Research Article

ADAPTATION OF GAMES AS A TEACHING AID IN GRAMMAR CLASSROOM

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

English has complicated sets of grammar rules, which make it difficult to master. Many non-native learners struggle with these rules and encounter difficulties in understanding them. English students, in particular, are unable to apply the different parts of speech and types of tense in English accurately in their speaking and writing. Although some teachers of English see language games as time-consuming, they have a special role in any foreign language teaching program because they facilitate foreign language learning, especially for young learners. With the introduction of communicative language teaching, English language teaching and learning have become much more demanding for teachers. Games have become crucially important for English language learner and teachers not only because they provide enjoyment and relaxation, but also as they encourage students to use their language in a creative and communicative manner.

INTRODUCTION

In language learning, authentic use of language and creative techniques and procedures are quite useful. Through creative procedure, one can have an interactive environment which may lead to an improvement in learning a foreign language. Educational games are one of the techniques and procedures that the teacher may use in teaching a foreign language. Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. A game should not be regarded as a marginal activity when it is used only to fill odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do. Games also assist in revision exercises and help learners to recall material in a pleasant and entertaining way. They motivate learners, promote communicative competence and generate fluency and may have a significant role in improving second language acquisition.

Significance of the Study

It is undeniable that Grammar plays an important role in learning the English language. Having a good command of the language means not only to master the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking but also to achieve grammatical competence. When students face problem in acquiring the language, the teacher should make an attempt to make their lessons as interesting as possible and not resort to the traditional 'chalk and talk' method which can be dull and predominantly teacher-centered. The information and data gathered in this study could prove useful in emphasizing the

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importance of using grammar games in the teaching of grammar items. The information gathered could also lead to more effective and efficient teaching method in the language classroom, particularly in teaching grammar. It is hoped that through the use of grammar games, a more conducive environment will be created to enable both teachers and students to enjoy the lesson in a more meaningful and more interesting manner. One of the problems in teaching strategies is that they are too abstract at all levels, especially at the basic stage. For example, children in grade 3 learn what an island is in the following way. "an island is a piece of land surrounded by water on all sides." this is a formal definition, and such is devoid of life, leaving almost no spaces for imagination, compare it with a story told by the teacher, of someone whose boat sank and swam to a beach, then tried to go home and wherever he went there were more beaches. This story should be enriched by all sorts of details on what the person found fruits, animals and so on. It could be accompanied by a beautiful drawing made by the teacher at the blackboard using colored chalk. The drawing should leave space for imagination, and not contain all possible details as though it were a photograph. They could create a living island in their minds. After such a story, the children would be asked to draw with crayons whatever they like about the story (and here an element of freedom is introduced into the classrooms), thus requiring some exterior action and not just intellectual absorption.

In a nutshell, it can be said that the excessive obstruction in learning activities causes children to hate school and the school language too. They should be given enough space to

explore their intellect and come up with their own creative thoughts.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One useful strategy to encourage learning a foreign language is using language games. When using games in the classroom, it is important for teachers to have a complete understanding of the definitions of games, which are usually defined as a form of play that takes into account rules, competition, and an element of fun. A teacher should consider following aspects while employing games in the classroom i) advantages of games, ii) the ability of games to capture students' attention, iii) lowering students' stress while playing games and iv) giving students chance for real communication during the play. Some teachers think that language games are a waste of time and prefer not to use them in the classroom since games sometimes have been considered only for its one element that is fun. In fact, games can provide English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as the second language (ESL) students more than that.

Given below are some of the definitions of games given by various scholars:

Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication. According to (Carrier 6-11), teachers should first consider the level of the game to fit their students' language level. They should choose the game that fits the purposes of that class or the content.

According to (Richard 192-199), even though games are often associated with fun, it has high pedagogical values, particularly in second language teaching. Games are effective because they provide motivation, lower students' stress, and give them the opportunity for real communication.

The main reason why games are considered as important elements in effective learning is that "they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses" (Avedon, 1997,).

Another reason why games are often used in language classes is that they reduce students' stress in the classroom. In conventional classrooms, students are often under pressure when they are trying to master the target language. Schultz (1988) said that

"… Stress is a major hindrance in language learning process. This process [learning language in traditional way] is by its nature time consuming and stress provoking… raise the stress level to a point at which it interferes with student attention and efficiency and undermines motivation…. One method has been developed to make students forget that they are in class…relax student by engaging them in stress reducing task (Games) p.".Skehan (1998) also mentions that grammar games promote communicative language learning through task completion, where the activities have some relationship to real world contexts. Moreover, the use of grammar games during learning helps the teacher to build students' interest and uphold their focus during the class lesson. When learners react to the activity of the language game through their emotional expressions, the context clearly gives them a

meaningful reason to learn the language (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2005).

