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Is Humor a Useful Classroom Tool to Motivate

and Help Young Korean Learners Remember?

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to show a link between humor in an EFL classroom and the ability to remember vocabulary. The idea was that a humorous class would increase dopamine secretion, lead to increased motivation and therefore increase the likelihood that words would be remembered more effectively. Two surveys were designed and administered to students then collected and analyzed. Results from the first study showed that students felt relaxed when humor was used in the classroom, that they enjoyed it, and that it helped to reduce anxiety. With those results, it was expected that students who were introduced to new words in a humorous classroom would remember lexical items more efficiently than the control group not exposed to the conditions of the humorous classroom.

This study is part of a growing body of research on humor in the EFL classroom. By using a largely unexplored source of Korean elementary school pupils as English language learners, the hope is that it will contribute to future research on similar topics and encourage more research in that direction.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to

the memory of my father

Thomas Alfred Faulkner (April 10, 1932 – February 6, 2004)

and in honor of my daughter

Helen Jung Faulkner

who came into life July 12, 2011.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As an educator, one might believe that humor could be used to relieve students of stress and create an environment more conducive to language learning: but is humor an effective tool when used to help motivate students to remember words more effectively? A Korean afterschool program was the context where the research occurred and students involved in the study were aged from ten to thirteen years of age (fourth to sixth year primary students). Due to the lack of research available for Young English Language Learners (YELL)s, this research was conducted in an effort to discover if humor could be used in these classrooms to enhance learning vocabulary and promote more effective recollection.

1.1 Rationale for the study

Only relatively recently has research been conducted to discover humor's effectiveness in the ESL/EFL classroom (Avner 1988, Schmidt, 1994, Senior, 2001, Chiasson, 2002, Askildson, 2005) because as Korobkin indicated in her study, humor in the classroom before the twentieth century was viewed by teachers and students alike as unprofessional or "unscholarly" (1988: 154). More recently, Malikow (2005) found in his Effective Teacher Study that his students considered a sense of humor to be one of the most important characteristics. The aforementioned studies were only concerned with older learners however, with very little research available evaluating the use of humor with YELLs .

1.2 Aim of the study

I will first introduce the most prevalent theories behind learning, and memory before directly discussing humor in sections 2.1 and 2.2. Second, in section 2.3 dopamine (DA) and reinforcement will be examined as to how they are related to humor. Third, the most prevalent theories behind motivation, motivational orientations, and a brief discussion of intrinsic, extrinsic and group motivation will be presented in sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7. Then results of two surveys will be introduced in sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, conducted to investigate attitudes towards humor and how it affects memory in Korean elementary EFL classes. Section 4.2 will illustrate the ways in which humor was used to create more comfortable classrooms concluding with a discussion and possibilities for future research in chapter 5. All provided in an attempt to motivate students and provide more efficient recall of taught lexical items.

The paper will investigate the premise that humor is a valid teaching technique when used appropriately in the classroom that can alleviate symptoms of boredom, promote relaxation, ease anxiety and encourage the stimulation of DA in the brain, motivate students and make learning more meaningful and memorable. It will also aim to link humor as a motivational tool in the Korean EFL classroom with more effective recollection of vocabulary by illustrating the complex relationships that exist among humor, learning, DA, motivation and memory.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"The brain doesn't pay attention to boring things" (Medina, 2009:4)

This section will first define learning in the EFL spectrum and explain what it means to *know* and *remember* a word. Secondly, section 2.2 will define humor in the context of a Korean YELL as children's perceptions of humor can vary greatly, not only from adults but from other young learners as well. Section 2.3 will then discuss the complex relationship between DA as a neurochemical reward, which reinforces behavior (via motivation) and *stamps in* memories of otherwise meaningless stimuli (Wise, 2001). The section will conclude with the different forms of motivation applicable to elementary school classrooms in South Korea.

2.1 Learning in the EFL context

Every discipline carries its own definitions of learning and knowing based on respective biases and beliefs. In the context of this study learning will be defined as, "a change in responsiveness to a particular stimulus and memory is the cellular modification that mediates that change" (Arias-Carrión and Pöppel 2007: 482). Simply put, learning occurs when an action or stimuli is interesting or important enough for the learner to remember it and the brain accommodates the learner; allowing for recall of an item when necessary. The next section will identify what is necessary for a child learn and therefore *know* a word.

2.1.1 Needs lead to knowing

In studies investigating why children learn, Halliday (1975) identifies seven uses of language for children in their early years. In his view, children are motivated to develop language in order to satisfy certain needs or desires. The first four help the child to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs whereas the last three help to adapt to his or her environment which is more applicable in the EFL context.

1. Instrumental: used to express basic needs for hunger or alleviate pain

2. Regulatory: Used when expressing commands or requests

3. Interactional: used to make contact with others and form relationships

4. Personal: used to express feelings, opinions, and individual identity

5. Heuristic: used to learn about the environment

6. Imaginative: used to tell stories or jokes, allowing the creation of an imaginary environment

7. Representational: used to state facts and provide information

Figure 2.1 Halliday's Seven Language Functions (1975)

Learning, teaching and remembering words also require discovering the *learning burden* described by Nation (2005) as knowing what needs to be taught about a particular word. The learning burdens of words vary tremendously dependent upon how one word relates to the same word in another language. For example, the learning burden of a loanword i.e. a word imported from a different language with little or no changes made to it (*Oxford,* 2011) would be easier than the burden from a word that is significantly different. Nation provides an effective taxonomy of discovering the learning burden of a word proving especially prudent in the EFL learning environment.

Meaning	Form and meaning Concept and referents Associations	Is the word a loanword in the L1? Is there an L1 word with roughly the same meaning? Does the word fit into the same sets as an L1 word of similar meaning?
Form	Spoken form Written form Word parts	Can the learners repeat the word accurately if they hear it? Can the learners write the word correctly if they hear it?

Figure 2.2: Nation's Discovery of the Learning Burden (2003)

After discovering the learning burden of a word, the teacher can at this point decide how to teach it and whether or not to incorporate various learning strategies (see section 3.4.2.2) to help students remember the words. If the learning burden of a word is too great, it might prove too difficult for use in a humorous context. The next sections will describe humor and highlight the benefits and disadvantages of its use in the classroom.

2.2 Humor

One of the first theories about humor was Aristotle's superiority theory where people would laugh at perceived inferior or ugly individuals, because they felt joy by being superior to them (Mudler and Nijholt, 2004). Later theories define humor as resulting from an incongruity (Deckers and Devine, 1981; Suls, 1972) i.e. when material is presented out of context, or when irregular combinations of material are presented. Boeree (1998:1) suggested that:

"humor is a form of delight somewhere between relief and joy, with physical manifestations somewhere between the sigh of relief and the tears of joy…the sudden awareness of an alternative construction of a distressful situation which dissipates (to some degree) that distress."

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For the purposes of this study, humor will be defined as *any physical action or spoken statement intentional or otherwise that causes the students to react by laughing, giggling and/or smiling.*

Schmitz (2002) divides humor into three basic categories based on Long and Graesser (1988): universal humor, culture-based humor, and linguistic humor. He claims that elementary school students can benefit from use of universal humor only, due to the complexity of culture-based and linguistic humor. The problem is that universal humor is often personal and relates to particular individual (Bell, 2009). Norrick (1993; 2003) adds that the use of humor is often too difficult in both form and function in general.

In contrast to the claims that humor may be too difficult for elementary language learners, Bell (2009) argues that beginners can indeed create and enjoy any type of humor coming in all shapes and sizes and that it can be used by anyone, regardless of proficiency. Askildson (2005) also finds that humor represents one of the most natural acts within human discourse offering advantages to both learners and instructors. Laughter often results from humor, and Brown finds that "humor can cut through the messiness of the higher centers of the brain and affect the emotional subcortical sections of it. The most reasoned political speech can be cemented into long-term memory by a good joke" (2009: 164). If humor can induce laughter and help students remember vocabulary more effectively, its use should definitely be explored.

At this stage, it is important to distinguish between laughter derived from humor and laughter that comes from non-humorous situations. Morreal (1983) gives specific, situational examples of the different types of laughter than can occur:

Non-humorous laughter	Humorous Laughter
Tickling	Hearing or telling a joke
Peekaboo	Watching a practical joke on someone else
Magic tricks	Seeing someone in odd clothing
Solving puzzles or problems	Hearing tall tales
Winning a contest	Hearing insults
Anticipation	Hearing puns
Embarrassment	Simply feeling silly

Figure 2.3: Morreal's (1983: 1-2) humorous and non-humorous examples

2.2.1 Humor in the Korean YELL classroom: intentional or spontaneous?

Humor in the classroom generally occurs accidentally as opposed to being planned or designed to achieve particular results. (Bryant et al, 1980 and Berk, 1996). Bell (2009:242) argues that the focus should be placed on using "naturally occurring interaction instead of relying on canned or pre-scripted jokes." Conversely, Chiasson (2002) argues that because humor is not random and occurs in authentic communication, humor in the classroom should not be random and should be used with objectives and activities planned well in advance. But using nothing but pre-scripted humor as Trachtenberg (1979) suggests might result in humor that is too difficult for elementary students to grasp. During this study, no joke telling would occur; humor would be used to induce laughter but not to force it.

This section discussed the debate between the intentional versus accidental uses of humor in the classroom. Section 2.2.2 will briefly discuss the benefits of using humor in the classroom while more specific examples of humor used with the humorous group are to follow in section 3.3.2.2.

2.2.2 The benefits of humor in the EFL classroom

"Really good teachers know when to use humor…to get lessons across (Brown, 2009:100)".

Humor is employed in the classroom for various reasons and can be enjoyed by both students and educators alike. Askildon (2005: 48) found that some educators use humor because of "its effect as a relaxing, comforting, and tension reducing device, its humanizing effect on teacher image, and its effect of maintaining/increasing student interest and enjoyment."

One study was conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute where more than 89,000 college students from nearly 500 universities were surveyed with many students admitting that some of their courses were "very boring, very difficult, or excessively anxiety-producing" (1997: 71). Berk (1996:88) then employed a three-year study to evaluate the effectiveness of ten different humorous techniques in order to combat these negative attributes and made some conclusions, five of which are listed below:

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1. Students viewed humor as an effective teaching tool to facilitate their learning.

