

## Games in Foreign Language Classroom

Biljana Milatović

*Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics  
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Montenegro  
Email: biljanamilatovic@gmail.com*

---

**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to point out some of the advantages of using games as accompanying elements of every foreign language class. Games should be the integral part, be specific with respect to various aspects of learning, be directed to the creation of the linguistic and communicative competence, should take into account the representation of all skills in the usage of language. Games make all tasks relaxed and quite easy, make students feel lively and vivacious, what is more than welcome, especially with young learners. They also create fantastic conditions and positive clamour what induce everyone to take part in and try to win.*

**Key words:** *games, language games, foreign language learning, classroom*

---

"Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each." *Plato (BC 427 – 347)*

### 1. Introduction

Games can be classified as cooperative, solitaire or competitive. Gibb (1978) defines game as 'an activity carried out by cooperating or competing decision makers, seeking to achieve, within a set of rules, their objectives'. When playing language games, students have fun at the same time as they practise English enjoyably. Games bring fun and energy into a classroom with the focus on learning. Greenal (1984) defines game as one kind of 'activity which is used to consolidate language already taught or acquired and occurs during the free stage of lesson or during occasions such as English club meeting...'

Traditionally, games have been used in the language class as warm-ups at the beginning of class, fill-ins when there is extra time near the end of class, or as an occasional bit of spice stirred into the curriculum to add variety. All these are fine, but games can also constitute a more substantial part of language courses (Lee, 1979; Rixon, 1981). But, teachers can use games for communicative language production, for practicing specific language skills and as a way to revise previously taught language. Precisely games are fun with a purpose, games provide feedback to the learner and to the teacher, games motivate, games improve teamwork, games encourage students to interact and communicate, games create a less threatening learning environment, games bring real-world information, games allow teachers add variety and flexibility to their teaching menus.

### 2. Game and its use in the foreign language classroom

The primary school is the principal place for the beginning of a successful learning. It is the place where students face the fact that they are to be hard-working and as good as possible. They are to learn a lot and try to succeed in everything. However, there is a lot of students that sometimes do not know how to react, they feel some kind of fear of possible failure, they do not have enough will and have to be forced to do even their simple tasks. Starting learning English at the earliest age, in the primary school, has its own benefits.

First of all, it can prolong the contact with the language and make students learn it more successfully. At the earliest age, students are very capable of acquiring the new language more easily and without being fully aware of it. I think, that young learners do it with a less stress, they seem to be rather relaxed and can do it quite easily, unlike adults who usually learn the foreign language rather than acquire it. Games can bring in something new in our classroom, especially concerning EFL (English Foreign Language) teaching. Mere idea about learning a foreign language can make students feel very nervous, almost upset and games are to break any kind of assumption that they would never succeed or give their best. So, one of the most important approach but also one of the most appropriate ways to convey certain information and make students eager and ardent to learn is through games. Also, games provide an environment that transforms the passive student into an active part of the learning process. A lot of students in primary school (especially younger ones) do not find foreign language learning as main stimulating factor, so a game can be a motivational one there. There are many benefits of using games in the EFL classroom. Games motivate and encourage both teachers and students. It means that in a relaxed atmosphere students play game with their class peers according to a set of rules and, although they are not fully aware of it, they learn a lot. They are in constant mutual touch with their surroundings, they contact and reveal. Teachers should behave as a walking source of knowledge, a positive controller and a guide. In simple words, when students make noise or make the class mere mess, teacher is there to provide an adequate situation for continuing game. Also, when they give false answer and the question is connected to the previously learnt material, teacher is there to explain it again (concisely if it is possible) and then revise it if it is necessary and there is enough time. Of course, teacher must try to make reserved and taciturn students participate.

Games have a huge educational value. W.R. Lee holds that 'most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning correct forms' and that 'games should be treated as central not peripheral to the foreign language programme (Lee, 1979: 2).

Almost the same opinion expresses Richard-Amato who says 'games can lower anxiety thus making the acquisition of input more likely. They add diversion to the regular classroom activities, break the ice, but also, they are used to introduce new ideas' (Richard-Amato, 1988: 47). Also, Millis (2005) outlines a number of advantages of games, such as appropriate anxiety levels and more constructive feedback.

