

# Teaching Learning English through *Hasya Rasa*

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## **Abstract**

*Language classes should be interesting and enjoyable to learn language effortlessly; learners should learn language without stress and burden in learning process. This article aims to describe rasa theory as a teaching method in language classroom. The research has occupied qualitative descriptive textual method; it is a library research. Language learning should be fun and stress free. The selected humorous poems and jokes make memorization of vocabulary items and their usages easy. The short-situational plot and dialogues make learning and memorization natural. Jokes and humorous poems help to learn language stress-freely. It becomes more effective for the learners of about six to twelve years and the beginners. This article describes only 'hasya rasa' among other 'rasas' in rasa theory. Teaching-learning English through (hasya) rasa theory is a unique and interesting method in ELT. This article provides ELT practitioners with the insight to explore more about the implication of rasa theory into ELT.*

**Key words:** rasa theory, hasya rasa, humour, joke, humorous poems

## **Introduction**

English is taught and learnt for academic purposes at school and college level. Teaching English in language classroom should be made as effective as possible; and after learning, the learners should be able to use English language where and when necessary. The aim of this article is to discuss whether *hasya rasa* can be used to teach and learn English language naturally and effectively. First, there is a brief discussion of *hasya rasa* in connection with English language teaching (ELT). Then, humorous poems and jokes are presented as examples.

Students and other people who pass the school level feel it difficult to communicate in English. They cannot express their everyday matters in English. Despite their learning at school level, they cannot communicate in English. They find more formal, serious subject matters in language classes

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so that they worry about the content of learning. This can discourage them to use the English language. Humorous texts like poem, short story and joke make their mind free and encourages learners to express themselves to their teachers and other friends. This helps them to learn language with relaxation. This situation provokes us to discuss the role of *hasya rasa* in connection with language classrooms. The crucial question is how can *hasya rasa* be applicable in language class?

So, the major objective of this article is to show how *hasya rasa* can be applied in teaching- learning English in classroom. Among nine different types of *rasas* described in the literature, *hasya rasa* is discussed in the context of teaching and learning of English rather than discussing it as a form of aesthetic pleasure; and the discussion is limited to elementary and basic level language class.

The description and discussion presented in this paper will be useful for basic level teachers in the course of teaching English as a foreign language. Instructors can use short humorous texts or poems, jokes or short story for language class. Besides, course book writers can also gain insights or examples to include humorous short texts that can be used as materials. They can also be useful for researchers in conducting action researches and experimental researches.

In this article, humorous poems and joke are randomly selected for description. Articles related to *rasa* theory have been reviewed and the insights from them are discussed. *Rasa* theory was adopted to find out *hasya rasa* in the poems and joke.

### Review of literature

*Hasya rasa* is one of the nine *rasa*-s. Bharatamuni introduced *hasya rasa* in his *Natyasastra*. It is based on the emotion of laughter. Laughter arises from the situations where a person/character wears unusual or unfit clothes and ornaments, and/or uses distorted language, and performs the acts of incongruent walking and behaviours, and the like in a poem or joke. The *sthayibhava* (dormant emotion) of *hasya rasa* is *hasa* (humour). Humour refers to the quality in something that makes it funny and amusing. It has the ability to create laughter at things that are amusing.

Abrams (2005) states, "In the normal use, the term 'humour' refers to what is purely comic: it evokes sympathetic laughter, or else laughter which is an end in itself" (p. 340). Readers or audiences are made to laugh at things or

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persons because they are not only laughable, but they are also being ridiculed. "Humour is the tendency of a particular cognitive experience to provoke laughter and provide amusement" (Wikipedia, 2013). People of all ages, professions, cultures, and locations respond to humourous texts, that is, to laugh, smile, or be amused at somebody or something funny. Realization of *hasya rasa* varies from person to person, and depends on social, cultural, professional levels. Each culture has different expectations of humour. Humour is a message whose verbal skills or incongruity has the power to evoke laughter. It makes language learners stress free.