2. A wide range of low-risk humor techniques can be very effective in reducing anxiety and improving learning and performance.

3. Strategies for using humor must be planned well and executed systematically to achieve specific outcomes.

4. Humor tends to be more effective when two or more of the senses, especially visual and aural (written and oral), are involved rather than just one sense.

5. Offensive humor should never be used in the classroom.

Figure 2.4: Berk's (1996) benefits of humor

However, many of these suggestions would be too difficult for use in an elementary school classroom. Most importantly, the humor used in the classroom needs to be age and culturally appropriate as the humor applicable to American first year university students would be unsuitable for Korean YELLs.

Recently, Barnes and Lock conducted a study investigating the student perceptions of effective teachers. Humor was an attribute mentioned by some of the students surveyed as a "useful tool to promote class atmosphere and combat boredom" (2010: 144) and that humor had direct benefits on learning. One student wrote that jokes, role-plays, and amusing gestures helped students to understand and remember better than learning experiences bereft of humor. Davies (2003) found that non-native English speakers with limited proficiency were able to construct humor by using body language, facial expressions and other non-verbal cues. His study also showed that these teachers and students were often helped by L1 speakers who would help in their construction of humor showing the power of humor's ability to create camaraderie. In a similar study conducted by Faranda and Clark (2004), students found that teachers who were friendly, outgoing and had a good sense of humor were considered more effective than teachers who lacked these qualities.

In addition to humor being a positive characteristic, it can aid in alleviating fear. Laufenberg (2010) finds that making mistakes is often the best way to learn. Adults begin to fear making mistakes while inhibiting their chances to grow and learn new things. Humor can ease the fear of making mistakes and when mistakes are made, laughter can relieve the feeling of embarrassment. Welker (1977) found that humor often acts as a means to gain attention and visibly reduce tension. Terry and Woods (2005) similarly found humor as a way to reduce tension in the elementary school classroom. Humor can be used to treat student and teacher

errors in a friendly noncompetitive way and as Welker adds, "to err is human, but also, to err is humorous" (1977: 252).

2.2.3 Critiques of previous humor research

Bell (2009) comments that previous research (Deneire, 1995; Schmitz, 2002) never has the right people who use humor in mind, namely teachers and students. In order to make informed decisions about what kind of humor is useful or appropriate in the classroom, one should consider those who plan to implement it. Berk (1996: 72) finds that studies in academia tend be "less scientifically rigorous… [more] anecdotal, uncontrolled, pre-experimental, and correlational" than those found in more scientific circles. Korobkin (1988: 154) states further that much of the available research is "anecdotal" and lacks truly "experimental findings." Senior (2001: 46) adds that some studies based on humor are "not based on empirical research" and only make blanket assertions, listed on the following page.

1. A sense of humor is a desirable quality in teachers and forms part of their personal charisma.

2. Humor is an effective icebreaker.

3. Humor relaxes students and makes them more susceptible to learning.

4. Students who feel relaxed are more likely to participate in interactive activities in which they may make errors in front of their peers.

5. Humor engages the affective domain and facilitates deep-level learning.

6. Humor draws people together because it is a universal that transcends cultural boundaries.

Figure 2.5: Adapted from Senior's Blanket assumptions (2001:46)

Papers have been written touting humor's educational benefits but very few of them have been successful in providing experimental evidence of the widely held belief that humor can work wonders in EFL classrooms (Avi, 1988). Despite some of the possible obstacles, humor is used within my classroom (often the self-deprecating kind) to make the students feel more at ease. An example of this is a "self-down" (Berk, 1996:80) which can serve as a way to save face in the presence of a mistake or as a move to reduce a teacher's feeling of embarrassment thereby aiding to ease the tension students might feel. In addition to easing student tension(s), humorous examples are sometimes more easily remembered than serious ones (Kaplan and Pascoe, 1977).

If humor is effective in helping students feel more comfortable and can reduce tension in the classroom, a survey could also determine exactly how effective classroom humor is in their eyes. Weinstein (1983) believes that teachers need to be aware that students are always interpreting what happens in the classroom and teachers should try to discover exactly how teacher behavior affects students. Surveys can help to aid teachers discover exactly how their students feel with security and anonymity.

Using information from Askildson's (2005) and Thompson's (2007) questionnaires as inspiration, a survey was devised to reveal how frequently and effectively humor was used to make the students feel better (see chapter 3.3.1). It was also intended discover how relevant they deemed humor was to the learning material and their experience in general. Prior to explicit discussion of the surveys however, humor needs to be defined succinctly enough for Korean YELLs and a reflective journal will provide contextual examples and illustrate some of the humorous techniques students were exposed to in the classroom.

Previous research has never attempted to explore the links between DA and memory in the context of the EFL classroom at any age. The next section will examine the ways in which DA can influence behavior and how the relationship between DA and memory is vital to the argument of humor enabling better recall of vocabulary.

2.3 Dopamine and reinforcement

Despite "DA neurons account[ing] for less than 1% of the total neuronal population of the brain, [they] have a profound effect on brain function" (Björklund and Dunnett 2007, Björklund and Lindvall 1984). DA is linked with the reward center of the brain, produces feelings of enjoyment, and motivates people to continue or pursue enjoyable activities. As such, the study was conducted to investigate if humor could be used as a means to increase enjoyment in learning and DA production and therefore, increase vocabulary retention.

DA release is associated with anticipation and research suggests that it occurs more robustly during anticipation than during consumption (Berridge and Robinson, 1998; Ikemoto and Panksepp, 1999). Wise (2004) discovered that DA acts as the "neurochemical link" (Serl, 2010:13) that plays an important role in rewards, punishment behavior, pleasure, cognition, and the *stamping-in* of memory. This stamping-in allows the learner to attach importance to stimuli that motivates and to disregard other stimuli that does not. Galvan et al (2005) conducted research to discover exactly how rewards were processed within the reward center of the brain and found that children find any sort of reward thrilling.

These all led to the hypothesis that expectation of humorous or fun activities would trigger DA secretion in the brain. The release would act as a reward, creating new pathways, and enhancing the mind's ability to remember by stamping-in vocabulary that students learned

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during humorous activities. Although it is impossible to determine exactly how much DA levels may rise in this study, it could be suggested that humor and laughter lead to increased interest in the subject matter.

Murphey describes an ideal situation for learning L2 which involves:

> "*passionate L2 interaction…*where students engage in repeated intensive emotionally-charged learning episodes, what we might call 'positive emotional cognitizing' or a basic 'excitement' from challenges meeting our skill levels, which then creates dopamine rushes…mak[ing] our lives exciting, meaningful, and fulfilling" (2011:87).

An example of an exciting episode could be a humorous interaction (see section 3.4.2.3) with the teacher and/or other students allowing the material or structures to be stamped into memory, never realizing that a humorous, fun and motivating activity might actually help them to remember vocabulary more effectively than that of non-stimulating material.

Furthermore, Bunge (2009) comments on how important motivation is in choosing what and when they study. When a child chooses the activity, he or she will generally choose something they are interested in. "Motivation is crucial. Motivation is experienced in the brain as the release of dopamine...The motivated brain, literally, operates better, signals faster. When children are motivated, they learn more" (2009:173). Motivation, which could result from DA secretion, will now be examined first with the traditional theories followed by more modern perspectives.

2.4 Theories of motivation

Gardner defined motivation as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language" (1985: 10). In Gardner's view, motivation consists of three aspects: effort, desire, and attitudes and is

mainly concerned with the individualistic aspect of motivation. As Phan (2011) adds however, this definition does not consider that a student's motivation may be derived from other influences, such as pleasing teachers and parents, or performing well on tests.

In this context, motivation is the driving force behind student action and student attitudes towards humor is a great indicator as to how much how they and their minds will be devoted to remembering. Hedge (2001) suggests that teachers should try to identify what motivates learners and appreciate some of the challenges they face.

Now the most prevalent theories behind motivation, motivational orientations, and intrinsic motivation will be introduced. Lastly the *Near peer role model* will be discussed with regards to extrinsic motivation in Korean YELLs.

Historically, three schools of thought have emerged with different theories regarding motivation (Brown, 2007). All three share the view that motivation is derived from human needs and the strength of those needs dictate how far and how hard someone is willing to work to be successful. The behavioral view addresses reward anticipation, the cognitive view focuses on curiosity and the constructivist view deals with environmental and social circumstances that affect motivation.

2.4.1 The Behavioral view

The behavioral view relates to a learner's anticipation of rewards (many characteristics symbolic of extrinsic motivation). This view is typically held by YELLs who are yet unable to realize the long-term advantages of studying English. In this case, motivation is usually driven by external forces i.e. through reward, praise or punishment. Pavlov (1927) and

Skinner (1957) provided the initial basis for behaviorism with their respective work on animal, human and verbal behavior.

2.4.2 The Cognitive view

The cognitive view involves choices a learner makes to achieve personal language goals or to avoid uncomfortable or undesirable experiences (Keller, 1983). Ausubel (1968) identified important factors behind student motivation, stressing the importance of discovery, environmental manipulation, staying busy, curiosity of our environment, interest in people from different backgrounds, the desire for knowledge, exploration and acceptance and acknowledgement by other people.

2.4.3 The Constructivist view

The constructivist view goes beyond the first two perspectives because it recognizes that the individual's social surroundings are as important as the need itself. Maslow (1970) provided the initial basic needs formula through his hierarchy. His *pyramid of needs* begins with basic survival at the base (e.g. oxygen, food, sleep) gradually continuing to more complex needs like protection and security, then to love, belonging, self-esteem and finally to *self-actualization* where the individual reaches his or her full potential.

Motivation is viewed not only as derived from one's own self-determination but also as the way in which individuals interact within various social circumstances. "Learning English is different from learning subjects such as math or science…and will involve social, historical, emotional, cultural, moral sense of self as a subject" (Kramsch 2001:12). Other cultural aspects that adversely affect classroom dynamics will be discussed further in sections 5.3.1 and the next sections will highlight motivational orientation.

2.5 Instrumental motivational orientation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) indicated that positive attitudes and motivation are related to success in second language learning and that children are motivated to achieve proficiency in another language in much the same way that is necessary to for them to learn their first language. "An orientation is instrumental if the purpose of language study is utilitarian such as getting ahead in one's occupation (Gardner and Lambert 1972:)." Dornyei (1990) suggests that it may be more helpful using instrumental orientation in promoting successful learning in the EFL context by ways of jobs, financial rewards or better test scores.

