

DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE GAMES FOR REINFORCING NON-ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS' GRAMMAR AT THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCES

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SUMMARY

Grammar plays an essential role in English language learning process for learning it will help language learners have better understanding in the knowledge of English language and then applying the structure accurately in their language use. It is said that grammar is considered one of the most important content in language learning but seems to be the most boring of all. English teachers have approached the changes in teaching grammar. Especially, prior researches on teaching English grammar through language games have also been examined. Hence, in this paper, we would like to introduce a study that developed language games to reinforce some aspects of English grammar of students. The study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences subjecting the 30 non-English major students of the university. The students were given pretest of grammar level before the treatment, then the posttest was administered to the same students after being taught grammar through developed language games. The finding showed there is significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the respondents. Therefore, developed language games are useful for reinforcing students' English grammar, valid to be used for grammar lessons, and are commendable among the students.

Key words: *Acceptability, grammar, language games, posttest, pretest, reinforcing*

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is one of necessary elements contributing to form a language system. It appears in every sentence we read, write, speak, or hear. A grammar (often called a formal grammar for clarity) is a set of rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences. The rules describe the structure of a language and control the way that strings are formed according to the language's syntax. The knowledge of grammar also identifies what learners have to do if they want to put some phrases into sentences. The crucial role of grammar in students' English learning is undeniable because it forms basis for the development of language skills such as speaking and writing. Ishtawi (2011) pointed out that "if students learn the main structures of English, it will help them greatly to speak and to write the language." It is impossible for people to speak without any grammar rules. We need those rules in the same way as we need the rules in a game. If there are no rules, or if every player follows their own rules, the game would soon break down. It is the same with

language, without rules we would not be able to communicate with other people. Without good grammar, words go together with no real sense; therefore, learners communicate successfully only in some of limited situations. Lam (2008) articulated that "without understanding of grammar, students would not do anything more than utter separate items of language for the separate functions. The expression of functional language is only possible through grammar of the language". Without grammar knowledge, students will not only find many problems to produce good sentences grammatically but also cannot express their ideas and feelings.

Based on our current teaching at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences and students' scores, it can be said that most students face difficulties in learning grammar because the grammatical rules of Vietnamese language are different from those of English. Students thought that English grammar is difficult and boring to learn, so they did not pay much attention to learning English grammar. It is obvious why they became passive, confused, shy, afraid of making mistakes, and felt bored when they study English grammar, and sometimes they

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were sleepy in the class when they had grammar lessons. It could lead the learners had negative results, they became unmotivated to learn it. When they were told to do the tasks relevant to grammar, they felt confused, shy and uncomfortable and became passive in learning process. Most students were afraid of asking the points that they did not understand. They tended to be silent because they were afraid of making mistakes and "losing face". In addition, the students did not have positive attitude and motivation towards English in general and grammar in particular. Consequently, teaching English grammar to the non-English major students is really a challenge to the teachers at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences.

There can be lots of ways and techniques to teach and learn grammar to make learning experience enjoyable in classrooms. Saricoban and Metin (2000) gave their ideas that "to make grammar lesson effective, beneficial, and interesting, teacher should use well-developed and fascinating techniques in the classroom. The examples of such integrated sources and techniques – the use of songs, verse, games, and problem solving activities". Moreover, Ishtawi (2011) listed four reasons to use games in teaching grammar. First of all, students not only gain knowledge but also apply what they learn owing to games in the teaching grammar. Therefore, games are regarded as communicative activities. It is clear that fun-learning games containing repetition usually make the language more understandable. Third, using some games motivate students and increase classroom cooperation and competition which creates positive atmosphere. Lastly, games allow meaningful use of language in context because they are amusing and challenging.

