# The use of L1 as a Source of Humour to Facilitate Interaction in EFL Classrooms

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**Abstract**
The recent decades have witnessed a remarkable increase in the body of research that examine the relationship between humour and language acquisition. This study, however, uses the micro-analytical approach of Conversation Analysis (CA) to investigate the impact of the teachers' competent use of the first language (L1) as a source of humour on classroom interaction and, consequently, learning. The turn-by-turn analysis of the data shows how the teacher's use of L1 as a source of humour resulted in smoothness in the interaction and helped in avoiding communication breaking down as a result of the students' insufficient knowledge of the target language (L2) knowledge. The study found that the careful use of L1 as a source of humour also led to the production of longer and more meaningful turns by students, who are characterised as having limited linguistic resources. This use of L1, however, is context sensitive. Pedagogically, despite the scepticism surrounding the use of L1, the paper concludes by emphasising the usefulness of the competent use of L1 as a source of humour in EFL to increase classroom interaction and recommends increasing the teachers' awareness regarding the potential of the competent and occasional use of L1.

*Keywords:* Conversation analysis, EFL, use of humour, Interactional Competence, Use of L1

**Introduction**

In this paper, I show how L1 is used as a source of humour in naturally occurring classroom interactions, not as an end in itself, but rather to facilitate interaction and to increase students' interactional competence. Through the use of a turn-by-turn analysis, the paper shows how the use of humour, in L1 in this context, is accomplished and the social function thereof. The paper also shows how this use contributed to language learning. It is worth mentioning here that learning is viewed through a sociocultural lens. In other words, learning takes place via socialisation and thus entails increasing the students' engagement in a more meaningful discussion in which they display understanding of the on-going talk and negotiate meaning with other participants.

Some people might argue that the use of L1, traditionally referred to as code-switching, has been investigated thoroughly in the field on second language acquisition (SLA) via different methods of investigation such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, video-stimulated recall, questionnaires and interviews (Norrish, 1997; Ferguson, 2003; Ustunel & Seedhouse, 2005; Raschka et al., 2009). However, as far as I am concerned, none of these studies has investigated the relationship of the use of L1, humour and interactional competence, which is the focus of this paper.

The analysis is conducted by identifying talk that is understood as humour by students and the teacher by examining interactional sequences that are marked by laughter. Humour is understood as an action that is interactionally achieved and socially situated in an orderly way. In this paper, no conceptual distinction is made between humour and play language with regard to meaning. In fact, the two terms are used interchangeably (Bell, 2005).

This paper challenges the common assumptions regarding the use of both L1 and humour as beneficial interactional resources in EFL, and presents evidence in the form of a low-level EFL classroom in which the teacher establishes a culture of humour, and how this leads to a notable increase in the students' engagement and, consequently, to an increase in their interactional competence.

**The importance of humour for ESL/EFL**

Humour is one of the features that has been examined within different disciplines such as psychology, sociology and education. It has been characterised as a complex phenomenon in human behaviour, as it entails "cognitive, emotional, behavioural, physiological and social aspects" (Foot & McCreaddie, 2006, p. 1079). However, it has only been three decades since the linguistic aspects of humour have received some attention from SLA researchers. Nevertheless, once recognised, the impact of humour on the acquisition of a second/foreign language has received tremendous attention. Subsequently, a substantial amount of research has emerged as a result of linguists' increasing interest in this long existing yet rarely investigated phenomenon.

In this section, the researcher will focus on some of the related studies that have investigated humour in the classroom and have linked it to different aspects of learning and teaching.

Tarone (2000), for instance, recognizes the impact of humour on reducing the level of anxiety associated with learning a foreign language. He says humour has the ability to reduce learners' affective filters. He also highlights the impact of humour on students' cognition, as he

connects humour to the facilitation of the process of memorising the new language. Tarone concludes that humour allows students to "try on different voices and language varieties" (p. 45).

Hay (2001), on the other hand, examines the strategies that participants employ to display understanding and agreement via humour in interactions. The author identifies laughter and echoing the speaker's words as noticeable support strategies that signal the understanding of humour. Involvement in and contributions to the humorous episodes are also categorised as signals of not only understanding humour, but also of agreeing with it.

