



Activating Critical Thinking Skills through Stand-Up Comedy in the EFL Classroom: A Discourse Analysis of Gabriel Iglesias' "Gabriel Goes to India"

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ABSTRACT

Abstrak: Keterampilan berpikir kritis (*Critical Thinking Skills/CTS*) merupakan kompetensi yang secara eksplisit diprioritaskan dalam pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia. Namun, kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (*English as a Foreign Language/EFL*) umumnya masih kekurangan pendekatan berbasis bukti untuk mengembangkan keterampilan tersebut melalui materi autentik. Penelitian sebelumnya telah mendokumentasikan manfaat afektif humor dalam pengajaran bahasa (Arief, 2023; Saito dkk., 2025) serta menunjukkan bahwa pemrosesan humor melibatkan operasi kognitif seperti deteksi ketidaksesuaian (*incongruity detection*) dan evaluasi stereotip (Attardo, 2020; Tsakona, 2020a). Akan tetapi, belum ada penelitian yang secara sistematis memetakan fitur-fitur wacana dalam teks stand-up comedy ke komponen CTS untuk kepentingan pedagogi EFL. Penelitian ini mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan menganalisis pertunjukan stand-up comedy Gabriel Iglesias berjudul *Gabriel Goes to India* menggunakan taksonomi CTS dari Facione (1990). Dengan menggunakan analisis wacana kualitatif yang dipandu oleh *General Theory of Verbal Humor* dari Attardo (2020), penelitian ini mengidentifikasi lima kategori fitur wacana dalam transkrip: stereotip budaya, ketidaksesuaian dan oposisi skrip, humor subversif, referensi intertekstual, serta metakomentar lintas budaya. Setiap kategori mengaktifkan komponen CTS tertentu: stereotip budaya mengaktifkan evaluasi; ketidaksesuaian mengaktifkan analisis dan inferensi; humor subversif mengaktifkan interpretasi; intertekstualitas menuntut pergeseran dari literasi budaya menuju literasi kritis; dan refleksi lintas budaya mengaktifkan regulasi diri (*self-regulation*). Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan sebuah kerangka pedagogis yang memetakan fitur-fitur wacana tersebut ke komponen CTS, beserta aktivitas pembelajaran yang direkomendasikan untuk konteks EFL di Indonesia.

Abstract: Critical thinking skills (CTS) are competencies explicitly prioritized in Indonesian higher education. However, EFL classrooms generally lack evidence-based approaches to developing these skills through authentic materials. Previous studies have documented the affective benefits of humor in language teaching (Arief, 2023; Saito et al., 2025) and established that humor processing involves cognitive operations such as incongruity detection and stereotype evaluation (Attardo, 2020; Tsakona, 2020a). However, no study has systematically mapped the discourse features of stand-up comedy texts to CTS components for the benefit of EFL pedagogy. This study fills this gap by analyzing Gabriel Iglesias' stand-up comedy special "Gabriel Goes to India" using Facione's (1990) CTS taxonomy. Using qualitative discourse analysis guided by Attardo's (2020) *General Theory of Verbal Humor*, this study identified five categories of discourse features in the transcripts: cultural stereotyping, incongruity and script opposition, subversive humor, intertextual references, and cross-cultural meta-commentary. Each category activated specific components of CTS: cultural stereotyping activated evaluation; incongruity activated analysis and inference; subversive humor activated interpretation; intertextuality required a shift from cultural literacy to critical literacy; and cross-cultural reflection activated self-regulation. Based on these findings, this study proposes a pedagogical framework that maps these discourse

features to CTS components, along with suggested classroom activities for the Indonesian EFL context.



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A. INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking skills (hereinafter abbreviated as CTS) have become a standard competency in higher education curricula in various countries, including Indonesia. The Freedom to Learn (Merdeka Belajar) policy explicitly lists critical thinking as one of the core competencies required of university graduates. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes, developing CTS faces two interrelated challenges: learners must process content in the language they are still learning, while the commonly used CTS framework originates from a Western intellectual tradition that is not always relevant in Southeast Asian educational contexts (Atkinson, 1997). Toh et al. (2025), in a study in Malaysia, confirmed that Facione's (1990) six core components of CTS, interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation, are valued by Southeast Asian students, although self-regulation remains under-recognized in university curricula. Therefore, a relevant question for the Indonesian context is how CTS can be taught through materials that are both linguistically accessible and cognitively stimulating.

Humor is a genre of content that has received increasing attention in language education, but it remains underexplored as a means of activating CTS. Studies have documented that humor reduces foreign language anxiety, increases motivation, and creates a positive affective learning environment (Arief, 2023; Saito et al., 2025). However, the cognitive dimension of humor has received far less systematic attention. Processing a joke requires listeners to identify incongruities between two semantic scripts, resolve these incongruities through inferential reasoning, and evaluate the social or cultural assumptions embedded in the humorous text (Attardo, 2020). These cognitive operations directly correspond to the components of CTS that educators seek to develop.

