

A Typology of Humor in the Philippine Classrooms

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Abstract

Humor has been used by educators in the classroom without active awareness of the possible impacts that it may bring on the students, particularly on their learning processes. At present, there is no existing humor typology in the Philippines, yet which can help educators determine the appropriateness of humor use in the classroom. Thus, this study aimed to develop a typology of humor utilized by Filipino teachers in the public schools. The nominated humorous teachers and their students served as the key informants in this study. They were asked to give examples of humor used in the classrooms and to categorize them according to their appropriateness. The responses were thematically analyzed resulting to the identification of appropriate, inappropriate, and context-dependent humor types. Future directions for humor studies were presented.³

Keywords: appropriateness of humor, Filipino humor, humor in Philippine classrooms

1. Introduction

The use of humor in the educational context has received a generous amount of attention from different researchers. Research studies have underscored the value of humor as a pedagogical tool. For the past sixty years, it has been proven that humor is useful in the educational context (Unsal,

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Agcam & Aydemir, 2018). Cornett (in Alatalo & Poutiainen, 2016) considered humor as the “educator’s most powerful resource to achieve optimal learning results” (66).

Several research studies affirm that the use of humor in classroom teachings has positive impacts on student learning both in the affective and cognitive aspects, to wit: reduced classroom anxiety by creating a pleasant and positive environment (e.g., Shibinski & Martin, in Seidman & Brown, 2015; Teslow, 1995); improved student motivation and engagement (e.g., Ivy, 2013; Carolino, 2017); and improved test scores and better retention (Unsal, Agcam & Aydemir, 2018; Ziv, 1988). However, despite the positive findings of many researchers on the effects of humor on learning, some researchers (e.g., Gorham and Christopel, 1990; Bryant, Brown, Silberberg and Elliott, 1981; Houser, Cowan & West, 2007) present less favorable results and argue that humor and learning have no relationship at all.

To shed light to the contradicting results, Kaplan & Pascoe (in Banas et al, 2011) highlight the need for humor to be relevant to the instructional material to increase learning. Thus, the central issue now boils down to the big role that relevance and appropriateness play in the use of humor in education. Teachers need to be cautious in selecting the types of humor that they intend to use in the classroom because depending on its appropriateness, humor may also bring adverse impact on learning. There is a “fine line between the sensible use of humor and its overuse or misuse” (Ivy, 2013, 57).

To draw a line between appropriate and inappropriate humor used in the classroom, several scholars attempted to create typologies of humor (e.g. Martin et al, 2003, Wanzer et al, 2006). There are various ways to classify the types of humor used in classrooms “based on the function that the humor appears to serve” (Banas et al., 2011, 122). For instance, Martin and his colleagues (2003) developed a humor styles questionnaire revolving around four dimensions relating to the relationship between individual differences in uses of humor and psychological well-being, to wit: 1) affiliative humor; 2) self-enhancing humor; 3) aggressive humor; and 4) self-defeating humor.

Affiliative humor is used “to enhance one’s relationships with others in a way that is relatively benign and self-accepting” while self-enhancing humor is a kind of humor that promotes one’s self that is “tolerant and non-detrimental to others” (Martin et al., 2003, 52). On the other hand, aggressive humor, as its name suggests, is offensive, hostile and detrimental to others “by denigrating, disparaging, excessively teasing and ridiculing others” (Zillman, in Martin et al.,

2003, 52). Self-defeating humor, on the other hand, attempts to enhance one's relationship with others but at the expense and detriment of one's self.

Another typology of humor is developed by Wanzer and her colleagues (2006), which is said to be an extension of other humor typology studies (e.g., Gorham and Christophel, 1990; Neuliep, 1991; Bryan et al, 1979). However, Wanzer et al.'s (2006) study used Spitzberg and Cupach's (1984) approach to communication competence as the theoretical framework of their study. Communication competence is "the extent to which objectives functionally related to communication are fulfilled through cooperative interaction appropriate to the interpersonal context" (Spitzberg and Cupach in Wanzer et al., 2006, 179).

In Wanzer et al.'s study (2006), four types of appropriate humor were generated, to wit: 1) related; 2) unrelated; 3) self-disparaging; and 4) unintentional/unplanned. The first one, related humor, includes humor strategies and behaviors that are connected to the material or lesson being studied. On the other hand, unrelated humor involves humor strategies and behaviors that have no relation to the material or lesson. Self-disparaging humor includes humor strategies and behaviors like "jokes, stories or comments in which an instructor criticizes, pokes fun of or belittles himself/herself" (Wanzer et al., 2006, 187). Lastly, unintentional or unplanned humor are humor behaviors that the teacher did not intend to elicit laughter, but the students find funny like unintentional puns and slips of the tongue.

In the same study, four humor types were considered as inappropriate, namely: 1) offensive; 2) disparaging–student target; 3) disparaging others; and 4) self-disparaging humor. Offensive humor includes any type of humor that have sexual contents, vulgar words, vices, illegal activities, and sarcasm. Unlike offensive humor, disparaging–student target is a humor type that is reproachful and derogative in nature that targets a singled-out student or a group of students. A disparaging humor targeting a singled-out student may include negative comments based on one's intelligence, personal life, appearance, gender and religion. A disparaging humor that targets a group of students includes gender stereotypes, degrading intelligence (such as slow learners), and appearance (Wanzer et. al., 2006).