These factors led us to develop and validate language games which could be used for reinforcing students' English grammar at Thai Nguyen University of Sciences. Developed language games were implemented in a production stage in all lesson plans. These language games focus on nine aspects of basic English grammar: possessive adjectives, plural nouns, verb *to be* in simple present, possessive 's, the present simple, there is/

there are, prepositions of place, some/ any, and modal verb (can/ can't). Each of the language games covers one grammar point that helps students to reinforce their grammar at the end of the lesson.

SUBJECT AND METHODOLOGY

The population of the study comprised 84 non-English major students for the school year 2012-2013. The participants were randomly chosen by using fishbowl technique to arrive at 30 non-English major students. In using the fishbowl method, the students' numbers were written on separate sheets of paper, then they were tossed so that they were mixed. Sheets of paper were picked out without looking. Most of the 30 non-English major students have been studying English as a foreign language for at least seven years. However, students were from various English proficiency levels.

The study employed the one group pretest-posttest design adapted from Hatch and Farhady (1982). As soon as the participants of the study were selected, the 45 item pretest was administered to the students. Afterwards, the students began to learn grammar through the developed language games. Students were taught with 9 lesson plans covering nine different aspects of grammar. Each lesson plan was written based on the three procedures: presentation, practice and production stages. Language games were implemented in a production stage in all lesson plans. After the use of the developed games phase, participants were given a post-test in order to investigate the learners' improvement in terms of their grammar knowledge and ability and the questionnaire. The questionnaire was also designed to determine students' the acceptability of the developed language games for reinforcing grammar. The questionnaire with four-point scale (4 = strongly acceptable (SA), 3 = acceptable (A), 2 = unacceptable (U), 1 = strongly unacceptable (SU) consisted of 8 items. To determine the significant difference in participants' performance before and after using language games for reinforcing students' grammar, frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and t-test for dependent samples were used.

In addition, the scale adapted from Hatch and Farhady (1982) and used for statement rating is:

Point Score	Range Interval	Descriptive Rating (DR)
4	3.50 – 4.00	Strongly Acceptable (SA)
3	2.50 – 3.49	Acceptable (A)
2	1.50 – 2.49	Unacceptable (U)
1	1.00 – 1.49	Strongly unacceptable (SU)

FINDINGS

Significant Difference between the Pretest and Posttest Scores

Table 1. Summary of Valuable for Testing Significant Differences between the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Respondents

	Highest	Lowest	\bar{X}	SD	T	T.V	Analysis
Pretest	9	4.5	6.3	1.23	7.5	2.045	Significant
Posttest	9	4	7.35	1.11			

Table 2. Frequency and Weighted Mean Distribution on the Acceptability of Language Games for Teaching Grammar

Statement (Language games...)	4	3	2	1	WM	DR
1. Help and encourage to sustain students' interest and lower their stress and anxiety towards grammar learning.	14	15	1	0	3.43	A
2. Create motivation for practicing grammar points as they are amusing, interesting and challenging.	16	14	0	0	4.00	SA
3. Give shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings.	13	14	2	1	3.30	A
4. Add interest to what students might not find interesting in grammar lessons.	15	14	1	0	3.46	A
5. Help students not only gain knowledge in grammar but also be able to apply that learning.	15	13	2	0	3.43	A
6. Aid students to realize that they have to use grammar correctly if they want to become winners.	17	11	1	1	3.46	A
7. Create relaxed atmosphere to remember the use of grammar faster and better.	17	12	0	1	3.50	A
8. Is useful for other aspects of grammar.	23	5	2	0	3.70	SA
Average Weighted Mean					3.47	A

Table 1 presents the comparison of the mean scores of the respondents in the pretest and posttest. It can be seen from the table that the mean score (\bar{X}) in the posttest (7.35) interpreted as *good* is higher than that in pretest (6.3). In addition, the standard deviation (SD) of 1.23 in the pretest is lower than that of 1.11 in the posttest. Furthermore, 1.05 mean difference reveals that there is a difference in the respondents' performance in grammar after being exposed to language games. In addition, as evident in the table, the computed t-value (T) is equal to 7.5 which is higher than the tabular value (T.V) of 2.045

which means that null hypothesis stating that "there is no significant difference between the students' pretest and posttest scores" is rejected. This implies that the performances of students significantly differ. From the statistical findings, it can be inferred that there is improvement in the respondents' grammar after they took part in the language games.

