

**Genre analysis of the ‘simple joke’ (with TESL/TEFL applications)**

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*(WD/08/03) Choose an authentic text (in English) which could be used in a language classroom to raise students awareness of genre conventions. Present a genre analysis of the text. Discuss the potential applications of genre analysis to the teaching of reading and writing in your teaching/learning context.*

NOTE: Special permission has been granted from CELS to use more than one text for the genre analysis of this assignment.

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper has two main objectives, the presentation and discussion of (1) genre analysis of authentic jokes and (2) potential applications of genre based teaching in my own teaching context. The first part of this paper will constitute an attempt to define jokes as a genre, discuss the history, importance and difficulty of joke analysis, make a contrast with other genres and also present an original framework for joke analysis which will be used to analyze two authentic jokes. The second part will focus on ideas for genre in the Japanese EFL classroom, namely by using a genre context study activity and two other genre analysis based activities.

## **2. Genre based analysis and teaching**

According to Johns (2002), in the timeframe of the 1970s and 1980s, the focus on psycholinguistic/cognitive approaches led to learner-centered classrooms. The process approach became commonplace in the writing classrooms while in speaking classrooms, the focus on form moved to a focus on fluency. However, there has been another shift over the last few years to an approach that focuses on the ‘situations’ or ‘contexts’ of the speaking and/or writing. Burns (2001) contributes that ESL pedagogy has failed to teach learners what they need to know to be ‘socially powerful’. It has focused on ‘enquiry learning, process, and naturalism’, but has deprived learners a systematic explanation of how language functions in social contexts (p. 200). Therefore, "[a]n important reason to consider genre-based instruction is that of empowerment: if

students are able to understand, access and manipulate genres, they acquire 'cultural capital'" (Bradford-Watts 2003). By not doing this explicitly, "(we deny) students the means to participate in and challenge the cultures of power they will encounter when interacting with members of the target culture" (Bradford-Watts 2003). The relationship between culture and language can be directly addressed by demonstrating to learners how language choices are made by looking at the vocabulary and grammatical choices and by studying the 'who, what, where, when, how, and why' of the text's situation and context (Paltridge 2001). It seems the study of context and genre itself is gaining in importance for substantial reasons.

## **2.1 The connection of genre analysis and English as a Foreign Language (EFL)**

According to Hyland (2004), it is not only possible to teach genre, but necessary and essential to do so. By noticing established patterns, EFL students can identify a recipe from a joke or a poem. The schema of prior knowledge is what is used when noticing and adhering to genre conventions. According to Johns (2002:3) there is "a major paradigm shift" in literacy studies and in teaching with regard to genre. It seems that current L2 genre pedagogies are a response to process pedagogies that were born from communicative methods. (Hyland 2004:7).

Genre-based EFL teaching can be used with several pedagogical practices; there is no single teaching/learning approach associated with it (Derewianka 2003). The inherent risk of genre-based teaching is having an overly prescriptive product-focused approach that may diminish creativity, or create "repression verses expression" (Swales

2000). Perhaps it may also "undervalue skills needed to produce a text, and see the learners as largely passive" (Badger & White 2000). Therefore the 'process' must not be lost in the teaching (Kim and Kim 2005). The possibility of 'dumbing down' the learner seems to be a key issue in this area. The incorporation of a balanced product and process oriented teaching approach into the classroom would seem most appropriate, however difficult it may be to define and realize exactly what such an appropriate balance actually is. This idea is further discussed in Section 2.2.

## 2.2 Introduction to joke analysis

What is a joke? As a genre, jokes are reasonably easy to point out. Here are a few examples of well-established, easily recognizable types of jokes:

### Common joke types

- (1) the question-answer type of joke, sometimes but not necessarily taking the form of a genuine riddle (What did the cup say to the saucer?...)
- (2) Three-character/three-cycle type of joke (an Italian, a Jew and a donkey went to heaven...)
- (3) Simple joke: a simple story (narrative) type of joke (A boy went to his doctor one day..., or Did you hear the one about the boy who...)