Stand-up comedy, as a genre that systematically combines incongruity, cultural commentary, stereotyping, and subversive discourse, offers a rich source of material for CTS-oriented EFL instruction. This study examines this potential by analyzing the discourse features of a stand-up comedy performance and mapping them to specific CTS components.

The American Philosophical Association's Delphi consensus report by Facione (1990) identified six core cognitive skills that constitute critical thinking: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation. This taxonomy has since been widely adopted across disciplines and educational systems (Cottrell, 2023; Toh et al., 2025). Cottrell (2023, p. 18) defines critical thinking as the implementation of skills such as "focusing attention, analytical dissection, evaluation, selection, judgment, and construction of a reasoned case," and emphasizes that these skills develop through practice, rather than as innate abilities.

On the other hand, Atkinson (1997) argues that critical thinking is better understood as a social practice acquired through cultural socialization, rather than as a universally applicable transferable skill set. Atkinson identifies three areas where Western CTS assumptions may conflict with non-Western educational contexts: individual versus collective orientation, norms of self-expression, and the role of language as a learning tool. Toh et al. (2025) partially address this concern by showing that Malaysian students rated all six components of Facione's CTS as important ($M = 6.86-7.10$ on a 9-point scale), although they also reported that self-regulation skills received insufficient curricular attention. Zhang (2026), in a study of Chinese EFL learners, found that task-based teaching methods produced measurable improvements in CTS, with argumentative tasks producing the strongest effect ($d = 0.78$) and cognitive complexity explaining 31% of

the variance in CTS results. These findings suggest that the design of learning tasks, particularly their cognitive demands, is a determining factor in the development of CTS in EFL contexts.

The use of humor in EFL classrooms has been mostly documented for its affective benefits. Arief (2023) found that linguistic jokes, including pragmatic, phonological, and pun-based jokes, increased student motivation, reduced anxiety, and improved the communication skills of Indonesian EFL learners. Arief (2024a), in a systematic review of 43 studies, identified a growing trend toward incorporating humor and local culture into foreign language teaching, although the review also noted that effective implementation methods remain underexplored. Saito et al. (2025) provided causal evidence that foreign language enjoyment enhances L2 learning outcomes, while foreign language classroom anxiety hinders it. These findings support the argument that humor, as a stimulus that induces enjoyment, creates conditions conducive to learning.

The cognitive processing of humor, as a parallel to CTS operations, has rarely been systematically studied. Attardo's (2020) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) identifies six Knowledge Resources that comprise every humorous text: Script Opposition, Logical Mechanism, Situation, Target, Narrative Strategy, and Language. Processing humor through this framework requires listeners to detect incongruities between two opposing scripts (analysis), resolve the logical mechanism connecting them (inference), assess the target and social implications of the joke (evaluation), and interpret the pragmatic meaning behind the surface utterances (interpretation). Tsakona (2020a) extends this argument to the educational realm by proposing that humorous texts can develop critical literacy skills through critical reflection on the ideological content of jokes.

Materials development theory also supports the use of authentic texts such as comedy shows in language teaching. Tomlinson (2023) advocates a text-driven approach in which authentic and engaging materials serve as the primary input for language learning activities. Curtis (2017) emphasizes the centrality of context in language teaching methodology and argues for principled eclecticism that responds to learners' needs, rather than adherence to a single method. The Teaching

English as an International Language (TEIL) framework (Selvi et al., 2023) calls for a shift from native-speaker norms toward recognizing English as a pluricentric language, legitimizing the use of culturally diverse materials in EFL classrooms. Lennon (2021) and Surkamp and Viebrock (2018) also note the value of incorporating authentic media texts, including performance genres, into EFL instruction for developing linguistic and intercultural competence.

Stand-up comedy, as Mintz (1985, p. 71) describes it, is "arguably the oldest, most universal, basic, and deeply significant form of humorous expression." Comedians operate from a position of marginality that allows for ambiguity and ambivalence, simultaneously acting as negative exemplars who are ridiculed and as spokespersons who voice sentiments that are socially unconventional (Mintz, 1985). This dual function makes stand-up comedy a form of cultural mediation that can both affirm and question social norms. Holmes and Marra (2002, p. 65) document that subversive humor functions as "a socially acceptable means of challenging or subverting authority," and use Critical Discourse Analysis to trace how humor destabilizes power relations in hierarchical environments.

Furthermore, several researchers have identified specific cognitive strategies used in stand-up comedy. Linares-Bernabéu (2021) identifies trumping as a subversive cognitive strategy in stand-up comedy, where comedians exploit the gap between literal and figurative meanings to challenge audience expectations. Tsakona (2020b) adds that processing intertextual references in humor requires a shift beyond cultural literacy (recognizing allusions) to critical literacy (interrogating the ideological assumptions carried by those allusions). These theoretical positions collectively indicate that stand-up comedy demands cognitive and interpretive operations from listeners that correspond to CTS operations.