For children, instrumental orientation may not directly apply to them and rewards may appear to be the only way to increase their interest in learning. Paul (2003) finds however, that rewards can cause problems over longer periods of time despite having some immediate benefits. Examples of problems include causing divisiveness between classmates, weakening interest in the subject matter, weakening active learning and discouraging students from trying if students perceive the rewards to be shallow.

2.6 Process-oriented motivation

Dornyei (2001a, 2001b) states there are many reasons for people to learn languages and that additional components of language learning must be recognized as having influence on learner motivation. Oxford and Shearin (1994) agree with Dornyei by saying that motivation is derived from one's own need for self-confidence and personal success. Dornyei (ibid) developed a theory to address the changes that occur in everyday motivation, present in three stages. He suggests that teachers are largely responsible for student motivation and in these stages, outlines major steps for creating and maintaining classes of motivated students.

2.6.1 Choice Motivation

The first phase of language learning in Dornyei's process-oriented approach (2001a and 2001b) is called *choice* motivation whereby a student decides to start studying English and set goals for her/himself. A good example of this would be a student using the language to communicate more effectively and exchange laughs with the teacher.

2.6.2 Executive motivation

The second, *executive phase* occurs when and if the student continues to hold an interest in and maintain his or her motivation to study English despite minor setbacks. A student might also decide at this point *not* to continue to study or lose interest in English altogether. The student may not have the patience or the willingness to continue especially if the class curriculum is uninteresting or too difficult.

Teachers and language advisors must be aware of these stages of motivation, keeping students motivated at each stage of the process and adapting to the highs and lows that can occur in each level of motivation. Humor can help in the EFL setting, and the survey was used to raise awareness of other factors including attitudes and cultural beliefs about the language. Most importantly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will influence how students approach language learning and if they are receptive to teacher input (or if they find it humorous). In the sections following, I will discuss intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

2.7 Intrinsic Motivation

Of great importance when addressing motivation is identifying the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. If motivation is intrinsically driven, students will be interested in learning English for its own sake, without the need for material rewards. As a

teacher, one would hope that students might be interested in English. Hopefully students because the students like films, music, books or find the English teacher or class funny and do not require rewards other than the pure joy found in the content. An elementary school student may not see the enduring benefits such as future career advancements or ease of travel, and it is therefore helpful for teachers and researchers alike to identify ways to understand what drives students to participate. Humor may be able to activate intrinsic motivation and help to increase vocabulary retention. Paul finds that intrinsic motivation is often "fostered by the sense of accomplishment gained from struggling at something that is…difficult at first, but succeeding" (2003: 23).

2.7.1 IM of knowing, accomplishment and experience

Vallerand and his colleagues (1992, 1993) went further and categorized intrinsic motivation (IM) into a three-part taxonomy. The first field, *IM of knowing* emphasizes the joy and satisfaction of understanding as well as the excitement from exploration of new ideas. This type of IM is traditionally associated with education and involves constructs such as exploration, curiosity, learning for the sake of understanding and the search for meaning. The *IM to accomplish* refers to the good feelings associated with mastering or achieving a goal, or creating something new. Focus at this stage is on the on the process of achievement as opposed to the end result. The third and final field is *IM-to experience stimulation* and refers to good feelings, such as fun or enjoyment, simply brought on by participation of a fun (or humorous) activity.

2.8 Extrinsic Motivation: The Near Peer Role Model (NPRM)

The final form of motivation requires role models as a means to provide inspiration for any kind of development. These role models often come in the shape of athletes, actors or kings

among other outstanding people whether fictional or not. Murphey (1998) however, describes Near Peer Role Models (NPRM) as people who are closer to student age level than traditional role models. NPRMs are more psychologically attractive to us because their abilities seem more possible and their feats easier to accomplish. They are not placed on a pedestal and more similar to us than comedians, athletes, scholars, or fictional characters. This can be found in mixed level, mixed age classrooms where students may look up to others without feeling that their abilities to create and understand humor or that other achievements are unattainable.

Chapter 3 will provide greater detail about student selection, teacher behavior and how the surveys were created, administered, collected and tallied.

CHAPTER 3
METHODS

While there is literature available concerning the use of humor in adult and university level classrooms, there is a general lack of studies investigating humor and YELLs. This chapter will highlight the processes involved in the creation, distribution and collection of two surveys. The first survey was used to determine students' attitudes towards humor in the classroom and the second survey attempted to determine whether or not humor was an effective tool to enhance memory of specific lexical items.

3.1 The research question

The two surveys were conceived and distributed to answer two questions. "What are the students' attitudes towards humor in their classrooms", and "Is humor an effective tool in helping students remember vocabulary? This section will describe the selection of questions for both surveys and provide detail about why particular questions were asked, why certain vocabulary items were chosen and how the information acquired through these surveys can inform teachers of specific, helpful ways to use humor in the Korean YELL classroom.

3.2 Research subjects

Having taught at elementary schools for more than five years, working alone as well as with more than ten co-teachers, the primary after-school classroom appeared to be the most natural place in which to conduct the research. I had worked with all of the classes and co-teachers for at least one year if not longer. I had become friendly with them, trusted by them and had

learned a majority of their given names. Every student was given the option not to participate and if a student felt uncomfortable answering the surveys, he or she could choose to come to class ten minutes after the start. The students were also guaranteed anonymity because their names would not be used. All the classes were willing to participate in the first survey with neither protest nor need for rewards.

It was difficult to determine which of the five classes would become the humorous group and which would become the control group. Finally, it was decided the class I had most experience with would become the humorous group. I had spent more than sixteen months with them while I had spent approximately a year with my control group. It also helped that the humor group (n=26) and the control group (n=34) were closest in number. After choosing which classes would be in which group, the surveys were edited and printed.

3.3 Teacher behavior

It is important to note here that every effort was made to ensure that every student received the same level of respect and courtesy despite placement in the humorous or control group. The survey, class and methods of teaching the lessons were all held in a professional manner. There were times where I attempted to appear less funny to the students in the control group but it was the lesson that mattered most, doing my best to help the students remember the vocabulary whether I appeared funny to them or not. The students were never told anything about the survey pertaining to humor, all were guaranteed anonymity and given the choice to participate.

3.4 Materials

Paper copies of both surveys were translated into Korean by three of my native-Korean co-teachers (see Appendix). Students were then asked to voluntarily complete the survey using as much time as was necessary and were fully cooperative with the research.

The first survey was distributed to all students in the fourth through sixth year in the elementary school afterschool program (n=119) whereas the second survey was only distributed to two classes. The humor group (n=26) and the non-humorous control group (n=34) were chosen because of their similarities in student number. The other classes had either too few or too many students to make similar comparisons. The other classes were excluded also because of other variables. It seemed only natural that comparing two classes would present fewer challenges in interpretation. After data collection, results were inputted into and downloaded from Survey Monkey with some of the tables made visual using survey monkey chart graphics.

3.4.1 Survey One: Attitudes

In designing the first survey, I wanted to know how the students felt about humor in general and whether they found my use of humor relaxing, threatening or if it had other effects. I modeled the survey after two other surveys. First, Thompson's (2007) survey was used to help develop questions about important characteristics of an effective teacher and second, Askildon's (2005) was referenced with regards to the frequency and effectiveness of my humor in the classroom. For the multiple-choice questions, a four-point Likert scale was used on most questions to avoid the temptation for students choose the middle answer throughout or to use the "social desirability bias" (Garland, 1991: 69) which stems from respondents' desires to please teachers or appear helpful to the investigation.

3.4.2 Survey Two: Animals

The second survey was designed with various groups of animals in mind. It was decided that a three-tiered system be used to divide the animals into groups. The first group was based on animals found almost anywhere on the earth and with high chances of students having read about them, seen them on television or in person. These animals were *cow, sheep, pig, horse* and *dog*. They were intended to be some of the most common, domesticated animals on the planet and as such, students may have been already exposed to the English. I anticipated that the majority of the students would be able to identify these animals with little difficulty.

The second group was based on animals not naturally found in South Korea yet visible again via books, Internet, television or even zoos. This group included *kangaroo, koala, camel, rhino* and *ostrich*. With this group of animals, I had believed that half the students would be able to identify these animals and even less to be able to name them without reference to the Korean script. The third and final group included *sea cow* and *killer whale* and was chosen with the idea that most students would know that the animals were in existence but not necessarily know the animals' respective names.

The survey contained animated pictures of the animals with Korean script provided underneath to avoid confusion and a blank space where the student could provide their English responses. Answers were then tallied by four measures, whether the student answered 'none', 'both', 'last and not first', and in the rare case of 'first not last' where a student may have forgotten the answer or something interfered with recollection of the first answer. This survey proved to be more difficult than anticipated because sometimes the students intuitively wanted to flip the paper over in order to give a correct response to their original answer. The students were politely asked *not* to change their original answers if they were incorrect.

The intention was to use words with relatively low learning burdens yet not so low that there would be no variation in student responses. Some of these words (*koala and kangaroo*) were loanwords and the teaching of these words would be quite simple. The only problem anticipated was the spelling.

3.4.2.1 Animals used for comparative purposes

The two words chosen to compare were *killer whale (orca)* and *sea cow (manatee)*. Referring back to Nation's (2001) questions regarding the learning burdens and their meanings or forms:

1. **Are the words loanwords in the L1?** Neither killer whale nor sea cow are loanwords.

2. **Are there any words with roughly the same meanings?** Sea cow can be translated directly however killer whale translates into tiger whale.

3. **Can the learners repeat the words accurately if they hear them?** The students appeared not to have any significant pronunciation problems whilst repeating.

4. **Can the learners write the words correctly when they hear them?** This experiment was to discover how well they could write the word after exposure to the words.

Figure 3.1 Learning Burden questions (2001)

Additional learning burdens included the spellings because they were not as predictable. If students heard them, they might be tempted to write *kilr wale* or *see cow* (perhaps confusing a popular sight word, *see* with *ocean*). The *wh* part required some attention (*wh* representing /w/ is an common spelling in English, white and where among others). Again, leaving the learning burdens of *killer whale* and *sea cow* largely in their spelling not in what they mean.