*Figure 1. Easily recognizable types of jokes*

This paper shall focus on the genre of the 'simple joke' (number three), a joke genre that has good potential for usage in the EFL classroom because this type of joke is relatively simple to recognize and as a genre, it has only two main parts: the set up and

the punch line. We shall see, however, that it is extremely difficult to conduct a meaningful yet objective analysis of simple jokes.

### 2.3 The history of Joke Analysis in Linguistics

“Genre analysis seeks to account for the purpose and function of linguistic features.” (Johnson 2000:76). How about joke analysis in the field of linguistics? It is certainly not a very popular area of study. Perhaps for many, the simple joke seems to belong outside the realm of academics. In only a few words, the simple joke creates a multitude of paradoxes that defies orthodox analysis. This is an example of typical paradoxes created by the simple joke (Driessen 2001):

<p><u>Driessen's paradoxes</u></p> <p><b>1. Omnipresent yet elusive</b></p> <p>Everyone has heard and perhaps told a simple joke, yet very few people clearly understand the mechanics and psychology involved in the process.</p> <p><b>2. Nonsensical yet serious</b></p> <p>Simple jokes usually involve a degree of nonsense, yet the joke writer must be serious about the writing, in order to create 'good' nonsense.</p> <p><b>3. Friendly yet hostile</b></p> <p>The simple joke calls for a friendly laugh, but is often at the expense of someone else.</p> <p><b>4. A universal yet specific</b></p> <p>They have a 'pop' quality yet are very demanding in design.</p>
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*Figure 2. Typical paradoxes found in jokes*

Joke analysis requires an intellectual effort (cognition is involved in understanding the double entendre or/or incongruence), yet such scholarly attention spoils the punch line. ‘Cohesion’ (Halliday 1976) must occur for the joke to be

functional, yet this very cohesion must also be destroyed for the joke to be functional. This paradoxical nature of the joke is further complicated by the fact that the joke involves perception and performance, cognition and action. A joke is intellectual and emotional, institutionalized and spontaneous (Driessen 2001). Is an unfunny joke still a joke? If only a few people recognize a joke as a joke, does it still belong in the joke genre? If not, which genre would it belong? Is a genre specific analysis possible for a work that is extra-genre? Although these are intriguing questions, joke analysis remains an unpopular academic area. Only two directly relevant large academic works have been unearthed by this writer: Attardo and Raskin's *Semantic Script-based Theory of Humor/General Theory of Verbal Humor* (1991) and Ritchie's *The Linguistic Analysis of Jokes* (2004).

Raskin (1985) first proposed the semantic script theory of jokes, later revised with Attardo as the General Theory of Verbal Humor (Attardo and Raskin, 1991; Raskin and Attardo, 1994). They use semantic scripts (frames, schemas) to map the linguistic and real-world knowledge necessary to interpret the jokes. Attardo and Raskin use this top down approach to come to their General Theory. On the other hand, Ritchie uses a bottom up analysis and admits that his work is far from conclusive and stresses that there currently is no theory of how humor works. In many ways, these two works exist on opposite sides of a spectrum and involve very different approaches. Without anything definitive to work with (Attardo and Raskin's work is too general for this paper and Ritchie's is incomplete), I decided that I must devise my own definitions and frameworks to create a more useful analysis of the simple joke.

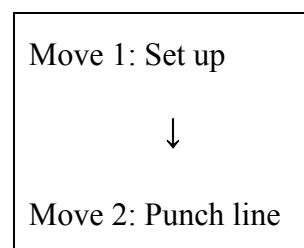
## 2.4 The constitution and mechanics of the joke

What does a joke constitute? Gruner (1978) created this list with good potential:

<u>Guner's list</u>	
Exaggeration	Incongruity
Surprise	Slapstick
The absurd	Human predicaments
Ridicule	Defiance
Violence	Verbal humor

*Figure 3. Gruner's list*

The list is fine, but far from a complete description of what a joke actually is. As a genre, the simple joke has simple mechanics. There are only two parts: the setup and the punch line. An orthodox analysis with 'moves' of a simple joke may look as follows:



*Figure 4. The simple analysis*

While this analysis (Fig. 4) is unequivocally non-falsifiable and completely objective, the results are hardly enlightening and, at least to this writer, borders on mundane. Moreover, "Textual analysis does not itself provide a rationale of why texts have acquired certain features" (Swales 1990:7). The simple analysis in Figure 4. does not



capture the real essence of the work, therefore ironically negating one of the greatest potentials of genre analysis.

