

# Humour Integrated Language Learning (HILL): defining, defending and developing an emerging field

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## Abstract

*There has been a notable surge in the studies on humour in the language classroom in the past two or even three decades. This burgeoning literature seems to have already entered the threshold of a field of study. In this article, humour-integrated language learning (HILL) is put forth as an umbrella term for diverse attempts to employ pedagogical humour in language education. HILL principally refers to a diverse suite of methods, tools and techniques where humour serves as a means (and/or an end) in language learning. It is envisaged that this paper can a) open a window on (L2) pedagogical humour in its diverse manifestations, b) underscore the potentiality latent in L2 humour to inform and influence language learning, c) present a more insightful, coherent picture of the attempts to use humour in language learning, and d) outline further developments and future directions in humour-informed research and practice within language education. This article also aims to broaden the borders of HILL by making connections between pedagogical (L2) humour and other relevant notions and approaches such as playful learning, creative pedagogy, critical pedagogy, technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), etc.*

*Keywords: humour, language learning, playful learning, innovative practices, humour-integrated education.*

## 1. Introduction: Setting the scene

Humour is a complex, wide-spread and long-standing phenomenon, running deep in the diverse aspects of our being, saying and doing (Attardo, 2020; Davies, 2015). Based on the socio-cognitive proposition that human beings are also *humour beings* (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2021a; Oshima, 2018; Ziv, 2010), humour can defensibly be argued to be as ancient and entrancing as humanity. Likewise, humour for educational purposes or ‘pedagogical humour’ (for short) can be traced back to ancient times, having been employed as a didactic means for various purposes (Banas et al., 2011; Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a). Metaphorically, the antiquity of pedagogical humour may span from *Eiron*, the stock character in Greek ancient comedy, who criticized the blameable dignities in the guise of buffoonery and ignorance to its modern descendent, *irony*, a rhetorical device and communicative strategy

through which a teacher safely comments on a student's misconduct (see also Attardo, 2020; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018; Ziv, 2021).

Aside from such historical backdrop, more than half a century of rigorous, scientific research has informed and influenced pedagogical humour (Banas et al., 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011). While it seems to be still outside the mainstream research, pedagogical humour has been explored by quite a number of scholars from diverse academic backgrounds (see Bell, 2011; Chen et al., 2019; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Qin & Beauchemin, 2022). This scientific zeal to explore the uncharted waters of pedagogical humour has also reached and even it seems to be amplified in language education (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Hadley & Newman, 2023; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020).

Within the realm of language education, particularly teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), studies with a primary focus on pedagogical humour have apparently channelled into a wide array of educational topics and concerns (see also Bell, 2011; Deneire, 1995; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b). Furthermore, at times, a notably different nomenclature has been employed to label what could rightfully or alternatively fall under pedagogical humour (see Attardo, 2020; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018; Cook, 2000). In this regard, the term (language) play seems to be the archrival of humour (Shively, 2013; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a). Hence, epistemologically, delineating the true extent and effects of pedagogical humour in language learning is a mammoth challenge which entails a literature-informed, expansive treatment of the subject matter (see also Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Davies, 2015; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b). Notwithstanding, as it will be argued throughout the paper, this scientific odyssey can singularly be rewarding and insightful. To 'humourize' language learning can be a novel and effective way to humanize and optimize language education, if properly fulfilled. In fact, shedding light on how this can be aimed serves as a major incentive for inquiries into pedagogical humour (see also Bell, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011).

This article strives to draw readers' attention to the vast notion and the versatile functions of pedagogical humour in language education. More precisely, the paper aims to elaborate on the emerging field of *humour-integrated language learning* (HILL). It is posited that this article can be a timely and a much-needed contribution to the wide-ranging literature of language education on, at least, three fronts: Firstly, pedagogical humour has been sprouting in language education research and practice for at least several decades. Yet, it still lacks a pedagogical framework and a point of reference within which it can *systematically* be investigated and practiced (see also Bell, 2011; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020). Metaphorically, what is the name of the nurturing soil which has borne these sweet fruits? It seems humour has either been downplayed as a trivial byproduct of class interaction or, what is worse, it has been frowned upon as a disruptive behaviour, being to the detriment of the serious business of language teaching and learning (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Deneire, 1995; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b). Taken either as a 'white elephant' or an 'ugly duckling,' pedagogical humour has been in the air of language education in the guise of different names and norms for long. Pedagogical humour, however, seems to be still a fledgling lacking a philosophy of education and a pedagogical framework (Banas et al., 2011; Neff & Dewaele, 2023). In this paper, HILL is put forth as an umbrella term for diverse attempts to employ pedagogical humour in the language classroom. It can potentially organize the scattered literature on pedagogical humour into coherent avenues of research and literature-informed teaching practices within language education (see also Bell, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020; Wulf, 2010).

Besides defining this emerging field, a second area of concern (and possible contribution) in this paper is defending pedagogical humour in language learning. From an epistemological standpoint, humour is saliently a tricky concept (Attardo, 2020; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018). On

the one hand, one may easily be tempted to consider humour as an epitome of “I know it when I see it” concepts (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2022). On the other hand, it defies any definition, being cast into diverse forms and functions (Whitton, 2018; Ziv, 2010). The intriguing and intricate nature of humour can practically make it a *double-edge sword*, turning to be drastically counter-effective (Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b; Wanzer et al., 2006). Thus, it is of paramount importance to discuss the far-reaching effects of pedagogical humour and warn against the possible pitfalls (Banas et al., 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b). The paper endeavours to defend the field of humour-integrated education through both highlighting the pedagogical benefits of humour in the language classroom as well as putting forth guidelines to safeguard its applications.

A third incentive behind writing this article is to establish a research agenda for future research on pedagogical humour. In other words, the paper attempts to highlight the existing gaps in the limited but burgeoning literature of pedagogical humour in language education. It also aims to broaden the borders of HILL by making connections between humour and other relevant notions and approaches, such as playful learning, creative pedagogy, critical pedagogy, technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), etc. Likewise, the article calls for promoting a supportive, well-established ‘humour culture’ and a ‘playful mindset’ within language settings. Similarly, it encourages readers to invest more in ‘humour literacy’ particularly L2 humour literacy as a neglected but important dimension of L2 communicative competence and cultural fluency (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2020, 2024b; Waring, 2013; Whitton, 2022).

