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## **WAYS OF USING HUMOR IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS: AN ANALYSIS BETWEEN TURKS AND THE SPANISH**

### **Abstract:**

Humor is an effective and significant part of interpersonal relations. Humor has always had a slight role in maintaining or ending relationships, and in relational conflict management. People make their addressee laugh by cracking a joke, receive their approval, and win them over or gain self-confidence.

Besides the fact that humor facilitate the solution of many problems in relationships, the partners may choose to use humor at the breaking points of their relationships, and this may cause the relationship to end.

Expressions (actions) are created by using various functions of humor in relationships (Affiliative humor, Self-enhancing humor, Aggressive humor, Self-defeating humor). Since it facilitates the hardships, humor has always been the most popular way of dealing with stuff in relationship conflicts. Humor is most frequently used when solving problems. However, this may lead to adverse outcomes if the partner's vulnerabilities are neglected. A sense of humor on a common ground is one of the essential building stones of a sound relationship.

This study has been designed to reveal the most common function of sense of humor used by the Turkish and the Spanish in their interpersonal relationships. In-depth interviews conducted with 5 Turks and 5 Spaniards through questions regarding four different styles of humor in HSQ Humor Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al., 2003) form constitute the research methodology of this study.

### **Keywords:**

humor, humor styles, interpersonal relationships

**JEL Classification:** A39, A30, A39

## Introduction

Humour plays a part in every aspect of life and life without humour is unimaginable. Humour is particularly important to make someone laugh, to come out of depressed mood/depression, to criticize someone jokingly, and for self-motivation. Use and styles of humour may naturally vary depending on age, gender, culture and personal characteristics. In this study, it is aimed to determine which of the humour styles among (Martin et al, 2003,p.48) affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating humour styles are mostly used by the Spanish and the Turkish depending on culture.

## Literature Review

Many authors agree that humour has a significant role in interpersonal relationships. As a method of establishing positive relationships, humour plays a crucial role in self-disclosure, social prohibitions, and in defusing tension and chaos, etc. (Long and Graesser,1988, p.35-60). In modern psychological research, humour represents a versatile understanding in relation to the characteristics of the stimulus/stimulator and it is influenced by cognitive processes. While the sense of humour appeals to the personal characteristics, the personal responses that cover cognitive, emotional, behavioural, psychophysical and social components are provided by the individuals (Sirigatti et al., 2016, p.219-224). It is also important to emphasize that humour is fundamentally a social experience. For one, we laugh much more when we are surrounded by other people than when we are alone. Indeed, laughter is contagious and it has even been proven to work as a form of therapy for people who are depressed or sad. Jokes are meant to be shared with others and comedians know that when the audience is not being amused, the humour is probably not very funny. Above all, humour can greatly reduce the tension among people and enable individuals who are different from each other to get along and even live together in harmony (Gordon,2014,p.162-174). In particular, several researchers have demonstrated that the adaptive humour styles, affiliative and self-enhancing, are positively related to certain aspects of psychological well-being: openness to experience, self-esteem, intimacy, relationship satisfaction, mature and effective coping, positive self-evaluative standards, subjective happiness, professional accomplishment, and mainly positive moods and emotions (Cann, Stilwell, & Taku, 2010,p.215; Kazarian and Martin, 2004, p.211-212).

Martin et al. (2003, p.52) suggests four different uses of humour: two of them are compatible styles: positive and benign/beneficial/useful (affiliative and self-enhancing) and the other two are incompatible styles: negative and damaging/harmful (aggressive and self-defeating). Affiliative humour tends to be related to telling funny things and jokes, and helpful in establishing relationships. Self-enhancing humour helps us not to take life too seriously, to be happy and satisfied and to focus on controversies of life and intrapsychic personal processes. Aggressive humour is the hostile form of humour and it involves sarcasm, disdain, and "repressive" or insulting and contemptuous mockery

depending on manipulating others on purpose without paying regard to negative outcomes. Self-defeating humour is based on entertaining other people, and it means getting someone's approval through humour (Sirigatti et al., 2016, p. 219-224).

**Table 1. Two-by-two model of humour styles**

	Benign/beneficial/useful Impact	Damaging/harmful Impact
For the relationship with others (improving worth and attractiveness to other people).	Affiliative Humour	Self-Defeating Humour
For the relationship with the self (improving self-worth and standing)	Self-Enhancing Humour	Aggressive Humour

Source: Martin et al., 2003, retrieved from Barnett M. & Deutsch J., 2016, p.108.

