They gave us grammar exercise to write and write." (S3)

> "I really hate studying English. Maybe a bit less now <giggled>. But I always slept in my English class or did homework of other subjects." (S6)

> "There is a neighbourhood in my city that many foreigners live. I went to the coffee shops there to meet people. I'm sure that I learnt more English there than in my classes at home. Oh my god my classes were just so boring!" (S12)

It is clear from these comments that the students had learnt English in a more traditional way with little focus on communicative skills in their home countries. This experience might lead to the expectations of "something different" (S13) when they came to the pre-sessional course. Twenty-four students expressed that prior to their

189

arrival in the UK, they had expected their pre-sessional tutors to be friendly and approachable, with only S18 stating that she "thought the teachers here would be cold", as that was the stereotype of British people in her country. Four students also reported that they had hoped to learn more about British culture and colloquial language, indicating that some students saw the pre-sessional course as an opportunity to prepare themselves for different aspects of life in the UK, not just as academic preparation. When asked about the reasons of their expectations, the large majority of them said they might be influenced by Western movies and music as well as social media, which portrayed Western people as "open-minded", "funny" and "friendly". Two students reported that they had studied with teachers who used English as their first language before, and these impressions also contributed to their expectations:

> "I went to a centre in my country to study IELTS. The teacher was British and he was very friendly. One time he brought mirrors to class for us to practice pronunciation and it was very fun. And so I always thought British teachers are all like that." (S5)

> "When I was in high school, I was in an exchange program for one month in Australia. The classes there were so different. Everyone can [could] speak their opinion in class. And the teachers were very nice to us too, always asked what we thought. I liked it very much I want to study away [abroad] for my university [degree]. (S16)

When compared with some of the teachers' opinions on how undergraduate students should be approached in the class, these quotes from the students appeared to suggest that there might be a mismatch between teachers' assumption of students' expectations and the students' actual expectations. Although the consideration of students' educational background was a useful part of the teachers' induction and training,

teachers may need to consider the influence of the internet, movies and social media on students' learning expectations. This is not to suggest that teachers should necessarily conform to these expectations, but rather consider that in the twenty-first century students' expectations may be influenced from several sources, making 'expectation' hard to predict. The majority of these students clearly expected a different learning experience in the UK to the one they had already had in their own country.

4.2.2. Students' perceptions of the effects of humour on a pre-sessional lesson

Most of the students reported that the effect of their teacher's use of humour was its ability to foster a comfortable and relaxed learning environment:

> "I think it [humour] helps me to feel relaxed. I can't learn if I'm scared of the teacher." (S5)

> "If there's no humour at all then the class will be too boring. We spend the whole day in the classroom and sometimes I feel tired and sleepy. Laughing can wake me up a bit." (S1)

S1's comment highlights the fact that a pre-sessional course is intensive and often perceived as being 'dry'. Students spend most of their time in the classroom, thus their teachers and classmates may provide the main interactions they have throughout the day. The introduction of a "fun" element into the classroom tasks seemed to make language learning become less of a grind for these students. This idea was further

supported with the majority of the students agreeing that humour made the learning process more interesting, especially if the topic of the lesson was unfamiliar:

> "There are some lessons that I don't understand why I need to learn that topic. Like last week or so we had to read many articles about cloning, which were so difficult and I wasn't interested at all. But my teacher tried to make it fun when she explained the meaning of new words. When I told her I can't understand the text, she said "Me too [neither]. That's why I teach English not Biology."" <laughed> (S18)

This quote also demonstrated how a teacher's funny comments on the materials could be perceived as 'sympathy' for the students with their challenges in learning, as discussed further in section 4.2.5.

Materials that contain humour were also considered to be an effective hook for more serious discussion topics, as reported by S15:

> "We read and summarised a text called 'The lonely snail". The text was very fun and interesting and I enjoyed reading it. Some texts are very long and boring, for example about politics or world leaders [or] something. I talked to my friends in other classes and they hate them too." (S15)

T6's use of this entertaining yet related material appeared to introduce a more complex topic of social standards and conformity to the students with ease. This example goes along with the literature (Sadowski, Gulgoz & LoBello, 1994; Matarazzo, Durik & Delaney, 2010) proposing that materials which contained relevant humour can be used deliberately to develop students' interest in a subject. In addition, as mentioned in the

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

Findings from the teachers' interviews, many students suggested that a teacher's use of humour, especially in teaching vocabulary or grammar structures, might help the students memorise and retrieve the information more effectively.

Furthermore, it was suggested that a teacher's use of humour made them appear more approachable and this factor had a great impact on the rapport in the classroom. The students indicated that they felt more confident to ask questions and discuss any issues they had with the teachers. S9 stated that she enjoyed the 'banters' with her teacher and felt more motivated to communicate in English, which the other students in the focus group agreed with. These students reported that they enjoyed these interactions, as they did not have this opportunity in their home countries. Again, it could be argued that students' preferred teaching approach might be considerably different to the one with which they are 'presumably' acquainted, as one student said:

> "You know, in our country you can't really joke with your teacher. They see it as disrespectful. But I don't think so. We just talk and laugh like normal people, we don't say anything rude. Why laughing together is not respect? I think I feel more confident in speaking now, because I actually have conversations with my teacher and my classmates in English. It's like real conversation that I say daily. If you never smile or laugh when you talk then you talk like a robot, right?" (S9)

S9's comment indicates the generally high power distance in the teacher-student relationship, which is suggested to be the norm in many Asian and Middle Eastern countries, such as China (Bush & Haiyan, 2000; Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006), Hong Kong (Walker, 2004), Thailand (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001), Saudi Arabia (Alshaya, 2003), the UAE (Richardson, 2004) and so on. It can also be seen from this

quote how engaging in natural conversation can increase students' experience with the culture and the target language. Humour can help create a safe classroom environment for students to practice their English and can eventually improve the students' confidence in using the second language in and outside of the classroom. S17 shared her opinion that humour made it easier for her to accept negative feedback and this was supported by S14, S15 and S18:

> "We don't speak a lot in class in my country because we're scared of mistake and get embarrassed. But here I just speak and try to make people understand. My classmates and I are very close to each other, and our teacher too. So if we make mistakes and it's funny we laugh […] One time, I lost a button on my sleeve. But I remembered the wrong word and I told the class "Oh my god I lost my bottom!" <laughed>. We laughed for like fifteen minutes!" (S17)

Here we can see that the humorous episode created a big impression on the learner and it is also worth noting that she remembered the language in question and used it correctly when telling this anecdote, perhaps because of her affective engagement in the original interaction.

S17 and S18, who were from T7's class, indicated that the trust and rapport they had in class also made the 'disciplinary punishment' much more acceptable.

> "If we have [had] a very serious teacher and we're [were] not close, the [penalty] table (see section 4.1.7c) is [would be] bad and we [would] feel bad to sit there. I sat there once because I used my phone in class. She (T7) told me: "This is to make sure that if

> I can't use my phone, nobody can!" <giggled>. To me, it's not like she wants to make me feel bad." (S18)

It's noticeable that the teacher here, even when using a 'punishment' combines it with humour ("if I can't use my phone, nobody can!"). This use of humour protects the rapport she has developed with the class in a potential face threatening situation.

S9 added that she had more respect for her teacher (T4) because T4 could frankly discuss her own mistakes with the class.

> "She told us the mistakes she had when she wrote her essay. Or when she isn't sure about something, she will say she's not sure. It makes it easier for us when we make mistakes. I have many teachers that pretend like they are so perfect and like they're never wrong." (S9)

This comment appeared to be in line with the opinion of some of the tutors that bringing more 'human' aspect into teaching might help develop the rapport as well as improving students' confidence. Another interesting point raised by S23 and echoed by S22 and S25 was the sense of inclusiveness resulted from being able to enjoy humour from a different culture.

> "My second teacher is quite fun and he jokes more [than her main tutor]. When I understand everything he says in the whole lesson, I feel happy. Not just in class, for example I meet the staff at school or when I go to shops, they say something funny and I understand, it makes me feel [that] my listening and understand[ing] of English

is good. When they joke with me, I think to myself "Ah they like me too, they're not

cold to me because I'm not British." (S23)

When asked if not being able to understand the attempt at humour gave the opposite

effect (feeling demotivated, or even excluded, by not understanding), S23 commented

that was not the case for her personally, as "I'm still learning it [English], I don't

understand things every day. So when I can [understand], I feel proud." It can also be

assumed that humour which contains cultural or linguistic references can be useful to

the international students' process of understanding and adapting to a new

environment. If the students appear to be unable to comprehend, the teacher can take

advantage of this communication breakdown to explain the basis of the humour so

their students can learn more about the target culture.

However, nearly half of the students suggested that there should be "a time and place"

for humour, which matched their teachers' views on the 'dose' and 'boundaries' of

humour. More specifically, S1, S6 and S7 agreed that they preferred humour that was

"related to the lesson or the topic [being discussed] in some ways". Furthermore, S21

reported that although humour could help with students' motivation, too much humour

could drift the students' attention away from the focus of the lesson:

> "I prefer to go to a fun and interesting class. For example, the teacher knows a lot
>
> about the topic and gives us good advice. If he or she is also a funny person than that's
>
> very good. But if they don't know what they're talking about and just tell jokes and
>
> laugh all the time, I don't like. After all, I still need to know what I'm learning from
>
> the lesson." (S21)

S2, on the other hand, indicated that teachers should be more serious in some specific situations, as she put it:

> "I think generally teachers should be friendly so students feel less pressured, because we're using a foreign language and it's difficult. But I also think if the students are very stubborn or lazy, or they don't make any effort to study, play games on their phones all the time, then the teachers should be strict with them." (S2)

This shows what a fine balance teachers have to find when using humour. S4 and S5 echoed this comment by describing how their tutor (T2) efficiently managed the class with her humour.

> "My teacher was very friendly. But we know we can't play with her. I don't know how to say it, she's not hard [tough], but yes is yes and no is no. No phone in class. Or for example, we are laugh[ing] at something funny, but when she knocks [on the] table or [the] board we know it's time to stop and come back to the lesson. If she's teaching and someone is noisy, she will be quiet and look at him until he stops. We always know she's the boss of the class. <laughed> (S4)

None of the student participants in this research associated their female tutor use of humour with lack of dedication, competence or overall performance. In fact, as discussed above, the opposite evaluation appears to apply – their use of humour was highly appreciated by the students. This is contrary to the previous studies by Bryant et al. (1980) and Evans et al. (2019) which suggest that women are often penalised for their attempts at humour in professional environments.

