

HUMOR IN THE CLASSROOM

Master's thesis

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English
July 2010

**JYVÄSKYLÄN
YLIOPISTO**

Tiedekunta – Faculty HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA	Laitos – Department KIELTEN LAITOS
Tekijä – Author Eevamaija Roininen	
Työn nimi – Title Humor in the classroom	
Oppiaine – Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji – Level Pro Gradu -tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Heinäkuu 2010	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 66 + 1 sivua
Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Huumori vuorovaikutuksessa on mielenkiintoinen tutkimuskohde, sillä se sekä vaikuttaa vuorovaikutustilanteessa olevien ihmisten suhteisiin että heijastaa niitä. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tutkia huumoria luokkahuoneessa ja selvittää, millaisia funktioita sillä on luokkahuoneen vuorovaikutuksessa. Monet aikaisemmat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, että opettajan huumorilla on myönteisiä vaikutuksia oppimiseen ja opiskeluilmapiiriin. Oppilaiden huumorilla sen sijaan on havaittu olevan sekä myönteisiä että kielteisiä vaikutuksia oppimiseen ja opiskeluilmapiiriin. Suomessa huumorin käyttöä kouluympäristössä on kuitenkin tutkittu hyvin vähän. Lisätutkimus huumorista voi antaa hyödyllistä tietoa luokkahuoneessa vallitsevista sosiaalisista suhteista ja opetustilanteiden rakentumisesta sekä huumorin vaikutuksesta niihin. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostui kahdesta 90 minuutin englannin kielen lukio-oppitunnista, jotka ovat osa Jyväskylän yliopiston kielten laitoksen valmiiksi nauhoitettua ja litteroitua aineistoa. Tunneilla oli läsnä 15 oppilasta sekä heidän opettajansa. Tutkimus on laadullinen ja sen metodina on käytetty keskusteluanalyysia. Lisäksi aineistoa on analysoitu keskittyen huumorikäyttäytymiseen sukupuolinäkökulmasta, näin ollen harjoittaen myös feminististä keskusteluanalyysia.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa havaittiin paljon huumoria, joka jaettiin neljään kategoriaan sen mukaan, kuka oli osallisena huumorin tuottamisessa. Opettajan tuottamalla sekä oppilaiden ja opettajan yhdessä tuottamalla huumorilla nähtiin olevan myönteisiä vaikutuksia opetusvuorovaikutukseen. Yksittäisen oppilaan tuottamalla huumorilla nähtiin olevan sekä myönteisiä että kielteisiä vaikutuksia luokkahuoneen ilmapiiriin. Oppilaiden välinen huumori oli poikien keskeistä huumoria, joka nähtiin osittain poikien tapana osoittaa maskuliinisuutta ja kuulumista ryhmään. Silmiinpistävää aineistossa oli tyttöjen osallistumattomuus huumorin tuottamiseen.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Classroom interaction, humor, conversation analysis, feminist conversation analysis	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository Kielten laitos	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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1 INTRODUCTION

Walker and Goodson (1977:212) have accurately described the complexity of humor as follows:

The nature of humour is complex because it resides not only in the logic of what is said, but in the performance of the teller, in the relationship between the teller and the audience, and in the immediate context of the instance.

Humor in naturally-occurring interaction between people reveals something about the people's relationships present in the interaction, and it also affects those relationships. Humor can be described as social "glue" because it has the power to create a feeling of togetherness. On the other hand, people can be excluded or ridiculed through humor. Humor plays a part also in classroom interaction. As classrooms are a central arena for identity formation and social development of young people, humor in the classroom is an interesting object of study for those who want to understand the social reality of classrooms.

Humor has been studied with a focus on teachers' humor with conversation-analytic and ethnographic research methods and in these studies it is often seen as a positive pedagogical tool of the teacher. (See Nguyen 2007, Poveda 2005, Saharinen 2007) More information on the teachers' use of humor has been gathered by questioning students' perceptions of teachers' humor (Anttila 2008, Chavez 2000, Torok, McMorris and Lin 2004). With the questionnaire studies researchers have been able to get information also about the negative sides of teachers' humor that seem to be out of reach for the researchers in the fields of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis.

When the focus is on the pupils, the observations are more controversial. Pupils' humor has been studied concentrating on the so-called class clowns (Hobday-Kusch and McVittie 2002, McLaren 1985, Norrick and Klein 2008) or as part of boys' expressions of hegemonic masculinity (Dalley-Trim 2007, Kehily and Nayak 1997). In addition, also pupils' humor has been studied with questionnaires (Meeus and Mahieu 2009).

Since humor studies offer so little information about pupils' humor, especially in Finland where the research on pupils' humor has been very scarce, this is an area that requires more study. However, as humor is a highly *interactional*, in other words a two-

way phenomenon, the present study investigated both the teacher's and the pupils' humor and how they intertwine in classroom interaction. The purpose was to discover what kinds of functions humor has in the classroom.

Since humor in classroom interaction is a conversational phenomenon, the chosen method for the study was conversation analysis. The data proved to be a very productive object of study with regard to humor use. There was plenty of humor produced by the teacher and the students and it seemed to have several different functions. The humor was observed to function both for the benefit of a conducive learning environment but sometimes also against it as negative attitudes towards the instruction were expressed through humor.

The data was especially interesting with regard to gendered behavior. However, conversation analysis has some restrictions that limit the study of gender in interaction. In order to be able to discuss the gender aspect of humor without violating the principles of conversation analysis, this aspect of humor was analyzed separately. The discoveries of the gender analysis are discussed in section 4 in chapter *Findings*. This part of the analysis falls under the field of feminist conversation analysis.

The complexity of humor as a social phenomenon becomes poignant when trying to define humor. In the present study humor is defined in compliance with Martin (2007:10, cited in Anttila 2008:21, my translation) who sees humor as “an emotional reaction to joy or amusement which appears in different social situations in the form of laughter or a smile”.

The theoretical background of the present study is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2, *Characteristics of classroom interaction*, describes the special characteristics of classroom interaction and how it has been studied. Chapter 3, *Pedagogical perspective on humor*, introduces previous studies on teachers' humor. Chapter 4, *Class clowns*, concentrates on one aspect of pupils' humor, the so-called clowning behavior. Chapter 5, *Gender and humor*, discusses the gender aspect of humor. Chapter 6, *Data and methods*, will present and discuss the methodological framework of the present study. The findings are introduced in chapter 7, *Findings*, and further discussed in chapter 8, *Discussion*.

2 CHARACTERISTICS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION

This chapter introduces common characteristics of classroom interaction and how it differs from naturally occurring interaction. While characterizing classroom interaction, some common ways to study and interpret classroom interaction will be presented.

2.1 Hierarchical relationship between the teacher and the students

The relationship between the teacher and the students is hierarchical. Saharinen (2007:261) describes classroom interaction as institutional conversation whose topics and orientation the teacher is seen to have the right to conduct. (For a presentation of properties of institutional interaction in L2 classroom, see section 2.4 in this chapter.) The teacher, when in a classroom, decides what the discussion is supposed to be about and how it should proceed. Similarly, Norrick and Klein (2008:91) state that the most noticeable difference between naturally occurring conversation and teacher-student-talk is that “the right for the distribution of talk is not shared equally”. In other words, the teacher has the power over speech turns and also the right to demand silence.

Furthermore, the teacher is an authority not only in the subject topic that she or he is teaching, but also in evaluating the pupils’ performance and reacting to their mistakes and breeches of norm (Saharinen 2007:261). This means that in addition to having control over the flow of interaction, the teacher also has the power to make assessments about the pupils’ skills and behavior. In effect, as Anttila (2008:60) points out, since the pedagogical relationship between the pupils and the teacher is a hierarchical one, it also has an ethical dimension. The teacher is in a position where his or her actions have real meaning in the students’ lives.

2.2 Initiation – response – feedback –structure describes classroom talk

Teacher-student talk can be studied with the help of a so-called IRF structure developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975): IRF is an abbreviation for an exchange structure that consists of three moves that are Initiation, Response and Feedback. The exchanges are

usually initiated by the teacher and thus contain an initiation, for instance question or command, by the teacher and some type of response, speech or action, from the students. The feedback move is not included in every exchange but is still an essential part of teacher-student interaction. (ibid.:49-56) In other words, in the teacher-fronted classroom interaction the teacher typically involves the pupils by asking a question to which the pupils or a pupil replies. This is usually followed by some sort of follow-up move from the teacher that informs the pupils whether the answer was correct or approved of.

Cazden (1988: 29) notes that “the three-part sequence of teacher initiation, student response, teacher evaluation (IRE) is the most common pattern of classroom discourse at all grade levels” (Cazden uses the term ‘evaluation’ instead of Sinclair and Coulthard’s ‘feedback’). However, it is rare that the classroom interaction is as neat and orderly as presenting this structure suggests. Norrick and Klein (2008:92) note that the IRF structure is surrounded by all sorts of other moves that have to be taken into consideration when analyzing classroom talk. This means that the pupils disrupt the instruction both unintentionally and on purpose, and the teacher can stray from the pedagogical speech as well.

2.3 Classroom interaction as three-partied performance

The IRF structure is well suited for analyzing classroom interaction from a certain perspective, especially for eliciting the pedagogical structure from the sometimes chaotic classroom interaction. However, classrooms can be investigated from other perspectives as well. One is seeing classroom interaction as a “theatrical performance” as suggested by Goffman. Goffman’s (1981, cited in Norrick and Klein 2008:87) participation framework presents one participant of a conversation as an addressee and one or several others as hearers. In a classroom the addressee could be, for instance, one of the pupils answering the teacher’s question and the teacher would be the hearer. The remaining persons present in the interaction event are described as ratified side participants

who can engage in byplay, crossplay and sideplay and open up a complex conversational floor simultaneous yet subordinate to the main floor which is managed by a ratified speaker and principal addressed participant(s).
(Goodwin 1997: 77-78, cited in Norrick and Klein 2008:87).

In other words, in a classroom the center stage is the teacher's, but the students can be involved in their own 'plays'.

2.4 Classroom interaction from a conversation analysis perspective

Recently conversation analysis (CA) has become a more popular method for studying classroom interaction. (see e.g. Ristevirta 2007, Saharinen 2007, Tainio 2009) Seedhouse (2004) has studied interaction in a second language classroom, i.e. L2 classroom, from a conversation analysis perspective. Although the framework used by Seedhouse is geared for studying L2 classroom interaction, it could be utilized for the analysis of foreign language (abbreviated FL) classroom interaction as well, because L2 and FL classroom interaction can be seen to have the same core institutional goal.

The present study is informed by the principles of CA as practiced by Seedhouse (2004). However, since the focus of the present study, humor in classroom interaction, is different from that of Seedhouse's object of study, which is to study the interactional architecture of L2 classroom, the present study applies Seedhouse's framework insofar it is seen relevant considering the focus of the study.

L2 classroom interaction can be described as institutional interaction where "invariant underlying institutional characteristics" are intertwined with flexibility and variability. In CA the organization of any institutional interaction is understood to rationally derive from the core institutional goal. (Seedhouse 2004:181) Institutional interaction thus differs from so-called naturally occurring conversation in that it has a specified goal that shapes it.

In the L2 classroom the institutional goal is, simply, that the teacher teaches the learners the L2. There are three interactional properties that derive from this goal. Firstly, L2 is both the object and the vehicle of instruction. From this it follows that, secondly, there is a reflexive relationship between pedagogy and interaction. This means that when the focus of pedagogy varies, so does the interaction. Consequently, and thirdly, all utterances are always potentially subject to evaluation. (Seedhouse 2004:182-187.) The peculiarity in language classroom is that the talk is usually very controlled, and sometimes very specifically on the micro level of speech production. For instance,

the teacher may demand a pupil to pronounce a word in a certain way. In addition to this, the talk that the learners produce is under constant evaluation by the teacher, as mentioned earlier. Hence, the pupils in language classrooms are very much under the control of the teacher.

Furthermore, Seedhouse (2004) makes a difference between the institutional setting of interaction and the context of institutional interaction. He notes that not all talk that takes place in an institutional setting, for instance in a classroom, induces an institutional context (ibid.:200). In other words, seen through Seedhouse's CA framework for studying L2 classroom interaction, talk in the classroom that is *not* pedagogically oriented, is not L2 classroom interaction. It has to be noted that, within the scope of this study, all talk in the classroom is considered classroom interaction, since humor in the classroom often occurs in the form of social talk. In other words, the analysis of the data is not restricted in the analysis of institutional interaction. However, the framework presented here can help in making distinctions between so-called on-topic and off-topic talk in the classroom which, in turn, may help in analyzing humor use within and outside the pedagogical talk.

This chapter has presented the special characteristics of classroom interaction and how it can be studied. As stated above, classroom interaction differs from naturally occurring interaction in that it is institutional and hierarchical. Classroom interaction can also be described as three-partied performance as it has an addressee, a hearer and an audience. These characterizations help in analyzing classroom interaction but there are also special frameworks for the study of classroom talk. Teacher-student interaction can be studied, for instance, with the help of the so-called IRF structure or with methods of conversation analysis. The present study applies the CA method developed by Seedhouse (2004) which was introduced above. The following chapters will discuss the use of humor in classroom settings, starting with the humor of the teacher.