Comic *rasa* can be traced in the East *Vedas* and in the West. Humour has been a major theme in the literature of the East and the West. Comic sentiment is an important emotion for human life. It relieves the mind of human beings from tension for a while. In art or literature, humour is presented to make readers or viewers laugh and give amusement. *Hasya rasa* is produced with the combination of *vibhava*, *anubhava* and *vyabhicharibhava* which are found in a circumstance of the play. A comic appearance, comic utterance or behaviour stimulates laughter in readers or viewers. Any character that wears funny dress speaks in distorted languages and performs comic actions in a play is the *alambana vibhava* (object) of *hasya rasa*. *Anubhavas* (consequents) of *hasya rasa* are biting the lips, narrowing of the eyes, the nose and cheeks, perspiration, holding the sides, etc. The transitory emotions of *hasya rasa* are *alysa* (lethargy), *nidra* (sleep), dreaming, etc. With the help of these components, the dormant emotion laughter (*hasa*) is relished as *hasya rasa*. A broken order, unexpected comic happening, unusual language use, ironic remark, satire, etc. make readers or viewers laugh. "Where laughter (not happiness) and love are found together, the comic element will blend into the general atmosphere of fun and festivity" (Patnaik, 2013, p. 117). *Hasya rasa* belongs to positive states of readers' or viewers' mind. Humour appeals the readers. Language teachers and learners can use *hasya rasa* many times to make language class effective.

Teaching language through *hasya rasa* is a unique and interesting approach. It is based on two premises. One is that language learning should be fun and stress free, which should happen in a natural environment. The next is that the humorous texts make easy memorization of vocabularies and their usages. Humorous poems, short stories, short plays or jokes are short-situational exchanges, which make it easy to learn and memorize effortlessly and naturally. Jokes and humorous short texts unconsciously help language

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learning. Humorous short literary texts and jokes offer full and various contexts in which characters from many social backgrounds are depicted. A humorous text is seen best as a complement to other materials used to teach English language effectively and naturally. "The mastery of jokes and comedy unconsciously helps to increase one's language capability" (Eynon, 2012, v).

Students can find their thoughts, feelings, customs, possessions in local jokes and short texts. Such teaching-learning activities increase a "learner's receptive vocabulary and facilitates transfer to a more active form of knowledge" (Collie and Slater, 2000, p. 4). Jokes or humorous short texts provide a rich context in which lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable. Students gain familiarity with the features of language. Students may become more creative and adventurous to use English language. Humorous texts erase stress and make students active. Humorous texts and jokes foster personal involvement in the language learning process. Students are drawn into the text. They become well-motivated in language class. They become eager to listen and tell other jokes and humorous short stories, poems in English language. Jokes and humorous short texts make cultural enrichment, language enrichment, personal involvement, and the language class interesting. This strategy increases personal involvement by arousing the students' interest and positive reactions. Texts should be from students' interests, cultural backgrounds and language level. The straightforward, plain and simple language of jokes and humorous short texts are helpful to learn English effectively and naturally.

A text having serious, abstract and formal contents in language class may fail to produce successful learning because it can make students bored. They may spend much time of the lesson thinking of the formal subject matter of the lesson than learning language. Although they seem to be engaged in practice of such lesson, their effort and attention given to learning language may not be natural and effective. If the students become bored in language class, they may involve in unruly behavior and make unnecessary noise in the class. Teacher has to control the class. More valuable teaching learning time may be wasted in controlling the students and motivating them to the lesson. If the students are interested in what they are doing, they enjoy the language class and continue to learn more efficiently; and it becomes easier for the teacher to teach language. "Interest is an essential feature of successful practice, just an optional improvement" (Ur, 2010, p. 9).

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This strategy aims to create intrinsic motivation in language class. “Humour can open people’s eyes” (Meyer, 2008, p. 563). Jokes and humorous short texts stimulate students to participate in practice and learn English language effectively because of the interest arousing features of such kind of text. Even a boring teaching item can easily be made interesting by using a joke or humorous short texts. A teacher can arouse and maintain interest through jokes, humorous short texts, locally known people, local folk tales, and amusing poetry, proverbs and quotations. These help to elucidate the complex linguistic features and meanings. Then, language teaching becomes more natural and effective. Humorous texts are interesting and funnier. Students can share their own personal experiences, opinions, ideas and feelings in the language class. Humorous texts make language classes funny and amusing. Then they easily participate in language learning activities. This strategy provides students with the opportunity to participate in language learning process. Humorous texts also provide thoughts; “humour is often used as a play of light that allows us to perceive shades of meaning that might be invisible” and “laughter engenders thought as well as pleasure” (Meyer, 2008, p. 562). Therefore, teaching learning English language through *hasya rasa* (laughter) becomes much more fruitful and effective than the other techniques.