Martin et al. (2003, p.53-54) classifies humour styles in 2 different models; while the purpose of humour is analysed in one axis, the other axis includes self and developing relationships with others, and the other one is the route. This purpose is the route that will be created by using indecent and dangerous humour in order to make their humour successful.

Affiliative humour (enhance relationships/benign) uses harmless humour to put others at ease and reveals users who are appreciative of themselves and their surroundings and high in relational satisfaction, often telling jokes or stories for the amusement of both themselves and others. Affiliative humour (enhance relationships) appears as harmless humour. Entertaining others and creating relational satisfaction are behaviours that are put forth by people, who are satisfied with themselves and their surroundings. They typically tell jokes and funny stories and entertain themselves and others (Leist and Müller, 2013, p.553; Martin et al., 2003, p.53; Mendiburo-Seguel, Páez, & Martínez-Sánchez, 2015,p.336).

Self-defeating humour (relationship enhancement/damaging) represents self-derogation and high-levels of anxiety, depression, aggression. (Mendiburo-Seguel et al., 2015, p.336). The individuals may not be interested in who they are, they may feel uneasy, may constantly compare themselves with others due to their perceived values, thus, they clearly use self-defeating humour to show their perceived mistakes and relieve from social stress, or to hide their true feelings from themselves and others.

Self-enhancing humour (self-enhancing/ego) mostly provides a defence mechanism that preconditions in low mode and a low self-value (Leist and Müller, 2013,p 553; Mendiburo-Seguel et al., 2015, p.336). Self-enhancing humour also ensures people to have realistic viewpoints of themselves, to disclose their inner value, and an awareness of dignity. Even though it is considered extreme, self-derogatory humour is not necessary between the

sense of self and the perceived self because it largely compensates itself (Martin et al., 2003, p.54-55). Aggressive humour is used coercively with the influence of impulse for the purpose of manipulation and disparagement, including the inappropriate conditions (Martin et al., 2003, p.52). Aggressive humour, also, is mainly the tendency to use humour to disparage, put down, or manipulate others, the use of ridicule, offensive humour, and the compulsive expression of humour even when inappropriate; it can be understood in the light of the "superiority" theory of humour (Saroglou and Scariot, 2002, p. 44).

Aggressive humour successfully completes the same function of humour by increasing the value of self and by establishing a social hierarchy (Leist and Müller, 2013; Ozyesil, 2012). Aggressive humour may damage the good conduct and may prevent the individual from remembering his entire individuality. Aggressive humour may arise from low sense of self and using humour in this way may invent an emergency, but this may also hide the real problems and prevents us from finding accurate solutions (Sugimura, Rudolph, & Agoston, 2014). Aggressive humour is used coercively with the influence of impulse for the purpose of manipulation and disparagement, including the inappropriate conditions (Martin et al., 2003).

People use humour in their marriage or closed relationship to make strong their feelings and loyalty. In other words, while humour is used for good causes, such as increasing intimacy in marriages and managing conflicts (Ammerman, 2002, Jacobs, 1985) it is also used maleficently to express negative feelings or to offend somebody (Saroglou, Lacour and Demeure, 2010). Sometimes couples may also use humour to abstain from conflicts or to tone down the conflicts (Butzer and Kuiper, 2008; De Koning and Weiss, 2002).

## **Methodology**

Humour exists in our lives in one way or another. The starting point of this study is to reveal if there is a difference between the humour styles of the Spanish and the Turkish and to reveal whether there are any differences between the humour styles in interpersonal relationships described in previous studies. Thus, there are two main questions in this study. These are: What are the most common styles of humour used by the Turkish and the Spanish? What are the differences between their ways of using humour?

In-depth interview method was selected in accordance with this purpose. In-depth interview is a qualitative research technique which is the researcher interviews participants in-depth and one-on-one. The interviewer typically has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in a particular order. Rather, it flows more like a conversation in which the respondent guides the direction of the interview. (Crossman, 2014, "In Depth Interviews")The participants of this study were the Spanish and Turkish instructors between the ages 27 and 37 in Izmir Ekonomi University and Ege University. The participants were selected through random sampling method on

a volunteer basis and 5 Spanish and % Turkish instructors participated in this study. The interviews were recorded by permission of the participants. Two researchers have separately deciphered and coded the tape recordings and the data obtained have also been checked by a separate encoder. On this basis, the results of the study were put through a qualitative evaluation and interpretation. 16 in-depth interview questions in humour styles questionnaire of (Martin et al.,2003, p.58-59) were used to code the results of the study. New codes have also been created and added by the researcher. Each participant stated their opinions for about 30 minutes on the articles in this questionnaire, which were converted into question form.