3 PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON HUMOR

This chapter will discuss teacher humor in the classroom with an emphasis on four authors who have researched humor in classroom interaction. Poveda (2005) has studied communication in a kindergarten classroom during a metalinguistic activity. He argues that using humor in a kindergarten classroom is essential “in the modulation of children’s face demands” (ibid.:89). Similarly, Saharinen (2007), having analyzed *teasing humor* in the highest level of secondary school, sees humor as an important functional pedagogical tool of the teacher. Furthermore, Nguyen (2007) has examined the interactional resources that a teacher uses in instruction and in building rapport in the classroom. His microanalysis of one adult ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) lesson shows how humor is deployed in the lesson to achieve a conducive classroom atmosphere. Finally, the negative side of teacher humor will be discussed referring to Anttila’s (2008) study of high school student experiences of teacher humor.

3.1 The concept of face

In order to understand the individual experience of a pupil in the flow of classroom interaction, the concept of face becomes handy. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:61) who developed a politeness model around the concept of face, “face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction”. This means that one wants to maintain a good image of oneself to the outside world when in social contact with other people. The concept of face is divided to negative face, which means that persons have their own “territory”, a right not to be distracted and imposed by others, and to positive face, which means one’s positive self-image and the need to be appreciated and have a self-image approved of by others. (ibid.) In other words, negative face refers to the desire to act freely without an interruption by others, meaning also that a certain respectful distance is maintained. The positive face, on the other hand, refers to the need to be liked and accepted in a group.

The concept of face is connected to power relations that are present also in classrooms. This is described by Cazden (1988:162) as she states the following:

The seriousness of any act, to teacher or student, depends on their perceptions of social distance (D), relative power (P), and a ranking (R) of the imposition of the teacher's act at a particular moment.

Nguyen (2007:285) states that a teacher, when teaching in the classroom, has a higher status, i.e. more power than the pupils which can affect the relationship between the teacher and the pupils so that it becomes distant. The relationship between the teacher and the students is thus always potentially face-threatening.

Consequently, as Poveda (2005: 91-92) states, children's faces can be threatened by teachers and peers in two ways: firstly, children's behavior in classrooms is assessed by both the teacher and the peers and this assessment is potentially negative, thus threatening children's positive face. Secondly, "teachers have considerable power to control, interrupt and redirect children's behavior inside schools (limiting children's freedom –*negative face*)" (Cazden 1988, cited in Poveda 2005:92).

However, to be successful, the teacher needs to be able to create a positive atmosphere where the pedagogical objectives can be met despite the asymmetric power relationships (Nguyen 2007:285). Humor can be utilized in order to bring about a good classroom atmosphere.

Investigating classroom interaction from the perspective of power relations and recognizing humor as a resource in alleviating the potential negative effects of the power relationship, gives humor unexpected value. Its value is not just in the passing amusement that it offers, but can affect the social relationships in the classroom in a positive way.

3.2 When the faces need to be saved

Teachers make use of humor in instruction in variable ways. In the following I will present some typical situations where humor is used for pedagogical purposes in the classroom. These are reacting to pupils' mistakes, making disciplinary turns, seeking for attention and giving instruction. In addition, humor can be seen as a metalinguistic activity.

Humor seems to be a way to react to students' mistakes in classrooms (Nguyen

2007, Poveda 2005, Saharinen 2007). Saharinen (2007) analyzed a Finnish language and literature lesson that was given for two groups of senior high school students with a similar content. In the sequences where exercises were checked, the teacher repeatedly had to react to students' mistakes. Thus a lot of humor appeared in these sequences because the teacher habitually reacted to students' mistakes by teasing them (Saharinen 2007:262). Humor can be used in this way as a tool to alleviate the seriousness of the teacher's correction move.

Furthermore, humor is made use of in avoiding conflicts in classrooms when disciplinary turns are needed. Teachers can make positive remarks in the instruction and also reply to negative outcries with humor in order to relieve the stress in the classrooms - instead of either ignoring the pupils' expressions of emotion or reprimanding the pupils for "talking out" (Norrick and Klein 2008:90). Moreover, demanding silence in the classroom in an unyielding manner threatens the face of the students and forces them to obey. A student is probably more willing to obey a persuasive and cooperative directive and thus a conducive learning atmosphere is more easily achieved. (Ristevirta 2007:242-243). Here humor can be employed.

In addition to disciplinary turns, simply getting the attention of the students can be a challenge and potentially lead to conflicts or an unfriendly atmosphere. According to Nguyen (2007:291), calling for attention can be a face-threatening situation for the students because the teacher has to ask the students to depart their engagement and start doing what the teacher orders them to do. The teacher in Nguyen's study utilizes humoristic speech in order to get the pupils' attention and thus makes the situation less stressful.

Moreover, in my opinion, using humor in disciplinary turns and when seeking for attention, the teacher does not merely make obeying easier for the pupils. Rather, the teacher can also protect his or her own face with humor, as a harsh disciplinary turn can result in pupils not obeying which is a highly face-threatening situation for the teacher. In other words, when the teacher invests all his or her authority in a demand for silence, for instance, and the pupils rebel, the teacher has lost control of the situation.

Humor can be inserted in instruction in many ways. Anttila (2008:153) mentions that teachers can, for instance, make humorous mnemonic rules and jokes with pedagogically oriented content. In Nguyen's (2007) study the teacher resorts to humor in

instruction in many ways. In one excerpt (ibid.:293-4) the class is correcting exercises on passive forms. One of the pupils makes some mistakes in her answer to which the teacher reacts by behaving as if he was truly disgusted by the mistake. Humor is the teacher's way to react to the student's mistake as it softens the correction move which is potentially face-threatening. In addition, it draws the attention of the other students to the task at hand and engages their interest.

Poveda (2005) uses Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor (see chapter 2) in interpreting a humoristic exchange in his study. Nguyen's (2007) extract can be interpreted using the same metaphor. In the example, the teacher takes up the role of someone who is appalled by wrong verb forms, the student who has made the mistake is handed the role of a poor, failing student and the rest of the class are the audience. The situation is humorous as it is interpreted as non-serious.

Furthermore, Poveda (2005) notes that humor does not merely help in instruction, but it is also a metalinguistic activity that challenges especially the young pupils' metalinguistic knowledge. Humor is improvisation and humoristic turns can thus be unexpected. As in the example above, the students have to recognize the situation as non-serious and this presumes that the students are able to interpret the situation as play. For the college-aged students in Nguyen's (2007) study, recognizing the event as humorous is probably easy. However, children, like those in Poveda's (2005) study, may be confused when the teacher starts to joke. Interpreting an act or a word-play as humor requires a certain level of intelligence and metalinguistic knowledge which young pupils might not yet possess.

As discussed above, humor in the classroom has a much more important function than mere amusement. Pupils and teachers struggle to create and maintain particular social identities in the classroom and humor can be used in order to achieve this; in addition to this humor can be seen as a metalinguistic activity (Poveda 2005:92).

3.3 Humor as an index of closeness

Saharinen (2007) and Poveda (2005) share the view that humor is also an index of closeness, an outcome of shared group history. In other words, in a classroom where the teacher and the students joke together, the humor is also a result of good classroom atmosphere, not only a reason for it. Saharinen (2007:262) reports in her study of two

high school lessons that there was laughter especially in the sequences where exercises were checked: here the teacher repeatedly teased the students and the students also teased the teacher. Nguyen (2007:298) notes that, in the classroom he studied, the social talk between the teacher and the students smoothed the path for the instructional tasks. This was achieved by the teacher in a strategic, controlled manner that maintained a “positive environment and solidarity in the classroom” (ibid.:298). It is likely that the positive environment and solidarity gave the students freedom to express themselves quite freely and a feeling that their jokes would be approved of. Pupils’ humor will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

3.4 The negative effects of teacher humor

This chapter has discussed various functions of teachers’ humor and, more specifically, the positive effects of humor. However, it has to be taken into consideration that not all humor that teachers resort to or create is positive. Anttila (2008) has studied Finnish high school students’ perceptions of teachers’ humor. The study, in addition to reporting students’ many positive experiences of teachers’ humor, shows that humor in the classroom is not always positive or positively received.

The students in Anttila’s (2008:162) study described [negative] humor as disparaging, humiliating or laughing at someone’s expense. In most accounts of negative humor the target of the teacher’s negative humor was an individual student or the whole group (ibid.:164). Other forms of negative humor according to the students were humor that was “ill-functioning”, i.e. not funny, and hurtful humor that was directed at some other people than the students in the classroom (ibid:168-9). According to Anttila (ibid.:196, my translation) “negative humor invoked negative feelings such as irritation, depression and feeling of inferiority in the pupils”.

Sarcasm is usually considered one of the negative forms of humor. This was the case also in a study by Torok, McMorris and Lin (2004) which examined the use of humor in college classrooms. However, in their study a fifth of the students evaluated sarcasm as an appropriate form of humor *for the professor* (ibid:17). Similarly, Anttila (2008:206) reports that in her questionnaire study the teacher’s negative humor was not considered as entirely inappropriate by all students, and that some of the students even

expressed enjoying the teacher's sarcastic remarks. Thus, although sarcasm, according to a dictionary definition is "bitter, esp ironic, remarks intended to wound sb's feelings" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 1993), *using* sarcasm in a classroom does not automatically mean that somebody's feelings are hurt.

The reason why the studies on teacher humor discussed in this chapter have such an unanimously positive attitude towards humor in the classroom is undoubtedly partly due to the study methods employed in them. Conversation analysis, although very applicable in studying humor as a conversational phenomenon, cannot capture the individual cognitive experience of participants. Moreover, it has to be taken into consideration that teachers who do not feel happy and confident in their work are less likely to allow researchers and video-cameras into the classroom. Hence, studies on classroom interaction are perhaps less likely to record negative humor use.

Furthermore, Anttila (2008:174) reports that in her data there were also accounts of humor in which negative humor was described as having positive effects and positive humor negative effects. Thus, classroom humor seems to be a far more complicated research subject than perhaps is anticipated.

As discussed above, teachers' humor, on one hand, can work for the benefit of instruction and protect the social identities of the pupils. On the other hand, as Anttila's (2008) study points out, the teacher's humor can also have negative effects. The negative side of teacher humor seems to be an area that has been studied very little. This is exemplified by comparing the number of authors that are cited in this chapter concerning positive and negative effects of teacher humor. Another area that seems to be less widely studied than the pedagogical uses of humor is the pupils' humor in classroom interaction. Pupils' humor will be discussed in the following chapters. The next chapter, *Class clowns*, concentrates on the so-called class clowns and the chapter *Gender and humor* considers humor from the perspective of gender, also including discussion on the use of humor in classrooms.

4 CLASS CLOWNS

While teachers' humor in classrooms is an increasingly popular research topic, there are very few studies on disruptions for humor by pupils, with the exception of literature on how to deal with unmanageable children (Norrick and Klein 2008:84, see also Meeus and Mahieu 2009). Moreover, studies on pupils' humor seem to be centered around the so-called class clowns whose behavior is interpreted as a reaction to power relations in classrooms.

4.1 Pragmatic perspective on class clowning

Norrick and Klein (2008) have studied the class clown phenomenon in the early years of elementary school in an American school in Germany. They see pupils' disruptions for humor, i.e. clowning, as a way to create an individual identity in the "faceless group orientation of the elementary classroom" (ibid.:83). As discussed earlier in chapter 2 *Characteristics of classroom interaction*, classroom talk can be described as IRF units that are controlled by the teacher. However, it is possible for participants in classroom interaction to compete for the floor with humoristic comments that result in overlapping talk and which can be followed by reprimands or the absence of them (Norrick and Klein 2008:91). In other words, through humor a student can achieve more freedom to express oneself in the classroom. Sometimes this humorous but disruptive behavior is scolded by the teacher, sometimes it goes unpunished. Norrick and Klein's (2008) study on clowning behavior concentrates on how it occurs in the flow of pedagogical interaction. The post-structuralist perspective, on the other hand, offers a societally interesting interpretation of the class clown's behavior.

4.2 Post-structuralist perspective on pupils' humor

Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002:196) interpret the role of a class clown from a poststructuralist perspective and describe it as a location from which a student or students who occupy that location are able to negotiate the right to influence the

conversation. Similarly to Norrick and Klein (2008), Hobday-Kusch and McVittie have studied class clowns in the early years of elementary school. Their research was conducted as an ethnographic study in a Canadian school where they recognized two boys as occupying the role, or the location, of a class clown. They perceived the role of a class clown as something that lent the boys some power over the classroom discourse, i.e. they were able to affect the classroom discourse in both negative and positive ways (Hobday-Kusch and McVittie 2002:196). Further, Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (ibid:201-2) state that from a post-structuralist perspective humor can be interpreted as an intentional way to alter the power relations within a social context.