Sometimes, disparaging humor targets nonstudent groups of people. This type of inappropriate humor is called *disparaging others*. Wanzer and her colleagues (2006) refer the term "others" to gender groups, racial/ethnic groups, university-related, religious groups, sexual orientation and political motivation. The last type of inappropriate humor is self-disparaging

humor. This type of humor consists of instances when the teacher belittles or criticizes himself/herself.

One key element to determine the appropriateness of humor is culture. As Teslow (1995) argues, “styles of humor are culture-dependent” (8). This goes to show that what is deemed funny in a certain country is not funny for other countries. Ivy (2013) cautioned that, in integrating humor in education, the teachers have to be sensitive to ethnic groups or the class in general. Thus, humor has to be appropriate and it has to follow the norms of the locality.

Ironically, in spite of being tagged as one of the happiest countries in the world, “very little to no attempt has been made to analyze the nature of humor in the Philippines as a bearing national stamp” (Ancheta, 2011, 37-38). While there is a considerable amount of research that focused on the use of humor in many countries, only a miniscule of studies had involved Filipino classes. To our best knowledge, only a few Filipino researchers (e.g., Martinez, 2007; Lagonoy, 2009; Bacay, 2013; Carolino, 2017) have attempted to explore the effects of humor on classroom teachings. As we browsed through these local studies on humor in education, we noticed that most of the authors, if not all, used pre-existing research tools that were based on humor typologies developed abroad. Unfortunately, there is no humor typology that was developed in the Philippines yet specifically the humor used in the classroom. Cognizant of the notion that humor is culture-dependent, the pieces of evidence that support the conclusions of the previous local studies may be deemed as weak and inconclusive.

To address this gap, this study aimed to develop a typology of appropriate and inappropriate humor that was viewed on a cultural lens. Having a typology of Filipino humor in the classroom is vital as it may help teachers avoid the impending negative impacts of humor on the learning of the students. The primary goal of this study is to categorize the examples of humor used by the teachers in the classroom by examining the responses, beliefs, and experiences of the students and the teachers. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What do the high school students consider as funny?
2. What types of humor used by teachers in the classrooms do students perceived as appropriate?
3. What types of humor used by teachers in the classrooms do students perceived as inappropriate?

2. Methods

This study was conducted in a public high school in the Philippines, specifically located in Quezon City, with a population of more than 4,000 students. This research involved ten humorous teachers, identified through nomination, and their students in all the classes that they were handling at the time of this study. To identify the ten humorous teachers, 24 Grade 8 and 21 Grade 9 students were asked to identify the teachers that they think were humorous. To construct our corpus, the data gathering procedure included participant observation, focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations.

Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the students were conducted. Eight Grade 8 students and seven Grade 9 students were involved in separate FGDs. An FGD guide was used in the conduct of this procedure. The students were asked what makes something funny. Furthermore, they were asked to write down examples of humor used by their teachers on meta-cards. Then, the students grouped the meta-cards with humor examples on the board indicating whether it was appropriate or inappropriate. Afterwards, discussions and clarifications were made by asking follow-up questions.

The ten student-nominated humorous teachers were interviewed to ask them about appropriateness and inappropriateness of humors used in the classroom. An interview guide was used in the conduct of the semi-structured interviews. The teacher informants were also asked to provide concrete humor examples that they used in their classroom teachings.

The classes comprised of 45 to 50 students of the ten nominated humorous teachers were observed in order to gain an in-depth knowledge on the types of humor used in the classrooms. Random informal interviews with the teachers and their students were conducted to gain elaboration and explanation of what occurred during the class. The participant observation took place four times a week, five to six hours a day for two months. The classroom observation focused on the humor types used by the teachers and how they affected student learning.

The data obtained in this study were analyzed through thematic analysis. Patterns and themes were generated from the narratives that were transcribed verbatim. The guide provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) in doing thematic analysis was used in this study, namely: 1) familiarizing

yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report.

3. Results

3.1 The Features of Humor: What is Funny for Filipino High School Students?

The first part of this study sought to know what makes a humorous message funny for the students. The responses of the key informants pointed to the idea that what makes something funny are these four features of humor, to wit: 1) relatable; 2) unexpected; 3) novel; and 4) inoffensive.

Being relatable talks about the schema of the students that are being linked with the humorous message on hand. The premise is, if the students have knowledge and direct or vicarious experience about the topic of the humorous message, it can be deemed as funny. Thus, the schema of the students is used as the key to unravel the humor in the message. Some of the relatable humorous messages used by the teachers were funny stories, personal experiences and life stories of the teachers, and *hugot* lines or “dramatic quotations related to love and life hurts” (translation by Olegario, 2017, 201). The central topic of the humorous messages that are relatable among the students is *love*. Majority of the teachers use love-related punch lines, stories, and jokes as the content of their humor.

Another well-mentioned characteristic of humor is being unexpected. Unexpectedness is described as something that is abrupt and unanticipated. Some humorous attempts of teachers were not expected by the students, thus, eliciting laughter among them. This feature is characterized by spontaneity.

