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USING LANGUAGE GAMES TO TEACH GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT

Teaching of grammar at the tertiary level is a strenuous task since teachers have to rely on various measures to make grammar lessons interesting and productive. There is a general notion that students do not show much enthusiasm in grammar classes when teachers follow traditional methods of teaching. This indicates the fact that there is a need to explore activities and teaching techniques to draw the attention of the students and make them show interest in grammar lessons. To achieve this goal, language games can be used effectively. The major purpose of this study is to know whether teaching grammar through language games help them enjoy grammar lessons and acquire knowledge in grammar in a playful way.

Keywords: language games, grammar, modules, grammatical knowledge

Introduction

In view of academic and workplace situations, accuracy is a remarkable aspect that is considered important in spoken and written communication. Knowledge in grammar cannot be overlooked since it helps the learners to speak and write without grammatical errors. It is an undeniable fact that classroom teaching focusing on grammar lessons will be immensely useful for the learners to communicate their ideas free from grammatical errors. On account the usefulness of grammatical knowledge, the English syllabus for engineering students of Anna University includes many grammar items. Though teachers do not teach grammar lessons separately, they rely on integrated grammar lessons. It shows that grammar is an important component of classroom teaching at the tertiary level. The grammar lesson will be effective and productive when teachers make use of language games that have an inherent motivational element.

Views on Grammar Teaching

It is interesting to note the views of Crystal (2004) on grammar and he mentions that it is the psychological system of rules which induces people to form, interpret the words and the sentences of their language. While discussing the importance of grammar, he 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.

Teaching grammar through traditional method is always a tough task for teachers. Larsen-Freeman (2003) believes that thinking about grammar as skill is a dynamic process rather than a static area of knowledge, which is good both for explicit and implicit grammar acquisition. Rothstein (2008) says that the language teacher needs to think of ways to make grammar teaching a fun, effective, memorable and meaningful

experience. To DeKeyser (1995), grammatical instruction is an implicit method of teaching because it does not involve rules, but it focuses on the form of input.

Doughty & Long (2005) warns about the explicit knowledge and says that learners need to develop their linguistic system unless it is accompanied by activities that engage natural acquisition process. Shaughnessy (1997) argues that the best method of grammar instruction is the one which gives the greatest return for the least investment. Noguchi (1991) points out that the grammar choices affect writing style, sentence combining is an effective method for helping students to develop fluency and variety in their own writing style.

Language Games

According to Hadfield (1999), language game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun. Games should not be considered as an amusing activity but an integral part of the language syllabus. While discussing the advantages of language games, Hadfield says that games can serve as a diagnostic tool for teachers, who can observe areas of difficulty and take suitable remedial measure.

The use of language games in classroom generates positive energy for learning. Lee (1991) points out that all games have a definite beginning and an end; they are also governed by rules. Games can be also used to encourage students' unity in teamwork, in which they will do their task eagerly and actively. Language games involve many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. The main focus of language game in the classroom is not only to help students to learn more effectively but also to have fun. According to Greenall (1990), the term 'game' is used whenever there is an element of competition between two students or teams in a language activity.

Games in general motivate the learners and involve them in the process of language learning. Saricoban & Metin (2000) claim that games and problem solving activities have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, and are examples of the most preferable communication activities, as the core grammar teaching helps students not only to gain knowledge but also apply in what they learn. Schultz & Fisher (1988) mention that games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in language activities since naturally they want to beat the other team. Apart from having fun, students acquire language skills at the same time.

Methodology

The present study is an experimental study which aims to find out the usefulness of grammar lessons using language games. The researcher conducted the study involving students from first year B.E. mechanical engineering (Tamil medium), College of Engineering, Anna University. About 40 students from this class participated in the study and the first 20 students were kept as control group whereas the remaining 20 students were kept as experimental group. Among 40 students, 35 students are male and the remaining 5 students are female. As far as the medium of instruction is concerned, only 6 students are from English medium schools whereas the rest of the students are from Tamil medium schools. Another interesting fact is that 34 students are from government schools and 6 students are from private schools. These students have low level of exposure to English language as they do not have adequate knowledge in grammar and they are reluctant to speak and write in English. They are in need of adequate knowledge and practice in grammar.

As a part of the study, pre-test was conducted to know the level of the students' knowledge in grammar items like active and passive voice, cause and effect expressions, and conditional clauses. The experimental group was exposed to grammar lessons based on language games but the control group was exposed to the traditional method of teaching grammar. After the pre-test, the researcher conducted grammar teaching sessions using language game modules for these students. Finally post-test was conducted to know the usefulness of language games in teaching grammar.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses have been framed for the present study.

- Students think that they can communicate effectively without any fear of grammatical errors if they have adequate knowledge in grammar.
- Students have favorable attitude towards teaching of grammar through games.

- Teaching grammar through language games has positive impact on learners' acquisition of grammar rules.