### Illustration

Humorous texts carry funny cultural backgrounds, customs, things, language. Therefore, learners may not be worried to memorize subject matters of the text. They just enjoy humorous texts and tell others the same in English language. They also start using English in their lives. In order to make the humorous short texts more educational and enjoyable, questions are asked regarding the subject matter of the humorous short texts. Sometimes, learners need to think outside the texts to respond some of the questions. Learners may learn the vocabulary used in the texts. They may practice unfamiliar words in their own contexts. They can give similar meanings, opposite meaning, change word-classes, use them in other contexts, etc. Learners will become familiar with the meanings of words, phrases and idioms through explanation of the texts and other features of lexical and syntactical items. Then they can internalize the meanings of the vocabulary items used in the texts. In the context of having Nepali as the native language, learners can also translate the original Nepali humorous texts into English language and vice versa.

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### *Text 1. The Video*

'The Video' written by Fleur Adcock is a humorous poem. Its subject matter is simply ludicrous in two stanzas of twelve lines. The poem is about video. In the first stanza of six lines, a mother gives birth to a baby named Laura. Mother's sister Ceri, father and midwife are around the mother's bed. Father and Ceri are "trying to focus the camcorder/on Mum's legs and baby's head." In the second stanza, after giving birth to the little infant, the mother becomes thin and busy more. Ceri plays the video repeatedly. It makes the mother go back in the labour pain. As other poets "leave [readers] smiling, grinning, chuckling, and laughing out aloud because they use language that is witty, surprising, teasing, or satirical" (Meyer, 2008 1264), Adcock also leaves readers smiling and laughing out aloud. In this poem, the poet/speaker leaves readers smiling, grinning, chuckling, and laughing aloud. In the labour pain of a mother, Ceri 'watched' the baby's head in the mother's genital. Ceri watched it instead of the midwife who has the knowledge of labour pain. This situation makes readers smiling, chuckling. Here, *hasya rasa* is realized. Ceri and the mother's sexual organs function as *vibhavas* of *hasya rasa*. The activity of Ceri do not fit (*vikrita*) here because it is not her job to observe the child delivery. She should feel shame but her activity shows shamelessness (*dristya*); such *vibhavas* cause laughter. Humorous poetry "engenders thought as well as pleasure". Students laugh at the father and Ceri who made a video of giving birth to Laura.

### Classroom activities

Activity 1: Students listen to the poem from the teacher or recorder for listening practice.

Activity 2: Students are divided into groups and asked to discuss about the labour pain if they have seen or heard. (For speaking practice)

Activity 3: Questions are asked to the students. (The teacher can ask students to read the poem and writes some questions answer with fun.)

- a) Have you seen your mother when she was giving birth to your sister or brother?
- b) Has your father made a video of your birth?
- c) Is it good to take video of mother and baby in labour pain?
- d) Were the father and Ceri serious about the pain of mother?

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e) Have you watched any domestic animal giving birth to its baby?

Activity 4 Vocabulary: Teacher provides opportunities for students to talk about the various aspects of vocabulary knowledge – for instance, pronunciation, synonyms, antonyms, denotative and connotative meaning, hyponymy, homophony, homography, homonymy, polysemy, metonymy, collocation, recognizing and changing word-classes, use, etc. Some vocabulary items from the poem include: video, born, watch, gather, midwife, move over, focus, camcorder, go back, thin, busy, in reverse.

The teacher can engage students in practicing these vocabulary items in different uses. For example, the word ‘watch’ means ‘look at’ or ‘observe attentively over a period of time’, like watching cartoons, films. The teacher can ask students and give other words having the meaning of looking: see, look, view, observe, gaze, stare, gape, peer, glimpse, notice, eye, study, etc. He can discuss about their meanings and uses in context. The teacher may give opposite and other meanings of ‘watch’. In this way, he can discuss about the words that are unfamiliar for students. Students learn vocabulary effectively connecting with the humorous text.

