

Traditional techniques used in teaching vocabulary education essay



The process of acquiring a language is a hard word which needs constant effort in many stages: understanding, repeating, adapting and applying in speaking and writing

(Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 1983). Teachers always try to find effective ways to present new elements of language and keep students' enthusiasm in attempting to get them. To be more specific, in vocabulary teaching, there are numerous techniques applied in this process. Game is one of them. However, there is much disagreement on the effectiveness of the technique. For safe use, teachers often use games just as a time-filler activity. Many researchers suggest that game should be treated as "central" in teacher's activity collection (Wright et al., 1983). Therefore, it is necessary to investigate benefits of using games in teaching vocabulary. This chapter begins with a review of studies on the techniques of vocabulary teaching, followed by a discussion on using games as a vocabulary teaching technique. Finally, it presents the research question examined in the present study.

Traditional techniques used in teaching vocabulary

According to Gairns and Redman (1986), traditional techniques of teaching vocabulary are classified in to three categories: visual, verbal and translation.

Visual techniques

These techniques concern with visual memory. They consist of flashcards, photographs, blackboard drawings, wall charts, relia, mime and gesture. They are employed in expressing words' meaning. These techniques are

especially helpful in introducing some certain parts of vocabulary such as: real items, places, professions, descriptions of people, action and activities.

Verbal techniques

These include illustrative situations, synonym and definition, contrasts and opposites, scales and examples. These are the most useful for illustrating abstract word

Translation

This is considered as an effective way to convey meaning. It helps save time, especially in cases of teaching low frequency words. However, it is really a danger if teachers overuse translation. Using too frequently mother tongue discourages students to develop awareness of using L2. They tend to use L1 “ as a framework on which to attach L2 items” (Gairns & Redman, 1998, p. 75)

As Gairns and Redman comment, these techniques are relevant to more teacher-centred approach. The items taught in the lesson are usually chosen by the teacher rather than the learners.

What are games?

In a broad sense, a game is defined as “ an exercise of voluntary control systems in which there is an opposition between forces, confined by a procedure and rules in order to produce a disequibrial outcome” (Avedon & Sutton-Smith, 1971, p. 405). Costikyan (1994, p. 12) defined games in comparison with puzzle, toy and story that “ A game is a form of art in which

participants, termed players, make decisions in order to manage resources through game tokens in the pursuit of a goal". In this thesis, the sort of games the writer wants to mention is educational game. It is stated that "Educational games are games that have been specifically designed to teach people about a certain subject, expand concepts, reinforce development, understand an historical event or culture, or assist them in learning a skill as they play"(Educational game, 2008). The subject discussed in this writing is second language. Therefore, the term " game" used here means the kind of educational game designed to build or consolidate second language learners' competence.

Characteristics of a game.

Researchers give features of a game in different headings. However, there is an agreement among these authors in following characteristics of a game.

Rule: Rule is an accepted principle or instruction that states the way a game are or should be done, and tells participants what they are allowed or are not allowed to do. Lin (2002) and Klauer (1998) agree that a game is governed by rules.

Fun: Fun is the feeling of pleasure and entertainment that a game brings about. Wright et al. (2006, p. 1) state that game is an "entertaining" activity. Lin (2002) also writes a game is characterized by fun. Besides, a game should have a " ludic element" (Klauer, 1998)

Goal: A game is defined as an activity having a final goal (Lin, 2002; Klauer, 1998)

In addition, Wright et al. (2006) maintains that challenging is necessary for a game, but competition is not. Challenging encourages people to involve in the game. Although competition may also stimulate engagement it causes participants the feelings of being “ winner” and “ loser” which do not support learning.

Why use games?