Similar to this study, Schmitz (2002) investigates humour in EFL classroom. To him, using humour in the classroom helps the students to get a grasp of the different aspect of interactions due to the impact it has on the classroom environment. Humour, he argues, makes the classroom more interesting. This, he claims, helps in improving the students' language proficiency. Schmitz, however, differentiates between the types of humour used by the teacher based on the students' level of proficiency. Exaggeration, hyperbole and irony, for instance, are to be used with lower levels students. Cultural jokes, on the other hand, are less likely to be understood by students' with limited L2 knowledge. Consequently, should be limited to students with higher level of language proficiency. Similarly, van Dam (2002) linked humour to the increasing level of students' participation, but used discourse analysis as a tool of investigation. van Dam argues that the high level of participation associated with humour in EFL classrooms could be attributed, at least in part, to face work. For van Dam high levels of participation are not a result of one day's work on the part of the teacher. In fact, participation is usually accomplished over a period until humour becomes normal practice. The paper concludes that humour in classrooms leads to the production of a fearless environment in which making mistakes does not constitute a loss of face.

Askildson (2005) and Bell (2005) examine the use of humour in second language classrooms emphasizing its importance to the teaching and learning process. Nevertheless, Bell (2005) focuses on the relationship between the use of language play and language proficiency. Bell argues that the students' proficiency increases with the use of play language. In a following paper, Bell (2009) investigates the importance of overtly discussing and analysing humour in classroom activities linking it to L2 learners' linguistic and sociolinguistic development.

Garland's (2010) study supports van Dam's (2002) findings. Garland, however, examines students' use of what he calls "humorous mock translation". By this, he refers to occasions in which the students use imagined translations of L2 into L1. This kind of translation is initiated by both students and teachers, and is mainly done to accomplish the mitigation of a loss of face. In other words, the students, in particular, use it in order to be perceived as funny people who are able to make others laugh, rather than to be perceived as slow students who lack L2 knowledge. By using humorous mock translations, the author argues, the students reflect expertise in the L2 by applying the rules they knew.  Thus, this serves as a display of expertise that might elevate a student's status and enable him or her to claim membership of a community of experts in a lesser-known language.

Similarly to this study, Forman (2011) examines humour initiated by teachers in low-level classes in Thai university EFL classrooms. He identifies two functions of humour in EFL classrooms, namely reducing the social distance between the students and the teacher, and creating

solidarity. He states that humour helps students to focus on form and increases classroom participation despite the learners' low levels of proficiency.

Lehtimaja (2011) also argues in favour of using humour in EFL classrooms. The author investigates humour in seven secondary schools in which Finish was taught as a foreign language. However, the focus of this paper is on the students' rather than on the teacher's use of humour. The study shows the systematic way in which the students deviate from the surrounding teacher's serious talk and marked their contribution as humour. The study concludes by emphasising that, despite the negative stance that the students display in relation to the teacher's talk, playfulness does not threaten the teacher's pedagogical agenda. In fact, teachers show that they can align themselves with students' playfulness and engage in serious work at the same time. The conclusion supports the claim made in this paper; in other words, teachers will always have the final say with regard to when or for how long humour can be used inside the classroom. It also shows that the scepticism surrounding the use of humour in EFL/ ESL classrooms is unfounded.

In relatively recent study, Pomerantz and Bell (2011) examine humour using discourse analysis. They investigate the function of humour in a Spanish-as-a-foreign-language classroom. As have many other linguists, they focus on students' initiated humour and associate humour with the students' lack of L2 knowledge. They argue that students use humour as a "safe house", allowing them to criticise the institution and the instructional norm within that institution without being overtly critical and without being held accountable for what they had said.

Waring (2013) also examines humour in ESL classrooms but using the term "being playful". The paper sheds light on an extremely important aspect of the use of humour in ESL classrooms, namely students' identities. Using conversation analysis as the method of investigation, she investigates how the participants' identities, in this case the students' identities, played a role in "being playful". The paper shows how students brought different non-student identities into classroom talk using humour. According to Waring, "being playful" allows the students to experience mundane talk in an institutional setting. Similarly, Reddington and Waring (2015), also using conversation analysis, study episodes of humour in ESL classroom interactions. They find that humour in ESL classroom interactions is the result of the students' diversion from the on-going sequence organisation by producing turns that are characterised by having new and unexpected components.

Degoumois et al (2017) presents examples of the difficulty of expressing opinions in the classroom due to the students' sensitivity to being assessed by others. The authors identify two strategies used by the students express their opinion. Firstly, the students, they argue, tend to conclude their opinions using humour. They offer their opinions through humorous talk. They also either preface or conclude the presentation of their opinions with downgrading in order to both satisfy the sequential expectations resulting from the teachers' request to express an opinion and to avoid being held accountable for their opinions.

Farahani and Abdollahi (2018) study the effect of using humour techniques on developing EFL learner's speaking ability and willingness to communicate. Their data consist of 60 Iranian adult intermediate EFL learners who are divided into experimental and control group. The learners are given a pre- and post- test to examine their speaking ability and their willingness to speak. The

researchers find a significant different in the students' ability and willingness to speak between the experimental and control group. The experimental group that was exposed to techniques of humor in their EFL classroom showed more ability to speak and more willingness to communicate in the target language.