Novelty, on the other hand, entails the freshness of the humor. When a humorous message was heard already by the receiver either from the same sender or from other people or platforms, the humor is expected to fail. The more that the humorous message is repeatedly heard, the more it loses its power to elicit laughter. The element of surprise is a key indicator of unexpectedness and novelty.

Lastly, the informants had a shared belief that humor must never be offensive nor demeaning. Offensive humor pertains to comments, statements or acts that intend to elicit humor in the expense of other people through ridicules and embarrassment. The general topics that are offensive in nature and should never be a focus of joking include, but not limited to, physical features and deformities, family issues, and religion. Moreover, sexual humor such as green and

dirty jokes was categorized as offensive. Sexual humor entails joking and giving comments that are malicious, obscene, and explicit.

3.2 Types of Humor

By understanding the features of humor, it can be deemed that there are types of humor that elicit positive responses and there are others that may cause harm among the students. The major goal of this study was to draw a line between appropriate and inappropriate humor by developing a typology of Filipino humor used in the classrooms. Appropriate humor refers to “humor [that] was not offensive and/or fitting for the class” (Wanzer et al., 2006, 182). On the other hand, inappropriate humor is humor that was offensive and/or not fitting for the class. Figure 1 shows the typology of humor used in Philippine classrooms based on the study of Luaña (2020).

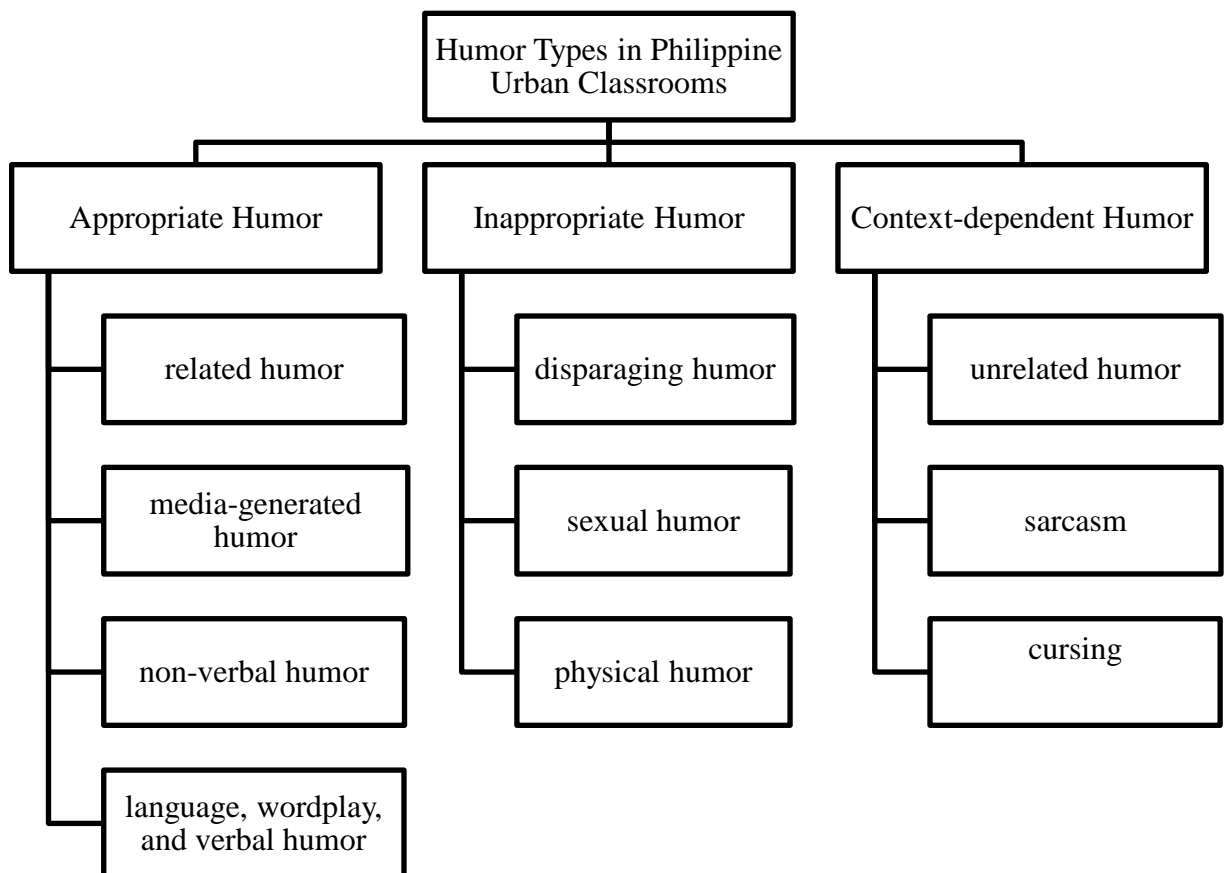


Figure 1. Typology of Humor in Philippine Urban Classrooms. Luaña, J. (2020). Patawa Si Teacher: Ethnography on Humor Integration in a Philippine Urban High School (Master's). University of the Philippines - Diliman.

3.2.1 Appropriate Types of Humor

Four pervasive themes were generated to describe appropriate humor. To reiterate, appropriate humor is perceived by the students and teachers as not offensive and fitting for the class. The four appropriate humor types are: 1) related to the topic; 2) media-generated humor; 3) Non-verbal Humor; and 4) Language, Wordplay, and Verbal Humor. In this article, the names of the teachers and students that are mentioned are not their real names.