It is envisaged that the paper can potentially a) open a window on (L2) pedagogical humour in its diverse manifestations, b) underscore the potentiality latent in pedagogical humour to inform and influence language learning, c) present a more insightful, coherent picture of the attempts to use humour in language learning, d) give an autonomous body and distinct character to humour-integrated practices and interventions in language education, and e) outline further developments and future directions in humour-informed research and practice within language pedagogy. The article is, in a sense, a manifesto to teach and learn languages ‘outside the box.’ It encourages readers to set foot beyond the educational orthodoxies and embrace novel, (more) effective ways of doing ‘being language teachers’ (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, b; Neff & Dewaele, 2023; Waring 2013). The Horatian platitude, *to instruct and delight* is the premise upon which pedagogical humour is built. The paper elaborates on how such educational ideal can get closer to reality through HILL. In the following section, HILL is defined as an emerging field of study and practice within language education.

## 2. HILL: Defining the field

A systematic review or a meta-analysis of pedagogical humour in language education falls outside of this article’s aim and scope. Nevertheless, as implied earlier, there has been a notable surge in the studies on humour in the language classroom in the past two or three decades, particularly since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Wulf, 2010). This burgeoning literature seems to have already entered the threshold of a field of study. That is, it is both well-rooted in the theoretical frameworks of (language) education and also well-touted in the relevant communities of expertise (see also Banas et al., 2011; Bell, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b, 2022; Prichard & Rucynski, 2022; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011). Thus, the time is ripe to characterize this field of study.

Humour-integrated language learning (HILL, henceforth) principally refers to a diverse suite of methods, tools and techniques where humour serves as a primary means and/or an end

in language learning. In other words, *humour as and for language learning* is the common thread running through all the teaching practices which may rightfully fall under HILL. Hence, perhaps an initial counter-intuitive or even controversial aspect of HILL is that this pedagogical approach encompasses not only *teaching with humour* but also *teaching about humour* (see Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Chen et al., 2019; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020). While the former (i.e., teaching a language with the help of humour) forms the lion's share of this approach, teaching about 'L2 humour' is also of particular significance. This latter aspect is further elaborated on toward the end of the article where HILL's future directions and developments are more sharply focused on (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020).

Regardless of which aim and aspect of HILL we are most interested in, the notion of humour remains at the centre of HILL. Subsequently, it brings to the fore the basic but fundamental question of what humour is (see also Attardo, 2020; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018). Logically, delineating HILL as an emerging field of study would not be feasible (or even tenable) without a prior definition for humour. Moreover, having a more accurate grasp of humour's length and width can potentially aid in making reliable connections with other related concepts (e.g., creativity, playfulness). This, in turn, may stand against a *reductionist* conceptualization of pedagogical humour, creating valuable opportunities to inspect into HILL in concert with other pedagogical concepts and concerns (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, b).

Toward this aim, it should initially be highlighted that humour has a fluid and elusive nature, defying any comprehensive conceptualization. Nevertheless, it can generally be construed as any creative act or behaviour in which contextual appropriacy is achieved through socio-cognitive incongruity (see also Attardo, 2020; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b; Martin & Ford, 2018). As a further explanation, humour, more often than not, hinges on the recognition and resolution of two incompatible semantic scripts in a certain context (Martin & Ford, 2018; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020; Proyer et al., 2019). Hence, humour is, in essence, in close affinity with creativity (Heidari-Shahreza, 2020, 2023; Proyer et al., 2019). In other words, to achieve humorous effect, the unexpected but contextually acceptable juxtaposition of two scripts/concepts are required (Attardo, 2020; Martin & Ford, 2018). This, in fact, is reminiscent of the core definition of creativity. Despite epistemological discrepancies and controversies, creativity scholars generally agree that creativity contains and entails the two core components of 'novelty' and 'appropriateness' within a certain context (Alves-Oliveira et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2019). Therefore, technically speaking, 'doing humour' is also being creative (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Proyer et al., 2019). This conclusion, as elaborated on later, may have far-reaching implications for humour-integrated education as well as creative pedagogy.

To better grasp the zeitgeist of humour, 'playfulness' should also be taken into account. Humour is often accompanied and characterized by frivolity and playful behaviour (Chen et al., 2019; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024 c; Shively, 2013). Hence, playfulness can throw light on the nature of humour. Proyer (2017, p. 114) defines playfulness as "an individual differences variable that allows people to frame or reframe everyday situations in a way such that they experience them as entertaining, and/or intellectually stimulating, and/or personally interesting." As in one's sense of humour (or rather 'humour competence'), playfulness also pivots on an individual's creativity to make a play frame to effect intentions in a novel and light-hearted way (see also Martin & Ford, 2018). The relevant literature indicates that playfulness can strongly be associated with creativity and humour (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Proyer et al., 2019). Thus, to account for the gestalt of humour, playfulness should also be considered as a part of the picture. This also gives valuable insights into HILL in theory and

practice to which the paper will return later (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, c; Whitton, 2022).

Another closely-related concept is ‘language play.’ As implied earlier, humour shares a vast common ground with (language) play. More importantly, the scholarship on pedagogical humour is, at times, indistinguishable or indivisible from the language play literature. Thus, it seems singularly beneficial if not vital to roughly map the (fuzzy) boundaries of humour and language play (see also Attardo, 2020; Forman, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018). In light of the relevant literature (see e.g., Bell, 2012; Cook, 2000; Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a, 2024c), language play can be defined as the creative manipulation of linguistic elements and features to instigate a humorous effect or to practice (and possibly perfect) one’s linguistic competence (i.e., for language learning purposes).

Three types of language play can largely be identified in the existing scholarship: Firstly, ‘formal language play’ which chiefly points to a creative (and usually witty) employment and alteration of language forms or the formal aspects of language, such as puns, neologisms, alliterations, and parallelisms. Secondly, ‘semantic language play,’ which is a “play with units of meaning, combining them in ways which create worlds which do not exist: fictions” (Cook, 1997, p. 228). Thus, in semantic play, language as ‘meaning potential’ (in Hallidayan terms) is used to form mental images and deliver communicative intents in a creative, amusing manner (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c, d for background information). Teasing, parody, double-voicing can serve as common examples of play with various units of meaning. The third type of language play is ‘pragmatic language play’ which is perhaps the most tacit and intricate category of language play. It centres on the novel (humorous) functions of language. Deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and discursive aspects of language use, pragmatic language play may often be born out of the creative realization of speech acts (e.g., requesting, inviting, and/or complimenting) (see Cook, 2000; also Heidari-Shahreza, 2018c, 2024d for further information on different types of language play).

Bell (2012) also makes a distinction between play *with* language and play *in* language. In simple terms, play with language refers to the unconventional marshalling of linguistic resources at various levels of linguistic knowledge (syntactic, semantic, phonological, etc.) to convey humour and playfulness. Play in language, in contrast, construes language as a ‘play frame,’ or a context and pretext to instigate creative communication and interpretation (see also Attardo, 2020; Davies, 2015). Hence, as Bell (2012, p. 244) points out in the latter, “individuals engage in role-plays or the creation of imaginary scenarios, tease and joke with others, or discuss ... taboo or risqué topics.”