4.2.3. Students' attitude towards teachers' unsuccessful use of humour

4.2.3.a. Incomprehensible attempts at humour

The majority of the students admitted that there were instances in which they could not understand their teachers' attempts at humour and recognised these attempts only when their classmates seemed amused or entertained (i.e. smiled, giggled or laughed). They also reported that sometimes they did not find these attempts amusing or funny at all. However, the students stated that these unsuccessful attempts neither had any negative impacts on the teacher-student relationship nor affected the students' attitude towards the lesson. In fact, they indicated that they appreciated the teachers' attempts at humour, as some of them commented:

"It's just a joke. If I don't understand it, I can ask my friends or ask the teacher to explain. It's no big deal." (S6)

"I just feel normal. If I'm interested, I can ask what he or she means. If I'm not in the mood, I just skip it." (S17)

"I just think the teacher is trying to make us relaxed and happy." (S12)

"Even comedians can't make people laugh every time. I just actually feel bad for the teacher if no one laughs. I mean at least they try, right? They won't try to make you laugh if they don't care or don't like you." (S19)

S1, S2 and S3 also commented that if the humour attempts were not comprehensible due to the cultural or linguistic reference, the students could actually have the opportunities to learn more useful knowledge, if the teacher was willing to explain. This opinion appeared to demonstrate that students were aware of the position of humour as part of a language and its culture, which will be discussed further in session 4.2.4. Noticeably, as mentioned in section 4.1.8.c, S21 suggested that the lack of appreciation for a teacher's use of humour could be a result from peer pressure or certain cultural expectations, and this was echoed by S23 and S24:

"I'm from a small province and we don't really laugh in class. The teacher maybe thinks I don't respect him or her if I laugh very loud. And if nobody laughs and just you laugh loudly, especially if you're a girl, you are <S23 looked up the word using her mobile dictionary> graceless." (S24)

"Yes, it is a thing in my country. For example, I go to a movie theatre to watch a comedy, if there's something funny I will look around when I laugh to see if my friends or other people are laughing too. I don't want to laugh alone." (S23)

These quotes suggest that teachers, especially those in the pre-sessional course, could be the students' first 'contact' with a new educational system. It is important for them to create a safe and non-judgemental environment in the classroom to encourage students to bring out more of their own personalities instead of feeling restricted by their previous experience.

4.2.3.b. Inappropriate use of humour

The students reported that they had experienced no incidents which involved teachers' insensitive or offensive use of humour in this course. There is a possibility that they might not have felt comfortable in sharing these experiences, even if there had been any. Alternatively, the students chose to share their experiences of teachers' inappropriate use of humour in the past, either in their home countries or in the UK. Many students suggested that they felt uncomfortable with sarcastic comments from their teachers. Teachers who used sarcasm were perceived as "mean", "immature", "unprofessional" and "scary" (S3, S7 and S13). This type of humour was reported to have a negative impact on the teacher-student relationship and the students' attitude towards the subject, as the comments demonstrated:

> "When I was in high school we had this teacher. He always gave us half smile [a smirk] and never said what he meant, so we always had to guess. One day, it was very hot, so we put a cold bottle of water on the table of teacher for every teacher that taught us that day. He didn't say thank you, he smiled and said: "Did you put poison in here?" We didn't like him from the start, but after that day we hated him and his lessons so much." (S14)

The students seem to have responded so negatively to this attempt at humour because of an expectation of some form of appreciation for the kind gesture. The 'joke' also rather stereotypes the teacher-student relationship as a battle, whereas we have seen that students appreciate the inclusive potential of humour.

S3 also shared her friend's unpleasant experience with this type of humour:

"I went to a language school before and my classmate was late for some times that week. So that day she was late too, and she said sorry. The teacher smiled very kind[ly] so she smiled back. But then he asked: "So what's your excuse today?" and still smiling. My friend's face was very red. I just thought he's so mean and very fake." (S3)

It is assumed that this use of humour was not well-received because of the teacher's 'misleading' kind smile. The fact that the student actually "smiled back" made it even more embarrassing for her when confronted with the sarcastic question from the teacher. Although containing the 'surprise' element popular in humour attempts, according to the incongruity theory, this specific example was interpreted as being deceitful and threatening.

Humour that mocked students' hobbies and preferences was also reported to be unpopular:

"My teacher saw a comic book on my table. I wasn't reading it in class. I just left it there because I read it in the break. She took a look and told the class: "So he likes reading books huh?" and some of them laughed. I felt very angry. What's wrong with comic books?" (S21)

"Before coming here, I learnt English in [a city in the UK]. At that time, I had a Hello Kitty [a fictional cartoon character] phone case. My teacher laughed when she saw it and she asked: "How old are you girl?" It's none of her business!" (S9)

> "I studied at a different centre here before. When I told my teacher American English accent is easier to hear, he said: "We actually call it broken English here!" and laughed. I felt a bit embarrassed. He made me feel like I'm stupid to like American English." (S12)

It is important to bear in mind that the relationship between the teachers and students in these instances is not clear. These 'jokes' might have been more acceptable if there had been a certain level of trust and rapport between them, as demonstrated by some examples from the observations as well as accounts from other students. Therefore, it is advisable that teachers should refrain from making 'jokes' on what might be considered as 'personal taste' if a good rapport has not yet been established.

Interestingly, in this exchange between S15 and S18, it was suggested that even if the inappropriate humour did not come from the teacher him/herself, agreeing or showing amusement at such humour left the same negative effects.

> "My friend, he is quite short, but he likes basketball. We had to choose a sport to play for physical education and he chose basketball. The monitor of my class joked: "Are you sure? I'll give you some time to think about it again!" Some students laughed, but the thing is my head teacher was in the classroom and she laughed too. She should say that it is wrong to say so. My friend was very embarrassed. I think she's wrong to laugh like that, she's a teacher." (S15)

> "I agree. I think if the teacher hears some bad humour in the class that makes someone feel embarrassed, the teacher should say it…say that it's not acceptable. When you laugh at your student like that, you're not a good teacher." (S18)

This negative effect from the teachers' appreciation of inappropriate humour might result from the perception that the teacher is the representation of 'authority' and 'rightness' in the classroom, thus their overlooking of offensive humour is deemed unacceptable because they appear to endorse the behaviour. It can be seen that the teachers in these episodes used humour to differentiate themselves from the students and make themselves appear more superior, which may explain the damage this function of humour caused the teacher-student relationship, as reported by Meyer (2000). These examples from the students also suggest that the teachers are right in thinking that there are delicate boundaries in using and appreciating humour – people are sensitive about sometimes unpredictable things.

4.2.4. The necessity of humour in the pre-sessional classroom

The large majority of students shared their opinions that it was important for the teachers to use humour in the pre-sessional course to some extent. Their explanation ranged from ideas that "it makes me want to come to the class" (S1), "it makes the relationship in class better" (S3 and S4) to "it helps me to learn more about British people" (S8) and "laughing makes me feel less nervous" (S17). A number of students mentioned other benefits of humour as the reasons for its importance in the language classroom, as demonstrated below:

> "All the lessons need some fun in it. It will be too boring coming to school every day with someone who can't smile or laugh with you. Not all the time, but at least sometimes." (S1)

> "I think we should have humour in class. For example, read or watch something fun is a way to learn English too. Long and boring texts give me headache. Sometimes in the class I yawn too much I have tears in my eyes! <laughed>" (S8)

> "I think learning a language is different from when you learn maths or physics. We need interaction to remember the English. It's not like formulas that you read loud or write and you learn. I like to tell jokes with other people. A bit of fun in the class is not a bad thing." (S12)

These comments suggest that the students see humour as part of the language, a means to understand and maintain conversation. In other words, humour is seen as a part of socio-linguistic competence, which is necessary for students planning to study in the UK (Aylor & Opplinger, 2003; Dynel, 2009)

On the other hand, three students (S2, S15 and S22) commented that the use of humour depended on the teachers' personality and the relationship they had with the class. S2 warned that teachers should not force humour, as "when they try to be funny, the students know", although earlier it was reported that many students appreciated that the teacher at least made an effort. S15 also shared that repetition of the same jokes could create boredom and awkwardness in the class, presumably because the students would not find it funny the second time and would think the teacher was going through a routine, rather than genuinely interacting. S22 asserted that it might be difficult for teachers to use humour "if the students are from different countries" and "some people can get angry by everything." These quotes can be seen as a warning against the overuse of humour in the class, which might be seen as unnatural and inconsiderate.

4.2.5. Students' preferred types of humour

Many students claimed that they enjoyed their teachers' self- deprecating humour or humour related to the teachers' personal experience of the topic discussed in the lesson. They revealed that this type of humour made the teacher appear more approachable and it also provided the view from a different culture. This preference may be explained by the fact that they had expected a different learning experience in the UK, with perhaps friendlier teachers and a more open-minded approach than which they had previously experienced. As they reported earlier, these students were mainly taught in a high power distance environment in their home countries. In addition, in Asian cultures where most of these students came from, there is a great emphasis on 'face' – one's social image, status or dignity (Kim & Nam, 1998; Wunderle, 2007; Le Monkhouse, Barnes & Stephan, 2012). Thus, these students might see their teachers' use of self-deprecating humour, which expose their own weaknesses and mistakes, as an approach that represents the difference of Western educational culture, something they might have hoped for when deciding to study abroad. S12 and S13 also reported that humour related to daily life and personal experience was easy for every member of the class to understand and contribute to, thus making the class become closer and more comfortable around each other.

Interestingly, several students stated that they enjoyed it when the teacher commented or humorously complained about the materials of the course, as it appeared that the teachers understood and sympathised with their students' frustration at learning academic English. S21 and S15, on the other hand, shared that they preferred humour that contained a play on words, such as puns or homophones, since "It's a fun way to

learn a lot of words at the same time." (S15). A number of students revealed that they enjoyed watching interesting video clips, especially if they were about global or cultural issues. They also advocated the use of materials which contained humour, especially in reading or writing skill classes, such as paraphrasing or summarising skills. Other students also recommended the use of body language and funny gestures, as they argued:

> "In my opinion, British teachers use a lot of body language. My teacher talks about body language with us in one lesson too, like do's and don'ts in England and I really like it." (S4)

> "Both of teachers have many facial expressions in the class. For me it is good. It will encourage the shy students to express themselves more. A smile, nodding head, all of that help. But my teacher's face when she is surprised is always very funny. I always find it funny. When I think of her, I remember her surprised face." (S9)

> "My teacher has this action <snapped his fingers, pointed his index finger to me and smiled> and says: "Bingo" if someone gives a good answer to his question. I like that and sometimes I do the same in the class too, as a joke. <laughed>" (S12)

These students elaborated that they enjoyed this type of physical humour as it made the interaction appear more genuine and spontaneous, compared to the formal classroom conversation they usually had in their home countries.

4.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of the present study in relation to the existing literature on humour in education, particularly on its use in the second language classroom. This study offers some fresh insights into the teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of humour in the pre-sessional course, an EAP context in which the teachers and students usually do not share the same first language and culture.

The majority of the teachers appeared to be aware of the benefits of 'joy' and 'fun' in learning, although some of them also saw humour as a potentially time-wasting and distracting teaching tool for an intensive academic English course. One interesting finding is that teachers may deliberately adopt certain teaching approach, in this case, a more formal style to align with students' previous education experience and accommodate their expectations. However, results from the focus groups suggest that the students came to study in a different country (the UK) hoping for a different learning experience from their home countries. Another important finding is that using humour not only makes the lesson more enjoyable for the students, but also brings 'joy' to the teachers and helps to create the rapport that makes delivering negative feedback easier. The results of this study also contribute to the growing area of humour research in language teaching by providing further evidence to support the benefits of humour in an academic English course.

The participants reported that they preferred spontaneous humour, which were often funny comments as a response to a situation or personal anecdotes related to the topic being discussed. While the majority of the teachers agreed that being able to create

humour could be innate, a common view among them was that using humour in the classroom was a strategy that could be learnt through experience (T1, T2, T4, T5, T6 and T8). This raises the question of whether it could be a legitimate topic for teacher education courses. Another interesting point emerging from the focus groups was that students also appreciated their tutors' friendly and funny body language, as these indicated the genuine and open nature of the conversation they had with their teachers, compared to the formal ones in the classroom in their home countries.

