

Teaching English Grammar Through Games

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Abstract: This paper sought to review the literature on teaching English grammar encompassing an overview of grammar definitions and teaching grammar approaches, as well as definitions of games, classifications of games, the influence of using games on the language learners' performance. Prior researches on teaching English grammar through games have also been examined.

Key words: English grammar; grammar teaching approach; game; technology

1. GRAMMAR

1.1 Definitions of grammar

Grammar is defined by Ur (1991: 4) as “the way language manipulates and combines words (or bits of words) in order to form longer units of meaning.”

This definition is quite close to the common understanding of what grammar is. The main difference is that it tells us how the rules of language actually work – they arrange and shape words. Nevertheless, knowing what these rules do is not a very motivating factor alone.

Crystal (2004) 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. Additionally, it can help everyone, not only teachers of English, but teachers of anything for all teaching grammar is ultimately a matter of getting to grips with meaning.”

Maugham (1938) adds,

“It is necessary to know grammar, and it is better to write grammatically than not, but it is well to remember that grammar is common speech formulated. Usage is the only test.”

As it can be seen from the above definitions, grammar is not an unimportant set of rules that can be ignored without consequences. It is a very complex phenomenon and even though learners may find it a difficult thing to master, the time devoted to that is certainly not wasted. Making students realize it,

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however, is only the first step in teaching grammar, and the following activities can take many different forms, based on a selected approach and method.

1.2 Overview of grammar teaching approaches

There are some milestones which chart the journey in the development of teaching English methodology through recent history in which a language item is grammar taught in various approaches which have their own positive and negative aspects. Yet, it is necessary to have a review of all the approaches in order that we can understand more clearly about the development and the history of grammar teaching and each approach's aspects as well.

1.2.1 The Grammar -Translation Method

The Grammar Translation Method is one of the most traditional methods, dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which offered little beyond an insight into the grammatical rules attending the process of translating from the second to the native language.

Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979: 3) feature the position of grammar in a lesson of the Grammar Translation Method as follows:

- Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
- Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words.
- Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.
- Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.

Or

“In the Grammar Translation Method, grammar is emphasized and taught deductively (Larsen -Freeman, 1986: 10-14). In addition, as Brown (2000: 15-16), long and detailed explanations of the intricacies of grammatical rules and forms are supplied for students to memorize and apply the syntactic rules to other examples.” (cited in Lu, 2009: 23)

We can conclude that in the method, grammar stays an important position. However, its contribution to language learning has been limited, since it has shifted the focus from the real language to a "dissected body" of nouns, adjectives, and prepositions, failing to generate the communicativeness in grammar lessons. Although the method is still a standard method for a long time, it is necessary to find a new method for an innovation in language teaching.

1.2.2 The Direct Method

As with the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, sometimes called the Natural Method is not new. The Direct Method, an answer to the dissatisfaction with the older Grammar Translation Method, teaches students grammar and vocabulary through direct translations and thus focuses on the written language.

Its principles have been applied by the language teachers for many years. Since the Grammar –translation Method is not effective in preparing learners to use the languages communicatively, the Direct Method became popular. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 23)

The principles of the Direct Method were as follows:

- Classroom instruction was conducted in the target language
- There was an inductive approach to grammar

- Only everyday vocabulary was taught
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through pictures and objects, while abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas

We can see that in the Direct Method,

“Grammar is not of as importance as in Grammar_ Translation Method. (Larsen -Freeman, 1986: 24-26, 43-46), grammar is taught by inductive analogy from the examples presented orally in the target language. Little of no analysis of grammatical rules is given. Structural patterns are given through the repetition drills and sequenced by means of contrastive analysis and taught one at one time. (Brown, 2001: 45, 74-75) (cited in Lu, 2009: 23)

The Direct Method enjoyed great popularity at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth but it was difficult to use, mainly because of the constraints of budget, time, and classroom size. Yet, after a period of decline, this method has been revived, leading to the emergence of another method, the Audio-lingual Method.