A good joke must have a good set up and a good surprise in the punch line. In most genres, the successfulness of the intended outcome of the writing is not necessary in the analysis of the genre (a bad Sci-Fi film is still a Sci-Fi film), but considering that the simple joke, if not effective, is either a non-joke (necessarily a different genre), or an unfunny joke (recognizable as a joke, therefore stays in the joke genre, but ineffective) there appears to be a need to include an analysis of the joke's effectiveness in the analysis, to establish which genre the work actually belongs to. Such analysis is, however, highly subjective and almost threatens to make a mockery of other (more objective) genre analysis.

Criteria for the simple joke:

The simple joke, under detailed analysis, is far from being simple. With a highly limited word count the joke must satisfy a number of highly specific conventions, and then, most importantly, render the reader/listener to an amused state. The simple joke is different from most other genres because straightforward adherence to the conventions alone will usually only produce extra-genre texts ('non-jokes'), and unlike writing for similarly briefly written genres such as 'claims forms' or 'postcards', even a total understanding of the genre conventions will not guarantee successful results as a writer for this particular genre. Because of the lack of relevant academic work in this field, I have opted to compose my own criteria to help establish the simple joke as a

genre. As stated above, the simple joke has two parts: the set up and the punch line.

<p><u>Criteria for the simple joke genre</u></p> <p>(a) A good set up must</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. establish a situation and an expectation</li><li>2. be short enough to keep keen attention</li><li>3. be easy to understand</li><li>4. not contain anything funnier than the punch line</li><li>5. provide contrast for the punch line's impact</li></ol> <p>(b) A good punch line must</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. work off the set up</li><li>2. provide a contrast/incongruence, surprise and/or exaggeration</li></ol> <p>Additionally:</p> <p>There is always a 'funny word' in the joke. A 'funny word' is a word that has been strategically placed in the joke to trigger a laugh or amusement. This 'funny word' is often (but not always) placed at the very end of the punch line. It may or may not be a 'funny sounding' word.</p>
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*Figure 5. Proposed criteria for the simple joke as a genre*

According to Ritchie (2003), 'supplementary information' may be included in the joke that is not actually necessary for the joke to function (be recognized) as a joke, yet is included to enhance its 'jokehood' (liveliness as a joke). This is Ritchie's list:

<u>Ritchie's 'enhancing supplement' list</u>	
Inappropriateness	Question solving
Thwarted expectations	Disparagement
Superiority over joke character(s)	Embellishment
Dramatic tension	Facilitation
Parallelism	Prank
Ingenuity	Funny words

*Figure 6. Ritchie's 'enhancing supplements' for a joke*

In a nutshell, the breadth of criteria involved in simple joke writing establishes it as a deceptively simple yet irregular type of genre that calls for its own unique analysis framework.

## **2.5 Joke one and its analysis**

According to Ritchie, his own work on joke analysis is not complete. It is nevertheless a milestone in joke analysis and therefore I have incorporated some of Ritchie's above observations into my own joke analysis framework. The following is an example of a simple joke and my detailed analysis of it:

*It's tough being a vegetarian!  
 But actually, you know I really do enjoy vegetarian foods.  
 ...especially with a little pork.*

The setup is comprised of line one and line two. The punch line is the third and final line. My analysis framework is used to analyze the five aspects of the set up and three aspects of the punch line. It also focuses on the features such as contrasts/incongruences and lists some supplemental areas that are necessary to attain a fuller understanding of the design of the joke.

Humor is a wide, often subjectively treated study. Despite many theories of humor across disciplines such as psychology, linguistics, anthropology, and medicine, it is still nearly impossible to determine how humor works. (Gardner 2008:9)

Because of the established elusiveness and paradoxical nature of simple jokes, rather than attempting to ignore the simple joke's uniqueness as a genre and deal with only the most objective types of data for the sake of convenience, I have (with due reservations) attempted to incorporate objective and subjective data collection within a single framework.

