



## Visualizing Humorous Teaching with the Joking-Action Sequences: A Case Study of a Chinese Elementary EFL Class \*

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### ABSTRACT

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This is a case study recording a Chinese elementary school's English lesson. The recorded class included 40 students around the age of 9, and was taught by an English-native speaker. Utilizing conversation analysis as a method, this study proposed two issues: one is to identify a new unit of turn-taking sequence — the joking-action, and try to characterize it; the other is to utilize the joking-action to visualize humor teaching and explore the practical applications and meanings of the joking-action. According to the analysis of the recorded video, joking-action in this study is roughly characterized by any verbal and non-verbal behavior that can cause students to laugh, thereby promoting these EFL learners' comprehension and application of English. The limited data also showed that joking-actions were used flexibly and extensively by the English-native teacher, and had a noticeable effect on students' understanding of a foreign language. This study identified a new turn-taking sequence unit that enriched and visualized humor instruction, with important theoretical and practical implications for the field of classroom conversation analysis and L2 teaching. However, this is only a case study and is not sufficient to generalize the concept and characteristics of joking-action. A large amount of quantitative or qualitative research is needed to refine this hypothesis.

### KEYWORDS

classroom conversation analysis, turn-taking unit, joking-action, EFL class, humorous L2 teaching

## 1. Introduction

Modes of instruction could build a special bond between teachers and students in the classroom. The teachers' speech acts, teaching methods, how the teachers carry on the conversation with their students, and how the teachers manage the classroom undoubtedly matter in the teaching process. Especially in the context of second language (L2) teaching. The multiple skills (e.g., reading, writing, listening, and speaking) that need to be developed to master a new language require a constant growth of linguistic and semantic information, and humor is an effective tool that can motivate learners while also assisting in the creation of a well-learning environment (Muñoz-Basols 2005). Kim and Malissa (2010) also believed humor as an instructional tool that serves a variety of goals in classroom teaching. However, as Wandersee (1982) placed out, the problem is how to apply them in a proper and effective way. Conversation analysis is commonly used to study L2 learners' interactions in the classroom (e.g., Barraja-Rohan 2011, Rumenapp 2016, Thornbury and Slade 2006). Therefore, this study attempted to explore how an English teacher can trigger students' responses to communications and interactions in L2 through interesting instructions by video-tracking an entire English classroom using the method of conversation analysis.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Role of Humor in Foreign Language Class

Much has been said about the benefits of humor in the classroom, both from the students' and teachers' perspectives. Such as, Ziv (1988) indicated that using humor in classroom teaching can improve the test scores of students. It helps "increase motivation, self-confidence and bridge the gap between teachers and students" (Al-duleimi and Aziz 2016, p. 107). In the classroom where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL), specifically, humor helps to relax the learner's tension socially and psychologically (Bell 2009); it can create a positive learning environment for the students (Bolkan, Griffin and Goodboy 2018), helps students remember and understand the course (Fata, Komariah and Irfandy 2018); and it can attract student attention (Schmitz 2002). The research results of Aboudan (2009) showed that students are very inclined to use humor in EFL classrooms. Humor, as Fata et al. (2018) claimed, can be used as an interlanguage for educational purposes to remove communication barriers between native speakers and non-native speakers of one language.

Humor comes in many forms. Kim and Malissa (2010) described it as, "it is not limited to jokes or humorous stories, rather, it can include props, puns, short stories, anecdotes, riddles, or cartoons. Humor can be anything that creates a positive feeling in students" (p. 27). Also, the function of humor in communication is extremely complex (Bell 2009). Using qualitative methods of encoding recorded data and classroom observation, Ziyaeemehr and Kumar (2014) investigated the functions of instructors' verbal humor in a university classroom where English is being learned as a second language (ESL). Their results proved that verbal humor is one of the most effective strategies that teachers can use to promote L2 instruction and improve learners' L2 communicative competence. Besides, their study confirmed that "humorous verbalizations in an L2 learning environment can function as devices for constructing and broadening L2 learners' knowledge of language form, meaning, and cultural understanding" (p. 11). In contrast, Cekaite and Aronsson (2004) analyzed the responses of immigrant children aged 7-10 years to joking events in their daily classroom interactions in an EFL context based on the theoretical framework of conversation analysis and discursive psychology. In their collected recording data of daily peers and teacher-student interactions, the teacher used facial expressions and gestures, as well as a specific intonation and

