

Can Grammar Be Fun? Entertaining Ways of Teaching Grammar

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Abstract. The aim of this paper is to offer some new perspectives on the teaching and learning of grammar by using entertainment in our classes. Fun in an educational environment – a grammar lesson – can be generated by: games, films, songs, jokes and even poems. The advantages of making grammar a ‘game’ and some practical points for teachers are the main focus of our paper.

Keywords: Grammar, Games, Creative, Learners, Entertainment.

1. Introduction

The very mention of the word strikes fear into the heart of the staunchest language learner. Many English teachers also feel the pit of their stomach churn at the thought of preparing and giving a grammar lesson. But what are we to do? If lexis and vocabulary are the building blocks of language, then certainly grammar is the structure that holds them together. Teaching and learning it are therefore inescapable. The only thing to do then is to make it as interesting, pleasant or at least as painless as possible.

2. Where is the Fun in Grammar Learning?

The worst way to learn anything is to just keep on relentlessly working your way through a text book, hour after hour. Even the most motivated people struggle to maintain their enthusiasm. One of the key things to remember about how to learn English grammar is to make sure you find some ways that let you have fun and be creative. Yes, believe it or not, it is grammatically correct to use the words grammar, creativity and fun in the same sentence.

Fun in an educational environment – a grammar lesson – can be generated by: games, films, songs, jokes and even poems.

3. Games

Most of us do not have very pleasant memories of grammar classes during our schooldays. Except for the few gifted grammar “Whiz Kids” who reveled in grammar, the average students generally used to dread, if not hate grammar.

Teaching English grammar can be hard going – for the teacher and the students. It doesn’t have to be difficult or painful, however. You can teach English grammar using fun learning games and before you know it your students will be more than willing. How does it work? You will ask. Well, there has been a movement away from the traditional methods of teaching English grammar through writing, rewriting and worksheets to using a more active, communicative and enjoyable approach through games. Grammar Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest in work. Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which 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 too must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information about something.

Grammar is perhaps so serious and central in learning another language that all ways should be searched for which will focus student energy on the task of mastering and internalizing it. One way of focusing this energy is through the release offered by games. [1] Games have the advantage of allowing the students to practise vocabulary and grammar structures extensively. They can do this because students are often more motivated to play games than they are to do desk work. Teenagers are delighted to be asked to do something

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that feels like an out-of-class activity and in which they control what is going on in the classroom – they become the subjects, while for a lot of the hours they spend in school they are the objects of teaching. [1] The point is that the fun generates energy for the achievement of a serious goal.

4. Advantages of Making Grammar a ‘Game’

There are several advantages of making grammar a ‘game’ for learners:

- Aydan Ersoz, author of *Six Games for the ESL/EFL Classroom*, claims that learning a language requires constant effort and that can be tiring. Ersoz says games can counter this because games that are amusing and challenging are highly motivating. [1] This is true of learners at all levels. Grammar exercises, though useful, may become monotonous and mechanical. However, when grammar is presented through games, learners become actively involved. According to Saricoban and Metin, the main reason to use games is that ‘the use of such activities both increases the cooperation and competition in the classroom.’ [3] One can use games to add excitement through competition or games which create bonding among students and teacher. The spirit of competition makes them participate enthusiastically. In fact, they master language structures, without being aware of the fact they are doing so. As modern language experts say, language is best learnt when the focus is not on language, but on meaning.
- Games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. While playing the game it is necessary for learners to listen to and understand what others say and also speak. In other words, games provide meaningful practice in real life contexts. By making the language convey information and opinion, games provide the key feature of ‘drill’ with the opportunity to understand the working of language as living communication. The ‘quality’ of the practice provided by these games is much richer than the amount or ‘quantity’ of practice provided by traditional grammar exercises.
- Games provide practice in all the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.
- Games are useful in all the stages of teaching/learning sequence – that is presentation, practice, recombination and free use of language. They can also be designed to suit various levels.
- Games also have a diagnostic role: while the students play the games, the teacher could quietly observe the students’ performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses. This feedback would prove very valuable to the teacher for further planning in his/her teaching.
- Games provide genuine information gap/opinion gap. What is information gap? We speak or write because we want to pass on information or convey an opinion which the listener might be interested in. If the listener is familiar with the information or is of the same opinion, there is no gap and s/he will probably switch off. In many language classes, there is no information gap at all and opinions are rarely asked for. When the teacher asks the student, for instance, ‘Where is the book?’ The student knows that the teacher knows the answer! The teacher is more interested in the form than the content of what the learner says. In grammar games, on the other hand, there is always a genuine information/opinion gap. This makes the game more interesting and life-like.
- Arif Saricoban and Esen Metin, authors of ‘Songs, Verse and Games for Teaching Grammar’ explain how and why games work for teaching grammar in an ESL classroom. They say, ‘Games and problem-solving activities, which are task-based and have a purpose beyond the production of correct speech, are the examples of the most preferable communicative activities.’ [3] They go on to explain that grammar games help learners not only gain knowledge but be able to apply and use that learning.

