THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF GAME-BASED AND SIMULATION –BASED APPROACH TO IMPROVE SPEAKING SKILLS

Abdullaeva Nigora
Tashkent State Pedagogical University
named after Nizami

Abstract

In this article, it is highlighted that the division of games focused on a particular language skill is, naturally, based on the actual activities implemented. However, it is also natural that such games can also be categorized in some other way since they are based on some particular tools and rules for learners to follow.

Keys: drama, simulation, game based, cooperation and competition games

As it is clearly known that there are several approaches and methods in teaching English or foreign languages. Most experienced teachers use different approach to appeal their students attention and motivate them to speak the foreign language naturally. The main responsibility of foreign teachers is teaching the students how to speak naturally and fluently. The best result of hardworking teachers' efforts can be seen by students' speech or their knowledge and score in the final test.

Learners are exposed to auditory input so their task might be to order the likes of a song, provide missing words to a song lyrics or provide entire lines (or even blocks of text) to stories. Productive or speaking games, in turn, can be used as a way of reinforcing vocabulary covered previously. Such games are focused on oral production so learners can be engaged in games such as taboo or 'find someone who'. In the former learners need to describe a given word or an idea in order for another learner to guess it. In the latter game learners may walk around the classroom asking one another a number of questions in order to find a person who shows some specific features (a someone who has a pet, who does not like orange juice etc.). The specific type of game and the level to which learners come up with oral input depend on learners' age, proficiency level and speaking skills they have (Sugar 1998: 63-65). The teacher does not have to be in the role of supervisor of the game. He is just responsible for the running and function of the activity and he helps children when they are in troubles, he monitors their performance and provides help on the language side. One of the most important aims of games is to make children talk to each other.

Games help the children organized into different patterns of interaction to dispose of such habits and inhibitions as e.g. when children are shy or do not like to talk to their classmates or to other people. Children, as they are in the thick of the game, forget about their formal class behaviour and start to react directly to what their fellows are doing and saying (1981: 4, 5).

When children are playing a game, they need to use language to some purpose. The repetitiveness of patterns used in a game is a very important aspect, which leads to development and improvement of the skills and moreover the players want to improve the skills necessary for a game they enjoy.

Players need not necessarily communicate with one another during the game – at least not with words. They can mime, perform with hands, gestures, and use body movements and so on, which provides a lot of fun and unpredictability. The ideal combination is a game in which learners have to react, by using language, to some challenge which may be decided by the luck of drawing a card or throwing a die, for example. (Rixon, 1981: 3, 4)

As Julia Khan mentions in Brumfit's book, "games are activities that children naturally and universally engage in. There is a certain timelessness in the pleasure children find in games and in how the nature of the games they play changes as they develop, ranging through fantasy, ritual, competition and luck". (Brumfit; Moon; Tongue, 1991: 143)

Children naturally want to play games. The activity needs to be creative and exciting so that the pupils learn effectively. They must be actively involved in the game and feel the pleasure and need in order to succeed in learning.

When playing a game children have to interact with somebody. Either with a partner or with the whole team. The learner needs to use language in a social context in order to interact effectively, which leads to successful learning. "Using the language is the best way of learning to use it" (Brumfit; Moon; Tongue, 1991: 145).

In many types of games, the rules demand that children must produce a structure correctly, pronounce or spell the words correctly so that the players recognize the difference between the sounds. Simulation is a kind of presenting dialogue when children are pretending to be someone else, e.g. a doctor and a patient, parent and a child, or shop assistant and customer.

Sesnan concerns simulation and demonstrations as "simple examples of a more general educational principle which can be called *learning by doing"* (1997: 172). By this term the author does not mean only learning about something but that it is important to develop the practical skill of doing something. In general children learn the language best by using it and this can be achieved spontaneously by doing or performing some action and at the same time practicing the new subject matter.

One of the best ways to remember things is to use physical movements when learning new words or phrases (as said in the chapter on TPR, p22). That is why it is essential for the teacher to use instructions only in the target language and consequently perform them to children.