tempo while talking, to achieve the purpose of communication with a seven-year-old girl. As a result, they argued that non-verbal action is also an integral element of joking events in the EFL classroom. Summarizing these findings, it becomes evident that the humor that occurs in the classroom is an act performed by students or teachers through both verbal and non-verbal means (Wagner and UriosAparisi 2011). However, previous studies have lacked evidence for combining the two to study their functions, and the present study will try to fill this research gap. Prior to this, for the purpose of visualizing humor instruction using turn-taking sequences, which is also part of the research methodology of this study, the next section presents the basic unit of conversational turn-taking

## 2.2 The Unit of Conversational Turn-Taking

As a sociological research method, conversation analysis (CA) primarily focuses on the study of interaction in dialogue (Wooffitt 2005), and the interactants can use CA to orient themselves within and to make sense of an ongoing interaction (Seedhouse 2004). In the field of second language acquisition, Barraja-Rohan (2011) utilized CA to teach interactional competence to adults in the L2 classroom from lower to intermediate levels. Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) provided L2 learners with authentic CA transcripts and findings of L2 social interactions to offer a novel approach for explicitly teaching L2 sociopragmatics in the foreign language classroom. Additionally, Rumenapp (2016) showed how teachers shift their views of students' identities and re-identify students' identities by analyzing the actual discourse of classroom interaction between teacher and students, so as to make more equitable pedagogical decisions for improving instruction.

Rumenapp (2016) found "Conversation analysis has been widely used to observe turn-taking in social settings, adjacency pairs, repair and so forth" (p. 27). Adjacency pairs are referred to as the terminal exchange of utterance sequences (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), which constitute the basic unit of conversational turn-taking (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, Thornbury and Slade 2006). Typically, the range of adjacency pairs in interactions includes: Greeting/Greeting; Question/Answer; Invitation/Acceptance (Rymes 2008); Joking/Laughter (Norrick 1993). Some examples are provided by Richards and Schmidt (1983) to illustrate these adjacency pairs:

- |     |                               |            |          |
|-----|-------------------------------|------------|----------|
| (1) | A: Hi.                        | (greeting) |          |
|     | B: Hi.                        | (greeting) |          |
|     |                               |            | (p. 119) |
| (2) | A: Where are you going?       | (Question) |          |
|     | B: I'm going to the bathroom. | (Answer)   |          |
|     |                               |            | (p. 121) |
| (3) | A: Jimmy!                     | (Summons)  |          |
|     | B: Coming mother.             | (Answer)   |          |
|     |                               |            | (p. 128) |

The adjacency pairs provide conversation turn-taking, such as a question being answered, and also prescribe the type of talk that the next talker can do (Richards and Schmidt 1983), such as a greeting should be followed by a greeting. As Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) emphasized, "the organization of taking turns talking is fundamental to conversation, as well as to other speech-exchange systems" (p. 696). It not only reveals how conversation keeps making sense, it also shows when and how people make a contribution to a conversation (Thornbury and Slade 2006). However, the turn-taking function in conversation in the classroom seems to be markedly different from that in regular conversation. Sacks et al. (1974) defined turn-taking in the conventional

context-free conversation as a self-selector, whereas turn-taking in classroom discourse is frequently a rigid allocation (Ellis 1992).

In order to create contexts that align with the real world to give the interactions in the classroom a truly conversational core, L2 teachers usually do something that is not about English, or even not in English, when the teacher instructs learners to “make a conversation in English” (Seedhouse 1996). Simply speaking, talks do create contexts, however, not only talks, but the actions, such as the body signals (De Fina 1997), or kinesic features (Levinson 2003), can also create a situation to establish classroom interaction (Garcia 2013).