The theme *related to the topic* is characterized as a humor type that uses the class lessons as springboards of the humorous messages. The humor is used in connection to the lessons or topics being discussed. As one of the male teacher informants said, “I integrate comedy in the lesson that is really related [to the topic] and not far from the lesson.” Using funny examples is one of the most prevailing ways of humor integration that is related to the topic. The teachers used funny examples to introduce, clarify, and expound specific concepts.

For instance, in one of the Grade 8 Mathematics classes, Teacher Maricel’s discussion on Parallel Lines Cut by a Transversal led to a batch of laughter after she differentiated between an intersecting line and a perpendicular line using humor. She emphasized that intersecting lines are two lines that meet but do not form a right angle, whereas, perpendicular lines are two lines that meet and form a right angle. To expound on this, she said, “*Ang intersecting line, parang kayo ng crush mo. Pinagtagpo pero hindi right. Sa perpendicular lines naman, pinagtagpo kayo at right kayo sa isa’t-isa. Kaya may right angle kayo* (Intersecting lines are just like you and your crush. The two of you have met but you were not right for each other. In perpendicular lines, the two of you have met and you were right for each other. That is why you have a right angle).” Through this, recall of concepts is much easier for students as they use the related humor attached to the concept taught in remembering the lessons most especially during examinations.

One interesting finding in this study is the prevalence of humorous contents obtained from different media (e.g., television, social media etc.). Media-generated humor is the type of humor that is electronically made but used in real life. The responses of the key informants underscored the role of different media as sources of humorous contents. The most dominant medium that served as the birthplace and purveyor of humorous content was social media sites.

Social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter had been used as an avenue to create and spread humorous contents such as funny videos, pictures, and memes. Humorous contents that went viral online, most often than not, they would be talked about in real life as well. In the school context, humorous teachers gave life to these humorous contents in the classroom by using them for different functions such as to catch the attention of the students and to give examples and explanations on the topic being discussed.

For example, in the resumption of classes last January 2020, Teacher Fiona asked her students about their plans this year. One of her students answered, “Ma’am, *wala* (Ma’am, none).” Teacher Fiona jokingly answered, “*Ano?! Bagsak pa rin sa 2020?* (What?! You will still fail this 2020?).” This drew laughter from the students. Undoubtedly, the reference of her joke was the memes shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Sample of Memes on Facebook. Reprinted from Netflix. (2020). In *Facebook* [Fan page] and The Saranghae Oppa (2019). In *Facebook* [Fan page].

Another type of humor that the informants considered as appropriate is nonverbal humor. Nonverbal humor is characterized as humorous messages that are not spoken but acted. This humor type includes facial expression, making a funny face, and gestures that are not offensive or demeaning. Hence, it does not include slapsticks. Nonverbal humor is usually a reaction by the humorous teacher to an event, situation or person where this humor is performed or referenced to.

For instance, after Teacher Fiona gave her students a short quiz, she asked them to exchange papers so they can check their answers. In answering, the students called by Teacher Fiona had to read the questions first before giving their answers. It was observed that when a student gave an incorrect answer, instead of saying that the answer was wrong, she made funny

faces eliciting laughter from the students. This change in her facial expression was also a signal for the other students that the answer given by their classmate was wrong; hence, they had the chance to answer so they raised their hands whenever Teacher Fiona showed such facial expressions.

Lastly, *Language, Wordplay, and Verbal Humor* also fall under the appropriate humor type. This theme is characterized by the usage of comical words, phrases, and puns that elicit positive responses from the students. The most common forms of this humor type are *hugot* lines, jokes, puns, figures of speech, and gay lingos. In terms of gay lingo, it is important to take note that it is not about being gay but the use of gay's language in the classroom which heterosexual teachers also use.

One of the most frequently used categories on this type of humor is *Hugot* lines. *Hugot* lines were used by the teachers as a supplemental comment to a concept or event that most of the time provoked positive reactions from the students. The *hugot* lines are usually dramatic and used to express hard feelings which may or may not be real. For instance, in Teacher Sheryl's class, her students played a game about the terms that they can still remember from their Grade 8 Physics class as a review for their next topic. One student mentioned Inertia. As a probing question, Teacher Sheryl asked the student to define what Inertia is. The conversation turned this way:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Teacher Sheryl: | Inertia, that's right. What do you mean by Inertia? |
| Student: | For example, I have one ball and another ball. When these two balls meet, <i>bumabalik</i> . (It bounces back.) |
| Teacher Sheryl: | <i>Sana all bumabalik!</i>
(I hope everything/everyone goes back.) |
| All students: | Boom! (Laugh heavily) |

This *Sana All hugot* line has been popularly used not just in schools but also in social media sites. Other variants of *Sana All* are *China All*, *China Oil*, and *Sana Oil*. This phrase is used to express how a person lacks something that others have and they wish to have the same. For instance, when someone introduces his/her romantic partner to someone who is single, the utterance of the phrase "*Sana All*" is anticipated.

