



Hearty Laugh

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Abstract: The short story “Hearty Laugh”—based on real-life experience—humorously recounts two interview encounters with an English teacher whose self-confidence in grammar and communication far exceeds his actual competence. Through hilarious examples—from a flawed definition of phonetics to the absurd passive construction “I WAS LAUGHED HEARTILY”—the narrator highlights the gap between the candidate’s claimed expertise and his actual linguistic proficiency in professional and academic contexts. The story gently satirizes exaggerated credentials while celebrating how such memories continue to evoke a warm, hearty laugh years later.

I have always had a hearty laugh coming across a few hilariously funny expressions from some of my vernacular background students or even some of my colleagues who are mediocre, if not pathetic, speakers of English. Imagine my shock when I recently came face-to-face with a ‘gem of an English Teacher’ who overwhelmed and choked me with his ‘knowledge of English grammar’ and his ‘mastery’ of a range of day-to-day expressions. A few years down the memory lane, whenever I recall this incident or narrate it to someone, it never fails to bring a smile or two onto my face. This outrageously amusing incident took place when the institution where I worked, in the South Indian city of Hyderabad, conducted interviews for faculty positions. And this gentleman in question just walked to be interviewed like a bolt from the blue!

In fact, this is the second time that I am ‘blessed’ to have come face-to-face with this gentleman. The first time was when I interacted with (read: interviewed) him for a faculty position to teach English for engineering undergraduates in a college where I worked then. He proved to be quite a handful to me even then. After exchanging some pleasantries, he proceeded with the customary five-minute demo lecture on a topic of his choice. ‘Phonetics’ turned out to



be the topic of his lecture. He started it with a formal definition of phonetics and, as I understood it, wanted to go on with the importance of learning its basics to improve one's quality of pronunciation. He went on to write a sentence on the blackboard which read exactly like this: **"Phonetics is the study of the production and articulation of speech, sounds"**. He said it aloud as he wrote the sentence on the blackboard and repeated it rather slowly and loudly when I, rather embarrassed, requested him to check it again. He sounded quite confident with the comma separating the words 'speech' and 'sounds' when I asked him whether it was intentional or merely an inadvertent error. I, somewhat sheepishly this time, asked him what if the comma was removed not quite understanding what purpose it was serving in that sentence. He emphatically made it clear that the comma was essential as the sentence was an 'accurate' definition of Phonetics and that definitions are generally taken verbatim (he did not use this word, of course). I was baffled when I heard him even mentioning that whether or not comma was there it would not make any difference to the meaning of the sentence! He blah blahed for some more time before we signalled to him to stop. My other colleagues sitting with me did not feel like asking any more questions as they might have been convinced of his 'felicity and proficiency' of the language. We took leave of him saying we would get back to him after a few days. That we never contacted him subsequently goes without saying.

I did not hear much of him until this eventful day when he appeared once again to be interviewed. Sitting along with me on the interview panel was our Head of the Department, an accomplished mathematics professor and author of a few textbooks. The interaction started with his self-introduction during which he mentioned that he was presently working with a reputed group of educational institutions and that he was also the Head of his Department. He also conducted FDPs (Faculty Development Programmes) and Soft Skills Workshops for the students and the staff of his entire group of institutions, he added.

He sounded quite confident when he asked us to give him a topic for a demo lecture confidently brushing aside our suggestion that he could give a demo lecture on a topic of his choice. I suggested that he could choose some simple and important grammar topic. 'Voice' was eventually agreed upon. He began by giving the usual definition and the age-old examples. Then



he talked about how some vernacular speakers wrongly use passive forms when active sentences were just enough and gave a sentence as an example: 'I am completed the work' in the place of 'I completed the work'. 'Fine', we thought as our HoD looked at me and nodded agreeably.

Stretching the topic a little further, I asked him what a sentence like 'I am finished' meant. To our amazement, he said that such a sentence did not exist and it was wrong to use it. He persisted with that even after I told him that it is a common day-to-day expression and even, he might have heard people using that several times. 'How about, "I am done"?', I asked him then. Again, the same answer—that it was grammatically wrong! I decided to quickly wind up the proceedings and asked him something more elementary. I asked whether he could convert some active sentences into passive. This I did more to allow him to get back into his comfort zone by falling back on something familiar; or so I thought. After giving him some basic active sentences like, 'Rama killed Ravana' and 'Raju plays cricket', I got a bit naughty and deliberately asked him to convert the sentence 'I laughed heartily' into passive. I was expecting the obvious and familiar response that I usually got from my students that it could not be converted into passive since there was no object in the sentence. I was totally caught unawares when my learned friend actually wrote this sentence on the board: "I WAS LAUGHED HEARTILY".

Though he took my phone number after the interviews, I was not expecting a phone call that soon so I was a bit confused when I received one from this man the same evening. I was literally flabbergasted when he casually started inquiring about his prospects and asking general questions about the working environment in our institution. Of course, I could not tell him what exactly I felt like; I could only tell him that our institution could not afford high profile candidates like him and that they were looking for people suitable more for entry-level positions. I felt like being laughed at loudly and viciously!

Short Biography of the Author: D. Krishna Mohana Sharma is an Associate Professor of English at Vignana Bharathi Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, with over twenty-eight years of teaching experience in engineering institutions. He teaches English language and communication, conducts soft skills and campus recruitment training programmes, and has



coordinated student affairs, digital media, public relations, and various student club activities. He holds a first-class M.A. in English from Kakatiya University and is currently pursuing his doctoral degree in Translation Studies. He maintains an active professional and academic presence through training, writing, and outreach initiatives.