In this sense, although Norrick (1993) asserted the joking/laughter adjacency pair in his study of diverse forms of joking in conversation, he only delved into the verbal aspects of humor with the perspective of “conversational joking,” which did not include actions. Further, using “laughter” as a response after humors is also one-sided, and does not meet the initial purpose of humor teaching. What’s more, “joking” and “action” have never been combined as a turn-taking unit in conversation analysis. The present study intends to venture into an attempt to integrate the two into one sequence to analyze its functions and characteristics in L2 classroom communication, and students’ responses to this sequence. The following section introduces the rationale of this study.

### 3. This Study

The initial purpose of this study was directly to examine the effects of humor on elementary students’ English learning through classroom conversation analysis. However, in the process of analyzing the data, it was found that the English-native teacher produced a rich variety of interesting verbal and physical gestures to facilitate students’ learning. “Joking,” despite being considered as a unit of conversational turn-taking (see Norrick 1993), is clearly not sufficient to adequately generalize “humor,” which is defined as “the quality in something that makes it funny, or the ability to laugh at things that are funny” (Oxford University Press, n.d.). In light of the dual research gap in the fields of humor instruction as well as conversation analysis, the preliminary observations suggested that humor should not be restricted to either verbal or action, but rather both. For this reason, the present study takes the liberty of setting the “joking-action” as a turn-taking unit to concretely and visually humor teaching in an EFL classroom, and then to discuss its characteristics through analysis. Meanwhile, this paper focuses on the sequence of joking behaviors of a native English teacher and mainly explores how joking-action was used by the teacher and what contributions it made to the EFL class through the transcriptional analysis of the classroom discourse based on the collected video data. The following research questions were addressed:

- 1) In what contexts are joking-actions used in the EFL class?
- 2) How do these joking-actions contribute to the EFL elementary learners’ language learning?

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Participants

The recorded class was a 45-minute second-grade English lesson at a public primary school in China taught by an English-native speaker (ENS). This class was made up of twenty girls and twenty boys ( $N = 40$ ) aged around nine. All the students’ mother tongue is Chinese, and they are learning English as a foreign language. Their English

level was very rudimentary (according to the observation of the recorded class, the students were only just learning to count numbers from 1 to 20). The native-English teacher was 29-year-old from Britain. He experienced two years of English language teaching after graduation and could not speak Chinese. The reason for choosing a classroom with an English-native-speaking teacher is that it avoids the need for a Chinese-native English teacher to explain in their mother tongue when students encounter comprehension difficulties. It allows a better understanding of the specific role that joking-action plays in native English-teacher and non-native English-learners' communication. Therefore, the precondition was that the students were completely in an English context. Consent was obtained from the instructor and students before the video was recorded. Considering the principle of anonymity in investigation and research, the names of the teacher and students in this paper are all in the form of pseudonyms.

## 4.2 Data Collection

The video data analyzed in this paper was recorded by a mobile phone with the help of the lead teacher (a Chinese who teaches English) of this class on October 13, 2020. The role of the lead teacher here was simply to record this video, not to assist with classroom instruction. The camera was placed in the middle of the back of the classroom in order to capture all the students in this class as much as possible. Video data was observed and analyzed by way of transcription. A simple plane graph of the classroom (the teacher's position and the seating of the forty students) was established for ease of reference (See Appendix II).

## 4.3 Analysis

The main topic of this 45-minute class was to learn the numbers one to twenty. The ENS teacher taught these primary second-grade Chinese students to read and spell these numbers in the form of a competition. Since he first met the students, the ENS teacher has gradually transformed the classroom into a very conducive learning environment by employing timely and appropriate joking-actions. The utterances between the ENS teacher and these Chinese students were transcribed based on the conversation analysis theory, so as to observe when and how the teacher's joking-actions (speech or kinesics) were applied in the sequence of discourse structures to promote the L2 interaction and learning. Through transcription, collation, observation, and analysis of the data, three of the most typical fragments where the joking-actions mainly occurred were selected as examples for this case study, which will be presented in the following sections. The functions of these joking-action sequences in the contexts in which they correspondingly occurred were discussed as well.

