

# THE ROLE OF GAMES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING\*

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Games can be regarded as central to a language teacher's repertoire and not merely a way of passing the time. Games provide one way of helping the learners to experience language rather than merely study it. They give the teacher an opportunity to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part, and in order to do so they 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. Games can help to master the knowledge, make the digestion process interesting and amusing. There are various activities, which can make the whole process of teaching and learning exciting, give the learners motivation and thus have positive effect in results. By using games in the classroom the teacher can conduct the lesson in a rather interesting way. Games have the power to enliven even the most intense lesson.

**Key words:** drill, motivation, a warm-up game, a quick refreshing game, to promote interactive teaching.

## Introduction

Language is not merely learning to read or write. Language is even more than being fluent in speaking it. One cannot be a carrier of a language unless he or she has excellent communication skills. The usage of a language is not only that in formal and predictable dialogues, but in everyday communication. The word communication assumes mutual understanding between the communicators, which becomes possible through a language. As mentioned above, speaking skills, no matter how proficient, are not enough for a successful information exchange: listening skills are also required. All these and many other skills are to be mastered during the language learning process, which is evidently a prolonged and difficult one. During this process learners must make an effort to study lexical and grammatical forms of new words, to spell and pronounce them, in other words to use new language appropriately in both written composition and in conversation (Langran & Purcell 1994:15-19).

Games are not only entertaining, but also encouraging: they help to sustain interest and efforts. Many games, similar to drill exercises, cause much use of particular language items. The focus is put on a specific language form and its frequent occurrence in a short period of time: this repeated occurrence of a particular language form is the contribution of drill exercises. The meaning of the language can be more vividly experienced through games which entail emotions.

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Drill exercises are quite mechanical, especially when compared to games. Thus, learning of particular language items through games is better imbibed than that based on perfunctory drills (Wright, Betteridge, Buckby 2010:2).

Games are good exercises for brains. Pupils can enjoy a rest after the intensive work on monotonous structures and drills by playing a quick refreshing game. This not only promotes interactive teaching and learning, but also helps many students to overcome language obstacles and even psychological complexes. What is even more, the playing process (especially a group work) makes the class more united and the atmosphere more friendly, open and free and, however strange it is, more relaxed. Although children play against each other, they learn healthy completion and become better friends.

### **Why Use Games?**

Learners are normally inquisitive to know all the details of the learning process. They are more often interested in teaching procedures. Teachers must be prepared to point out the reasons for which this or that activity is conducted. In case of the usage of games, it is sometimes necessary for the teacher to be prepared to justify the choice of a particular game, sometimes even the usage of games in general, in terms of their efficiency. The learners should know about the successful consequences if the language is used appropriately. It is preferable that the teacher should highlight factors that made him/her use games: memorability, the frequency with which the language item occurs and meaningful use of language.

Every teacher knows that we all have various emphases in the ways we learn and perceive. Learning styles are not assumed to be exclusive, since even the same person may have different preferences in learning styles. For instance, one can choose to be creative at one time and analytical at others. No matter how different the preferences for a certain learning style are, all learners probably have at least one. Any class consists of different types of learners and hence different types of preferences exist within one class. Teachers have a wide range of games to choose from when considering various teaching styles. Examples of those styles are as follows:

- ✓ Visual= "I see what you mean". (This is connected with visual memory. Some people are best responsive to information which is seen: graphs, diagrams, writing and pictures. In this matter colour, size and design should be paid attention to.),

- ✓ Auditory= "I hear what you are saying". (There are people who respond to information much better when it is heard),

- ✓ Kinaesthetic= "I've put it together, at last". (This is connected to gestures: some people might prefer to move, touch things in order to learn efficiently.),

- ✓ Creative= "Let's have a go" (Even if it is still the beginning, there might be people who will need to use the language creatively.),

- ✓ Analytical= "Let's stop messing about and get down to the basic rules" and analyze some patterns. (Some people have strong analytical skills and look for rules, they might like to analyze language forms. ),

✓ Cooperative = "It's really fun to work with other people", it makes it more interesting, when the task is done in a group. For some people it is not a matter of being more interesting, but it is easier to have and be able to use the help of group members.

✓ Individual = "I like to be left alone to get on with it." In contrast to the style described above, this one is for people who find it much more efficient to work themselves. They might want to avoid troubles caused by others (They might not work as fast as them, for instance.) or might just prefer to work separately and take all the responsibility on themselves only.

✓ Serious = "I don't want to mess about, but get down to the real business of learning". This style is for the people who opt for rather sober approaches toward things, especially toward learning. This learning style has some similarities with analytical and individual ones, but there is something typical to this style only: it is the in-depth approach to things. When choosing a game for people preferring this learning style, one should search for 'humourless' games that don't intend to amuse or busy pupils, but are of rather serious 'intensions'. This serious style of learning is not about taking the competition in games seriously, instead, it concerns the so-called demanding approaches to learning.

✓ Amusing = "I like a good laugh", "Don't take it all so seriously." If the game-process has some humorous elements, it might add lightness to the whole experience. This is preferable for the people who concentrate better in an amusing atmosphere.