Activity 5 For More Practice: A teacher asks the students to write a few paragraphs regarding what they would do if they were at the time of giving birth to a baby, and how they would convince your father to care your mother.

### ***Text 2: Howard Nemerov’s “Walking the Dog”***

Howard Nemerov’s poem “Walking the Dog” also makes children smiling or laughing aloud because he has used a teasing and satirical language. *Hasya rasa* is experienced while going through the poem. The subject matter is simple but it creates laughter. The persona goes for walking with dog in the morning walk- “Two universes mosey down the street.” The persona clearly says “two universes”- one of human being and the other of a dog. They are “connected by love and a leash and nothing else.” The dog finds the things that the man cannot find. The dog is enchanted by a bush. Their relation is maintained by patience balancing. They do not “think each other’s thoughts.” Their common interest is in shit on the way. They wander along the way observing excrement or waste materials. The dog’s sense is sharper than the man. The dog signifies the place by sniffing, and “squats and shits”. They return home with dignity. Here is a satire to people who work along the street with their dogs in the morning. They both excrete waste materials in

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the materials; the excrement mixes in the water and dust. Here, the word 'dignity' also satirizes. The person who excretes on the way, how does he walk with dignity? How is he called a "master"? Such language that is teasing or satirical makes laughter in the poem. Thus, *hasya rasa* is experienced. Some readers may not laugh wildly but chuckle while reading the poem.

*Hasa* (laugh) is the *sthayibhava* (dormant emotion) of *hasya rasa*. *Hasa* is quickened by different *bhava* like *vibhava*, *vyabhicharibhava*. In this poem, the person and the dog are *alambanavibhava*, which are the determinants to cause laughter. The speaker takes his dog along the street to excrete waste materials in the street – "our interest in shift". The environment in which the dog and the speaker wander is called *uddiponavibhava*; the *uddiponavibhava* helps to increase the *bhavas*. The street where men and animals like the dog excrete waste materials becomes dirty is the environment. Such environment intensifies the experience of *hasya rasa*. *Hasya rasa* is experienced by an idea but not by the situation itself. The speaker seems rich and educated but walks down the street with the dog and both excrete in the street. This idea is satire that produces laughter—"...squats and shits/ Whereon we both with dignity walk home". Human being is considered superior to other animals; but the dog can get more information than man can. It is also a satire to man. The readers chuckle here. The laughter ranges from gentle smile (*smitta*) to wild laughter (*atihāsita*) according to levels of characters or status of the readers. This poem satirizes the so-called rich and educated people who walk along the street with dogs and excrete waste materials in the street. The poet Nemerov uses laughter to engender pleasure and thought of frippery.

Students laugh at the man who excretes on the road with his dog.

### Classroom activities

Activity 1: Students listen the poem carefully from their teacher. It is for listening practice, and they know the way of reciting the poem.

Activity 2. Students read and discuss the poem that makes them laugh in the class.

Activity 3. Question answers (Teacher asks some questions and students answer with fun.)

- a) Do you have a dog at your home?
- b) Do you or your family member take the dog to the road for excretion?

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- c) Have you ever excrete the waste material from your body on a road or public place?
- d) What do you think about the persons who expel feces from the body on the road?
- e) Is it good to shit openly on the road?

Activity 4 Vocabulary: Teacher provides opportunities for students to talk about different aspects of vocabulary – for instance, pronunciation, synonyms, antonyms, denotative and connotative meaning, hyponymy, homophony, homography, homonymy, polysemy, metonymy, collocation, recognizing and changing word-classes, use, etc.

Teacher can discuss the words unfamiliar to students, which may include: universe, mosey, connect, leash, mooch, snout down, hidden, sight, enrapture, bush, haul, patience, symbiotic, content, shit, sluice, inspect, sniff, squat, dignity, etc.

The teacher may make students practice these vocabulary items in different uses. For example, they can discuss the pronunciation of the word ‘mosey’. It means to walk or move in a leisurely manner. Its synonyms are walk, run, move, wander, trudge, tread, promenade, stride, stroll, meander, shuffle, linger, saunter, march, tramp, etc. Teachers can discuss about the homophones of ‘mosey’ and their meanings: mousy, mossy, mussy, mousey, massy, etc.