Finally, Fadel &  Al-Bargi (2018)  look at the characteristics and frequency of the usage of verbal humour at a Saudi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. They find a relationship between the frequency of the use of humour and the students'' level of proficiency. In fact, they argue, humour is used more frequently at higher level than lower ones. They identify; language play, irony, jokes, and self-defeating humour as the main types of humour used in the Saudi EFL classroom.

**Participants**
The data were collected from a Saudi language institute. The students were all native speakers of Arabic, as was the teacher. The students were studying English as part of their foundation programme, after which they would attend university and choose their specialties based on their GPAs. The selected data are part of a larger corpus that consists of 16 hours of recordings by three different teachers. However, this particular teacher, being a native speaker of Arabic, was the only one who used L1 as a source of humour. Her use of humour was unique in the sense that her classes were different from those of the other two teachers. Her classes were characterised by increased student engagement and a notable reduction in the social distance between the teacher and her students. It is worth mentioning that, when conducting this study, a teaching session of 120 minutes was recorded; however, only the part during which the teacher invited the students to close their books and answer a question regarding their real-life experiences is examined here. The question required the students to compare their lives to those of their grandparents. The goal was to elicit more personal answers from the students and to assess their ability to apply the knowledge that they had acquired in a different context. The chosen excerpts constitute what the researcher considered to be the most enjoyable moments of the lesson, as they are marked by episodes of laughter from both the teacher and from the students.

**Data Analysis**
The data were transcribed using conventions adapted from Have (1999) (see Appendix A). Following a detailed turn-by-turn analysis of the dataset, the researcher identified the recurring patterns of teacher-initiated laughter and examined the resulting interaction on the part of the students as proved by the next turn.

Conversation analysis was chosen as the method of analysis because it studies naturally occurring speech and shows that spoken interactions are systematic orderly in all its aspects. Conversation analysis is different from other methods of analysis such as discourse analysis with regard to its focus and method. It examines the data, in this case classroom interactions, using an emic as opposed to an etic approach. In other words, it investigates the data from within the system and does not impose any external factors on the analysis. It shows the method and the interactional resources to which the participants resorted in order to display understanding and achieve intersubjectivity.

By using a detailed, moment-by-moment analysis of the interactions, CA aims to describe and explain the different competences that the interactants use, as well as the resources on which they rely in order to become engaged in an intelligible and socially organised interaction.

**Interactional competence**

Interactional competence (IC) is one of the most important aspects of classroom skills that linguists have recently suggested should be investigated and included in curricula. However, there is no single specific definition of what the term 'interactional competence' might encompass. In fact, the term has been used as an inclusive label under which different types of competences have been discussed and included. Nevertheless, linguists agree on different points regarding the term; for example, there is agreement among scientists that IC is co-constructed and that it is a joint effort on the part of the interactors (Young, 1999; McCarthy, 2005).

With regard to institutional settings such as classrooms, IC requires the students' involvement in the on-going talk (Hall, 1999). This engagement should be meaningful, and takes the shape of an expert-novice relationship in which the expert offers constant support and guidance throughout the process of talk in interaction (Hall, 1999). The learners keep adjusting their L2 knowledge through meaning negotiation, as well as via other-initiated repairs and recasts (Wong & Waring, 2010). Walsh (2012) discusses IC in classrooms, adding that classroom interactional competence (CIC) was the "teachers' and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning" (p. 158). In other words, he highlights the importance of interaction and engagement in the process of learning. CIC, he argues, mainly involves the ways in which communication is managed by the interactants.

It is worth mentioning here that learners, particularly beginners, benefit from their knowledge of L1 when interacting in L2, particularly in unfamiliar contexts in which they lack knowledge in L2. The utilisation of L1 knowledge takes the form of borrowing some words or phrases, or even some interactional competences. The teacher's role in this case should be to guide the students by giving direct or indirect instruction that highlights the similarities or differences between L1 and L2 without the students losing face; this is where the role of humour may mitigate feedback or save face (van Dam, 2002; Garland, 2010).

This paper shows how the use humour led to the establishment of a culture in which the students' levels of engagement were relatively high, and there was no fear of making mistakes or of lacking sufficient knowledge to participate. The teacher built on the students' L1 knowledge and defied the stigma surrounding its use in EFL classrooms, particularly as a source of humour.

**Analysis**

The next excerpt is taken from an EFL reading classroom. After introducing the reading lesson and discussing the new vocabulary, the teacher started a new phase of the lesson in which she asked the students to give their opinions regarding what they considered to be characteristics of a good leader.