<i>Is it a joke or a non-joke?</i> <b>It is a joke.</b>	
<i>If it is a joke, how do you rate the funniness?</i> (low mid <b>high</b> )	
<i>What was the punch line?</i> <b>...especially with a little pork.</b>	
<b>The Set up</b>	<b>Rating (1 is low)</b>
<i>Situation and/or an expectation establishment</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<i>Brevity (short enough to keep keen attention?)</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<i>Understandability</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<i>Dryness (non-jokeness)</i>	1 2 3 <b>4</b> 5
<i>Contrast for the punch line</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<b>The Punch line</b>	<b>Rating (1 is low)</b>
<i>Effectiveness (working off of the set up)</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<i>Contrast/exaggeration level</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<i>Proximity of funny word to end of punch line</i>	1 2 3 4 <b>5</b>
<b>What is the situation or expectation?</b> A vegetarian's talk about how hard it is being a vegetarian in this world.	<b>Contrasts/incongruences</b> Vegetarian vs. non vegetarian A difficulty vs. a non-difficulty Vegetables vs. pig/pork Healthy sounding food vs. fatty food 'Sacred' image vs. liar image
<b>Supplemental Information</b>	<b>Answer Yes/No (If Yes, explain)</b>
<i>Did the joke solve a direct question?</i>	No
<i>Did it involve disparagement?</i>	Yes – slight disparagement of the speaker
<i>Did it involve tension?</i>	Yes –the difficulties of the vegetarian
<i>Was there any word play?</i>	No
<i>Did it involve a prank?</i>	No
<i>Did it make someone sound superior?</i>	No
<i>Rate the ingenuity of the joke</i>	Low Mid <b>High</b>
<i>Special knowledge necessary:</i>	vegetarian
<i>Where there any funny sounding words?</i>	Yes
List the funny sounding words: <b>Pork</b>	

Figure 7. Analysis of joke number one

This framework (Fig. 7) has been designed to have the analyzer provide numeric (degree) responses in a vain effort to fully capture the true essence of the writing for this genre. This of course is impossible. However, the usage of numeric values seemed the most sensible way to combat the elusive nature of jokes. As can be seen in the chart, the sample joke has been given high marks in the numeric ratings. It should be noted that the success of a joke is dependant on the entire context and delivery of the content, none of which can be reliably pre-detected or predetermined by any reader/analyzer. This is another incorrigible aspect of joke analysis. The simple joke as a genre appears to be too complex for any one analyzer (or a group of analyzers) to create a fully objective and universally acceptable analysis of. This does not automatically make the (admittedly subjective) results in Figure 7 useless and/or superficial. Contrarily, this clearly demonstrates the ‘objectivity defying’, artistic nature of the simple joke and helps establish it as a unique genre for which orthodox analysis would not do justice. (A poignant analogy would be a computer generated color analysis of Picasso’s *Guernica*. The computer generated color analysis would perhaps be valid, but only on a mundane level and would certainly be missing the *raison d’être* of the work.)

Although it may be instantly shunned for not sustaining a high degree of objectivity, the proposed joke analysis chart is nevertheless useful and perhaps even necessary in some of ways. For example, for writers it provides a thorough checklist and rating system for the crucial components of their joke in progress and for readers it provides a standardized (albeit subjective) system to analyze with, and helps readers

uncover the ‘hidden’ features of the simple joke. “A novice writer could then be presented with a model comprising the writing conventions established by that writing community.” (Johnson 2000:77). This helps the joke writer to be a better joke writer and it helps the genre analyzer identify and numerically rate the components of the writing. In short, it makes the elusive components of a joke more tangible, comparable and probably more memorable. More practical applications of such features are discussed in Section 3 of this paper.