5. Some Practical Points for Teachers

- 1) When the teacher is looking for games to use in your classroom, she/he should not just pick something to be “time filler” which does not have a definite linguistic outcome. These games may entertain the students, but when the teacher doesn’t have much time with them each day as it is,

s/he wants his/her game to do double duty to get the most out of the time the teacher spends playing games. Thus, a clear linguistic outcome is required for each game.

- 2) The game can be a listening game to allow the students to repeatedly hear a new grammatical structure in use, or it can be a speaking game to allow practice of the grammar once it has been absorbed through listening beforehand. There are degrees of difficulty with speaking games from basic repetition in a fun context to more creative sentence creation for revision or more advanced practice once the basics have been mastered. The teacher should lead the learners through this progression so that the game at hand is always well within the grasp of the students. This makes games fun rather than laborious. It is a mistake to play a speaking game immediately after the new grammar has been presented. Ideally reading, spelling and writing games come after the new grammar has been absorbed and the students can use it orally.
- 3) Another thing to watch out for with grammar games is that a maximum of students are involved simultaneously. If the teacher has thirty students s/he wants to avoid a game where only one student is speaking at a time. What are the other twenty-nine students supposed to do in the meantime other than get bored? On the other end of the scale however are games that cause chaos in class and make teachers unpopular with colleagues because of high noise levels.
- 4) Also the teacher needs to make sure that the rules of the games are clearly explained and fully understood by the students so that the game develops naturally and correctly. Some games may contain variations or suggest other grammar points to be played with. Teachers should not interrupt the game to correct any mistake. If otherwise, all the fun and learning will be ruined.
- 5) To begin with, when learners are not familiar with the new approach, games could be used to supplement the main course. Later as teachers and learners acquire greater familiarity, they may be used as substitute for parts of the course.
- 6) We must remember to choose a game appropriate to the level of the learners. The instructions should be clear. We may also use the mother tongue to explain the rules of the game, if necessary. If the learners are unclear about what they have to do, chaos and a feeling of disillusionment may result.
- 7) At the beginning, all learners may not participate enthusiastically. Some may feel shy and inhibited. Do not compel them to participate. A time will come when they would be willing to participate.
- 8) The teacher should be alert and note when learners begin to get tired of a game. At this stage, s/he should stop and change over to another activity. Otherwise there is the danger that learners may develop grammar game fatigue.
- 9) In the course of playing the game, learners are sure to make mistakes. However, the teacher should not stop the game in order to correct the mistakes. S/he should quietly note down the mistakes without interrupting the game, and take them up for discussion.
- 10) Grammar games could be used in three ways.
 - before presenting a structure – to diagnose learner’s knowledge
 - after presenting a structure – as feedback to find out how much learning has taken place as revision.
- 11) Many teachers believe that competition should be avoided. It is possible to play many games with ‘the spirit of challenge to achieve’, rather than to ‘to defeat someone’. [4] It is not only wrong but also counter-productive to match learners of unequal ability even within a single exchange or challenge. The less able learner may ‘give up’ and the more able learner develops a false sense of his/her ability. It may not be a good idea to force individuals to participate. For many such learners there will be point of ‘readiness’ to participate later. Learners reluctant to participate might be asked to act as judges or scorers or just be observers.
- 12) If the teacher wants to make sure his/her activities (games) appeal to all sorts learning styles, the teacher will have to vary the types of things you expect your students to do. For preschool and

early elementary grades, the teacher ought to stick to games that use talking, listening, looking and moving. For middle and high elementary, you can continue to use games that use talking, listening, looking and moving and add in some games that use writing and reading.

6. Conclusion

All we wanted to demonstrate was that the teachers should not give up grammar too easily, because of dry rules and activities, as there are alternative resources at hand; besides being potentially motivating due to their funny aspect, the games, jokes, songs, films and poems provide personalization practice as they offer the students the chance to be actively and personally engaged in the lesson and pleasurable tension especially when games are in focus. Ultimately, it is the teacher's job, and sometimes desire, to look for other funny resources and to make use of his/her creativity in transforming a boring grammar drill into an entertaining, challenging, motivating and efficient one. "Imagination is one of the most important gifts that man possesses, but also vast domain characterized by ambiguity." [5] The lack of funny grammar resources in current course books should be an alarm signal for keeping up with the 'grammatical' times for both teachers and course book writers especially. We strongly believe that it is grammatically correct to use the words grammar, creativity and fun in the same sentence.

7. References

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