The cognitive operations required to process humor have structural parallels with cognitive skills classified as CTS, although these parallels have not been systematically examined. Detecting incongruities between two semantic scripts (Attardo, 2020) corresponds to analysis, as listeners must decompose a text into its constituent scripts.

Resolving these incongruities through inferential reasoning corresponds to inference. Evaluating the social assumptions embedded in humorous stereotyping, for example, cultural generalizations or ethnic caricatures, corresponds to evaluation. Interpreting the pragmatic force of subversive humor, where the surface meaning differs from the speaker's intended critique, corresponds to interpretation.

Arief (2024b) provided preliminary evidence for this relationship in a narrative inquiry involving 60 Discourse Analysis students. The study found that linguistic jokes encourage reflection and encourage students to consider how jokes are constructed and what linguistic elements are at work within them. However, the study did not map specific humor types to specific CTS components, nor did it analyze a continuous comedic text. This study fills this gap.

Existing studies on humor in language education predominantly focus on affective outcomes such as motivation and anxiety reduction, or on general pedagogical recommendations. Studies that examine the cognitive dimensions of humor tend to remain within the realm of humor theory without explicitly connecting it to the CTS framework. Arief's (2024b) narrative inquiry established that humor can trigger reflective thinking in EFL learners, but did not conduct a systematic discourse analysis of specific humorous texts to identify which discourse features activate which CTS components. To the author's knowledge, no study has analyzed a complete stand-up comedy performance as instructional material and mapped its discourse features to Facione's (1990) CTS taxonomy for EFL pedagogical purposes. This study fills this gap by conducting a discourse analysis of Gabriel Iglesias' stand-up comedy special "Gabriel Goes to India", a performance containing cultural stereotyping, incongruity, subversive humor, and intertextual references, and mapping each discourse feature to the specific CTS component it potentially activates.

This study aims to find out discourse features in stand-up comedy (specifically Gabriel Iglesias's "Gabriel Goes to India") that have the potential to activate critical thinking skills in EFL learners, and how can these discourse features be mapped to specific CTS components (analysis, analysis, evaluation, inference, interpretation) for EFL pedagogical purposes.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative discourse analysis design. This approach was chosen because discourse analysis allows for a systematic examination of language in use and addresses both the linguistic structure and social functions of utterances within a communicative event (Holmes & Marra, 2002). The data source was the transcribed subtitles of Gabriel Iglesias' stand-up comedy special "Gabriel Goes to India." The analytical process was guided by two complementary frameworks: Attardo's (2020) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH) for identifying and categorizing humor types, and Facione's (1990) taxonomy of critical thinking skills (CTS) for mapping humor processing demands to specific cognitive skills.

The choice of a discourse-analytical approach is based on the principles of material development in language teaching. Tomlinson (2023) advocates a text-driven approach in which the analysis of authentic texts precedes the design of pedagogical activities. Curtis (2017) argues that methodological decisions in language teaching should respond to the specific context of instruction, rather than following a single, prescribed method. This study applies these principles by first analyzing the discourse features of a comedy performance and then proposing how these features can be operationalized as tasks that activate CTS in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

The data for this study are sourced from the subtitled transcript of Gabriel Iglesias's stand-up comedy special "Gabriel Goes to India," which contains 653 subtitle entries and covers approximately 26 minutes of the performance. This material was selected for four reasons. First, the show contains various types of humor relevant for CTS activation: cultural stereotyping, incongruity and script opposition, subversive humor, intertextual references, and meta-cognitive cultural commentary. Second, the cross-cultural content comparing Indian, Mexican, and American cultural practices provides ample opportunities for EFL learners to evaluate cultural assumptions and reflect on their own positions. Third, the English in the show is accessible to upper-intermediate and advanced EFL learners, as Iglesias's comedic style relies on storytelling and culturally recognizable references rather than complex syntactic structures. Fourth, the show is authentic global English material consistent with the

TEIL framework (Selvi et al., 2023), which calls for exposure to diverse varieties of English and culturally situated language use.

The transcripts were formatted as subtitle data (numbered entries with timestamps and spoken text) and treated as discourse data. Audience reactions, laughter and applause, recorded in the subtitles were retained as contextual markers of humor reception.

1. Phase 1

The authors read the transcripts repeatedly to identify and categorize all instances of humor. Each instance was classified using Attardo's (2020) GTVH, which specifies six Knowledge Resources for analyzing verbal humor: Script Opposition (two opposing semantic scripts activated by the text), Logical Mechanism (the logic of resolution connecting the scripts), Situation (properties, participants, activities), Target (the target of the joke), Narrative Strategy (genre or form of organization), and Language (specific words and phrases). The authors used Script Opposition and Target as the primary classification criteria because they most directly reflect the cognitive demands placed on the listener: detecting opposition requires analysis, while evaluating the target requires social and cultural judgment.

