

**Jornadas científico-pedagógicas do
Departamento de Linguística e Literaturas**

O humor, as línguas e a literatura

5 de novembro de 2015

*Humour and the English language:
blunders, slip-ups and mistakes*

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Humour and the English language

1. The *nature* of humour
2. The *function* of humour
3. The *features* of the language of humour
 - Context
 - Content
 - Prosodic features
 - Lexis
 - Grammar
 - Style
4. Blunders, slip-ups and mistakes

1. The *nature* of humour:

Situations, characters, speech, writing or images to amuse an audience

LAUGHTER

Physical & emotional well-being, reduce the levels of stress hormones, boost the immune system, lower blood pressure, provide physical workout

Based on everyday observations: exaggerated version of the human condition

2. The *function* of humour:

- To entertain → to laugh
- Secondary function: to improve the audience
 - Make them less pretentious
 - Make them politically aware

Exposing them to the vices and weaknesses of individuals and society, they can avoid the same pitfalls in their lives

HOW? Shock, embarrass, make the audience feel uncomfortable

3. *Features of the language of humour:*

- Context:

*in which period was the discourse written or performed? Past or contemporary? Any historical background?

*in which geographical region does it have its roots? Is it based on any accent or dialect?

*which cultural or social background informs the discourse?

- Content: what relevance does the content have?

*is it personally linked to the speaker, writer or intended audience?

*is it a contemporary issue, a political or social comment? Does it focus on a celebrity or a particular event? Is it based on observations of everyday life or is it fictional?

*is the topic range broad or narrow? Is it a single subject or based on linked or unconnected subjects?

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- Prosodic features:

*do the intonation patterns reinforce the comedy (rising or falling tones, volume, exaggerated variations)?

*is the rhythm used for comic effects (change in pace, emphatic stress, frequent pauses)?

*are there vocal effects (laughing, sighs, silly sounds, rude noises, groans)?

*are there paralinguistics (hand gestures, facial expressions, movement)?

- Lexis:

*formal or colloquial/contemporary expressions?

*ambiguity?

*subject-specific?

*dialects?

*neologisms?

*unusual, inappropriate or unexpected words?

*catchphrases, puns or wordplay?

- Grammar:

*standard or non-standard?

*modern or archaic?

*formal or informal?

*closer to speech or to writing?

*phrase structure: long or short?

*types of sentence: simple, compound, complex?

*mood: declarative, interrogative, imperative?

- Style:

*literary devices: metaphors, similes, symbols?

*rhetorical devices: antithesis, listing, repetition?

a. Student bloopers and classroom blunders:

The girl tumbled down the stairs and lay *prostitute* at the bottom.

“My dear sir, you must learn to distinguish between a *fallen* woman and one who has merely *slipped*.”

Arabs wear *turbines* on their heads.

A triangle which has an angle of 135 degrees is called an *obscene* triangle.

A *virtuoso* is a musician with real high morals.

Adolescence is the stage between puberty and *adultery*.

Ancient Egypt was inhabited by mummies, and they all wrote in
hydraulics.

Queen Elizabeth was the 'Virgin Queen'. As a queen she was a success.
When Elizabeth *exposed herself* before her troops, they all shouted
'hurrah'.

The Gorgons had long snakes in their hair. They looked like women, only
more horrible.

I expected to enjoy the film but that was before I saw it.

Zanzibar is noted for its monkeys. The British governor lives there.

Bach was *the most* famous composer in the world, *and so was* Handel.
Handel was *half* German, *half* Italian, and *half* English.

A fossil is an extinct animal. The older it is, the more extinct it is.

Abstinence is a good thing if practiced in moderation.

John Milton wrote 'Paradise Lost'. Then his wife died and he wrote
'Paradise Regained'.

Beethoven wrote music even though he was deaf. He was so deaf he
wrote loud music.

b. Notes written by parents to excuse their children's absence from school:

Please excuse Mary for being absent. She was sick and I had her shot.

Please excuse Harriet for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch, and when we found it Monday, we thought it was Sunday.

Please excuse Jimmy for being. It was his father's fault.

c. In the court room, recorded in the proceedings:

Q. Are you married?

A. No, I'm divorced.

Q. What did your husband do before you divorced him?

A. A lot of things I didn't know about.

Q. Mrs. Jones, is your *appearance* this morning pursuant to a deposition notice which I sent to your attorney?

A. No. This is how I dress when I go to work.

Q. Have you ever *beaten* your wife?

A. No, I might *slap* her around a little but I never beat her.

Q. Just what did you do to prevent the accident?

A. I closed my eyes and screamed as loud as I could.

Q. And lastly, Gary, all your responses must be oral, ok?

A. Oral.

Q. How old are you?

A. Oral.

d. Collected from insurance forms explaining car disasters:

The pedestrian ran for the pavement, *but* I got him.

The pedestrian had no idea which direction to run, *so* I ran over him.

To avoid hitting the bumper of the car in front, I struck a pedestrian.

A pedestrian hit me and went under my car.

**The guy was all over the road. I *had to* swerve a number of times
before I hit him.**

e. From church bulletins and orders of service:

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on Oct. 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in school days.

For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.

This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. White to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.

Thursday at 5 PM there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All wishing to become little mothers will please meet with the minister in the study.

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The 8th-graders will be presenting Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' in the church basement on Friday at 7 PM. The congregation is invited to attend this tragedy.

[On a church bulletin during the minister's illness]

GOD IS GOOD

Dr. Hargreaves is better

f. On signs and billboards:

[At restaurant-gas stations throughout America]

Eat here and get gas

[In a Florida maternity ward]

No children allowed

[In the window of a Kentucky appliance store]

Don't kill your wife. Let our washing machines do the dirty work.

[In a Tacoma men's clothing store]

15 men's suits -- \$10.00 – They won't last an hour!

g. Absurd quotations:

You couldn't get me on Mars if it were the last place on Earth. (Erma Cohen)

The food here is terrible, and the portions are too small. (Woody Allen)

Cocaine isn't habit forming. I should know – I've been using it for years. (Talullah Bankhead)

Of course I can keep secrets. It's the people I tell them to that can't keep them. (Anthony Haden-Guest)

I'd give my right arm to be ambidextrous. (unknown)

h. Lost in translation:

[In a hotel in Athens]

Visitors *are expected to complain* at the office between the hours of 9 and 11 AM daily.

[In a Japanese hotel]

You are invited to *take advantage of* the chambermaid.

[In a Bangkok dry cleaner's]

Drop your trousers here for better results.

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[In a Rhodes tailor shop]

Order your summer suits. Because is big rush we will *execute* customers in strict rotation.

[In a Zurich hotel]

Because of the impropriety of entertaining guests of the opposite sex in the bedroom, it is suggested that the lobby be used for this purpose.

[In a Norwegian cocktail lounge]

Ladies are reported not to *have* children in the bar.

[In the office of a Roman doctor]

Specialist in women and other diseases.

Concluding remarks