The analysis of a joke would not be complete without a line-by-line narrative summary of the linguistic nuances of the joke. The following shall be attached to the analysis of the example joke:

<p><i>Line number one:</i> <i>It's tough being a vegetarian!</i></p>	<p>This opening line sets a serious tone and begs for sympathy with <i>It's tough</i>. It also induces an expectation. The reader expects to find out what is so tough about being a vegetarian.</p> <p><b><u>This line accomplishes:</u></b> tension, curiosity and sympathy.</p>
<p><i>Line number two:</i> <i>But actually, you know, I really do enjoy vegetarian foods.</i></p>	<p>This line changes the ‘air’ of the joke. <i>But actually</i> initializes the change, <i>you know</i> makes the narrator sound friendlier and closer than before. <i>I really do enjoy</i> completes the transition: the serious ‘air’ becomes pleasant. There is a feeling of relief. It makes the reader wonder that kind of vegetarian foods the narrator actually enjoys eating.</p> <p><b><u>This line accomplishes:</u></b> tension release and a raise in curiosity.</p>
<p><i>Line number three:</i> <i>...especially with a little pork.</i></p>	<p>It is funny because the outcome was not expected. It is funny because <i>a little pork</i> was mixed in with the sacred sounding vegetarian food. It is also funny because of the sound of the word <i>pork</i>. Pork starts with P and ends with</p>

	<p>K. These are high impact sounds (consonant plosives) that sound more amusing than other softer sounds (Menchen 1936). If the word <i>beef</i> (with the low impact F sound) had been substituted in the punch line (<i>Especially with a little beef</i>), it would not have sounded as funny. A <i>little fish</i>, would be an even worse substitute because of the added confusion brought on by the word <i>little</i>. (A little fish could also mean a <i>small fish</i>.) Pork is a good choice also because the image of a pig (and fatness) mixed in with vegetables is immediately funnier than a cow or fish mixed in with vegetables.</p> <p><b><u>This line accomplishes:</u></b> It is the puchline.</p>
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Figure 8. Line by line narrative analysis of joke one

The line-by-line narrative analysis in Fig. 8 is also subjective and relies heavily on the context and the reader's understanding of the context, therefore, different analyzers will probably produce widely different results.

## 2.6 Joke vs. non-joke

Thus far this paper has focused on what the simple joke is. What is a non-joke? How does it contrast with the simple joke? To help answer these questions, a non-joke (a slight variation of the original joke) is provided below:

*It's tough being a vegetarian!*

*But actually, you know, I really do enjoy my vegetarian foods.*

*Meat tastes nice with my vegetables.*

It literally has an identical message to the original joke, yet it is now a non-joke. What



has happened? (1) The funny word ('meat') has been moved to the front of the punch line (the timing has been changed), (2) the contrast with the set up has been lost and (3) the plosives have been dropped. What might appear to be small changes have made the punch line unrecognizable as the punch line and therefore has rendered this piece a non-joke, even though the literal message remains unchanged. There seems to be only a very fine line between a joke and a non-joke, however the small difference creates a huge difference in the outcome. In this case, the work is no longer a joke; it can only be classified as a non-joke, and no longer fits in the simple joke genre. This again suggests that the factors leading to the joke's jokehood (including the subjectively deducted factors) are in some way relevant in the analysis of jokes.

## **2.7 Analysis of joke number two**

*While reading the morning newspaper...*

***Husband:** Honey, you know about organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous, right? Did you know there has also been a Procrastinator's Society since 1947?*

***Wife:** Really!? I never knew. Maybe you should go dear...*

***Husband:** Yep, it's too bad they haven't met yet.*

<i>Is it a joke or a non-joke?</i> It is a joke.	
<i>If it is a joke, how do you rate the funniness?</i> (low mid high)	
<i>What was the punch line?</i> Yep, it's too bad they haven't met yet.	
<b>The Set up</b>	<b>Rating (1 is low)</b>
<i>Situation and/or an expectation establishment</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<i>Brevity (short enough to keep keen attention?)</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<i>Understandability</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<i>Dryness (non-jokeness)</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<i>Contrast for the punch line</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<b>The Punch line</b>	<b>Rating (1 is low)</b>
<i>Effectiveness (working off the set up)</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<i>Contrast/exaggeration level</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<i>Proximity of funny work to the end of the punch line</i>	1 2 3 4 5
<b>What is the situation or expectation?</b>	<b>Contrasts/incongruences</b>
The trivial/novel 'fact' of the existence of a Procrastinator's Club.	reality vs. fiction seriousness vs. jest real help vs. no help
<b>Supplemental Information</b>	<b>Answer Yes/No (If Yes, explain)</b>
<i>Did the joke solve a direct question?</i>	No
<i>Did it involve disparagement?</i>	No
<i>Did it involve tension?</i>	No
<i>Was there any word play?</i>	Yes – mildly with procrastinator
<i>Did it involve a prank?</i>	Yes, a mild prank on the wife
<i>Did it make someone sound superior?</i>	No
<i>Rate the ingenuity of the joke</i>	Low Mid High
<i>Special knowledge necessary:</i>	Alcoholics Anonymous, procrastinator
<i>Where there any funny sounding words?</i>	Yes mildly
List the funny sounding words: procrastinator (the strong P and K sound)	