2. Phase 2

Each categorized humor instance was mapped to the CTS component it can activate in an EFL learning context, using Facione's (1990) taxonomy. The mapping followed a systematic correspondence: the cultural stereotyping instance was mapped to evaluation (assessing the validity and fairness of cultural generalizations); the incongruity and script opposition instances were mapped to analysis (decomposing the joke into its constituent scripts) and inference (drawing conclusions from the resolution of the incongruity); the subversive humor instance was mapped to interpretation (identifying the pragmatic forces and ideological positions behind surface utterances); intertextual references were mapped to critical literacy, defined as moving beyond recognizing allusions to interrogating their ideological functions (Tsakona, 2020b); and cross-cultural meta-commentary was mapped to self-regulation, understood as monitoring one's own

cultural assumptions in response to the comedian's reflective remarks.

3. Phase 3

The authors synthesized the findings from Phases 1 and 2 into a pedagogical framework. This framework maps each category of discourse feature to its corresponding CTS component and proposes classroom activities that EFL instructors can use to activate these components through comedy materials.

The trustworthiness of the analysis was ensured through four steps. First, the authors conducted multiple rounds of coding and reviewed the transcripts at each phase to verify the consistency of the classification. Second, thick descriptions are provided in the Findings and Discussions sections, where each analytical claim is accompanied by a specific transcript citation so that readers can evaluate the authors' interpretive decisions. Third, theoretical triangulation was achieved by applying two independent frameworks, the GTVH and Facione's CTS taxonomy, to the same data, so that each instance of humor was examined from both a humor theory perspective and a cognitive skills perspective. Fourth, analytical categories were derived from an established theoretical framework, rather than generated inductively, thus minimizing the risk of unsystematic classification.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Discourse analysis identified five categories of humor discourse features in the transcripts, each mapped to the CTS component it activates. This analysis uses an excerpt from the transcript of Gabriel Iglesias's "Gabriel Goes to India" as an illustration of each mapping, with the subtitle entry number in parentheses as a reference.

1. Overview of Humor Discourse Features

Transcript analysis identified 73 discrete humor instances distributed across five categories.

Table 1. Distribution of humor discourse features in "Gabriel Goes to India"

Humor discourse features	Institutions	Activated CTS components
Cultural stereotyping	39	Evaluation

Incongruity and script opposition	14	Analysis, Inference
Subversive humor	8	Interpretation
Cross-cultural meta-commentary	7	Self-regulation
Intertextual references	5	Critical literacy
Total	73	

Cultural stereotyping was the dominant humor strategy in the show, accounting for more than half of all identified instances. This distribution is consistent with the cross-cultural content of the show: comedians spent a significant portion of the show comparing Indian, Mexican, American, and German cultural practices. Incongruity and script opposition, the second most frequent category, operated primarily within the cultural stereotyping segment, where comedians construct expectations based on one cultural framework and then subvert them with punchlines drawn from a different framework. Subversive humor, cross-cultural meta-commentary, and intertextual references were less frequent but analytically significant for CTS activation because they require listeners to process meaning at a pragmatic or ideological level.

2. Cultural Stereotyping and Activation of Evaluation Skills

Cultural stereotyping was the most frequently occurring humor strategy in the transcripts (39 instances) and provided the most direct context for activating evaluation as a component of CTS. Facione (1990) defines evaluation as the judgment of the credibility of a statement and the logical strength of an inferential relationship. When comedians use cultural stereotypes as a premise for humor, listeners are placed in a situation where evaluation becomes a necessary cognitive operation: listeners must judge whether the generalization is accurate, and whether the humor relies on a valid or absurd stereotype.

Three patterns of cultural stereotyping were identified in the transcripts, and each pattern placed different evaluative demands on the listener.

a. Pattern 1: Parallel cultural comparison

The comedian constructs a long list of similarities between Indian and Mexican cultures, as in the following quote:

"Mexicans love tortillas / Indian people love naan bread / which is a fluffier form of a tortilla / Mexicans love chicken Indians love chicken / Mexicans love hot and spicy / Indians invented hot and spicy / most popular drink in Mexico is Fanta / most popular drink in India is Fanta / Indian people worship cows Mexicans love barbecues" (entries 44–52)

This structure establishes a predictable pattern of parallelism (both cultures share X, both cultures share Y) that is then disrupted in the final pair: "Indian people worship cows; Mexicans love barbecues". The listener must evaluate the legitimacy of the preceding parallels, whether these are genuine cultural similarities or superficial generalizations, and assess the logic of the final contrast. For EFL learners, this evaluative task is further complicated because it involves judging a culture that may not be their own. Billig (2005) argues that humor involving stereotypes is never neutral; it always reinforces or challenges existing assumptions, and the audience's evaluative stance determines which function is employed.