Activity 5 For More Practice: Teacher asks the students to write a few paragraphs describing what they would do if they had a pet dog at home. Or, what they would say to the person who takes his dog on the road for excretion and he also excretes on the road.

### ***Text 3. Searching for Lodging (Bas basna khojne)***

In a village, a traveler was searching a lodge in the evening. But he could not find because there were no lodges in the village. Then he wished to request villagers to stay that night at their home. He reached a nearest house, and requested:

Traveler: Namaste aamai (mother), would you give me a room (bas)?

Old woman: Bamboo (bans)? There is some in the garden. Cut and take it away.

Traveler: No, no. I mean to sleep.

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Old woman: What?! You want to sleep with an old lady like me?! You bastard! Rascal!

In searching for a place to sleep, the traveler wandered and night fell. He goes to a house and asks:

Traveler: Hello sister, is there a place to sleep (bas) at your home?

Young woman: In our house, we are only females, daughter and daughter-in-laws, today, no male. Therefore, it wouldn't be right to give lodging to a male.

The traveler went to almost all houses in the village. But all people explained the same reason, about females, daughter and daughter-in-laws. No one was ready to provide him lodging. He was disappointed.

Traveler (angrily, again visits a house): In your house, are there females, daughters and daughter-in-laws?

House owner (feeling a bit astonished): Why do you ask? What do you want to do?

Traveler: I want to spend a night.

[Students: (laugh) Haha haha haha haha haha]

### *Classroom activities*

Activity 1: For listening practice, the teacher reads aloud in front of students, or brings the recorded text and asks his students to listen carefully.

Activity 2: Students are divided into groups and instructed to go to other classes to tell the same joke. (For speaking practice)

Activity 3: Question-answers (Teacher asks some questions and students answer with fun.)

- a. What did the old woman understand by 'bas' and 'sleep'?
- b. Why did the traveler not get lodging in the village?
- c. Why was the male not given to sleep at night in the house where there were only females?
- d. Would he get lodging if the traveler was a female?
- e. Did the traveler look for lodging or daughters and daughter-in-laws at the last house?

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- f. In your opinion, did he get lodging in the last house?

Activity 4 Vocabulary: Teacher provides opportunities to the students to talk about various aspects of vocabulary knowledge, for instance, pronunciation, synonyms, antonyms, denotative and connotative meaning, hyponymy, homophony, homography, homonymy, polysemy, metonymy, collocation, recognizing and changing word-classes, use, etc. Some of these items include: 'bas', 'bans', bamboo, room, garden, bastard, rascal, traveler, wander, daughter-in-law, lodging, explain, sleep, reason, provide, disappointed, angrily, visit, astonished, spend, etc.

*Some Sample Sentences for Vocabulary*

1. Is it cheaper to live in a lodge than a hotel?
2. Is there bamboo near your house?
3. You bastard! You made her cry.
4. Your mother is a daughter-in-law of your grandfather.
5. It is difficult to explain the effects of God.
6. Ramila was disappointed not to be chosen in a cricket team.
7. My parents looked astonished at my result.

Activity 5 For More Practice: Teacher asks the students to write two paragraphs describing what they would do if they were in the same condition as the traveler, and how they would convince the villagers to provide them lodging.

### Conclusion

In learning English, people become worried about contents, instead of learning the language that is necessary for daily life. Instead of more formal and complex contents, we can include the contents having humorous poems and jokes, so that learners enjoy *hasya rasa* in the class and practice with fun even outside the classes. Texts having humour help learners learn and expose them in the target language naturally and effectively. It becomes easy to remember the contents and to tell or write similar other poems and jokes. Language learners become creative in language use in this way. Teachers and students enjoy texts and get pleasure in teaching and learning because of *hasya rasa* experience. This analysis exposed that teacher can teach language skills and aspects including the linguistic features using the

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humorous poems, jokes or short stories. Grammatical categories, grammatical functions, grammatical transformations, and grammatical operations can also be discussed in the language classes. It is also possible to analyze language used in humorous poems and jokes in terms of context. It becomes much more effective for the children of about six to twelve years. We should teach language at elementary level, but not the contents. Textbooks may not be necessary in language classes. Language classes should be interesting and enjoyable, and learners learn language effortlessly and naturally through *hasya rasa* explication. It makes easier to learn English through the experience of *hasya rasa*.

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