Figure 9. Analysis of joke number two

At first glance, this joke may seem to have very little in common with joke number one. Figure 9 however shows some interesting similarities (and differences). Both jokes score high in the set up and punch line ratings and they both have numerous contrasts embedded in the jokes. An interesting similarity between the two jokes can be found at the end of the chart: both jokes make use of the strong P and K sounds. The first joke used the word 'pork' as a funny word and the second joke used the word 'procrastinate' as its funny word. Because the funny word 'pork' was placed at the end of the punch line in joke number one, it was more directly effective as a funny word than 'procrastinate' in the second joke, which was not only not at the end of the punch line, but was not in the punch line at all.

Because 'procrastinate' only appears in the set up, it can easily be overlooked as the funny word, but it certainly is the funny word of joke two. Both jokes rely on the plosives to enhance their funniness. The major differences between the two jokes (other than the topics) were that (1) the first joke was a simple single person narrative while the second one involved a mild prank on the wife within a short dialogue and (2) the placement of the funny word was radically different, therefore changing the ultimate strategy of the joke.

The placement of the funny word in joke two deserves special attention. The discourse pattern has changed and has become effectively more 'transactional' (Nunan 1999:53). Joke two retains a high level of funniness even though the funny word was not in the punch line. In normal circumstances, that could easily render the joke a non-joke because the punch line would be unrecognizable as a punch line. What has

happened? Rather than relying on the sight and perceived sound from the reading of the funny word in the punch line (an immediate ‘verbal slapstick’ type of humor), this joke relied on the lingering memory in the reader’s mind of the nuances of the funny word from the set up. This could be described as a form of forced ‘anaphoric cohesion’ (Coulthard, et al. 2000:53). It forced the reader to recall the funny word (procrastinate) from the set up and create the impact in their own mind, rather than have them read it on paper. The arrival of the solution to the joke’s initially perceived incongruence provides the reader satisfaction partially because of the joke’s overall level of ingenuity in forcing the anaphoric cohesion. It is also gratifying because the reader is (1) given the opportunity to provide his/her own solution to the perceived incongruence (and therefore the joke brings about the natural and typical satisfaction derived from ‘a job well done’) and (2) ‘cohesive harmony’ (Coulthard, et al. 2000:55) is regained with the help of the reader.

This second joke demonstrates that even within the rigid genre conventions of the simple joke, it is possible to use ingenuity, deviate slightly, achieve good results and still remain within the genre. However, this modified simple joke signifies a convention variation that may be more useful if classified as a ‘sub-genre’ within the simple joke genre.

## **2.8 Problems with the joke analysis**

As with some other discourse analysis (or critique, which this joke analysis necessarily overlaps with), the results are egocentric. For example, consider this

abridged analysis of joke number two from a Japanese EFL student:

<b>The Set up</b>	Rating (1 is low)
Situation and/or expectation establishment	1 2 3 4 5
Brevity (short enough to keep keen attention?)	1 2 3 4 5
Understandability	1 2 3 4 5
Dryness (non-jokeness)	1 2 3 4 5
Contrast for the punch line	1 2 3 4 5
<b>The Punch line</b>	Rating (1 is low)
Effectiveness (working off of the set up)	1 2 3 4 5
Contrast/exaggeration level	1 2 3 4 5
Proximity of funny work to end of punch line	1 2 3 4 5

Figure 10. One EFL student's analysis of joke number two (abridged)