## Findings

When the statements of the participants during interviews are analysed in terms of humour style, it is observed that the Turkish and Spanish participants share similarities especially in affiliative and self-enhancing humour styles.

### Theme1: Affiliative Humour

Affiliative humour style include that make somebody laugh, crack a smile and at the same time people who try to make herself/himself laugh and people who loves to be with positive people together. Affiliative humour style makes people joke about humour in their closed relationships, with catching witty side on their daily life with telling item, anectode and the situations that they encounter in life. Using this humour style makes people relationships much more powerfull and loyalty. Here are the some examples of from interview:

The Turkish:

- I usually laugh, but do not joke around; I do sometimes depending on who I am talking to
- I want humour in every aspect of my life but sometimes you need to act normal. Humour is spontaneous for me
- I both love to laugh and joke around

The Spanish:

- Generally I don't keep more distance
- Yes I'm in good mood if I'm not sleepy
- It depends on person to person
- yes I like joking,
- It depends people to people

In this respect, Turkish people like to make humour for receive approval and to increase loyalty of their relationships. Similarly Spanish people argue that sense of humour depends on people to people. It can not be said there was significant difference between Turks and Spanish in this type of humour.

## **Theme 2: Self-Enhancing Humour**

Self- enhancing Humour is type of humour which gives people positive energy when they are in bad mood and unhappy. People who like this type of humour likes to motivate themselves by humour. People who use this type humour style have too much self-esteem and self-confidence. Here are the some examples of from interview:

The Turkish:

- Even if I do, I cannot entertain myself, I chose to stay away from everything when I feel depressed.
- I don't necessarily try to come out of depression, but sometimes I try to cheer myself up by reading comics.
- I prefer to use other things than humour to come out of depression. I listen to music, or prefer to stick to my melancholic state.
- It is a humane process, laughing is a natural process. When I feel down, I love to watch TV or get together with my friends, who are guaranteed to make me laugh. Humour is one of the most important factors to eliminate my moodiness.

The Spanish:

- No, I don't. I show my feelings,
- No I don't when I'm happy I can show it when I'm not happy I guess I can show it people say me you are not OK.
- I can find something to watch for example TV series. It can be funny or before the sleep I always try to watch something funny
- No, don't cover my feelings.
- I guess I don't I should do I should start doing it but I don't. If I'm depressed I listen depressing music I keep myself more depressed mode and to get out of that situation
- I'm not a person who shares his feelings very easily I may show them I can show but I may not share details about.
- I cannot say I have humorous look because I'm more realistic person

As a result of findings from these type of humor styles, Turkish people are much more disposed to their real feelings than Spanish people. Although Turkish people say that

they can not hide their feelings and their feelings can transpire from their faces they show disposed masking their real feelings. Spanish people are much more realistic they said that they don't need to hide their real feelings.

### **Theme 3: Self-Defeating Humor Styles**

This type of humour is used for defense mechanism. People who likes criticize people with humour and who likes to humiliate in appropriate situation use this type styles. Here are the some examples of from interview:

Turks:

- I would not drag myself through the mud, but I love to make fun of myself
- Since me and my colleagues know each other very well, we need to mask our feelings sometimes.
- I can. I can both empathize and use humour and mix them up to cheer up that person.

Spanish:

- I do, I often laugh at my mistakes.
- Yes that happens when I'm going to the class I have to forget about problems at school at home or other,
- I don't behave in a different way that I'm feeling I I'm sad I don't want to speak too much or if I'm angry I want to be alone.
- I show my feelings if I have to cover it not with a joke,
- No, I may not say anything if that say because even if they make fun of me I can offend them.
- If everybody smiles it's nice to say it, if I have an opportunity I do, I don't afford myself to make a good spirit.
- No but we speak about each other and we criticize each other.
- No, with some friends always but in family humour is good for me because other people always feel good

This types of findings shows that Turks and Spanish people are not successful about hide their feelings. Even if they hide their feelings they can be understood by their environments. Turks are effort to make people laugh than Spanish. This is because of being collective society. Spanish people are much more individual. They don't need to make people laugh and establish mutual relations.

