Harmony or Attack: the Function of Student Humor at Lower Secondary Schools

Abstract

This paper addresses the phenomenon of school humor, focusing on the question of how it contributes to shaping teacher-student relationships. Based on an analysis of texts written by lower secondary school students, the paper shows that humor at school serves contradictory functions, such as harmonizing teacher-student relationships on the one hand, and enabling power negotiation aimed at gaining superiority on the other. Analysis of narrative data has identified a specific phenomenon of festive humor. Within its frame, teacher-student relationships nearly always tend to be harmonized.

Keywords: humor, school, teacher-student relationships

1. Introduction

This paper deals with humor that develops within the school institution. It primarily focuses on the ways humor occurs in teacher-student relationships. Humor can be defined as a specific type of experience arising from the perception or evocation of a funny event (Bariaud, 1989). This term can be related to both the perception and creation of something funny.

1.1. Humor as a social phenomenon

Humor needs to be understood as a social phenomenon. Empirical research shows that people tend to laugh more often in company than when they are alone,