McLaren (1985) carried out an ethnographic study in a Catholic Canadian junior high school in the 1980s. According to McLaren (ibid.:84) the class clown takes the role of a ‘meta-commentator’ and is thus “able to resist the classroom instruction by penetrating in an often sarcastic fashion the formal and tacit axioms of propriety that help to sustain order and control during classroom lessons.”

Drawing heavily on the work of cultural and symbolic anthropologists, McLaren went as far as to interpret the behavior of class clowns as ritual resistance which is connected to class struggle of subordinate groups in the capitalist hegemonic system. Although especially from a contemporary Finnish perspective it is difficult to see the humoristic actions of class clowns as a form of class struggle, the interpretation of resistance is interesting. If not exactly a form of class struggle, humor can, however, be seen as enabling resistance and destabilizing power relations in the classroom.

Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002:206) state that

Once the event is translated as “funny,” more choices are made available to the students, which in turn allows them more power in the situation — at least, if nothing more, the power to interpret events in more than one way.

In other words, when one is able to make others laugh, he or she is at least momentarily in control of the situation and how the situation is interpreted. Thus, from a poststructuralist perspective, humor can be conceptualized as not only amusement, but as a social tool that can be used to challenge power relations. As Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002:202) put it, “Humour can be an indicator of social status in a classroom (Hobday-Kusch 2001; Martin and Baksh, 1995); a post-structuralist lens informs how students negotiate power in classrooms.” The connection of status with the production of

humor in the classroom will be touched upon in the next chapter that discusses students' humor in the classroom from a gender perspective.

This chapter has discussed the clowning behavior of pupils in the classroom and presented interpretations according to which pupils' humor is connected to power relations in classrooms, or even outside the school, as McLaren (1985) claims. Meeus and Mahieu (2009) offer a somewhat less controversial view on humor in classrooms. In addition to stating that pupils' humor is 'boundary-seeking and boundary-crossing' behavior (ibid.:559) –yet another interpretation of humor as linked to power relations – they (ibid.:560) also note that “pupils use humour to make things more fun”. In other words, Meeus and Mahieu suggest that sometimes there is no other reason for pupils' humor than simply making the lesson more fun for themselves and their classmates. The following chapter will concentrate on the gender aspect of humor and consider how the production of “fun” can be intertwined with the production of gender.

5 GENDER AND HUMOR

Gender is an aspect that tends to influence the way people communicate with each other. Conversely, it is also produced in interaction. Therefore, humor in interaction is a prolific object of study also in the field of gender research. This chapter discusses the role of gender in humorous behavior in three sections. First, the differences between men's and women's humor, as discovered in a number of studies, will be introduced briefly. Second, in order to understand the influence of gender on classroom behavior, section 5.2 will present some findings of gender studies in academic settings. Third, the use of humor in the production of heterosexual masculinity will be discussed based on studies by Kehily and Nayak (1997), Dalley-Trim (2007) and Davies (2003).

5.1 Gendered humor styles

This section discusses the gendered humor styles of men and women in two subsections. The first section will summarize research on humor and gender from over fifty years as presented by Kotthoff (2006). The second section presents a study by Holmes (2006) which gives more recent information about women and men's humor styles.

5.1.1 Traditional humor styles of men and women

Traditionally, expectations for acceptable female and male behavior have been very different from each other and humor makes no exception in this respect. Firstly, Kotthoff (2006:9) points out that one's status affects one's eagerness to produce humor.

Every invitation to laugh is an invitation to withdraw focal attention from the ongoing discussion and to direct it to non-instrumental pleasure. For women and subordinates, this distraction of focal attention is a risky maneuver, because they momentarily take control of the situation.

In other words, a person who jokes in a situation takes conversational space for something that could be considered unnecessary. Hence, successful joking requires that one is able to take that space, i.e. has a status high enough for 'stealing' attention in a

situation. This is also recognized by Walker and Goodson (1977:213) who state that “success or failure at telling jokes endangers status in the immediate context and so not surprisingly it is usually those with most power in the situation who tell most jokes“. Thus joking is seen to reflect power relations.

Furthermore, joking is also often described as an aggressive communication move. Kotthoff (2006:13) notes that avoiding overt aggression is usually seen as a feminine feature whereas verbal and physical fighting is seen as typical masculine behavior in most cultures. Joking is thus not easily combined with traditional female role expectations because it is a somewhat aggressive form of communication.

In effect, it is generally believed that women laugh and smile more than men but are less prone to behave humorously themselves (Chavez 2000:1021). It can be suggested that this difference in behavior patterns stems from early childhood. Kotthoff (2006:13) reports that “starting at late pre-school age, boys tell more jokes, frolic and clown more, while girls laugh more often.” This difference in girls’ and boys’ behavior is recognized for instance by Maybin (2002) in her ethnographic school study on informal language practices of ten- to twelve-year-olds. According to Maybin (2002:271), “public competitive exchange of anecdotes of self-display tended to be dominated by boys”. Maybin’s study was carried out in England but the observation could undoubtedly have been made in a Finnish school study as well. Traditionally, boys and girls have had different standards for acceptable behavior also in Finland.

As stated in the beginning of this section, the findings of women’s and men’s humor and interaction styles reported here are, for the most, based on relatively old studies. Since, the concept of gender, the research methods in the field of gender studies and also women’s position have changed. Therefore, contemporary studies bring a welcome contribution to the discussion of gendered behavior.

5.1.2 Recent study: equal participation but different style in humor

Recent studies on the gender aspect of humor give a somewhat different picture of men's and women's humor behavior. Kotthoff (2006:4) states that "the simplistic model of the actively joking man and the receptively smiling woman has lost ground". Two major reasons can be given for this change.

Firstly, while the conception of gender in cultural and social studies has altered, also the method of studying male and female humorous behavior has developed (Kotthoff 2006:6). Holmes (2006) studied the gender tendencies in jointly constructed (abbreviated conjoint) humor in several workplaces in New Zealand. She analyzed the data using two pairs of concepts (or continuums) which are supportive vs. contestive, and collaborative vs. competitive.

In order to understand the results of Holmes' (2006) study and also for the purposes of the present study, the afore-mentioned terms for the analysis of conjoint humor will be explained here. The terms supportive and contestive describe the pragmatic content of the propositions. Supportive comments support what has been said in previous turns, whereas a contestive contribution challenges the proposition of previous turns in some way. The pair collaborative vs. competitive, in turn, describe the style of interaction. The collaborative style is one where there is a lot of cohesion between the lines of different speakers, even synchronized turns. In the competitive (or minimally collaborative) style the contributions are more independent and not necessarily linked to each other. In other words, there can be many "competitive" comments on one previous proposition. Having studied conjoint workplace humor with the help of these pairs of concepts, Holmes (2006:47) came to the following conclusion:

Supportive conjoint humor tended to be more frequent in groups, which included women, while contestive humor sequences tended to occur more often in meetings in which men were involved. A high energy, maximally shared floor, with frequent turn overlapping and strong cohesive ties between contributions to the humor sequence, was more likely to develop in contexts where both genders were participants, and least likely in those where only men were present. Conversely, a minimally collaborative, or competitive type of floor tended to develop more often in groups involving only men, or in which men predominated.

In other words, the style of humor tended to change according to the gender distribution of the groups. The literal content of the propositions was more supportive while there

were more women present and more contestive when there were more men present in the situation. The style of the contributions was most cohesive in mix-sexed groups and least cohesive in only males' groups. This means that while both men *and women* were active in humorous interaction, there were gender tendencies in the humor styles. Gender still affects the way humor is produced in interaction.

Holmes' (2006) method seems to be very suitable for studying the effect of gender on humor in interaction, because it captures the intricacies of naturally occurring conversation. A clear advantage in her approach is that it focuses on describing the tendencies in discourse styles instead of making calculations and drawing (perhaps rash) conclusions from them.

A second reason for different results of recent studies on humor, as compared with older studies, is undoubtedly social change. Kotthoff (2006:13) argues that Holmes' (2006) study reveals the potential that humor has in diminishing status differences and sees this as indicating historical change in the "cultural role of humor in communication". Women's position in society has gone through major changes during the last decades and this has given women more status which consequently has given women more freedom to act humorously in public.

5.2 Gender and classroom behavior

In order to understand how gender influences humorous behavior in the classroom setting, it is good to get acquainted with what studies tell about the gendered behavior of girls, boys and teachers in the classroom. The following sub-sections will concentrate on these issues, based on a research report by Sunderland (2000).

5.2.1 Tendencies of classroom behavior

In the following Chavez (2001:1201) reports on the body of research on gendered behavior in academic settings:

Female students have been found to play supportive roles in mixed-sex groupings, to be less likely to call out or 'make trouble', to take fewer turns and be interrupted more

frequently, and to receive less attention from the teacher.

Sunderland (2000:159) points to similar tendencies found in studies on teacher talk carried out in the 1970s and 1980s, which revealed that the teacher, in addition to speaking more than the students, talked significantly more to the males than to the females in the classroom.

According to Sunderland (2000:160), findings such as the ones reported above have often been read as “evidence for and a manifestation of male dominance”. However, as Swann and Graddol (1988, cited in Sunderland 2000:160) point out, male students receiving more attention in classrooms than females is hardly a result of intentional choices, but is rather the outcome of a ‘collaborative process between teacher and students’. In other words, a teacher who gives more chances for boys to speak is most likely not intentionally sexist but acts according to norms of communication that are natural to him or her.

5.2.2 The quality of teacher’s attention and the style of pupils’ participation

Furthermore, Sunderland (2000:161) demands that a distinction be made between the amount of teacher attention and the type of attention, noting that not all teacher attention is useful; for instance being scolded could even hinder learning.

Sunderland (2000) has studied the teacher treatment and pupil participation by gender in a German-as-a-foreign-language classroom in a British comprehensive school, the pupils being 11 and 12 years of age. With regard to teacher attention, although on most measurements gender similar, there were two statistically significant differences by gender. First, the boys were scolded more, and, second, the girls were being asked more academically challenging questions. Furthermore, a closer look at the pupil participation showed that the boys, on average, talked more whereas the girls spoke more German. In other words, it seems that the way girls and boys participated in the classroom interaction was different.

Sunderland (2000:164) concludes that the girls’ femininity in this classroom was distinctly academic when compared with the type of masculinity that was constructed for the boys. The boys might have been louder but in an academic sense the girls dominated. Similarly, Davies (2003), having studied 14-year-old pupils’ gendered

discourse styles in small group discussions in English comprehensive schools, concluded that the girls' discourse style was more conducive to learning than the boys' discourse style that was obstructive to learning.

However, looking at statistical tendencies gives too simplifying a picture of the classroom interaction. Sunderland (2000:164) states that within any classroom, even when the pupils have very similar family and educational backgrounds, "gender will not be a straightforward masculine-feminine binary. There will always be diversity within each gender group and in all probability overlap between them." In other words, there are talkative, joking girls and silent, receptive boys among the pack.

In Sunderland's study there were two boys in the class who took up a lions' share of the teacher's attention. This phenomenon of dominant, masculine boys is further investigated in Dalley-Trim's (2007) and Kehily and Nayak's (1997) school studies which will be discussed next.

5.3 Humor as constitutive of heterosexual masculine identities

Dalley-Trim (2007) and Kehily and Nayak (1997) have studied classroom interaction focusing on the performance and the constitution of masculinity, respectively. Kehily and Nayak's study focuses on the role of humor in the hierarchical relationships of 15- and 16-year-old adolescent males in secondary schools in Britain whereas Dalley-Trim (2007:199)

examines the ways in which two groups of boys took up positions of dominance within their respective classrooms and, more specifically, focuses upon the ways in which they came to construct themselves, and perform, as embodied masculine subjects.

The school where the study was carried out was an Australian secondary school, the pupils being 14 years old.

Kehily and Nayak (1997) see humor as constitutive of heterosexual masculinity. Similarly, Dalley-Trim (2007:203) states that heterosexist language practices are central in acquiring a masculinist identity; moreover, boys use body language in addition to verbal language in enacting the hegemonic versions of masculinity. These heterosexist language practices include humor in many forms. The following sections will discuss

sexual humor, homophobic humor and ritual insults as practiced by teenaged boys in school.

5.3.1 Sexual humor

Nayak and Kehily (1997) observed that game-play and retelling mythic stories with sexual content fostered “group solidarity and shared male identity through ‘othering’ teachers, girls, women and those who fail to cultivate a hyper-masculinity”. Similarly, Dalley-Trim (2007:203) describes the behavior of a small group of boys who used sexual language practices in order to degrade other boys in their class and create humor within their own group. In other words, sexual humor plays a role in male-bonding, as it excludes girls and puts down those boys who are not masculine enough to participate in the sexual humor discourse.

However, it has to be noted that intra-group humor is a way to increase intra-group solidarity in other than teenage male groups as well. On one hand, well-intentioned, collaborative humor can, for instance, increase work-place collegiality, as reported by Holmes (2002). On the other hand, participants in a situation can be excluded with the intra-group humor, or ridiculed with jokes and humorous remarks.