b. Pattern 2: Reversal of prejudice

The comedian recounts warnings he received from Americans about India (*"don't drink the water," "don't eat the food from the street people," "there's a lot of crime over there,"* entries 25–31), then reveals that these warnings describe Mexico equally:

"I'm like let me get this straight / there's a lot of crime don't stay out late / don't eat any of the food from the street vendors / and don't drink the water / why does that sound familiar / [...] that's Mexico" (entries 33–38)

This punchline requires the listener to retroactively evaluate the initial warning. A warning that initially seemed specific to India is revealed to be a generic prejudice that could apply to any country categorized by American popular culture as "developing". DeCamp (2017) identifies this strategy in stand-up comedy as a form of negotiating race and cultural identity: the comedian positions himself

within the stereotyped group (Mexico) to critique the stereotype's universality, rather than its specific content. For EFL learners, evaluating this reversal requires recognizing that cultural judgments often reflect the speaker's biases more than the reality of the culture being described, an evaluative operation that Facione (1990) classifies as assessing the credibility of claims.

c. Pattern 3: Multi-group stereotyping

In a segment about drinking habits, the comedian assigns typical drinks to ethnic groups:

"Everybody in America likes drinking / for example Mexicans most Mexicans we like drinking tequila / most black people like Hennessy / most white people like Jagger / here in India you guys like Fanta" (entries 467–474)

This sequence presents a rapid-fire series of ethnic generalizations, and listeners must evaluate whether the associations are observations, stereotypes, or comedic inventions. The evaluative difficulty is compounded because the comedian occupies an insider position for one group (Mexicans) and an outsider position for the other, so the authority behind each generalization varies. Carroll (2020) argues that the moral status of ethnic jokes depends on whether they contain defective ideology; listeners must evaluate not only the factual accuracy of the claims but also the ideological work the humor does. "The ensuing confrontation, in which German audience members object to their exclusion from the joke" (entry 488), adds a further layer of evaluation: listeners observe a live negotiation over who deserves to be stereotyped and who objects to the exclusion, thus reversing the usual dynamics of offense.

The evaluative demand common to all three patterns is assessing whether cultural generalizations are observations, reductive stereotypes, or deliberately absurd caricatures designed to expose the logic of stereotyping itself. This operation corresponds directly to Facione's (1990) definition of evaluation: assessing claims and assessing arguments. It should be noted that for Indonesian EFL learners, this material is particularly productive because Indonesian culture is not among

the cultures stereotyped in the performance, thus providing a cognitive distance that allows for analytical evaluation without the defensive posture that might arise if cultural references were direct (Atkinson, 1997; Deen, 2020).

3. Incongruity and Script Opposition as Triggers for Analysis and Inference

Incongruity and script opposition encompass 14 instances in the transcript and are the primary punchline mechanism throughout the show. GTVH Attardo (2020) locates the humorous effect in the opposition between two partially overlapping semantic scripts that diverge at the punchline point. Processing this opposition requires analysis (decomposing the text into its constituent scripts) and inference (drawing conclusions from the resolution of the opposition).

a. Sacred cow and corpse sequence

The comedian describes a cow blocking traffic and the driver's refusal to honk: *"we cannot honk at the cow, we must wait for the cow to move"* (entry 293). The punchline follows: *"we drove past a dead body 15 minutes ago / that is probably him"* (entries 296–297). Two scripts are in opposition here: Script 1 is a reverence for the cow based on the Hindu belief in reincarnation (cows are reincarnated people), and Script 2 is a pragmatic indifference to an actual corpse in the road. The listener must analyze the logical relationship between the two scripts, if the cow is a dead person, then the corpse they passed earlier is the cow they are waiting for, and draw the inference that the comedian is exposing the tension between religious belief and everyday practice. Attardo (2020) classifies this type of resolution under the Logical Mechanism "false analogy", where the connection between scripts is technically valid within the internal logic of the joke, but absurd when applied to the real world.

b. Red Light Scene

A different form of script opposition occurs in this scene. The taxi driver runs a red light, and when the comedian confronts him, the driver responds: *"didn't you see there was no one there"* (entry 338) and then asks: *"do you want to yell or do you want to make plain"* (entry 341). Script opposition occurs between the American script (red light = absolute stop) and the

Indian script (red light = contextual suggestion). The listener must analyze the two competing logical systems and conclude that the driver's reasoning, while violating one cultural norm, is internally consistent within the other. The comedian's own reaction confirms this inferential demand: *"he made a good point I sounded like a third grader / I wanna make plain"* (entries 342–343). The comedian acknowledges the driver's logic, and the listener must follow the same inferential path to understand why he accepts it.

c. The instance of "blood of juice."

