GRAMMAR THROUGH GAMES IN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH CLASSES
Alsu Gainutdinova, Rezida Mukhametzyanova
Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract
The paper deals with the best strategies of using games in University English classes. The methods applied to achieve the solution of the research problem are analysis of literature and experiments performed in grammar classes. The research is based on the results achieved by students mastering English grammar through games as well as the works by contemporary Russian and international researchers, teachers and lecturers on teaching students using effective tools as various types of games.

The authors conclude that games included into the process of studying English grammar at an upper-intermediate or an advanced level can liven up English classes and help students internalize and acquire grammar in an unconscious manner. Being motivated by games in classes students show better results at grammar tests. Students of the first and the second years of studies were involved into the experiment. The paper might be of interest for school teachers and University lectures interested in varying methods in teaching English grammar.

Keywords: English grammar, games, students, methods of teaching, university, KFU.

1 INTRODUCTION
In modern world language learning is becoming an integral part of any kind of education. Therefore, new ways of motivating students and diagnosing the results are to be applied. Games seem to meet these requirements. On the one hand students have a good chance to practice the language they have learnt. On the other hand, games can also serve as a diagnostic tool for the teacher, who can note areas of difficulty and take appropriate remedial action. [1]

Students of different age groups have different characteristics and it determines the methods used to teach them. All students respond to various stimuli (such as pictures, sounds, music, movement), but for most of them (and us) some things stimulate them into learning more than other things do. Nevertheless, teachers need to find out whether there are any generalizations which will help all of them.

The authors relied on the findings partly presented in the works of Russian researchers E.I Passov, [2] A.V. Konisheva, [3] N.D. Galskaya, [4], etc. who stated the need to enhance the process of teaching English especially students receiving higher education at Universities. The purpose of this paper is to summarize and systematize the best practices of KFU teachers in teaching grammar to University students through games and pictures. The research is based on findings and experiences of the authors as well as the works by contemporary Russian and international researchers on ways of teaching English grammar.

2 METHODOLOGY
To provide well-grounded conclusions the following theoretical and practical methods were applied to achieve the solution of the research problem:

- a descriptive method for observation and classification of the material;
- a system oriented analysis of literature as well as the experience of some teachers on the stated topic.
3 RESULTS

3.1 Types of games

All games used in English classes can be divided into linguistic games and communicative games. Linguistic games are aimed at improving pronunciation skills as well as grammar skills. This type of games seems to be appropriate mostly at the initial stages of learning the language more than at the advanced one. For instance, according to E.I. Passov linguistic games in the process of teaching the language can form specific skills like the skill to form questions.

Communicative games are focused on organizing communication between students while solving some communicative tasks. The emphasis in the communicative games is on successful communication rather than on correctness of language. Nevertheless, games cannot be considered to be some kind of an amusing activity for Friday afternoon or for the end of term. Even though communicative games are aimed at involving students into communication they are not fully devoid of the use of appropriate language. To carry out the communicative task it is essential to use the language, and by careful construction of the task it is possible to specify in advance what language will be required [1]. Thus both types of games are interrelated and have much in common.

3.2 Techniques

The games make use of variety of techniques. Variety is important in language teaching, and a succession of games based on the same principals, though exiting and novel at first, would soon pall [1]. Techniques used include information gap, guessing, search, matching, exchanging and collecting, combining, and card games, problems and puzzles, role play and simulation techniques. Depending on the technique used in the game students play either in pairs or groups. Moreover, games described in books and aimed at students of different age groups can be easily modified.

3.2.1 Game 1: A better world/Planet swap

Apart from being an engaging game, A better world provides excellent opportunities for speaking and listening. There are two versions of the game, both of which practice the same language and grammar. There are some grammar areas causing difficulties to students even of the upper-intermediate and advanced levels such as modal verbs and their equivalents. This game enables students to practice different modal verbs as well as the vocabulary on the topics laws and world problems. In order to practice more grammar during the game, students were offered to use some other modal verbs expressing obligation, necessity and permission in addition to those given in the book Advanced Communication Games by Jill Hadfield. The second-year students are already familiar with the meanings of all modal verbs, but some of them such as shall, will, should, ought to, be to may still cause difficulties when used spontaneously.