✓ Dramatic = "I love a good story". Some people grasp new information better when it is associated with drama and storytelling (Wright, Betteridge, Buckby 2010).

### **The Role of the Teacher**

There are games which are teacher-led and there are those in which the teacher's role is mainly a passive one: Peter Watcyn-Johns states 3 things the teacher is usually responsible for:

- ✓ preparing the material in sufficient quantities,
- ✓ explaining clearly what is to be done,
- ✓ checking answers or managing the scoring in the end of the game or in the process of playing (Walcyn-Jones 1993).

These might sound very simple and easy to do, but these are not the only things the teacher does, of course. These go along with conducting the whole lesson, finding or coming up with an appropriate game or an activity for the given topic, so that the lesson turns into an enjoyable time of the day.

In addition to these, the whole responsibility for the game results (how fair it was, the extent of productivity of the game, etc.) lies on the teacher. Besides, any teaching process assumes an approach, pedagogical in general and psychological in particular. Especially when working with children, any action, any word or even a look may be crucial.

There are games in case of which pupils work at their own pace, i.e. independently of the teacher. The teacher should set up a time. Once the game has started, he/she should walk around the room and monitor the process and

progress of work being done by the children and listen to them. While doing this, the teacher should also pay attention to the degree to which the work is shared: is it equally divided or is the leader doing the whole work. Keeping control over the discipline is always important, but this does not mean that the teacher should interfere or help the working process, unless absolutely necessary. Almost all the games have a competitive essence and this is what draws the pupils' attention. It is a well-known fact that a runner reaches the finish-line faster if he/she knows someone else is running simultaneously. Competence motivates, excites, makes active and gives impulse. Thus, have your pupils enjoy all these by themselves. On the whole, the role of the teacher cannot and should not be underestimated.

### **Play with No Advance Preparation**

It's commonly accepted that language games require little or no advance preparation. We do not particularly agree on this. Having observed practical cases, considerably more enthusiasm can be noticed in completing home tasks when learners know that they are to play a game at the next lesson. This is a way to give them a specific short-term aim in learning the proper topic: be it a given vocabulary, a tense structure, a set of idiomatic expressions or some other game. Learners, especially at young age, are fond of practical knowledge. They probably do not differentiate between the active and passive layers of vocabulary. Thus, when they are said to learn a random thematic group, it would not be enough to tell them that they will need those words at some point of their lives. So their usual response to this would be looking through those words, without paying attention to their meanings and not even memorizing them. Learning in this case would be boring and, therefore, not much affective. However, when the child knows about a possible award, he/she feels motivated to learn the whole thematic group with proper pronunciation, definitions and synonyms, even with some derivatives and usages.

In short, when assigning children to study verb forms or a given vocabulary list, it is a good option to tell them that they are to play a game at the next lesson. Any learning process can be made interesting, if properly motivated.

Furthermore, a game, if given without advance preparation, lacks a probable nervous state of mind among learners, something that is typical to any preparation process. Games are meant to make the whole process easier and more interesting, not more stressful because of competition, for instance.

Games that are played without advance preparation are just like pop quizzes. These "not prepared for" games give the instructor opportunity to examine the knowledge gained by the learners from this or that lesson. This is a good way of observing the results. When checking a homework assignment, a pop-game would be a good alternative. It is a way to make not only the learning, but also the checking process interesting and motivating.

### **Conclusion**

Games are a way to make the foreign language practice enjoyable. They are good exercises for brains. It is always healthy to give the pupils a five-minute break. It is a delicate way to meet their concerns and fears. With the help of

different games the teacher can involve everyone in the learning process. He/she can use a game as a quick warm-up or a time-filler at the end of the classroom. The pupils enjoy playing in any conditions. They also like competitions. These two can be perfectly combined in one language game to both interest and entertain them. The more games and amusing activities involved in the learning process, the more engaged the students are. Any home assignment will be completed with enthusiasm, if the pupils know that it is going to be checked with a game. Small rewards, by the means of candies, stickers, kinder toys or even mere points, will always encourage the pupils to study harder and to learn more, though you should engrain more of intrinsic motivation.

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## Խաղերի դերը օտար լեզու ուսուցանելիս

Հոգվածում ներկայացված տեսակետների համաձայն՝ խաղերը պարզապես ժամանցի միջոց չեն, այլ դասավանդման անբաժանելի մաս և ունեն ուսուցողական մեծ արժեք: Խաղերի միջոցով տարբեր տարիքի սովորողները կարող են ձեռք բերել կայուն գիտելիք, ազատ գործածել դրանք և հղկել արդեն իսկ ունեցած հմտությունները:

## Роль игр в обучении иностранному языку

Согласно точке зрения, представленной в статье, игры не являются лишь средством времяпрепровождения, а составляют неотъемлемый компонент урока и обладают большо́й обучающей ценностью. Учащиеся различных возрастных групп с помощью игр могут накопить стойкие знания, при этом свободно манипулировать ими, оттачивая уже имеющиеся навыки в этой области.