How Would Unconscious Jokes Potentially Influence One's Mindset and Behavior

-- "Stop rolling" in a high school student group as an example

Zhihan Yang

Tsinglan School, Dongguan, 523429, China

20230152@tsinglan.cn

Abstract. "Stop rolling, stop rolling" is a kind of self-deprecation and joke that naturally arises in student groups and even adults under the pressure of society's fierce competition. Studies have shown that self-deprecation and jokes have a positive effect on the release of stress, but from daily life experiences and major online platforms, there are also signs of disgust and dislike for such jokes, that is, after the first layer of positive effects, these jokes often have a second layer of subtle and invisible negative effects. According to cognitive psychology, jokes have certain salient and inhibitory effects. For high school students, "Don't roll it" as an unconscious joke can also potentially affect their mindset and behavior. This study found that, first, the relationship between the two people in the conversation constitutes a different conversational context. One of the factors that may make the difference is "the existence of a competitive relationship". That is, when there is a disparity in power between the two people, the other person being joked about tends to be dismissive. Second, when the mental schema of the conversational pair is inconsistent or lacks consensus, the joke may cause the joked student to be offended. Third, when the self-awareness types of the people in this conversation are different, especially when the subject of the joke belongs to a high self-esteem personality type, the joke will hardly work.

Keywords: Unconscious Jokes; Mindset and Behavior; High school student group.

1. Research background and problem raised

"Stop rolling, stop rolling" is a kind of self-deprecation and joke that naturally occurs in student groups and even adults under the pressure of society's competition. It has been shown that self-deprecation and jokes have a positive effect on the release of stress, just as expletive outbursts at certain times have an important role in stress reduction. Generally, when people invoke such jokes, they do not want the target of the joke to stop trying to make an effort or to genuinely behave in a disagreeable manner toward the target of the joke. When such jokes about "rolling" are used, the scenario is usually that a student sees the target of the joke doing homework in the classroom and runs over to them and says "Wow, the king of rolling"; or in the dormitory, the target of the joke is not playing games, but studying. However, from daily life experience and from the major online platforms (Zhihu, B station) where such jokes are viewed with disgust and annoyance, I begin to hypothesize whether the first layer of positive effects, such as diluting stress and making friends, is often followed by a second layer of subtle and invisible negative effects. In other words, even in this context, where there is no subjective malice and no tendency to harm, does this kind of joke about "rolling" trigger a negative learning mindset in the target of the joke? Will it cause the subject of the joke to misjudge that "my environment is an indolent environment"? Will it put pressure on the target of the joke to "conform to public behavior"? With these questions in mind, I tried to find the answers from the literature and empirical research.

2. Literature review and definition of key concepts

Some scholars have explored the linguistic aspects of jokes in previous studies. For example, Zeng Yun (2007), in his article "On the Expression of Jokes", says that "the appropriate use of jokes can help shorten the psychological distance between people and form a relaxed and lively atmosphere. .....

Appropriate use of various types of jokes can give full play to the communicative function of jokes. ". Another example is: Zhu He (2021) in "The communicative function of 'making a joke' in the language string" explores the communicative function of "making a joke", and proposes that "repair, destruction, rejection, relief, return" in jokes correspond to the communicative functions of face, social power, and communicative goal management, respectively. As for "involution," the term was first used in the book "Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia" by Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist. In his study of rice agriculture in Java, Geertz found that agricultural production in colonial and post-colonial Java had remained static and undeveloped for a long time, only repeating simple reproduction and failing to increase per capita output. Under the pressure of population, the small farmer economy gradually became a "subsistence economy". The term "involution" is used in sociological concepts to describe the phenomenon of human society reaching a certain definite form at one stage of development and then stagnating or failing to transform into another advanced model. While there has been a wealth of research on involution, there has been less response to the joking of involution. In this sense, this paper will respond to the opening question by taking the recently popular "Stop rolling" as an example.

Jokes are friendly conversations that make fun of each other and promote friendship through "flirtatious", "offensive", or playful remarks. On the one hand, jokes often create a pleasant atmosphere, relieve stress, lubricate social relationships, bring pleasure and add color to our lives; on the other hand, jokes have their unique characteristics compared to other languages, which are ambiguity, vagueness, and dynamism. Therefore, the understanding of jokes is not a direct copy of the text of the dialogue language, but an understanding based on the psychological construction of the joking parties, that is to say, jokes have a unique connotation complexity and contextual dynamics in the communicative process. In this sense, "Stop rolling", as a kind of flirtatious joke, is a speech act that brings a lot of interpersonal functions by making jokes to others in a funny way.

3. Theoretical framework and conjectures

3.1 Disinhibition and inhibition of joking discourse in the context of cognitive psychology

Disinhibition means "highlighting a positive emotional message," which I understand to mean that the person being joked about should be able to recognize the "joking" tone, perhaps by making them feel that "you are actually complimenting them" or "you are empathizing with them and not trying to be sarcastic." "Inhibition" means not letting the listener simply pick up on the literal negative meaning of the joke. Some people get angry when they hear someone make a joke about them because the speaker has not done a good job of "suppressing negativity" and the person being joked about is offended and therefore has no way of understanding what is funny in the statement other than the content of the attack. In other words, the joker needs to organize his language in such a way that others "understand that others are joking, or even are complimenting the person", and not to make their words sound like "cursing".