Colloquial words and gay lingos were also listed as appropriate humor under this humor type by the students and teachers. According to Nora, a Grade 9 student, her teachers use words whose syllables were rearranged in reverse such as *oyats*, *omsim*, and others. *Oyats* means *tayo* (or in English, *we*) while *omsim* means *mismo* (or in English, *definitely*). Some gay lingos that were heard from the teachers are “*char*”, “*baklang ‘to*”, and “*keme*”. These terms were usually used as an expression.

3.2.2 Inappropriate Types of Humor

Three themes were generated to describe inappropriate humor. To reiterate, inappropriate humor refers to humor types that the students and teachers perceived as offensive and not fitting in the class. The three types of inappropriate humor are: 1) Disparaging humor; 2) Sexual Humor; and 3) Physical Humor.

The most pervasive theme under inappropriate humor is *Disparaging Humor*. Disparaging humor is characterized as humor used to depreciate the target students by means of giving negative comments and remarks on students’ physical attributes (e.g. weight, facial features, skin color), mental capacity (e.g. dumb, stupid, idiotic), and personal life (e.g. family issues, secrets). This type of humor is hurtful in nature and may be detrimental to the students especially when they are the target of such humor.

Two forms of disparaging humor were generated namely *targeting students* and *insensitive humor*. Joking on the students’ physical attributes or deformities and mental capacity is a form of disparaging humor—targeting students. It targets a specific student for the purpose of appearing to be funny by giving derogatory and offensive humorous messages. One example of disparaging humor targeting student is when Teacher Sharon teased her thin-skinned student by saying, “*Nako, isang bulate na lang ang pipirma, wala ka na* (One more worm to sign the petition and you are dead) and “*Isang ubo ka na lang, patay ka na*” (One last cough and you are dead). This was in reference to his very petite body structure.

On the other hand, disparaging humor can also be described as humor that is “below the belt” and too personal, hence, hurtful to others. This form of disparaging humor is referred to as insensitive humor. The responses of the key informants pointed to the notion that humor attempts referenced to one’s personal and private life is inappropriate, thus, not fitting in the class. When the students’ families and secrets are used as a reference of humor, the students tend to get

offended. For instance, Nedie, a Grade 9 student, shared with me her experience with one teacher who involved her mother as a reference for a joke. When asked what she considers as inappropriate humor, she answered:

‘Yung paglait po doon sa magulang ko, sir. Kasi sabi po sir, “Nanay mo siguro balyena,” gumanon po. Kaya sa isip ko po, hindi po nakakatuwa yun sir kasi nanay ko yun eh. Ang dami na pong sakripisyo ng magulang ko para sa akin tapos parang isang teacher, babastusin mo? “Sino ka?” parang napaganun po ako.

(It is inappropriate when my parents are ridiculed. The teacher said, “Maybe your mother is a whale.” In my mind, it was not funny because that is my mother. She did not sacrifice a lot for us just to be ridiculed by a teacher. I just told myself, “Who are you (to ridicule my parents?)”

Another inappropriate type of humor is *sexual humor*. Sexual humor entails joking and giving comments that are malicious, obscene, and explicit. This humor type includes green jokes and lewd statements/comments. All of the student participants, except one male student, in the FGD believe that sexual humor has no place in the classroom. The male student said that sexual humor is just a joke and should not be taken seriously. However, this was disputed by the female participants especially those who experienced being joked at by a teacher with sexual humor.

For instance, Nina, a soft-spoken and Morena Grade 9 student, was joked by his teacher saying that he wanted to court her. She narrated, *“Yung nagbibiro po s’ya. Pinagpapaalam nya... ikaw sa nanay mo na para ligawan ka. Hindi po s’ya nakakatuwa kasi parang nakakabastos* (When he jokes that he will ask my parents to court me, it is not funny because it is offensive).” Because of this, Nina became aloof of this teacher and did not want to talk with him anymore.

Moreover, a male classmate also witnessed a male teacher’s lewd comment about his girl classmate. He narrated that while they were having a group activity, his teacher joked his female classmate, *“Ang laki ng melon mo* (Your melons are big).” Noel felt uncomfortable hearing this from his teacher especially that he saw his teacher looking at the boobs of his classmate. *“Manyakol naman ng taong ‘to* (This person is a sex maniac),” he thought. This incident implies that even if the students are just witnesses of sexual remarks, they also feel uncomfortable about

it. Hence, not because they are not the target of the sexual humor already means that they are not affected by it.

Lastly, *physical humor* was also identified as an inappropriate humor type. Physical humor is described as humor that inflicts physical harm to the target by slapping, hair pulling, punching, and other forms of physical actions with a purpose eliciting laughter. This form of humor may also be referred to as slapsticks. Physical humor, according to the responses of the students, is hurtful; hence, they are not funny and not fitting in the classrooms.

3.2.3 Context-dependent Types of Humor

Interestingly, during the interviews and focus group discussions, there were answers that fell under the umbrella of both appropriate and inappropriate humor depending on the context the humor was delivered. As we explored deeper, we figured out that this humor type's appropriateness depends on the present situation and the context. Hence, in addition to appropriate and inappropriate humor, we added context-dependent humor. Context-dependent humor includes four themes, to wit: 1) unrelated humor; 2) sarcasm; and 3) cursing.