The following sections will discuss the differences between the humorous group and the

control group.

3.4.2.2 The Control (non-humorous) group

At the beginning of class, students were first instructed that a survey was to be handed out

and to alleviate their fears, they were asked not to write their names or school years on the

paper. They were also assured that this was not a test and that there were no wrong answers.

If they were unable to identify the animals, no penalty or poor mark would result. The

students were given as much time as was needed with most students completing one side

within five minutes. They were then asked to turn their papers over.

In this situation and with these students, a serious approach to teaching them was used.

Oxford (1990, 1992) while developing her Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL),

identified six major groups of L2 learning strategies and despite her recommendation of using

multiple strategies simultaneously, doing such would move beyond the scope of this

investigation. In lieu of or in addition to humor, some of Oxford's memory-related strategies

were used (see Table 3.1) to help students link one L2 item or concept (sea cow > animal)

with another but without necessarily involving a deeper understanding. This memory learning

strategy is described by Oxford as a direct strategy, which depends upon review and practice

to help with storage and retrieval of new information. Schmitt (1997:205) then defines

memory strategy as one that "relates new material to existing knowledge".

```
                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                    │Creating mental│        │  grouping,   │
                    │    links     │────────│associating and│
                    └──────────────┘        │ elaborating  │
                                            └──────────────┘

                    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                    │Applying Images│        │images, keywords│
                    │ and Sounds   │────────│and sounds in │
                    └──────────────┘        │   memory     │
   ┌──────────┐                             └──────────────┘
   │  Memory  │──┤
   │strategies│    ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
   └──────────┘    │Effective Review│──────│  structured  │
                   └──────────────┘        │   viewing    │
                                           └──────────────┘

                   ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────┐
                   │Using Actions │────────│physical response│
                   └──────────────┘        │or mechanical │
                                           │  techniques  │
                                           └──────────────┘
```
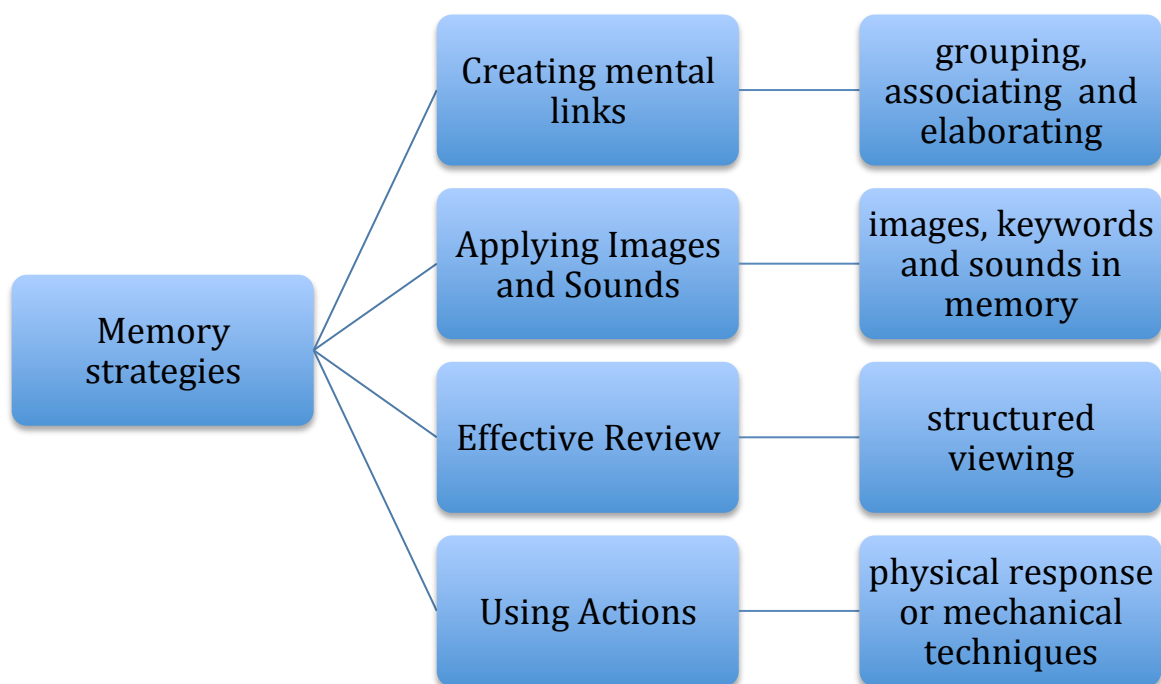
Figure 3.2: Oxford's Memory Strategy Classification

In line with Oxford's suggestions, I decided to use photographs from the Internet to help them learn the animal names with large visual cues seen via a projector. For future reference and in longer-term studies, Cameron (2001) adds that recycling previously met words frequently in varied situations could make it easier for the students to retain the vocabulary outside a one-off exposure (see section 5.3.3.2). Medina (2009) reminds us that memories are so volatile that repetition is vital for remembering.

3.4.2.3 The humorous group

This section will briefly discuss the ways in which teaching the words were taught to the students differently from the control group. Like the control group, the students were politely asked to partake in the survey and were kindly suggested not to write their names or change their answers. There were 26 students present to take the survey and several techniques were used in an effort to make the words funnier and hopefully more memorable.

The next step was to introduce vocabulary and the stronger students were asked if they could provide any of the answers. For the first animals, most students were able to identify and name the first animals represented but as the animals became increasingly difficult to identify, fewer students were able to provide the animals' names. To provide input, some of the better students were able to identify the animal names, which they shared with other students.

In addition to input from students or myself, an attempt to provide a humorous setting was made. I adapted a game discovered in Paul's (2003) games section where one student was to sit in a chair and answer any and all questions with a response given to him or her by the teacher. The lexical focus of this particular technique was *sea cow*. The goal of the student sitting in the chair was to try as hard as possible *not* to laugh or smile. The students were given carte blanche and could ask any questions they could imagine. Here is an excerpt from my reflective journal:

> "One student asked what is your mother's name? The seated student replied 'sea cow' as the entire class roared with laughter. Just then, another student asked 'what is your best friend's name?' The student again responded with 'sea cow'. At this point even my co-teacher was laughing as I tried my hardest not to crack a smile. The laughing was infectious and eventually the seated student had no choice but succumb to the laughter" (June 23, 2011).

It was my hope that this experience would encourage a greater ability to remember the word *sea cow* when the survey administered again. This technique was repeated with all the unknown animals and created similar reactions, though the activity proved less humorous with the third and fourth animals. The students however were all willing to try their hand at resisting the urge to laugh or smile in the face of a laughing audience.

After completion of the animal list, the students were then informed that they could complete the survey. Most of the students hurriedly wrote the names of the animals trying not to forget the names of all the animals. As soon as they finished, they were instructed to raise their hands and their surveys were immediately collected.

The focus of this chapter has largely been centered on the students, the materials and the methods by which the activities were carried out in the classroom. The next chapter will provide greater detail about the subtleties regarding the potential problems of the survey and an in-depth analysis of why the surveys produced unexpected results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

After receiving all the surveys, surveymonkey.com was used to help store, retrieve, interpret and print the data. The first survey was designed to show student attitudes towards humor and had surprisingly hopeful results. I had therefore anticipated that a positive view of humor would result in more efficient short-term (ST) recall from the humorous group of students than from the control group. The second survey results were surprising, showing few differences between the humorous group and the control group in their ability to remember animal names.

4.1 Survey one: attitudes

This section will discuss in greater detail, the results from the first survey, which will highlight qualities students perceived to be important and the effects that humor had on the class. The first graph following shows what the students believed to be the most important qualities for a teacher to possess. The first survey question asking students to rank the most important qualities resulted in 39% (n=30) saying humor was the most important quality while 27.6% (n=21) stated that humor was the second most important and 34.7% (n=26) indicating that humor was third most important meaning that a total of 64.7% (n=77) believed that humor was one of the three most important qualities for a teacher to possess. This result gave justification in pursuing the second survey, which was intended to show that humor had a positive effect on memory and would show a higher level of recollection. This chapter will show results from both surveys with the help of graphs to illustrate the data. Bell's (2009)

characteristics of good teachers provided additional inspiration for the first survey. The responses from his survey indicated that humor was perceived as a good quality for teachers to possess and was chosen as a topic for further investigation.

Table 4.1: Most important qualities of effective teachers
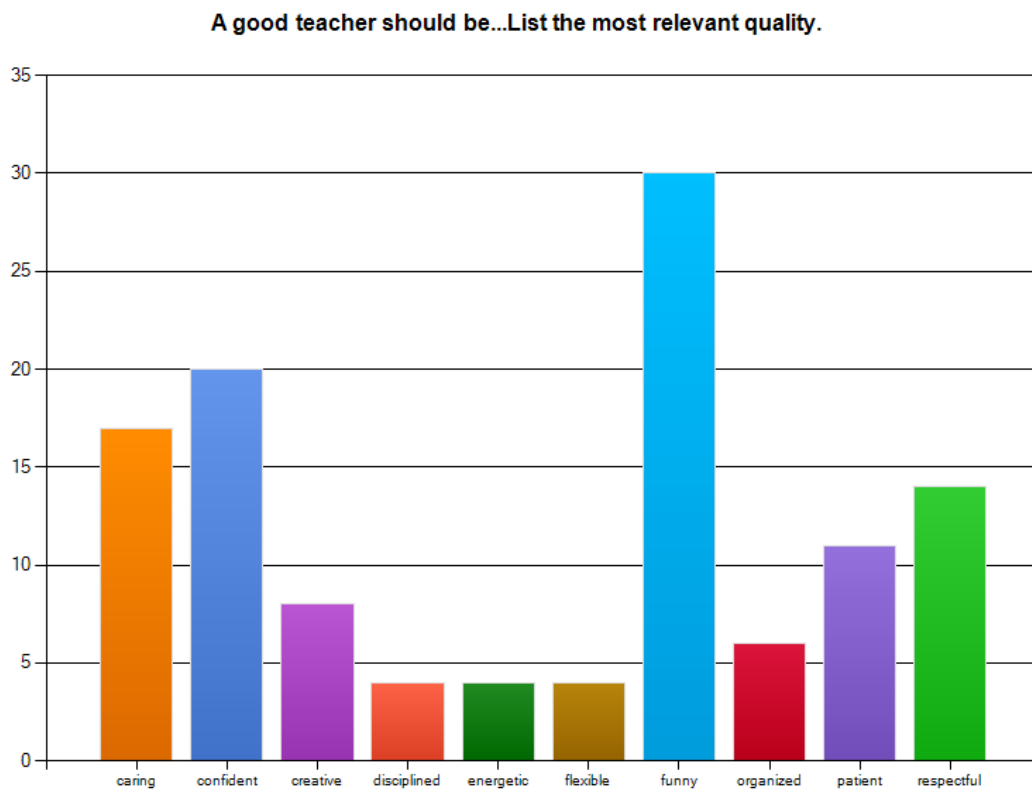
The table above shows how students chose the most important quality of a teacher. Also hopeful was the overwhelmingly positive response to humor as a means to make students feel more relaxed in class with 91.4% (n=107) indicating that humor made them feel at least slightly 42.7% (n=50) or considerably relaxed 48.7% (n=57) in class (See table following for further detail).

