RESEARCH ARTICLE

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USE OF LANGUAGE GAMES AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Learning/ Teaching a Foreign language / Second language (English) is a complex task especially in a non-native context where there is little scope for exposure to and use of the target language. The mother tongue (L1) exercises pro-active interference in the learning of a foreign language like English (L2). The level of complexity /difficulty increases with the widening difference between the two languages (L1&L2). Higher levels of conscious efforts are required on the part of the learners to free themselves of the influence of the mother tongue, and to understand, assimilate and interpret the newly learnt language items. It's an uphill task, both challenging and rewarding for the teacher also to play a pivotal role in facilitating the teaching-learning process. High motivation is the need of the hour for the teaching-learning process so as to make it a pleasant experience for both the partners in the process. In this context Language Games serve as an effective tool towards this end and serve the purpose. Learners of all age groups show interest in games and learning becomes easier and simpler when learning takes place through games. Language games provide familiar, native setting for language learning in a non-native context there by removing all sorts of apprehensions, hesitation, fears and confusion.

BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE LEARNING CONTEXT

Learning a Second or Foreign language (English) is a very difficult task for the non- native learner. The learner needs to free himself from the influence of his mother tongue. He/she has to put forward conscious attempts/efforts to understand and express the linguistic items into spoken or written expressions by undertaking Coding and Decoding (Transfer of Learning from L1 to L2). Learning a new language poses some problems for the learners and more so in the case of a language like English. The wider the gap or the differences between the two languages (L1-L2), the more complex the learning process would be.

TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

On the other hand the teachers find it very difficult to provide meaningful and natural contexts to facilitate the language learning among the non-native learners. They need resourcefulness as well as the resources. Unlike the content subjects, languages are skill based subjects. But unfortunately the curricula of most of the universities are designed to promote chunks of facts and informative texts to the language learners in anticipation of the output which is mostly based on rote memory and recollection. Besides the students are made to learn essay type questions and paragraph questions, critical appreciation of poetry, descriptive writing assignments and questions from grammar etc. No where can we find contextualization. The results of this defective set up are frustrating and disastrous as expected. The poor performance of the learners is not due to their inability nor is it because of their lack of identifying the significance and the practical utilitarian aspect of the language. It can be pointed out that the problem or the difficulty is largely due to the unattractive, disinteresting, dull, boring class room sessions which turn them as mere passive listeners and experience failure to take part actively. Here comes the need of the teachers to play their trump cards, a handy role that can never be ignored nor minimized.

NEED OF THE HOUR

The teacher has to move away from the traditional all- in–one or all- in – all image, shed his authoritarian approach and come out with a new mind set, friendly attitude and be one with them and one among them. He needs to keep his mind open to invite ideas, thoughts from the learners, push them to the front, making the teaching-learning process more of a learner-centered than being a teacher-centered system. Secondly the teacher should contextualize and conceptualize the learning modules by making use of a variety of E- learning audio-visual resources available to him such as digital, electronic gadgets, smart phones, Computers, Podcasts and Pad lets etc and some other print media resources like News Paper clippings, Journals, Books, Journals, Magazines, and even designing some out of brain-storming as task-based activities, fun-filled exercises etc. Whenever and wherever there is possibility, he can use technology in his class room and make his teaching active, attractive, interesting and bi-polar. Besides with the employment of technology or even without it the teacher can make his classroom teaching- learning environment lively, fun-filled, joyful an entertaining and enjoyable experience through devising games based learning. The Teacher's role here becomes more prominent, he gets more burdened for framing all the gaming sessions but nevertheless his pains will not go unpaid

for. Rich dividends are sure to follow the suit since language games initiate high level of motivation, inspiration and are stimulating paving the way for the learner involvement in the classroom proceedings.

LANGUAGE GAMES-AN OVERVIEW

Radical changes have been coming up in the domain of language pedagogy. The age old tedious and monotonous lecture method has been replaced by new methods of teaching such as communicative language teaching method, learner-centered teaching method, learning-centered teaching method, experiential teaching and participatory teaching etc. the point of focus or the centre of attention however is the learner and all strategies are directed towards improving his lot. Latest researches also evince the role of game theory as an upcoming trend, new methodology for the language teaching. Language games take origin in the earlier part of 20th century.

WHAT ARE LANGUAGE GAMES?

Language games are games involving the repetition or creation of words, sentences etc in order to facilitate the learning of language according to Oxford dictionary. Quite often it is presumed that the term "language game" is synonymous with "word game" A language game is also called secret language, ludling, or argot. It is a system of spoken words to render them incomprehensible to the untrained ear. Language games are used primarily by groups attempting to conceal their conversations from others or people playing tricks on each other.

Language games allow students to apply their previous knowledge in L1/L2 to English and there by learn and have fun too. Wittgenstein (1965)

offers an explanation to arrive at the meaning of the term "Language Games" He states that people are trained to "react in this way" to the words of others and he views that in simple situations there is just the word and a single, correct response. Language games initiate some action on the part of the participants, make them think, do something, apply and express/interpret.

CRUX OF LANGUAGE GAMES

Various language learning theories serve as the basis for the language games depending on the levels and needs of the learner groups. These games are an admixture/ fine blend/ or an amalgamation of many a teaching methodology viz. the heuristic method/the problem solving method/ the task based teaching method etc. Most of the games are designed taking into consideration the mutual cooperation, acceptance of the activities/tasks as challenges, readiness to work upon finding solutions for them etc. The challenges that they face act as reinforcers of their learning and real time motivators. The learners can also develop critical thinking, analytical skills, insightful thinking, lateral thinking and out of the bos thinking besides having lots of fun. The teachers can find the games a means of providing suitable contexts that fit into the groove/situation and nevertheless the learners too find themselves at home with an exposure more or less native like learning environment/experience that enables the learners to take part in the communication process with ease and comfort.