Dalton (n.d) states that "Activities structured as games can provide concrete practice for learners while reducing the tension and anxiety often encountered during the learning process." The author further argues that games can be beneficial for language learning in which they are normally designed in accordance with real-life activities. They offer students with an opportunity to exercise real and meaningful language contexts while interacting with their partners/peers or competitors.

Furthermore, Granger (1982) mentions that grammar games enable the learners to be an active participant in teaching learning process. Instead of just listening to the teacher explaining grammar rules during the class lesson, the students will do most of the talking while completing the tasks and interacting with others. Likewise, Clark (1982) asserts that games can be utilized as a means to assess and rehearse language lessons in a fun and entertaining atmosphere. While playing the games, the students' attention can be focused on the game activity, whereby subconscious learning of the language items will take place in them. Thus, this enables the learners to review and reinforce what they have learned in class.

Role of Grammar in Teaching Language

Linguistics takes a descriptive approach to language. It tries to explain things as they actually are, not as we wish them to be. When language is studied descriptively, it tries to find the unconscious rules that people follow when they say things like a sentence. The schoolbook approach to language is typically prescriptive. It tries to tell how one should speak and write. There is a place for both description and prescription in language study.

Prescription, in other words, can only occur after the language has been described, and good prescription depends on the adequate description. Descriptive and prescriptive approaches to the language would follow this harmonious relationship: linguists would describe the rules of a language, and pedagogues would use those descriptions to make textbooks to teach language learners. Language serves as a symbol of group identity. The way a word is used and pronounced sends signals to others.

Grammar is the soul of language. It is the foundation for producing correct or accurate utterances of any language. Grammar is the system of language. People sometimes describe grammar as the "rules" of a language, but in fact, no language has rules. If we use word 'rules', we suggest that somebody created rules first than spoken language, like a new game. But language did not start like that. The language started by people making sounds which involved into words, phrases, and sentences. All language changes over time. What we call 'grammar' is simply a relaxation of a language at a particular time, there are so many native speakers who speak or communicate accurately without having knowledge of the grammar of their own language. Children start to speak before they even do not know the word grammar. But for teaching a foreign language, grammar can help to teach language more quickly and more efficiently. When a learner understands the grammar of target language, they can learn that language more efficiently.

Grammar is the system of language. It is also a foundation and rules of language. It is a set of components in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. It is a set of rules that govern language. There is a growing awareness that there is no method which can be considered as the best method for the effective teaching of grammar. Teachers have found that it is impossible to use any one method for all students in a class and they prefer to adapt the methods to the needs of the students.

Crystal (2004, p.) says,

"Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English. Additionally, it can help everyone, not only teachers of English, but teachers of anything for all teaching grammar is ultimately a matter of getting to grips with meaning."

Maugham (1938, p.) adds,

"It is necessary to know grammar, and it is better to write grammatically than not, but it is well to remember that grammar is common speech formulated. Usage is the only test."

Effects of Games on L2 Learners

Harmer (1998: 3) asserts that:

"Motivation is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action...The motivation students bring to class is the biggest factor affecting their success."

Finding an effective way to motivate learners is always the interest of teachers, researchers, and linguists. As Hansen (1994: 118) states, "Games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings." Games are highly motivating since they are amusing, interesting and at the same time challenging. The activities in a game get all the students to move around, activate their mental capacities and stimulate neural networks, thus motivating learners in learning and retention. At that time, students who are shy also attend the activities with fun, forgetting their shyness and feeling of fear. Further, games add interest to what students might not find interesting. Sustaining interest can mean sustaining the effort. (Thiagarajan, 1998; Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2005)

The grammar lesson can be taken as a typical example where it is considered as a boring one in a traditional way as a typical example. If the teacher just follows the tasks given in the textbook and students have to do the tasks in writing and reading, then the teacher himself/ herself will lead a grammar lesson to a boring, hard-digesting experience to their students and surely, do not meet the need for a more interesting and effective grammar class. At that time, the game is the most useful. Elements in teaching grammar games employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. If these games are good then learners will be learning while they are playing.

Avedon & Sutton-Smith (1971: 28- 29) believes,

"The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses." It can be clearly seen that games can capture students' attention and participation. Thus, they can motivate students to want to learn more. Moreover, they can transform a boring class into a challenging one.

Wright, Betteridge, and Buckby (1984:) emphasize the importance of the game in the following words: "Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information. Thanks to games, shy language learners will have more chances to speak and show their feeling and opinions in English as much as they can."