However, the current study also finds that the use of humour can be counter-productive if it is overused or aims to hurt others, for example, in the forms of sarcasm and mocking. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should gradually introduce humour by starting with jokes about themselves until a rapport is established. Teachers should also pay attention to the timing of their humour and try to refrain from jokes that are unrelated to the context of the lesson. The students in this research also believed that teachers should raise their concerns over any inappropriate humour coming from the students, as silence might be interpreted as supporting and enjoying such humour. The next chapter presents the implications from these findings and the conclusion of the thesis.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study was to explore the teachers' and students' perceptions of the use of humour in the UK pre-sessional classroom. It also set out to gain a better understanding of the types of humour used and to evaluate the effects they might bring into these classrooms. There were ten teacher participants and twenty-five student participants in this research. To achieve the aims of the study, twenty classroom observations, ten semi-structured interviews with the teachers and four focus groups with the international students were conducted to capture and gather the views and practices of the participants. This final chapter of the thesis will provide a summary of the key research findings, the implications drawn from these results and the contributions of this study to the current literature of humour and EAP. The chapter will also discuss the limitations of the research before suggesting possible future directions for related research projects.

5.1. Summary of the study

The current study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1.1. To what extent do UK pre-sessional teachers use humour in their teaching?

1.2. What types of humour do UK university pre-sessional teachers use in the language classes?

1.3. In which contexts do they use humour and for what purposes?

2. What are UK university pre-sessional teachers' perceptions of the roles of humour in the pre-sessional classroom?

3.1. What are international students' perceptions of the roles of humour in language

courses?

3.2. How do they respond to their teachers' use of humour in the pre-sessional classes? What has been learned about these issues will be discussed in the following sections, organized by looking at each question in turn.

5.1.1. To what extent do UK pre-sessional teachers use humour in their teaching?

With the exception of T9, all of the teachers in this study attempted to use humour at some point of the observed lessons. Almost all of them appeared to be aware of the positive effects of 'fun' and 'enjoyment' in language learning and to associate humour with the enhancement of these factors. Four of the tutors reported to frequently employ humour whereas four teachers indicated that they occasionally used humour in their teaching in this course. The teachers attributed the relatively limited use of humour in the pre-sessional course to the high stakes and serious nature of the course, students' level of language, and their assumptions of the students' educational background, expectations and preferred teaching-learning styles. Noticeably, the teachers who decided to avoid using humour appeared to have a more negative evaluation of their students, often referring to them as "having a low-level of language, not motivated" (T3), "even more than shy, not very hard-working" (T9) and "are not accustomed to this educational system" (T1). It appears that the teachers' decisions to employ or avoid humour in this course were informed by a complex combination of factors. Largely these were their perceptions of the roles of humour in the language classroom generally, their evaluation of the students, the context of these particular classes (i.e. as part of a pre-sessional course) and also their own teaching experience. It can be seen

that these different factors may 'pull' in different directions. There was a belief expressed that humour was useful in the classroom, but this was modified by assumptions about the students' educational background, for example.

 Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study concerning the extent to which humour is used in the pre-sessional classroom , there were sixty-nine attempts at humour during the twenty-nine and a half hours of classroom observation, with an average of two humour attempts per hour of teaching. My data would suggest that the answer is that humour is used very sparingly. However, these numbers may not accurately reflect the actual use of humour in any particular lesson , as the results of this study have shown that the use of humour greatly varied, from not being used at all to being used in nine instances per lesson. Another factor that makes it difficult to give an accurate answer to this question is the challenge of identifying and categorising humour instances, as discussed in sections 2.4. and 3.1. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind just how subjective and contextual the use of humour in the classroom can be.

5.1.2. What types of humour do UK university pre-sessional teachers use in the language classes?

The most prevalent type of humour used by the teachers in this pre-sessional course was funny comments, mostly directed at the students or at the teachers themselves. These comments were often part of the exchanges among the members of the class, including the teacher, reflecting the interactive nature of the language classroom. The comments were also frequently directed at the content of the lessons and occasionally

at me in the observed lessons. In other words, the majority of the humour was related to the 'here and now' of the teaching situation. Other popular types of humour used in the course included the exploitation of funny materials (such as video clips or reading texts), physical humour (such as exaggerated body language and facial expressions) and funny stories about the tutors themselves. It is clear from the data that some of the most prevalent types of humour used in the pre-sessional lessons in this study (physical humour and funny materials) were not identified and reported in the original humour taxonomy suggested by Bryant et al. (1980). My adapted classification of humour, therefore, appears to be more suitable and useful for this particular context of EAP, and potentially for classroom observations of humour more generally.

All of the tutors in this course stated that they preferred spontaneous humour and maintained that humour should come naturally from both the teachers and the students for it to be genuine and effective. However, many of them also advocated the use of funny materials, which is a form of prepared humour. The interviews with the teachers suggested that this may have been in direct response to the belief that EAP material is often relatively dull, unengaging and often contains topics that are unfamiliar to the students. This situation led to the popularity of the funny comments directed at the coursebook or the content of the lesson itself, which was often drawn from the frustration of teaching and learning these materials. The effect of these humour attempts was to build a united position of teacher and student 'against' the difficulty faced (uninspiring material).

On the other hand, more than half of the teachers also agreed that 'spontaneous' humour can actually be the result of observation or previous 'trial and error', as they

drew on their experience of similar situations to identify opportunities for humour and recalled what had worked well in previous situations. Thus, just as an improvisation comedian may draw on prepared routines that have worked before and deploy them at just the right moment for the current situation, for teachers too there might be no clear line between spontaneous and prepared humour. The majority of the teachers suggested that to avoid the risks of being offensive, teachers should start from humour about themselves rather than the students. In addition, any types of humour should be introduced gradually and should not be too challenging for the students to understand. This may account for the use of physical humour (which has no language barrier), particularly at lower levels.

5.1.3. In which contexts do they use humour and for what purposes?

The majority of the tutors reported using humour to create a more relaxed and encouraging learning environment, since this was an intensive course and the students spent most of the day in the classroom. They also stated that they often used self-deprecating humour to bring the 'human' aspect into the class and build rapport at the beginning of the course. In addition, humour was thought to reinforce the existing teacher-student relationship and glue the class together as a 'community', as seen in the humour aimed at dull teaching material. This rapport and the non-threatening environment created through the use of humour were suggested to boost students' confidence and motivation, encouraging them to contribute in the lesson, to experiment with the language and attempt to initiate humour in English themselves. It is also worth noting that the funny exchanges between the teachers and their students involved the use of quite idiomatic language/metaphor (T1: "He's your mate you have

to keep an eye on him"; T4: "B is yawning thinking Oh my god, notes, I can't bare this") with a focus on 'interactional' communication, which is not often promoted in the classroom due to its unpredictable and potentially time-consuming nature. Taking part in these casual conversations were reported to "bring the students out of their shell" (T8) and help them cope with their anxiety and insecurity surrounding their language proficiency, as well as helping them prepare for life in the UK.

Humour, in the forms of funny materials and examples, was also used to generate students' interest in the topic of the lesson and assist with their ability to retain information, especially new structures and vocabulary. This use of humour was suggested to make unfamiliar and complicated topics more enjoyable and students appeared to be more willing to participate in the class discussions. On the other hand, some tutors in this study used humour as a 'discipline reminder' to reinforce classroom rules in a less threatening way. They also revealed that humour made it easier for them to deliver negative feedback and their students seemed to be more receptive to suggestions and more accepting of classroom discipline. Interestingly, half of the teachers stated that employing humour also made their teaching more interesting and their delivery of the lesson more relaxed and confident (T7: "I'm much more confident to say something like: 'I don't think this is clear enough' 'Could you do this better?'"). Consistent with the literature on the functions of humour suggested by Meyer (2000), this research found that the tutors used humour to identify themselves and create rapport with the students, to clarify the content of the lesson and make it more memorable and to enforce ground rules in the classroom while still maintaining a good relationship with their students.

5.2. What are the perceptions of UK pre-sessional teachers and students of the roles of humour in the classroom?

There seem to be two main views among the teachers regarding the position of humour in a pre-sessional class. One view is that humour is thought to make positive contributions to the classroom and to be a good addition to the teachers' repertoire of teaching strategies. Many tutors in this study suggested that when used within the appropriate 'boundaries', humour could be a useful teaching tool to foster the delivery of complicated topics, new structures and vocabulary, although of course, 'appropriate boundaries' remain hard to define. Humour was also indicated to have great influence on the learning environment and help with students' lack of confidence and also increase their willingness to communicate, which are reported to be major issues with international students (Wang, 2009; Lopez & Bui, 2014; Telbis, Helgeson & Kingsbury, 2014). Data from the classroom observations and the focus groups with the students indicated that when the teachers employed humour, the communication among the members of the class was improved, which made the teachers become more likeable and relatable to their students. This in turns created a bond between the two parties and appeared to lead to more efficient learning, as the students made an effort to 'please' their teachers through both academic and non-academic behaviours. Although often associated with 'fun' and 'amusement', in this study, humour was also suggested to be an effective disciplinary method which could be used to discard unwanted behaviours in a more face-saving way.

Despite the advocation towards the use of humour in a language classroom, some tutors expressed doubts about whether humour in the EAP class was essential due to

the time constraints and goal-oriented nature of the pre-sessional course. Some teachers went further in their doubts about humour and indicated that humour was a diversion that could potentially distract students from the academic goals and waste classroom time. They also suggested that the possibility of appearing insensitive or unprofessional made humour become a risky teaching technique. Noticeably, two teachers cited students' previous educational background and expectations as reasons to avoid humour, specifically for undergraduate students who might be new to higher education and its associated norms of behaviour. The teachers maintained that these students were likely to resist teachers' attempts to reduce the power distance and hierarchy in the classroom and that they needed more formal, distanced instruction on how to achieve their academic goals.

Intriguingly, the above assumption appears to differ from the students' expectations in this study. Although it is true that the majority of the students were familiar with more teacher-centred strategies in their home country, they came to the UK with the expectations that the learning environment here would be different. Many of them expressed that their preference for a more friendly and communicative classroom was one of the main reasons for their decision to study abroad. The students stated that the 'fun' factor was important to them, since they spent most of their day in the classroom and it was not easy to maintain a consistently high level of motivation. They also suggested that when the teacher appeared to have a sense of humour, they felt more comfortable approaching their teacher for questions and feedback, which they could not do very often in their home country. Being able to enjoy humour with their teachers and classmates was also reported to bring them a sense of ownership of the class as well as the pride of being able to understand humour in a second language. This rapport

made their language mistakes and negative feedback become less face-threatening and they were able to learn from these instead of just feeling embarrassed. As the pre-sessional course was their first encounter with the host education context and culture, they felt it was necessary that they could learn more cultural aspects before entering their main course. The students, however, did mention that the repetition of the same jokes or comments should be avoided, as it would lose the necessary sincerity and create awkwardness. Overall, it is clear that the students had a variety of strong reasons for hoping that their lessons would be fun, and these views did not match those held by at least some of the teachers in the study.

5.3. How do international students respond to their teachers' use of humour in the pre-sessional classes?

The majority of the students in this study reacted positively to their teachers' use of humour, through the presence of laughter, amused facial expressions and the heightened classroom atmosphere. Many students in the observed lessons made an effort to keep the conversation going after their teachers had initiated humour. Some of them were willing to contribute to the interaction with their own humour, which in turn motivated them to contribute more in the classroom. Some of the humour attempts from the teachers met with more neutral reactions, probably because the students did not fully understand the comments or just simply did not find them too funny. There was also a possibility that there was certain pressure to behave in a certain way stemming from students' culture, since some of the classes consisted of students from the same country.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The students in this study reported that their teachers' unsuccessful uses of humour did not affect the teacher-student relationship or the students' interest in the lesson. They expressed that they recognised and appreciated the teachers' effort to make the lesson more enjoyable. These students indicated that they did not associate 'funny' with 'unprofessional'. Instead, they felt that the use of humour made their teachers appear more approachable and the relationship they had created become more genuine, as opposed to the more formal and functional relationship they normally had with their teachers back home.

