

THE USE OF GAMES IN LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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Abstract

Grammar acquisition is increasingly viewed as crucial to language acquisition. However, there is much disagreement as to the effectiveness of different approaches for presenting vocabulary items. Moreover, learning grammar is often perceived as a tedious and laborious process. In this report I would like to examine some traditional techniques and compare them with the use of language games for grammar presentation and revision, in order to determine whether they are successful in presenting and revising grammar than other methods. From my teaching experience I have noticed how enthusiastic students are about practicing language by means of games. I believe that the grammar games are not only fun but they help students learn without a conscious analysis or understanding of the learning process while they acquire communicative competence as second language users.

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MAIN PART

There are numerous techniques concerned with grammar presentation. However, there are a few things that have to be remembered irrespective of the way new lexical items are presented. If teachers want students to remember new grammar it needs to be learnt in the context, practiced and then revised to prevent students from forgetting. Teachers must take sure of that students have understood the new words, which will be remembered better if introduced in a “memorable way”. Bearing all this in mind, teachers have to remember to employ a variety of techniques for new grammatical presentation and revision.

We suggest the following types of grammar presentation techniques: (1) visual techniques. These pertain to visual memory, which is considered especially helpful with the grammar retention. Learners remember better the material that has been presented by means of the visual aids. The visual techniques lend themselves well to presenting concrete items of grammar. They help students to associate the presented material in a meaningful way and incorporate it into their system of the language units, and (2) verbal explanation. This pertains to the use of illustrative situations connected with the grammar material studied.

A lot of experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but they have a great educational value. We hold that most grammar games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms. The grammar games should be treated as central, not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. Games, as Richard Amato thinks, are to be fun, but he warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching programmes.

There are many advantages of using games in grammar: (1) games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely, (2) games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunities to express their opinions and feelings, (3) they also enable learners to acquire new experience within the foreign language that are not always possible during a typical lesson, (4) games add diversion to the regular classroom activities, break the ice and introduce the new ideas, (5) in the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games the students remember things faster and better, (6) grammar games are a good way of practicing the language, for they provide a model of what learners will use the language for in real

life in future, and (7) grammar games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency.

If not for any of these reasons they should be used just because they help students to see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems, and this is the main reason to use games when studying English grammar.

There are many factors to consider while discussing games, one of which is appropriacy. Teachers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to make them profitable for the learning process. If games are to bring desired results, they must correspond to either the students' level, or age, or the materials that are to be introduced or practiced. Not all of the games are appropriate for all students irrespective of their age. Different age groups require various topics, materials and modes of games. For example, children benefit most from games which require moving around, imitating a model, competing between groups, and the like. Furthermore, structural games that practice or reinforce a certain grammatical aspects of language have to relate to students' ability and prior knowledge. Games become difficult when the task or the topic is unsuitable or outside the students' experience.

Another factor influencing the choice of a game is its length and the time necessary for its completion. Many games have time limits but according to Siek Piscozub, the teacher can either allocate more or less time depending of the students' levels, the number of people in a group, or the knowledge of the rules of a game, etc.

Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of the lesson. As Mr. Lee observes, a game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Mr. Rixon suggests that games should be used at all stages of the English lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen.

At different stages of the lesson, the teachers' aims connected with a game may

vary: (1) presentation. It presents and provides a good model making its meaning clear, (2) controlled practice. It elicits a good imitation of the language and appropriate responses, and (3) communicative practice. It gives to the students a chance to use a foreign language.

Grammar games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners to recall a grammar material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All authors referred to in my report agree that even the grammar games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom since they motivate learners, promote the communicative competence, and generate the fluency. However, can they be more successful for presentation and revision than other techniques? My teaching practice proves that the answer to this question is absolutely affirmative.

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