Kehily and Nayak (1997) also describe sexual humor as a way to displace one’s own “sexual anxieties on to others through laughter, while relieving the self of embarrassment”. In this way sexual humor could be seen as a sort of coping method, a face-saving act which is used at the expense of others.

5.3.2 Homophobic humor

One form of sexual humor is homophobic humor which is used by males to emphasize their heterosexual masculinity (Kehily and Nayak 1997). Dalley-Trim (2007) and Kehily and Nayak (1997) witnessed for instance name-calling and abusive, homophobic jokes in their respective studies. Kehily and Nayak (1997) note that homophobic performance implies that gender categories are not entirely fixed and, hence, masculinity has to be constantly proven within male peer groups; homophobic humour is a way to display one’s heterosexual masculinity as “independent, entirely unfeminine and exclusively

‘straight’”. Both Nayak and Kehily (1997) and Dalley-Trim (2007) claim that homophobia is interconnected with misogyny, i.e. that the ‘feminine other’ and thus homosexuality has to be expelled from within.

In my view, however, this interpretation is too coarse a generalization. I see *homophobia* as a sign of insecurity about one’s own identity and homophobic humor more as a sign of belonging to a certain group rather than something that automatically denotes homophobia or misogyny. Further, according to young people who were interviewed for an article in the newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* the word ‘homo’ in their speech refers to stupidity rather than to people with a homosexual orientation (Hietanen 2010). This indicates that although words like ‘gay’ and ‘homo’ may have negative meanings in the speech of the young people, their use is not automatically an indication of homophobia or misogyny. Nevertheless, homophobic humor, or rather humor that resorts to vocabulary that refers to non-heterosexuality, plays a role in the intra-group interaction of young males.

5.3.3 Ritual insults

Kehily and Nayak (1997:3) witnessed in their study the teenaged males as being involved in so-called blowing competitions. Blowing competitions are verbal duels where the opponents give and take ritualized insults and thus perform their masculinity (ibid.:3). In other words, the boys threw insults at each other as a sort of a game. Success in this game was considered a sign of masculinity. Nayak and Kehily (1997) also observed that the boys exchanged these insults also among friendship groups outside the classrooms which indicates that the literal meaning of the insults was not necessarily considered as offensive. Among friends the language that would be highly offensive in other contexts, was used for humor and male-bonding.

In sum, humor, especially sexual and homophobic humor, and ritualized insults seem to be an essential part of the intra-group interaction of certain groups of boys. This threatens to marginalize those who are denied access to this sort of humor either due to their sex or lack of status. Humor is thus connected to situational power and the hierarchy of the students in a classroom. For instance, Dalley-Trim (2007:209) reports

that a group of boys was able to dominate the linguistic space of the classroom through 'humorous' and disruptive performances. The boys were thus able to take more than their fair share of the classroom talk.

Nayak and Kehily's (1997) and Dalley-Trim's (2007) studies tend to show girls and non-masculine boys as victims of the boys who attempt to highlight their own masculinity. However, Davies (2003), having studied the discourse styles of fourteen-year-olds in group discussions during English literature classes, gives another viewpoint to the matter. She points out that boys' discourse style and group pressure hamper their learning. "The vigilant monitoring of deviation from male heterosexual norms enacted great social pressure and this process made the work so much more difficult to negotiate for the boys than the girls." (ibid:129). This means that the boys could not participate in a group discussion in a sincere way, showing interest in the pedagogical task, because that kind of behavior would have been in conflict with the masculinity as defined by the peer group. Hence, the boys, too, can be seen to suffer from the enactment of hegemonic masculinity – at least with regard to their academic development.

At this point it must be noted, though, that it is also possible that girls dominate the linguistic space in a classroom. Furthermore, the studies reported in this section were carried out in schools in northern England and in one school in Australia and thus represent the school culture in those places. They do, however, bear some resemblance to the data in the present study.

The focus of this study is humor in the classroom and considering humor in the classroom from a gender perspective introduces into the discussion a point of view different from the others presented above. This chapter has attempted to shed light on the effect of gender to humor, and vice versa. Firstly, it was suggested that there is a connection between status and eagerness to joke. Interpreting interaction events from this perspective may change the interpretation of a humorous exchange quite drastically. Something that could have been seen as a good-humored exchange between co-workers at first sight might turn into a manifestation of power relations in the eyes of the analyst. Secondly, a more recent study of women's and men's humor styles was discussed. This gave some practical, and perhaps less politically flamboyant, tools to study humor in interaction. Furthermore, gendered tendencies of classroom behavior were briefly introduced which provided some background for the discussion in the last section. In the last section it was suggested that humor plays an essential role in the teenaged males'

enactment of hegemonic masculinity.

6 DATA AND METHODS

The focus of the present study is humor in the classroom. As humor in the classroom is a social and mainly conversational phenomenon, the chosen method of analysis is conversation analysis, i.e. CA. Further, since the data proved interesting in terms of gendered behavior, I decided to include a gender perspective in the analysis. CA has some restrictions concerning the interpretation of a conversation which limit the analysis of gendered behavior. Hence, the gender analysis will be separated as its own section in the analysis and it can be described as feminist conversation analysis. This chapter will present the study questions, methods and principles of analysis and the data of the study.

6.1 Study questions

The present study investigates the functions of humor in the classroom. The question about the functions is two-fold. First, function can be understood as the motivation of the speaker for his or her actions. This can range from very intentional planned jokes to reacting to a face-threatening situation with humor. On the other hand, the function of humor can refer to the effects of humor. The effect can be, for instance, an improved but also a worsened atmosphere in the classroom. The effect of humor is in any case some sort of an emotion. However, within the framework of this study emotion cannot be measured. Thus the effect of humor is studied as it appears in actions and expressions of emotion.

6.2 Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis seems to be a popular method of studying humor in the classroom (e.g. Norrick and Klein 2008) and I also intend to use this method of analysis. However, there are also other methods to study humor in the classroom. Humor in the classroom has been studied, for instance, by collecting stories of humoristic events and classifying those events (see Meeus and Mahieu 2009). There are also ethnographic studies on class clowns and their social position in schools (see Hobday-Kusch and McVittie 2002, McLaren 1985). Furthermore, pupils' and students' views on teachers' humor have been

collected through interviews and questionnaires (e.g. Anttila 2008, Chavez 2001). These different approaches have already been discussed in the previous chapters.

Conversation analysis is a good method for studying humor because it takes into account the complex situation in the classroom. It does not restrict itself to the analysis of jokes or humoristic events as incidents independent of their context of production. Studying humor in a classroom environment with the CA method gives information about the immediate context of the humor and, further, how the humor transforms the context. Thus it can give us information about the intricacies of a complex social interaction event with many participants. It can also give us information about the social relationships of the participants.

Furthermore, in the present study the institutional context of the humor is a language classroom. The interaction is thus framed and oriented by the pedagogical purpose of teaching and learning English. Hence, this study will touch upon questions about how humor affects language learning and teaching and how humor transforms the learning environment.

6.3 The principles of conversation analysis

Conversation analysis is a widespread method for studying naturally occurring conversations. It has its roots in ethnomethodology and sociology and was developed by Harvey Sacks and his colleagues Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. (Tainio 2009:158-9) This study applies CA methodology as presented by Paul Seedhouse whose interest lies in studying the interaction of language classrooms. According to Seedhouse (2004:3) the focus of CA is “on the principles which people use to interact with each other by means of language”. The object of analysis is a naturally occurring interaction event that would have taken place also without the intention for study and can therefore be considered as a natural interaction event (Tainio 2009:159).

Seedhouse (2004) introduces four principles that guide conversation analysts. First, “there is order in all points in interaction” (ibid.:14). This means that although naturally occurring conversation may appear chaotic, there is order and structure within all conversations and the participants of a conversation are rational actors. (See the discussion on characteristics of institutional conversation in chapter 2.) The second

principle is that “contributions to interaction are *context-shaped* and *context-renewing*” (ibid.:14). In other words, conversation is built on what has been said and done before, and this, in turn, renews the context for the next speaker. According to the third principle, nothing in the interaction “can be dismissed a priori as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant (Heritage 1984b: 241)” (Seedhouse 2004:14). This, according to Seedhouse, is the reason why CA uses such detailed transcriptions. Furthermore, the fourth principle is that “we should not approach data with any prior theoretical assumptions or assume that any background or contextual details are relevant” (ibid.:15).

This last principle is well explicated by Tainio (2009:159-160) who states that in CA the analyst attempts to reveal the interpretations and orientations that the participants of an event *themselves* have and not to bring into the analysis his or her own interpretations; furthermore, one is supposed to analyze only that what can be observed from the data. As mentioned above, the principles of CA are in this sense restrictive. CA is an applicable method for studying the texture of conversations, but one cannot get a very firm grasp of issues like gender and power with a strict CA approach.

6.4 The data

The data of the present study consists of two videotaped English-as-a-foreign-language 90-minute lessons in a Finnish high school. The class consists mostly of first year high school students. In the first lesson there are 6 male students and 5 female students present and in the second lesson there are 8 males and 6 females. The teacher is a female. The data and the transcription were available through the Department of Languages at the University of Jyväskylä. For the transcription conventions and codes for identifying speakers, see Appendix.

6.5 Steps of analysis

The present study is informed by Seedhouse's framework for studying classroom interaction but it does not strictly follow it. The major reason for this is that Seedhouse's research subject is different than in the present study. Seedhouse has studied the interactional architecture of L2 classroom whereas the present study concentrates on humor and its function. The present study has been carried out following, loosely, the conversation analysis procedures by Seedhouse (2004:38-9) which will be presented in the following.

- 1) Un-motivated looking: this means looking at the data without preconceptions, trying to find new phenomena. In this study the phenomenon to be investigated, humor, was decided beforehand and this first step was thus bypassed.
- 2) Inductive database search: the data was examined for the purpose of extracting all instances of humor.
- 3) Establishing regularities and patterns: the instances of humor were carefully studied and then categorized according to their functions and the participants in each instance.
- 4) Detailed analysis of single instances in order to explicate the emic logic: certain instances that were considered especially interesting or representative of the classroom interaction were chosen for yet closer analysis.
- 5) A more generalized account: the discoveries are presented here on a more general level, representing the conclusions drawn from those discoveries.

6.6 Analysis from the perspective of gender

Finally, as the data was so interesting with regard to gendered interaction tendencies, it was also analyzed from the perspective of gender. This analysis is presented as a separate section.

In my analysis I view gender as an "ongoing, socially and discursively constituted construct" (Dalley-Trim 2007:200). This is a conceptualization informed by the work of Butler (1990) and takes into consideration the fact that, as gender is an essential part of one's identity, it is an aspect that is present in interaction even if the

participants of an interaction do not explicitly express its relevance. This definition emphasizes the social nature of gender which makes studying gender in interaction all the more relevant.

As stated above, the strictest form of conversation analysis does not allow that any theoretical assumptions or background knowledge is brought into the analysis. According to this principle, gender could be studied applying a CA method only when the participants of the interaction event themselves introduce the gender aspect into the interaction. This greatly inhibits the analysis of gender in interaction.

However, there is also a strand of CA known as feminist CA. The relevance of feminist CA lies in the aforementioned conceptualization of gender as ‘socially and discursively constituted construct’. Therefore, the practitioners of feminist CA do not settle with analyzing the gender aspect in conversation only when it is topicalized by the participants in the interaction event. Thus the researchers in the field of feminist conversation analysis include research interviews in the data and utilize knowledge about historical patterns of gender and sexism in the analysis (Bucholtz 2006:54).

Nevertheless, although practitioners of feminist CA take some liberties in their research methods in relation to supporters of the strictest forms of CA, all practitioners of CA share certain principles in analyzing gender. As Bucholtz (2006:53) puts it, gender should be seen as

a phenomenon whose meaning and relevance must be analytically grounded in (though not, for some feminist scholars, necessarily restricted to) participants’ own understandings of the interaction and not smuggled into the analysis via the researcher’s assumptions and commitments.

This I interpret as a warning against over-analyzing one’s data. The analysis should be based on what is seen in the data and not on what is assumed of it beforehand.

This chapter has introduced the data and the principles and steps of analysis in the present study. The following chapter will present the findings that have been reached with the aforementioned methods. In the first three sections of the findings, the analysis has been carried out attempting to follow the strict principles of CA, whereas the fourth section concentrates on the gender perspective of humor and the analysis presented there can be characterized as feminist CA.

7 FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings considering humor and its functions in the classroom data. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section, *Teacher humor*, concentrates on analyzing humor from a pedagogical perspective. The second, *Humor between the teacher and the pupils: banter and teasing*, discusses the spontaneous humor between the teacher and the students and what it tells about the relationship between the participants. This section also includes commentary on the differential teacher treatment by gender. The section named *The class clown* focuses on one pupil who stood out from the class with his humorous behavior. The last chapter, *Boys' humor*, considers the humor production from the perspective of gender.