Excerpt (1)

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 1   T:    ↑okay now that we have finished the chapter can you
 2             tell me > in your opinion<, what are the characteristics
 3             of a good leader!
 4             (1.6)
 5   T:    "gair eno ykoon waseem" (tr. Other than being
 6             handsome) ((laughter))=
 7   SS:   ((laughter))
 8   S1:   $° taweel°$(tr. tall)
 9   S2:   $ "areedh"$ (tr. wide)
10   T:    (( laughter))
11   SS:   (( laughter))
12   T:    Oh ↑yeah the list can be too::: long but remember that
13             we are talking about the leader <a male or a female>
14             NOT a " Arees" (tr. groom) ((laughter))
15   SS:   ((laughter))
16   S3:   yes(.) teacher BUT even the leader should be "waseem"
17             (tr. handsome)=
18   T:    = we say handsome in English for "waseem"=
19   S3:   handsome (0.2) you know, look Canada president
20             ((laughter)), he is he is beautiful ((laughter))
21   SS:   [((laughter))]
22   T:    You mean their prime minister ' raees alwazara" (tr.
23             prime minister), well ((laughter)), I cannot deny that he
24             is hand some but above all he is what?
25             (0.5)
26   S4:   [smart]
27   S3:   [success]ful
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In this excerpt, the teacher used the discourse marker "okay" to announce the closing of a phase of the lesson when the new chapter was introduced and a move to the next phase in which the students were asked to give their personal opinions based on their understanding of the material introduced previously. The book's chapter is entitled "remarkable individuals". It discusses individuals across the world who have made a difference in their societies.

The teacher asks the students, "What are the characteristics of a good leader?" A relatively long intra-turn silence follows (1.6), which is understood by the teacher as a possible sign of misunderstanding of her question. The teacher takes the turn again and prompts the students to offer an opinion by using L1. She gives them an example of what the word "characteristic" might entail "other than being handsome", while simultaneously initiating humour. The teacher's use of the adjective "waseem" in L1, "tr. handsome", has made the noun "leader", which is usually used for both genders in classic Arabic, exclusively masculine which, in turn, has made her comment sexually suggestive. Discussing sexuality is considered to be inappropriate in classrooms in general and in the Saudi context in particular. However, the students' affiliation with the teacher and a chorus of laughter follows (line 7). By terminating the original target language agenda and using L1, the teacher not only introduced humour, but also encouraged the students to initiate it. This is proved in the subsequent two turns in which S1 and S2 added to the teacher's list of leaders' characteristics using L1.

In lines 9 and 10, we can see that the students replicated the teacher's humour by suggesting additional physical features that had sexual associations, something that could be considered to be irrelevant to the chapter introduced previously. In other words, by emulating the teacher's joke, the students showed understanding of the humour and agreement on its use in this context. We can also see that the students self-selected, a phenomenon that is relatively rare in EFL classrooms. The teacher (lines 11 and 12) and the rest of the class laugh at the students' (S1 and S2) humour. The teacher's lack of reaction to the use of L1 as a source of humour by the students seems to lead the rest of the class to consider the use of humour (L1) in the classroom as a legitimate practice.

The teacher takes the turn (lines 12-14) to comment on the students' contribution by acknowledging their answers. She uses "yeah" as an acknowledgement device, followed by her evaluation of their contributions. However, she uses a prolonged vowel with the word "to::::" to indicate that this can go on for ever. Following this, she seizes the opportunity to tease the students by reminding them that the word "leader" can be used for both genders and that they are talking about leaders not grooms. Once again, when it comes to invoking laughter, the teacher used L1 as a resource in a long and complex turn in the target language. In this example, we see how the teacher plays with the use of L1 in a creative way. She manages to get the message across using L2, yet initiates humour by drawing the students' attention to what she expects from them. In other words, she succeeds in creating a warm atmosphere for learning without deviating from her pedagogical agenda, as we can see in the rest of the excerpt.

The teacher's initiated humour resulted in a chorus of laughter involving the entire class, followed by S3 taking an unsolicited complex turn in which she managed to display a relatively advanced interactional competence. S3 took an unsolicited turn using a "yes" turn initially to agree with the teacher's assertion. Usually, the use of "yes" followed by other components is to indicate having epistemic access to the topic under discussion (Heritage, 1984; Jawhar, 2016) or to show agreement and consequently affiliation with what has been said in the previous turn (Pomerantz, 1984). However, S3 followed this by "but", which can be understood as an announcement of further elaboration. The use of "but" indicates an addition that might be dispreferred by the other participants and indicates disagreement. S3 closes her turn by resorting to humour using L1 to downplay her commitment to her opinion, which is in disagreement with that of the teacher. In this way, S3 managed to accomplish the interactional work of delivering her controversial opinion while simultaneously maintaining affiliation with the teacher's position regarding the topic in question.