The most cognitively demanding instance is the punchline *"blood of Jews"* (entry 553). A German audience member demands an explanation of what the Germans are drinking. After a sequence of escalations, the comedian says: *"I got right in his face and I said blood of Jews."* The opposition script operates between the surface phonology (*"juice,"* a drink) and the implied referent (*"Jews,"* a Holocaust reference). The listener must analyze this phonological ambiguity and infer the intended meaning from the context, namely, the confrontation with the German audience member in a sequence of jokes about national drinking habits. This instance requires historical knowledge, phonological analysis, and pragmatic inference operating simultaneously. Linares-Bernabéu (2021) identifies this type of structure as "trumping," where the figurative meaning overrides the literal meaning, and the cognitive work required to process the gap between the two becomes the source of the humorous effect itself.

The analytical and inferential demands common to all three examples are the decomposition of the text into two competing interpretive frameworks and the construction of a resolution that connects them. For EFL learners, this operation is productive because it requires careful attention to linguistic structures, phonological, semantic, and pragmatic, as well as cultural knowledge, both of which are learning goals in communicative language teaching (Curtis, 2017).

4. Subversive Humor and Activating Interpretation Skills

Subversive humor encompasses eight instances in the transcript and is characterized by the comedian's use of humor to challenge cultural assumptions,

power dynamics, or audience expectations. Holmes and Marra (2002, p. 65) define subversive humor as *"a socially acceptable means of challenging or subverting authority."* Facione (1990) defines interpretation as understanding and expressing the meaning or significance of various experiences, situations, and data. When a comedian uses humor to challenge an assumption, the listener must interpret not only what is said (the surface utterance), but also what is meant (the pragmatic force behind it).

The most obvious example of subversive humor in the transcript occurs in the opening sequence, where the comedian discusses warnings he has received about India. American acquaintances warn him: *"India is a third world country"* (entry 24), *"don't drink the water"* (entry 25), *"don't eat the food from the street people"* (entry 27), and *"there's a lot of crime over there"* (entries 30–31). The comedian then recites these warnings and asks: *"why does that sound familiar"* (entry 37), before delivering the punchline: *"that's Mexico"* (entry 38). On a surface level, this is a joke about the similarities between India and Mexico. On a pragmatic level, the comedian critiques the American tendency to project the same anxieties onto any country coded as "developing", a subversion of the cultural authority behind the warnings themselves. Interpreting this subversion requires the listener to go beyond the joke's propositional content to its ideological function. Marin-Arrese (nd) identifies this type of humor as ideological struggle, where conceptual blending creates incongruities that challenge existing power structures.

A second example occurs in entries 113–121, where the comedian interrupts his own comedy routine to reflect: *"head movement is just a form of expression no matter where you live in this world / people express themselves in their own unique way / whether through facial expressions, hand gestures, body movement, extra words / everywhere you go things are different / and that's just how they express themselves in India"* (entries 114–121). This passage is subversive because it disrupts the established comedic framework. The audience has been laughing at the stereotypical Indian head wobble for several minutes, and then the comedian reframes the behavior as a universal human expression. The listener must interpret this shift: the comedian is not merely adding a disclaimer but rather repositioning the entire preceding sequence as an exercise in

noticing cultural difference, not in mocking it. Wedeen (2013) describes a similar dynamic in Syrian political comedy, where humor exposes the contradiction between public narrative and lived reality.

A third instance occurs in a Polish joke (entries 505–510), in which the comedian says: *"I had no idea there were going to be Germans here tonight / yeah felt like Poland."* When some of the audience doesn't respond, he adds: *"it's not my fault some of you pendejos failed history"* (entry 510). This is a double subversion: the comedian first challenges the German audience members with a historical reference as a retort, then challenges the audience members who don't laugh by questioning their education. The listener must interpret the pragmatic force of each move and judge who holds discursive power at each moment in the exchange.

A common interpretive requirement across all three examples is identifying the gap between what is said and what is meant. Billig (2005) argues that humor is never ideologically neutral; it always reinforces or disrupts existing social relations. For EFL learners, the ability to interpret this gap is directly relevant to developing pragmatic competence, a recognized goal of communicative language teaching (Lennon, 2021; Surkamp & Viebrock, 2018).

5. Intertextuality and the Development of Critical Literacy

Intertextual references encompass five instances in the transcript. These instances are moments where the comedian references external cultural texts, film, television, video games, and require the audience to recognize the reference and process its function within the comedic context. Tsakona (2020b) argues that processing intertextual humor requires a shift beyond cultural literacy (the ability to recognize allusions) to critical literacy (the ability to interrogate the ideological work performed by those allusions).

a. Grand Theft Auto reference

The comedian compares Indian traffic to a violent video game franchise: *"that's a video game I wanna see / I wanna see Grand Theft Auto India"* (entries 345–346). Recognizing this reference requires cultural literacy (knowledge of the game), but critical literacy requires the listener to question why the comparison

is humorous: it works because it maps a Western entertainment framework (simulated urban chaos) onto a non-Western lived reality (actual Indian traffic), and the humor relies on the asymmetry between the two. Listeners who process this asymmetry engage in a critical analysis of how Western media frames non-Western experiences.