Does humor make you feel more relaxed in class?
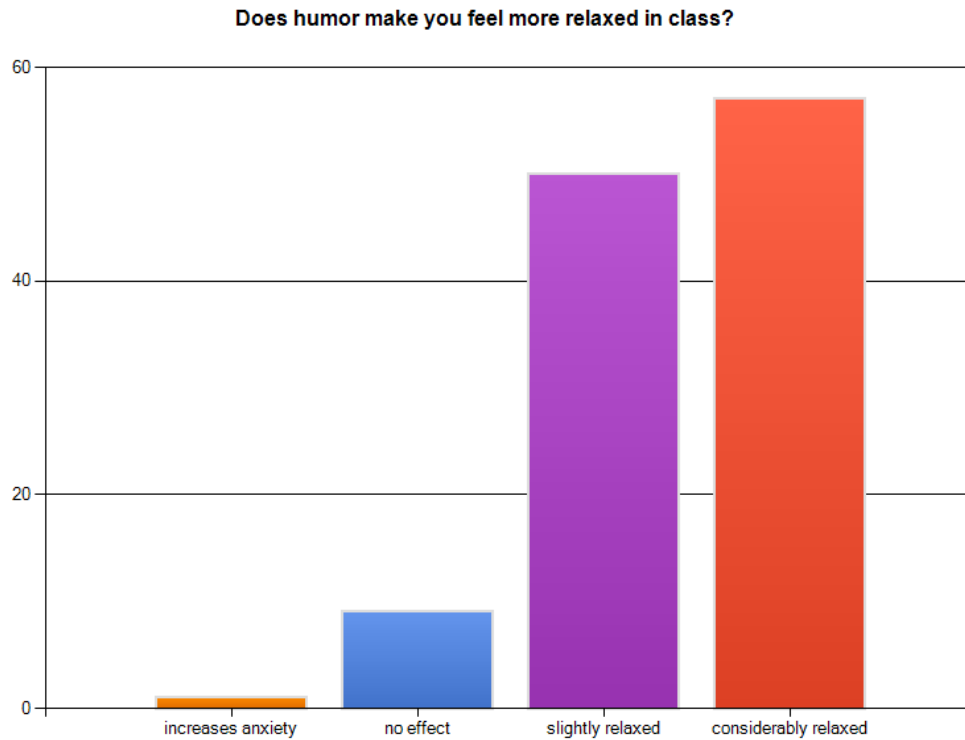
Does humor make you feel more relaxed in class?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
increases anxiety	0.9%	1
no effect	7.7%	9
slightly relaxed	42.7%	50
considerably relaxed	48.7%	57

Table 4.2 Humor's effect on students

The next table illustrates the almost unanimous positive response to whether or not students felt that humor could help in class. 90.7% (n=107) responded that they felt humor was helpful in class whereas only 9.3% (n=11) indicated that humor was not helpful.

Do you think humor can help in the class?
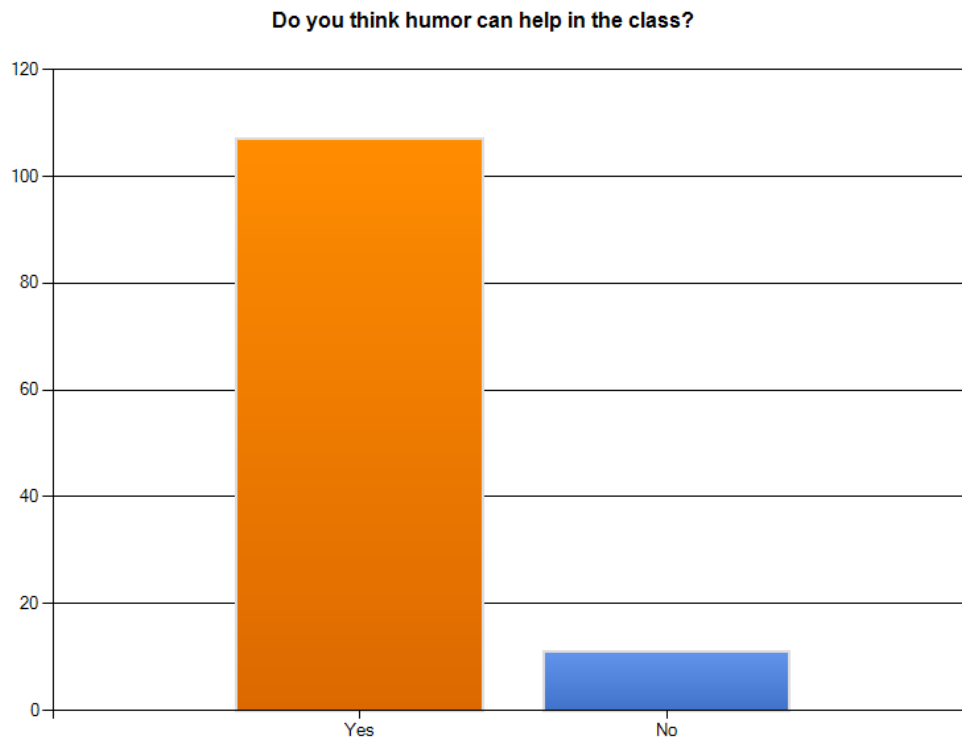
Do you think humor can help in the class?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	90.7%	107
No	9.3%	11

Table 4.3: Humor's perceived ability to help in class

With such a large proportion of students responding in such a positive fashion, it stood to reason that humor might in fact be able to positively influence vocabulary acquisition. Intriguingly, such was not the case and section 4.2 will provide more details about the results. One group was exposed to a humorous version of the lesson while the other control group was exposed to a more traditional non-humorous version of the same materials. The only difference between the two classes was presentation; there was no difference in materials or content.

4.2 Survey Two: animals

This section will explain the results from the second survey involving the memory of animal names. The humorous group was exposed to the animals one by one with the addition of a large picture of the animal on the projector as well as the humorous tactic described in section 3.3.3.2, whereas the control group lacked *only* the humorous tactic. The humorous group with the additional humorous tactic was expected to have a higher incidence of recalling the animal names. However the results indicate that either the styles of presentation did not differ enough or the memory strategies used with the non-humorous group may have accommodated some of students by helping them to recall the animal names more efficiently.

4.2.1 Sea cow

Purple represents the seventeen students (65.4%) able to remember *sea cow* after being introduced to it in a humorous manner. Seven students (in blue) knew the word previously while only two students (orange) were unable to answer either before or after exposure to the word. The tables (see following page) illustrate also that 61.8% (n=21) of students in the control group were able to answer only the second question, meaning that they did not know the word before taking the initial survey but were able to remember the word the second time the survey was administered (after non-humorous exposure). Notice the similarities in the number of students in both groups who did not know the word initially but were able to remember the word after exposure to it.

Manatee (sea cow)
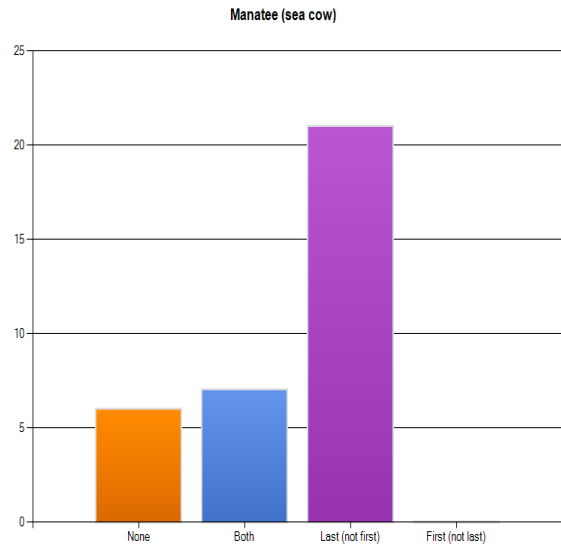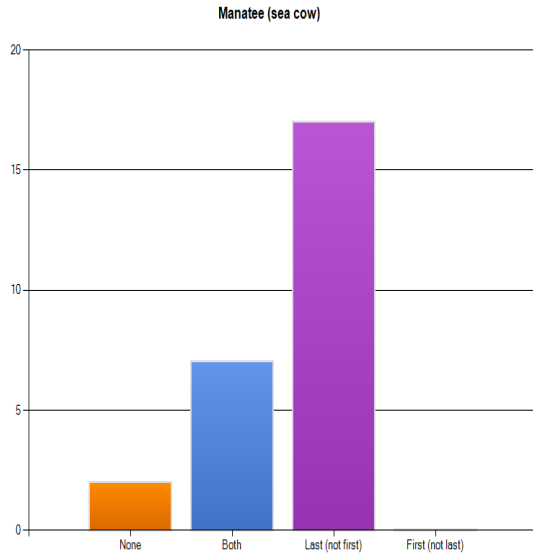
Sea cow (humorous group)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
None	7.7%	2
Both	26.9%	7
Last (not first)	65.4%	17
First (not last)	0.0%	0

Table 4.4: Sea cow (humorous group)