As one may infer from the above account of language play, humour, particularly ‘verbal humour,’ and language play largely overlap. While humour may find other non-verbal outlets to get realized (e.g., visual humour as in cartoons), it is more often than not, fully or partially verbalized (Attardo, 2020; Forman, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a). That is, humour, in so many cases, is either language-based or can verbally be enhanced (see Figure One). From a pedagogical perspective, this bears two insightful messages: Firstly, HILL as a field of study can/should possibly cater for language play or any instance of playful languaging, too (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024d). Otherwise, it might be simplistic and restrictive in its approach. Secondly, there is an inherent kinship between humour and language which can add to the credibility of HILL and may contribute to expanding the borders of this pedagogical approach (see also Proyer et al., 2019; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b, c; Whitton, 2022; Waring, 2013).

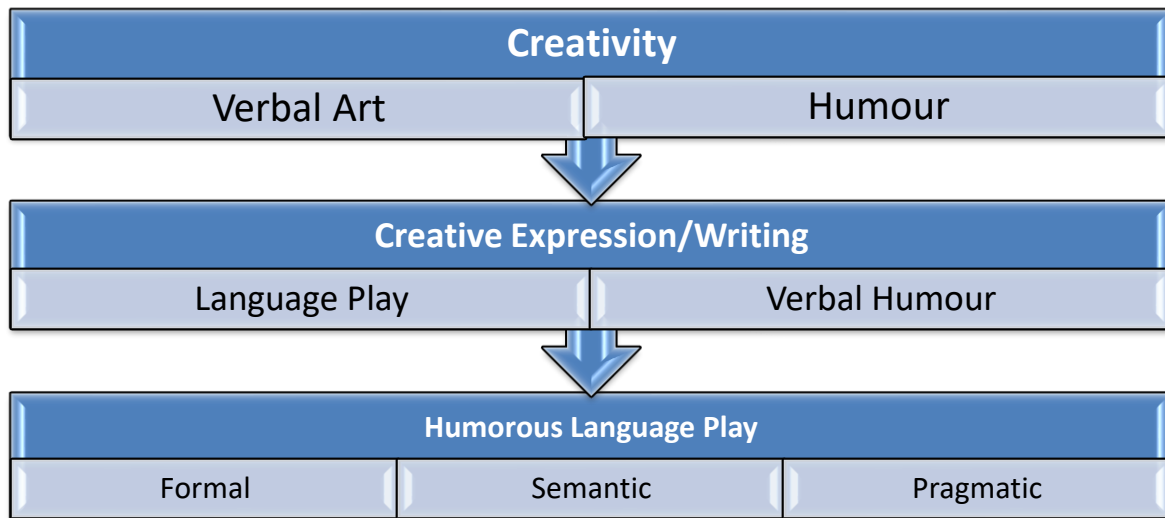


Figure 1. The relationship between humour and language play (based on Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a)

A glimpse at the (pedagogical) literature on language play generally confirms this conclusion. In this respect, two major avenues of inquiry can be discerned: a) ‘language play for fun’ or humorous language play and b) ‘language play for practice.’ That is, the relevant scholarship distinguishes language play for amusement (most akin to verbal humour) from the language play which is used to further practice a second/foreign language (Cook, 2000; Cekaite& Aronsson, 2005; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b). From a pedagogical perspective, there are notable differences between these two approaches to language play. Language play for fun, by definition, pivots on learners’ command on L2 forms and functions (Bell, 2012). In other words, it is the outcome of their successful L2 attainment and uptake. Hence, Cook (2000) argues that “there is good reason to regard language play [for fun] both as a means and an end of language learning” and that “ability to play with language” may even be employed as a “test of proficiency” (p. 204). Language play for practice, however, was put forth by Lantolf (1997) on the grounds of Vygotsky’s ‘private speech’ (see Vygotsky, 1980). It is mainly concerned with being-learned (rather than already-learned) L2 forms and functions. Such play creates a learning context in which learners find opportunities to rehearse their L2. Lantolf (1997, p.19) asserts that while rehearsal language play is not enough, “without language play [for rehearsal] learning is unlikely to happen” (see also Cekaite& Aronsson, 2005; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a, b). Making and repeating words and sentences in L2 or solo role playing L2 situations can serve as instances of language play for practice.

Language play for fun and language play for practice aim for notably different objectives. Nevertheless, HILL has the potential to unite and inspire both directions since it is, by definition, intended to serve both ‘focus on form’ and fun (see Bell, 2012; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018c, 2020). By the same token, HILL may be the missing link to adopt a coherent approach to playful language learning (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b, c). This is a notion the paper addresses in more depth later when discussing areas of development within and beyond HILL.

To better understand the essence and spirit of (pedagogical) humour and HILL, it should also be added that humour should not be equated with or confined to laughter. To clarify the distinction, humour is generally accompanied by a number of contextual cues among which laughter (or smile), marked prosody and word order could be more salient (Bell, 2012; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a; Shively, 2013). Notwithstanding, such cues do not necessarily define or delimit humour (Attardo, 2020). ‘Deadpan’ humour and ‘meta-humour’ for instance, generally lack such signposts. This warning or disclaimer about the zeitgeist of humour seems

imperative because humour in the language classroom is perceived by some teachers as (futile) moments of loud laughter and gaiety. Subsequently, one can become concerned about teacher stature and authority as well as educational norms and objectives (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b, 2022; Wanzer et al., 2006). Along the same lines, building L2 materials or instructional procedure upon pedagogical humour may seem impractical, even untenable.

As implied earlier, HILL, however, does not assume (or even advocate) such conceptualization of humour and humour-integrated learning. HILL, in its truest sense, a) endorses a creative and critical approach to language learning through which more efficient and joyful tools and tactics are employed to teach a language, b) supports a systematic, literature-informed approach to pedagogical humour and c) favours a complimentary and non-totalitarian pedagogical impact. Thus, HILL goes beyond a language teacher's sense of humour (funniness) or sporadic, spontaneous moments of laughter. It also does not aim to override well-established educational paradigms such as student-centred learning or task-based instruction. Rather, it is based on the premise that integrating humour into language learning can facilitate teaching delivery and enhance students' learning experience (see also Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011; Wulf, 2010).

In sum, HILL as an emerging and promising field of study within language education rests upon the multi-faceted notion of humour. Humour, as it was conceptualized in this section, has far-reaching roots in a constellation of pedagogical notions and functions (e.g., language play, playful learning, and creativity). In fact, to perceive the full range of HILL, an 'integrated science' approach is required (see Rezaei, 2021). That is, as it is elucidated further in the final section of the paper, *interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary* perspectives should be taken on pedagogical humour to map HILL within language education. Yet, the above account could hopefully outline the major tenets and borders of HILL. Having briefly addressed the 'what' question (i.e., defining the field), in the next section, the paper elaborates on the 'why' and 'how' questions. Put differently, on what grounds a humour-integrated approach to language learning can be justified and how it can safely and effectively be put into practice.