The first section contains three and the three following sections each contain two excerpts from the data. The perceptions of classroom humor will be discussed in the light of these excerpts. All the excerpts are first described after which there is an analysis of the excerpt with regard to the functions of humor.

This study investigates the functions of humor which means both the motivation for humor as well as the effects of humor. The focus of this study is data-driven. In other words, I have studied the data, localized instances of humor and attempted to find an explanation for the use of humor in them.

The data consists of two EFL lessons and, accordingly, both languages are used during the lessons. The transcriptions contain thus both English and Finnish. I have translated the Finnish language utterances into English for the description of the interaction, concentrating on their meanings in the interaction rather than their literal meanings.

The names that occur in the analysis have been invented (for the purposes of the present study / in order to protect the identity of the participants). Further, only the pupils whose behavior is commented on in the analysis of each excerpt are referred to with names. Other speakers are identified with codes (see Appendix).

7.1 Teacher humor

The teacher appears remarkably humoristic during these lessons. The teacher's plentiful use of humor is described with the help of three examples. The first example shows how the teacher adds humor to grammar instruction, thus making it less tedious and improving the classroom atmosphere. However, humor seems to be characteristic for the teacher, and thus not all the humor seems to be specifically planned to improve the instruction. Rather, the teacher reacts to different situations with humor. The second excerpt is an example of this. The third excerpt presents how the teacher creates rapport by showing approval of the pupils' humor. The teacher is not the producer of humor in this example, but she laughs a little at the pupil's humorous comment and thus attempts to improve the pedagogical relationship between herself and the student.

In this example the teacher enlivens the lesson by using one of the pupils as an example in teaching comparative forms for adjectives. The teacher and the pupil seem to have an extraordinary relationship which spawns this sort of interaction.

Excerpt 1 (1413-1436)¹

1	T	no niin otetaas ensin ne vertailusanat HHH
2		miten tämmöne (0.6) perusesimerkki kun
3		Teemu on yhtä komea kuin Tom Cruise
4		(4.2)
5	T	tulee Teemu esimerkkejä kaikki
6		(1.7)
7	T	Teemu on yhtä komea kuin Tom Cruise
8		(1.9)
9	T	helppo
10		(3.6)
11	T	sanokko Anna
12	Anna	aa Teemu is as <ha:ndshome [as]> Tom Cruise
13	T	[as]
14	T	<handsome (0.5) as (1.3) Tom> (0.8) Cruise
15		(2.7)
16	T	<yhtä komea kuin>
17		(2.0)
18	Teemu	kostatsä ny vielä sitä (.)
19		[mun kommenttia]

¹ The original line numbers in the data

20	T	[koston] koko loppu kurssin
21	LMs	((boys make laughing noises))
22	LM2	tosii (fiksu)
23	Teemu	ei mitää (.)
24		mää kestän kyllä

The teacher switches into a humorous mood in the middle of a sentence. She begins the sentence with a customary clause “how would you say this basic example” (line 2), and then finishes her utterance with “Teemu is as handsome as Tom Cruise” (line 3), where Teemu refers to one of the students. The humor on this line stems from the contrast between a conventional start of the sentence and the probably unexpected decision to use one of the students as an example. The humor of the sentence is accentuated by the fact that in the example the student’s appearance is compared with that of a famous movie star, i.e. the example is not something neutral. Making a comparison between the student and the major movie star could also be interpreted as a comment on the overly confident behavior of the student in question. The teacher then adds after a pause on line 5 that all the examples are going to be about Teemu.

One of the students, Anna, translates the example into English when selected by the teacher (lines 11-12). Teemu then comments on the teacher’s actions by asking “are you avenging that comment of mine?” (lines 18-19). By this he refers to a previous comment that he had made about the teacher during the same lesson. The comment was humorous but had a negative and thus potentially hurtful content. The teacher replies, ironically, that she is going to keep on avenging for the rest of the course (line 20). This spawns a little laughter in the classroom.

It is unlikely that the teacher had been offended by the pupil’s earlier comment, because she appears to be in a good mood during this exchange. In any case, the teacher’s ironic comment about avenging through the rest of the course is evidently intended as a joke and this seems to settle the event – if there was anything to settle. It also remains unclear whether the motivation for Teemu’s comment (lines 18-19) was remorse or not. However, in his reply (lines 23-24) Teemu maintains the humorous mood. The exchange then continues with Teemu-examples.

The extended joke of the teacher obviously realizes some pedagogical purposes. Firstly, it brings novelty to teaching grammar, and, secondly, as it generates laughter it

has apparently succeeded in creating rapport in the classroom. Singling out a student from the class like this is a risky maneuver. However, the student's behavior during the lesson suggests that he is more likely to enjoy this kind of attention than to feel intimidated by it. Teemu's behavior will be discussed more thoroughly in section 3.

In the following excerpt the teacher comments on the boredom of grammar instruction. The topic, comparative forms of adjectives, is the same as in the previous example. This takes place shortly after that.

Excerpt 2 (1505-1511)

1	T	no nii (.) sitte tämmöne sana ku <me:lko>
2		otetaa tähä tää ny on kauheen tylsää
3		mut koulussa kuuluuki olla tylsää
4		että te ette jäis tänne pyörimään loppu elämäksi
5	Teemu	(pyrkii jat[kaa])
6	T	[no] (.) nii (2.3)
7		sitä meillä koulutuksessa aina (1.4) korostetaa (0.8)

On line 1 the teacher brings into discussion another word for describing adjectives, 'melko', which is the Finnish for 'quite'. On line 2 she comments on the flow of instruction by saying that the topic is very boring. Further, she then digresses to discuss the boredom of school. On lines 3-4 she says that school is supposed to be boring so that the students would not stay in school for the rest of their lives. Here Teemu inserts a comment saying something vague that could be translated "tries to continue" (line 5). It is unclear what he actually means with this. It could be a request or a demand for the teacher to stop digressing and continue with the grammar teaching. However, as said, it is unclear what he means. The teacher reacts to Teemu's interruption on line 6 by saying "yes, okay" and then adds to the topic about boredom that it is something that is emphasized in the training (apparently referring to teachers' in-service training). In other words, she tells the class that in the training the teachers are advised to give boring lessons, which is contrary to the truth and thus obviously meant not to be taken seriously.

The humorous lines of the teacher are a meta-comment to her own instruction and it seems to be born spontaneously in the middle of instruction. This does not raise much of a reaction in the classroom. The reason for this might be that joking is very

habitual to the teacher. In other words, there is no novelty for the students in the teacher making a non-serious comment like this.

The teacher often reacts to the students' humorous comments with an approving laugh. The following excerpt shows one of those instances.

Excerpt 3 (1266-1289)

1	T	no kuka saa (0.6) no Teemu siinä on sulle haastetta nyt [(sit)]
2	Teemu	[on] °vai°
3	T	on
4	Teemu	six (2.1) /vuuden/ (0.3) /antike/ kitchen chairs
5	T	six wooden antique (0.2) kitchen
6	Jarmo	eihä siinä oo (pilkkuja välisä)
7	T	ootappas nyt (0.4) >eiks sielä oli i↑kä< (0.7)
8		tä- tän JÄRJESTYKSEN mukaan meni väärin
9		ikä ja ma- ikä oli ensin [(x)]
10	Teemu	[voi] mun maailma musertui [(nyt iha)]
11	T	[nii ei] kö
12	T	elikkä six
13	LM	((laughs?))
14		(3.8)
15	T	määki laittasin tollai niinku sää
16		mun korva sa[nos tol]lai
17	Teemu	[niinpä]
18	T	£mutta tän säännön mukaan se ei menis£
19		sitä mää ihmettelin tätä ku .hh
20		<six
21	LF	((coughi[ng])) ((still minor coughing))
22	T	[antique]
23	T	wooden> (0.2) kitchen chairs (.) on KIELIOpin mukaan
24		oikea järjestys

The class is discussing an exercise where the task is to put adjectives in the right order in a noun phrase. On line 1 the teacher selects one pupil, Teemu, to try to put the adjectives in the right order. She gives the turn to Teemu by saying that “there’s a challenge for you now” after one pupil has already refused to answer, expressing that he cannot give the right answer. Teemu responds by saying “is there” on line 2 and the teacher gives a confirmation on line 3. Teemu gives the answer in a staccato, Finnish like-accent (line 4). Jarmo apparently comments on Teemu’s speech style on line 6, saying that “there

aren't any commas between the words". The teacher ponders on Teemu's performance on lines 5 and 7 and then says that according to the textbook rule the order was incorrect (lines 8-9). Teemu reacts to this by saying, ironically, that his *world crumbled down*. The teacher responds to this by saying "yes, isn't that right" (line 11). At this point she seems to be looking at Teemu and smiling. She goes on explaining that she would have herself put the words in the same order as the student but that the grammar book gives a different order (lines 12-24). In the middle of the teacher's explanation on line 17 Teemu says "yeah, isn't that so" after which the teacher laughs a little while she is speaking on the following line 18. This is possibly a reaction to the student's comments.

In this example the teacher seems to be working hard to give the pupil the message that he gave a legitimate answer. She utters three times that *the answer was wrong only according to the text book rule* (lines 8, 18 and 23-4) *but not according to her own language intuition* (see lines 15-16 and 19). In addition to this she laughs without no other apparent reason than the pupil's comments on lines 11 and 18. It looks as if the teacher was trying to create rapport between her and the pupil with her lengthy explanation and reactions to the pupil's comments.

The reason for the teacher's behavior might be that she had scolded the student quite harshly previously during the lesson and tries to settle the dispute. Here, she does not act humorously herself. Rather, she shows with her reactions to the pupil's humorous comments that she approves of them.

This section has focused on the teacher's humor. It has shown how the teacher uses humor to create rapport and make the lessons more interesting for the pupils. However, humor is often born in interaction and the following section discusses the humor that occurs between the teacher and her pupils.

7.2 Humor between the teacher and the pupils: banter and teasing

This section presents two instances of humor that occur between the teacher and the students. The first one, a humorous exchange between the teacher and one pupil, could be describes as banter. In the second one the teacher reacts to the pupils' utterances and teases them as a group.

In this excerpt there is banter between the teacher and one of the students, Teemu.

Excerpt 4 (1485-1504)

1	T	mm↑m (1.1) meidän koiramme ovat yhtä (1.3) karvaisi↑a
2		(3.4)
3	T	Teemu
4	Teemu	häh (1.0) our dogs (0.7) are (0.8) mikä oli (.) se
5	T	yhtä karvaisia
6	Teemu	ash
7	T	ei voi sanoa as
8	Teemu	täh?
9	LM6	tuli moka
10	Teemu	nii equally (0.5) furry
11	T	hm↑m (.)
12		do you have a dog?
13	Teemu	nouhh
14	T	mh↑mh
15	Teemu	but I do have a (.) very hairy little sister
16	T	aha
17		(1.6)
18	T	does it run in the family
19	Teemu	yes
20		(1.5)

The class is discussing examples of forming comparative forms for adjectives. This is a follow-up to the task that begun in excerpt 1 where the teacher used one of the students, Teemu, as an example. The teacher says phrases in Finnish and the students are supposed to translate each phrase into English. On line 1 the teacher gives an example and chooses Teemu to translate it. Teemu struggles with the translation until the line 11 when the teacher takes a turn to ask Teemu whether he has a dog. Teemu answers that he does not (line 13) but then he continues on line 15 that he has a “very hairy little sister”. There’s a short pause and then the teacher responds with the line “does it run in the family” (line 18), meaning to ask, jokingly, whether the hairiness is a trait inherited from the parents. To this Teemu answers “yes” (line 20), thus playing along with the teacher’s joke.

The teacher extends the pedagogical talk to social talk by asking a question on line 12. The question is personal and not directly related to the grammar instruction that

is taking place. Teemu does not restrict his answer to a simple negative. He gives a humorous answer. The teacher takes this as a challenge and comes up with an answer in the form of another question.

I interpret this as a positive stretch of humor with regards to the pedagogical relationship between the teacher and the students. The teacher digresses from the institutional talk for the benefit of rapport and is able to create a sequence of humor in collaboration with a pupil. The teacher's humor in this excerpt is directed at one pupil and its literal meaning could be interpreted as offensive as the teacher suggests with the question "does it run in the family" that Teemu is particularly hairy. However, it is most unlikely that Teemu would take this seriously and feel offended. In fact, it is likely that Teemu enjoys this kind of attention since he himself provokes it: he responds to the teacher's personal question by initiating a joke.

Banter between the teacher and the pupils was something that Anttila (2008:203) discovered in her study and according to her it has not been reported in previous studies. She reckons that reciprocal humor appears when the teacher and the pupils know each other well. In other words, as stated also by Poveda (2005), humor can be an index of closeness. The humor in this data indicates that the teacher and the students are familiar with each other. Furthermore, this sort of humor seems to bring the teacher and the students yet a bit closer. However, in the scope of this study it is difficult to say how much the humor actually affects the teacher and the students' relationship.