Although the students reported that they did not encounter any use of humour that was offensive or made them uncomfortable in this course, some of them reported having encountered these in the past. These include the use of sarcasm, mocking of activities that the students view favourably and a teacher's signs of amusement towards (and therefore tacit support for) aggressive humour targeting particular students in the class. The students' responses to these incidents are consistent with the lecturers' caution that humour should be gradually introduced, and the teachers should understand their audience to establish a boundary for their sense of humour.

5.4. Implications

The findings of this study have a number of practical implications. Although there is a substantial amount of research on the benefits of using humour in education, humour is hardly mentioned in teacher education materials, specifically in English language teaching. This may discourage prospective teachers to try and experiment with humour in their teaching. There is, therefore, a definite need for humour to be openly discussed

in training programmes, providing guidance for teachers on how to integrate humour into learning tasks, such as debating, games and role-plays.

Furthermore, considering that teaching can be a stressful occupation and some teachers in this study have suggested that humour help them to cope with their teaching responsibilities, teachers should probably be encouraged to develop and strengthen their humour skills into habits, which in turns could lead to desirable outcomes, such as increased positive mood and improved well-being. This can be done by encouraging teachers to actively collect interesting and funny materials that are related to their lessons. Also, video recordings of successful lessons containing teacher-initiated humour could be introduced and analysed in training programmes and workshops so teachers are gradually familiarised with how humour can be used as an effective teaching tool. In addition, a 'humour diary' in which teachers reflect on their use of humour in the classroom or just simply take note of their own funny observations in daily life may also be useful. Taken together, teachers should employ humour in a way that fits comfortably with their teaching style. For teachers who are new to using humour, self-deprecating humour may be a good type to start with, as suggested by the tutors in this study. The findings of the current research also indicate that funny examples, definitions and instructions are also useful sources of humour that possibly help with students' ability to retain the content of the lesson. For teachers who are not entirely confident with their ability to produce humour, they can still demonstrate their sense of humour to the students by sharing the humour of others, such as reading texts, video clips and quotes.

Based on the comments from the teachers and students in this study and the fact that teachers' funny 'complaints' about the materials used in this course was one of the students' favourite sources of humour, greater efforts are needed to make EAP material more engaging while equally avoiding offence. Perhaps more visual materials and topics that are more relatable to the students, such as global problems or cross-cultural issues should be included to improve students' interests in exploring the content of their textbook.

Another important practical implication is that students' expectations may need to be investigated more thoroughly during the induction sessions for teachers about to teach pre-sessional courses. This is not to suggest that teachers have to accommodate all of their students' expectations but being aware of these will give the teachers the freedom and confidence to adopt the most effective teaching techniques, without having to rely on assumptions or even cultural stereotypes about their students.

5.5. The contribution of this study

I believe this study has made an important contribution to knowledge in several ways.

5.5.1. Substantive new findings

It is often suggested that learners from Asian and Middle Eastern countries expect a teacher-dominated classroom with a large power distance relationship (Bush & Haiyan, 2000; Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Richardson, 2004; Nguyen, Terlouw & Pilot, 2006). However, I have found that students' expectations are more complex than

this and that previous experience can influence these expectations in unpredictable ways. This finding is important in that it helps teachers to rethink of what they know and believe about their students' educational background and expectations and their practice based on this knowledge. Investigation of students' needs and expectations therefore should be conducted and discussed among the tutors in the induction prior to the course.

The second major finding was that teachers' perceptions and evaluation of their students' competence may have a great influence on their use of humour. In this study, teachers who made more negative evaluations of their students' language competence and academic performance showed the inclination to avoid using humour or to mainly use humour to reinforce classroom rules. It appears that they associated the use of humour with an informal teaching approach, thus attempting to avoid humour or use enforcement humour to maintain classroom order and teacher-student power distance. This finding is an important contribution to our understanding of teachers' cognition, as it reflects their beliefs and knowledge and also impacts on their practice in the classroom, particularly with regards to their use of humour.

This current research has also identified the difficulties in employing humour in an EAP context, with a relatively fixed syllabus and a focus on the product of learning. With an intensive schedule and the need to cover all content, the idea of having to put more effort into entertaining students or to find materials that contain relevant humour may not appear appealing to some teachers (Hamp-Lyons, 2011; Alexander, 2012). In addition, the lack of engaging content in EAP materials, both on this course and more generally, was also reported in this investigation (Hyland, K., & Hamp-Lyons, 2002;

Zohrabi, 2010; Alexander, 2012). Perhaps the challenge of judging appropriacy in global material remains the major barrier for publishers to add more humour to coursebooks. Global material will always find it hard to identify an appropriate boundary because what works in one context may not be appropriate for another (Benesch, 1996; Chun, 2015; Kohnke, 2019), especially with the case of implementing humour – a complex social, cultural and context-based phenomenon. Nevertheless, the current study found that teachers using humour was one way to cope with the challenges of the course, uniting and creating a supportive 'community' within the classroom. Humour, therefore, can play a significant role in improving the psychological well-being of both teachers and students.

Another important finding to emerge from this study is that teachers' unsuccessful humour attempts (i.e. the students do not understand or do not find the humour attempt funny) do not seem to negatively affect their professional image in the eyes of their students. Instead, the students in this study expressed appreciation and appeared to defend the teacher's effort to create a friendlier classroom environment. This finding is particularly useful for teachers who would like to incorporate humour in their teaching but are still unsure of students' attitudes towards this technique.

The literature on the use of humour in education has highlighted many different taxonomies of humour types, the majority of which are constructed through the analysis of audio recordings, for example, studies done by Bryant et al. (1980), Torok (2004), Wanzer et al. (2006) and so on. In this current study, I have extended one of the most cited classifications of humour in the classroom by Bryant et al. (1980), by adding the 'targets' of 'funny comments' made by the tutors, and another two

categories of 'physical humour' and 'funny materials'. This taxonomy has been shown to work well in EAP context, as the collected data suggests that these are the most prevalent types of humour used in this pre-sessional course. Therefore, my study has contributed a more nuanced taxonomy that may be more suitable for the language classroom context.

5.5.2. Methodological contribution to knowledge

While observation, interviews and focus groups are not new methodological tools, I have applied them to an area which has in the past tended to rely on quantitative studies. This has given rich qualitative data in the field of humour research as opposed to those previous studies. For example, the key studies on humour and education carried out by Kaplan and Pascoe (1977); Bryant et al. (1980); Berk (1996); Marshall (2002); Garner (2006); Lovorn and Holawayn (2015) all rely on quantitative data to a very large extent. The teachers and students in these studies often share the same first language and possibly similar culture, which does not reflect the complex nature of teaching English and its culture to speakers of other languages in an English-speaking country. The thesis has provided a deeper insight into the perceptions and practice of the tutors, as well as the views and experience of the students regarding their teachers' use of humour in the lessons. These findings have added understanding of the participants' perceptions about humour as part of the interaction in the language classroom – an area which has not received much attention from discourse studies in the past (see section 2.6.5.1 – classroom discourse).

5.5.3. Contextual contribution to EAP and UK higher education (HE)

The research has been one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine teachers' use of humour and its effects in the particular context of a pre-sessional course at a UK HE institution. Although there have been several studies on the use humour in other teaching contexts, such as those by Garner (2006), Sidelinger (2014), Petraki & Nguyen (2016), Ruch & Heintz (2016), very few have focused on the UK. Therefore, there is a significant need for more humour research to be done in the UK context – a multicultural country and one of the most popular destinations for international students. In addition, pre-sessional courses and EAP are still underrepresented in the literature of language teaching and we should not assume that research carried out in one teaching context will necessarily be appropriate to other contexts.

Furthermore, the findings will be of interest to those who would like to know more and try adopting humour in their pre-sessional courses. The study could also help teachers to rethink their students' expectations and understand the students better from their points of view. Studying abroad is an exciting yet challenging journey for the international students, thus it is important that the teachers are aware of their students' needs and beliefs (Jarvis & Stakounis, 2010; Copland & Garton, 2011, Dewaele, Comanaru, & Faraco, 2015). As stated above, the findings from this study highlight the need for a more thorough investigation and discussion of students' perceptions and expectations during the teachers' induction to the course.

This study also has significant implications for the integration of the use of humour in teacher education and training. Since humour is a complex phenomenon, it could be

difficult to conduct systematic training (Petraki & Nguyen; 2016). However, open discussion, workshops and sharing of tips, techniques and resources of humour could be encouraged with the support of more research-based evidence, which the current study has attempted to generate. These may include sharing and discussing the effective types of humour to be used in the classroom and the appropriate timing (for example, teachers can rely on self-deprecating humour at the beginning of the course), analysing successful lessons containing teacher-initiated humour, keeping a 'humour diary' and so on.

The present thesis may also be particularly relevant to EAP material writers and help them to reflect on their ways of producing more relevant and interesting materials for a potentially stressful and intensive EAP course like the pre-sessional. Last but not least, the study hopes to help humour gain widening acceptance into the language teaching practice and encourages more future research into this area.

5.6. Limitations of the study

As with any research, this study is subject to several limitations. The scope of this study was limited in terms of the number of participants. It was not an easy task to recruit the teachers and students for this study, due to their busy schedules and the short time frame of the course. There could have been more than two observations for each teacher to provide a more thorough view of the use of humour in their practice. However, this could not be done, especially with the six-week classes, which had a large number of students in this pre-sessional course. All of the teachers preferred to have more time to get to know their students at the beginning of the course before

having an observer, and the final week of the course was reserved for the final exam and exam preparation. In addition, students also had to take a mock exam in the middle of the course and were asked to reflect on their results and feedback with their teachers afterwards. Therefore, the teachers were not willing to organise more observations and this decision is completely understandable. As a consequence, the transferability of this study may be limited. I have made the effort to minimise this limitation by providing thick description of the context in connection with the observed behaviours, as well as giving specific details on the collecting and analysing of the data.

A potential source of bias for the study is the influence that I had upon the collecting and interpreting of the data. Although interviews are a good option when a researcher seeks to explore more complex phenomena (Denscombe, 2007), such as humour, this technique contains the risk of participant reporting what they think they do, rather than what they actually do. Classroom observations and interviews with both sides (teachers and students) were therefore conducted to capture both the perceptions and the practice of the participants. Similarly, as indicated in the literature, humour is a very subjective concept and there is a possibility that I missed an attempt at humour from the teacher. Conducting the interviews during the week of the second observation was one way to reduce this possibility and ensure a more accurate interpretation of data collected from the observations. The methodological and data source triangulation is hoped to limit credibility issues of the study. Also, different individuals may have different interpretations of the same events or data. This bias was possibly minimised by the fact that the analysis of the data was also critically reviewed by my two supervisors. The discussions of the findings were therefore revised based on the literature and my supervisors' constructive feedback.

It is also unfortunate that the study does not compare and contrast the use of humour between male and female teachers to a greater extent. This was due to the uncontrollable factor that the majority of the tutors in this course were female. This would be a fruitful area for further research into the use of humour in EAP, as there is a strong literature base for the use of humour being linked to gender.

Another arguable weakness of this study is the absence of video stimulated recall during the interviews and focus groups. However, as explained in section 3.7.2., the majority of the teachers requested that video recording would not be used in the observation to minimise the observer effect and any discomfort that the camera might bring. The systematic recording of data on the observation sheet, and also in field notes, mitigated this potential weakness to an extent.