# 5. Results and Findings

## 5.1 "Joking-Action" in Greeting Section

The first "joking-action" appeared at the beginning of this class, as the subtitle indicates, in the part of greeting talk. In this context, joking-actions performed two functions: 1) they helped to attract students' attention so as to effectively manage the class, and 2) they played a vital role in coordinating with students to facilitate their communication in the target language. The following extract illustrates the situation.

## &lt;Transcriptional Extract 1, T = Jerry, SS = students&gt;

- 01. T: >I'm so hungry want to eat small children<  
((did an action seem to catch students)) (joking-action)
02. SS: ((shouted, inaudible word, pointed to each other)) YOU. (laughter)
03. T: So, good morning >everybody::< (greeting)
04. SS: Good morning tea:=Jerry=cher (greeting)  
((The sound was scattered))
- 05. T: Goo::d mor::ning tea::cher↑  
((he waved his hands to students and imitated a child's voice)) (joking-action)
06. SS: ((laughed)) Goo::d mor::ning tea::cher  
((while swaying their bodies)). (repetition)

The pupils played very noisily during the break before the class began. Jerry made a joke when he met the students. Jerry said he was very hungry and wanted to eat children (line 01), and he did a motion that seemed to catch the students, so the students shouted, and they were delighted. In line 02, there was some confusion in what they said, but from the video data, the students pointed at each other and said, "... for you," which might be interpreted as "eat him or eat her." That was enough to explain why some students cooperated with Jerry and responded to him. An interaction formed here, and Jerry's joke immediately caught the students' attention (see Schmitz, 2002). Interestingly, the students understood the teacher's joke and were able to respond appropriately with a counter-joke.

In a joking way, Jerry attracted the students' attention from the chaos, which appears to be a clue that I — as your instructor for this class — am already standing here, indicating that we are about to begin our class. It can be seen that the joking-action was used as soon as Jerry entered the classroom, which enabled students to have a very natural interaction with him at the very beginning of the course. Jerry then greeted the students in rapid succession when he made sure that all the students' attention was focused on him (line 03). Here, a greeting sequence appeared between the teacher and students (lines 03 and 04). Jerry said, "Good morning, everybody," and the students responded very dispersedly. They seemed uncertain or unfamiliar, at least to some of the students. Therefore, Jerry elongated his sound and repeated it again (line 05) in a child's voice while waving his hand to his students. Trofimovich (2016) mentioned that repetition has long been recognized by language education experts as a powerful mechanism for triggering unconscious learning. Jerry found the students' uncertainty through their performance. He tried to draw closer to the students so that he simulated the children's voices and was accompanied by gestures to assist the students in speaking the language of greeting again. The students swayed their bodies to the rhythm of Jerry's waving hand and repeated "Good morning, teacher" well again (line 06).

From extract 1, the students were in a playful state during break time when Jerry entered the classroom. Jerry launched a joking-action that not only caught the students' attention (see Schmitz 2002), but also made them consciously return to their seats as they realized the class was about to begin. On the other hand, starting a lesson in a fun way allows students to move quickly from a resting state into a learning state, rather than merely contributing to the organization of classroom discipline. After Jerry successfully got the students' attention, they started the conversation sequence of greeting. Later, as a result of the students' inability to say the greeting fluently, Jerry imitated the children's voices to assist the students in speaking, which was an accommodation

phenomenon for the students. Giles and Ogay (2007) explained that communicative accommodation “provides a wide-ranging framework aimed at predicting and explaining many of the adjustments individuals make to create, maintain, or decrease social distance in interaction” (p. 293). The main characteristics of accommodation that can be utilized include utterance length, speech rate, information density, volume, and pausing frequencies and lengths, as well as response latency (Trofimovich 2016). The adjustment Jerry made to the students in a way that the students regarded as interesting (learn from the laughter of the students, line 06) resulted in the students speaking the target language in the same way as Jerry did (line 06), so it can be said that the joking-action here promotes students’ English learning.