Questionnaire

In the present study, questionnaire has been used as a tool to know the opinions of the participants regarding knowledge in grammar and teaching grammar through language games. The questionnaire has the following divisions – a) knowledge in grammar and b) grammar through games. The responses of the students for each division are analyzed to get a clear idea about their views. The background knowledge gained from this analysis can be used for preparing the modules to give practice in grammar. In the questionnaire, there are statements with two options - 'Agree' and 'Disagree'.

Responses of the Students: Knowledge in Grammar

There are six statements that are given to assess the opinions of the students about the usefulness of knowledge in grammar. Table 1 gives the percentage details of the responses of the students for the questions on knowledge in grammar. In response to the first statement, 97.5 percent of the students feel that they can speak in English without mistakes if they have adequate knowledge in grammar. Then 77.5 percent of the students agree with the view that the fear of grammatical errors is the major reason for their inability to speak in English. The responses of the participants for the rest of the questions show that they are very much worried about grammatical errors. On the whole, it is inferred that they can speak and write in English with a lot of confidence only when they have adequate knowledge in grammar. It means that they need knowledge in grammar to communicate effectively in English.

Table 1: Responses of the Students on Knowledge in Grammar

Sl.No	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1	Knowledge in grammar is useful to speak in English without mistakes.	39(97.5%)	1(2.5%)
2	I cannot speak in English because of the fear of grammatical errors	31(77.5%)	9(22.5%)
3	My friends often mock at me when I speak with some grammatical errors.	23(57.5%)	17(42.5%)
4	I believe that I can speak in English boldly only when I have enough knowledge in grammar	35(87.5%)	5(12.5%)
5	There are several grammatical errors in my essay writing.	36(90%)	4(10%)
6	I can write an essay without mistakes only if I have sufficient knowledge in grammar.	38(95%)	2(5%)

Based on the analysis, the first hypothesis framed for the study "Students think that they can communicate effectively without any fear of grammatical errors if they have adequate knowledge in grammar" is proved right.

Responses of the Students: Grammar through Games

In response to the first statement, all the participants mention that they like language games because they make learning interesting. About 97.5 percent of the students feel that learning grammar will be an enjoyable experience when it is taught through games. They also expect the teachers to use language games to teach grammar. Most of the participants believe that they can learn various grammar aspects through games since games are the source of motivation. Table 2 gives the details about the responses of the students for the statements on grammar through games. This makes it clear that they possess positive attitude towards language games.

Table 2: Responses of the Students on Grammar through Games

Sl.No	Statements	Agree	Disagree
1	I like language games because they make learning interesting.	40(100%)	0%
2	Learning grammar is full of fun when it is taught through games.	39(97.5%)	1(2.5%)
3	I expect teachers to teach grammar through interesting games.	39(97.5%)	1(2.5%)
4	I participate actively in language games.	32(80%)	8(20%)
5	I believe that I can learn grammar aspects quickly when teachers teach them through games.	38(95%)	2(5%)
6	Language games motivate me to learn various aspects.	38(95%)	2(5%)

Based on the analysis, the second hypothesis framed for the study “Students have favorable attitude towards teaching of grammar through games” is proved right.

LANGUAGE GAME MODULES

The researcher has designed language game modules for ten sessions to teach active and passive voice, cause and effect expressions, and conditional clauses. Each session lasts for one hour. Among the teaching sessions, three sessions are for active and passive voice; another three sessions are for cause and effect expressions; and the remaining four sessions are for conditional clauses. In each module, there are some remarkable features such as ‘identification’, ‘time-limit’, and ‘group work’. The aspect ‘identification’ helps them to get a clear idea about the specific grammatical item used in the game. Another feature is group work, where members of the group help each other and develop team spirit to achieve their goal. In addition, time-limit is given for each activity of the game to create a challenging situation, in which group members have to think and act fast to answer the questions within the stipulated period of time. A brief account of each language game module used by the researcher in the study is given here.

a) Cause and Effect Module

As a first step, students are asked to identify the cause and effect from the given pictures or cartoon images. Each group competes with one another to identify which is cause and which is effect within the allotted time-limit. The second stage is about the narration of a story based on the set of pictures that has a sequence exhibiting cause and effect relationships given to each group. After arranging the pictures in a logical order, they discuss the outline of the story based on the pictures and narrate the story to the audience. Then, enacting is the last stage of the cause and effect module where each group has to select a person to represent the group. First the representative of the group will be given different scenarios in which he has to select one and enact before the group. The other students have to identify the scenario and come out with three sentences conveying cause and effect relationships. This will help them to frame sentences with appropriate cause and effect expressions.

b) Active and Passive Voice Module

Each group is given a sheet with 10 verbs; the members of the group have to identify the Past Participle form of the verbs within the given time-limit. Every right answer will be given marks and when the answer is wrong, it will be an open question to other groups. The second stage of the game is substitution in which they have to substitute the right words in the right place. Students will be given a box of piece of papers in which the answers are written. Within the given time-limit, each group has to substitute the appropriate piece of paper in the right place. To confuse the students, there will be three different tenses for the given verb and they have to identify the right tense and frame the passive sentence. The third stage of the game is to spot the errors where they have to identify the errors and correct it. The errors may be due to wrong use of tenses, sentence pattern, and preposition. Each group has to come out with the correct answer within the given time-limit.