1.2.3 The Audio-lingual Method

The Audio-Lingual Method was developed in the 1940s and dominated foreign language teaching in the 1950s and 1960s in an attempt to address some of the perceived weaknesses of the Direct Method.

The Audio-lingual Method, like the Direct Method, is also an oral-based approach. However, the method drills learners in the use of grammatical sentence patterns. It was also based on linguistic and psychological theory and one of its main premises was the scientific descriptive analysis of a wide assortment of languages (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 35). According to Skinner (1957),

“In the Audio-Lingual Method, grammar is most important for the student; the teacher drills grammar, the student must repeat grammar patterns after the teacher.”

The method fell short of promoting communicative ability as it paid undue attention to memorization and drilling, while downgrading the role of context and world knowledge in language learning in general and in grammar in particular. After all, it was discovered that language was not acquired through a process of habit formation and errors were not necessarily bad or pernicious. Due to weaknesses in performance, and more importantly because of Noam Chomsky's theoretical attack on language learning as a set of habits, Audio-Lingual Method is rarely the primary method of instruction today.

1.2.4 Community Language Learning (CLL)

CLL is one of the so-called ‘designer’ methods which arose in the flurry of methodological experimentation in the 1970’s (along with The Silent Way, Suggestopedia, TPR, etc).

“In Community Language Learning (CLL), grammar is not focused. Grammatical patterns are perceived in the teacher’s transcription of the students’ conversations and examined in their native language with the teacher’s help. (Larsen -Freeman, 1986: 99-104)” (cited in Lu, 2008: 23)

The CLL approach seems useful for listening, speaking and also useful for adult learners. In addition, it is found that the CLL approach is effective for students whose anxiety is often high because English is far different from their mother tongue. Therefore, the CLL approach should be especially effective in cases where students' native language is a non cognate language of the target language.

1.2.5 Total Physical Response (TPR)

TPR (Total Physical Response), developed by Dr. James Asher, is a method of teaching language using physical movement to react to verbal input in order to reduce student inhibitions and lower their affective filter. It allows students to react to language without thinking too much, facilitates long term retention, and reduces student anxiety and stress.

TPR reflects a grammar-based view of language. Asher states,

“...most of the grammatical structure of the target language and hundreds of vocabulary items can be learnt from the skillful use of the imperative by the instructor”. (Asher, 1977: 4)

TPR makes students use grammar in their daily life, also helps them accomplish to be successful. It helps reduce students' stress, yet students gain successful grammar acquisition. However, it is a type of method for only beginners (children) because students learn the language with the objects, pictures and kits and they are treated as if they don't have prior knowledge. This method helps students internalize grammar in a perfect way and uses psychomotor systems to teach grammatical points.

1.2.6 Communicative language Teaching (CLT)

Developed in the 1970s, and in critical reaction to the formal and boring types of exercises used under the Audio-lingual Method ('drill-and-kill' exercises), Communicative language teaching (CLT), also referred to as "communicative approach, is an approach that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language.

“In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), grammar is taught as a means to help learners convey their intended meaning appropriately. The teaching of grammar can be managed either deductively or inductively but focuses on meanings and functions of forms in situational context and the roles of the interlocutors. (Larsen- Freeman, 1986: 132-133) The overt presentation and discussion of grammatical rules are less paid attention to. (Brown, 2000: 266-267)” (cited in Lu, 2009: 24)

It can be concluded that Grammar can be taught inductively or deductively in Communicative Language Teaching. It is fact that some learners learn better by being given the context and then are presented with the grammar rules afterwards while others need the rule in order to understand the rationale for the new grammatical structure. Besides, it depends on the kinds of grammatical points, which help teachers decide the ways of presenting grammar effectively.

In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the teacher spends less time on the structures of the language and more time encouraging the learners to use the language. It is frequent that communication activities such as games and puzzles which are often carried out in pairs or group are encouraged in teaching with no much correction or intervention during the activity.