5.7. The difficulties with researching humour

As previous discussed in the findings and discussions chapter, EAP teachers can be quite reluctant to use humour in their teaching, making humour a tricky subject to research in this context, especially in terms of getting data. In this study, I observed a total of twenty lessons – two of them had no examples of humour to discuss and several others have very few. For this reason, many previous studies on humour were conducted without collecting data from actual lessons (e.g. Torok, McMorris & Lin, 2004; Frymier, Wanzer & Wojtaszczyk, 2008) or were done by using a controlled experiment method (e.g. Garner, 2006; Zabidin, 2015). Humour itself is also an abstract concept with no single agreed definition, which leads to another problem of

identifying its examples in the lessons. Furthermore, finding something funny and showing amusement may be innate and easy to do, but actually explaining why it is funny (or not) or listing one's preferred types of humour, even in one's first language is not an easy task. Therefore, when conducting the focus groups, I at times found it challenging and time-consuming to elicit responses from the students, not because they did not want to answer, but rather it was difficult to express themselves in English. Last but not least, as White (1941, p.17) once commented "Humour can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind.", the research on humour may appear unattractive to some as they believe analysing humour kills all the fun, especially for those who investigate it. However, it can be argued that while studying humour requires objective observation and analysis from a distance, being part of humour in social interactions is very different. Perhaps, the attempt to recount and re-enact situational humour when interacting with other people is more likely to 'kill the frog'.

5.8. Recommendations for future research

To advance the research into the use of humour and its effects in the pre-sessional courses in the UK, similar projects should be repeated in different parts of the country to see if attitudes towards, and uses of humour, remain broadly consistent. In fact, little research on humour in all disciplines has been conducted in the UK. Thus, the views of teachers and students on the use of humour should be broadened to full degree programmes and include a broader range of participants. Also, as discussed above, what is now needed is larger scale study with larger number of participants. It would

be useful if the number of male and female teachers could be more balanced to provide a thorough comparison of their use of humour.

Longitudinal studies with the focus on teachers' development in using humour over time can be done to gain greater understanding into the impacts general teachers' education, teaching experience and contexts may have on their use of humour. On the other hand, considerably more work will need to be done to determine the affective and cognitive effects humour may have on the students in the language classrooms. It would also be useful for further research to investigate student-initiated humour in the language classroom interactions. In addition, since one's sense of humour is an integrated part of their culture, it would be interesting to further examine the perceptions and the use of humour by teachers who use English as their first language and those who do not.

5.9. Reflection as a teacher-researcher

There is considerable evidence that teachers engaging with research is beneficial for their professional development. For example, teachers who engage with research:

- become more flexible and find it easier to embrace new ideas (Oja & Smulyan, 1989)
- have a greater sense of self-efficacy (Boudah & Knight, 1998, cited in Atay, 2008)
- are less likely to jump to a conclusion when trying to solve a problem (Burns, 2009)

- are more likely to have renewed enthusiasm for teaching (Atay, 2008)

- are more likely to recognise socially deleterious effects of certain educational policies than non-researching teachers (Emery & Thorsrud 1976, cited in Kincheloe, 2012), and thus may position themselves as activists and agents for school and social changes (Cochran-Smith, 1994)

- help improve the status of teaching as a profession, working towards the professionalisation of ELT

On top of these reported benefits it could also be argued that teacher engagement with research has political benefits because it moves teachers away from simply implementing procedures decided by others and instead makes them creators and critical users of knowledge. As teachers create research, they also create a 'workmate' collaboration, a channel for the teacher community to exchange and discuss ideas and successful practice, as well as working together to implement strategies based on new understanding emerging from their research (Kincheloe, 2012). Moreover, with research skills, teachers can actively investigate the questions to which they want answers in their own immediate context.

In this final short section of this thesis, I would like to reflect on my PhD journey as an ELT teacher who has the opportunity to become a researcher. Preparing for the data collection and the writing up of the thesis require a considerable amount of critical reading, synthesizing information and critical writing. Critical reading and writing themselves were not easy tasks. Trying to read and write critically in English, which is not my first language, made it tremendously challenging and frustrating at times. However, the process was also extremely rewarding, since I feel that I have truly

progressed and also gained helpful insights into the preparation and conduct of research, which I suppose would be useful for my teaching of EAP.

Studying the use of humour – a complex social phenomenon – was also an interesting and entertaining experience. The literature on humour gives me the knowledge to be able to not only enjoy the content but also understand the mechanism of the attempts at humour. The findings of this research have expanded my view on the perceptions of its use from both teachers and students, as well as helping me further understand teacher-student communication in the classroom and the international students' needs. The notion of being able to contribute to knowledge and the new understandings have significantly helped with my enthusiasm and confidence in teaching. In addition, the process of collecting data truly opened my eyes and gave me the opportunities to reflect on my own perception and practice on teaching and more specifically, on the use of humour. I have also learnt many useful teaching techniques through the classroom observations and the interviews with my colleagues, and at the same time, gained more insights into the challenges that they faced during the pre-sessional course. The opportunities to listen and have a conversation with other international students – considering that I am also one of them – are invaluable. I believe these will help me in my effort to improve the international students' learning experience and become a better facilitator in the classroom. I also believe this is just the beginning of my striving to operate in a culture of good work.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ETHICAL APPROVAL LETTER AND ETHICS REVIEW CHECKLIST (FORM UPR16)

University of Portsmouth — Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk

4th April 2017

Dear Quyen Tran,

Study Title:	Humour in the language classroom: The perceptions of English lecturers and international students on the use of humour on pre-sessional courses in higher education
Ethics Committee reference:	16/17: 36

Thank you for submitting your documents for ethical review. The Ethics Committee was content to grant a favourable ethical opinion of the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation, revised in the light of any conditions set, subject to the general conditions set out in the attached document.

Appendices

The Ethics Committee provides a favourable ethical opinion with the following requirements:

1. There is no documentation that could threaten participant anonymity (such as referring to specific lectures which would clearly help to identify the lecturer)

2. That it is clear that visual recording is being consented to

3. That the language used to inform participants takes into consideration that English may not be the first language of the participant

There is no need to submit any further evidence to the Ethics Committee; the favourable opinion has been granted with the assumption of compliance

The favourable opinion of the EC does not grant permission or approval to undertake the research. Management permission or approval must be obtained from any host organisation, including University of Portsmouth, prior to the start of the study.

Documents reviewed

The documents reviewed by The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Document	Version	Date
Application Form	1	20/03/2017
Participant Information Sheet	1	20/03/2017
Consent Form	1	20/03/2017
Evidence from External Organisation Showing Support	1	20/03/2017
Interview Questions/Topic List	1	20/03/2017

Appendices

Focus Group Questions/Topic List	1	20/03/2017
Supervisor Email Confirming Application	1	20/03/2017

Statement of compliance

The Committee is constituted in accordance with the Governance Arrangements set out by the University of Portsmouth

After ethical review

<u>Reporting and other requirements</u>

The enclosed document acts as a reminder that research should be conducted with integrity and gives detailed guidance on reporting requirements for studies with a favourable opinion, including:

- Notifying substantial amendments

- Notification of serious breaches of the protocol

- Progress reports

- Notifying the end of the study

<u>Feedback</u>

You are invited to give your view of the service that you have received from the Faculty Ethics Committee. If you wish to make your views known please contact the administrator ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk

Appendices

Yours sincerely and wishing you every success in your research

****

Chair

Dr Jane Winstone Email: ethics-fhss@port.ac.uk

Appendices

FORM UPR16

Research Ethics Review Checklist

Please include this completed form as an appendix to your thesis (see the Research Degrees Operational Handbook for more information

UNIVERSITY OF PORTSMOUTH

Postgraduate Research Student (PGRS) Information		Student ID:	792419
PGRS Name:	Quyen Phuc Tran		
Department:	SLAL	**First Supervisor:**	Peter Watkins
Start Date: (or progression date for Prof Doc students)	**February 1st 2017**		

Study Mode and Route:	Part-time	☐	MPhil	☐	MD	☐
	Full-time	☒	PhD	☒	Professional Doctorate	☐

Title of Thesis:	Humour in the pre-sessional classroom: The perceptions of teachers of English and their international students
Thesis Word Count: (excluding ancillary data)	61660

If you are unsure about any of the following, please contact the local representative on your Faculty Ethics Committee for advice. Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the University's Ethics Policy and any relevant University, academic or professional guidelines in the conduct of your study

Although the Ethics Committee may have given your study a favourable opinion, the final responsibility for the ethical conduct of this work lies with the researcher(s).

UKRIO Finished Research Checklist:
(If you would like to know more about the checklist, please see your Faculty or Departmental Ethics Committee rep or see the online version of the full checklist at: http://www.ukrio.org/what-we-do/code-of-practice-for-research/)

a)	Have all of your research and findings been reported accurately, honestly and within a reasonable time frame?	YES NO	☒ ☐
b)	Have all contributions to knowledge been acknowledged?	YES NO	☒ ☐
c)	Have you complied with all agreements relating to intellectual property, publication and authorship?	YES NO	☒ ☐
d)	Has your research data been retained in a secure and accessible form and will it remain so for the required duration?	YES NO	☒ ☐
e)	Does your research comply with all legal, ethical, and contractual requirements?	YES NO	☒ ☐

Candidate Statement:

I have considered the ethical dimensions of the above named research project, and have successfully obtained the necessary ethical approval(s)

Ethical review number(s) from Faculty Ethics Committee (or from NRES/SCREC):	16/17: 36

If you have *not* submitted your work for ethical review, and/or you have answered 'No' to one or more of questions a) to e), please explain below why this is so:

Signed *(PGRS)*:		**Date:** 09 / 01 / 2020

UPR16 – April 2018

Appendices

APPENDIX 2: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR STUDENTS

UNIVERSITYOF **PORTSMOUTH**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Languages and Applied Linguistics

Park Building

King Henry 1 Street, Portsmouth, United Kingdom PO1 2DZ

STUDENT PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: **Affective factors in the language classroom**

Name and Contact Details of Researcher(s): **Quyen Phuc Tran (Jo)**

Email: **UP792419@myport.ac.uk**

Name and Contact Details of Supervisor: **Dr Peter Watkins**

Email: **peter.watkins@port.ac.uk**

Ethics Committee Reference Number: **16/17: 36**

Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Joining the study is entirely up to you, and before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I am happy to go through this information sheet with you, to help you decide whether or not you would like to take

part and answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to talk to others about the study if you wish. Do ask if anything is unclear.

Study Summary

This study is concerned with the affective factors which can have great influences on teaching and learning a foreign language. We are seeking participants who are taking part in the pre-sessional courses for higher education and do not use English as their first language. Participation in the research would require you to attend a short interview and take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

What is the purpose of the study?

The research is part of the fulfilment of the requirements for my PhD degree course at the University of Portsmouth. It is hoped that the study could gain insight into the cultural and academic differences that can affect the process of teaching and learning a language in the pre-sessional course in higher education.

Why have I been invited?

The research aims to examine the international students' perceptions about the cultural and academic differences in the pre-sessional courses for higher education. As an international student enrolling in the pre-sessional course in Portsmouth, you have been invited to participate.

Do I have to take part?

No, taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide if you want to volunteer for the study. If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign the attached consent form, dated 20 March, version number 1.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You are invited to take part in a short interview lasting approximately 45 minutes, together with other students from your class in a group of 6-8 participants. The interview will include questions about your opinions on the classroom environment and how it may affect your learning in the pre-sessional course. An audio recorder

will be used during the interviews. The interview will take place at either the classrooms in LSI or the University of Portsmouth library.