Simulation is a good way to combine guided practice with a kind of free activity. Pupils enjoy such activities much more than being forced into learning by heart or memorizing. Dialogues and role-plays that require physical movements or action work best with young children. With low primary learners it is good to use puppets or teddies that would ask children questions, so that they were encouraged to answer more freely.

Such simulated situations provide children a deeper understanding of their livers. By acting children practice their speaking abilities and develop self-confidence. Drama activities contribute to developing other skills as well as cooperation, making agreements or expressing themselves.

Myers further distinguishes between different roles of teacher. He/she can choose to take either high-status role, as for example the king that enables him/her to direct children and take control of the whole activity. On the other hand, the teacher can choose a low-status role, for example one of the seven

dwarfs of the Snow-white. In this case children feel equal and independent, as the teacher is one of them, which gives them confidence to speak out and take responsibility within the situation. Drama activities are one of the best ways to practice fluent speech and help children use language in a natural context.

Not only playing a story or acting in a drama is motivation and funny for children. They always need somebody to watch their performance. Usually the audience is the other part of the class who is not performing at the moment or other schoolmates.

Furthermore, children like watching drama. According to Sesnan "young audiences enjoy watching people fighting, shouting, and pushing each other around in a play, but this should only be a small part of drama. Good drama involves all the emotions. A good actor rarely shouts and is able to make the audience laugh and weep, feel angry, feel happy, or feel sad by good acting"(1997: 220).

There are plenty of topics that can be performed as a drama. I like performing stories with my primary children that we have read. Or I read a story slowly, so that children could understand and after reading they were supposed to perform the plot. They were allowed to use mother tongue while acting as long as the purpose by young children was to prove their listening comprehension, anyway older pupils had to speak only in the target language.

Other interesting topics are either the ones from real world (children v. parents; at the shop; at the doctor) or some historical events, stories involving animals or just convincing somebody to do something.

Sesnan (1997: 221) points out important rules in drama:
- An actor should never stand backside to the audience, because they might not hear him/her properly
-Two actors should not speak at one time
-There should not be more than 5 people at the stage at one time
-An actor may speak to the audience so that the other actors appear not to hear – this is called an aside
In the globalization age today, English assumes as a more and more important part as a means of international communication than ever. Therefore, in some recent years, the focus of teaching has been promoting oral skills in order to respond to the students' needs for effective communication.

In language teaching, language games have proved themselves not merely as "time filler activities" but as an important factor which can create more chances and interest to motivate students to speak. Nevertheless, language games have not successfully applied to speaking classes in many educational institutions.

Speaking is one of the basic language skills that have to do be mastered by English foreign learners due to its significant and its use for communication. There are many characteristics of a successful speaking activity which are introduced by Penny Ur as follows:

• Learners talk a lot: As much as possible of the period time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by learner talk.

• Participation is even: Classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants: all get a chance to speak and contributions are fairly evenly distributed.

- Motivation is high: Learners are eager to speak because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it, or because they want to contribute to achieving a task objective.

- Nowadays I am a student but I've already begun my teaching process to young learners. While teaching them I've across to some problems on developing their speaking even I've used some games during my classes. According to Penny Ur, there still exist some problems with speaking activities as follows:

- Inhibition: Unlike reading, writing and listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom: worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts.

- Low or uneven participation: Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard, and in a large group this means that each one will have only very little time talking.

- Mother-tongue use: In classes where all, or a number of, the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it: because it is easier, because it feels unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language, and because they feel less "exposed" if they are speaking their mother tongue.

- For being a good teacher I'll try to find solutions, sometimes I need to some advices from my experienced teachers.