b. Star Trek reference

The comedian described the laughter of German audience members as *"they're laughing like Klingons from Star Trek"* (entry 378). The cultural literacy requirement is the recognition of Klingons as aggressive, warrior-like aliens. The critical literacy requirement is the recognition that the comparison characterizes German audience members as foreign and intimidating,^a a framing that prepares the audience for the confrontation that follows and reinforces the stereotype of Germans as physically imposing. Tsakona and Chovanec (2020) note that intertextual humor segments the audience into those who recognize the reference and those who do not, creating in-group and out-group dynamics that themselves deserve critical examination.

c. Shrek reference

At the end of the performance (entries 648–651), the comedian's son says that Germans *"sound like the Three Little Pigs from the movie Shrek."* This reference operates through a child's interpretive framework: the son identifies the pattern (German accents resembling cartoon voices) without the cultural baggage an adult would bring to the same comparison. For the listener, critical literacy requires recognizing that the child's interpretation removes the ethnic dimension from the comparison and reduces it to a purely phonological observation, retroactively reframing the previous sequence of German stereotypes.

For EFL learners, intertextual references in comedy provide a structured context for practicing the move from recognition to critical interrogation, a move that Tsakona (2020b) identifies as the transition from cultural literacy to critical literacy.

6. Cross-Cultural Content and Self-Regulation

Cross-cultural meta-commentary spans seven instances in the transcript and is characterized by

moments in which the comedian steps outside the comedic framework to reflect on cultural differences. Facione (1990) defines self-regulation as the conscious monitoring of one's own cognitive activity, the elements used in that activity, and the outcomes. When the comedian models reflective thinking about cultural norms, the audience is invited to engage in the same self-regulatory process.

The most extensive example occurs in entries 114–121, which were discussed in subversive humor. This passage also serves as a meta-cognitive prompt: *“head movement is just a form of expression no matter where you live in this world / people express themselves in their own unique way”* (entries 114–116). The comedian is not simply making a factual claim; he is modeling a cognitive movement from “that behavior is funny” to “that behavior is a form of expression.” For the listener, following this movement requires self-regulation: recognizing that the initial response to the behavior is based on the assumption that it is deviant, and then correcting that assumption by recategorizing the behavior as a culturally situated expression.

The second example occurs in entries 160–169, where the comedian offers travel advice:

“if you ever get the opportunity to travel to India I encourage you to check it out / you are gonna see some beautiful things / you are gonna see some amazing things / you are gonna see some sad depressing things and some real horrible things / overall it's a well balanced trip / but when you get back home here to the United States / you will have a whole different appreciation for your life” (entries 160–169)

This section models a metacognitive process: the comedian reflects on how exposure to different cultural realities changes the way one views one's own life. The self-regulatory demand on the listener is the recognition that cross-cultural experiences do not simply increase knowledge but reconstruct existing assumptions.

A third example is the audience's reaction when a German audience member is identified (entries 401–405): *“and the whole crowd got really weird / they freaked out / because they thought I was going to start making fun of the German people.”* The audience's anticipatory anxiety exposes the audience's own assumptions about how ethnic comedy works.

Listeners must recognize that the audience's reaction is itself a form of cultural knowledge, the audience knows that comedians typically mock certain ethnic groups and reflect on the implications of those expectations. This is a self-regulatory operation: listeners monitor the audience's cognitive responses and, by extension, their own expectations about the comedian's behavior.

For Indonesian EFL learners, the self-regulatory dimension of this material is particularly relevant. Atkinson (1997) identified norms of self-expression as an area where Western CTS assumptions can conflict with non-Western educational contexts. The comedian's modeling of reflective cultural comparisons provides a low-stakes context in which learners can practice self-regulatory thinking without the confrontational dynamics that might arise in live classroom debates. The TEIL framework (Selvi et al., 2023) supports this approach by advocating exposure to diverse cultural perspectives as a core component of English language education.

7. Proposed Pedagogical Framework

The analysis of identified systematic correspondences between humor discourse features and CTS components. Table 2 synthesizes these findings into a pedagogical framework that maps each discourse feature to its corresponding CTS component and proposes classroom activities for the Indonesian EFL context.