Notes: There will be a class observation prior to the interview. The whole class, including the teacher, may be recorded using audio/video recorder, in agreement with every participant involved. Alternatively, field notes and observation sheets can be used to collect the data.

Expenses and payments

We do not plan to pay any participants.

What data will be collected and / or measurements taken?

The data collected is about respondents' opinion and experience of certain affective factors in the classroom and no personal data will be recorded that would allow for identification.

What are the possible disadvantages, burdens and risks of taking part?

No risks or discomforts are anticipated from taking part in this study. Your participation on the research will **not** have consequences with regard to your assessment on the course. The audio recordings of the interviews will not be passed on to any of your teachers or tutors. The only perceived disadvantages of taking part in this research are the time taken to attend the interview and the personal effort on your part to respond to questions from the researcher.

What are the possible advantages or benefits of taking part?

While there may be no immediate benefit to you personally (other than the opportunity to practice communicating in English), the research findings will provide us with an insight into the impacts that certain emotional elements might have on the learning process in the pre-sessional courses in higher education. You will also be contributing to knowledge about strategies to improve the learning experiences for pre-sessional students.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. We do not ask for any information that would enable anyone to identify you personally, thus your identity will not be revealed in the write up of the study or at any other time. Data collected from the interviews will be stored securely in password protected accounts. Data will not be stored on memory sticks, or other insecure devices.

The data, when made anonymous, may be presented to others at academic conferences, or published as a project report, academic dissertation or in academic journals or book. It could also be made available to any commissioner or funder of the research. Anonymous data, which does not identify you, may be used in future research studies approved by an appropriate research ethics committee.

The raw data will not be passed to anyone outside the study team without your express written permission. The exception to this will be any regulatory authority which may have the legal right to access the data for the purposes of conducting an audit or enquiry, in exceptional cases. agencies treat your personal data in confidence.

The raw data will be retained for up to 10 years. When it is no longer required, the data will be disposed of securely (e.g. electronic media and paper records / images) destroyed.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

As a volunteer, you can stop any participation in the interview at any time, or withdraw from the study at any time before, without giving a reason if you do not wish to. If you do withdraw from a study after some data have been collected you will be asked if you are content for the data collected thus far to be retained and included in the study. If you prefer, the data collected can be destroyed and not included in the study. Once the research has been completed, and the data analysed, it will not be possible for you to withdraw your data from the study.

Appendices

What if there is a problem?

If you have a query, concern or complaint about any aspect of this study, in the first instance you should contact the researcher(s) if appropriate. If the researcher is a student, there will also be an academic member of staff listed as the supervisor whom you can contact. If there is a complaint and there is a supervisor listed, please contact the Supervisor with details of the complaint. The contact details for both the researcher and any supervisor are detailed on page 1.

If your concern or complaint is not resolved by the researcher or their supervisor, you should contact the Head of School:

The Head of School of Languages and Area Studies, University of Portsmouth:

Professor Alessandro Benati

Telephone: 023 9284 6050

Email: alessandro.benati@port.ac.uk

Address: Park Building, King Henry 1 Street, Portsmouth, PO1 2DZ

If the complaint remains unresolved, please contact:

The University Complaints Officer

023 9284 3642   complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk

Who is funding the research?

This research has no external sources of funding and is self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

Research involving human participants is reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure that the dignity and well-being of participants is respected. This study has been reviewed by the Faculty Ethics Committee and been given favourable ethical opinion.

Thank you

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering volunteering for this research. If you do agree to participate your consent will be

sought; please see the accompanying consent form. You will then be given a copy of this information sheet and your signed consent form, to keep.

APPENDIX 3: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Languages and Applied Linguistics

Park Building

King Henry 1 Street, Portsmouth, United Kingdom PO1 2DZ

<div align="center">TEACHER PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET</div>

Title of Project: **Affective factors in the language classroom**

Name and Contact Details of Researcher(s): **Quyen Phuc Tran (Jo)**

Email: **UP792419@myport.ac.uk**

Name and Contact Details of Supervisor: **Dr Peter Watkins**

Email: **peter.watkins@port.ac.uk**

Ethics Committee Reference Number: **16/17: 36**

Invitation

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Joining the study is entirely up to you, and before you decide I would like you to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. I am happy to go through this information sheet with you, to help you decide whether or not you would like to take part and answer any questions you may have. Please feel free to talk to others about the study if you wish. Do ask if anything is unclear.

Study Summary

This study is concerned with the affective factors which can have great influences on teaching and learning a foreign language. We are seeking participants who are teaching the pre-sessional courses for higher education in Portsmouth. Participation

in the research means the researcher will attend two of your classes (but not participate in or interrupt your teaching in any ways). You will also be asked to attend an interview that takes approximately 45 minutes of your time. The observations are not judgemental in any way. We have no fixed idea of practices that we are looking for, but simply wish to establish what happens in such courses in the first instance.

What is the purpose of the study?

The research is part of the fulfilment of the requirements for my PhD degree course at the University of Portsmouth. It is hoped that the study could gain insight into the affective factors that can affect the process of teaching and learning a language in the pre-sessional course in higher education.

Why have I been invited?

The research aims to examine the perceptions of language teachers in higher education about the affective factors in the classroom and the teacher's techniques to create a positive affective context for learners to work in. As a lecturer teaching the pre-sessional course for higher education in Portsmouth, you have been invited to participate.

Do I have to take part?

No, taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. It is up to you to decide if you want to volunteer for the study. We will describe the study in this information sheet. If you agree to take part, we will then ask you to sign the attached consent form, dated 20 March, 2017, version number 1.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The researcher will ask for your permission to attend two of your classes (but neither participate in any of your class activities nor interrupt your teaching). The classes may be recorded using audio/video recorder, with your permission. Alternatively, if you prefer not to be recorded, field notes and observation sheet will be used. You are also invited to take part in an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The

interview will include questions about your opinions on certain affective factors in the language classrooms and how it may affect your teaching strategies in the pre-sessional course. An audio recorder will be used during the interviews. The interview will take place at either the classrooms in LSI or the University of Portsmouth library.

Expenses and payments

We do not plan to pay any participants.

What data will be collected and / or measurements taken?

The data collected is about respondents' awareness of the affective factors and their techniques to create a positive learning context in the classroom. No personal data will be recorded that would allow for identification.

What are the possible disadvantages, burdens and risks of taking part?

No risks or discomforts are anticipated from taking part in this study. Your participation on the research will not have consequences with regard to your profession. The video/audio recorders and field notes of the class observations as well as the audio recordings of the interviews will not be passed on to any of your managers/supervisors and teacher trainers. The only perceived disadvantages of taking part in this research are the time taken to attend the interview and the personal effort on your part to respond to questions from the researcher.

What are the possible advantages or benefits of taking part?

While there may be no immediate benefit to you personally, the research findings will provide us with an insight into the impacts that the affective factors might have on the teaching - learning process and how teachers employ different techniques accordingly in the pre-sessional courses in higher education. You will also be contributing to knowledge about strategies to improve the learning experiences for pre-sessional students.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Yes. We do not ask for any information that would enable anyone to identify you personally, thus your identity will not be revealed in the write up of the study or at any other time. Data collected from the interviews will be stored securely in password protected accounts. Data will not be stored on memory sticks, or other insecure devices.

The data, when made anonymous, may be presented to others at academic conferences, or published as a project report, academic dissertation or in academic journals or book. It could also be made available to any commissioner or funder of the research. Anonymous data, which does not identify you, may be used in future research studies approved by an appropriate research ethics committee.

The raw data will not be passed to anyone outside the study team without your express written permission. The exception to this will be any regulatory authority which may have the legal right to access the data for the purposes of conducting an audit or enquiry, in exceptional cases. These agencies treat your personal data in confidence.

The raw data will be retained for up to 10 years. When it is no longer required, the data will be disposed of securely (e.g. electronic media and paper records / images) destroyed.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

As a volunteer, you can stop any participation in the observation and interview at any time, or withdraw from the study at any time before the data is aggregated, without giving a reason if you do not wish to. If you do withdraw from a study after some data have been collected you will be asked if you are content for the data collected thus far to be retained and included in the study. If you prefer, the data collected can be destroyed and not included in the study. Once the research has been completed, and the data analysed, it will not be possible for you to withdraw your data from the study.

What if there is a problem?

If you have a query, concern or complaint about any aspect of this study, in the first instance you should contact the researcher(s) if appropriate. If the researcher is a student, there will also be an academic member of staff listed as the supervisor whom you can contact. If there is a complaint and there is a supervisor listed, please contact the Supervisor with details of the complaint. The contact details for both the researcher and any supervisor are detailed on page 1.

If your concern or complaint is not resolved by the researcher or their supervisor, you should contact the Head of School:

The Head of School of Languages and Area Studies, University of Portsmouth:

Professor Alessandro Benati

Telephone: 023 9284 6050

Email: alessandro.benati@port.ac.uk

Address: Park Building, King Henry 1 Street, Portsmouth, PO1 2DZ

If the complaint remains unresolved, please contact:

The University Complaints Officer

023 9284 3642   complaintsadvice@port.ac.uk

Who is funding the research?

This research has no external sources of funding and is self-funded.

Who has reviewed the study?

Research involving human participants is reviewed by an ethics committee to ensure that the dignity and well-being of participants is respected. This study has been reviewed by the Faculty Ethics Committee and been given favourable ethical opinion.

Thank you

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering volunteering for this research. If you do agree to participate your consent will be sought; please see the accompanying consent form. You will then be given a copy of this information sheet and your signed consent form, to keep.

APPENDIX 4: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Languages and Area Studies

Park Building

King Henry 1 Street, Portsmouth, United Kingdom PO1 2DZ

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Affective factors in the language classroom

Name and Contact Details of Researcher(s): Quyen Phuc Tran (Jo)

Email: UP792419@myport.ac.uk

Name and Contact Details of Supervisor (if relevant): Dr. Peter Watkins

Email: peter.watkins@port.ac.uk

Ethics Committee Reference Number: 16/17: 36

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated March 20, 2017 (version 1) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

□

3. I understand that data collected during this study, *could* be requested and looked at by regulatory authorities. I give my permission for any authority, with a legal right of access, to view data which might identify me. Any promises of confidentiality provided by the researcher will be respected.

□

4. I understand that the results of this study may be published and / or presented at meetings or academic conferences, and may be provided to research commissioners. I give my permission for my anonymous data, which does not identify me, to be disseminated in this way.

□

5. I agree to the data I contribute being retained for any future research that has been approved by a Research Ethics Committee.

