

The use of grammar games

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The advantages of using games. Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. W. R. Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms. He also says that games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language teaching programme. A similar opinion is expressed by Richard-Amato, who believes games to be fun but warns against overlooking their pedagogical value, particularly in foreign language teaching. There are many advantages of using games. "*Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely*" (Richard-Amato).

They are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy students more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (Hansen). They also enable learners to acquire new experiences within a foreign language which are not always possible during a typical lesson.

Games encourage, entertain, teach, and promote fluency. 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.

Choosing appropriate games. There are many factors to consider while discussing games, one of which is appropriacy. Teachers should be very careful about choosing games if they want to make them profitable for the learning process. If games are to bring desired results, they must correspond to either the student's level, or age, or to the material that is to be introduced or practiced. Not all games are appropriate for all students irrespective of their age. Different age groups require various topics, materials, and modes of games. For example, children benefit most from games which require moving around, imitating a model, competing between groups and the like. Furthermore, structural games that practise or reinforce a certain grammatical aspect of language have to relate

to students' abilities and prior knowledge. Games become difficult when the task or the topic is unsuitable or outside the student's experience.

Games also lend themselves well to revision exercises helping learners recall material in a pleasant, entertaining way. All authors referred to in this article agree that even if games resulted only in noise and entertained students, they are still worth paying attention to and implementing in the classroom since they motivate learners, promote communicative competence, and generate fluency.

1. Puzzle stories

|Grammar: *Simple present and simple past interrogative forms*. Level: *Beginners*. Time: *30 minutes*. Materials: *Puzzle story (to be written on the board)* /

Preparation: Ask a couple of students from an advanced class to come to your beginners group. Explain that they will have some interesting interpreting to do.

In class: **1.** Introduce the interpreters to your class and welcome them. **2.** Write this puzzle story on the board in English. Leave good spaces between the lines: *There were three people in the room. A man spoke. There was a short pause. The second man spoke. The woman jumped up and slapped the first man in the face.* **3.** Ask one of the beginners to come to the board and underline the words they know. Ask others to come and underline the ones they know. Tell the group the words none of them know. Ask one of the interpreters to write a translation into mother tongue. The translation should come under the respective line of English. **4.** Tell the students their task is to find out why the woman slapped the first man. They are to ask questions that you can answer 'yes' or 'no'. Tell them they can try and make questions directly in English, or they can call the interpreter and ask the questions in their mother tongue. The interpreter will whisper the English in their ear and they then ask you in English. **5.** Erase the mother tongue translation of the story from the board. **6.** One of the interpreters moves round the room interpreting questions while the other stays at the board and writes up the questions in both English and mother

tongue. **7.** You should aim to let the class ask about 15-25 questions, more will overload them linguistically. To speed the process up you should give them clues. **8.** Finally, have the students copy all the questions written on the board into their books. You now have a presentation of the main interrogative forms of the simple present and past. **9.** After the lesson go through any problems the interpreters had-offer them plenty of parallel translation: *The solution. The second man was an interpreter. Further material.*

Do you know the one about the seven-year-old who went to the baker's? His Mum had told him to get three loaves. He went in, bought two and came home. He put them on the kitchen table. He ran back to the baker's and bought a third. He rushed in and put the third one on the kitchen table. The question: Why? Solution: he had a speech defect and couldn't say 'th'.

2. Umbrella

|Grammar: *Modals and present simple*. Level: *Elementary to intermediate*.
Time: *30-40 minutes*. Materials: *One large sheet of paper per student*.

In class:**1.** Ask a student to draw a picture on the board of a person holding an umbrella. The umbrella looks like this. **2.** Explain to the class that this 'tulip-like' umbrella design is a new, experimental one. **3.** Ask the students to work in small groups and brainstorm all the advantages and disadvantages of a new design. Ask them to use these sentence stems:

It/you can/can't...

It/you will/won't...

It/you + present simple...

It/you may/may not...