The most dominant form of context-dependent humor is *unrelated humor*. Unrelated humor is characterized as humorous messages that are injected in classroom teachings but have no relation to the topic being studied. This theme includes teachers' life stories and experiences, jokes, and anecdotes. In the course of my classroom observations, it has been noted that humorous teachers love to tell stories to their students. The most common stories that teachers shared with their students were about their personal life experiences. These stories were used as random fillers before, in between or after class discussions, although they were not connected with the lesson.

Unrelated humor may be deemed as appropriate when it used in moderation without wasting academic time. Hence, when unrelated humor is used as a random filler to give the student a mental break after a long and intensive discussion and to catch the students' attention, it may bring forth positive impacts on the students.

For instance, it was observed that Teacher Sherwin was used to giving his students time to copy the notes on the board. While the students were writing, he shared stories and personal experiences that were not related to the topic. For example, during their discussion on Universal Acceleration Motion–Vertical Dimension, Teacher Sherwin enthusiastically shared his experience the first time he had a scientific calculator. He narrated:

Noong college, hindi ako bumili ng calculator. Hindi rin ako nagnakaw siyempre. Nakakapulot ako! Inaantay ko kung may magke-claim kaso wala. Kaya nilalagyan ko na ng apelyido ko. Siguro sabi ng Diyos, “Kailangan mo ng calculator? Eto para sa ‘yo!” Napa- “thank you, Lord” ako!

(When I was in college, I did not buy a calculator. I did not steal as well, of course. I usually find lost calculators! I waited if someone would claim, but there was none. So, I put my surname on it. Maybe the Lord said, “You need a calculator, here’s one for you!” I will just say, “thank you, Lord!”)

However, when unrelated humor is used excessively to the extent that it jeopardizes academic time, it is deemed as inappropriate. When unrelated humor is used abusively, it may bring you far away from the topic being discussed and may cause distraction among the students. In the FGD, some students attested that some teachers spent almost the entire class period by telling unrelated humorous stories. For instance, one of Elizabeth’s teachers shared an unrelated story with them. Elizabeth narrated:

Kinukwento niya buong buhay niya hanggang matapos oras niya. Tipong mula pagkabata niya hanggang paglaki niya, kinukwento niya samin. Tapos isang beses sabi ko po bakit nya ginagawa yon. Sabi po niya, “para hindi sayang sa oras.” Sabi ko po, “paanong hindi sayang e lesson po dapat yung tinatopic natin?” Tapos ‘di na n’ya po sinagot, tumawa nalang.

(She told us her life story until her class with us ended. She was telling us her life story from childhood to adulthood. Then, one time, I asked her as to why she was doing that. She answered, “to save time.” I answered back, “we are actually wasting time because we are not discussing our topic.” She did not answer anymore, instead, she just laughed.)

Looking at these examples of unrelated humor in the classroom, shifting back to the topic was deemed important. Hence, one important skill in using unrelated humor in class is having an awareness that they are going out of topic. By having this awareness, the teachers can easily divert

back to the topic and not go far away from it. Verbal cues were used by the teachers to divert the students' attention back to the lesson.

True enough, unrelated humor may bring you far away from the topic to the extent that instructional time is wasted. In this case, unrelated humor was ineffective. On the other hand, when unrelated humor is controlled and limited, it may serve as a break from a heavy discussion. Hence, it was deemed effective as it gave students relief from the discussion. This condition on the successful shifting back to the lesson after an attempt of unrelated humor serves as a yardstick as to whether or not the humor is helpful in the learning of the students or just a distraction.

Another form of context-dependent humor is *sarcasm*. Sarcasm is described as words, comments or statements that pertain to the opposite of what you really mean in order to be funny or to insult someone. The teacher informants were observed to use sarcasm in two situations—first, to answer a valid question from a student and second, to reprimand a student's misbehavior. The responses of the informants suggest that when sarcasm is used to counter a valid question from the students, it may be deemed as inappropriate as it discourages the students to participate in the discussion.

Nedie raised in the focus group discussion that there were times when she asked a valid question but the teacher answered it sarcastically. She shared, “*Kapag hindi ka po sinasagot ng teacher... ‘yung nagtanong ka po tapos pa-pilosopo ‘yung pagsagot ng teacher.... Mapapatahimik ka nalang po* (When you asked a question and your teacher did not answer you seriously. Instead, they will answer sarcastically).”

This statement by Nedie was observed in Teacher Maricel's class. In her discussion on Isosceles Triangle, she asked the students to fold a triangular paper into two equal parts. She asked the students after they had folded the triangle, “What can you notice?” One student answered, “*Triangle pa rin!* (It is still a triangle!)” Teacher Maricel said, “*Malamang [triangle], alangan namang square? Mas magulat ka kung naging circle ‘yan,* (Obviously, it is still a triangle. Obviously it is not square. Be more surprised if it became a circle).” After this incident, the student was observed to be passive for the rest of the class. Although used as a joke, the use of the sarcastic comment on this particular situation may have discouraged the students to recite or participate in the class discussion as it might have sent an impression to them that it is not a safe space since incorrect answers receive sarcastic comments.

