

L'humour français

"I am just kidding." Whereas in the Netherlands or in Great-Britain self-deprecating remarks are used on a regular basis, like the previous one, I've realised in France, this is rarely the case. Does it have to do with humor being too much of an absurdity to them, rather than a proof of their intelligence? I am trying to understand the several misunderstandings I have encountered in France, because as philosopher Theodore Zeldin pointed out, nothing separates people more than their sense of humor. The word "humor" can be better translated in French as "mood" or "state of mind". It was first mentioned by Voltaire in 1761, in a letter to a friend. He said: "The English have a term to signify this joke, this true comic, this gaiety, this politeness, these projections that escape a man without him realizing, and they express this idea with the word "humeur", "humor", which they pronounce "Yumour". It appears that the English concept was yet unknown to the French territory. Humor is an universally understood language and facilitates relief of tension, but in France it can easily be elevated to a literal and quite often serious dimension. It was Voltaire alongside with other French writers who appreciated wittiness more than humour, which we can see recognize in the following quote: "Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer." - If God didn't exist, we have to invent him. Haha!

What is the difference in sense between wit and humor? Well, humor is a humble way to express a humility, a mistake or a lack of joy, where it is accepted to laugh at oneself or others. Whereas being witty (*esprit*) is a bit more sophisticated due to his intellectual and judgemental undertone.

Furthermore, being humourish in France is more linked to making jokes on the basis of an excellence in the use of their own language. This so called "l'humour engagé" or engaged satire, is prominently featured in the leading French satirical daily *le Canard enchaîné* through the use of sharp-pointed phrases, extensive play on words and provoking cartoons.

Also, French humor can be a bit below the belt or harsh, *Grinçant*, in comparison with the Anglo-Saxons. Discussions about gay sex, moral values, political infidelity and religions are easily addressed. I admire their criticism and debating culture in general, but it is quite a pity that even humor needs to have a target, to the extent that it can be received as cold, complicated or patronizing to (naïve) foreigners. The down-to-earth and gentle joking of the Northern European seems to be less effective compared to the combative use of humor in France. Eventually, we shouldn't underestimate the depth of French as a country, as seen in their language, history and complexity of mind.

Is their reasoning and taboo breaking attitude, not something that all human beings can develop and benefit from, as it helps us to understand the depth of reality better? Well, let's discuss it.

<https://www.understandfrance.org/French/Attitudes3.html>

<https://www.private-frenchlessons-paris.com/blog/frenchculture/1683-is-french-humour-difficult-to-understand>