They are learner-centered activities and every game should be organised in a way that everyone in the class has his/her own role. Every student should have a chance to express his/her own opinion, to try, to participate, to be involved in the process of the learning foreign language. 'Games... 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' (Wright, Betteridge & Buckby, 2005: 1). Teacher has to create such conditions so that students can feel free to ask whatever they want, to answer, to communicate, to enjoy. False answer or wrong step towards the certain goal must not mean ending up with the game, just opposite to it. It has to be an impel to the progress and success. Games benefit students in a variety of ways and they can be easily adjusted for age, level and interest and requires not too much time for preparation. Through playing games, general students' knowledge can be extended, creative use of language can be encouraged. It is satisfying to see the whole class participate, want to win, and among all see them enthusiastic and eager to learn.

### **3. When and how to use game**

Games can be used differently in the language classroom. Games can be used at the very start of the lesson class, in the middle of it or at the end. Appropriate moment for the game is whatever part of the class which will provide students a mere fun within the mere learning. So it is the teacher's decision when to start with game. Rixon (1981) agrees that games can be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen. This is acceptable, of course, a game has to be more essential part of the

foreign language learning process. Games have to be used as adequate activities for practising specific language items, skills and their communicative abilities, and their focus must be on revising and recycling the previously learnt material but also on acquiring and practising the new one.

Students like to play language games. But, sometimes, it happens that a game is not well-prepared and it is not appropriate for certain age and knowledge level. Such kind of the activity can bring only a failure and a lot of objections. Students would have been disappointed if they had ever had to play a game which was not interesting and appropriate for their level. So, a successful game requires thorough preparation. It means that teacher must clearly understand all rules which he/she'll present to the students adequately. He/she has to have a plan that will direct the whole activity. The organisation of the game must be prepared and the teacher needs to think of a pair, group or general class work. He/she has to have other options if game seems not to go according to. Teacher must be ready to quit the game when it is necessary. In the game everyone has to have active roles. I think that small classes are more suitable for playing games because it is easier to pay attention to everyone and give them their tasks. But there is also situation when teacher meets large class (more than 25 students) and has to deal with it. Perhaps it could be easier to divide it in two parts and while the first one plays the game, the second one behaves as an audience and supports their friends. Instead of dividing them teacher can choose the game which demands individual participation or large groups, too. Every student has to understand how to play the game exactly. For younger learners, few sentences in their native language can make the situation clear. The older ones demand clear explanation and direction and, only if it is really necessary, teacher can say it in their mother tongue or demonstrate it by trial examples. Rules are rules and no one is there to break them. Also, if the game is played in groups, each team must be consisted of equal number of students. Every group shall contain equal number of students that are on the higher knowledge level. It will not be challenging and entertaining if the teacher groups the best students into one team. Some methodologists recommend that teacher should set up permanent teams so he/she does not have to name new teams each time. In my opinion this could have its advantages but making new teams each time lead us to diversity and feeling of surprise and unpredictability, what is another charm of game. While choosing a game teacher will think about students' abilities, interests and age. As game is a kind of the activity that includes competition and thus make someone winner and someone loser, it is useful and practical to reward winners.

According to Howard Gardner there are eight distinct intelligences that exist in our students. Those are 'linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist' (Gardner, 1999: 91). Different activities are suitable for different intelligences. Those learners with linguistic intelligence, for example, enjoy activities that include reading, speaking or writing and those with musical intelligence are good at singing or activities that involve whistling, rhythm, etc.

In order to satisfy everyone's needs we should think about students as individuals, we must enable them to express their own feelings, desires, thoughts, we should help them improve their capabilities, also peer into their souls and find the most appropriate way to make them successful learners. Innovative and encouraging activities as well as games are more than welcome in doing that.

#### **4. The Research Goal**

The goal of the research is to establish to what extent do teachers use games, whether they are satisfied with the results of game use in foreign language teaching, and how satisfied are the students with its use in the teaching process.

##### *4.1 Instrument and sample*

We only used the questionnaire for this research. It consisted of three parts: general information, information about organizing and planning games for classes, and attitudes about didactic-methodological characteristics

of games and their use in the teaching process. The obtained data were quantitatively processed.

The research was carried out in Montenegro, in seventeen primary schools with eighty-eight teachers who teach four foreign languages: English (N 52), Italian (N 7), French (N 7), and Russian (N 22).

#### 4.2 The research process

The questionnaire was used anonymously in order to ensure as sincere answers to the questions as possible by the students.