Here lies the essence of the inhibition mechanism and its role in text processing. This mechanism works on the principle of "saving energy" by "leaving out the irrelevant" because of the limited energy resources of our human body. In our conversations, because we can distinguish the important from the unimportant, we can discard the unimportant - and then the remaining important information becomes a coherent, comprehensible message. This highlighting mechanism will result in people selecting different information and producing different imagery in the same conversation, depending on the individual focus, observation style, and perspective. But the selection of "different information" is not random, but by the tone of our conversation, whom we are talking to, and the general context of the conversation, we can find the information we are concerned with by combining our feelings. Therefore, the highlighting and suppression in jokes mean that the joker needs to "highlight" that he is not hurting the other party, but flirting, or even complimenting the other party; and needs to "suppress" the possible negative meaning in the words themselves, through lexis, syntax,

etc. It is necessary to "suppress" the negative connotation, to make the other person think the "literal meaning of the negative words" is unimportant and therefore ignore it.

In addition, the concept of Affinity refers to how would the relationship between the teaser and the teased affects the ability of both parties to set up common ground, where both of them know that the offensive words are without hostility (because both know that the other would never hurt the other), and vice versa. This can be interpreted flexibly as follows: if you trust someone, are close to them, and believe that they would not want to cause you harm, then the "jokes" coming from such people, even if they are offensive, those literal meaning will be treated by the brain as "unimportant information " and thus are suppressed and ignored.

In this sense, the suppression of jokes is a combination of the biological instinct to save unnecessary energy consumption and the affinity schema: first, the biological instinct of the person being joked will make him consider whether the information is out of context, redundant or irrelevant; the affinity schema further classifies whether the negative information in the discourse is unimportant by evaluating the relationship between the two parties: if they are close, the negative information will be removed; if they are distant, that information will be taken into consideration. The disinhibition mechanism is more concerned with the jokester's ability in word choice, tone, etc.; The joker needs to highlight the positive aspects (lightened mood, relaxed atmosphere, etc.) of his or her words through various verbal communication techniques.

3.2 Explanation through Cognitive psychology in this Essay

The reason for this assumption is based on some of the theories related to cognitive psychology. First, when a student is too "rolled", it has a negative connotation. Although "roll" can be broadly understood as describing a person's "effort," it is more descriptive of a person who "does not think" and violently fills his or her competitiveness. The word "roll" implies that one's goal is purely to "out-compete" others. This kind of directionless competition is not promoted in today's society (not only in China but also worldwide).

At the same time, "a person is rolling" carries the meaning of "confrontation against the group". Because the word "roll" itself carries a strong competitive connotation, it means that the individual wants to surpass the remaining group for the sake of just being better. When student A says that student B is very "rolled," it implies that the entire rest of the group is the opposite with student B, meaning the rest of the group is "not rolling". Therefore, when the target of the joke is "accused" of acting against the whole group and destroying the harmony of the group, there is an uncomfortable state of mind. Because as social individuals, people do not want to be deprived of their social circle. Of course, usually, the student who is studying does not think that he is doing something to harm the group and certainly does not stop his or her studies because of it. But this anxiety of wanting to explain themselves may exist as a result of the joke, and will unconsciously affect the motivation of learning.

Another way motivation can be affected is through misjudging one's environment as indolent. As mentioned above, when A refers to B as "very rolled", B will receive the implication that "the rest of the class is not studying, hence not rolling ". With such a cue, the target of the joke will believe that he or she is an outlier in the group and will have unnecessary anxiety about "needing to defend themselves" or about what others think.

4. How unconscious jokes potentially affect the mindset and behavior of high school students

For high school students, the heavy study load, and the intense pace of study, combined with the anxiety and nervousness about further education itself, can leave high school students in a state of physical and mental exhaustion. Seeing all the students around them trying to study hard, they often get caught up in it and thus feel pressured to do the same. In this context, how does the unconscious joke of "stop rolling" potentially affect the mindset and behavior of high school students? Based on

real-life experience and questionnaires, I investigated different types of students' perceptions of the joke about "rolling".

4.1 Interview case 1: "Rolling" Jokes among students of different levels of academic strength

Student M: "I think mainly it is about who says the joke, for example, if a poor performer said to me 'stop rolling', I simply do not care, because he and I rolled simply not on a level; even if I rolled, I will not affect him, he also can not affect me, because the gap is too big, there is no competition, simply not having to compete."

I: "So it can be understood that there must be an element of competition in it for the joke to have an impact?"

Student M: "Yes, you have to be put in the same competitive relationship before the series of psychological fluctuations you just said will happen. But if you say that there is a classmate that is particularly poor in learning, with another particularly good one, they simply cannot roll together!"

I: "Oh, so would you say that in scenarios like that, the joke 'stop rolling' simply is a joke, and people will not react with other fluctuations in hearts!"

Student M: "Right."