From all the above we can see that through the history of grammar teaching, the ways teachers have gone about the teaching of foreign languages have seen enormous changes over the past centuries. Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses, and it provides a 'recipe' for various practical classroom ideas and procedures; a good method that stems from a good theory can produce a number of ideas. Depending on the content and the purpose of the lesson, teachers choose and combine many methods in a lesson as long as these methods are suitable and affective in their grammar teaching.

1.3 The application of technology in teaching and learning Grammar

Nowadays, the integration of technology into the foreign language teaching becomes popular. As more and more technological advances with their resources become available, it is necessary that teachers become aware of how those advances might be used to enhance foreign language teaching and learning.

As Chapelle (2001: 1) states,

“As we enter the 21st century, everyday language use is so tied to technology that learning language through technology has become a fact of life with important implications for all applied linguists, particularly for those concerned with facets of second language acquisition.”

A lot of teachers may wonder what we need technology for or why the familiar background and chalk should be placed by an LCD screen and a mouse or a stick simply because

(a) what you can do technologically can not be done in traditional setting classroom with only chalk and board;

(b) technology, from the functional viewpoint, opens a number of enhancements supporting educational processes.

1.3.1 The advantages of instructional technology in language teaching and learning

A lot of researchers have showed the advantages of technology in language teaching and learning.

Roblyer and Edwards (2000: 12) states,

“Technology-based methods have successfully promoted several kinds of motivational strategies that can be used individually or in combination.”

The kind of motivational strategies mentioned may be the visual and interactive features as suggested by Pask-McCartney (1989),

“The visual and interactive features of many technology resources seem to have focus students’ attention and encourage them to spend more time on learning tasks.”

However, a lot of students may be fear of making mistakes and it keeps them away from participating classroom activities. Instructional technology including computers and other media can help dealing with this problem.

Roblyer and Edwards (2000: 84) states,

“Computer-based practice may motivate students to do the practice they need. Computers don’t get patient or give disgusted look when students give wrong answers”

“...unlike feedback from an instructor or tutor, the feedback from computers can remain unbiased, accurate and non-judgmental, irrespective of students characteristics or the nature of the student response” (Mason & Bruning, cited in Su (2005).

Technology not only facilitates the teachers’ tasks and saves their time and effort but also gives immediate, accurate and individual feedback which interests students and benefits students who are not confident doing their tasks in front of the class.

According to Fisher (1997), Mintz (1993), Plomp and Voogt (1995) (cited in Kara and Yesilyult (2007)), a computer enables repeated trials of an experiment with considerable ease in a limited time, provides immediate feedback, allows simultaneous observation on graphical representation, and offers a flexible environment that enables students to proceed with their own plans.

On commenting the role of technology in education, particularly that of computer, Nelson, Ward, Desch & Kaplow (1976: 28) assert that,

“The tutorial to teach German reading uses the computer as a source of information to be consulted by the students as needed;uses a model of structure of the language to be taught to enable the program to determine whether a response is correct and to provide the students with useful error analysis if it is not. (cited in Chapelle, 2001)

Together with computer, technology with the present of the Internet also provides teachers and learners with a tremendous resource in which the materials required can be retrieved and with some simple manipulations as Warschauer (1996) puts it,

“using the World Wide Web (WWW), students can search through millions of files around the world within minutes to locate and access authentic materials exactly tailored to their own personal interests.”

Not only students, but also teachers can benefit much from the Internet because

“Media materials can lend authenticity to the classroom situation, reinforcing for students the direct relation between the language classroom and the outside world.” (Brinton, 2001: 461)

1.3.2 The application of technology in teaching and learning grammar

Grammar is usually taught by using traditional method before the availability of computer in the classroom teaching. Grammar lesson seems complex to students, and teaching grammar is challenging. Teachers always rely on blackboard and poster as their teaching aids.