The joking-action occurred twice in the greeting part. One was at the beginning of the course (the teacher pretended to eat kids). It not only managed the class, effectively got the students’ attention, but also enabled students to get into a learning state quickly. Another one occurred when students’ voices were fragmented in the process of language output (the teacher imitated the children’s voices). The joking-action obviously motivated the students to speak the target language.

## 5.2 “Joking-Action” in Question-Answer Section

A second typical set of joking-actions appeared in the question-and-answer session. The functions of “joking-action” shown in this context are: 1) to improve students’ confidence; 2) to introduce new knowledge; and 3) to manage the class. Firstly, “How are you?” as a greeting sequence in the actual conversation, was used by Jerry to start a question-and-answer session with individual students to test their mastery of the answer to “How are you?” The specific joking-actions can be seen in the following extract.

### <Transcriptional Extract 2, T = Jerry, SS = students>

- |       |     |   |                 |
|-------|-----|---|-----------------|
| 09.   | T:  | >so<, How are you today?<br>((Jerry selected a student to answer))          | (question)      |
| 10.   | S1: | uh::uh::<br>((keep silence, no answer, and others very<br>eager to answer)) | (answer)        |
| 11.   | T:  | How are you today?<br>((Jerry asked the child next to S1))                  | (question)      |
| 12.   | S2: | I am fine ((low voice))   | (answer)        |
| 13.   | T:  | [ how are you today?  | (question)      |
| 14.   | S3: | >I’m fine thank you<  | (answer)        |
| 15.   | T:  | Yeah, goo:d ↑<br>((he high-fived the S3 student))                           | (joking-action) |
| 16.   | T:  | How are you↓ today?   | (question)      |
| 17.   | S4: | I’m fine thank you ((more confident))                                       | (answer)        |
| → 18. | T:  | GOOD  | (evaluation)    |
| 19.   | SS: | ((students were talking each other, chaotic))                               |                 |
| 20.   | T:  | OK, [[OK, OK, ((He signaled to the class to<br>stop talking))               |                 |
| → 21. | T:  | ((singing)) I’m fine:::↑ ((made faces))                                     | (joking-action) |

22. SS: ((laughed and looked at Jerry)) (0.6s) (laughter)
- 23. T: No one no↑ ((thumbs down and frowned)) or (joking-action)  
so-so↑ ((swang his hands))
24. SS: So::so ↑ ((shook their heads with wobbling of (following)  
their bodies))

The responses to “How are you?” are broad, such as “as usual, pretty good, only fairly, not bad” and so forth, but for these second-grade and only nine-year old EFL learners, they only knew a fixed answer pattern, what is known as formulaic language, that is, “Fine, thank you.” However, the most important thing was that the students supplied the information the teacher expected and were able to communicate with the teacher, as well as that they understood what the teacher meant. Besides, the surprising finding was that they responded with “I am fine, thank you” rather than “I am fine, thank you, and you?”, suggesting that the students’ understanding of the actual communication function has not been completely replaced by the formulaic language of L2. They knew that in actual communication, it is not necessary for many people to ask the same question of one person in a shared scene (it is not necessary for every student to ask the teacher “and you?”). Jerry high-fived his student and commended, “Good” (line 15). A typical IRE structure (Mehan 1985) in classroom conversation analysis was formed in this question and answer sequence:

Initiation:	Teacher:	[ how are you today?
Response:	Student 3:	>I'm fine thank you<
Evaluation:	Teacher:	Yeah, goo:d ↑

In authentic conversations outside of the classroom, such evaluations would be impossible, at least for English native speakers, as it is unnatural. However, this simple question-and-answer sequence lasted nearly one minute. The teacher was taking time to train the students in this basic conversational skill so that they could master how to answer “How are you?” Gradually, as the students approached Jerry’s expectations, he gave comments and high-fived one of the students. This behavior seemed to shorten the social distance between the teacher and the students, making the students feel more relaxed and confident (cf. Al-duleimi and Aziz 2016, Bell 2009). The performance of the next student (line 17) provided evidence for this claim. Due to the teacher’s friendly and well-timed physical contact (high-five), students’ performance ranged from reticence (line 10) to more confidence (line 17).