### **3. HILL: Defending the field**

Defending the field of HILL bears the double-barrelled meaning of a) illuminating and arguing for the pedagogical benefits of a humour-integrated approach to language learning and b) elaborating on the instructional designs and guidelines to successfully implement pedagogical humour in language settings. As said earlier, besides historical and anecdotal accounts and evidence, pedagogical humour has scientifically been investigated since the mid-twentieth century (Attardo, 2020; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Banas et al., 2011). Within the realm of applied linguistics and language education, (at least) about 25 years of rigorous research and discussion has informed and shaped pedagogical (and L2) humour (see also Cook, 1997, 2000; Bell & Pomerantz, 2016). In light of the accumulated scholarship on HILL (see e.g., Forman, 2011; Prichard & Rucynski, 2022; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011), a wide-ranging list of beneficial effects can be presented. In the following lines, within the space limits, the article touches upon major pedagogical benefits of HILL, particularly those which are both theoretically speculated and empirically confirmed.

#### **3.1. Pedagogical benefits of HILL**

A salient characteristic of a humour-integrated language classroom is its positive ambience. The playfulness and light-heartedness inherent to HILL can greatly contribute to lowering language learners' affective barriers (e.g., negative attitude, anxiety, and inhibition) (Banas et al., 2011; Heidari-Shahreza & Heydari, 2019). It can also enhance 'immediacy' indices (e.g.,

rapport and interpersonal warmth) and diminish ‘avoidance’ behaviours (e.g., not answering a question or asking for clarification) (Pomerantz & Bell, 2011; Waring, 2013). Similarly, a humorous atmosphere can lessen learners’ defensiveness, breaking the ice in class interaction and collaboration (Chen et al., 2019; Heidari-Shahreza & Heydari, 2019; Oshima, 2018).

Drawing upon such beneficial effects, HILL can closely be associated with ‘positive education’ (PE). Being rooted in the positive school of psychology, positive education puts huge emphasis on five key elements (as represented by PERMA model): positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievement (see Jacobs & Renandya, 2019 for further information on positive education in relation to language education). The relevant literature suggests that HILL can potentially lend a hand in these cornerstones of positive education, particularly the ‘positive emotions’ and ‘relationships’ dimensions (Neff & Dewaele, 2023; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011).

In addition, the self-rewarding, versatile nature of humour may push forward the less-motivated learners, particularly within the English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts where students may not have *immediate* needs and objectives for language learning (Forman, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b, c). Pedagogical humour, in such settings, can also be a source of intrinsic motivation and personal interest. Dörnyei (2001) categorizes humour under motivational strategies in the language classroom. He recommends to “bring in and encourage humour” (p. 42) as a notably motivating aspect of language learning content.

Furthermore, research on humour in the language classroom indicates that HILL may, in fact, enhance L2 students’ learning gains (Bell, 2012; Prichard & Rucynski, 2022). That is, it can positively moderate L2 uptake, aiding in developing and retaining the linguistic knowledge. What is more, this beneficial effect seems to have a wide range of coverage, encompassing different levels of language proficiency (i.e., from elementary to advanced) and diverse aspects of L2 competence (e.g., syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) (see Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b; Shively, 2013). A thorough discussion of the causality and correlation behind such pedagogical effects goes certainly beyond the aim and scope of this article. Nonetheless, several driving forces can briefly be pointed out to better justify and contextualize the learning potential of HILL.

Firstly, pedagogical humour, as mentioned earlier, can create a joyful, secure venue for learners to take part in class activities. Also, the jocularity and peculiarity latent in humour can possibly make HILL (content) highly-engaging (see Waring, 2013; also Hadley & Newman, 2023). Hence, this approach, in practice, may create singular opportunities for the emergence of a ‘flow state’ in which L2 learners can experience full engagement and enjoyment (see Csikszentmihalyi, 2008; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Waring, 2013). This, in turn, renders an *optimal learning experience*, being conducive to higher learning gains. From a different perspective, HILL presents the instructional content in a novel manner. The humorous profile of the learning materials may serve as an ‘input enhancement’ strategy, making the input *more noticeable* (Dörnyei, 2001; Bell, 2011; Neff & Dewaele, 2023). Building upon the ‘noticing hypothesis’ (see Leow, 2023 for background information), this subsequently turns the input to be more learnable as well.

A second factor accounting for HILL’s positive effects lies in the social essence of humour (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2021a; Ziv, 2010). Observational studies tracking down the instances of classroom humour reveal that humour is, more often than not, instigated and invested in during the class social interactions (Davies, 2015; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b, c). In other words, HILL can potentially create a context for learner-learner and learner-teacher interaction (see Shively, 2013). This insight can further be pursued in light of the ‘interaction hypothesis’ based on which the more L2 learners have opportunities to interact, the better they attend to and acquire the L2 forms (see also Long, 2016). Likewise, it makes sense within the Vygotskian ‘social theory of learning’ (see Daniels, 2016 for background information). As



said earlier, humour hinges on the successful socio-cognitive recognition and resolution of the apparently incongruous content. Within the language class settings, this is usually achieved *collaboratively* with the help of other (more competent) class members (see Davies, 2015; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018c; Shively, 2013). Hence, Vygotskian notions of ‘zone of proximal development’ (ZPD) and ‘scaffolding’ (i.e., guidance from a more capable person) find credence in HILL and vice versa.

In this regard, a glimpse at playful language-related episodes (PLREs) can be insightful, too. They are practically instances of learner-learner interaction and class discourse within which the students’ attention is playfully directed to an aspect of the L2 and/or the learning process (Bell, 2012; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018c). Put differently, a PLRE is an incidence of metalinguistic awareness and a form-focused dialogue which is cast humorously and may have learning potential.

Along the same lines, HILL can find great support in ‘student-centred learning’ (SCL). This widely-accredited pedagogical paradigm advocates the *active* role of (language) learners, encouraging teachers to put their students at the centre of class activities (see Bremner, 2021 for further information). Jacobs and Renandya (2019) conceptualize an SCL approach to language learning based on 10 interdependent notions: student-student interaction, motivation, focus on meaning, curricular integration, diversity, learner autonomy, students and teachers as co-learners, alternative assessment, learning climate and thinking skills. HILL can directly or indirectly add to these pedagogical dimensions. In particular, student-student interaction, motivation, learning climate and thinking skills, as reasoned before, may be facilitated through a humour-integrated approach (see Forman, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Martin & Ford, 2018). In the same vein and in the long run, HILL can enhance group/class cohesion, making affordances for ‘cooperative language learning’(CLL) (see Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Shively, 2013). In fact, Jacobs and Renandya (2019) recommend ‘student-centred, cooperative learning’ (SCCL), as an enhanced, synergized approach in language education. Pedagogical humour, as advocated in HILL, may potentially lubricate the wheels of such composite orientation, making its implementation more feasible.

