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Book review

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ABSTRACT

EN This book review focuses on the monographic volume, *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*, written by Rachel Shively (Illinois State University) and published in 2018 by de Gruyter. The book offers a thorough ethnographic study of L2 Spanish students' use and appropriation of conversational humor and humorous strategies during a semester abroad in Toledo, Spain. Shively also discusses the pedagogical implications of her study and provides practical examples of how humor can be introduced in the L2 classroom.

Key words: CONVERSATIONAL HUMOR, STUDY ABROAD, SPANISH L2, HUMOROUS STRATEGIES

ES Esta reseña se centra en el volumen monográfico *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*, escrito por Rachel Shively (Illinois State University) y publicado en 2018 por la editorial de Gruyter. Este libro presenta un detallado estudio etnográfico del uso y apropiación de diferentes estrategias humorísticas conversacionales por parte de estudiantes de español como L2 durante un semestre de estudio en el extranjero en Toledo, España. Además, Shively discute las implicaciones pedagógicas de su estudio y ofrece ejemplos prácticos de cómo el humor se puede integrar en un curso de segundas lenguas.

Palabras clave: HUMOR CONVERSACIONAL, PROGRAMAS DE ESTUDIO EN EL EXTRANJERO, ESPAÑOL L2, ESTRATEGIAS HUMORISTICAS

IT Questa recensione riguarda il libro *Learning and using conversational humor in a second language during study abroad*, scritto da Rachel Shively (Illinois State University) e pubblicato nel 2018 dalla casa editrice de Gruyter. Questo libro presenta un dettagliato studio etnografico dell'utilizzo e dell'appropriazione del comico e delle strategie umoristiche da parte di apprendenti di spagnolo come L2 durante un semestre di studio all'estero in Spagna nella città di Toledo. Inoltre, Shively discute le implicazioni pedagogiche del suo studio e offre esempi pratici di come l'umorismo si può integrare in un corso di insegnamento di una seconda lingua.

Parole chiave: IL COMICO NELLA CONVERSAZIONE, PROGRAMMI DI STUDI ALL'ESTERO, SPAGNOLO L2, STRATEGIE UMORISTICHE

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In the book, *Learning and Using Conversational Humor in a Second Language during Study Abroad* discusses L2 learners' acquisition of humor in a study abroad context from a pragmatics framework. Shively provides us with a thorough ethnographic study of L2 Spanish students' use and appropriation of conversational humor and humorous strategies during their semester abroad in Toledo, Spain. The book also presents an extensive overview of the underpinnings of the varied functions of humor, the different approaches to its study, and the wide-ranging meanings that humor conveys for students and people in general. In addition, it summarizes the most relevant studies in this area. Furthermore, the author's examination of how L2 students of Spanish use humor in their linguistic interactions in Toledo is done within a solid theoretical framework. It is a remarkable resource not only for researchers, but also for those teaching an L2, particularly Spanish, as it offers ways in which to incorporate humor in the classroom.

The book is structured in an organized and principled way in six chapters. The first one serves as a general introduction to humor studies in different settings and, particularly, in relation to those which examine humorous use and its acquisition in the L2 classroom and/or study abroad programs. The author positions her study within the framework of language socialization, which stems from Ochs' 1991 work. Shively emphasizes that this theory assumes that to be socialized to and learn an L2 means to acquire the competence to become a member of a community. More specifically, she indicates that "[a] basic tenet of language socialization theory is that socialization occurs throughout the lifespan, as individuals enter into new settings and rely on more knowledgeable people to acquire interactional practices." (p. 23). The author's objective in drawing on language socialization theory is to explore the kinds of humor L2 students encounter and how they use this linguistic strategy themselves in interactions during their study abroad program to provide "insight into L2 pragmatics, generally, and L2 pragmatics in study abroad specifically" (p. 25).

