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# Innovative Techniques and Language Teaching

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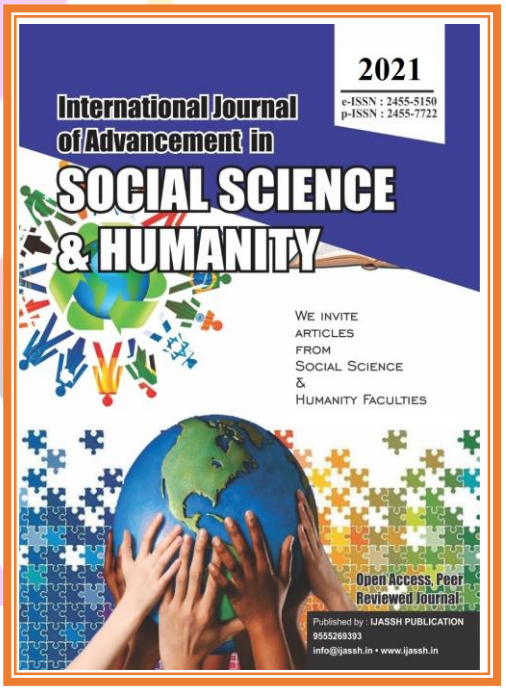


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## ABSTRACT

We all know that teaching of language whether as a second language or foreign language is a bit tedious as the job of the language teacher is not only to teach but also to develop the skill of speaking among the learners. This is what makes language teaching different from the teaching of other subjects. So, language teaching lessons have to be well organized and meticulously designed so that they really serve the purpose of both the teachers and the learners. However, often it has been observed that the atmosphere in the language teaching classes becomes so somber and serious that the whole game of developing the skill is spoiled. It is precisely because of this that many language teachers create chaos and confusion and end up by improving their own language and not the language of students. If they change their strategy and instead create a positive learning environment by making students feel at home, involving them in different language games, it could produce very fruitful results. Therefore, the attempt of this paper is that there are many such games which a language teacher could exploit in the classroom, which could create a free, frank and interactive atmosphere, and thus the teaching and learning of language will become very easy and spontaneous. The paper also offers guidelines on how those language games are to be used in the classroom to teach language effectively and naturally.


## INTRODUCTION

Games can serve a useful function in the language classroom. They provide an enjoyable change of pace and they subtly reinforce language while focusing on activity. They play a range of roles in the language curriculum. Tradition- ally, 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 substantial part of language courses (Lee:1979, Rixon:1981, Uberman: 1998). In the Presentation-Practice- Production framework (Mauer: 1997), (in which language items are first presented for students to listen to and/or read, then practiced in a manner in which the language used is controlled, e.g., students read out a dialogue from the textbook in which two characters compare study habits, and then produced by students in a less controlled manner, (e.g., two students discuss their own study habits), the games can be either for practicing specific language items or

skills or for more communicative language production. Similarly, games can also be used as a way to revise and recycle previously taught language (Uberman: 1998). Children often are very enthusiastic about games, but precisely for that reason, some older students may worry that games are too childish for them. Teachers need to explain the purpose of the game in order to reassure such students that there is such a phenomenon as "serious fun." Also, older students can be involved in modifying and even creating games. Furthermore, adults have long participated in games on radio and television, not to mention the fact that popular board games, such as Monopoly, are played by adults. Games have long been advocated for assisting language learning. Here are some of the reasons why:

1. Games add interest to what students might not find very interesting. Sustaining interest can mean sustaining effort (Thiagarajan: 1999; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005). After all, learning a language Jinvolves long-term effort.
2. Games provide a context for meaningful communication. Even if the game involves discrete language items, such as a spelling game, meaningful communication takes place as students seek to understand how to play the game and as they communicate about the game: before, during, and after the game (Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2005).
3. The emotions aroused when playing games add variety to the sometimes dry, serious process of language instruction ((Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000) Ersoz, 2000 and Lee, 1995).
4. The variety and intensity that games offer may lower anxiety (Richard-Amato: 1988) and encourage shyer learners to take part (Uberman: 1998), especially when played in small groups.
5. Games can involve all the basic language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and a number of skills are often involved in the same game (Lee: 1995).

All games have three criteria in common: they have a set of rules, a competitive element and usually include some sort of paraphernalia such as dice, board and counters. Although fun, the most important thing to remember when considering using a game is whether or not it generates useful language practice. The various games which could be used for language practice are:

Alibi: It is a problem solving game. Two or more people are given roles to play in a murder mystery story. The other players then quiz them to try and find out who the killer is. It is a fantastic game for the language classroom which can be used as it is. The teacher relates a crime story, for example, last week you and another teacher

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were kidnapped and your kidnappers did not release you for three days. When you returned to work, your boss did not believe you, and is going to interview you and the other teachers separately. So, in this game, we can put the students into pairs. Some pairs will be bosses and others teachers. Give them 10- 15 minutes; the bosses have to write as many detailed questions as possible, and the teachers have to work out their story. It is best to give them an idea of what is necessary- what time did it happen? What did the kidnappers look like? How many were they? Then one member of a boss pair takes one member of a teacher pair and asks all these questions. The other boss does the same with the other teacher. bosses then come back together and then try to find a contradiction in the teacher's story. It is primarily good for practicing past tense and reported speech.