### **Theme 4: Aggressive Humour Styles**

This type of humour styles are destroyer, satirice, insulting. And this type of humour can destroy the relationship. Here are the some examples of from interview:

Turks:

- I constantly talk about it for the first five minutes, if it occurs to me once in a while or if something similar happens, I talk about that previous situation.
- I use humour to affirm a situation. Blundering and laughing are the positive side of the situation
- I do, if I am as mad as a hornet. But I don't do it very often because I don't like to break other people's hearts.
- Yes I do, I am sarcastic and yes, humour is a good way to do it.
- I say everything right to people's faces. If I am close to that person, I don't imply or tone try to tone things down.
- It depends on who it is

Spanish:

- No. well it depends a situation if the person can be annoyed because of you I do you don't find an opportunity to say something always so depends.
- If I want to I may use jokes to soften things up I may use jokes I may use humour but I can't say that to put someone down to make someone feel bad.
- Black humour someone down is not a good it's about behaviour personal character

As a result Turks use aggressive humour in a strategic way. They use this humour type for referring. But Spanish people use this humour not in a practical way. It is not the way they say their idea.

### **Theme 5: As a way of defense mechanism styles (In conflict management)**

Spanish:

- I don't joke around much, almost never because when I believe a problem must be solved right away, I can't joke around and disrupt the matter. The problem must be solved first, then everything would be fine.
- I joke around and make fun of things a lot, I know it is sometimes annoying, but I do it anyway.
- I think the problem must be solved first. I get serious and if the person jokes around, I would get angrier. It may also be the sole intention of the person I am arguing.

Turks:

- Yes, I do. I mostly use humour and brush it over when someone drops a brick. For example, when two people argue, sometimes you know that humour is the only



way to solve the problem. Sometimes things must be laughed away and that's where humour steps in. We had an argument with my friends at our soccer game and we eventually laughed it away because the arguments may lead to undesirable situations.

- I frequently use humour to drop innuendos, to make fun of others and in times of conflicts.
- yes of course if there are misunderstandings I can use joke to put the relationships in a good way

This type of humor style occur in our interviews. Because mostly Turkish people said that they like to use humor in conflict management. They use this type of humor as a way of to stop argue each other but not to solve the problem and cover it up by humor makes people to annoy each other. On the other hand, Spanish people consider that making humor in conflict period is insulting and make people not to take any notice of. There is a significant difference in a way of using humor in conflict management.

## Conclusion

The most significant result of this study is the type of humour, which gets lost in translation due to language and cultural differences. Humour appears as a method of conflict resolution, which is used both by the Turkish and the Spanish, and which is regarded as a way of consolidating relationships and increasing the level of content in close relationships. According to the authors (Leist and Müller, 2013, p.553; Martin et al., 2003, p.53; Mendiburo-Seguel, Páez, & Martínez-Sánchez, 2015,p.336) In affiliative humour styles they typically tell jokes and funny stories and entertain themselves and others and in our results Turkish people and Spanish people use this humour type similar way. According to literature (Sirigatti et al., 2016, p. 219-224) self-enhancing humour helps us not to take life too seriously, to be happy and satisfied and to focus on controversies of life and intrapsychic personal processes, in our results Turkish people likes to make themselves motivate with humour in a positive way for ex. by going out with positive friends but Spanish people prefer to live their real feeling deeply and mostly don't afford themselves to leave these feelings. According to (Mendiburo-Seguel et al., 2015, p.336). Self-defeating humour (relationship enhancement/damaging) represents self-derogation and high-levels of anxiety, depression, aggression. The individuals may not be interested in who they are, they may feel uneasy, may constantly compare themselves with others due to their perceived values. In our results Turkish and Spanish people are nearly same for showing their real feelings when they are in depressed mood but when Turkish people try to make positive atmosphere by making easy jokes Spanish people don't need any afford for it. They like to seem in as their own feeling and mood. In aggressive humour style theme Turkish people like to make aggressive jokes for to show their feelings, opinions on the other hand they use this humour type as a strategic way. But Spanish people think that this type of humours can injure people feelings.

However, it may sometimes be used as aggressive humour by the Turkish as to making innuendos and being sarcastic. This method, which is mostly used by both cultures as a way of moderation and resolution, causes nothing but trouble by stirring up the conflict and leading the parties into a dead end. It only helps covering up the conflict for a little while. The responses of the participants coincide with the findings in other studies in literature. According to self-defeating humour style, a transparent approach prevails in both cultures, and nobody finds it necessary to control their feelings and to mask their expressions. They usually prefer to joke around with their family members and close friends. According to the theory of uncertainty and social influence, failing to keep someone at bay generates a risk factor and thus, the participants prefer to avoid from joking around with people they barely know. In addition to this study, gender and humour styles or personal differences and humour styles may also be studied.

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