Table 2. Distribution of humor discourse features in "Gabriel Goes to India"

Features of humorou s discourse	CTS compone nts	Cognitive operations	Suggested classroom activities
Cultural Stereoty ping	Evaluatio n	Assessing the Validity and Fairness of Cultural Generalizat ions	Students watch the food compariso n segment (entries 44–52) and classify each claim

			as an observation, a stereotype, or a comedic exaggeration. Class discussion on what criteria distinguish the three categories.				says, and (b) what the comedian criticizes. Group discussion about what makes the second reading convincing.
Incongruity / script opposition	Analysis, Inference	Decompose text into two competing scripts; draw conclusions from resolution	Students identify two scripts in the corpse/cow joke (entries 293–297) and write a logical chain connecting them. Pairs compare their analyses.	Intertextual references	Critical literacy	Moving from recognizing allusions to interrogating their ideological function	Students identify the GTA India reference (entry 346) and discuss: What does the comparison assume about India? What does it assume about the audience? How would the joke change if the referenced game were different?
Subversive humor	Interpretation	Identifying the gap between surface meaning and pragmatic force	Students read the sequence " <i>Indian = Mexican warning</i> " (entries 24–38) and write two interpretations: (a) what the comedian literally	Cross-cultural meta-commentary	Self-regulation	Monitoring one's own cultural assumptions in response to	Students listen to the section " <i>head movement is just expression</i> "

		a reflective prompt	" (entries 114–121) and write a reflective journal entry: What assumptions does the comedian challenge? Do the audience (and students) share those assumptions?
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The framework is designed to be modular: instructors can select individual activities based on their learning objectives without having to implement the entire sequence. The progression from evaluation to self-regulation follows Facione's (1990) taxonomy of externally directed cognitive operations (assessing claims made by others) to internally directed operations (monitoring one's own assumptions), which aligns with the developmental trajectory of CTS instruction recommended by Cottrell (2023).

It should be emphasized that the text-driven approach advocated by Tomlinson (2023) underpins this framework. Comedy transcripts are the primary input texts, and all classroom activities are derived from specific discourse features within those texts, rather than from externally imposed exercises. Curtis (2017) argues that language teaching methodologies must respond to the specific context of instruction; the framework proposed here responds to the Indonesian EFL context by using cross-cultural comedy, which positions learners as observers of stereotypes and representations of other cultures, rather than as direct targets of the humor. Double (2014) supports the pedagogical use of stand-up comedy, noting that the genre's continuity and present-tense approach make it highly accessible for

classroom analysis. This framework is consistent with the TEIL paradigm (Selvi et al., 2023), which calls for authentic and culturally diverse English language materials that transcend native-speaker norms.

D. CONCLUSION

This study identifies discourse features in Gabriel Iglesias' stand-up comedy special "Gabriel Goes to India" that can activate critical thinking skills in EFL learners and maps these features to specific CTS components for pedagogical purposes. Discourse analysis guided by Attardo's (2020) GTVH and Facione's (1990) CTS taxonomy identified 73 instances of humor distributed across five categories, each corresponding to a different CTS component. Cultural stereotyping activates evaluation because learners must assess the validity of cultural generalizations. Incongruity and script opposition activate analysis and inference as learners decompose the joke's structure and draw conclusions from its resolution. Subversive humor activates interpretation as learners identify the pragmatic forces behind surface utterances. Intertextual references activate critical literacy by shifting from recognizing allusions to interrogating their ideological functions. Cross-cultural meta-commentary activates self-regulation because the comedian models reflective thinking about cultural assumptions.

This study makes three contributions: (1) A theoretical contribution demonstrates that humor processing and CTS share structural cognitive operations: detecting incongruity, resolving script opposition, evaluating stereotypes, and interpreting pragmatic force are CTS operations performed on humorous input. These findings extend the existing literature, which has documented the affective benefits of humor in language education (Arief, 2023; Saito et al., 2025), by specifying the cognitive mechanisms through which humor activates CTS; (2) A practical contribution is the pedagogical framework in Table 2, which maps each discourse feature to its CTS component and proposes classroom activities that Indonesian EFL instructors can implement using comedy transcripts. This framework is modular and text-driven (Tomlinson, 2023), consistent with the TEIL paradigm (Selvi et al., 2023), making it adaptable to various EFL contexts without requiring

a fixed methodological sequence; and (3) The methodological contribution is a replicable analytical procedure that combines GTVH-based humor categorization with Facione's CTS mapping. This procedure can be applied to other comedy performances and other authentic materials to assess their CTS activation potential.

Several limitations of this study should be noted. The analysis is based on a single comedy performance by a single comedian, and the distribution of humor types, with cultural stereotyping accounting for more than half of all instances, reflects the specific cross-cultural content of the selected texts. Different comedians or performance styles would likely produce different distributions and activate CTS components in different proportions. Furthermore, this study is analytical rather than empirical: the authors identified the potential CTS activation of the comedy material through discourse analysis, but the actual cognitive effects on learners were not measured. Future research should test this pedagogical framework in Indonesian EFL classrooms using pre- and post-measures of CTS performance and extend the analysis to a variety of comedy texts to examine whether the discourse-to-CTS mapping identified here holds across comedy styles and cultural contexts. Student intake data, including how learners from different cultural backgrounds respond to the material, would strengthen the pedagogical claims of this study.

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