In Chapter two, the author provides details about the study, including its length (11 weeks), characteristics of the Toledo Institute in Spain where the study took place, characteristics of the participants, and the types of data collected. The participants were six students from a University in the Midwest in the USA who were studying Spanish. Their proficiency, as measured by an in-house exam from the Toledo Institute, ranged from an intermediate to an advanced-low level. Shively specifies that she collected both discourse and metalinguistic data. The discourse data stemmed from the recordings that students made of spontaneous conversations with host family members as well as with native Spanish speaker peers. This yielded 23 hours of usable data employed for the analysis. To make sure data from different stages of the 11-week program could be compared and to detect any developments, students recorded at different times according to a schedule the author provided to them. Shively explored how frequently humor was used, its success or failure, if students initiated or supported humor, the types of humor topics and targets, the resources employed, and functions it served. In the second set of data, the author collected metalinguistic information using student's journal entries and interviews with students and their host family about students' performance in Spanish along with field notes.

In the third chapter, the author summarizes the types of data she encountered, providing examples and organizing the discussion in relation to the frequency of use, its success and failure, the target of the jokes, the type of humor (teasing, irony, exaggeration, revoicing, playing with language structures, self-repetition, contextualization cues), the topics of humor (United States or Spain cultural reference, personal/daily life, learning L2, traveling), its initiation, and the functions served (amusement, affiliation, discourse functions). To guide readers, there are tables with summaries of information in a visual form. In these tables, one can see that there are commonalities and differences in the linguistic behavior of students. For example, we observe that students tend to tease their peers more often than a member of their host families. There were also only two students who employed deadpan humor. Also, contrary to what some may think, most of students' humorous attempts in the L2 were successful.

The center of the book is found in Chapter four where the humor productions of four students are presented in a detailed manner. The students selected were those who had made adjustments to their L2 humor strategies over the course of their semester abroad. Since two of them did not, their production was disregarded. The comprehensive coverage of the types of humor used by these students underscores the presentation of theory earlier in the book. In some examples where it was difficult to ascertain the students' and/or the interlocutors' intentions, the author mentions this ambiguity. As Shively employed different methods, the author was able to triangulate and find insightful details on how humor production is closely related to socialization. It also shows how students' emotional comfort level with their interlocutors could promote or inhibit their humor display. The triangulation is one of the reasons why this study is so unique and insightful. By the end of this chapter, one can observe that humor production is an important factor for

students' identity construction. It is also evident from the analysis that interlocutors' reactions to students' Spanish can impact students' desire to use humor in conversations and be daring with it.

The analysis of the humor by the host families and same age peers as well as their perception about the students' Spanish, and their evolution is presented in Chapter five. Here we realize that, sometimes, there is a mismatch between what students see and what they perceive. The rate and kind of humor used by interlocutors varies by participant. For example, host families teased students more than their peers. However, the author notes that, most of the time, both host family members and same age peers "designed their humor to be comprehensible to students as L2 learners" (p. 233). It was also observed that when interlocutors responded to the participants' humor, it was mostly to its content and not its form.

The conclusions of the study, the pedagogical implications, limitations, and the future research ideas are included in Chapter six. An important pedagogical suggestion that stems from the data is that instructors should raise awareness of the use of humor in the L2 to empower students in their use of this strategy which has key personal and social functions. Shively further emphasizes the fact that "teachers would do well to avoid basing instruction only on their own intuitions or anecdotes, [and] rather use published studies of humor and gather samples of authentic instances of humor" (p. 253). While this study was well planned and executed, Shively is aware that a longer longitudinal study would better inform on the processes taking place in students' L2 adjustments in relation to humor use. She also indicated that it would have been better to have videotaped the conversations to "capture multimodal aspects of humor" (p. 255). Data was recorded by the students, so in the future it should be obtained in more naturalistic settings. Overall, Shively's book is very well designed, insightful, and thorough. This study about the acquisition of humor in an L2, particularly in Spanish, is an essential reading for those who do research in humor and L2 pragmatics. In conclusion, this book is an excellent resource for those interested in the use and acquisition of L2 humor, researchers or teachers alike, as its academic discussion is accessible to the layperson.

References

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