The beneficial effects of HILL can also be associated with creativity pedagogy (CP). From a pedagogical standpoint, creative pedagogy is primarily aimed to enhance learners’ creativity potential (or creativeness). This, in practice, engulfs a wide range of cognitive skills and strategies such as brainstorming, convergent and divergent thinking, etc. (see Cremin & Chappell, 2021 for a recent literature review). It also taps diverse socio-personality traits and contextual resources (e.g., risk-taking, openness to experience). As a well-endorsed, promising educational framework, creative pedagogy is currently looking for effective ways to implement and develop creativity programs and interventions in educational contexts (Alves-Oliveira et al., 2021). With an eye to the genetics ties between creativity and humour (see also Proyer et al., 2019), HILL can potentially be a means to reach such objectives. An insightful intersection in this regard is ‘playful creativity,’ which is, in essence, very close to humour (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Proyer, 2017). I will return to this notion later, putting forth suggestions to develop HILL based on playful creativity and playfulness.

Furthermore, humour is inherently *creative, critical and corrective*. That is, humour provides safe and smart ways to regulate class power relations, cross the red lines and speak truth to power (Pomerantz & Bell, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b). Through humour, L2 learners can experiment with new identities, develop a discourse of resistance and pronounce their presence in the classroom more clearly (see also Qin & Beauchemin, 2022). In simple terms, they are better able to express their feelings, wants and needs within the playful atmosphere of HILL and via the *politic* language of humour (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Nilsen & Nilsen, 2018; Waring, 2013). Hence, class members can safely engage in face-threatening acts (FTAs) (e.g., complaining about teaching practices, a student’s misconduct), and have a

voice and place in class, while politeness and educational norms are maintained. Metaphorically, pedagogical humour equips the language classroom with a ‘safe house’ and a ‘safety valve’ (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b; Pomerantz & Bell, 2011).

In the same vein, as Cook (2000) points out, HILL can possibly unbind language learning materials (especially the coursebooks) from educational orthodoxies and dogmatic content policies. Under the façade of humour, topics, even those that are locally or socio-politically frowned upon, can be ushered in. This is particularly beneficial in educational settings where there is limited freedom of expression, instructional content lags behind modern curricula or there are grave sociocultural allergens (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b; Qin & Beauchemin, 2022). In short, HILL can be well-endorsed by critical pedagogy, paving the ground for a more humanistic approach to language education (see Giroux, 2021). Interestingly, Paulo Freire, a prominent figure in critical pedagogy, conceptualizes the ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ as a ‘pedagogy of laughter.’ He highlights the role of humour in creating a ‘dialogical’ atmosphere and empowering students as ‘active agents.’ Thus, the liberating potential latent in HILL can be the steppingstone toward humanizing language education (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Qin & Beauchemin, 2022; Whitton, 2022).

### **3.2. Methodological and practical considerations of HILL**

Having briefly addressed the rationale behind HILL, the paper now turns to the practical side of the coin, that is, the implementation of pedagogical humour in language education. Operationalizing HILL can appear a mammoth challenge before both educational systems at macro level and language teachers at micro level. It can possibly be a practical bottleneck which may discourage educational stakeholders from investing in HILL, while theoretically being in favor of such approach(es). In the following lines, the article briefly addresses HILL from a methodological perspective, elaborating on several instructional designs and possible practical pitfalls.

In theory, a wide range of educational paradigms and theoretical frameworks may take HILL under their wings. Nevertheless, the ‘pedagogy of play’ or ‘playful learning’ seems to be relatively more compatible and fruitful (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, b; Homer et al., 2019; Whitton, 2022). This proposition primarily rests upon both the genetic ties between humour and play (as argued earlier) and the methodological connections. As a philosophy of education, as well as a diverse suite of methods, tools and techniques, playful learning builds upon the characteristics and affordances of *play* to conceptualize and operationalize learning (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a and Whitton, 2022 for an in-depth discussion). Play, by definition, is a complex, versatile and fluid concept that characterizes a wide range of human activities and behaviours. From having the feeling and attitude of playfulness to a plethora of games (either learning or recreational ones), pedagogy of play is expanded (Hadley & Newman, 2023; Proyer et al., 2019). Thus, quite a number of pedagogical approaches such as ‘(digital) game-based learning,’ ‘gamification,’ ‘quest-based learning,’ and, of particular interest to this article, ‘humour-integrated learning’ may be categorized under the pedagogy of play (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b; Whitton, 2018). Playful learning has recently gained prominence in all stages of education and across a wide range of disciplines (Whitton, 2022). The notions of ‘playful higher education’ and ‘playful university,’ for instance, have been put forth and explored in recent years (see also Giroux, 2021; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a; Macfarlane, 2015).

This ‘playful’ turn by educationists and educators is, among other things, watered by

- a) the far-reaching pedagogical benefits of playful approaches as widely documented and confirmed in (early) childhood education (ECC) (see Hadley & Newman, 2023; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a),
- b) the discourse of awareness and resistance levelled against the serious ambience of (formal) education particularly with an eye to its increasing degrees of instrumentalism and performativity (Macfarlane, 2015; Whitton, 2022), and
- c) recent developments in ‘educational technology’ (e.g., virtual learning environments) as well as the technological advances in ‘playware’ such as augmented reality (AR), massively-multiplayer online role-playing games, and (fully) immersive simulations (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b; Homer et al., 2019).

Hence, playful learning as a pedagogic philosophy and a methodological framework seems to be able to organize, standardize and optimize HILL (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b, c; Whitton, 2022).

The recent literature on playful learning advocates ‘signature pedagogy’ (see Shulman, 2005 for background information) to design and implement playful approaches in education including HILL (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, b; Whitton, 2022 for a critical discussion). Signature pedagogy aims to embrace the form, nature and spirit of pedagogical humour, conceptualizing HILL at the level of a) *surface structures* where humour is realized as (a part of) language learning materials and activities (e.g., a funny story as a reading passage), b) *deep structures* where pedagogical humour informs the pedagogical principles and assumptions of language education (e.g., active learning, cooperative learning), and c) *implicit structures* through which pedagogical humour shapes the philosophy of language education, modifying pedagogical standards, policies and evaluation indices, etc. (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, b). Figure Two below provides a sketch of HILL within signature pedagogy.