The teacher latches onto S3's comment (line 18) and takes advantage of the student's use of L1 to place focus on form and to reintroduce the new word "handsome". S3 picks up the other-initiated repair and continues it by repeating it after the teacher. She uses the shared knowledge device "you know" to involve her and to add to the on-going talk by offering a real-life example of a "handsome" leader. However, she substitutes the new vocabulary "handsome" with the more familiar term "beautiful". She also prefaces and closes her turn units with laughter, again to downplay the sensitivity of her opposing opinion and to shape it as a less serious talk. In other words, she marks her opinion as humour. The rest of the class aligns with S3 and replicate her laugher.

The teacher (lines 22-24) claims the turn and introduces other-initiated repairs. She introduces the new vocabulary "Prime Minister", and follows it with a translation in L1. The teacher then shows some solidarity with the student's response by adding her own assessment of the Canadian prime minister's physical characteristics, prefacing them with a "well" that suggests a less straightforward response (Schegloff & Lerner, 2009). The teacher closes the humorous episode via a question that redirects the talk to a more serious topic, that of leaders' characteristics. The students understand the teacher's shift in focus and follow it by giving more serious answers (lines 25-26).

In this excerpt, I have shown how the teacher's deliberate but careful use of L1 as a source of humour resulted in a warm classroom environment in which the students were not afraid of taking unsolicited turns and contributing to the on-going discussion. In fact, the teacher's use of humour, using L1, encouraged the students to initiate humour themselves, which resulted in a noticeable increase in the amount of classroom interaction. However, the teacher remained the main authority in the classroom, and was the only person who could bring the humorous episode to an end and shift the focus to more serious, pedagogically related work.

Excerpt (2)

The following excerpt is taken from the same reading comprehension class. In this part of the lesson, we see how that teacher plays her traditional role as the main source of authority by limiting the time and amount of humour allowed in the classroom. At the same time, it shows how the culture of humour introduced by the teacher in this particular classroom led to more student-initiated humour and, consequently, to increased participation.

| 1 | S6: | miss M↑iss ((raising hand)) |
| 2 | T: | (( looks at S6)) yes (S6) what would you like to add |
| 3 | S6: | Prince Mohammad is $handsome$ TOO and a leader ((laughter)) |
| 4 | T: | HANDSOME again ((laughter)) "Ya banat Allah ye khaleekum |
| 5 | | rakizo shwai (.) ana bedi sefat alga'ed mush aljasadyyah" (tr. girls, |
| 6 | | please for God sake be focused (.) I want the leader's |
| 7 | | characteristics not his physical feature) |
| 8 | | (0.5) |
| 9 | S7: | " ana fahmah bas"  (tr. I know but) I don't know how to say in |
| 10 | | English (0.9) okay, the leader must be wise and studied well |
| 11 | | especially English= |
| 12 | S3: | = educated |
| 13 | S7: | Yes (.) educated = |
| 14 | T: | =aha |
| 15 | S7: | he need to make people love him and want to listen to |
| 16 | | [him] |
| 17 | S8: | [follow him not $"yetanshooh"$ (tr. ignore him) ((laughter)) |
| 18 | | ((looks at the back of the class)) |
| 19 | SS: | ((laughter)) |
| 20 | T: | ((laughter)) no one can " yetanish" (tr. ignore) the prince my dear |
| 21 | | (0.2) O↑kay now that we now that a leader should at least have |
| 22 | | special characteristics that make people want to do things not have |
| 23 | | to do them as S7 said. The leader should also take initiatives |
| 24 | | |

In this excerpt, S6 displays a desire to participate by trying to attract the teacher's attention verbally (calling her 'miss') and non-verbally (by raising her hand). The teacher (line 2) looks in

the direction of S6 and uses the short response token "yes" to assure S6 that she has been noticed and that she will be given the floor. However, the teacher gives S6 the floor using the question" what would you like to add?" S6 takes the floor and offers another example of a handsome leader. This time, however, and unlike S3 in excerpt 1, the student gives an example of a Saudi prince rather than of an international character. She also uses the adjective "handsome" to display having epistemic access to the word.

The teacher takes the floor (line 4) and teases S6 by emphasising the word "HANDSOME"; she also questions using the term again despite her previous comment regarding leadership as a skill rather than as a physical feature. She follows this with laughter to mitigate the negative effect of criticising the student's use of the word "handsome'. Following this, she puts aside the target language's pedagogical agenda and uses L1 to provide some procedural instructions in order to ensure understanding. The teacher's use of L1 at that moment, the seriousness in her voice and the absence of laughter at the end of the turn are understood by the students as an announcement of the end of the humorous episode.