Acceptability of the Developed Language Games

Table 2 shows the frequency and weighted mean distribution on the acceptability of using language games as perceived by the students. Generally, language games are

acceptable with 3.47 average weighted mean (WM) in enhancing the grammar of the students.

It follows that the language games are acceptable in adding interest to what students might not find interesting in the grammar lessons and aiding the students to realize that have to use grammar correctly if they want to become winners (3.46); helping and encouraging to sustain students' interest and lower their stress and anxiety towards grammar learning and giving shy learners more opportunity to express their opinions and feelings (3.30). However, creating motivation for practicing grammar points as they are amusing, interesting and challenging (4.00); being useful for other aspects of grammar (3.70); and creating relaxed atmosphere to remember the use of grammar faster and better (3.50).

CONCLUSIONS *

Based on the aforesaid findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Language games are useful for reinforcing students' English grammar.
2. The use of language games is valid in grammar lessons.
3. Language games integrated in grammar lessons are commendable among the participants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of conclusions, the following recommendations are offered:

1. There should be further improvement of the games to increase further the acceptability of the games among the students.
2. Workshops and training courses on the use of language games in teaching grammar may be conducted for teachers to familiarize with them.
3. Teachers may also relate language games with all English skills to activate students' motivation and participation.
4. Further studies may also focus on other grammatical points to see how and to what extent the adoption of language games could affect students' improvement of grammar.

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TÓM TẮT
PHÁT TRIỂN TRÒ CHƠI NGÔN NGỮ NHĂM CÙNG CỐ KIẾN THỨC
NGỮ PHÁP CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN TIẾNG ANH
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KHOA HỌC – ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

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Ngữ pháp đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong quá trình học tiếng Anh bởi việc học nó sẽ giúp người học ngôn ngữ có sự hiểu biết tốt hơn trong kiến thức về ngôn ngữ tiếng Anh và sau đó áp dụng các cấu trúc một cách chính xác trong quá trình sử dụng ngôn ngữ của họ. Ngữ pháp được coi là một trong những nội dung quan trọng nhất trong việc học ngôn ngữ, nhưng dường như lại nhàm hơn cả. Các giáo viên tiếng Anh đã tiếp cận những cải tiến trong việc giảng dạy ngữ pháp. Đặc biệt là các nghiên cứu trước đây về việc giảng dạy ngữ pháp tiếng Anh thông qua các trò chơi ngôn ngữ cũng đã được kiểm nghiệm. Do đó, trong bài viết này, chúng tôi xin giới thiệu một nghiên cứu mà đã phát triển trò chơi ngôn ngữ nhằm củng cố ngữ pháp tiếng Anh của sinh viên. Nghiên cứu được tiến hành tại trường Đại học Khoa học, Đại học Thái Nguyên với đối tượng bao gồm 30 sinh viên không chuyên tiếng Anh của trường đại học này. Sinh viên được tham gia kiểm tra trình độ ngữ pháp trước và sau khi áp dụng trò chơi ngôn ngữ. Kết quả chỉ ra có sự khác biệt đáng kể giữa điểm kiểm tra của sinh viên trước và sau khi áp dụng trò chơi ngôn ngữ. Chính vì vậy, trò chơi ngôn ngữ rất hữu ích trong việc củng cố ngữ pháp tiếng Anh của sinh viên, thích hợp để được sử dụng trong các tiết học ngữ pháp và được sinh viên đánh giá cao.

Từ khóa: *ngữ pháp, trò chơi ngôn ngữ, kiểm tra sau, kiểm tra trước, củng cố*

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