Battleships: In this game two players each have a grid of 15 by 15 squares. The players place different sized and their ships their grid on opponent has to guess the location by calling out grid references one at a time. It can be used in children's classes by putting grammar along the top and side of the board so that students have to form a sentence to choose a square. The strategy of the game remains but with a language focus.

Bingo: In this game, each player has a card containing a grid, half of which have random numbers in them. The caller shouts out numbers picked from a bowl, and players mark off the numbers on their card if they have them. The first player to get all the numbers, or a row of numbers, shouts "Bingo" and wins. It can be used as it is to practice numbers. We can adapt the game to focus on larger numbers or pronunciation problems like the difference between "13" and "30". Or we can use vocabulary, say the word and the students have to cover the correct picture. It can be adapted to any language item and it's a great way to finish off a lesson, especially with children.

Charades: In this game, the player has to mime the title of the book, film, song of TV show to their team who guess what it is. The idea of Charades is good but we usually use books, films and TV shows which students in other countries will probably be unfamiliar with. In this case we should decide in advance what culturally-specific or inter- nationally known items to use, and write these on slips of paper which students choose at random. For more of a language focus, we may wish to jot down verbs or occupations which students have to mime.

Dominoes: It is a game where you try to match the spots of a domino (a small rectangular piece of wood or plastic marked with a number of spots 1-6 on each half of one surface) put down by another player. It is good for practicing phrasal verbs, verb collocations and prefixes and suffixes. The pieces are to be adapted so that they match

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up (e.g. take + out, lay + down, get on) so the students have to match them in the game.

Hangman: It is a word game where we replace each letter with a blank line and the other player has to guess the word one letter at a time. Each time they are wrong one part of a stick figure drawing of someone being hung is drawn. The winner is the player who guesses the word or completes the drawing first. Letters and basic words are really good for beginners. This is good for the last minutes if we need a filler.

Pictionary: A game in which teams choose a person who has to draw a word for them to guess against the clock. The word can be an activity, place, person or object. It is great fun in the classroom at all levels. Try using it as a winner at the beginning of the class. Split the class into teams-one player from each team comes to the front and the teacher shows them a word. They return to their team to draw the word; the first team to guess wins a point.

Snakes and Ladders: It is also known as Chutes and Ladders. A 10/10 grid with pictures of snakes and ladders is randomly placed on some of the squares. If a player lands on the bottom of a ladder he can move up; if he lands on the head of a snake he must slide down. Whoever reaches the end first wins. It can be adapted by putting sentences in the squares, some of which are grammatically or otherwise incorrect. When the student lands in the square, he goes up the ladder if he can correct it, or down the ladder if he can't. It is great for end of week revision of new concepts and language items. With children you could use simple words spelt wrongly which they have to correct.

Tic Tac Toe: It is also known as Noughts and Crosses. A grid of three by three squares. There are two players. One uses noughts while the other uses crosses. They take turns in placing their shape on the grid, aiming to get three of their shapes in a row to win the game. adapted easily by putting a word such as modal verbs, idioms, phrasal verbs or preposition in each square of the grid on the whiteboard. A team has to make a correct sentence with it before they can claim the square. Again, it is a great way of revising at the end of the week.

Trivial Pursuit: It is a board game in which items answer questions with the aim of writing six pieces to complete a "pie". We could invent our own version using facts we have dropped into lessons and general knowledge.

Twister: A big plastic sheet with coloured circles on it and a spinner with colours and parts of the body on it. Depending on where the spinner falls, players are asked to "place your right hand in the blue circle", etc. the last person left standing is the winner. It may be suitable for small children's classes to practice colours and body parts.

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20 Questions: One person thinks of an animal, mineral, vegetable, famous person etc, and the rest of the players guess what they are thinking of by asking up to 20 questions which they can only answer with yes or no. They win if no-one can guess the right answer after all 20 questions. This provides great speaking practice, especially if done in pairs. We should insist on totally accurate questions; students generally have a lot of problems with this form.

Scrabble: It is a board game in which players take turns to lay down words created from seven random letters. It can be easily used in the classroom, but use it sparingly as it doesn't have communication or specific language focus. We will also need to provide more than the normal 7 letters per player.

To conclude, when using all the above games in the language games classroom, certain important things are to be kept in mind. First of all, the instructions are to be kept simple and clear and if possible they are to be demonstrated with strong students. The second is that a suitable seating arrangement is to be organized for It is also to be ensured the game. that there is some feedback or follow-up activity to finish the game. Last of all, it is good to use game for revising new language at the end of the class/week.

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