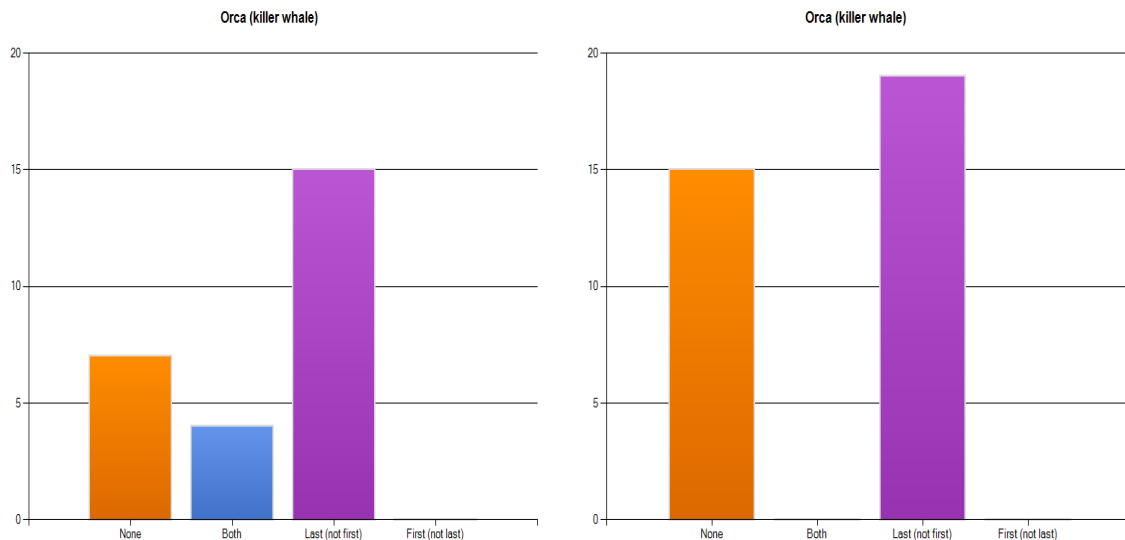| Sea cow (control group)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
None	17.6%	6
Both	20.6%	7
Last (not first)	61.8%	21
First (not last)	0.0%	0

Table 4.5 Sea cow (control group)

4.2.2 Killer whale

The *killer whale* provided subtly different effects from the humorous and control groups.

Although both groups showed roughly the same percentage of students able to remember

killer whale after the primary exposure, the control group showed fewer students were able to

produce the item at all, neither before nor after. The table again illustrates the students who were able to remember killer whale (purple) only *after* exposure to it. 57.7% (n=15) of the students in the humorous group were able to remember killer whale while a similar statistic, 55.9% (n=19) were able to remember killer whale after non-humorous exposure.

Killer whale (humorous group)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
None	26.9%	7
Both	15.4%	4
Last (not first)	57.7%	15
First (not last)	0.0%	0

Table 4.6: Killer Whale (humorous)

Killer whale (control group)		
Answer Options	**Response Percent**	**Response Count**
None	44.1%	15
Both	0.0%	0
Last (not first)	55.9%	19
First (not last)	0.0%	0

Table 4.7: Killer Whale (Control Group)

The table following uses percentages instead numbers which gives a clearer indication of just how similar the responses were from both groups. The blue represents the percentage of students unable to answer the animal name either before or after exposure to it. The red shows students who answered the animal name both before and after meaning that they already knew the animal's name. The third section, green indicates students who did not know the animal name before exposure to it but were able to recall the animals afterward.
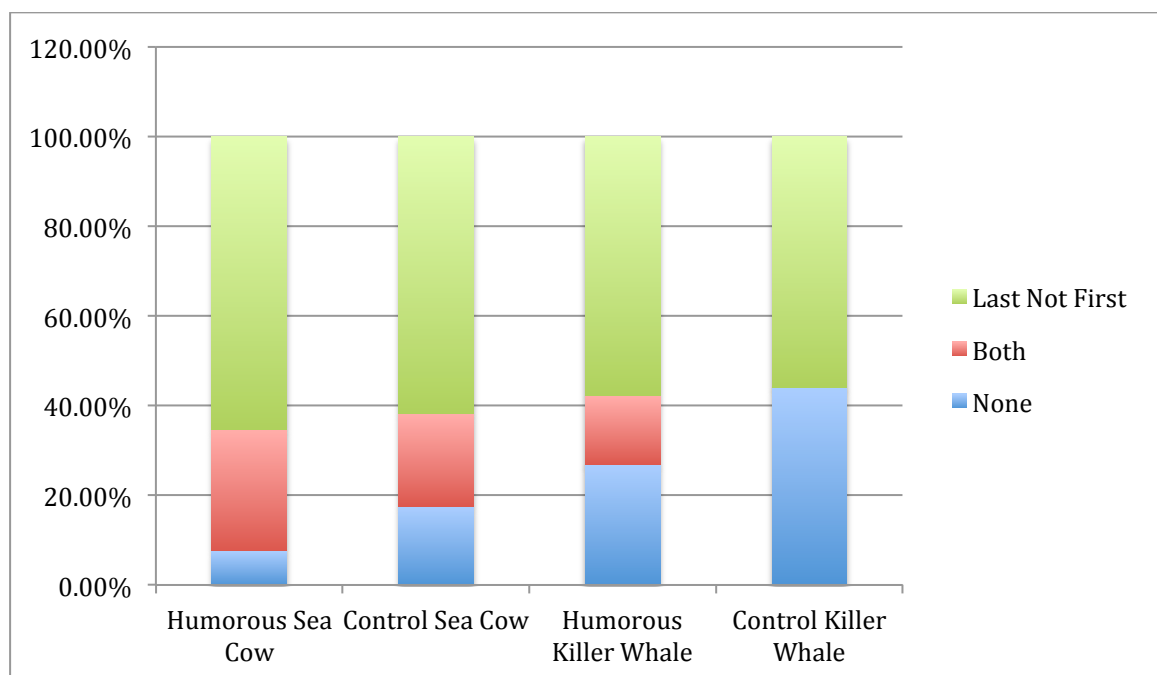
	None	Both	Last Not First
Humorous Sea Cow	7.70%	26.90%	65.40%
Control Sea Cow	17.60%	20.60%	61.80%
Humorous Killer Whale	26.90%	15.40%	57.70%
Control Killer Whale	44.10%	0	55.90%

Table 4.8: Combined Humorous and Control Group Statistics

The statistic of most interest (green) was the students who did not know or could not produce the animal names the first time they were given the survey but were able to produce the

vocabulary word the second time. The previous tables illustrate that there were statistically very few differences in vocabulary recollection between students who were exposed to the teaching of animal names whether in a humorous way or as in the control group.

These similarities could indicate that the teaching techniques were too similar or that the visual aids (one of Oxford's memory strategies, 1991) compensated for the absence of humor in the control group. Conversely, the group taught using humor may have largely ignored the strategy due to the humor involved, which acted as a distraction instead. Other possibilities for the similarities between the humor and control groups could be accounted for by a good working short-term memory *or* a particular interest in animals or English in general. These possibilities and others will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Two surveys were carried out in order to discover student attitudes towards humor and the effectiveness of humor in the EFL classroom. The original hypothesis was that learners would be able to recall lexical items more effectively through the use of humor. The findings were inconclusive and have shown by not providing enough pedagogical differences between the humorous group and the control group, that more time and more effective measures are needed for future testing of humor's effectiveness in the classroom. This chapter will first identify problems with the survey through reflective practices and action research. Second and most importantly, the possible limitations of the research will be discussed including but not limited to Hofstede's cultural characteristics, hygiene resources, attention span, immediate short-term memory and differences in humor. Lastly, suggestions for further research will be identified.

5.1 Reflective Practices

Throughout the creation and distribution of the survey a reflective journal was kept in order to keep track and reflect on positive and negative experiences. Richards and Lockhart (1996: 16-7) provide some initial questions, which on several occasions were used as a basis for journal writing. The headings included *Questions about what happened during the surveys and/or lessons…Questions about students [and] Questions to ask oneself as a language*

teacher. This reflective journal led to the discovery of some potential problems with the survey and with the way in which I conducted my classes. Reflective practices have been used throughout my teaching career and in turn helped me to identify and eliminate questions that may not have been suitable for this survey.

Not only has it helped identify problems and solutions to problems, it has allowed a more introspective approach to teaching and learning. Following is an explanation of one of these reflective practices *action research*, which was helpful in streamlining the survey process and the survey questions. It also aided in identifying problems within the confines of the classroom and within my teaching and allowing also for some of my research to become available to the public.

5.2 Action Research Identifies Some Limitations of the Study

Action research is a term that so far no single entity has been able to define succinctly largely due to the breadth of possibilities within it. Wallace (1998) described it as a way for teachers to collect and analyze data about their own classes to suggest ways to improve what happens in them while Richards and Lockhart (1996) urge that it should be used in a cyclical fashion which involves planning, action, observation and reflection (See figure following). Mackey and Gass (2005) state that action research is more inclined to discover things about teacher and learner development rather than contributing to theory.
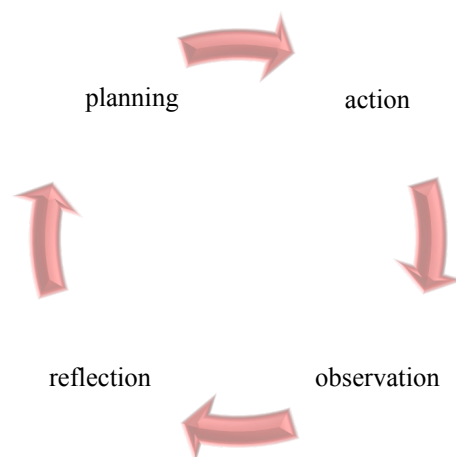
Figure 5.1: Cycle of Action Research (adapted from Richards and Lockhart, 1996)

Despite Nunan's concerns namely, "lack of time, lack of expertise, lack of on-going support, fear of being revealed as incompetent…and fear of producing a public account of their research for a wider (unknown) audience" (2001:202) and Dornyei's (2007) belief that action research may be a noble idea but not working in actuality, I felt that using action research could be valuable in determining areas needing improvement for future surveys and research in general.

Some of the problems identified through action research involved artwork that was too small, appearing grainy, unclear and at times, illegible. Other times the materials were not fully visible for all seated students and sometimes the writing on the board was not written clearly enough. I had also failed to seat some of the students in a communicative manner. Students were initially faced forward in a traditional classroom setting later realizing that it was more conducive for students to talk with each other if they were in fact facing inwards towards each other and not all in the same direction. I also found that I did not vary the materials nearly enough using almost identical lesson plan templates for all of my classes, nor did I vary the exercises enough to keep the students interested throughout the class period.

