GAMES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

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Abstract: Game is a natural means for children to understand the world around them. Therefore, it should be part and parcel of their learning, including the learning of foreign languages. The aim of this article is thus to give a description of game, its classification and benefits for English teaching. In addition, the right timing for the implementation of game into the teaching is considered. The author also describes different ways of using games in language classrooms. In conclusion, she provides a list of tried and tested books and websites for ready-made games.

Key words: Techology, language, libguistic categories, games, teachig methods.

Introduction

Language is immensely powerful, but it can also be loads of fun. In fact, a sense of fun can make language more powerful ….. Language and play complement and enrich each other. A fusion of the two produces language games. Game is a natural means for children to understand the world around them. Therefore, it should be part and parcel of their learning, including the learning of foreign languages. The exploitation of games in children's learning is not a recent idea. This thought was already supported by Czech teacher Jan Amos Komensky in his book *Schola Ludus* (*Osobnosti.cz*, n.d.) in the 17th century. This book is a collection of plays which should serve for the teaching of Latin. Furthermore, Komensky in this book emphasized that all teaching should be illustrative with the help of specific examples. In addition, the

teacher should proceed in his teaching from easy examples to the most difficult ones.

The Definition of Game, its Classification and Benefits

There exists an array of definitions of the term *game* (cf. Celce-Murcia & McIntosh, 1979; Hadfiled, 1998; Khan, 1991; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005). Hadfield (1998: 4), for example, defines the game as 'an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun.' In this paper the game is perceived as a meaningful fun activity governed by rules (author's definition). The language games can be divided according to different principles. Hadfiled (1998) offers two classifications of language games. She divides them into linguistic (these focus mainly on accuracy) and communicative games (these are based on successful exchange of information). Hadfiled's second classification has more categories and usually includes both linguistic and communicative aspects. These games are as follows (Hadfiled, 1998, as cited in Jacobs, n.d. b):

- *Sorting, ordering, or arranging games*. For example, students have a set of cards with different products on them, and they sort the cards into products found at a grocery store and products found at a department store.
- *Information gap games*. In such games, one or more people have information that other people need to complete a task. For instance, one person might have a drawing and their partner needs to create a similar drawing by listening to the information given by the person with the drawing
- *Guessing games*. These are a variation on information gap games. One of the best known examples of a guessing game is 20 questions, in which one person thinks of a famous person, place, or thing. The other participants can ask 20 yes/no questions to find clues in order to guess who or what the person is thinking of.
- *Search games*. These games are yet another variant on two-way

information gap games, with everyone giving and seeking information. Find *Someone Who is a well-known example*. Students are given a grid. The task is to fill in all the cells in the grid with the name of a classmate who fits that cell, e.g. someone who is a vegetarian. Students circulate, asking and answering questions to complete their own grid and help classmates complete theirs.

- *Matching games*. As the name implies, participants need to find a match for a word, picture, or card. For example, students place 30 word cards, composed of 15 pairs, face down in random order. Each person turns over two cards at a time, with the goal of turning over a matching pair, by using their memory.

- *Labelling games*. These are a form of matching, in that participants match labels and pictures.

- *Exchanging games*. In these games, students barter cards, other objects, or ideas.

- *Board games*. Scrabble is one of the most popular board games that specifically highlights language.

- *Role play games/dramas*. Role play can involve students playing roles that they do not play in real life, such as dentist, while simulations can involve students performing roles that they already play in real life or might be likely to play, such as customer at a restaurant. Dramas are normally scripted performances, whereas in role plays and simulations, students come up with their own words, although preparation is often useful.