Ten students were required to analyze the second joke with my framework. None of the results were identical. In fact most of the results differed widely. What could have caused this wide variance? The writer of the above analysis was an intermediate level EFL student who did not know the meaning or significance of 'Alcoholics Anonymous', nor did she know the meaning of 'procrastinate'. The student needed special background knowledge to understand this joke (just as I needed this special background knowledge about her to understand her analysis). Considering these points, it becomes

clearer that analysis of this type is indeed largely dependent on the context and the analyzer's knowledge of that context. The EFL student has since then been instructed on the meanings and cultural significance of 'Alcoholics Anonymous' and 'procrastinate'; she can now appreciate the joke and give it a higher rating. This before/after effect realization has given me much to consider about what discourse and genre analysis actually accomplishes. Paltridge (2001:122) shares similar concerns over using genre in the classroom. This before/after effect can be an easily overlooked area but should be more pronounced and perhaps more prominently included in the study of the 'context'. This effect can surely be turned into something productive in the classroom. Practical uses of context study borne from genre analysis can be found in Section 3.3 of this paper.

## **2.9 Observed conventions for the simple joke genre**

Two simple jokes were analyzed for this paper. Both were easily recognizable as jokes by native English speakers. What was noticed was that both simple jokes relied on the 'set up and the punch line' format, funny sounding plosives, and some special cultural knowledge. Non-native English speakers seem to have trouble analyzing works in this genre, especially when the joke calls for cultural knowledge and/or knowledge of higher-level vocabulary.

As with most genres, the communities that use the simple joke have certain expectations about the design and implementation of the joke. Below (Fig. 11) are my observed conventions of the simple joke genre. Deviations from these conventions often

produces non-jokes, while simple adherence alone to the conventions does not guarantee 'jokehood' or even funniness. Therefore there seems to be an elusive quality to simple jokes that often defies standard analysis frameworks. My proposed genre conventions for the simple joke are as follows:

**Genre conventions of the simple joke**

1. The simple joke must have a good set up and a good punch line.
  - a. the set up should create an expectation
  - b. the set up should be concise and easy to follow
  - c. the set up should be dry
  - d. the set up must provide contrast for the punch line
  - e. the punch line must contrast the set up and/or exaggerate something
2. There must be at least one contrast/incongruence. Numerous contrasts can enhance the potency of the joke.
3. Funny sounds, especially at the end of the punch line enhance the funniness of the joke. The consonant plosives such as the strong P and K sounds are popular sound choices for jokes (as a form of verbal slapstick) where the sound seems to attack ('slap') the reader/listener in a humorous way.
4. The reader/listener expects their initial understanding of the presented situation in the set up, to be falsified by the end of the punch line[Forced Reinterpretation (Ritchie 2004)].
- 5 The degree of ingenuity in the dichotomy of the set up and the punch line (such as creative word play) often separates the jokes from the unfunny jokes and the non-jokes.

*Figure 11. Observed genre conventions of the simple joke*

### **3 Practical Applications of Genre Analysis in the EFL classroom**

#### **3.1 A pair of practical activities**

A schema is a frame for both understanding and producing content. Schema should be developed in the reading/writing EFL classroom for the following reasons (Hyland 2004:72):

- Students will write more when they are writing about a familiar topic  
(Freidlander, 1990)
- Writers at any level draw upon their own background experiences and therefore the writing is at least partially shaped by classroom experiences
- Schema is developed from social and cognitive processes inside (and outside) of the classroom

The following pair has been devised to develop schema and writing skills:

#### **Activities for the study of genre**

##### **1. Authentic text genre analysis and mimicry**

Students are required to find an authentic (relatively short) English text from a magazine or the internet and (a) do an analysis of the text and (b) write a similar text in the same genre. Discuss how the initial genre analysis helped complete the activity.

##### **2. Authentic text genre analysis and parody**

Students are required to find an authentic (relatively short) English text from a magazine or the internet and (a) do an analysis of the text and (b) create a parody of the text in its genre. Discuss how the initial genre analysis helped complete the activity.