As Hegelheimer & Fisher (2006) says,

“Technology can be instrumental in creating an innovative online grammar resource aimed at raising learner awareness of troublesome grammatical features.”

According to Barr (2006),

“Computer enhanced grammar teaching and learning, using computer technology to teach grammar to first- year students achieved the success.”

Initially, he has some concerns about how students would react to the technology like if the students would be enthused by grammar classes or if technology would help in grammar teaching. But after a semester, he got positive feedback in which 70% of the respondents felt technology made positive contribution to learning grammar, and students wanted more exercises, especially those available online. Further, in contributing to motivational value, computer technology made students appreciate why they studied the areas they did as the diagnostics test revealed their weaknesses.

On finding the effectiveness of computer in teaching and learning grammar, Mohamad and Amin (2009) conclude,

“Teaching grammar by using computer is more effective than teaching grammar by using traditional method. The finding agreed with the research of Nutta’s (1998) on the post secondary students enrolled in an intensive ESL program in the effectiveness of using computer to teach grammar by using computer. There was a significant difference in the scores of test between the computer based group and the traditional based group. The group which was taught by using computer scored better in the open ended question category in immediate posttest and delayed posttest compared to the group which had teacher directed grammar teaching.”

With the finding on the effectiveness of computer in grammar teaching, computer with all the multimedia can be effectively used for teaching of grammar. Graphic images, clear photos, sounds and videos can be used to help teachers in grammar teaching. Grammar lessons will become more effective, motivating and interesting.

Mohamad and Amin (2009) also emphasize,

“Teachers can always creatively design the content of the courseware in making teaching and learning more meaningful. Students can use courseware to study grammar and with the guidance from a skilled teacher, grammar can be learned effectively and interestingly. The

courseware to teach grammar can be strengthened with other multimedia elements like video and animations and these will help students to understand complex concept in grammar.”

In short, the use of technology is fast developing in language teaching and learning. Language educationists have been integrating the use of technology, most particularly computer in teaching. Educational software is creatively developed to help teaching and learning of English. However, it is best to remember that computer is not a substitution for teachers but rather it is an enabler to help both teachers and students have more opportunities to experience various innovative methods in teaching and learning.

2. THEORIES OF GAMES

2.1 Definitions of game

According to Haldfield (1999):

“A game is an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun... Games should be regarded as an integral part of the language syllabus, not as an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of the term.”

This definition highly evaluates the importance of games in teaching. It adds to teachers’ techniques in teaching that games serve not only as an ‘amusing activity’, but as a technique to carry out tasks to learners amusingly as well.

Haldfield (1999) adds:

“Games can be used at all stages of the progression from controlled to free practice, serving at one end of the range as a memory aid and repetition drill, at the other as a chance to use the language freely and as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. They can also serve as a diagnostic tool for teacher, who can note areas of difficulty and take appropriate remedial action.”

Haldfield further emphasizes the effective use of games. Students are always lazy to do the tasks. Therefore, games are used suitably in the way in which learners are led to participate in the games so that learners can have a chance to practice or use the new language items they have just learnt eagerly and willingly instead of forcing them to do the tasks unwillingly. It is more effective in a way that students can play and learn at the same time.

Lee (1991: 3) defines:

“Games in the strict sense, which have a definite beginning and end, are governed by rules...”

Similarly, Haldfield (1990) defines games as "an activity with rules, a goal and an element of fun."

Games are not carried in chaos. Games have the rules, and for it is necessary players to digest these rules before the start so that they can play the games smoothly without committing them.

According to Greenall (1990: 6),

“The term ‘game’ is used whenever there is an element of competition between individual students or teams in a language activity.”

When appears ‘an element of competition’, all above rules are most needed. Besides, games are, in this case, emphasized to encourage students’ solidarity in teamwork in which they have to try their best to do the tasks or maybe to code any requirements given in the games for their team spirit.

Therefore, games comprise many factors such as rules, competition, relaxation, and learning. The main focus of using game in class is not only to help students to learn more effectively but also to have fun.