As Jerry drove the students’ motivation, the atmosphere in the classroom started to get out of control (line 19). Students began talking, laughing, and playing with each other. The classroom was chaotic, as if it were at break time. In such a situation, Jerry wanted to end this conversation. He said “OK, OK” (line 20) and gestured for the students to lower their voices, but to no avail. Another joking-action occurred at this moment. Jerry spoke in a singing way, inaudible what it was, but he might be trying to get the attention of these children by raising his voice, speaking along with his singing way, and making faces (line 21). It was clear that this set of joking-actions was effective in managing the noisy classroom and in catching the attention of the students, as they looked at him (line 22). These joking-action brought a cooling-off period of about 0.6 seconds. Jerry then posed a new turn: “No one no or so-so?” (line 23). As mentioned earlier, the students had only one fixed answer to the question of “How are you?” and they did not know what the authentic fact was (they didn’t know how to properly express their true feelings). Jerry wanted the students to know that there are different answers to this question. He was worried that the students would not understand him, so he spoke with his body movements. He frowned and said “No” with his



thumbs down, and when he said “so-so,” he waved his hands to hint at the students. This means, “Are you all fine? No one just so-so?” Jerry attempted to promote the students’ understanding of the new knowledge by using a series of actions. The students’ answers gave the impression that they did not really understand the teacher’s meaning.

Cekaite and Aronsson (2004) once proposed, “How do children engage in joking interactions before they master a second language?” (p. 374). One solution is to recycle the words of previous speakers (Cekaite and Aronsson 2004). There are also some studies suggesting that interlocutors can adopt or reuse each other’s language patterns during interactions (see Trofimovich 2016). According to the colon markings of the *Jefferson Transcription System* (Jefferson 1979), it can be seen that the students hesitated in speaking the first “so”, and the tone of the second “so” completely imitated the teacher’s tone — with a rising intonation (line 24). Although the students did not immediately understand the meaning of their teacher’s words, the new input had already emerged and had been unconsciously spoken by the students. If students want to achieve the goal of mastering the new input, it requires more practice at a later stage.

As can be seen from this session, there were three joking-actions. The first one was given by the teacher when the students performed well (interacting with the students with a high-five), which can improve the students’ confidence. The second occurred when classroom discipline got out of hand. Jerry didn’t severely stop the students, or just watch them silently to wait for them to quiet down, or punish them like traditional management. Spahiu and Skopje (2013) once said, “A well-managed classroom is a prerequisite for learning...The management involves the ability to deal with problems in different situations” (p. 92). He failed to achieve a good effect with ordinary interruptions (line 20), but he was not trapped by the unexpected situation. Instead, he instantly tossed out a joking-action (he sang and made faces) to get the students’ attention for class management, as proved in the first extract. In addition to this, in order to ensure smooth language input, joking-action (gestures and moves) were used to help students understand the new input when Jerry intended to teach it.

### 5.3 “Joking-Action” in Grouping Section

An additional typical context in which joking-action occurred was in the grouping section. The topic of this lesson was to teach students to count numbers from one to twenty in English. Jerry took a competitive approach to organizing activities. He divided the students into four teams according to their seats, called “Bird team,” “Tiger team,” “Dragon team,” and “Monkey team” from the right column to the left column (see Appendix II). In this case, joking-actions demonstrated the functions of 1) arousing students’ interest in learning; 2) encouraging active participation in classroom interaction; and 3) promoting students’ understanding of foreign language discourse, as shown in the transcriptional extract 3.