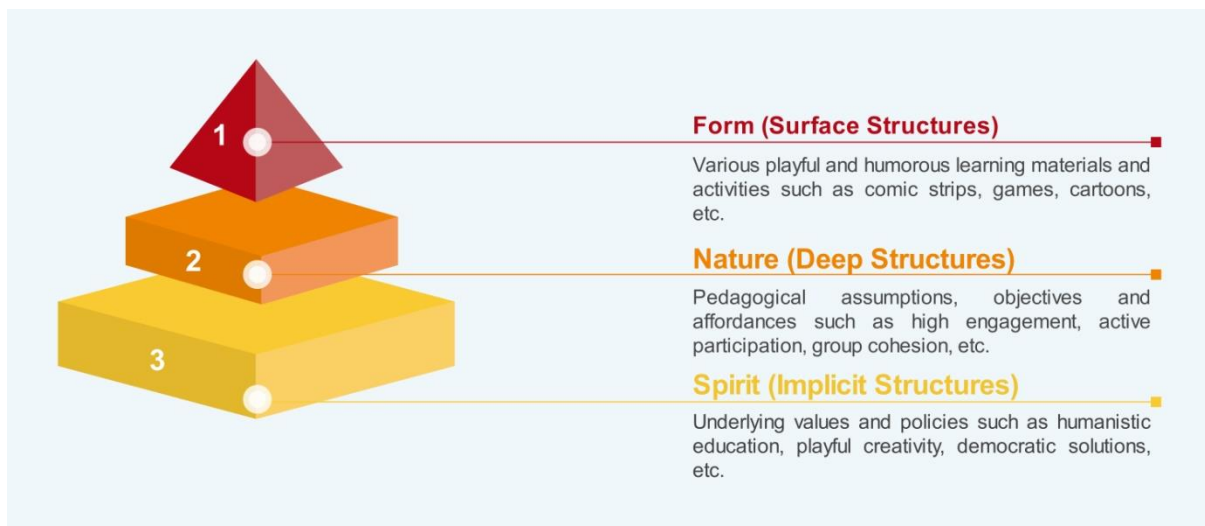


Figure 2. The instructional framework of HILL within signature pedagogy (based on Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b, c)

At a more operational level, HILL assumes three instructional designs to curriculum development: ‘backward,’ ‘central’ and ‘forward’ (see Richards, 2013 for a detailed

discussion). These curriculum approaches chiefly differ in design priorities and sequencing (see Figure Three below).

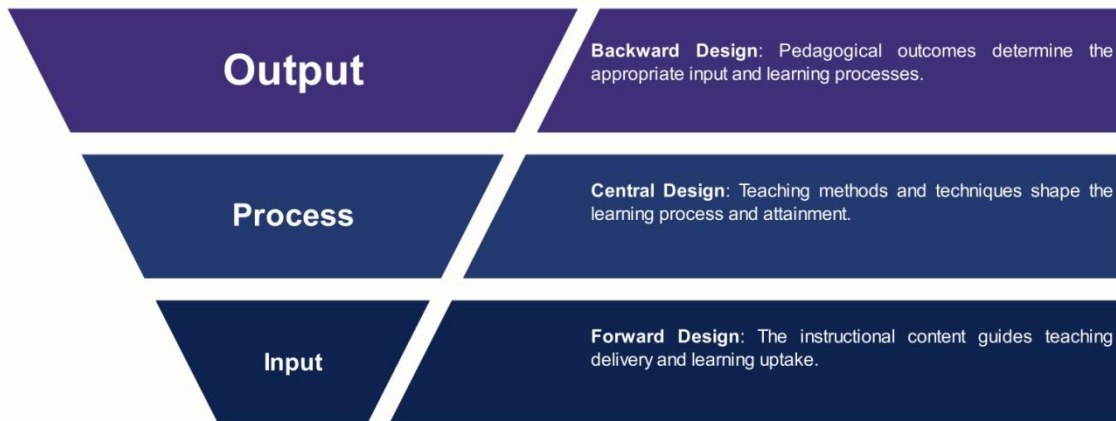


Figure 3. Major curriculum approaches in HILL (based on Heidari-Shahreza, 2020, 2024c)

HILL principally advocates a *backward* curriculum design (see Bell & Pomerantz, 2016). By starting from the end in the instructional design (i.e., beginning with the pedagogical goals), the backward approach enjoys the salient advantage of being disciplined, goal-driven and language learning-focused (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2020, 2023 and 2024c for sample HILL activities with the relevant instructional tips and steps). As a further explanation, the literature on pedagogical humour indicates that a practical pitfall and a major concern of (language) teachers in resorting to humour is that the humorous content may not sufficiently cover the learning themes and objectives (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a; Wanzer et al., 2006). Put differently, the humour might turn to be unplanned, haphazard and course-irrelevant, wasting the instructional time (Banas et al., 2011). In fact, the term *pedagogical* humour also serves as a warning against sheer funniness and frivolity. HILL is a serious call to learn, not to laugh away learning. While not being necessarily an/the only effective design, a backward approach (if properly employed) seems to better safeguard a systematic, efficient implementation of pedagogical humour. Figure Four below depicts the instructional cycle of HILL based on a backward design.



Figure 4: The backward instructional cycle of HILL (based on Heidari-Shahreza, 2020)

Beside the methodological issues, the successful incorporation of HILL also depends on practical and contextual factors (Banas et al., 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b). For example, the educational norms and the socio-cultural assumptions of the learning context in which HILL is put into practice may prove to be decisive (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016). Such rubrics should particularly be heeded in the language settings where (language) education is still formally conservative or largely conformist (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a, c; Qin & Beauchemin, 2022). In this regard, developing a ‘humour culture’ and a *gradual* shift to playful approaches seem to be advisable. Piloting and validating the possible effects of HILL in a certain context may also be beneficial (see Wanzer et al., 2006; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011). Teachers should, in particular, be heedful of the possible ‘vampire effect’ of humour. That is, the humorous dimension of the instructional content may unwittingly overshadow the pedagogical incentives. Likewise, such content may initially win the favour of the learners due to the ‘novelty effect.’ In the long run, however, it might not be able to keep students interested in the learning input. In fact, that is why, throughout the paper, a systematic, principled integration of course-relevant humour is advocated. Along the same lines, the backward instructional design is recommended to diminish such possible negative effects.