In this excerpt the teacher teases the boys of the class.

Excerpt 5 (1988-2001)

1	T	no tonne teiän täytyy vähän keksiä sinne koulutukseen
2		että te nyt varmaan ihan lukion pohjalle oo jääny sitte=
3	LM(1)	=on
4	T	(°kuitenkaan°)
5	LM(1)	meillä oh=
6	LM2	=meillä on
7	LMs	((laughter))
8	LM	niih
9	T	pojilla se on [kyllä] uhkana
10	LM	[ää]
11	T	eikö vaan
12	LM5	ai mitä?

13	LM2	koulutus jää (0.2) vuoteen kaks tuhatta viis
14	LMs	((laughter))

The students are in the middle of writing *curricula vitae*. Since the students are so young, most of them about 16 years old, the teacher has instructed them to write the CV as it might look like seven years after the time of writing. This way there would be something to write in the CV. The teacher walks around in class, giving advice.

On lines 1-2 she comments on the education part in the CV by saying that the students ought to make up something for that part and adds that they will probably continue their studies after high school. Some of the boys laugh at this and say “we have...” (lines 3 and 5-8), probably meaning that they have not included any education after high school in their CV’s. The teacher reacts to this on line 9, saying that the boys are in danger of not continuing their studies after high school. This is obviously meant as a tease, as she also looks for some sort of response on line 11 by saying “right?”. Here the teacher teases the pupils after they have first shown that they are amused. The pupils have, in a way, opened the floor for humor. The teacher responds to this with the tease. Saharinen (2007:287, see section 3.3 for more discussion) states that, similarly to informal interaction, teasing can be an indication of personal closeness in institutional interaction which is very similar to what Anttila (2008) and Poveda (2005) state about the use of humor in the classroom. It seems, as stated above, that the teacher and the students have a close, non-authoritarian relationship which allows this kind of teasing.

These two examples have presented humor between the teacher and some pupils. There are no girls as active participants in either one of the examples. In fact, the girls in this class do not participate in the humor as its active producers. The girls are recorded laughing but not once does any one of them tell a joke or act otherwise humorously herself.

One reason for this could be differential teacher treatment by gender. The teacher often initiates jokes with the boys of the class and also responds to the boys’ humor by laughing. However, rather than being sexist treatment, it seems that this is a result of reciprocal interaction. The boys also start jokes and thus signal to the teacher that they have a sense of humor. The girls’ contributions, on the contrary, are always serious. The gender aspect will be discussed in more detail in section 4. However, in section 4 the

discussion will be about the functions of the boys' humor, as the girls do not offer anything to analyze – apart from their marked passivity to produce humor.

This section has discussed two similar forms of humor, banter and teasing between the teacher and the students. Banter and teasing between the students and the teacher are a sign of a non-authoritarian learning environment (e.g. Anttila 2008, Saharinen 2007) which is very much the case in this classroom data. However, although the environment in the classroom is quite egalitarian and there is a great deal of humor, the relationship between the teacher and the students is not entirely harmonious. There appears some friction in the relationship which will be discussed in the following sections. This section also commented on the gender aspect of humor which will be studied more closely in section 4.

7.3 The class clown

One of the boys, Teemu, already discussed in the previous sections, could be described as a class clown. He is an active student but his behavior is not always appropriate. He keeps making jokes and inserts comments in the classroom interaction which makes the class and also the teacher laugh at times. This way he, on one hand, contributes to the classroom interaction. On the other hand, his actions sometimes cross the line between good and bad behavior. The first excerpt in this section shows an instance where Teemu's behavior seems to work for the benefit of a good classroom atmosphere. The second excerpt presents a situation where Teemu is in a conflict with the teacher.

Here, Teemu throws himself into a comical act. This is from the beginning of the first lesson in the data. The theme of the lesson is the students' skills and the teacher has asked the students to tell the others about their skills. Not many students seem to be willing to describe their special skills, so the teacher gives the turn to Teemu.

Excerpt 6 (52-85)

1	T	but we have (.)
2		fortunately we have (.)
3		<one perfect pupil here> (.)
4	Teemu	yes=
5	LMs	=(boys laugh [at this point])]

6	T	[tell us about your] skills
7	Teemu	of course
8	T	so=
9	Teemu	=well (0.8) I know a lot (0.5)
10		I know (.) a whole (0.5) buns of (.) skills (1.1)
11		I <u>have</u> a whole bunch of skills
12	T	such ↑as=
13	Teemu	=FIRST of all I can ride a bi↑cycle (1.1)
14		>second of all< (.) second of all
15		I can (.) ride a (.) tri↑cycle (0.9)
16	T	what's that
17	Ls	((there is a spell of laughter from the class))
18	Teemu	that's a little thing but children (.) drove
19		you know (.) tree (0.8) kykles
20	LMs	((there is a laughter from some of the boys))
21	Teemu	and th-en (0.9) on the thirdess of- (.) thirdes-ss of all
22		I know how to ↑rite (0.8)
23		I know [how to listen]
24	T	[speak english] please
25	LM(4)	((a boy laughs))
26	Teemu	↑what
27	T	[speak english please]
28	LM(4)	[((the same boy laughs again))]
29	Teemu	okay (0.7)
30		ten I: mmm (1.9) ten (.) I: (1.7)
31	T	okay that's enough [°I think°]
32	LMs	[((laughter))]
33	Teemu	yes
34	T	okay yo- you seem to be very skillful

The teacher gives the turn to Teemu with an ironic remark “fortunately we have one perfect pupil here” (lines 2-3). The irony comes from the contrast with the content of the teacher’s words and what the teacher most likely thinks. In other words, judging from Teemu’s unruly behavior during the lessons, it is very unlikely that the teacher considers Teemu to be a perfect pupil. Teemu plays along by inserting a confirming “yes” to the teacher’s talk. The boys laugh at this.

Teemu’s act begins on lines 9-11 where he sets up expectations about what he will say next. He takes his time in doing this and the teacher hurries him by saying “such as”, prompting Teemu to get to the point. Teemu then presents his three “skills” which are riding a bicycle, riding a tricycle (a children’s three-wheeled bike) and writing.

The comical effect could be seen to come from four aspects. Firstly, the skills

that Teemu presents are hardly ones that would generally be described as anyone's special skills. Rather, they are very common skills. Secondly, Teemu divides his speech into three parts using linking words 'first of all', 'second of all' and "thirdness of all" (which is incorrect). He puts a lot of emphasis in the linking words which adds to the comical effect for the other students. Thirdly, Teemu speaks English with an exaggerated Finnish accent which is a way to add a humorous aspect to any stretch of speech. Fourthly, Teemu's act is humorous because he persistently sticks to his role in presenting his so-called skills. The teacher lets him continue for a while and then interrupts Teemu's comical act with the lines "okay" and "okay that's enough, I think" (line 31). She then comments on the act with an ironic remark "okay, you seem to be very skilful" (line 34).

As Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002:196) pointed out, class clowns are able to contribute to the classroom interaction both in positive and negative ways (see chapter 4, section 4.2). Teemu's performance here could indeed be seen as both negative and positive in relation to the pedagogical purpose of the task. The positive aspect is that Teemu participates in the pedagogical talk when the other pupils in the class keep quiet. Furthermore, as he is able to make the class laugh, the atmosphere in the classroom could be said to improve. The teacher also plays a part in this by allowing Teemu to carry on with his joke for as long as she does.

The teacher seems to anticipate what sort of contribution Teemu is going to offer to the conversation, since she gives Teemu the turn with an ironic comment. Moreover, the teacher's comment in a way provokes a non-serious contribution. The teacher's attitude seems to be different towards Teemu than it is towards the other students. She involves Teemu in jokes but also criticizes him blatantly during the second lesson.

As Teemu's act also mocks the pedagogical purpose of the task, his participation is also negative with regards to a conducive learning environment. Having made a joke out of the conversation that was intended to be casual classroom talk, he might have made sincere participation more difficult for the other students in the future. Davies (2003:129), having compared the discourse styles of 14-year-old boys and girls in group discussions, reports that the boys sometimes enriched their discussions with humor and intertextual references which, however, could trivialize the discussions or distract the boys from the intended topic. Similarly, in the present study Teemu often makes a joke during classroom discussion which might be unbeneficial with regard to the

development of a good discussion.

In this example Teemu amused the class at his own expense. Had his classmates not laughed, the episode would have been highly face-threatening for him. However, he succeeded in his humorous performance and thus did not “lose” his face in front of his peers. According to Hobday-Kusch and McVittie (2002:202) “one might interpret the use of humour as a deliberate way to shift power relations within a social context”. From this post-structuralist perspective the incident could be seen as a way to negotiate power. Teemu succeeds in altering the tone of discussion from good-humored but yet principally serious into a total joke. In other words, he re-defines the institutional teacher-student interaction as a joke. This is in accordance with Hobday-Kusch and McVittie’s (ibid.) idea about translating the event as funny (see chapter 4, section 4.2 for further information). In addition to this, he occupies the floor for quite a while with his joke. It is possible that Teemu has managed to improve his status among his peers with his act – at least momentarily.

In this example Teemu clearly plays a role throughout his turn. The role could be that of a child presenting his skills. In this example it is underlined that he is not presenting himself. However, in the following it is not quite clear whether he is playing a role or not. Here Teemu is scolded by the teacher for not doing anything while the others are doing an exercise. This example is also challenging for the analysis because it is difficult to define whether there is humor or not.

Excerpt 7 (257-293)

1	T	°(etköhän) sää Teemu vähä jotain voisit tehdä°
2		(1.2)
3	Teemu	hmmm (1.2) ehhhh
4	T	ei tuo sun sanakoe ainakaan vakuuttanu
5	Teemu	eikö
6	T	<u>@ei todellakaan@</u>
7	Teemu	no hyvä tämmösiä et sit on iha (0.4) outoja sanoja
8	T	niinpä näitä outoja(ha) täälä opiskellaan
9		[(x) ei me tuttuja opiskella]
10	Teemu	[nii joita mä en tuu koskaan käy]ttämää enää
11	T	höh höh (1.2) no ei ehkä niitä väkivalta videossa (°ole mut°)
12	Teemu	hhh £nii-i

13	T	mm muual↑la
14		(4.4)
15	T	(ois) se nöyryys Teemu se nöyryys
16	Teemu	(niinku ois)
17	T	hmm KU OLIS
18		(3.8)
19	Teemu	kuka tietää mitä on nöyryys englanniks?
20		(1.3)
21	T	°no nii°
22	Teemu	humility ((pronounced in Finnish like fashion))
23	T	°hm↑m°
24	Teemu	nii kukaan muu ei tienny
25		(1.6)
26	Jarmo	mää oisin tienny
27	Teemu	>oisitko<
28	Jarmo	°oisin°
29	Teemu	>mikä se [oli<
30	Jarmo	[(en vaan viittiny sanoa)
31	LM	ehhehheh
32		(3.5)
33	T	°ei riitä kato et tietää sen° (1.2) sanana nii
34		kannattas toteuttaa ° (sitä)°
35	Teemu	°ehhh (0.4) (x) °
36	T	°hmm°
37		(2.8) ((there's quiet talk))

The teacher starts the exchange on line 1 by suggesting to Teemu that he could do at least something. Teemu replies to this with a sigh (line 3). The teacher continues by saying that Teemu's performance in a word test, that the class had recently taken, was not particularly good (line 4). Teemu replies to this by saying "it wasn't?" (line 5). The teacher replies, emphasizing the words, that "it certainly was not". Teemu defends himself by saying that the words (apparently in the test) were strange (line 7). The teacher replies to this by saying that the point is to learn those words that are not familiar yet (lines 8-9). Teemu continues his complaint about the strangeness of words by saying that they are such that he will never have to use them again (line 10). The teacher utters "rubbish" (the Finnish utterance is an exclamation that does not have a precise meaning) by which she denotes that Teemu's comment was not accurate and continues after a short pause that the "strange" words are probably not those that are used in movies or other recorded materials with violent content (line 11). With this she seems to insinuate that Teemu is a consumer of that kind of material. Teemu says "yeah" (line 12) and the teacher continues "but elsewhere" meaning that the so-called strange words will be used

in other contexts than the violent movies.

There is a pause and then the teacher continues scolding Teemu on line 15 by repeating the word 'humility'. Teemu replies to this by saying something that could be translated "yeah, if only I had it" (line 16). The teacher repeats Teemu's words with an emphasis on line 17. This could be translated "if only you had it". There is a pause and Teemu asks the class whether anyone knows the English for the word 'humility' (line 19). The teacher says "okay, then" (line 20). Teemu answers to his own question on line 22. The teacher sighs (line 23) after which Teemu states that nobody else knew the word (line 24).

Jarmo now takes a turn saying that he would have known the word 'humility' (line 282). Teemu asks if this is true (line 27 and 29) and Jarmo confirms that he would have known the word (line 28) but that he just "didn't feel like saying it" (line 30). The teacher then says that it is not enough to know the word but that one also ought to act according to it, i.e. show some humility.