However, to use games in classrooms, it is equally important that before playing, the rules of the games are clearly explained and well understood by the students. There should be only a few, well-explained rules. Demonstrations also can be very helpful because it can help students understand the game and help them follow the rules.

In a nutshell, as mentioned by Caillois (1957)

“A game is an activity that must have the following characteristics:

- *fun*: the activity is chosen for its light-hearted character
- *separate*: it is circumscribed in time and place
- *uncertain*: the outcome of the activity is unforeseeable
- *non-productive*: participation is not productive
- *governed by rules*: the activity has rules that are different from everyday life
- *fictitious*: it is accompanied by the awareness of a different reality”

There are many kinds of games designed for different levels as well as topics, so that students with different language proficiency levels can enjoy and gain the best results from them.

2.2 Classifications of games

Classifying games into categories can be difficult because categories often overlap. Hadfield (1999) explains two ways of classifying language games. First, language games are divided into two types: linguistic games and communicative games.

- Linguistic games focus on accuracy, such as supplying the correct antonym.
- Communicative games focus on successful exchange of information and ideas, such as two people identifying the differences between their two pictures which are similar to one another but not exactly alike. Correct language usage, though still important, is secondary to achieving the communicative goal.

Second, Hadfield (ibid.) classifies language games into many more categories. Together with the classification of games as linguistic games or communicative games, some games will contain elements of more than one type.

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. Information gap games can involve a one-way information gap, such as the drawing game just described, or a two-way information gap, in which each person has unique information.

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. This is also known as the Pelmanism principle, after Christopher Louis Pelman, a British psychologist of the first half of the 20th century.

Labeling 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. Similar are exchanging and collecting games. Many card games fall into this category, such as the children's card game Go Fish.³

Board games. Scrabble⁴ is one of the most popular board games that specifically highlights language.

Roleplay games. The terms role play, drama, and simulation are sometimes used interchangeably but can be differentiated (Kodotchigova, 2002). Role play can involve students playing roles that they do not play in real life, such as doctor, 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.

Another distinction among games is that between competitive games and cooperative ones (Jacobs, in preparation). Research suggests that learning, as well as affective variables, are enhanced by a cooperative environment (Johnson, Johnson & Stanne; Slavin, 1995). Millis (2005) outlines a number of advantages of cooperative games, such as appropriate anxiety levels and more constructive feedback.

According to Lee (2000) (cited in Pham, 2007), games have been classified into ten kinds:

- Structure games which provide experience of the use of particular patterns of syntax in communication
- Vocabulary games in which the learners' attention is focused mainly on words
- Spelling games
- Pronunciation games
- Number games
- Listen-and-do games
- Games and writing
- Miming and role play
- Discussion games

Another classification of games by McCallum (1980) consists of seven kinds:

- Structure games
- Vocabulary games
- Number games
- Spelling games
- Conversation games
- Writing games
- Role play and dramatics

It is shown that the classifications of games from the above linguists are common in a way that each kind of games focuses on a language item or a skill for the purpose and the content of the lesson. Therefore, teachers should be careful of choosing the most suitable game for each lesson so that learners and teachers can benefit the most from these games.

2.3 The advantages of using games in language teaching and learning

According to Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984),

³ Game "Go Fish" at <http://www.pagat.com/quartet/gofish.htmls>.

⁴ Game "Scrabble" at http://www.hasbro.com/scrabble/en_US/scrabbleGame.cfm

“Language learning is hard work. Effort is required at every moment and be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.”

“Games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful.

A little different, according to Richard-Amato (1996: 10), even though games are often associated with fun, we should not lose sight of their pedagogical values, particularly in foreign language teaching and learning. Games are effective as they create motivation, lower students' stress, and give language learners the opportunity for real communication. Yet, there has been much prejudice that games are just for fun, not for educational purposes.