Likewise, as clarified earlier, having a good sense of humour in the non-technical, ordinary sense (i.e., “I can make others laugh”) does not suffice for teachers to harness pedagogical humour. While it could be a hopeful sign, (L2) humour literacy certainly goes beyond being funny (Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020). In fact, introducing and promoting humour literacy is an important and novel dimension of HILL. This approach is primarily concerned with enhancing and facilitating language learning. That said, humour competence is also of particular interest. The emphasis on humour literacy can be justified by the significant social functions of humour, rendering humour both a *cultural barrier* and *carrier* (Heidari-Shahreza, 2021a, b; Oshima, 2018; Ziv, 2010). It is based on the postulate that language is primarily used for communication and effective communications in a second/foreign language depends on not only good language skills but also pragmatic awareness and socio-discourse competence (see also Cook, 2000; Davies, 2015; Pomerantz & Bell, 2011). In light of the relevant literature (see e.g., Banas et al., 2011; Oshima, 2018), humour is an important moderating variable in successful (intercultural) communication. As Edward Hall (1959/1973, p. 52), the anthropologist, wisely states “if you can learn the humour of a people and really control it you know that you are also in control of nearly everything else.”

The ‘teaching about humour’ dimension of HILL, tacitly speaks of an extended view of L2 proficiency and the need for learners and teachers to know more about (L2) humour. Therefore, besides having a good sense of humour, ‘microteaching’ successful instances of classroom humour and ‘teacher professional development’ (TPD) workshops on pedagogical humour seem to be particularly beneficial (Chen et al., 2019; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a, b; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020). The aim is not to raise a generation of ‘teacher comedians’ in language education. Rather, such pre-service and/or in-service trainings should aim to enhance teachers’ ‘humour orientation’ (willingness to employ humour) and humour literacy, familiarizing them with how humour can be a means and an end for language learning (Banas et al., 2011; Cook, 2000; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b). In the final section, the paper throws more light on diverse aspects of developing humour competence.

From a practical viewpoint, materials development for HILL might also be an area of concern for language teachers (and L2 materials writers). Leaving the ‘comfort zone’ of a coursebook, being taught for several years, could be a difficult decision (Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c). Nevertheless, the development of language learning materials for HILL can be feasible and affordable on the grounds that, firstly, HILL instructional content can be developed (in many cases) based on the playful and creative elements and features of

current materials (see also Hadley & Newman, 2023). In other words, it could be a matter of reorientation, adaptation or systematization. For instance, the well-known English series for children, *Family and Friends* (Simmons, 2008) already contains playful characterization and comic strips. Similarly, *Top Notch* (Saslow & Ascher, 2019), another successful English language teaching (ELT) course, uses sitcom videos as complimentary instructional content. Secondly, the HILL content has to be neither hilarious, causing loud bursts of laughter nor based on different forms of humour (e.g., jokes, comedies, cartoons). As clarified in the discussion of HILL within the purview of signature pedagogy, the nature or spirit of humour (rather than the form) may be prevalent in the learning context. Hence, creative materials which can potentially induce an atmosphere of playfulness and positivity also fall under appropriate instructional content for HILL (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b; Whitton, 2022). Thirdly, HILL, in principle, advocates a systematic and sustainable approach to language learning. Nonetheless, as stated earlier, it is complimentary and non-totalitarian in nature. Thus, not all aspects of learning materials need to be altered (drastically). Playful teaching practices (as in HILL), can best be viewed as, metaphorically, nutritional complements in the blood circulatory system. They can notably inform and positively influence the whole education, while being least invasive (see Giroux, 2021; Hadley & Newman, 2023; Whitton, 2018). Having briefly argued for HILL in terms of its pedagogical benefits and methodological underpinnings, in the next section, the article addresses the areas of development and future directions of HILL.

#### **4. HILL: Developing the field**

As an emerging field of study, HILL pertains to quite a number of topics and factors which are still un(der)-explored. The uncharted waters of HILL await interested researchers and original thinkers from diverse academic backgrounds such as (educational) psychology, applied linguistics, sociology, etc. In fact, this article, as mentioned earlier, posits that an ‘integrated science’ approach can be most fruitful in developing HILL. Integrated science, in essence, advocates *science without borders* by adopting an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary orientation toward research topics (see Rezaei, 2021). Given the multifarious nature of humour and the complexities involved in language education, such approach seems well-justified (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b, 2024c; Bell & Pomerantz, 2016). Bearing this in mind, four avenues of research look particularly important and insightful within HILL (see Table 1).

Firstly, besides L2 learners and teachers, other ‘educational stakeholders’, within the purview of HILL, should be investigated. So far, the scholarship on L2 pedagogical humour has largely focused on L2 ‘learner humour’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘teacher humour’ (see e.g., Forman, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018a, b; Shively, 2013). The class members (i.e., teachers and learners) are probably the most important agents in putting HILL into practice. Nonetheless, the full-range and the long-term implementation of HILL entail the favorable attitude and the collaboration of other education-minded people in different layers of language learning. Parents, school authorities or district administrators serve as examples of such individuals (see also Hadley & Newman, 2023; Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b).

Table 1. Major areas of development within HILL

Areas of Development	Variables & Identifiers
<b>Stakeholders</b>	Diverse (groups of) individuals directly or indirectly involved in (humour-integrated) education such as students and teachers, parents and school authorities, educational boards and community members, etc.
<b>Contexts</b>	Various learning settings and contextual factors including but not limited to formal vs. informal, face-to-face vs. online, democratic vs. hegemonic, EFL, ESL, ESP, EIL, etc.
<b>Paradigms</b>	Dominant and emerging pedagogical philosophies, methodologies, and teaching practices such as CLT, TBLT, CALL, SCL, PBL, TELL, etc.
<b>Efficiency</b>	Different factors contributing to the overall success and the combined effect of HILL such as skill transferability, materials development, input enhancement, assessment rubrics, subject matter coverage, etc.

In this regard, one potentially insightful line of research can be probing into the development of a ‘humour culture’ within an L2 educational setting (e.g., a class, school, college). Pedagogical humour can severely be counter-effective, if a ‘playful mindset’ is not (already) developed in a given learning context (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a; Whitton, 2022). As a further explanation, educational assumptions and constraints, and also socio-cultural differences may notably hinder the beneficial effects of HILL (Oshima, 2018). Developing such a culture (and mindset) involves not only learners and teachers, but also other educational stakeholders responsible for or interested in language education. Hence, this notion can be an insightful intersection to investigate particularly for educational researchers with multidisciplinary interests.