4. For example: *'It is easy to control in a high wind', 'You can see where you're going with this umbrella'*. **5.** Give the students large sheets of paper and ask them to list the advantages and disadvantages in two columns. **6.** Ask the students to move around the room and read each other's papers. Individually they mark each idea as 'good', 'bad' or 'intriguing'. **7.** Ask the student how many advantages they came up with and how many disadvantages. Ask the students to divide up into three groups according to which statement applies to them: *I thought mainly of advantages. I thought of some of both. I thought*

mainly of disadvantages. **8.** Ask the three groups to come up with five to ten adjectives to describe their group state of mind and put these up on the board. **9.** Round off the exercise by telling the class that when de Bono asked different groups of people to do this kind of exercise, it turned out that primary school children mostly saw advantages, business people had plenty of both while groups of teachers were the most negative.

Note: Advantages the students offered:

<i>In a hot country you can collect rain water.</i>	<i>It'll take less floor space to dry.</i>
<i>It won't drip round the edges.</i>	<i>This umbrella makes people communicate. They can see each other.</i>
<i>You can use it for carrying shopping.</i>	<i>You can paint this umbrella to look like a flower.</i>
<i>It's not dangerous in a crowd.</i>	<i>You'll get a free supply of ice if it hails.</i>
<i>It's an optimistic umbrella.</i>	
<i>It's easy to hold if two people are walking together.</i>	
<i>With this umbrella you'll look special.</i>	

3. Picture the past

|Grammar: Past simple, past perfect, future in the past. Level: *Lower intermediate*. Time: 20-40 minutes. Materials: None. |

Class:**1.** Ask three students to come out and help you demonstrate the exercise. Draw a picture on the board of something interesting you have done. Do not speak about it. Student A then writes a past simple sentence about it. Student B write about what had already happened before the picture action and student C about something that was going to happen, using the appropriate grammar.

I got up at eight a.m. \ I've just got off the bus. \ I'm going to work today.

2. Put the students in fours. Each draws a picture of a real past action of theirs. They pass their picture silently to a neighbor in the foursome who adds a 'past tense' sentence. Pass the picture again and each adds a 'past perfect' sentence.

They pass again and each adds a 'was going to' sentence. All this is done in silence with you going round helping and correcting.

4. Presentation. Listening to time

|Grammar: Time phrases. Level: *Upper intermediate to very advanced*. Time: 40-50 minutes. Materials: None.|

Preparation: Invite a native speaker to your class, preferably not a language teacher as they sometimes distort their speech. Ask the person to speak about a topic that has them move through time. This could be his country history. The talk should last around twenty minutes. Explain to the speaker that the students will be paying close attention not only to the content but to the language form, too.

In class: **1.** Before the speaker arrives, explain to the students that they are to jot down all the words and phrases they hear that express time. They don't need to note all the words! **2.** Welcome the speaker and introduce the topic. **3.** The speaker takes the floor for fifteen to twenty minutes and you join the students in taking language notes. If there are questions from the students, make sure people continue to take notes during the questioning. **4.** Put the students in threes to compare their time-phrase notes. Suggest the speaker joins one of the groups. Some natives are delighted to look in a 'speech mirror'. **5.** Share your own notes with the class. Round off the lesson by picking out other useful and normal bits of language the speaker used that are not yet part of your student's idiolects.

Example: *One speaker mentioned above produced these time words: only about ten years/there was a gap of nine years/ at roughly the same time/over the next few hundred years/from 1910 until the present day/it's been way back/ within eighteen month there will be/until three years ago/when I was back in September.*

Variations: Choose the speaker who is about to go off on an important trip. In speaking about this, some of the verbs used will be in a variety of forms used to talk about the future. Invite someone to speak about the life and habits of someone significant to them, but two lives separately from them, say a grandparent. This topic is likely to evoke a rich mixture of present simple, present continuous, will be used to describe habitual events, 'll be -ing etc.

When to use games. Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet, as Lee observes, "*a game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher and class have nothing better to do*". Games ought to be at the heart of teaching foreign languages. Rixon suggests that games to be used at all stages of the lesson provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. At different stages of the lesson, the teacher's aims connected with a game may vary:

1. Presentation. Provide a good model making its meaning clear;
2. Controlled practise. Elicit good imitation of new language and appropriate responses;
3. Communicative practice. Give students a chance to use the language.

To invite the learners to pick specific grammar features out of a stream of live speech is a powerful form of grammar presentation. In this technique the students 'present' the grammar to themselves. They go through a process of realization which is lot stronger than what often happens in their minds during the type of 'grammar presentation' required of trainees on many teacher training courses. During the realization process, they are usually not asleep.

Reference:

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