Importance of Games in Teaching Grammar

Too many people language learning and teaching is essentially a question of grammar. Hence, language teaching should concentrate on linguistics units or forms or language structure which is the trend of the day. The goal is to shift the emphasis in the area of grammar from the formal study of grammatical structures to the more actual use of language. Consequently, the interest in the language description, which has been keen during the last few decades, resulting in the emergence of a new approach to language description. It is, therefore, more appropriate at the present time to speak of multiple grammars of a language rather than of the grammar: formal grammar, functional grammar, transformational grammar, and the minimalist grammar. The newer approach to grammar leads to different teaching methods such as structural and communicative which, in turn, requires more explanation.

The structural approach to language teaching is "more top – down, giving forms and structure, a focus on form rather than meaning or use" (Good, 2003:). Such focus on form, as Ellis (1985:) states, aids the acquisition of grammatical knowledge. The approach to structural grammar is associated with the names of such linguists as Bloomfield, fries, and Bloch. The focus is, as Fries (1957:) points out on the grammatical system and 'physical term,' in which the linguistic unit can be combined. Fries (1957:) goes further to suggest that the essence of grammar lies in the structural meaning which is 'specifically singled by a complex system of contrastive patterns'. The communicative approach to language teaching and learning is "more bottom- up, starting from content and task- based, completing a task" (Good, 2003:). Therefore grammar in this approach is considered to be a major part the process of language learning. The emphasis is one of the uses of l2 without a thorough understanding of its systematic operation. Such emphasis manifests itself in the process-based teaching method as learners, in the context, are very fluent in using the language for communicative purposes. By focusing on meaning and self-expression, learners develop their ability to actually use a language according to their communicative needs. In this context Littlewood (1981:) points out that 'learning communication seems to be an alternative to learning grammar'. The structure is not that single most important factor in language teaching and

language learning. To exemplify it, a sentence can be analyzed, such as 'why do not you go for shopping? 'According to structuralists, it is unambiguously an interrogative. But from a communicative point of a view, it's ambiguous as it may function as a question as or as a suggestion or even as a complaint. Therefore, the communicative competence and rules of use must be given more emphasis in language learning. As Littlewood (1981:) puts it 'grammar exists not for it on sake but in order to serve communication'.

Grammar teaching in a foreign language classroom has been a controversial issue in the last 50 years. In the history of language teaching, the role of grammar has been addressed by a number of linguistics theories. Lock (1997) mentions some of the dichotomies that arise whenever dealing with grammar teaching. They are formed vs. function, form vs. meaning, fluency vs. accuracy, meaning based instruction vs. form based instruction & the one grammar teaching: communicative vs. grammar. These dichotomies have been solved by three general ways: traditional grammar teaching, communicative language teaching, and post-communicative language teaching including CEF (Newby, 2006) CEF refer to European framework of reference for language.

Traditional grammar teaching was based on a formal notion of competence, the underlying knowledge of concepts and rules stored in the mind of readers which equated grammar with syntax & morphology, considering meaning as a totally different linguistic level. The set of practices associated with this approach was concerned with presentation-practice-production cycle, where the teacher presents new grammatical item with the rule and explanation of form and meaning. Then, some controlled exercises were done to consolidate the rule and this intensive practice or drilling condition eventually lead to production. Grammatical competence was viewed as explicit knowledge of rules.

Communicative language teaching started in 1970's with the words of Wilkins, Widdowson, Broomfit, Candling, Keith, Johnson, Dell Hymes, and other applied linguistics. This new concept of grammar which appeared in Halliday (1997) said the writing was consolidated in the 80's. He stated that the dichotomies mentioned earlier are irrelevant. Since the concept of function, meaning, and communication are included in the study of grammar its teaching should focus on the use of language rather than its form.

Activities for teaching grammar

Choosing games for a language classroom are quite challenging. First of all, the teacher should decide on the purpose of a game.

Nedomová (2007) stated the fact that we should consider whether the game-like activities for children only to make the lesson more attractive and protect them from being bored or whether we tend to revise and practice some particular part off grammar vocabulary etc. when they choose a game. Considering the level of the game is equally important while choosing games. The teacher must decide whether the level of the game fits student language level because a game may become difficult when it is beyond the learner's level or it may become boring when learners find it too easy to carry on. When games' value in grammar teaching is considered, teachers tend to use it for practice or to reinforce a specific

grammatical knowledge that can be used easily as they are playing the games.

The fact that games enable social interaction and participation is also important. Learners, especially the young ones, learn better when they interact with their peers. Some games may include both cooperation and competition together. While students cooperate within a team, they, at the same time compete against another team (Rixon; 1991)

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