□

6. I agree to take part in the above study.

□

FURTHER ADDITIONAL, OPTIONAL CLAUSES ARE PROVIDED OVERLEAF

Procedures entailing some risk to the person or privacy of the participant

- I consent for photographs of me to be taken during the experiment for use in scientific presentations and publications (with my identity obscured). ☐

- I consent for video of me to be taken during the experiment for use by the study team only (my image will not be shown to others / and will be destroyed after the data has been analysed). ☐

- I consent for video of me to be taken during the experiment for use in scientific presentation and publications (my identity may not be obscured). ☐

- I consent for my interview to be audio / video recorded. The recording will be transcribed and analysed for the purposes of the research ☐

- I consent to verbatim quotes being used in publications; I will not be named and my identity will be kept anonymous. ☐

Limitations to Confidentiality

- I understand that should I disclose any concerns with regard to my own, or others' professional practice in the course of the interview, the researcher might be duty bound to refer the matter to relevant agencies. ☐

- I understand that should I disclose possible criminal offences that have not been investigated or prosecuted, in the course of the interview, the researcher may report the matter(s) to relevant agencies. ☐

- I agree to be named as a participant and referred to accordingly. ☐

Dissemination of Results

- I would like to receive further information about the results of the study. ☐

Name of Participant: **Date:**   **Signature:**

Name of Person taking Consent: Quyen P. Tran (Jo) **Date:**   **Signature:**

APPENDIX 5: AN EXAMPLE OF THE OBSERVATION SHEET

Date: 26/7/2018   11.30 a.m.   Teacher: 1

Lesson: research design (methodology) / numbers   Seating arrangement: U shape

Number of students: 11 (postgraduates, Chinese & ME)

TYPES OF HUMOUR:

Joke	**Funny comment (self, students, materials, others)**	
Riddle	**Physical humour**	**Pun**
Funny story	**Funny material**	**Others**

Time	Classroom interactions	Extra materials / Course book	Ss' reactions
5 (minutes into the lesson)	Checking attendance T1: Where's your mate? Student A: I don't know. S: How can you not know? He's your mate you have to keep an eye on him! <smiling> S: Maybe he's facetiming with his girlfriend again! → funny comment at students		The class laughed
13	Late student arrived T1: Did you have a good chat with your girlfriend? How is she?" S: "She's happy to talk to me. And I'm sorry for being late." → funny comment – friendly teasing		Class was entertained (head shaking, tsk tsk sound → (friendly, no disapproval)

20	Student seemed sleepy. T1: Do you need a pillow? → funny comment – friendly teasing		Student and surrounding peers smiled
52		Disagreement between two students about a statistic result of a task T1:[Student's name], tell me who's right. I don't have a calculator here but I trust you! → funny comment at students	Mentioned student smiled, the rest giggled
53		T1: You don't want to mess with C when it comes to numbers do you? → funny comment at students	Half of the class smiled, half giggled.
68	S: [T1's name], are *few* and *a few* different? T1: Yeah. Let me think of an example. Okay. When I invited a hundred people to my party and few people came, it means there were like…two people. But if a few people came, it means not many, but enough to not make me cry. → funny material (example)		The class collectively laughed.

APPENDIX 6: AN EXAMPLE OF THE FIELD NOTE

Thursday, 26/7/18   11.30   (T1)

- Main class
- T checked attendance, seemed to remember ss' names better? → more familiar? → <u>Interview</u>
- Humour: interactional (keep an eye)
- T discussed the poster with the class (briefly)
  → expected font, size, word count, put more graphs/tables, %, less words
- Went through research methodology & design
- Extra material: ≠ parts of method. section of report → asked ss to put them in correct order
  → individual work, checked with peers when finished
- T walked around to assist
- Humour: sleepy / pillow
  → class seemed heightened
- T came back to table, waited + observed
  → not monitored much?, ss spoke to each other more, class was a bit noisier than undergrads, T didn't tell them to keep noise down → more mature? actually discussed not chatting
- T talked about squeezing method. section into poster "It's a challenge"
- T asked ss to give their answers + gave a sample of method. section in correct order
- T asked: 'What's special about the verb form used in this section? Do you see who did it? (distributed questionnaires, completed, observed)

①

→ encouraged use of passive voice = more formal *

- T asked Ss to work with their research group to decide what to include in the method. part of poster.

- T typed on screen:

  + Methods?
  + Participants: how many, age, gender, nationality, etc.

  + Questionnaire: how many, types, design, aim

  + Analysis: how, software

- Ss discussed, asked T to assist when needed
  → seemed comfortable
  → mixed class, used Eng. to discuss
  → walked around to other group to discuss / chat
     T let them → less control? → <u>Interview</u>

- T asked Ss to come back to their seats, moved to ≠ topic: Discussing number.

- T asked Ss to do task in textbook: calculate & produce statistic (individual + group)

- T asked Ss to give their answers

- Ss gave ≠ answer → humour
     → friendly, banter

- Moved to ≠ task: Quantifier (many, some, a large amount of, etc.)

- Humour: funny example: a few / few.

②

- More tasks on quantifiers
- T advised ss which tasks to do to benefit their own writing
- T asked Ss to discuss their method. section w a ≠ group, see if they understood
- Ss teamed up, discussed & chatted + T walked around to join & assist
    → Ss seemed to enjoy this, tried to explain to peers⇒ laughing & giggling
- T told ss sto draft their method. part for their individual report, not wait last minute.

③

APPENDIX 7: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A. Questions for teachers who use humour in the observed lessons

1. Thank you for allowing me to observe the lesson.

Can you tell me a little bit about the class - their level, how long you have taught them, which classroom activities they enjoy doing the most and so on?

How long have you been teaching English? How about EAP?

2. Was/were the lesson(s) I saw fairly representative of the lessons you have with them?

In what ways?

or in what ways was it different?

3. a. I was very interested in the humour in the lesson I saw. (Give examples)

Were these things that you planned? Or did they happen spontaneously?

b. You used [types of humour] at [   ]. Why did you use it? Was it a conscious decision or did it 'just happen'?

4. How important would you say that humour is in teaching?

Is it necessary for the teacher to use humour as a teaching technique in the classroom?

(if the answer is 'it depends') - what does it depend on?

5. Do you think that humour comes best from the teacher, the learner, or the materials? (or a combination?)

6. How often do you generally use humour in your class?

What does it depend on?

7. Do you intentionally choose or tend to use materials that are likely to generate laughter?

8. How do you evaluate your use of humour in these lessons? Is it possible to judge whether it is effective?

9. Have you noticed any advantages that humour or humorous materials might bring as a pedagogical tool in your own teaching?

10. a. In your opinion, are there any possible problems that the use of humour might cause in the language classroom?

b. Have you ever had such problems when you use humour in your class?

11. Do you think the students enjoy it when their teacher employs humour in class?

12. Do you think the teacher's sense of humour is a gift? Or can it be learnt (e.g. in a training course)?

13. a. Did you receive any training on how to use humour as an educational strategy in your teaching courses?

b. Do you think there should be some training on that area?

14. a. Would you want to join the training, if it was available?

b. What sort of things would you hope to learn?

B. Questions for teachers who do not use humour in the observed lessons

1. Thank you for allowing me to observe the lesson.

Can you tell me a little bit about the class - their level, how long you have taught them and so on?

How long have you been teaching English? How about EAP?

2. Was/were the lesson(s) I saw fairly representative of the lessons you have with them?

In what ways?

or in what ways was it different?

3. a. I was very interested in the studious nature of the class. Is this something you aim for when you teach?

(No → 4a   Yes → 4b)

depends: what does it depend on?

4. a. (3a = No) In other teaching situations, how is your teaching different?

Have you ever tried using humour or humorous materials in your class?

b. (3a = Yes) Do you think there is ever a place for a less focused atmosphere?

Yes: How did the students react to it? Was it a good or bad experience for you, in general?

No: Why not? (skip from Q5 to Q13)

It depends: What does it depend on?

5. How do you evaluate your use of humour in these lessons? Is it possible to judge whether it is effective?

6. Do you think that humour comes best from the teacher, the learner, or the materials? (or a combination?)

7. How often do you generally use humour in your class?

8. Do you intentionally choose or tend to use materials that are likely to generate laughter?

9. Have you noticed any advantages that humour or humorous materials might bring as a pedagogical tool in your own teaching?

10. a. In your opinion, are there any possible problems that the use of humour might cause in the language classroom?

b. Have you ever had such problems when you use humour in your class?

11. Do you think the students enjoy it when their teacher employs humour in class?

12. Do you think humour can ever work effectively in the classroom?
What does it depend on? (e.g. type of class, type of teacher, type of learner)

13. Do you think the teacher's sense of humour is a gift? Or can it be learnt?

14. a. Did you receive any training on how to use humour as an educational strategy in your teaching courses?

b. Do you think there should be some training on that area?

15. a. Would you want to join the training, if it was available?

b. What sort of things would you hope to learn?

C. Questions for students in the focus groups

1. a. How did you learn English in your country?

b. Did you like English as a subject at school? Why/ Why not?

c. When you came to the UK, what did you expect from the course and your teacher?

2. Your teacher used [   ] when [
], how do you feel about this use of humour? (optional)

3. a. Does your teacher use a lot of humour in class?

b. Could you give me some examples? What does (s)he usually do?

4. Do you like your teacher's use of humour? If you do, why? How useful is it?

5. a. Have you ever had any experience in which you don't understand your teacher's humour or don't find it funny at all?
How did that make you feel?

b. Have you ever had any experience in which your teacher's humour made you or your classmates feel uncomfortable?

What did you think about your teacher after that?

6. a. Do you prefer a serious/ strict or a fun teacher?

Why so?

Are there any specific situations that you like your teacher to be fun...or serious?

7. Do you think that humour comes best from the teacher, the learners, or the materials? (or a combination?)

8. Do you think teachers should use humour in English classes? Why/ Why not?

9. a. What types of humour in English class do you prefer? (e.g. give funny comments, tell funny stories, use materials with humorous content, etc.)

b. Could you explain your choice for me? Any specific reason for these choices?

10. Are there any types of humour that your teacher shouldn't use, or subjects that your teachers shouldn't joke on in the class?

APPENDIX 8: AN EXAMPLE OF THE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

The researcher (R): Thank you for allowing me to observe the lesson.

T4: My pleasure!

R: As you're aware, it states on the participant's information sheet that my research is about affective factors. To be more specific, it focuses on the use of humour in the classroom.

T4: Ah, now we speak the same language! Okay, humour, interesting! <laughed>

R: Can you tell me a little bit about your classes - their level, how long you have taught them, which classroom activities they enjoy doing the most?

T4: My main class, I would say most of them have 5.5 nearly 6.0, some a bit over 6.0. I have spent a bit of time with them before you came. The other class is quite similar, I think. Both classes enjoy debates, individual presentations, speaking to each other. Basically they like sharing ideas with others.

R: How long have you been teaching English? How about EAP?

T4: How long? Probably quite long, more than ten years now. With EAP maybe four or five [years]

R: Were the lesson(s) I saw fairly representative of the lessons you have with them?

T4: Yes, I would say so. I always try to keep the class as active as possible, you know, change activities, ask them to move around the classroom, ask them to work with other people.

R: I was very interested in the humour in the lesson I saw. For example, the funny comments when you gave feedback to your second class after the debate. Were these things planned? Or did they happen spontaneously?

T4: No, they were just spontaneous interaction. I don't really plan anything like that. I enjoy teaching this class as much as my main class. They're all lovely people so I

would just bring my personality to the class. I like to bring this human aspect into the classroom and I believe this is one of the most important factors to create an effective environment. You're a teacher, but you're also just one of them. I think humour is a crucial factor that can create this nice, non-threatening atmosphere that students feel relaxed. You need to show them you're human too, just like them. Bring all the diversity into the class and first you have to show them you're one of them. You're a teacher but you're also approachable, you can make mistakes, you can make jokes. When students are relaxed, they start to feel more comfortable with each other. The teacher should be the one they feel connected with first. Once they break that wall, they have a figure that they find approachable, they can move on with their peers. You're the bridge. That's why I like listening to them, talking to them, making jokes and making them laugh with me.

I get to know them more through individual tutorials and so I can bring more humour into the class. Some of them are sensitive, some are religious, they can take things personally so you have to behave accordingly

Personally, I believe in order to create the bond with the students and gain their trust you have to show them that you're human and you can make mistakes, and more importantly you can laugh at yourself. Whenever I notice that I make a mistake, which I do quite often <giggled>, I just bring it to their attention and we laugh about it together. And we just really enjoy this friendly relationship which continues outside the classroom. It boosts their confidence and glues the class together as a whole.

R: How important would you say that humour is in teaching?

