

USING GAMES IN THE PROCESS OF TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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Аннотация: В статье исследуются проблемы повышения эффективности изучения грамматики английского языка в процессе использования игровой деятельности во время учебных занятий. Автор выделяет основные аспекты такой деятельности и показывает, что игра интегрирует языковые навыки, способствует повышению мотивации углубленного изучения языка. В процессе игры создается языковая среда, приближенная к реальной жизнедеятельности человека. В статье демонстрируется роль игр. Автор показывает, что каждая игра должна быть употреблена по уровню сложности, адаптирована к конкретной аудитории.

Ключевые слова: Грамматика, игра, язык, студенты, мотивация, занятия.

Abstract: The article deals with the problem of improving efficiency in English grammar learning as the result of using games. The author underlines the main aspects of such activities and brings forward the idea that game integrates language skills and helps to motivate sound language learning. While playing games students are involved in the process close to natural surroundings. The author gives the idea that every game should be adapted to students' level and be included in every lesson.

Key words: grammar, game, language, students, motivation, studies.

To investigate the problem we should look into the definitions of such terms as “grammar” and “game”. Oxford dictionary says that grammar is “the whole system and structure of a language ... in general, usually taken as consisting of syntax and morphology (including inflections) and sometimes also phonology and semantics” [Oxford 1995 : 517]. And according to the same dictionary game is “a form of competitive activity or sport played according to rules... an activity that one engages in for amusement” [Oxford 1995 : 486].

Games provide enjoyment and relaxation they encourage students to use foreign language in a creative and communicative manner. Games encourage learners to direct their energy towards language learning by providing them with meaningful contexts [Nixon 2003 : 3]. The relationship between games in the teaching of foreign languages has been explored in various studies in many countries.

As expressed by Lee "... games have a very clear beginning and ending and they are governed by rules" [Lee 1979: 3]. Competition, which is associated with games, plays a crucial role as for the nature of games requires. Learners are excited by competition because the question of who will win or lose remains unanswered until the game is over.

Games provide language teachers with many advantages when they are used in classroom. One of these advantages according to McCallum is that "learners are motivated to learn the language when they are in a game" [McCallum 1990: ix]. Another advantage is that students' anxiety towards English learning decreases while the game is being played. In English classes, learners feel stressful because they think that they have to master the target language that is unknown to them. Besides, learners become too anxious about being criticized and punished by their teachers when they make a mistake. Games are advantageous at this point because they reduce anxiety, increase positive feelings and improve self-confidence because learners are not afraid of punishment or criticism while practicing English. One more plus of playing games is that you focus students' attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items [Hadfield 1990: 13].

In general the benefits of using games in language-learning can be summed up in the following points. Games are learner centered, promote communicative competence, create a meaningful context for language use, increase learning motivation, reduce learning anxiety, integrate various linguistic skills, encourage creative and spontaneous use of language, construct a cooperative learning environment, foster participatory attitudes of the students.

Mastering grammar makes students start speaking actively. Students usually get bored by frequent repeating grammar structures, all the efforts of repeating these structures do not bring much satisfaction. This happens because grammar material usually is given traditionally and its abstract character makes negative attitude to it. Grammar including theory can be given vividly, interesting, captivating. It should awaken emotions and be target at student's personality [Thornbury 2008: 15].

The most instructive language learning games are those that emphasize specific structures. They do not only practice the basic pattern but also do so in a pleasant, easy way that allows the students to forget that they are drilling grammar and concentrate on having fun. The following games are concerned with Yes/No questions, Wh-questions, tag questions, comparative and superlative, adverbs, modals, demonstratives, etc.

Grammar is perhaps so serious and central in learning another language that all ways should be searched for which will focus student energy on the task of mastering and internalizing it. One way of focusing this energy is through the release offered by games. Students are delighted to be asked to do something that feels like an out-class activity and in which they control what is going on in the classroom – they become the subjects, while for many hours they spend at universities they are the objects of teaching. The point is that fun generates energy for the achievement of the serious goal.

So, if you have decided to use games within the teaching process you should bear in mind some points to pay attention to. They are

- purpose of a game
- level of a game
- size of the classroom
- equipment needed for a game
- time needed for a game
- materials if any needed
- age of learners

First of all, the teacher should decide on the purpose of a game. At first a game may seem appropriate and useful. However, when you look at it from the view point of foreign language teaching, it may have little or no purpose. That's why it's important to decide on its purpose.

If we speak about the level of the game it is also important to pay attention to. Teachers must decide whether the level of the game is right for students' language level because a game becomes difficult when it is beyond the learners' level or it becomes boring when learners find it too easy to carry on. Each game is

proposed for a given level ranging from beginner to advanced. But a lot of activities can be adapted to different classes with different grammar components. By changing the grammar content a teacher can, in many cases, use the game frame offered at a higher or lower level [Rixon 1981: 4]. Generally, any frame can be filled with any structures you want to work on with your students.

The size of the classroom is important only if a game needs moving around the class. Some games may need much space, other games you can play without doing any movements.

The equipment needed for a game may be various (stopwatch, tape-recorder, printer, etc). It also teachers should bear in mind not to be puzzled.

For some games it is needed 5-10 minutes, for others up to 60 minutes. And if your classes are 60 minutes maybe it is not good idea to use long-time games. According to the time you can choose when to play in the beginning, in the middle or in the end of the classes. Teachers know their students better and it is up to them to decide when to play a game. For one group it makes sense to use a game like warming up activity, for another group it is still better to finish a lesson by playing a game. Grammar games can be used in three ways:

- before presenting a given structure (to find out how much knowledge in this area has been already disjointedly presented in the group);
- after a grammar presentation (to see how much the group have embraced);
- as a grammar revision.

Before using a game you should make a list of needed materials. It can include a dice, counters, photocopies, felt-tip pens, scissors, paper-clips, pictures and other stuff.

Enjoyment of games is not restricted by age. Some individuals, regardless of age, may be less found of games than others. But so much depends on the appropriateness of the games and the role of the player. It is generally accepted that young learners and adults are very willing to play games. This partly depends on the learners' socio-cultural background [Wright 1994 : 2].

It is essential to choose games which are appropriate to the class in terms of languages and type of participation. Having chosen an appropriate game, its

character and the aims and rules must be made clear to the learners. It may be necessary to use the mother tongue to do this. If the learners are unclear what they have to do, chaos and disillusionment may result.

Games increase learners' proficiency in practicing grammar communicatively. With the help of grammar games, students can develop their ability in using language as they are given a chance to use language in the situations which have a purpose [Deesri 2001:3]. In short, games provide learners with an opportunity to drill and practice grammatical rules and forms by presenting them in a communicative way. In sum, with the introduction of communicative competence, games, which were treated as time fillers or for relaxation activities, began to appear as an indispensable part of any English foreign language teaching program.

Any games or activities which involve language and which your learners enjoy are language- learning material. You can find 'new' games by studying magazines, newspapers, radio and television programs, party games and indeed by asking your learners.

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