S7 uses L1 (lines 9-11) to offer a justification to the teacher for not being able to participate. She claims to understand the task, but lacks sufficient L2 knowledge to answer the question in L2. However, S7 does not surrender the turn or abandon her desire to participate. She uses "okay" as a discourse marker to shift from justification to a reattempt to complete the task. She offers what seemed to be the teacher's desired answer - "the leader must be wise and studied well, especially English". S3 latches onto S7's comments and performs an other-initiated repair. She suggests "educated" as an alternative to "studied well". S7 takes up the repair (line 13) without any resistance. The teacher witnesses all of these interactional actions without any interference; in fact, she uses the backchannel "aha" to encourage the student to continue and to expand on what she had said. S7 then proceeds to list more characteristics of a good leader. S8 (line 17) overlaps with S7, and comments on her opinion using a mixture of L2 and L1 in her turn.

Once again, the student picks up on the teacher's interactional use of L1 as a source of humour. To mark her comment as humorous and to minimise the possible negative effect of her comment in her classmates' opinions, S8 closes her turn with laughter. She follows this by looking towards the back of the class, seeking agreement from the rest of the class. The class aligns with S8's joke and laughs at it. Petitjean and Degoumois (2014) showed that choral laughter following a student's problematic turn was an efficient resource for troubleshooting in a classroom (p. 82). The teacher (lines 20-25) approves the joke by laughing at it and building on it using the same technique of combining L2 and L1 in the same turn. However, she uses reformulation as sequential closing third (Schegloff , 2007).

Excerpt (3)

This excerpt is taken from another reading comprehension class presented by the same teacher (Jawhar & Walsh, 2018) following the closure of the chapter that pertained to changes in people's social life styles in the United States during the last century as a result of economic pressure. After finishing the reading material in the book, the teacher asked the students for their opinions regarding the difference in life styles between their generation and that of their grandparents. Once again, the teacher was attempting to ensure that the students were capable of implementing the knowledge they had learned from the chapter in real life. In other words, the teacher was attempting to make the students use the topic under discussion to talk about their own experiences - topicalisation - (Slimani, 1989) or, in other words, their knowledge.

The teacher teased the students explicitly about their use of L1, yet accepted such for the ultimate sake of communication.

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144  S6:    another subject
145  T:     (( smiling voice)) another subject sure go ahead
146  S6:    (( inaudbile))
147  T:     yeah okay financially , money , yeah thank you
148  S10:   " can fe harah we ketha" (tr. there was neighborhood and so
149         on)
150  T:     ((laughter)) " harah we ketha ma tenfa'a fe alengleezi" ( tr.
151         neighborhood and so on this can not be said in English)
152  SS:    (( laughter))
153  S10:   "eywah ma tenfa'a" (tr. yes it can not))
154         (( smiling voice))
155  S?:    (( laughter)) (( inaudible))
156  T:     there is no " harah" (tr. neighborhood)) and ((laughter)) no "
157         eyyal" (tr. Boys) in the " harah" (tr. neighborhood))
158  S10:   Ya'ani momken tokhreji aye wagt adi alwatha'a ya'ani adi
159         [daheen ya'ani la troohi la tokhreji (tr. meaning you can go out
160         anytime and anywhere it was okay now you , i mean, don't go
161  S11:   "hata ma'a alawalad kan adi (tr. even with boys it was okay)
162  T:     aha
163  S11:   [" da heen after asahwah sar mafee"(tr. now after the
164         wakening (Islamic revolution) there is no trust)
165  S12:   [" can fee thigah marah ziyadah" (tr. there was too much trust)
166  T:     " thigah" (tr. trust), yeah
167  S11:   " ba'ad alsahwah sar mafee (tr. after the wakening (Islamic
168         revolution) there is not anymore)
169  T:     " ele heyyah" (tr. that is what)
170  S11:   " ele ya'ani_ can ya'ani_ can yeshoofo_ fe al past can fe _
171         makanow meltazemeen be aladat we altagaleed. Mo aladat we
172         altagaleed  zai mathalan daheen  mamnoo'a alikhtilat we kitha
173         ya'ani kanat hayatuhum adyah ba'ad ma jat alsahwah sarow
174         yegoolo mamnoo'a al|ikhtilat
            (tr. Meaning_ there was_ they used to see_ in the past there
            was_ they were not sticking to customs and tradition. Not
            customs and tradition, like for example religion. Mingling was
            forbidden and so on. Meaning their life was normal. After the
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Earlier in the excerpt, S6 raised her hand in a display of willingness to participate. The teacher gives her the floor, but S6 informs the teacher that she will be initiating a new topic. The teacher allows her to introduce a new topic (line 145), and S6 adds something that is inaudible. The teacher (line 147) acknowledges S6's input, but closes the sequence without any comment or

further explanation regarding S6's suggested topic, which suggests the irrelevance of the new topic. S10 self-selects and takes the floor using L1. She suggests a relatively new subtopic. The teacher does not seem to object to the new subtopic, yet still uses humour to question the reason that S10 chose to speak in L1. Thus, she treats the contribution as humorous and repeats it, asking if the same answer can be given using English instead of L1 (lines 150-151).