#### <Transcriptional Extract 3, T = Jerry, SS = students >

- 27. T: OK, I ((inability to hear)) for you:: bird ↓ team  
((pointed to the first column while imitating  
the flutter of a bird’s wings) *(joking-action)*
28. SS: Ha-ha-ha. ((laughed)) *(laughter)*
29. S?: Oops ((Chinese))
- 30. T: ((watched the second column)) and I will call  
you:: Tiger ↓ team ((imitated the way a tiger is  
angry)) *(joking-action)*

31. SS: Ha-ha-ha. ((laughed and shouted)) (laughter)
- 32. T: ((pointed to the third column)) I will call you  
DRA:GON↓: team ((lowered his voice and  
made a pose of being a dragon)) (joking-action)
- 33. T: ((pointed to the fourth column)) I will call you:  
Monkey↑ team ((Jerry jumped like a monkey  
and scratched his head)) (joking-action)
34. SS: ((students were shouting, laughing, talking to  
each other)) (laughter)
35. T: OK, so, >bird,tiger,dragon,monkey< (inform)
36. SS: Yeah:: =inability to hear= ((talked in  
Chinese, some students imitated the four  
animals)) (acknowledge)

Jerry offered the designations for the four columns in order to be used in the following competitions. He named the four teams after animals, mimicking the animals' characteristics each time he provided. For example, he named the first column "Bird team" by swinging his arms like a bird in flight (line 27); he named the second column "Tiger team" to mimic the angry appearance of tigers (line 30); and when he named the third column "Dragon team," he lowered his voice and made a huge shape in the air with his hand, as if he was describing a dragon (line 32). He highlighted the words "tiger" and "dragon" at an exaggerated volume to show the ferocity and majesty of these two animals, which can create a good interaction atmosphere. Finally, when he pointed to the fourth column and called them the "Monkey team," he jumped up and scratched his head like a vivid monkey (line 33). Each group of students responded to Jerry with laughter as a sign of acceptance.

A series of joking-actions made the students more interested in their group roles, with some students screaming, some laughing, and others imitating the four animals (line 36). Regardless of whether the students had learned the words for the four animals before or not, they were able to interpret these words correspondingly according to the teacher's amusing performance. This statement can be seen in line 36 (some students were imitating the four animals), and the students knew which team they were on in the subsequent competitions. It should be noted that it was not only the competition between the teams but also the individual competitions on behalf of their teams. This is not the focus of the present study, so it will not go into details.

By observing the third extract, Jerry offered the assigned names to the students in the four columns with ample joking actions. The students answered with laughter, but enough to show that they were very interested and ready for the following competition. As Jefferson (1979) proved, utterance is not extinguished by laughter, it acts as a sequentially implicative object which can produce subsequent activities. These funny non-verbal joking-actions aroused students' interest in learning and encouraged them to actively participate in the classroom interactions. Furthermore, the students understood the meaning of their respective team's designations due to the teacher's lively explanations, as evidenced by the students' ability to accurately act out the characteristics of those animals (line 36). This observation shows that the use of joking-action in classroom instruction can also enhance the overall intelligibility of foreign language input.

## 6. Discussion

Second language researchers and theorists believe that language learning causes anxiety, which can hinder students' successful performance in foreign language classes (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) indicated that reducing stress by changing the environment in which foreign language learning takes place is a very important but difficult task. However, it was not difficult to see that even in the English-only class in the present study, the language barrier did not prevent the non-native children from communicating and interacting with the native English teacher. Joking-actions greatly eased the stress of a foreign language classroom and made outstanding contributions to this EFL class. It can be characterized as any verbal and non-verbal behavior that can cause students to laugh in order to promote these EFL learners' comprehension and application of English.

The functions expressed by joking-actions are roughly consistent with the findings of previous studies on humor instruction (e.g., Al-duleimi and Aziz 2016, Bell 2009, Schmitz 2002, Ziv 1988, etc.), but due to the fact that joking-actions in this study represent both verbal and non-verbal behavior, their benefits are more comprehensively discussed here. Moreover, the present study revealed the circumstances in which the joking-action can be used to achieve good learning outcomes (e.g., when the classroom was out of control, and when assisted students with L2 output and input, etc., as proved above). Theoretically, joking-action provides a new sequence for the field of conversation analysis, visualizing the teaching of humor. From a practical point of view, the findings of this study provides a reference for effective elementary second language education.