On the contrary, a sarcastic approach is deemed as appropriate when it is used as a way to correct student misbehavior. The students wanted to receive sarcastic comments for their misconduct instead of being nagged and scolded by the teachers. For example, Teacher Edward was also observed to have used sarcastic comment when reprimanding latecomers. One time, in his 12:10 pm class, two students came in late. They greeted the class by saying, “Good afternoon, Sir. We’re sorry we’re late.” Teacher Edward answered, “*Ha? Ang aga niyo pa....para bukas. 12:30 pm pa lang oh* (What? You are still early...for tomorrow’s class. It is just 12:30 pm).” This statement made the class laughed. Sarcasm, in this example, was used to reprimand students, thus, the recurrence of the students’ tardiness was hoped to be diminished.

Cursing has been heavily used by the students inside and outside the classrooms. In spite of the heavy usage of cursing in the daily conversation of the students, we expected that cursing will still fall under inappropriate humor. However, to our surprise, cursing appeared in both appropriate and inappropriate humor. We found this finding very interesting, thus, we investigated this discovery more thoroughly.

As we probed deeper, we figured out a big difference between “*putang ina mo*” (You are a son of a bitch) and “*putang ina*” (son of a bitch). The thing is, cursing targeting students is inappropriate, whereas, cursing used as an expression is appropriate for the students. When asked if it is alright for teachers to curse in the classroom, one female student answered, “It is good to be used in the classroom but it has to be used correctly. It should not pertain to other people but they can use it as an expression.” All the other Grade 9 student participants agreed to her explanation. The bottom line is, when cursing is used as an expression, it may be deemed as appropriate but when it is used to target a specific person, accompanied by anger, it is deemed as inappropriate.

4. Discussions

The findings of this study revealed that not all humorous message attempts elicit positive emotions such as laughter from the receivers. Humor has features that make it funny. Humorous attempts need to be relatable among the receiver since they use their schema to unravel the humor in the message. By tapping the schema of the receivers, the message becomes meaningful to them. This finding may be explained by Lutz & Huitt’s (2003) Stage Model of Memory which highlighted the importance of *meaningfulness* in information processing. When the information is meaningful, it may be easily understood by the receiver. Thus, when a humorous attempt is relatable among

the receivers, it will be attached to a meaningful association in their existing network of the related idea. This process, in turn, may result to the appreciation of humor.

Being unexpected and novel is also important for humor to be appreciated as these features preserve the element of surprise in the humorous message. When a humor attempt is expected and repeated, it extinguishes the element of surprise which “eventually leads instead to negative emotions, such as the feeling of irritability” (Balmores-Paulino, 2018, 53). Moreover, this decrease in the power of humor to elicit positive responses due to the repeated delivery of the same humor can be explained by the Incongruity Theory. Kant (in Berger, 2013) described laughter as “an affection rising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing” (210). This statement implies that in order to understand the humorous message, the receiver should be able to identify the incongruity embedded in humor and second, resolve that incongruity, in that particular order (La Fave et al., in Alatalo and Poutiainen, 2016).

The first time that the humor was delivered already revealed and resolved the incongruity in the message. When the incongruity is already resolved, there is no longer a strained expectation. When there is no strained expectation, there is no longer humor. Thus, when a sender repeats the same humorous message, most probably, that humor will fail, especially because according to Berlyne (as cited in Alatalo and Poutiainen, 2016), incongruity “requires both a novel and an unexpected combination of stimuli” (71). By repeating the same joke, the element of surprise is exhausted which is considered as an important component for a successful humor production as viewed on the lens of the Incongruity Theory.

The inoffensive feature of humor may be related to Balmores-Paulino’s (2018) notion of humor threshold which refers to “the point where beyond this, a humorous message fails to be comical and may likely be viewed unacceptable” (52). Since the humor is offensive and demeaning, it may be deemed hurtful by the target and listeners of the humor. In other words, when a humor attempt is offensive, it takes away its comical value. Humor that is offensive in nature is not funny at all.

Cognizant to the features of humor, one may already predict that not all humorous messages are funny. In the context of education, not all humor types are appropriate or fitting in the classroom. Some humor types have adverse impacts on the students’ learning. Several humor types were listed in this study as appropriate. One is related humor. Related humor is appropriate in the classroom in the sense that it helps the students retain and recall information in a more

effective and efficient way. This finding may be explained by the Information Processing Theory (IPT). In a nutshell, IPT views cognition as the study of how people encode, structure, store, retrieve, use or otherwise learn knowledge” (Neisser, as cited in Lutz & Huitt, 2003, 1). Atkinson and Shiffrin’s (1968) Stage Theory Model highlights the importance of attention in information processing. Also, one important element of the information processing model is meaningfulness. Slate and Charlesworth (1988) posited that “when material is made meaningful, it is learned more rapidly and retained for longer periods of time than rote learning” (6). Since the humor is related and meaningful to the lives of the students, it is easily retained in their memory. Moreover, in terms of recall, students may easily remember the information by recalling first the humor attached and related to it.

Another interesting finding in this study is the media-generated humor which we consider as the new breed of humor types. This type of humor is popular since the students are heavy users of social media. Media-generated humor is created and circulated instantly, however, no matter how fast it may be created, media-generated humor, like memes, also perishes abruptly. As Bauckhage (2011) explicated, “most Internet memes spread rapidly; some were observed to go in and out of popularity in just a matter of days. Memes are spread in a voluntary, peer to peer fashion, rather than in a compulsory manner” (2). The instant demise of media-generated humor may be linked to one of the features of humor which is novelty. Once the humor is oversaturated already, it will lead to its natural death. The proliferation of media-generated humor, hence, is time-bounded.