A similar classification is provided by Lewis & Bedson (1999). In their classification some of the games listed above can be included in their classification under a broader umbrella term, such as *movement games* (the type of game when learners are physically active, e.g. *Find your partner*) or *task-based games* (usually pairs or groups work on meaningful task in the way they enjoy; learners obey clear rules and they have got a chance to

practise all language skills; teacher is an organizer and facilitator). In addition to Hadfiled (1998), they add a very popular type of games nowadays, i.e. *computer games* (they can be played either at school or at home, individually or in pair; students predominantly practice their reading and writing skills). Finally, Jacobs (n.d. a) makes another distinction between the languages games. He divides them into competitive (learner tries to be first to reach the goal) and cooperative games (learners try to reach the same goal together; they help each other). And he suggests that competitive games can be modified to lessen the competitive element and to add a cooperative element. In his paper he also gives a few specific examples based on the available literature.

Many surveys also proved that the games have a positive and effective influence on the learning of foreign languages (cf. Carrier, 1985; Chen, 2005; Jacobs, n.d. b; or Kupeckova, 2010). The reasons for this statement are as follows:

- games get students involved in their learning; they motivate them;
- games encourage creative and spontaneous use of language (cf. Chen, 2005);

- games introduce a change in formal learning situations;
- games create a pleasant stress-free and relaxing atmosphere in a language class;
- games unconsciously promote and practise all four basic language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing;
- games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful (cf. Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005);
- games decrease student's anxiety to speak in front of the other students; they feel less intimidated in this,
  less formal learning situation;
- games are student-centred;

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- games can promote collaboration among students; and
- games can connect to a variety of intelligences (Gardner, 1999, as cited in Jacobs, n.d. b).

2. Timing and Ways of Using Games in Language Classrooms

The language teachers must seriously consider when to use games, which of them to use and how to use them appropriately, purposefully and efficiently in order to meet both students' needs and lesson objectives (cf. Khan, 1991). As Jacobs (n.d. b) states, games are traditionally used in the language class as warm-ups at the beginning of class, fill-ins when there is extra time near the end of class, or as an occasional bit of spice stirred into the curriculum to add variety. However, if games are seen as meaningful practice of language, they can be exploited as follow-ups of the presented teaching material for practicing and reinforcing the required skills or knowledge; or for revising and recycling already acquired skills or knowledge; or as a testing mechanism in order to discover students' weaknesses in their language proficiency. Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby (2005) regard games central to a language teacher's repertoire and not just a way of paging the time. Hong (2002) adds, 'the key to a successful language game is that the rules are clear, the ultimate goal is well defined and the game must be fun.' Nevertheless, if the game were a success, students must also possess relevant level of language proficiency and know the rules of the game in order to complete it. Furthermore, the teacher should consider students' learning styles, their willingness to cooperate and their current state of mind since they might be tired and not in mood of playing any kind of game. The organization of any game-like activity places great demands on the teacher. S/he must prepare the content of the game, materials needed for its completion, clearly explain the rules of the game to students and set the time. The game can be introduced by the

teacher in order to eliminate misunderstandings in the following way (cf. Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005):

- explain the rules of the game to students;
- demonstrate with the help of one or two learners parts of the game;
- write on the board any key language and/or instruction;
- trial the game; and
- play the game.

See Appendix A for a list of tried and tested books and websites for ready-made games.

3. Conclusion

As Uberman (1998: 87) puts it, 'games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency and communicative skills. If not for any of these reasons, they should be used just because they help students see beauty in a foreign language and not just problems that at times seem overwhelming.'

Appendix A. A list of tried and tested books and websites for ready-made games

Lindstromberg, S. (Ed.) (1997). *The standby book. Activities for the language classroom.* Cambridge: CUP. (The book offers 110 different classroom activities, most of which can easily be adapted for use in teaching any foreign language. Some of the activities are intended to make up just part of a lesson. Others can make up a complete lesson).

Marsland, B. (1998). *Lesso ns from nothing.* Cambridge: CUP. (This book is a sourcebook of 70 ELT easy-to -use exercises and activities which do not require extensive resources and facilit ies. Each activity begins with the language to be practised, the level and age, followed by the procedure, rationale and any variations on the procedure).

Rooyackers, P. (2002). *101 la nguage games for children: Fun and learning with words, stories and poems.* USA, CA: Hunter House Inc. (This book contains 101 language games and variations, as well as an introduction that explains how the games can be made accessible to everyone.)

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