The rest of the class also understand the teacher's use of L1 as humorous, and follow with choral laughter. S10 (line 148) treats the teacher's humour as a genuine question and responds to it by confirming the teacher's assertion "yes it can not". The teacher (line 152) maintains the humour and produces a turn that consists of both L1 and L2 while using an exaggerated foreign accent. The teacher's creative but hilarious use of both languages was perceived as a license to resume the talk in L1; therefore, not to be concerned about the lack of L2 knowledge. The teacher's humorous use of L1 encouraged S10 to take the floor again. She produces an extended turn using L1 to explain what she meant in the previous turn (line 148). S11 takes the floor to add to the discussion without any interruption from the teacher, who only resorts to using a newsmaker device in a single-unit turn without any attempt to claim the floor (line 162).

The teacher's use of humour and her lack of action towards the use of L1 functioned as a successful strategy to create interactional space for S11 to elaborate on her answer, although still using L1. S12 follows her classmates daring attempt to communicate, even though she uses L1. She takes the floor once S11 has reached a transition relevant place (TRP) and adds to the on-going topic (line 165). The teacher (line 169) uses a wh-question to ask S11 overtly about what she means. S11 responds with an extended complex multi-unit turn. She uses different interactional competences, such as false starts, in which she interrupts her turn and makes a new start, self-initiated repairs and reformulates her sentence. More importantly, she supports her argument with an example, again using L1.

In this excerpt, the teacher opens the interaction with humour to tease the student about her use of L1 by also using L1. The use of humour here minimised the tension that might have resulted from the student's claim to lack L2 knowledge. To emphasise communication, the teacher submits to the student's desire and accepts L1 as a tool for communication in order to smooth the interaction and to create a classroom culture in which communication is valued over accuracy. The use of humour also results in a display of different complex interactional competences in L1 that can be built on in the future to introduce knowledge related to L2. It is worth mentioning that the permission for the students to use L1 is not always guaranteed, as there are examples of moments during which the teacher denied the students the privilege of using L1 and they submitted to her authority and shifted to L2. This means that the teacher used and allowed the use of L1 only in specific cases when she thought that the use of L1 would serve the ultimate goal of smoother and more intelligent interaction. In other words, she uses humour in L1 as a vehicle through which students with lower levels of proficiency could find the space to interact and be part of the classroom community without being afraid of being judged as a failure or as lacking knowledge.

**Discussion**

In this section, I provide an overview of the findings, including the detailed interactional features in this classroom, and I will show how humour contributed to bringing more complex interactional features to the surface in L1 and in L2.

A closer look at the data shows that the conversation in this context is goal oriented, as it lasts for a long time once it begins, and the topic is maintained over a long stretch of talk. With regard to topic management, the teacher in this class proposes the original topic; however, because the topic is quite free, the students have the liberty to suggest new subtopics, and the teacher seems to encourage this. Nevertheless, the teacher signalled the concluding move in each sequence and the shifts to the next one via the use of discourse markers, as well as by response tokens that indicated agreement or acknowledgement followed by the allocation of the next speaker's turn. The teacher's role does not entail undermining the students' active role in the development of the topics.

In this dataset, we can also see the extensive mutuality and collaboration among the students themselves, as well as with the teacher, particularly with regard to topic development and other-initiated repair. We can also note the teacher's use of syntactic elements to link the turns, and the tremendous sense of joint responsibility to maintain the interaction by all interactants. The teacher also tends to use many open-ended questions to help the students to extend the topic under development, thus increasing their interactional space. The use of humour in L1 has obviously increased the students' interactional competence in the following ways:

1. **Creating a warm and less intimidating atmosphere**:   The teacher's creative use of L1 as a source of humour in this dataset created a relaxed classroom in which the students were not afraid to take unsolicited turns, to contribute to the on-going talk or to be playful. In fact, it is obvious that the teacher's use of humour in L1 encouraged the students to initiate humour themselves using both L1 and L2. However, this noticeable increase in classroom interaction and the alternation of the traditional role between the teacher and the students does not mean that the teacher lost control over the classroom.  In fact, throughout the lesson, the teacher maintained her authority and was the only person who decided when to put an end to the humorous episode and when to shift the topic (Lehtimaja, 2011). This role was used cleverly to refocus attention on the more serious talk.