c) Conditional Clause Module

Each group is given a box which has papers with different forms of the verb for the given questions related to conditional clauses. Each group has to identify the correct tense for the questions within the time-limit. The second stage is chain game in the form of group work, where students are asked to sit in the form of a circle. Then researcher initiates the game by giving the main clause of the conditional sentence and asks one of the students to complete the sentence. The other students have to continue the same process of mentioning the main clause and getting the rest of the conditional sentence from the neighbor. This activity is known as chain game since it starts from the first member and ends with the last member. In the Paramapatham game, group representative will stand inside the box. The group rolls the dice and the representative will move according to the number of dice. In each box there will be questions regarding three conditional clauses. Students have to come out with answers for the given questions within the time-limit.

Pre-Test and Post-Test

The pre-test conducted by the researcher aims to assess the knowledge of the students in grammar items like active and passive voice, cause and effect expressions and conditional clauses. The maximum mark allotted for the pre-test is 20. After the pre-test, researcher prepared ten modules of grammar for the above mentioned three grammar items using language games. In the experimental study, the participants are divided into two groups – a) control group that has the first twenty students and b) experimental group that includes the remaining twenty students. After the completion of 10 sessions, post-test was conducted for the students to find out whether there is any improvement in the acquisition of grammar rules. The maximum marks, number of questions and pattern of the test followed for the pre-test was retained for the post-test. The test was common for both the groups. The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores may show the impact of teaching sessions using the modules of grammar with a focus on language games.

Control Group: Pre- test and Post- test Score Analysis

Table 3 Pre- test and Post- test Score of the Control Group

Student	Pre- test (20)	Post- test (20)	Difference in score
Student -1	7	8	-1
Student -2	5	7	2
Student -3	9	5	-4
Student -4	4	10	6
Student -5	8	10	2
Student -6	7	7	0
Student -7	6	8	2
Student -8	9	10	1
Student -9	7	6	-1
Student -10	5	6	1
Student -11	9	7	-2
Student -12	7	6	-1
Student -13	10	7	-3
Student -14	5	8	3
Student -15	7	5	-2
Student -16	5	6	1
Student -17	8	6	-2
Student -18	4	6	2
Student -19	11	9	-2
Student -20	9	12	3
Mean	7.1	7.45	
Standard Deviation	2.02	1.9	
t = 0.5632	P value =0.5766		

Table 3 shows that the mean value of the pre-test score of the control group is 7.10 whereas the mean value of the post-test score is 7.45. It can be seen that the difference is 0.35. Though there is difference in view of mean values, the application of t-test alone can clarify whether the difference is statistically significant or not. The P value has been calculated by using t-test and the P value is 0.5766. The difference between the pre-test score and post-test score is not statistically significant at 0.05 levels.

Experimental Group: Pre- test and Post- test Score Analysis

Table 4 Pre-test and Post- test Score of the Experimental Group

Students	Pre- test (20)	Post- test (20)	Difference in score
Student -1	5	8	3
Student -2	6	9	3
Student -3	5	7	2
Student -4	8	11	3
Student -5	5	5	0
Student -6	4	6	2
Student -7	9	12	3
Student -8	5	8	3
Student -9	12	16	4
Student -10	4	7	3
Student -11	3	7	4
Student -12	9	12	3
Student -13	6	10	4
Student -14	10	11	1
Student -15	8	8	0
Student -16	14	17	3
Student -17	6	7	1
Student -18	4	8	4
Student -19	9	13	4
Student -20	8	11	3
Mean	7.00	9.65	
Standard Deviation	2.90	3.22	
t = 2.7358	P value = 0.0094		

Table 4 shows that the mean value of the pre-test score of the experimental group is 7.00 whereas the mean value of the post-test score is 9.65. In other words, the difference is 2.65. Though there is difference in view of mean values, the application of t-test alone will show whether the difference is statistically significant or not. The P value has been calculated by using t-test and the P value is 0.0094. The difference between the pre-test score and post-test score is considered to be statistically significant at 0.05 levels.

As far as the experimental group is concerned, it can be said that there is significant difference between the pre-test and post-test performance of the students. The difference is statistically significant. The third hypothesis "Teaching grammar through language games has positive impact on learners' acquisition of grammar rules" framed for the study is proved right. In other words, teaching sessions using language games has a positive effect on the performance of the students in the post-test. Therefore the study concludes that teaching grammar through language games plays a significant role in the acquisition of grammar rules. It can

be suggested that teachers can use language games to motivate the students to participate actively in grammar classes.

Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected from the students of engineering through questionnaire confirms that grammatical knowledge is essential for them to communicate effectively without any fear of grammatical errors. It is also found that students are in favour of teaching grammar through language games. Besides, the pre-test and post-test analysis of the experimental study shows that language games have positive impact on learners' acquisition of grammar rules. It is inferred that language games can be used in classes to make grammar lessons more interesting and enjoyable experience to the students.

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