A second strand of research within HILL may focus on diverse and prospective contexts of language learning. Language education, especially TESOL, is currently practiced under a wide array of learning conditions and for a myriad of different purposes (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Jacobs & Renandya, 2019). As a result, the possible effects of HILL might significantly vary from one context to another. Thus, it seems imperative to look into HILL through the lens of contextual factors. Studies have tangentially explored the EFL and ESL contexts so far, leaving many educational particularities untouched (see also Bell, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018b, 2020). There is a huge potential for comparative research examining the differential effects of HILL within these and other contexts (Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011). Contextual dichotomies such as formal vs. informal learning, face-to-face vs. online learning, or ESP vs. EGP can open insightful windows on HILL. Under the purview of such contexts, pedagogical humour can also be inspected together with other approaches or features of playful learning (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b; Hadley & Newman, 2023). For instance, ‘gamification’ (i.e., incorporating game features into a learning context/task) can create affordances for pedagogical humour and vice versa (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a; Homer et al., 2019). Therefore, investigating HILL within a gamified online context may offer valuable insights. ‘Duolingo,’ a widely popular, gamified language learning app, can perhaps serve as a case in point for the interested researchers to pursue this line of research. Additionally, HILL can cast light on class interaction and discourse within such contexts, reflecting the richness and peculiarities involved (see also Prichard & Rucynski, 2022). A wide spectrum of discursive, behavioural and societal themes and patterns can be unmasked via content, thematic analysis of classroom humour.



A third avenue for further research on HILL pertains to different teaching paradigms. ‘Teaching with and about humour’ as the dual-purpose of HILL can potentially be achieved within/through the framework of most well-established educational paradigms, such as communicative language teaching (CLT), task-based language teaching (TBLT) and student-centred learning (SCL) (see Hadley & Newman, 2023; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c; Prichard & Rucynski, 2022). Nevertheless, the operationalization, compatibility and effectiveness of HILL in each case may entail specific contextual prerequisites and educational affordances (Wanzer et al., 2006). Hence, comparative and correlational research questions can be posed to explore the systematic embedment of HILL. For example, under the purview of TBLT, one question can be how humorous language learning materials should be developed vis-à-vis task design features (e.g., authentic, integrative focus on language skills). *Avant-garde* research themes and topics within intelligent computer-assisted language learning (iCALL) may also be addressed (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b). Fruitful areas of investigation include (but are not limited to) pedagogical humour in technology-enhanced instruction, L2 ‘computational humour’ in computer-mediated communication (CMC), L2 ‘robotic humour’ within pedagogical applications of ‘social robots,’ and L2 humour in the context of AI-enhanced playful learning (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024b; Hempelmann, 2008; Homer et al., 2019).

The fourth line of research can aim to delve deeply into the ‘educational efficiency’ of HILL. As an umbrella term, it chiefly refers to the combined effects of different educational artifacts and variables to reach an *optimal* education (see Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b; Johnes et al., 2017 for further information). Considering its complimentary, non-totalitarian nature of HILL, the fundamental concern here is how the educational *low investment, high profit* ideal can be approached (or achieved) through a humour-integrated approach to language education. Under the purview of educational efficiency, a plethora of issues can be problematized and possible solutions may be sought with respect to HILL beneficial effects.

‘Academic burnout,’ for instance, is a wide-spread concern in many educational settings, exponentially surging in the (post)modern world especially during and after the COVID era (Heidari-Shahreza, 2022; Pressley, 2021). Being a modern concept (i.e., since the 1970s), burnout points to a state of physical, emotional, and/or intellectual exhaustion which is often accompanied by a teacher’s or student’s low motivation, low achievement and negative attitudes toward the learning context (Pressley, 2021). Obviously, academic burnout inflicts educational efficiency on many fronts. With an eye to the affective benefits of HILL, an insightful research question could be how pedagogical humour can help restrain and/or diminish academic burnout (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2022; Whitton, 2022).

Likewise, further research is required to discern how much of what is gained through HILL can be retained for (or transferred to) real-world situations. HILL, by definition, strives to enhance both L2 learners’ language skills and communication skills (or alternatively, their linguistic and humour competence). The question is whether or not (and how) the positive effects of HILL can be converted into a long-lasting linguistic and communicative toolkit. This, in practice, calls for possibly longitudinal (ethnographic) research to attest the actualization of HILL potential (see also Bell, 2011; Heidari-Shahreza, 2024c).

Along the same lines, ‘playful’ language assessment can be pursued within the educational efficiency dimension of HILL. Interestingly, the notion of ‘L2 humour as a test of L2 proficiency’ has long been suggested in the relevant literature (see e.g., Bell, 2011; Cook, 2000). Research on language assessment has also been looking for innovative, more democratic and authentic ways of measuring L2 learners’ achievement and uptake (Heidari-Shahreza, 2021b, 2024b, c; Youn, 2020). Thus, pedagogical humour can potentially be approached in future research from the perspective of language testing and assessment particularly pragmatic testing.



Table 2. Core components of L2 humour competence (training)

Core Components	Description
<b>Recognition</b>	It entails the awareness of various contextual cues such as marked prosody, laughter, etc. and the familiarity with socio-cultural assumptions.
<b>Comprehension</b>	It includes knowledge of humour mechanism particularly semantic and pragmatic incongruity (or script opposition).
<b>Responding</b>	It covers certain aspects of intercultural fluency, (im)politeness, discursive competence.
<b>Production</b>	It depends on sufficient affinity with diverse forms, styles and functions of humour and their socio-cultural prerequisites.
<b>Application</b>	It relies on the effective use of humour for various communicative, critical and corrective purposes.

There are still other research topics that can possibly inform and influence HILL in general and the above-mentioned strands of inquiry in particular. The notion of humour competence or (L2) humour literacy may perhaps epitomize such potentiality. As pointed out earlier, sufficient humour competence is a means and an end in HILL. At a functional level, it begs the question of what humour competence (training) should include and how it can be aimed for. Drawing and expanding upon the existing literature (see e.g., Bell & Pomerantz, 2016; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020; Prichard & Rucynski, 2020), five key aspects of L2 humour savoir-faire can be identified: identification (or recognition), comprehension, responding, production and application. Table 2 provides more information on these five dimensions. Humour competence training within (and beyond) HILL awaits further research, being still an under-explored but promising avenue of inquiry (see also Chen et al., 2019; Wulf, 2010).

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, HILL as an emerging field of study strives to synergize pedagogical humour in language learning, offering valuable insights into innovative and effective language teaching practices. Inspired by John Dewey, the prominent educational reformer, if we teach today's language learners the way we taught yesterdays', we may unwittingly rob them of the *light* (i.e., the true essence) and the *delight* (the joy) of language learning. The cohort of playful learning approaches to language education including HILL seems to be the 'enlightened' path to these educational ideals (see also Heidari-Shahreza, 2024a). An emerging field of study, regardless of its methodological rigor and literature support entails 'an army and navy' (so to speak) of committed researchers and practitioners to fully flourish. It is envisaged that HILL, in the long run, would enjoy the wide support of language teachers, particularly those who think (and teach) outside of the box.

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