Non-verbal humor such as facial expressions and gestures may be explained by the cognition of humor as discussed by Balmores-Paulino (2018). He explained that “humor involves a cognitive-perceptual component, through which a humor definition can be extracted” (47). Actions that are deemed comical by the source of humor may elicit laughter from the audience. This finding shows similarities with the work of Wanzer et al. (2005) on categories of humorous coping strategies. Nonverbal humor such as gestures, facial displays, and vocal tones and variety were used by their nurse respondents as a tool for coping in health care settings. This type of humor is used to help healthcare workers to cope with stress brought about various situations such as the death of patients, difficult patients, work relationship, and general stress. Hence, the finding of this study extends the work of Wanzer et al. (2005) from a health care setting to an educational setting.

The *Language, Wordplay, and Verbal Humor* type was also presented by other scholars in their studies. For instance, Bryant et al. (as cited in Banas et al., 2011) identified puns as a standalone category of humorous message. In a similar vein, Wanzer et al. (2005) also generated a theme called *language and wordplay*. This theme is characterized as witty and clever verbal communication which includes “telling jokes, teasing others, or making fun of self, using sarcasm, slang, verbal mistakes, regional language, and so on” (Wanzer et al., 2005, 116). Generally, the theme *Language, Wordplay, and Verbal Humor* in this study is perceived as a combination of Bryant et al.’s (as cited in Banas et al., 2011) *puns* and Wanzer et al.’s (2005) *language and word play*. However, unlike with Wanzer et al.’s (2005) work, in this study, sarcasm is not a part of the theme *Language, Wordplay, and Verbal Humor* but of the context-dependent type of humor.

In the study of Balmore-Paulino (2018), he stated that humor threshold or breaking point for humor is relative to one person and another; hence, “the humor threshold of a person may become higher or lower relative to the relational context of the humor initiator and humor recipient” (59). This may be the explanation as to why some humorous messages are context-dependent. For instance, sarcasm and cursing may be appropriate for individuals who have a high degree of closeness but inappropriate for those who have no strong positive relationship. Since humor is viewed as culture-dependent, it may be inferred that in order to effectively deliver a humorous message, one needs to consider the norm, belief, schema, and present situation of the target of the humor.

5. Conclusions

The rationale of this study was that no typology of Filipino humor is developed in the Philippines despite the fact that humor is engrained in its culture. This paper categorized humor used by the teachers in the classrooms according to its appropriateness based on the students’ and teachers’ beliefs and experiences. In retrospect, this study aimed to develop a typology of humor with the hope to guide teachers in selecting the humor that they use in the classrooms to avoid the impending adverse impacts on students’ learning.

The typology of humor developed in this study drew a line between appropriate and inappropriate types of humor. True enough, not all types of humor, regardless of the teacher’s intention, result on positive impacts on the overall learning experience of the students. Hence, the use of inappropriate types of humor in the classrooms is highly discouraged as these humor types

pose danger in the classrooms. Disparaging, sexual, and physical types of humor should be avoided at all cost.

On the other hand, appropriate types of humor lead to positive impacts on the overall learning experience of the students; thus, related, non-verbal, media-generated, and language, wordplay, and verbal humor types are advised to be used in the classrooms. This study also unraveled that context-dependent humor relies heavily on the present situation; hence its appropriateness depends on certain conditions such as the target, the delivery, and the goal of the humor.

While there are similarities, the findings of this study infer that Filipino humor is unique and has differences compared with other countries. Some types of humor may be funny in other countries but are offensive in the context of the Philippines. For instance, sarcasm was listed as appropriate was listed as appropriate in the study of Wanzer et al. (2005) but context-dependent in this study. Indeed, culture plays a vital role in humor appreciation.

Study Limitations

While this study has provided substantial information on the appropriateness of Filipino humor in the classrooms, the findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. First, the corpus of this study was obtained from an urban public high school only, thus, generalization was not sought to the larger population. Moreover, the conclusions of this study only apply to high school students. Humor appreciation may be age-dependent as well; hence, elementary school pupils, college students, and graduate school students may have different perspectives on the appropriateness of humor used by their teachers or professors in the classroom. Lastly, cognizant to the notion that humor is culture-dependent, the conclusions of this study exclude the experiences of those high school students in a rural community.

Future Directions

The findings of this study open various directions for future studies related to the use of humor in the classrooms. Given the fact that this study only covered a public school, further studies may look into what types of humor used by their teachers do students in other educational contexts such as private schools, parochial schools, and exclusive schools consider as appropriate and inappropriate. By doing this, comparisons to show similarities and differences of humor types in

the different educational contexts may be made to develop a more comprehensive typology of Filipino humor in the classrooms.

Another avenue for future study would be a more in-depth investigation on how students across all educational attainment categorize appropriate and inappropriate humor. The key question would be, is humor appreciation age-dependent? This study may be beneficial in the selection of humorous materials depending on the academic level of the students.

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