T4: Definitely, definitely important. If I think the students are tired, instead of using conventional interaction, I prefer to use humour "Did you rock a baby last night?" <laughed> He didn't expect the teacher to come with a serious face and asked him

something like that and we all laughed. It brought him back to the classroom. That's the power of humour I think.

R: Do you think that humour comes best from the teacher, the learner, or the materials, or a combination?

T4: It's not everyone is skilful in cracking jokes so I think humour can come from anything. I like to think that it's an interaction, so I welcome humour from the students too. It's a combination of things that contribute to the atmosphere.

R: In the second observation with your main class, one student made a comment about God and notes, "Yes teacher God will [be] sleepy too if he has to read notes". Do you still remember it? It involves 'God' and you said some students are quite religious. What do you think about this comment?

T4: I think it shows that they feel comfortable with each other. I did not notice any offence. We actually feel comfortable talking about cultural and religious things in the break sometimes.

R: How often do you generally use humour in your class?

T4: Very often <laughed>. I think you can find at least one or two in any of my lessons. But I don't crack jokes all the time. Sometimes I can get a bit angry with them, but because I know that they know me, I already created this bond with them, so when I feel upset about something I can express it naturally with them without being scared that I would lose the rapport.

R: Do you intentionally choose or tend to use materials that are likely to generate laughter?

T4: If I can, yes. If it's both relevant and fun then I can't see why not. But I think it's difficult to find fun EAP material, most of them are a bit boring, we all know that, don't we? <laughed> But I try to use different types of material, talk about my

experience or about people I know. I think students can relate to that. When they understand the differences in the culture and the views, hopefully they will be more open, maybe less aggressive about these changes and differences.

R: How do you evaluate your use of humour in these lessons? Is it possible to judge whether it is effective?

If my joke didn't work, I could see there was no signs of smile or enjoyment. And a massive turn me down because it wasn't a good joke <laugh> But it's still good as I can still turn it around. When I realise that they don't find it funny, I would say something like "You guys are supposed to laugh because I just made a joke. Maybe it's just not my lucky day then". And they would laugh at it. At the very least it makes things less awkward for me.

R: Have you noticed any advantages that humour or humorous materials might bring as a pedagogical tool in your own teaching?

T4: If I don't show them I'm approachable, I can laugh, I'm human, I don't think they are encouraged to learn and express themselves in my class. So first you have to create this bond, and humour is one of the factors. Once I have this bond, I'll have a huge impact on them, I become more likeable, then I can push them to learn and my feedback is more welcomed. They feel the responsibility not only towards themselves but also towards me. I hear this very often: "Teacher, I forgot to write my summary but I'm going to do it for you tomorrow". I asked: "Why do you do this for me, it's your assignment, you're doing it for yourself" and they said: "But teacher you try very hard for us so I'm going to do it for you." So they push themselves harder because of the bond we have.

R: In your opinion, are there any possible problems that the use of humour might cause in the language classroom?

T4: Sometimes it doesn't work which can be weird, but I've learned to turn it into my advantage. If they don't laugh, then I'll say "Please smile, I feel really bad" <laughed>

R: Do you think the teacher's sense of humour is a gift? Or can it be learnt, for example in a training course?

T4: I think it's a combination. You can learn in time because the more experienced you are, you know what works and it also depends on your personality. First you need to respect the students and their cultures, care for them, understand what they need, love your teaching. Once you bring all these elements into your class then the humour will come naturally. So I think humour may not be innate, it can be developed overtime.

R: Did you receive any training on how to use humour as an educational strategy in your teaching courses?

T4: Not training, but I think we have some informal discussions before, and culture is my personal interest.

R: Do you think there should be some training on that area?

T4: There definitely should be some training or workshops on cultural differences. From those discussions I think humour can thrive. I'm always interested in learning how to make my students happy and excited about their lessons.

R: Thank you. Now I just want to summarise what we've been discussing so far. Please correct me at any points if my understanding of your view is inaccurate. So you think humour is an important part of a pre-sessional classroom because it brings many benefits to the students, for example making them feel more relaxed and more comfortable with you and with each other?

T4: Yes, and also it probably makes them feel more confident. Because it helps create a rapport in the class, so they feel safe speaking to me or in front of their classmates.

R: And you said humour also helps you feel more comfortable and relaxed?

T4: Yes, definitely, I think the atmosphere of the classroom affects the teacher too, how enthusiastic they are about the lesson.

R: And humour is also part of your personality?

T4: Yes it is. And bringing my personality into the classroom is the way I connect with my students.

R: Thank you very much for this interesting conversation!

APPENDIX 9: COMPLETE LIST OF DESCRIPTIVE CODES

No.	Codes	Example of participant responses
1	Students responded well to material containing humour.	If the material is really funny, for example watching a video about what Europeans think about British culture, they [the Europeans] did make some jokes about how we love talking about the weather. They [the students] found that funny, I responded to them, they were able to respond to the material.
2	Teacher's positive attitude towards humour	Humour is a crucial factor that can create this really nice atmosphere in the class.
3	Teacher brings personality/human aspect into the class	Personally, I believe in order to create a bond with the students, first of all you have to show them that you're human, you can make jokes, make mistakes, you can laugh at yourself.
4	Teacher seems more approachable to students	She's fun and friendly. I can ask her to explain if I don't understand. I don't ask questions at home [home country]. Maybe that's why my English is bad.
5	Teacher uses funny examples in teaching vocabulary	I want to make learning vocabulary fun…give them some funny examples, something that actually goes into their head.
6	Humour helps with students' retention of the lesson	I also think it's useful in the sense that if something is funny, like if there's a good joke on the tittle of an article they have to read, or if someone says a funny comment about the content of the lesson, the class is likely to remember that, and so they're likely to remember the lesson.

7	Students make jokes in English	They feel safe to try things, to try and be funny, something that is very hard for them to do in English, but they're willing to give it a go.
8	Students do not use much first language in class	90 percent of the time they don't speak Mandarin and Cantonese in class, which I think for monolingual pre-sessional class coming from China where they don't necessary speak that much English in class is quite rare.
9	Teacher can explicitly express that she's upset with the class	Sometimes I can get a bit angry with them, but because I know that they know me, I already created this bond with them, so when I feel upset about something I can express it naturally with them without being scared that I would lose the rapport.
10	Teacher feels more comfortable when having to give negative feedback	[…] But also for me to feel confident and comfortable, like I'm much more confident to say something like: 'I don't think this is clear enough' 'Could you do this better?'
11	Students are more receptive to feedbacks	When they're feeling safe and we have a good relationship then they're more likely to respond well to feedbacks and change what they do.
12	Humour is not essential in EAP	I don't know if it's [humour] a must in EAP, because I believe that it depends on the teacher and their particular teaching style.
13	Humour can cause confusion in class	My students already struggle to understand the lesson in English, adding humour will just confuse them even more.
14	Students need formality to achieve goal – no humour	For this class, it's a conscious decision to create a more formal atmosphere. They need a formal framework to achieve their goal.
15	Teacher does not use humour with young graduates – they back off	If you have a class of very young undergrads who are new to the university culture, and I know this from experience, if you've got them sitting

		around, if you get sort of right up close to them and kneel down, bring yourself to their level, you try doing that and you crack some jokes and they just…you could see them physically withdraw and their heads go down.
16	Teacher does not want to look unprofessional	I don't want them to think I'm unprofessional or not taking the job seriously
17	Time and place for humour	It's about the time and the place. It depends. If you're making jokes all the time and they're not used to that at all in their home country, you'll become a clown teacher. You need to have that boundary.
18	Too much humour - students feel more comfortable than they should	Too much joking around make the students feel more comfortable than they should, particularly at the beginning when you're getting to know them. They might feel too comfortable and start asking about your personal life for example.
19	Humour can be offensive	If it's a group or culture that you don't know very well, it could be easy to offend somebody.
20	Teacher's experience of unsuccessful humour	I remember in [named country] when I first started teaching, at a teenage adolescent class, late adolescent, and of course I was more sarcastic than I am now. I can't remember the exact joke because it was a long time ago, but it didn't receive positive reaction. They didn't laugh and I think it offended some of them. It kind of affected the relationship for a couple of weeks and I had to try hard to win them back.
21	Teacher is not very interested in humour	I think the students need assurance rather than humour. And I'm simply more interested in other aspects of teaching than humour.
22	Students' expectation when first arrived	I want something different. My English [is] bad because the lessons in my country are boring.

23	Students can laugh at their own mistakes	Sometimes I make mistake in class, like I use *he* for woman all the time. My classmates also make mistake. We all laugh but we [are] not embarrassed.
24	Students make an effort to study because of their teacher	Sometimes I'm lazy but I don't want to disappoint her [teacher], so I try to finish homework.
25	Student prefers fun class	I want fun class. I come here because I think it's more interesting than [the class] in my country.
26	Student expresses affection to their teacher	She's strict but she's also fun. I miss her class when I study with another teacher.
27	Student does not understand teacher's humour – still appreciate the effort	I don't always understand when she jokes, but it's okay, at least she tries to make us happy.
28	The influence from other students	I think it's interesting. I think I did laugh or something, but not loud. I think my classmates don't understand it, it's strange if I laugh.
29	Students don't care about humour	I don't care if the class is fun or not, just need to pass the exam.
30	Teacher is strict – students feel uncomfortable	He was okay at first, not fun but okay. Then he gets harder [stricter]. Sometimes he's angry he talks very loud like he's shouting. It makes us [feel] awkward.
31	Student is uncertain about teacher's humour	I think sometimes she jokes about the lesson, but I don't know…I'm not sure if it's a joke…Like it's not serious, but it doesn't make you like 'haha' <laughed>
32	EAP materials are 'dry'	You're very unlikely to find humour in EAP materials unless you get a one-off, interesting topic. EAP materials are quite dry, the topics of text and lessons are just very very dry.
33	Effective types of humour in the class	I tend to start with jokes being about me rather than about them so they can start to understand

Appendices

		my sense of humour, but in no way I can offend them.

APPENDIX 10: COMPLETE LIST OF MORE INTERPRETATIVE CODES

Descriptive codes	More interpretative codes
Students make jokes in English	Humour and students' confidence
Students do not use much first language in class	
Students can laugh at their own mistakes	
Teacher seems more approachable to students	Humour and teacher-student relationship (+)
Student expresses affection to their teacher	
Students make an effort to study because of their teacher	
Teacher can explicitly express that she's upset with the class	
Teacher feels more comfortable when having to give negative feedback	
Student does not understand teacher's humour – still appreciate the effort	
Teacher does not use humour with young graduates – they back off	Humour and teacher-student relationship (–)
Teacher does not want to look unprofessional	
Too much humour - students feel more comfortable than they should	
Humour can be offensive	
Teacher brings personality/human aspect into the class	Humour as a teaching strategy
Students responded well to material containing humour.	
Teacher's positive attitude towards humour	
Teacher uses funny examples in teaching vocabulary	

Appendices

Humour helps with students' retention of the lesson	
Students are more receptive to feedbacks	
Humour is not essential in EAP	The unnecessity of humour in EAP
Teacher is not very interested in humour	
Students need formality to achieve goal – no humour	
Humour can cause confusion in class	
Students don't care about humour	
The influence from other students	Unsuccessful use of humour
Student is uncertain about teacher's humour	
Teacher's experience of unsuccessful humour	
Students' expectation when first arrived	Students' expectation and experience
Student prefers fun class	
Teacher is strict – students feel uncomfortable	
EAP materials are 'dry'	
Time and place for humour	
Effective types of humour in the class	Effective types of humour in EAP