Conversely, Kim (1995: 23) disagrees with the above prejudice. He says that there is a common perception that all learning should be serious and solemn in nature and that if one is having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then it is not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games.

Though different in the viewpoints, the linguists want to emphasize the ultimate aim of using games in teaching is that teachers want a better lesson in which their students benefit much. Some of the common advantages of using games in language teaching and learning language are recapitulated as follows:

2.3.1 Games motivate learners

Harmer (1998: 3) asserts that:

“Motivation is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action....The motivation students bring to class is the biggest factor affecting their success.”

Finding an effective way to motivate learners is always the interest of teachers, researchers and linguists. As Hansen (1994: 118) states,

“Games are highly motivating and entertaining, and they can give shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings.”

Games are highly motivating since they are amusing, interesting and at the same time challenging. The activities in a game get all the students to move around, activate their mental capacities and stimulate neural networks, thus motivating learners in learning and retention. At that time, students who are shy also attend the activities with fun, forgetting their shyness and feeling of fear.

Further, games add interest to what students might not find interesting. Sustaining interest can mean sustaining effort. (Thiagarajan, 1998; Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2005)

Let's take the grammar lesson which is considered as a boring one in a traditional way as a typical example. If the teacher just follows the tasks given in the textbook, students have to do the tasks in writing and reading, then the teacher herself will lead a grammar lesson to a boring, hard-digesting experience to their students and surely, do not meet the need for a more interesting and effective grammar class. At that time, game is the most useful. Games employ meaningful and useful language in real contexts. They can be used to give practice in all language skills and grammar points in this case, and be used to practice many types of communication. If these games are good then learners will be learning while they are playing.

Avedon & Sutton-Smith (1971: 28- 29) believes,

“The main reason why games are considered effective learning aids is that they spur motivation and students get very absorbed in the competitive aspects of the games; moreover, they try harder at games than in other courses.”

It can be clearly seen that games can capture students' attention and participation. Thus, they can motivate students to want to learn more. Moreover, they can transform a boring class into a challenging one.

As Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984) hold,

“Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part and in order to do so 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. Thanks to games, shy language learners will have more chances to speak and show their feeling and opinions in English as much as they can.”

2.3.2 Games promote learners' interaction

Interaction comprises the nature of classroom pedagogy and classroom behavior. Pair or group work is one of the main ways to promote interaction.

As Jacobs & Kline Liu (1996) express, many games can be played in pairs or in small groups, thereby providing a venue for students to develop their skills in working with others such as the skill of disagreeing politely and the skill of asking for help.

In most games, learners have to play in groups in which everyone has a turn, encouraging everyone to take a turn, rather than letting others do all the talking and other actions, and discouraging one or two people from shutting out others.

Naturally when playing games, students are trying to win or to beat other teams for themselves or on the behalf of their team. They are so competitive while playing since they want to have a turn to play, to score points and to win. In the class, learners will definitely participate in the activities. Therefore, in groups or in pairs, they are more willing to ask questions, communicate and discuss with their partners and think creatively about how to use English to achieve the goal. The competition in the games gives students a natural opportunity to work together and communicate in English with each other a lot.

In the same way, on mentioning competitive games, Rinvoluci and Davis (1995) have asserted:

“competitive activities that hit pairs against pairs and threes against threes are excellent for fostering collaboration and mutual help within each team.”

Therefore, in this kind of games, learners interact a lot with one another.

2.3.3 Games improve learners' language acquisition

Thanks to the motivation and interaction created by games, students can acquire their lessons better and more interestedly than other ways (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971).

Games can stimulate and encourage students to participate in the activity since naturally they want to beat the other teams... Apart from having fun, students learn at the same time. They acquire new language. Students begin to realize that they have to use the language if they want others to understand what they are saying (Schultz & Fisher, 1988).

Furthermore, Richard-Amato (1988: 147) emphasize,

“Games can lower anxiety, thus making the acquisition of input more likely.”