In this example Teemu is openly criticized by the teacher. Instead of showing humility, he faces the criticism first by denying the value of what is taught and then by making a show of knowing the word 'humility'. Teemu acts stubbornly in not starting to do the exercise when the teacher first comments on him not doing anything. He could yield and start with the exercise but instead he indolently objects to this (line 3). The teacher then reacts to this by saying that Teemu did not do very well in the word test. This is a face-threatening act from the teacher and Teemu puts up a defence. He criticizes the word test, and perhaps the teaching in general, by saying that the words that he ought to learn are strange.

It is not quite clear whether Teemu is serious about the usefulness of the words or not. Throughout these two lessons Teemu plays the role of an arrogant student. It is something that the teacher, some other pupils and he himself make jokes about. Here, however, the teacher has cornered him with her direct criticism and, as said above, it is unclear whether Teemu is playing his role to the full or if he really finds the words too strange and thus unnecessary to learn.

When the teacher mentions the word 'humility' and Teemu makes a show of being the only one who knows the word in English, it is clear that Teemu is "acting" the role of a know-it-all student. Another student objects to Teemu's claim about being the

only one who knows the word. In his response, he maintains the childish tone set up by Teemu and thus in a way plays along with Teemu's act. On the other hand, he resists Teemu's claim and thus his participation in the exchange might be his way to playfully support the teacher. However, the motivation for his participation remains unknown in the present study.

Furthermore, it is also unclear how serious the teacher is during the incident. Her criticism is quite blatant when the literal content of the words is studied. However, it seems that she is smiling a little at the end of the exchange which significantly reduces the severity of the situation.

This example demonstrates the difficulty of defining humor. There is acting and there is one little laugh which is a bit forced. Teemu clearly tries to "make a joke" out of the exchange with the teacher. Some students smile a bit during the exchange but other than that, the class does not appear to be very amused. This could be defined as a comical act that has not succeeded very well in humoring its audience.

It seems that Teemu is stuck in his role. Whenever he speaks English he does this with an exaggerated Finnish accent which denotes that he is not quite serious about anything he says. In addition, almost anything he says is a joke or an attempt for humor. Teemu's role as a class clown gives him freedom to express his thoughts, for instance to criticize the teacher and the purpose of the exercises. However, it seems that it would be difficult for him to quit playing his role and act sincerely. Hence, his act might also restrict his behavior.

In this section I have discussed the complex role of a class clown in the classroom interaction. The first excerpt was analyzed with regard to participation and classroom atmosphere. It showed that the class clown's contributions to classroom interaction can be both negative and positive. Furthermore, looking at the excerpt from a post-structural perspective on power relations indicated that the class clown might be able to negotiate power for himself with his joking behavior. The second excerpt showed how the class clown resisted the teacher and her criticism by taking up a role. This section also presented the difficulty of defining humor. This issue will be discussed, among other issues, in the following section.

7.4 Boys' humor

This section discusses the humor in these lessons with a focus on the gendered behavior. The first excerpt presents a humorous exchange between some of the boys in the class. The second excerpt is an instance where a pupil gives a smart answer to the teacher's question, thus creating amusement. Both examples are from the second lesson the overall tone of which seems to be more negative. There are more conflicts between the teacher and some male pupils.

This exchange takes place in the beginning of the second lesson. Teemu has shaved his head bald and this triggers some comments among some male pupils and the teacher. In analyzing this excerpt, I will make use of Holmes' (2006) concepts for describing humor styles during jointly constructed humor. There are two pairs of concepts, supportive vs. contestive and collaborative vs. competitive. For an explanation of the concepts, see chapter 5, section 5.1.2.

Excerpt 8 (18-45)

1	T	[okay]	
2	Jarmo	[EI] TEEMU hirvittävä letti	
3	Antti	[<EI NÄIN>] TEEMU	
4	LM	[ahhahhah .hh]	
5		(1.2)	
6	T	[what's has [happened] to you=	
7	LM	[(xx [x)]	
8	Antti	[<pistä ny]t se pipo päähä>]	
9	T	=what happened to your hee-] hear	
10	Aleksi	[helvet]ti on päässy [valloillee]	
11	Teemu	[mitäh?]	
12	T	[what happened to] your hear=	there's
13	Teemu	=I loose it	lots of
14	T	you lost it	talk
15	Teemu	yes	here
16	T	aha	
17		(1.1)	
18	Aleksi	peruukki jäi kotiin	
19	Teemu	nii	
20	Antti	ehh (1.0)	
21	Antti	Teemu ei sun nyt niin tosissaan ois [tarvinnu ottaa sitä [eelistä	someone

		vi]ttuilua	
22	T	[isn't it a little bit [chilly?]	also laughs
23	LM	[(xx)]	little
24	T	this time of year	
25	Teemu	eiku oikeesti	
26		tää on [älyt]tömän siisti	
27	T	[okay]	there's
28	T	<I suggest we check the::> the grammar exercises first an	talk

The teacher is about to begin the lesson. She says “okay” on line 1, denoting with this that she wants the pupils’ attention. She is interrupted by Jarmo who comments on Teemu’s hair by crying out “NO, that’s a terrible haircut!” (line 2). Antti chimes in “Not like this, Teemu!” (line 3). One of the boys laughs slightly forcedly. Antti’s line could be interpreted as supporting the previous comment as it strengthens it. A shared orientation for humor has been created. The teacher also joins in the conversation on line 6 by asking what has happened to Teemu’s hair.

Antti says on line 8 that Teemu ought to put his cap back on, thus continuing the joking. This happens partly simultaneously with the teacher’s repeated question “what happened to your hair” (line 9). Alekski then inserts his comment in the interaction, saying that “all hell has broken loose”. Teemu responds by saying “what” on line 11. The teacher repeats her question once again to which Teemu replies with the incorrect verb form that he had “lose it”. The teacher makes a subtle correction by repeating Teemu’s answer with the right past tense verb form “you lost it” (line 14). Alekski continues joking by saying that “Teemu had forgotten his wig home” to which Teemu replies “yeah” (line 19). After this Antti feeds in his comment on line 21. He says that Teemu should not have taken it so seriously when he had been joked about on the previous day. This might refer to the teacher’s joke about Teemu’s hairiness. The joke occurred during the first lesson in the data (see excerpt 3). The teacher also participates by suggesting that it might get a bit cold for Teemu because of his baldness, considering the time of year (lines 22 and 24). Teemu defends his new style by saying that “it’s really neat” (line 26).

Jarmo, Antti and Alekski have created a stretch of jointly constructed humor. They joke about the same topic and share the same floor. However, the comments do not build on each other, but rather they have independent content in relation to each other. Each comment could exist independently of the others. In other words, the boys’

discursive style is competitive. In Holmes' (2006) workplace study this type of humor was more common among meetings with only male participants than in mixed-sex or only females' meetings. In other words, the boys' act can be suggested to be more typical for males than females.

Furthermore, the boys take quite a lot of linguistic space here. They dominate, or struggle for domination of the situation. For a moment, they succeed in transforming the conversation from an institutional, teacher-dominated conversation into a joking exchange of male peers. The boys also show ignorance to the rules of appropriate behavior in that they use swear words. Alekski uses the word "hell" in his comment on line 10 and also Antti swears on line 21.

As stated earlier by Kotthoff (2003) and Walker and Goodson (1977) in chapter 5 section 5.1.1, joking is often a sign of status. With this performance the boys seem to be competing for status. With their competitive comments they try to outshine each other. On the other hand, their performance is effective because they orient to the same topic and work, loosely, as a group. This seems to be a way to demonstrate their masculinity.

The teacher also participates in the talk, possibly out of genuine interest, possibly trying to create rapport by participating in social, non-institutional talk. Also, the teacher's participation might be a way to maintain power. By asking Teemu about the hair, she does not give the floor entirely to the pupils.

Further, the boys' comments about Teemu's hair are not positive. On the contrary, their literal meaning is very negative. On line 2 Jarmo utters that Teemu's hair is terrible and Antti's comment on line 3 supports this proposition. At this point there is nothing in the literal meaning of the propositions that could be interpreted as a joke when taken out of context. Yet there is laughter. Alekski's comments "all hell has broken loose" (line 10) and "left your wig home" (line 18) are contrary to the reality and thus easily decoded as jokes.

This is similar to Nayak and Kehily's (1997) observations about ritual insults. They (ibid.) report that the young males in their study insulted each other among friends for humor. Within friendship groups these insults were decoded in a different way than in other contexts, i.e. not automatically as offensive. Similarly, this incident can be interpreted as playful banter among friends.

This kind of banter seems to promote male-bonding and be a result of it. At least the boys who take part in making comments about Teemu's hair definitely are "playing together" as a group. However, their relationship to Teemu raises some questions. Is Teemu the target of their playful critique because they are good friends? Or are the comments real critique disguised in humor? These are questions that cannot be answered with the tools given by conversation analysis, at least not in the scope of the present study.

This instance exemplifies the social nature of humor as described by Goodson and Wilson (1977, see *Introduction*). Decoding an utterance as humor requires more than perceiving the content of words as non-serious. The social nature of humor becomes evident also in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 9 (1571-1597)

1	T	mikäs oli ruotsalaiset?
2		(1.7)
3	LM	(°xx°)
4		((there's a [laugh] from the boys))
5	Sami	[gay]
6	T	nii ruotsalaiset
7	Sami	°gays°
8		(1.7)
9	T	Sami
10		pientä rajaa taas
11		pientä rajaa
12		(pitää ottaa se) yksityiselämä taas
13	LM	(xx)
14		(1.3)
15	T	hmm ei meiän tartte kaikkia täälä °luetella (xx)°
16	Sami	ai kaikkia ruotsalaisia
17	LMS	((laughter))
18	T	omia taipumuksia
19		Tomi=
20	LM	=(x)
21	Tomi	the Swedish
22	T	the Swedish (0.2) joo-↑o
23		(4.0)
24	T	ja yks kappale
25	LM	(x)
26	Tomi	a Swede
27	T	a Swede

The class is revising words for nationalities in English. The joke begins when the teacher asks in Finnish what is the English word for ‘the Swedish’ on line 1. There is a pause and laughter. One of the boys, Sami, utters quietly the word ‘gay’. The teacher repeats her question on line 6. Sami now repeats the word ‘gay’ in plural, as if now giving the right answer.

The teacher reacts to this by repeating the words “keep a line” on lines 10-11 which is a colloquial expression, meaning that the pupil ought to watch his mouth. There is subdued laughter. Then the teacher continues by saying that “not everything has to be recited here”. The utterance is vague, in need of an explanation. The pupil responds to this quickly, asking “oh, all the Swedes?”. Again, there is subdued laughter and the teacher replies, now completing her previous clause “one’s own orientation”, apparently referring to one’s sexual orientation. It is as if the teacher was insinuating that Sami is a homosexual. With this, the teacher is trying to outsmart the pupil and thus maintain order. The turn is then given to Tomi who gives the correct answer in plural and singular.

The smart, even impertinent, answers produced by Sami on lines 7 and 16 show some disrespect towards the teacher. However, the motivation of Sami’s answers might not be so much to challenge the teacher’s authority. Rather, it seems like a way for him to demonstrate his wittiness and boldness to his peers.

The literal content of the joke on line 5 is that the Swedes are homosexuals. This kind of a joke seems to appeal especially to young Finnish males. The humor in the joke on lines 7 and 16 stems from three aspects. Firstly, anti-Swedish discourse and joking seems to be common among Finnish teenagers, especially boys. When the Swedish people are a topic of conversation, it is not uncommon that they are joked about. Secondly, homosexuality can be considered, from a certain perspective, an abnormal, anti-masculine characteristic which can thus be ridiculed. The joke is hardly particularly funny in the sense that there is no unexpected punch line, elaborate mimicking or other such features that might be the cause for amusement. The reason for the laughter has to be looked for elsewhere. The third and the most important reason for the amusement lies in the performance of the joker. This aspect will be discussed at length in the following paragraphs.

The humor in this example can be explained with the help of the terms ‘joke’ and ‘comic’. Jokes are, as described by Walker and Goodson (1977:212) “humour that survives reduction to a script”. In other words, jokes are the kind of humor that is more or less independent of a context. Sometimes it is difficult to say whether a humorous exchange, for instance a humorous exchange in a classroom, is a joke or not. In the scope of this analysis, however, it is not relevant to make a clear division between jokes and other humorous utterances.

However, with regard to the present analysis, it is relevant to make a distinction between jokes and another form of humor, namely the comic. Walker and Goodson (1977:212-3) refer to comic when they say that “the performance is an integral part of the humour“. There are many definitions of the comic that could be discussed at length. However, here it suffices to say that the comic refers to the performance of humor that creates amusement. The comic and the joke often play a part in producing humor and they are often intertwined.