Academic opinions on effectiveness of games in teaching second language

To talk about the reasons for applying games, Wright et al. (1984) claim that learning is a hard task which requires maintaining constant efforts over a long period of time while games motivate students to work with interests. It seems that they do it naturally because one of games’ characteristics is fun. Students like this non-stressful way and do it with enthusiasm. Besides, using games to teach brings lessons a new face. To quote Vernon (2006), “ Incorporating English games is a great way to get out of the rut of language drills, worksheets, boring repetition and individual study”. Furthermore, games contribute diversion to the regular classroom activities. As a result, each lesson becomes interesting because of its varied forms. Games also attract learners because they are challenging. Players are challenged by the “ ultimate goal” (Lin, 2002). Moreover, the sort of motivation that games bring students is self-motivation which encourages students’ active partaking (Prasad, 2003). Ersöz (2000) concluded that games are “ highly motivating” because they bring enjoyment, newness, diversity and self-motivation to lessons.

In addition to bringing motivation, games are recognized that they also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful (Wright et al, 1984). In recent years, the need for meaningfulness in language learning has been accepted. It means that knowing a language is knowing how to communicate successfully in that language. To reach the goal of being able to make communication well in a second language, students need more than repetition, they should practice what they have learned in conversation which is like the real world (Vernon, 2007). To meet this demand, Vernon suggested game as an effective technique. For the reason that to take part in a game, learners must negotiate to understand what others are saying and make others comprehend them. " Thus the meaning of the language they listen to, read, speak and write will be more vividly experienced and, therefore, better remembered." (Wright et al, 1984, p. 3). Further support comes from Prasad (2003), applying games in language lesson " provides a valuable impetus to a purposeful use of language". As a result, by involving in games, a student " enhances unconscious acquisition of inputs" (Chen, 2005).

Games are indicated that they make learning second language easier and improve retention because students learn through practice. There is a famous saying: " Practice makes perfect". Students can not master a language if they do not use it. Games are not only one pleasant way of practicing but they are also help students remember better. There is evidence showing that games allow students to focus well enough to learn better. For instance, rewriting a lesson with a story context combined with a challenge for the student to overcome (in other words, making it into a

game) significantly improves the learning performance of children. Games also support maintaining what students have learned. When students are having fun the language that they hear and use is more likely to make an impression on their memory and so be easy to recall in the future.

In teaching vocabulary, it seems that this field draws many researchers' attention. Uberman (1998) proceeded practical examples of using games for vocabulary introduction and revision. In the first part of the research, he evaluated the helpfulness of games in presenting vocabulary. He compared two groups which studied the same content but in different ways. He used a presentation game with the first group and with the other translation and context guessing. The result is the group which had learned vocabulary through games performed significantly better. However, it is especially interesting and surprising that the second group also received high scores for the game. In the second part, he compared two groups; one use matching and defining exercises to revise vocabulary while the second one use cross-word. After a small test, the result showed that the second group performed slightly better.

In an action research conducted by Khuat and Nguyen (2003) who aim to assess effectiveness of learning vocabulary through games, students said that they liked the relaxed atmosphere, the competitiveness, and the motivation that games brought to the classroom. On the usefulness of games, teachers who took part in the research reported that students seem to learn more quickly and retain the learned materials better in a stress-free and comfortable environment.

How to choose a game?

There are numerous of vocabulary games, but to have a successful game, teachers should take into account many factors. Wright et al. (1984) states that games are not limited by age. However, the success of the games depends much on appropriateness of the games and the role of the player. To ensure effectiveness of a game, they also give specific questions which teacher should consider:

Will the game take you a long time to prepare, compared with the amount of useful work you get from it?

Will it be relatively easy for you to organise in the classroom?

Is it likely to interest the particular group of learners you have in mind?

Is the language or is the language skill you are concerned to teach intrinsic to the activity? Or are you (honestly!) just forcing it into the game?

Is the amount of language and the type of use enough to justify the use of the game? Or do you have another good reason for introducing it into the game?

The more “ yes” answers teachers have for their games the more possible that the games meet the demands of learners.

In short, to have a successful game, time of preparing, compatibleness with the classroom, the learner’s preferences, relativeness to the lesson, reasons for choosing games should be considered.

When to use games?

According to Wright et al. (1984) games can be used in all stages of the teaching/learning sequence (presentation, repetition, recombination and free use of language. Rixon (1981) also agrees that games are compatible to every stages of the lesson: presentation, controlled practice and communicative practice. However, to lend themselves well to teaching vocabulary, games should be carefully chosen.