*Figure 12. Two genre based activities*



The two activities in Figure 12 are relatively easy to implement assuming the students are given instruction on how to do a genre analysis. I have had successful trials with these activities with twelve Japanese EFL students in the following genres: magazine advertisement, want ad, restaurant review, movie review, horoscope, and travel information. It was not difficult for them to uncover the conventions of these common genres. When the students showed good results with the mimicry of the genres (Activity 1) they moved on to do parodies of the genres (Activity 2). The dryness of Activity 1 contrasted well with the parody involved in Activity 2. This dichotomy worked very much like the set up and punch line arrangement of the jokes discussed in the first half of this paper and provided extremely lively and amusing results with the students. I believe the added enjoyment from the parody creation made the activities memorable for the students and provided them with (1) intrinsic motivation and (2) the means to uncover genre conventions in the future on their own. It is assumed that the combination of (1) and (2) will assist in the further development of the students' reading and writing skills. It should be noted that these two activities could often be used in tandem without the fear of boredom as long as the target genres are changed each time.

### **3.2 Genre context analysis for reading and writing development**

As discussed earlier in this paper, genre can be much more than the sum of its visible parts such as lexis, sentences or grammar. Important factors include the socio-cultural context of production/interpretation of the text, its intended purpose, the audience, the discourse community's expectations and even its relationship with other

texts (Paltridge 2001:45). Teachers should have their students study these contextual issues at some point in their reading/writing education. The following worksheet (Fig. 13), adapted from Paltridge (2001:51), was used in my own EFL classes with intermediate and high level students. It was used to teach students to be better readers of texts because of the detailed genre/context analysis involved and was also used to help writing students better understand the genre they were writing in. Perhaps most importantly, it is well suited to assist in achieving the proper balance within the product vs. process writing issue, discussed in Section 3.1.

What is the text about?	
What is the purpose of the text?	
Where is the text from? (magazine, etc.)	
What is the tone of the text? (formal/informal...)	
Background information of the author:	
Who is the intended audience?	
What is the relationship of the author and the intended audience?	
Are there any rules or expectations that govern how the text was written?	
What cultural knowledge is assumed by the text?	
What other knowledge is assumed?	
Which genre does this text belong?	
Which key words from the text support your analysis? Explain.	

*Figure 13. Genre/context analysis worksheet adapted from Paltridge (2001)*

Genre analysis is powerful. Genres adhere to their own conventions and therefore the study of the genres exists outside the confines of ‘grammar’ or ‘vocabulary’ study. In a sea of methods and theories, genre analysis based study stands out because it allows teachers and students to work on language reading and writing without artificially imposed constraints (such as rigid teacher generated grammar based syllabuses) because genres naturally transcend such artificial boundaries. Genre analysis allows for a real study of authentic text. Perhaps the biggest concern in the West associated with genre based teaching of writing is the possibility of “repression verses expression” (Swales 2000). Indeed, “(g)enre analysis has been criticized by some educationalists that feel it is too prescriptive.” (Johnson 2000:89). However, considering the standard teacher centered teaching of Japanese school systems, rules to “adhere to the prescribed forms” may actually be comforting, or at least ‘normal’ for Japanese students. From what I have seen, genre analysis has been welcome in my EFL classes and has not been treated novel by my students. It seems the concern about “repression versus expression” need not be a realistic concern for the teaching of my own EFL students. This is perhaps an indication that the concern of “repression” may actually be a Western convention that does not exist (or at least not at the same level) in Japan.

## **4 Conclusion**

This paper has taken liberties with the genre analysis of the simple joke. Two jokes were analyzed with an original analysis framework and conventions of the simple joke as a genre have been uncovered. It is hoped that this paper has sufficiently demonstrated that orthodox analysis of simple jokes cannot fully capture the true nature of texts in this unique genre and that although there are reservations even from this writer, there seems to be a real need to add subjective data to the analysis of simple jokes. This may be why few academics dare venture into this paradoxical and elusive genre.

Activities based on general genre studies allow learners to explore English from an entirely realistic perspective not bound by artificial frameworks. This paper has discussed the usage of three such activities in a positive light and this writer plans to continue adding such genre based teaching to his repertoire in hopes that it will genuinely help his students acquire the ‘cultural capital’ that is said to be lacking in many EFL classrooms today.

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