CLASSIFICATION OF LANGUAGE GAMES

The criteria for grouping the language games under different heads can be the functions that they serve

or the structural items that are included or the types of communication involved. The characteristic features, personality traits, nature of the participants, their backgrounds, age, sex, cultural aspect, needs, maturity levels vary and the purposes of language achievement can also differ. The games can be conducted in a structured manner or in an informal way or guided practice / free choice.. However the effectiveness or the fun depends much on the relevance of the game and the involvement/participation of the learners. In a guided mode the teacher acts as a facilitator where as in a free practice session the learners themselves play a lead role. Basically language games can be divided into three categories based on the level of the participants (targeted learners) as basic, intermediate and advanced.

WHY LANGUAGE GAMES: (PURPOSE)

According to Wittgenstein the primary purpose of the language games is to dispel language confusions and make learning easy and muddle-free. They can be conducted even without any resources provided the teacher as the facilitator is resourceful. Besides the language games are superior to the tasks/activities in that the former are serious and formal where as the latter are enjoyable, entertaining and provide fun. These offer meaningful and contextual practice that is much needed. The games project the view that language learning does not necessarily mean or involve learning a mere string of words but they are cues aimed at prompting desired outcomes from the listeners/readers. Moreover language games thwart the misconception that language learning should be a serious process and there is no scope or room for fun or

enjoyment/entertainment. But practically these language games play the role of ice breakers taking us away from the tediums/ monotony of the hectic routine classroom teaching. The games provide a relaxed and free atmosphere where in the learners can learn faster and better (Wierus and Wierus, 1994; cited in Uberman, 1998).Sivers has noted that many teachers use games as "a teaching device" but more often than not they use the games only as pastime activities. He also claims that they often overlook the significance of the relaxed atmosphere created by the games (cited in Uberman,1998). Further Zdybiewska holds the view that games are a good way for practicing language, as they provide a model to learners to use in real life, in future (1994; cited in Uberman, 1998) It's worthwhile to quote Richard-Amato in this connection who remarks that language games "add diversion to the regular classroom activities," and break the ice, [but also] they are used to introduce new ideas" (1988; cited in Uberman, 1998).

APPROPRIATE SLOT FOR THE USE OF THE LANGUAGE GAMES

Generally teachers use games for teaching before the start of the actual lesson as a warm up activity (ice breaker) or towards the end of the lesson when some time is left. But Lee **(1979 ;3)** feels that a language game should not be regarded as a marginal activity just filling in odd moments when the teacher and the class has nothing better to do." Rixon (2001) suggests that games can be used at all stages of the lesson, provided they are suitable and carefully chosen.

CHOICE/SELECTION OF LANGUAGE GAMES:

What sort of language games are to be chosen? What should be the criteria?

Tyson (2000) suggests that the following factors must be considered while choosing the language games.

▪ Be more than just fun.

▪ Inculcate "friendly"competition among learners.

▪ Keep all of the learners involved and interested.

▪ Encourage learners to focus on the use of language rather than on thelanguage itself.

▪ Provide learners a chance to learn, practice, or review a specific learning item.

List of Language Games:

I. Vocabulary Games; Word games:

1. Antyakshari.
2. Riddles.
3. Cross Word Puzzle.
4. Word Search.
5. One Word Substitutes.
6. Homonyms.
7. Homophones.
8. Homographs.
9. Vowels.
10. Consonants.
11. Silent Letters.
12. Vegetables.
13. Fruits.
14. Flowers.
15. Animals-Babies.
16. Animals-Sounds.
17. Jumbling (Rearrangement)

Letters /Words/ sentences in words/sentences/paragraphs.

18. Word Building – Making as many words as possible from a given word using the Letters in the word.
19. Grouping mixed words under correct heads.
20. Analogy: Picking the Odd Man Out.
21. Relations.
22. Human Body Parts.

II. Grammar Games:

1. Parts of Speech.
2. Verbs-Tenses.
3. Adjectives-Degrees.
4. Collective Nouns.
5. Proverbs.
6. Arrangement of words in Alphabetical Order in time span.
7. Spelling.
8. Number.
9. Transformation of Sentences.
10. Giving some sentences to be grouped and framed into meaningful paragraphs.

Riddles also prove to be an interesting inclusion in the pack of language games as they are funny, entertaining and thought provoking as well.

I give you life inviting death for me

You get showers and showers of gifts from me

You cook me and cook with me

Who am I?   (Tree)

I am round and make a tinkling sound

I am the maid's smile and bride's pride

Your blushes reflect in my colours

Who am I?   (Bangles)

I put you in right path

What you are is because of me

The making of the society is my duty

You earn by learning from me

I am your friend, philosopher and guide

Who am I?   (Teacher)

You sit in me

Cut a piece I give you beauty

Cut me again as you need me to breathe

Who am I?   (Chair)

You can be a caller, listener, lover of music,

Sender, receiver of notes, caluculate and roam

about in the global village

Beyond the frontiers of fourth dimension

If you possess me - Who am I?   (Mobiler)

I mean a sect, a group, a race / I become a girl

when you sever me

If you cut me again I become the washerman's

companion, carrier. Who Am I? (Class)

CONCLUSION

Learning a language that too a foreign language like English is generally an arduous task. More over the dull, routine, monotonous, congested classroom settings, the stereotyped tradition bound methodologies, the authoritarian approach all culminate resulting in making the learning process more cumbersome. Learning with fun in an attractive, and interesting classroom environment where teaching-learning through language games is the best possible solution. Learning through play way method, through tasks, planned and graded activities without any restrictions, in a free atmosphere paves way for an ideal learning process.

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