This action research process has provided opportunities for publication and has become material intended for publication and for use in presentations at conferences. It has also helped to identify other challenges to be discussed in the following sections.

5.2.1 Teaching with larger classes and multiple levels

There is no such thing as a perfect learning or teaching environment and adversity within the classroom comes in many forms. From personal experience, that adversity has manifested itself in large class sizes and mixed levels. Large classes are definitely affected by a poor teacher: student ratio and allow fewer opportunities for student speech and few chances for teachers to provide feedback. Other problems with mixed level classes include challenging the higher-level students while trying to simultaneously accommodate the lower-level students. Adjusting to these challenges falls outside the scope of the research but it is important to account for these issues and how they could affect the research.

Student numbers affect the data and the ideal is that the more students, the more conclusions can be drawn from them. This study is an *opportunity non-probability sample* however and despite the rule of thumb in social sciences research being 1-10% of the general population (Dornyei, 2007), *"sampling issues…in academia…always force pragmatic choices"* (Kemper et. al, 2003: 273-4). In other words, with time limitations and student numbers, it would be impossible for a study of this scope to make any true generalizations and as Dornyei (ibid) suggests, it is important for the researcher to clearly identify the limitations of the study. Section 5.3 following will discuss those limitations in greater detail.

5.3 Possible Limitations of the Research

With the initial belief that the humorous class would have remembered the animal names more effectively, looking at the data, it is difficult to see any significant differences. The differences between attitudes towards humor and its effectiveness in these settings made it difficult to make any judgements. When the students overwhelmingly replied to the question: *To what degree does humor in the foreign language increase your interest in learning that language?* with 111 students out of 119 answering with an increase in interest, it was hoped that the use of humor in the humorous class would have shown students able to recall more of the animal names. The first and second group of animals appeared easy to most students in the control group (88.5%, n=23/26), while 86.75% (n=30/34) of the students in the humorous group were able to answer the animals' names both before and after the survey. More animal names might have shown more significant differences and might have produced results more suitable for comparison.

Additional limitations included lack of time making it impossible to gauge how effective humor could have been with regards to long-term (LT) memory. The students displayed positive attitudes towards humor on the first survey in which case an LT study may have proven more suitable or effective, especially with an experimental group of students who had been exposed to a less traditional teacher and a control group with a teacher using a more traditional teacher role. This traditional versus non-traditional teacher role may have caused other problems and the next section will discuss Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and how they affect the classroom.

5.3.1 Hofstede's Cultural Characteristics

Hofstede explored the cultural differences in societies from 1967 until 1973, using IBM as the backbone for much of his research. He travelled extensively throughout Europe, Asia and other parts of the world interviewing employees and conducting numerous surveys. He has updated his research occasionally to evaluate more countries and to add additional cultural dimensions. The dimensions he initially identified were the Power Distance Index (PDI), Individualism (IDV), Masculinity (MAS), Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) and later added Long-Term Orientation (LTO). Four of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001, 2008, 2009) will be examined with a focus on how they affect teaching and learning here in South Korea followed by possibilities as to why these cultural differences may have interfered with the research question.

5.3.1.1 Power Distance

The first dimension, PDI measures how willing a society is to tolerate inequality from a bottom-up perspective. Hofstede comments, "all societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others" (2001:1) and this is especially prudent for South Korea in academia. In societies with a low score of PDI, teachers and students are more likely to treat each other as equals with teachers being experts in their fields who transfer impersonal truths. Students are permitted to initiate some communication in class and classes are more student-centered in general. South Korea received a rather high score of 60 (Hofstede, 2001) and in large PDI societies, students are highly dependent upon teachers, treat them with respect (usually without question) and most if not all classroom communication is initiated by teachers resulting in largely teacher-centered classrooms.

Korea has a tradition of treating teachers as experts who know their field of study and should not be questioned (Hofstede, 2001). As such, a humorous teacher could be seen by other teachers and students as a threat to the school and the education system itself. Humor, although perceived as positive by the students in the survey may have actually been a threat to the student comfort zone with students again answering using the *social desirability bias*. Another possibility is that the students had become so accustomed to my sense of humor that the control group felt that I was acting strange in *not* trying to induce laughter.

5.3.1.2 Individualism

The second dimension Hofstede imagined was Individualism (IDV) with Korea receiving a low score of 18 (Hofstede, 2001). The score on this dimension indicates that Korea is collectivist as compared to individualist. In individualist societies, students' individual initiatives are encouraged, students are expected to speak up in class and social groups are generally based according to personal or professional interests. Diplomas are viewed with potential to increase economic worth and/or self-respect. In collectivist societies like Korea, students own interests are discouraged, speaking in class is frowned upon, and they associate according to in-groups where long-term commitment and loyalty to them is paramount. Diplomas providing entry to higher-status groups can be purchased as opposed to earned (Hofstede, 2008).
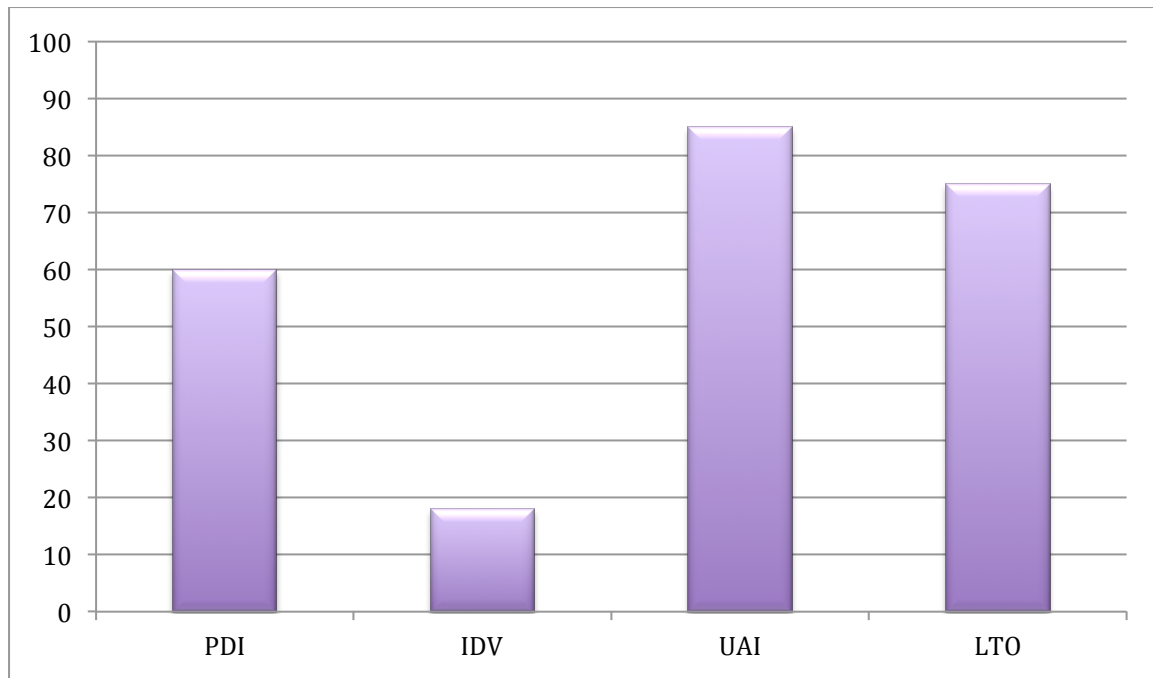
Table 5.2: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions for South Korea: PDI=60, IDV=18, UAI=85, LTO=75.

5.3.1.3 Uncertainty avoidance

South Korea's highest Hofstede dimension is Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) at 85, indicating the society's low level of tolerance for uncertainty (Hofstede, 2001). In lower UAI societies, students enjoy classroom discussions and teachers are permitted to indicate that they may not know all the answers. Tolerance for individual differences is higher and parents are more directly involved in their children's education. Conversely, in a society with strong UAI classrooms such as Korea, the typical students want to know the right answers and the teachers are expected to have them (Hofstede, 2008). Students are under high pressure to assimilate or conform to a standard norm and parents are not as involved in their education. Societies like this tend to adopt and enforce strict rules and ultimately try to control everything in order to avoid uncertainty, eliminate the unexpected, and resist change.

5.3.1.4 Long-term orientation

The fourth and final characteristic LTO is defined by how members of a particular society are willing to put effort into adapting themselves to reach a possible future. In a culture that values a short-term orientation, members of society might reflect upon past experiences to achieve more immediate goals with less regard for the future. Students with an LTO attribute their success to effort and regard failure as a lack of effort. Students normally study diligently but the focus is on the applied sciences and mathematics and less on theoretical, abstract sciences or the humanities (Hofstede, 2008).

5.3.2 Hygiene resources

Another problem identified through reflective action research was the rushing of teaching some of the animals in an effort to cover as many of them as possible. Frequent use some of Mackay's (1993) hygiene resources was found, in order to avoid potential embarrassment on the part of some students instead of using humor as was originally planned. A table highlighting some of these resources follows:

---

1. Rephrasing students' answers to make them acceptable

2. Substituting an easy task for a difficult one

3. Expanding minimal student responses

4. Changing the questions into simple yes/no answers

5. Taking over reading aloud if the students read too slowly

Figure 5.3 Mackay's hygiene resources (1993: 35)

5.3.3 Additional possibilities

This section will briefly discuss other problems that may have led to the unexpected results. First, the choice not to use other research examples will be explored, followed by attention span, overloading the short-term memory, and concluding with a summary of some cultural differences.

5.3.3.1 Appropriateness of the studies

Schmidt and Williams' study (2001) was considered as a possibility for replication and proved useful in their teaching context but could not be replicated due to the difficulty of using comic strips with lower level learners. It was anticipated that less than ten percent of the students would have benefitted from the use of comic strips and thus the idea of using them was eliminated. It was believed that with humor, the students would have been able to remember the animal names more effectively but the results show that there were very little differences between the two groups of students.