#### 4.3 The research results and discussion

Since games are considered to be an indispensable technique and instrument for obtaining the most optimal results in foreign language acquisition and since they are used in foreign language teaching as a back-up for consolidation of teaching units, we will point out in this paper only to the results which are exclusively related to game itself. Hence, to the question: *Are games part of your operational plan?*, 94% of the respondents gave a positive reply. From these, the teachers of French replied with 100% that they are, the teachers of English 94%, Italian 86%, and Russian 82%. This result was as expected. It is necessary to introduce and use games in class work; it is a free and voluntary activity to which every student approaches voluntarily and all students are equal in it. A teacher, as a class organizer, is aware of this, and introduces it into the operational plan consciously and with a clear aim.

The answer to the question related to the number of planned games per class, gave us a clear picture of their presence per languages. The English language teachers use the most in the first, second and third grade, while for the rest of the grades, the use decreases. They use it 100% for the first three grades, which is natural as children willingly and eagerly accept the game at a younger age. The decrease in the game use is due to more complex programme requirements. Hence, the English language teachers plan to use games 43% for the final grade of the primary school. The teachers of French, Russian, and Italian, start using games from grade seven, since they start learning these languages as second foreign languages and as an optional subject in primary schools from that age. From the very beginning of the teaching process, games are less planned among them in comparison to the English language teachers. For the final grade, the planned game use is from 11% to 13%. It is clear that games should not have a merely entertaining role and use in the teaching process, but rather, they should be organized and designed to change certain types of exercises during the class, and primarily those which students find monotonous, which cause frustrations among them, and which don't give sufficiently efficient results.

As for the basic resources for game selection, 38% of the respondents use the textbook and handbook as the basic resource for games which they use for teaching. Only 27% of the teachers use magazines or design the games on their own, and, unfortunately, only 9% use professional literature as a game resource. We did not expect the results showing such a low use of professional literature as it is easily available today, in the era of the Internet and on-line libraries.

The obtained replies to the question how much students accept games were the following. The French language students stated that they accept the game 100%, the English language students 94%, the Russian language students 95%, and the Italian language students 90%. The obtained result shows that it is necessary to use games as much as possible since it is a necessary, stimulant, and entertaining element in foreign language teaching. It motivates students, creates a pleasant atmosphere in a classroom, changes the rhythm of the class by offering varied situations for students, and creates the feeling of satisfaction which appears because of the ability to use a foreign language as a mother tongue. Hence, games are more than just relaxation.

The question: *Are you satisfied with the results that you achieve by using games?*, showed that the teachers are not as satisfied as students. Namely, out of three given options: *yes, partly, no*, no one gave a

negative reply. Most replies that were chosen by the teachers were *partly*, and among them were: 75% of the English language teachers, 59% of the Russian language teachers, 58% of the French language teachers, and 51% of the Italian language teachers. It is obvious, that the teachers are not fully satisfied with the use of games during the classes although it has as its goal to focus student's attention on certain language structures, lexical elements, and morphological paradigms. The teachers believe that games obtain an entertaining character in the classroom, and that it is often quite difficult to use them in a quality way in classrooms. It is, as the teachers say, a perfect technique that can be successfully realized and that gives good results in foreign language learning at a younger age, but it acquires an entertaining character at higher levels, students are less motivated to participate and it becomes monotonous and boring.

## 5. Conclusion

As learning a foreign language is obligatory in our schools, teachers should try to make it interesting in order to facilitate students' tasks and make them willing to learn. Teachers also should try to understand their needs and desires, to make them feel relaxed in the classroom and thus portray the new experience to students as something both serious and amazing. Students are not supposed to be afraid of the learning foreign language and they need to be prepared to give their bests and reveal their capabilities, because if they feel fear about it, they will lose an interest and will to master it at the very start. So, prepare students for fun and surprises, but also underfeed and direct their love towards the new language. Of course, games are a good partner in doing that.

## References

- Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*, NY: Basic books, New York
- Gibbs, G. (1987). *Dictionary of gaming, Modelling and Stimulation*. E & FN Spon Ltd., London
- Greenal, S. (1984). *Language games and activities*. Great Britain: Hulton Educational Publication
- Lee, W. R. (1979). *Language teaching games and contests*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Millis, B. (2005). The educational value of cooperative games. *IASCE Newsletter*, 24(3), 5-7.
- Richard-Amato, P. A. (1988). *Making it happen: Interaction in the second language classroom: From theory to practice*. New York: Longman.
- Rixon, S. (1981). *How to use games in language teaching*. London: Macmillan.
- Wright, A., Betteridge, D., & Buckby, M. (2005). *Games for language learning* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.