The use of games in teaching English is not, however, appropriate at all times. Using various games can help students memorize vocabulary or grammar; it can eliminate the anxiety aroused from using a foreign language or uncertainty about the correctness of the output. As Demes da Cruz also states „While playing language games, students can be exposed to the target structures. However, this is done in a context of a game, they relax and forget that they are being watched. They often become so involved in the game that they stop feeling anxious about their mistakes. At the same time overuse of games may take away the time the students can use to be working individually, having the matter explained properly or simply working with the language seriously. It can also create the overall class atmosphere in such a way that it is not a real learning, making it more difficult to concentrate on studying for serious purposes, like exams. The last consequence of overuse of games in language teaching to be mentioned here is the fact that the students might get bored with all the play. The reason is that students, especially students of higher secondary schools or adults, usually do not like to be treated like little children. The teacher must place challenge before them too, they need to have the feeling of having accomplished something more difficult than a good game result. Having said the above, experience, however, confirms that abandoning games in the classes of the older group age would deprive the teaching-learning process of enjoyment, which enriches and motivates the students. To be complete, it is also necessary to mention the teachers need to enjoy their work, enjoy the classes and activities realized. "The moment we enter the classroom; we must act as people who are looking forward to whatever is coming. To fulfil that, games are of great help to keep the teaching work still enjoyable. Simply put the teacher must carefully consider how much and when it is appropriate to use games in the language teaching in order to be beneficial to the students and the whole teaching process.

According to Kayi [1] when utilizing game-like activities in the teaching process, it is necessary to realize that, despite many shared features, between the games and studying there is also a certain variance, as whereas play does not pursue strictly defined objectives, tuition is essentially target-orientated. While overcoming this tension, the didactic play must avoid two extremes: pursuance of the teaching aims must not superimpose the essence of play itself to such an extent that the pupil does not perceive the activity as a game; on the other hand, inexpedience and latitude of the game must not reach a degree when the actual aim of the teaching slips out. Further suppport comes from Zdybiewska (as cited in Uberman,2002), she believes that games can be a good way in practicing the target language that being learned by the children, since they are able to provide a model of language on what the learners will use in the real life. Related to that statement, Kim presents six advantages of using the language games in the classroom, which are: games are motivating and challenging. games are as a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class. games help the students to make and sustain the effort of learning. games provide language practice in the various and integrated language skills. games encourage students to interact and communicate to each other. games create a meaningful context for language that is being learned by the students. In line with Kim, Mei and Yu jing also [2] believe that through playinggames, students can learn English as the way the children learn and say their mother language without being aware they are studying; thus without stress, the students can learn a lot in learning the target language. While Wright [3] write that games can help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners who want to take part in the activities, must understand what others are saying or have written, and in order to do so, the students then must speak or write in expressing their own point of views or give information. Thus games are able to help the students use and practice the target language being learned in a relaxed way. Games are also highly motivating since they are amusing and interesting. Games also can be used in giving practice in all language skills and the use to practice many types of communication which is in line with the objectives of the teaching skill.

There are some studies conducted on the use of games in language learning. By using games, the students became more interested, actively involved and motivated in the learning activities. Games also helps the students in building a good relationship with their friends as well as increasing their achievement in learning English. While Nurisnaini found out that games and songs are effective strategies in improvi ng the students' participation in the classroom activities. Furthermore, Huyen and Nga [4] stated that games have been shown to have more advantages and effectiveness in learning vocabulary in various ways. First, games bring relaxation and fun for the students, thus help them to learn and retain new words more easily. Second, games usually involve friendly competition and they keep learners interested in the activities. These create the motivation for learners of English to get involved and participated actively in the learning activities. Third, vocabulary games bring real world context into the classroom and enhance students in using English language in a flexible and communiative way. There are many types of games the teacher may make use of and they are aimed to train different kinds of skills desired for students to be acquired.

Because in some my learners I noticed some difficulties which were faced by the students in speaking English such as fear of making mistakes, fear of being laughed by their friend as they have no idea about pronunciation and grammar that they use. Besides, they are also bored in learning English because the teaching —learning activities provided in a conventional way, for instance, the teacher asked the students to perform the text they memorized. Furthermore, they also cannot speak based on their willingness because what they want to speak is structured by the teacher, in other words they just repeat the word that has been produced. Afterward, those problems make students get lazy or less ability to speak. Therefore, for creating new atmosphere I began to use communicative games. Communicative games can be an alternative way to overcome students` difficulties in learning how to speak English. In fact, they can improve their speaking skills by playing some communicative games. Therefore, it can give positive impact towards students` motivation.

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