2. **Addressing problems related to classroom interaction**: The students in this dataset imitated the teacher's use of L1 to create humour. They used humour to minimise the possible negative effect of their comments on their classmates' opinion or to challenge the established classroom roles with regard to what is acceptable as a topic for discussion and what is not. They also used laughter to deal with what Petitjean and Degoumois (2014) referred to as "troubleshooting" in classrooms; in other words, when there is a problem in the turn. In most cases, the teacher accepted the students' initiated humour, and sometimes built on it using the same technique of combining L2 and L1 in the same turn. Nevertheless, there are moments in which the teacher used reformulation as a sequential closing third to such language use (Schegloff, 2007).

3. **Minimising the tension resulting from insufficient L2 knowledge:** The teacher initiated humour using L1 to emphasise communication and to avoid the tension that is usually associated with the students' claim to lack knowledge in L2. In such cases, the teacher accepts L1 as a tool for communication in order to smooth the interaction and to create a classroom culture in which communication is more important than accuracy. This use of L1 as a source of humour encouraged the students to use longer turn that, when analysed, reflected different complex interactional competences. However, the teacher made it clear to the students that permission to use L1 in the classroom was a privilege rather than a guaranteed right. There were moments of interaction in the dataset in which the teacher denied the students the privilege of using L1 and insisted on the use of L2 instead. The teacher's insistence on the use of L2 during these moments usually proved to be useful, as the students then produced the desired response. In other words, the teacher only allowed the use of L1 when it served the ultimate goal of smoother and more intelligent interaction. However, this use was always 'sugar-coated' with humour. In summary, humour in L1 served as a portal through which students with lower levels of proficiency could find the space to interact and to be part of the classroom community without being afraid of being judged as a failure or as lacking knowledge (Pomerantz and Bell , 2011).

Ultimately, this analysis has shed light on the importance of using both humour and L1 with low-level students in order to facilitate interaction and to encourage more participation in a friendly environment without the fear of losing face (Schmitz ,2002; van Dam, 2002). However, this use of humour should be combined with the work required to accomplish the pedagogical agenda. The results of this study are in agreement with several studies that examined the importance of humour in the learning process, but it add a new aspect as they show the impact of using L1 as a source of humour, particularly for students with low English-language proficiency. This use worked not only at the educational level, but also at the personal level, as it showed that teacher-initiated humour led to better interpersonal relationships and less distance between the teacher and the students.

**Conclusion**

Despite the scepticism surrounding the use of humour in academia, this paper is an addition to the body of work that calls for the use of humour in education in general and in EFL in particular. It offers further evidence from EFL classrooms in which the use of L1 as a source of humour minimised the tension witnessed in several instructional settings and increased the interactional competence in the classroom. Furthermore, the paper shows that teacher-initiated humour did not undermine the instructors' authority; nor did it hinder efforts to develop understanding. In fact, these data provides insight into how the competent use of L1 as a source of humour resulted in a tremendous amount of interactional work, particularly from the students' side. It also led to the creation of a warm classroom atmosphere in which the fear of losing face as a result of lacking L2 knowledge was not witnessed. By contrast, the students in this dataset, proved to be fearless about making mistakes.

The teacher's use of L1 as a source of humour notably increased the students' ability to take unsolicited turns that were relevant to the on-going interaction.  It helped them to display their interactional competence and understanding of the interactional routine by obtaining the teachers' attention verbally and non-verbally, taking unsolicited turns and initiating humour. These

interactional features are considered to be extremely important aspects of interactional competence (Young, 1999).

Finally, the study has pedagogical implications, as it shed light on the ubiquitous yet little-studied interactional endeavour of using humour in EFL. Taking note of the detailed interactional features of the use of L1 as a source of humour and raising teachers' awareness of it will surely lead to better EFL teaching and learning. Finally, understanding the benefits of the competent use of L1 as a source of humour will help teachers to allow the less-proficient learners to participate without experiencing the usual loss of face associated with individual participation in L2.

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## APPENDIX (A)

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
Adapted from Paul ten Have (1999)

| | |
|---|---|
| . | falling intonation contour |
| , | 'continuing' intonation contour |
| ! | animated tone |
| ? | rising intonation contour |
| : | lengthening of preceding syllable |
| _ | abrupt cut-off |
| **Bold** | emphasis |
| CAPS | louder than surrounding talk |
| ° ° | quieter than the surrounding talk |
| > < | quicker than surrounding talk |
| [ ] | onset and end of overlap |
| == | latched utterances |
| (1.5) | Silence, timed in seconds and tenths of a second |
| (()) | Learner's first language |
| (XXXX) | Unclear talk |
| T | teacher |
| S1: | identified student |
| S? : | unidentified student |