There are inevitable limitations to the study. Joking is not always enjoyable or understood successfully. A variety of factors should be taken into consideration to achieve the success of joking-action communication in teaching. For instance, the joking-action should be understandable by students and should vary with language proficiency and the specific situations of the English class. In this study, Jerry did some joking-actions such as he felt hungry and wanted to "eat children" and demonstrated the features of "bird, tiger, dragon, monkey," which could be understood by nine-year-old children but may not be appropriate in an adult L2 classroom. On the other hand, in this elementary EFL classroom, the responsibility for initiating a conversational turn seems to rest solely with the teacher due to the limited L2 knowledge of the students. Thus, whether the joking-action contributes to promoting advanced English learners or adult non-native-speaking learners with substantial free L2 pragmatic information (Kasper 1997) to take responsibility for counter-initiating turn-taking in L2 classroom conversations can be discussed in a broader context. Furthermore, some students may have over-performed than usual, while some others may have cheating performances in the team because they were aware that their headteacher was videotaping them. As a consequence, using overall performance to assess students' achievement of L2 learning goals is still worth considering.

Additionally, this study focused on one elementary English class, using joking-action to visualize humor instruction in the EFL context. It was arbitrary to name the unit of "joking-action" sequence to represent the teacher's interesting verbal and action behaviors in L2 teaching. There is a need to explore more features of joking-action through various research methods to generalize its definition in different contexts, because there are subtle differences in the responses of L2 learners to joking-actions at multiple learning stages, and also in the understanding of joking-actions by L2 educators in different cultural backgrounds.

## 7. Conclusions

Teaching a foreign language to children is sometimes difficult. They are born to play, always curious about new things, and it's hard to focus on one thing for a long time. Meanwhile, language learning is arguably boring. A second language teacher should not only have specialized knowledge, but also be expected to have personalization. In most cases, some interesting actions in classes could eliminate students' mental fatigue and relieve their anxiety. This is why some students from Eastern countries prefer English-native language teachers, because these "foreign" teachers' classes are more free and relaxed, and they are not forced to learn boring grammar and recite vocabulary compared with their mother-tongue language teachers. Exactly, the most essential thing in foreign language education for children is to develop their motivation and interest. It is counterproductive if they are always asked to be quiet or if the teachers always strictly manage classroom discipline. In order to attract children's attention to ensure the teaching purpose of an EFL class is realized effectively, entertaining teaching ability is the premise.

This paper analyzed the important role of joking-action in an EFL classroom by observing the partial transcriptional extracts of a second grade English class in a Chinese primary school. The recorded video showed that the "joking-actions" were flexibly applied by the English-native-speaking teacher in his class. It was used continuously throughout the whole teaching process, rather than in isolation. The joking-action sequences that occurred in this elementary EFL class offered effective functions for managing and advancing L2 classroom communication and interaction. Interestingness greatly stimulated students' enthusiasm for English learning, and contributed to accommodating the interaction between the teacher and students to achieve the purpose of promoting learning and introducing new knowledge. The suggestion of the joking-action sequence also provided an insight into both the studies of conversation analysis and the application of humor teaching in L2. What is more, if the claim that joking-action sequences visualize humor instruction can be scientifically quantified, it may not be impossible to generalize the interaction approach of the joking-action in L2 teaching.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Elementary

## Appendix

### Appendix I: Transcription Notation

The transcription notations used in this study adapted from *Jefferson Transcription System* for conversation analysis:

(.)	A notable pause but of no significant length.
(0.2)	A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause.
[	A point where overlapping speech occurs.
><	The pace of the speech has quickened
<>	The pace of the speech has slowed down
(( ))	Comments by transcriber
<u>Under</u>	A raise in volume or emphasis
↑	There is a rise in intonation
↓	There is a drop in intonation
→	A particular sentence of interest to the analyst
CAPITALS	Something was said loudly or even shouted
(hh)	There was laughter within the talk
=	A continuation of talk
::	Represent elongated speech, a stretched sound

**Appendix II: The Classroom Scene Diagram**