We consider the idea of having a feedback session after this game essential as the proper usage of modal verbs involves plenty of practice.

3.2.2 The object of the game and the procedure

According to the rules for playing A better world the class is divided into four groups and different problem sheets are given to each team. Each team after discussing their planet’s problems come up with a set of laws designed to make the situation better on the planet. The next stage is to send out an ambassador to one of the other planets to find out what is and what isn’t allowed on the planet. When the ambassadors are back to their own planets with the information they have collected, they try to guess what the other planet’s problems are. Then the ambassadors are sent to a different planet and the process is repeated. The object of A better world is for each ‘planet’ to guess correctly what the other planets’ problems are.

3.2.3 Game 2: Silly superstitions

This game is more individual as it is a search type of games. In this game every student has one piece of information. Players must obtain all the information available to fill in a questionnaire. Each student is thus simultaneously a giver and a collector of information.

Playing this game students have a good opportunity to revise and practice conditional sentences which may present difficulties for Russian speaking students. They are exposed to the situation when
one and the same pattern repeated several times providing a great chance to internalize it and then acquire it in an unconscious manner.

3.2.4 The object of the game and the procedure

There are two versions of this game. For version 1 everyone in the class is given a questionnaire (1) and a superstition (A). The object of the game is to complete the questionnaire. To achieve the goal, students mingle with their classmates and ask each other What will happen if…? Until they have obtained enough information to complete the questionnaire. This game is offered to be used as a warm-up for version 2.

To make the game conform more to the specific grammar needs of the second-year students, we made some modifications to the official rules given in Advanced Communication Games by Jill Hadfield. Instead of using conditional sentences which express real situations students are offered to use conditional sentences of type 2, which describe imaginary present or future situations.

In version 2 of the game every student in the class is given a silly superstition (B). Students should then get up and carry out whatever actions are necessary to bring them good luck. When they have finished, give out copies of the questionnaire (2). The object of this version of the game is the same as of version 1 to complete the questionnaire.

As in different cultures people may have radically different superstitions about the same life situations it may be worthwhile getting students to write their own and then collecting them and redistributing them, so that no one gets their own superstition. With students of different nationalities in classes in KFU this version of the game may inform students about modes of living in other countries and bring them together.

3.3 Motivation

Before entering Kazan Federal University students usually have had approximately ten years of studies at school where they have had about three English classes per week on the average. On the one hand, it means that their level of the language is rather high. On the other hand, students may find the classes boring, perhaps because they have been studying the same material for so many years. The lessons are mechanical and quite predictable – the teacher presents rules, gives exercises for students to work on, and administers tests to assess learning [5].

Moreover, students who have had negative learning experience in the past may be nervous of new learning. Students used to failure may be consciously or subconsciously prepared for more failure [6]. For such students games may become an excellent opportunity to practice the language without being pointed out mistakes they may make. Games help to create an active and emotional environment at formal lessons. They add an element of competitiveness that motivates students to participate [5].

The possibility of receiving extra points for participation in games, quizzes and other activities may motivate them to improve their final grades.

Games help students to develop the ability to communicate on different topics, to find the necessary lexical units and the keys to solve problems in the game situation. Students develop sociability, compilation, a sense of self-confidence, the ability to express their thoughts in a foreign language.

Thus, students have nothing to lose, and much to gain, from participating in the games [5].

4 CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the role of games in the language learning process we can conclude that games are an integral part of any language syllabus. Used regularly in class they provide an excellent opportunity for intensive language practice. Being entertaining on the one hand, games may be used as a diagnostic tool for teachers on the other hand.

In this paper we hope to have shown some of the ways to modify commercially available communicative games which teachers can use as the bases for their new ideas.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

REFERENCES