It is clear that in the easy, relaxed atmosphere which is created by using games, students remember things faster and better (Wierus, 1994: 218).

According to Duong (2008), 90% of his students confided that they could remember new words faster and better due to the relaxed atmosphere created by playing games. This is doubly reinforced by the same sentiment of Nguyen and Khuat (2003):

“Students tend to learn better, when it is applied in a relaxed environment like playing games. In fact it has been proved that an interested and involved class, learning through several fun-filled English language games takes in 100% of the lesson and retains 80% of it.

The meaning of the language students listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced in a game and, therefore, then they will better remember the language they learnt.

2.3.4 Games increase learners’ achievement

As far as we know, games can involve all the basic language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a number of skills are often involved in the same game (Lee, 1995).

Further support comes from Zdybiewska(1994: 6): “...games are a good way of practicing language, for they provide a model of what learners will use the language for in real life in the future exercises that practice and utilize the new language have been completed, games can then be introduced as yet another means for enabling greater comprehension.”

As strongly emphasized above, games can motivate learners, promote learners’ interaction, and improve learners’ acquisition. As a result, games can increase learners’ achievement, which means that learners’ test scores, ability of communication, some skills, knowledge of vocabulary, or other language skills can improve.

Riedel (2008) emphasizes the advantage of games in improving learners’ achievement,

“We are teaching a new generation of students, which requires unconventional teaching strategies be put into practice in the classroom. And when schools use the games, the student benefits speak for themselves--a greater desire to learn and higher test scores.”

In brief, games prove to be a useful tool employed regularly in language teaching. Games not only offer learners a highly motivating, relaxing class, but most importantly meaningful practice to all language skills. Consequently, games can motivate learners, promote learners’ interaction, improve their acquisition and increase their achievement.

3. PRIOR RESEARCHES ON TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR THROUGH GAMES

So far, there have been some studies on the use of games in grammar teaching in Vietnam context.

Nguyen (2005: 78) in “How to teach Grammar communicatively” which was carried out at Nong Lam university with the involvement of 100 students and 10 teachers, suggested ways to present and practice new grammatical rules communicatively for students learning and enjoying at the same time. The methodology he carried out included games that played an important part in teaching grammar communicatively. Also emphasized in the results, “games are as “vital part” of a teacher’s equipment because they provide not only practice but also an amusing and challenging recipe from other classroom activities.

Luong (2009) studied the application of games in grammar review lessons for sixth graders. The study consisted of a survey with the involvement of 8 teachers and 225 students from three high schools and an experimental project with 82 students within 3 months. The results showed a dramatic improvement of students’ ability in using grammatical knowledge in written tests and oral performance as well.

Nguyen (2010) in “Teaching and learning Grammar through games in the tenth grade at Hung Vuong high school” indicated the necessity of games for easing the difficulties, exciting the atmosphere in teaching and learning Grammar. The results emphasized that for the teachers who just follow the tasks given in the textbook and do not create any games activities lead a grammar lesson to a boring,

hard-digesting experience to their students and surely, do not meet the need for more interesting and effective grammar classes.

Though different in the fields studied, all the researches above aimed at showing difficulties and suggesting solutions for teaching and learning grammar to Vietnamese learners. One of the best solutions is through games which meet the purpose of creating a relaxing and motivating atmosphere for most learners. However, the pedagogical implications suggested in the studies above are just about games carried out in traditional way in which teachers use handouts, pictures without the help of technology. So far, no attention has been paid to the use of games in electronic lessons as a means to motivate and immerse learners in the grammar lessons. In addition, the researchers did not emphasize the necessity in carefully choosing games which are suitable for the content of the lesson and students' level and ages as well.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In a nutshell, this paper has presented a review and analysis of the literature on teaching English grammar encompassing an overview of grammar definitions and teaching grammar approaches, as well as definitions of games, classifications of games, the influence of using games on the language learners' performance. Prior researches on teaching English grammar through games have been included as well.

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