5.3.3.2 Attention span, Echoic memory and cultural differences

Attention span, poor short-term memory or subtle distractions that may have gone unnoticed by me could have affected the humorous group. Both groups did benefit however from exposure to the animal words and may have improved their ability to store words more effectively, as can be seen in the increase across the board in remembering lexical items.

Concerning memory, problems can arise if an overload of the immediate short-term memory occurs i.e. when multiple new items are introduced to students at once and students are then required to decide which new animal names to remember. In this case, loanwords would be much simpler for students to remember as opposed to words with higher learning burdens and

thus students might inadvertently dismiss the more difficult items. Hedge identifies this phenomenon as "echoic memory" (2000: 231) whereby the immediate short-term memory is able to retain items for only seconds at a time often due to this overload and the students therefore only retain what they perceive as important and may miss the message.

Cultural differences or what I consider to be funny may not be funny to the students and the difficulty involved in measuring humor is difficult as well. Humor is a subjective quality and not all students will find the same humor funny. Some of Hofstede's cultural variables present within the student population may have also contributed to some of the unexpected results.

The combination of factors, which may have led to these unexpected results, does not indicate that humor is ineffective nor should it discount the research. It suggests that a more subtle approach, a significantly longer research plan and more effective measures are needed. As a teacher, maybe I am not funny. The students may have responded to the survey answering with *Terry is a funny teacher* in an effort to spare my feelings. Whatever the case, my use of humor in such a short timespan may have had no effect on their propensity to remember animal names more effectively.

This research also might indicate that humor is not sufficient alone and that teachers should strive to be more effective teachers and to create meaningful course content that can be presented in a humorous way. Perhaps humor is best used as a minor tool in addition to other techniques. The focus of the study may have also been overly concerned with student involvement or coverage objectives. Longer-term studies will be essential to fully explore the positives of humor in the EFL classroom.

5.4 Suggestions for future research

With such a small-scale study and on such a short-term basis, it is truly difficult to find any correlation between humor and better recollection of lexical items either for ST or LT memory. The difficulty in identifying just how much DA is secreted in anticipation of humor also makes it impossible to state how DA affects humor outside of speculation. An LT study with accurate measures of DA secretion due to anticipation of humor and long-term memory capacity would be most helpful and could provide insights into just how and how much humor can increase memory. Such a study seems unlikely at this point because it would require a more thorough understanding of neurochemistry and a scientific background.

In Murphey's (2002) view, and in keeping with reflective practices, recordings or videos used for later reflection might have identified other problems and/or successes in either creating humor or enhancing memory. Earlier in the survey process, it was decided not to include three of the other classes due to fear of the difficulty in comparing classes with a varied number of students. Had the other groups been included, perhaps some significant differences in memory would have been noticed.

As Cameron (2001) suggests, recycling items in varied environment and contexts, repeated exposure to lexical items and employing more of Oxford's (1990) memory strategies, combined with a humor Korean YELLs would find humorous could greatly increase the potential for students to remember vocabulary. It would also provide a basis for further exploration of the links that operate among humor, DA, motivation and memory.

This section concludes with problems, suggestions and ideas for further research. The next section will summarize the paper and highlight the effects of humor on memory.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the thesis and before the surveys had materialized, there had always been a personal feeling that there must be some way to link humor and learning. If something is enjoyable, should it not be used to create a motivational environment conducive to language acquisition? That was the premise for the research and these surveys were at that point, designed to discover if humor was a valuable tool to help students enjoy learning and help remember lexical items (in this case, animal names) more efficiently.

The first survey was administered, returned and the results provided great encouragement prompting further exploration of humor. These results showed generally positive feelings on behalf of students towards the use of humor in the classroom. It was tempting to believe that they actually enjoyed my humor in the classroom. Because the first survey was designed and implemented in order to discover student attitudes towards and the perceived effectiveness of humor in the EFL classroom, the original hypothesis was that learners would be able to recall lexical items more effectively through its use.

Further analysis of the first survey led to the creation and distribution of another survey, which was created to determine how well students could recall various animals when presented in two different manners. The first and intended humorous manner was initially

thought to provide a more effective language-learning environment than the traditional non-humorous environment of learning traditionally found in Korea.

Although the first survey suggested that students felt good about humor in class, the second survey showed insignificant differences between the humor and the control groups. The findings were inconclusive with only minor differences between the humorous group and the control group. More time and more effective measures need to be used for future testing of humor's effectiveness in the classroom.

Concerning humor and its relationship to motivation and DA secretion, the inability to measure either DA secretion or motivation made it difficult to determine how much humor may have helped while other possibilities included a memory overload but that was difficult to determine as there were only ten new lexical items presented. The difficulty of the new lexical items lay mostly in their spellings, and the words that were most difficult for students to remember were those carrying a heavier learning burden.

Other suggestions were explored and there was no single determinant as to why the results were so unexpected. One possibility was the lack of variability between the ways in which the classes and surveys were conducted in the humor and control groups as well as the possibility of cultural differences that may have led to the students not reacting to the brand of humor used within the classroom.

These inconclusive results indicate that future studies will be needed to determine if humor has an effective place in the classroom. Humor is such an essential part of the human experience and if humor can motivate students through laughter, it seems only natural that it

could help students remember things more effectively. Until that point when research can identify how memory is directly affected by humor, any comments about the benefits are speculative at best.

The research suggests that humor may not be as effective as had originally been hypothesized. However, the true value of humor will need to be examined more fully through an LT study that can utilize more effective measures of DA secretion and/or more sensitive ways to determine which types of humor may appeal to students' liking. Using a study with repeated and varied humorous and non-humorous exposure to the lexical items could identify potential differences between the groups and determine if humor is a valid tool for use within the EFL environment.

Despite the setbacks, it seems that humor did have a positive effect on student behavior as could be seen in the joy and laughter it provided within the confines of the humorous classrooms. As the proverbial door of this study's attempt at linking DA with motivation and thus influencing memory closes, another door opens with the possibilities of exploring humor's effect on providing an environment conducive to students enjoying, learning, and remembering vocabulary because of it.

Survey One

1) A good teacher should be…If you could choose the three most important characteristics
from the choices below, which would they be?
위에 주어진 단어들 중에서 가장 중요하다고 생각하는 단어들을 순서대로 나열하세요.

caring   confident   creative   disciplined
보살핌   자신감   창의적인   절제된

   energetic   flexible   funny   organized
   파워넘치는   융통성있는   유머있는   계획된

      patient   respectful
      인내심   존중하는

Please **rank them** in the spaces below.
위에 주어진 단어들 중에서 가장 중요하다고 생각하는 단어들을 순서대로 나열하세요.
1 _____   2 _____   3 _____

2. How would you rate your teacher's effectiveness as a teacher?
테리선생님이 자신의 영어에 얼마만큼 영향을 미치는지 점수를 준다면?

(totally ineffective)   (slightly ineffective) (effective)   (extremely effective)
(완전히 비효과)   (약간 효과)   (효과)   (매우 효과적)

3. How often does your teacher use humor during each class?
얼마나 자주 테리선생님은 매 수업시간에 유머를 사용하나요?

   (never)   (sometimes)   (often)   (always)
  (사용하지않음)   (가끔)   (자주)   (항상)

4. How much of the humor used by your teacher is relevant to classroom subject matter?
 테리선생님의 유머가 수업과 얼마나 관련이 있나요?

 (none)   (a little)   (about half)   (all)
(전혀없다)   (약간)   (50%정도)   (100% 관련있다)

5. Does humor make you feel more relaxed in class?
유머가 수업시간을 더 편안하게 만들어주나요?

(increases anxiety)   (no effect)   (slightly relaxed)   (considerably relaxed)
  (더 긴장됨)   (효과없음)   (조금씩 편안해짐)   (아주 편안해짐)

6. To what degree does humor in the foreign language increase your interest in learning that language?
유머가 영어나 다른 외국어를 배우는 여러분에게 흥미를 일으키는데 효과적인가요?

(decrease in interest)   (no increase)   (increase)
 (흥미감소)   (도움안됨)   (효과가 있음)

7. Do you feel that your teacher's use of humor makes him more approachable in class?
선생님이 수업시간에 유머를 사용하여 수업시간이 편안해지면 선생님에게 영어로 더 이야기하기가 쉬운가요?

 (less approachable)   (no effect)   (slightly more)   (more approachable)
(좀 더 다가가기 힘듦) (전혀 효과없음)   (약간 도움이 됨)   (더 다가가기 쉬움)

8. In your opinion, how often should humor be used in a typical class period?
여러분은 수업시간에 얼마큼의 유머가 사용되어야 한다고 생각하나요?

   (never)   (sometimes)   (often)   (usually)
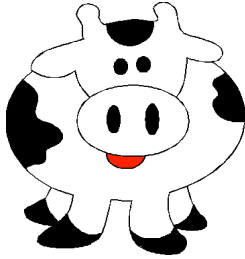(사용하지않음)   (가끔)   (자주)   (항상)

9. In your opinion, how important is humor to learning English in the classroom overall?
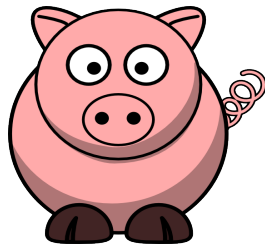여러분은 영어를 배우는데 유머가 얼만큼 중요하다고 생각하나요?

   (not at all)   (a little bit)   (important)   (very important)
(전혀 중요하지않음)   (약간 중요) (중요함)   (아주 중요함)

Survey 2

Please write the name of the animal under each photo:
각 사진 아래에있는 동물의 이름을 기재하십시오

소_____

돼지_____

말_____

개_____

캥거루_____

코알라_____

낙타_____

타조_____

바다소 _____
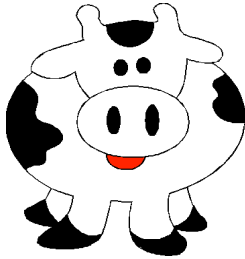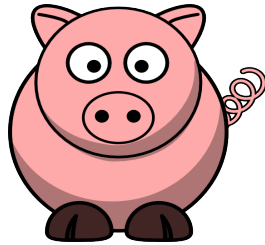

범고래_____

Please write the name of the animal under each photo:
각 사진 아래에있는 동물의 이름을 기재하십시오

소_____   돼지_____   말_____   개_____

캥거루_____ 코알라_____   낙타_____   타조_____

바다소 _____   범고래_____

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