In this excerpt it seems to be the performance, the comic, rather than the joke that actually amuses the students. Sami first gives the smart answer with a serious expression on his face, as if he had come up with the right answer to the teacher’s question. When the teacher repeats the question, prompting Sami or some other student to give a proper answer, Sami repeats his smart answer but now in plural, as if the answer was now correct. He maintains his serious expression. The comic comes from the tension that is created when Sami is able to act as if his mock answer was legitimate. The seriousness of his expression is a part of his comic act. The humor is spontaneous, it could not have had been prepared in advance and it would not work in another context. The context of language instruction offers a setting for the humor.

Furthermore, Walker and Goodson (1977:214) describe the nature of comic with the following words:

Whereas the joke offers ease between strangers, the comic offers a key to identity through the sharing of a culture. The nature of the comic is hidden from those who do not share a particular vocabulary of actions, events and memories.

In this excerpt the word ‘gay’ is almost like a code word for “let’s laugh now”. Saying it out loud and linking it to the Swedish people makes the boys smirk and laugh. The boys share the vocabulary and manifest their belonging to the group by laughing at the joke.

As stated earlier by Nayak and Kehily (1997) and Dalley-Trim (2007), homophobic jokes work as a tool to accentuate one's own masculinity and belonging to the masculine peer group. In other words, although the boys may find the situation genuinely humorous, the laughter here also plays a role as an expression of male identity. This claim can be supported by the fact that none of the girls or the teacher seem to be amused by the act.

This section has discussed the humor in the classroom with a focus on gender. The first excerpt showed young males' humorous exchange the style of which could be described competitive. This seems to function to highlight the boys' masculinity and contribute to male-bonding between the boys who take part in the exchange. Also the second excerpt presented how humor can be used to accentuate masculinity. It employed homophobic humor in defying the teacher and thus humored the boys of the class.

Analyzing humor from different perspectives shows that it is far more than "just a joke". The first two sections concentrated on the positive sides of humor. The teacher's humor was seen to enliven the instruction and the humor between the teacher and the students seemed to be both a result of a close pedagogical relationship and conducive to it. The last two sections showed a different side of humor. The class clown's humorous behavior presented in section 3 could be seen as both beneficial and harmful with regard to a positive classroom atmosphere. The 'clowning' could be interpreted as a way to improve one's status in the classroom. The last section that analyzed humor from the perspective of gender also suggested some new interpretations to the use of humor. The findings of this chapter will be discussed further in the following chapter, *Discussion*.

8 DISCUSSION

The humor in the data of the present study was a very productive object of study. There was plenty of it and it had many functions which were sometimes very different from each other. The previous chapter presented the findings of the present study and this chapter will discuss those findings further. The findings will be contemplated drawing comparisons with the previous studies presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5. In addition, the limitations of the CA method for studying humor, especially with regard to the research question of the present study, will be discussed. Finally, some suggestions for further study will be presented.

There was humor in all parts of the lesson and *both* the teacher *and* the pupils produced humor and responded to humor by laughing. The humor produced in collaboration by the teacher and some of the students points to a non-authoritarian, close relationship between the participants. This is not always the case in Finnish high schools where the students plan their own timetables and might not attend the lessons of one teacher for more than one course. Thus, although the Finnish school teachers are usually not very authoritarian, the relationship between the teacher and the students can be distant due to the short periods that one teacher teaches the same students. Hence, if the amount of humor can be used as an index of closeness, the humor in these lessons points to a close relationship.

Insofar as the amount of humor and laughter can be seen as an indication of having a good time, these lessons were entertaining for the pupils and the teacher, at least for the most. However, not all the students participated in the humor in the same way and not all the humor produced by the pupils was positive. The active participants in the joking were the teacher and some pupils. The rest of the class were onlookers who either responded to humor by smiling or laughing a little or maintained a serious expression.

The teacher was very humorous. She inserted humorous comments in the instruction and responded to the pupils' humor by laughing which most likely improved the classroom atmosphere and thus made it more conducive to learning – at least to some pupils, namely those who participated in the humor themselves.

The teacher's humorous style seemed to make the pupils laugh, and the pupils

also participated in the pedagogical tasks. However, as Anttila's (2008) study reveals, students do not appreciate the teacher's humorous contributions without reserve. It was reported that humor can distract concentration and that poor humor can be a source of irritation (ibid.:191). Furthermore, some students also reported having laughed at the teacher's humor, although they were not genuinely amused (ibid.:172). In other words, it is possible that some of the students in the present study did not like the teacher's humor but did not explicitly express this during the lessons.

Some of the pupils participated in the humor in many ways. They inserted humorous comments in the instruction, joked with the teacher and with each other and responded to humor by laughing. The pupils' humor often seemed to be conducive to learning but there were also discordant humorous comments. For instance, humor was used to criticize the teacher and to express unwillingness to carry out the pedagogical tasks assigned by the teacher.

As stated above, Kotthoff (2003) and Walker and Goodson (1977) suggest that humorous behavior is connected to social status, and thus to social power. If this data is investigated from the perspective of status, the results quickly become politically relevant. The teacher jokes habitually in the classroom since she as the teacher is the authority in the classroom. Another person who jokes repeatedly is the student who was recognized as a so-called class clown in the analysis. If joking and acting humorously is something that requires a higher status in a situation then it is also logical to say that being able to make others laugh increases one's status.

The "class clown" and some other boys who took the linguistic space to perform a humorous speech act, either had status or attempted to gain it with their humorous behavior. As stated above, humor was also a way to challenge the teacher. The teacher and the pedagogical purposes were criticized through humor. From a post-structuralist perspective, humor produced by the boys could be seen as a way to negotiate more freedom to express oneself in the classroom.

It was very perceptible that none of the girls participated in producing the humor as active jokers. The girls did smile and also laugh a little during the lessons but never once inserted a humorous comment in the interaction themselves. This is an observation that simply cannot be overlooked but cannot be answered with the methods of the present study.

Kehily and Nayak (1997) and Dalley-Trim (2007) reported in their respective studies that the boys dominated the classrooms and were able to exclude and marginalize girls and non-masculine boys especially with sexual humor. This data, however, does not give implications to such interpretations. The girls do not seem to be dominated or excluded from the classroom interaction by the boys. Neither are the girls the targets of the boys' jokes. The boys' humor is directed at oneself, the other boys, some other person or issue outside the classroom, and sometimes at the teacher, but never at the girls of the class.

In my view, the girls' reluctance to participate in the humorous behavior could be interpreted as being caused by the different models and expectations of gendered behavior. Sunderland (2000:164) reported that in her study of a German language classroom it seemed that the "the type of femininity being 'performed', or constructed, in this class, by the teacher and the girls, was a distinctly academic one relative to the boys' masculinity". This is similar to what was observed in the present study. I would not see the girls as victims of the boys' behavior in the classroom. Rather, the girls' way to gain prestige seems different from the boys' struggle for status. Furthermore, Davies (2003) discovered in her study that 14-year-old boys were not capable of serious discussion when this was the task in an English lesson. According to Davies this was because the boys considered school work as something feminine which was considered ill-fitting with the hegemonic masculinity. When a boy showed genuine interest in the task, he was quickly put down for this.

This bears interesting implications to the interpretation of the data of the present study. The pupils in the present study are about two years senior to the pupils in Davies' (2003) study and past the age which is usually considered most difficult in a teenager's life. At least in Finland teenagers are generally expected to behave more maturely once they enter secondary education. In other words, the two years' age gap should level the pupils' behavior. And indeed, there were boys in this study who participated in the instruction in a serious manner without having to deal with constant name-calling and putting down from their peers. However, some anti-schooling comments can be detected during the lessons, only expressed by boys.

It seems, as suggested by Kehily and Nayak (1999), Davies (2003) and Dalley-Trim (2007), that humor is an essential part of the young males' peer culture. Humor is a requirement for belonging to the group. For instance, "homophobic" humor as seen in

one of the excerpts, seemed to rely on the sharing of a certain kind of vocabulary. The word ‘gay’ functioned like a code word for laughter. Walker and Goodson (1977:214) state that “Joke-telling is a social currency between those of different social status: the comic thrives between equals in the face of authority, and is a source of conspiracy.” This seems to explain the appeal of the aforementioned homophobic joke for the boys, and also the humor in the classroom more generally. For the teacher the joking was a way to smoothen the force of institutional interaction whereas the boys’ homophobic joke was like a small rebellion, fueled by the word ‘gay’.

The purpose of this study was to investigate humor use in the classroom and find out what are the functions of humor in this classroom. It now seems that this question cannot be answered thoroughly with only conversation analysis, at least not in the scope of this study. If very strict CA is done, humor can only be studied as it appears in interaction. One can study where a joke takes place in interaction and extract the punch line of the joke or the reason why something is considered funny. With CA one can thus describe the development of the situation. However, the reasons for people’s behavior remain unknown.

As was mentioned earlier, an important principle of the “strict” form of conversation analysis is that the analysis should attempt to reveal the interpretations and orientations that the participants of the event have. I found this confusing since, at the same time, the analysis should only be based on what is visible in the data. The following is a critique of the method by Joan Swann (2002:52). It is directed at the ideas of Emanuel Schegloff but it seems to apply to the principles of CA as presented by Seedhouse (2004) as well.

He [Schegloff] argues that any aspects of context that are seen to be relevant to an interaction (including the social characteristics of participants/speakers) should derive from the orientations of the participants/speakers themselves, and not from those of the analyst. Schegloff is actually talking about something more limited than the expression ‘participants’ orientations’ may suggest. He is referring to just those features that are made visible (or audible) in an interaction.

In other words, the ‘orientations and interpretations’ of the participants refer to their actions and those orientations that they explicitly utter during the conversation. In my view, the orientations and interpretations that people have are not always revealed or

explicitly expressed in interaction. Therefore it is difficult to draw the line between interpretation and guessing. It proved difficult to follow this principle in analyzing the data.

One can question, for instance, how the teacher's humor affects the classroom atmosphere. Looking at the data, one can see that many of the students laugh during the lessons. One can assume that the students are having a good time. But what are they actually laughing about? Are they amused by the teacher's joke or just laughing out of politeness? Can one actually draw the conclusion that the atmosphere in the classroom is good if there are some pupils laughing?

Furthermore, as mentioned above, in the present study the girls' passivity became very evident. Although the data of the study consists of only two lessons, the discovery cannot be ignored. In my view it is justified to at least speculate about the reasons for the girls' passivity because from a gender perspective it is a very noteworthy observation.

The CA method is serviceable for the description of conversations but it should be supplemented with other research methods. And indeed, CA has been used as a part in large ethnographic studies. The present study raises some questions that could be answered using other methods than CA. For instance, the teacher could be interviewed for her motivations for using humor and the girls could be questioned about their "humorlessness". Further, the class could be observed during other lessons or for a longer period in order to gain more knowledge about the functions of humor in the classroom interaction.

Another interesting research topic could reside in the aforementioned anti-schooling comments. Recently there has been discussion on the difference in girls' and boys' performance in school. The girls are reported to gain, on average, slightly better grades than boys. This results in disadvantage for the boys when they apply for further education. In the data of the present study there were some exchanges between the teacher and some male students that revealed ignorance of the school work by the boys. Some of the boys' comments implied an anti-schooling attitude. The teacher, on one hand, scolded some male pupils for their carelessness. On the other hand, however, she joked with some of the boys about them being at risk of not pursuing their studies after high-school. In the classroom interaction the joke seemed quite harmless and even beneficial with regard to a positive classroom atmosphere. However, are boys, in a way,

excused for the lack of effort with jokes like this? Is the attitude that *boys will be boys* still alive in today's educational discourse in Finland?

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APPENDIX

Transcription conventions

?	rising intonation at the end of a prosodic entity
↑	rising intonation, marked prior to the syllable or word where occurs
↓	falling intonation, marked prior to the syllable or word where occurs
<u>what</u>	word emphasis
>what<	speech pace that is quicker than the surrounding talk
<what>	speech pace that is slower than the surrounding talk
°what°	speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk
WHAT	speech that is louder than the surrounding talk
wha:t	a sound or a syllable is extended
(1.9)	silences timed in tenths of a second (approximately)
(.)	micro pause, which marks a clear stop in the speech too short for measuring
((laughs))	transcriber's comments about the character of talk or addressed recipients
(xx)	unrecognizable item – phrase length
(x)	unrecognizable item – possibly one word
(what)	dubious hearings
hhh	audible aspiration
.hh	audible inhalation
ye-	a cut-off word
[left-hand bracket indicates the beginning of overlapping utterances
]	right-hand bracket indicates where overlapping speech ends
=	contiguous utterances or units of talk
£what£	smiley voice
@what@	animated voice
♪what♪	word or phrase is sung

Codes for identifying speakers

T	teacher
LM1	identified male learner, using numbers (M1, M2...)
LF1	identified female learner, using numbers (F1, F2...)
LM	unidentified male learner
LF	unidentified female learner
LF(3)	uncertain identification of speaker
LL	unidentified subgroup of class
Ls	learners
LMS, LFs	male learners, female learners