From Student M's words, we can infer that even if the same sentence "Stop rolling" is used, the conversation will be different when the competitive relationship between the two people is different. Learning or not learning, working hard or not working hard may be a more sensitive topic for the two parties with similar academic strength, which then builds a competitive relationship.

Thus, for a conversation like this between two people that are in a competitive relationship, this joke may be perceived as unauthentic, and the person who said it may be perceived as too unctuous. Deep inside the person being joked about knows that even though the joker says "stop rolling," the joker will still work quite hard.

4.2 Interview case 2: Being labeled as "Rolling" will cause psychological misconceptions

Student D: "It makes me feel annoyed when I heard someone say that to me because I am only doing the things I love to do, but there will always be someone saying that and giving me the label that I am one of those who 'rolls.' "

I:" Can I ask why would you feel annoyed and offended? Can I understand it as" when someone put this label on you, you will feel that the thing, that you love for the sake of itself, becomes something mundane or something that is 'not good'? Like your interests are degraded."

Student D:" Yes, I think that is what I mean. Because I am doing the thing because I love it, not because I want to compete and win. I am not rolling for the sake of rolling."

I:" Interesting! You said that some people will roll for the sake of rolling. So, do you think those people, they don't have a clear understanding of what they want to do in their life, they simply want to be better than the whomever person that is sitting next to them?"

Student D:" Yes!"

I:" And do you think being like this is a positive status or a negative status for a person?"

Student D:" Definitely has some negative connotation."

We can see from this interview that most people have a common ground understanding toward people who are "rolling," that is: those people do not have a life goal that is personal to themselves, their sole goal is to simply reach higher. However, the people who love what they do, do not consider themselves to be like the rolling people, thus when others put a label on them, they will automatically feel the conflict in the self-image other people assign to them. Thus displeasing feelings will come.

4.3 Interview case 3: The effect of the joke on someone with a strong heart and not self-conscious

Student J:" I've seen a lot of people who are studying in the classroom, but as soon as you walk near them, they swipe their iPad or close their laptop to pretend that they are not studying, as if "to

study" is some crime that one should be ashamed of. I feel that they should not hide it, because to study is the job of the students, we should be studying."

I:" Do you think they hide from people because they don't want someone to make fun of them and say to them "stop rolling?"

Student J:" I believe so... Because if you are spotted by someone, they will say "wow, you are such a rolling person" or something similar, and that is just frustrating."

I:" Do you think they want to hide, or when get spotted, they will want to prove that they are not rolling, they are just simply studying? Because if you roll and roll, that is suggesting that you want to be better than the others."

Student J:" I think most people will feel that way. But I don't because I don't care about the group, I don't care about how others think of me, and I am not interested in changing how they think."

I:" That makes sense, if someone cares about their image in other's eyes, then they will feel spontaneous to explain themselves, but for a person like you who doesn't care about it, it's like you have a shield for the joke."

Student J:" Ha, exactly."

This interview provided a new perspective. Because the essence of this harm of the joke is revolved around one caring about their impression in another's eyes. Thus for a person who is certain about who they are, and comfortable with without being in a group, then the joke will not have that many effects relatively.

5. Conclusion and Reflection

"Stop rolling, stop rolling" is a kind of self-deprecation and joke that naturally arises in student groups and even adults under the pressure of society's complexities. Studies have shown that self-deprecation and jokes have a positive effect on the release of stress, but from daily life experiences and major online platforms, they also show dislike of such jokes, that is, after the first layer of positive effects, these jokes often have a second layer of subtle and invisible negative effects. According to cognitive psychology, for a sentence to be a joke, it needs to meet the requirement of inhibition and disinhibition. For high school students, the heavy study load, and the intense pace of study, coupled with the anxiety and tension about further education itself, can leave high school students in a state of physical and mental pressure. Seeing all the students around them trying hard to study, they are often caught up in it and want to pressure themselves to do the same. Thus feel very tired. In this context, the unconscious joke of "stop rolling" can potentially influence the mindset and behavior of high school students. This study found that, first, the tone will be perceived differently when the relationship between the two people, in the conversation, is different. One of the factors that may make the difference is "the existence of a competitive relationship". In other words, when there is a disparity in power between the two people, the other person who is being joked about will tend to be not concerned. Second, when the affinity state of the conversational pair does not match, or when there is a lack of consensus, the joke can be offensive. This joke can cause displease because being identified as "rolled people" conflicts with some people's image of themselves. And the labeling of "rolled people" itself is with a negative connotation, suggesting one is immature. Third, when the person being joked about is of a highly self-respecting personality, the joke will not create a negative impact at all. This type of person has good self-awareness and self-acceptance, with a full grasp of their strengths and weaknesses, advantages and shortcomings. Therefore, they don't care about the evaluation of others in their character, and perhaps they are also not very attached to the group, so this kind of joke will not have a great impact. As the saying goes, "the speaker has no intention, but the listener has an interpretation", but in different interactive groups, jokes can play different roles and bring different effects, the mechanism, and logic of which are revealed by the interpretation of cognitive psychology. Due to my limited theoretical level, the discussion in this paper is only the beginning, and there is still more room for richer and deeper exploration in the future.

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