UNIT 21 TEACHING GRAMMAR : NEW ACTIVITIES AND GAMES

STRUCTURE

21.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall learn the following :

a)   What are grammar games (G.G.) and grammar practice activities (GPA).

b)   The usefulness of GGs and GPAs in the classroom.

c)   We shall also a look at a number of GGs and GPAs.

21.1 INTRODUCTION

Most of us do not have very pleasant memories of grammar classes during our schooldays. Except for the few gifted grammar "Whiz Kids' who revelled in grammar, the average students generally used to dread, if not hate grammar. Perhaps this is due to the traditional approach to teaching grammar. The general pattern was to present the rules of grammar first; this was followed by a number of exercises which were mechanical and moknotonous. Further, even if the students wee able to do all the exercises correctly, there was no guarantee that they would be able to read the write English well because of their mastery of grammar.

Recently there has been a lot of rethinking on teaching grammar. Changes have been introduced with specific reference to two major issues.

a)   to make grammar learning enjoyable.

b)   to make grammar help learners to read and write better.

Bedore we proceed further let us understand what is meant by the terms "grammar games" and "grammar practice activities".

GRAMMAR GAMES

Grammar games are similar to play way methods of teaching. Practice in important areas of grammar is provided through games. So while students think they are just playing a game, in fact they are unconsciously getting practice in a particular grammatical strcture. Learning becomes fun.

GRAMMAR PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

Grammar Practice Activities, as the term implies, provide practice in grammar. The practice will be made interesting and not mechanical like traditional exercises. Further these activities will provide opportunities for learners to use language for communication. As Earl Stevick cautions us "Though a student may repeat over and over the forms of the language, in doing so he may not be using the language."

The GG's and GPAs help learners to engage in active language use— while learners are producing structures which they should practise, they are at the same time actively involved in communication. They listen, speak, understand and interpret. This improves their communicative competence.

21.2   ADVANTAGES OF GRAMMAR GAMES

Games help to motivate learners and sustain their interest.

As we pointed out earlier, grammar is serious study and requires hard work. Grammar exercises, grammar is serious study and requires hard work. Grammar exercises, though useful, may become monotonous and mechanical. However, when grammar is presented through games, learners become actively involved. The spirit of competition makes them participate enthusiastically. In fact they master language structures, without being aware of the fact they are doing so. As modern language experts say, language is best learnt when the focus is not on language, but on meaning.

2.   Games help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful.

While playing the game it is necessary for learners to listen to and understand what others say and also speak. In other words, games provide meaningful practice in real life context. By making the language convey information and opinion, games provide the key feature of 'drill' with the opportunity to understand the working of language as living communication. The 'quality' of the practice provided by these games is much richer than the amount or 'quantity' of practice provided by traditional grammar exercises.

3.   Games provide practice in all the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

4.   Games are useful in all the stages of teaching/learning sequence - that is presentation, practice, recombination and free use of language. They can also be designed to suit various levels" primary, secondary or tertiary.

5.   Gmaes also have a diagnostic role: while the students play the games, the teacher could quietly observe the students' performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses. This feedback would prove very valuable to the teacher for further planning in his teaching.

6.   Games provide genuine information gap/opinion gap. What is information gap ? We speak or write because we want to pass on information or convey an opinion which the listener might be interested in. If the listener is familiar with the information or is of the same opinion, there is no gap and he will probably switch off. It may seem terribly obvious. In many language classes, there is no information gap at alland opinions are rarely asked for. When the teacher asks the student, for instance. "Where is the book"? the student knows that the teacher knows the answer ! The teacher is nore interested in the form than the content of what the learner says.

In grammar games, on the other hand, there is always a genuine information/opinion gap. This makes the game more interesting and life-like.

1. How do grammar games differ from traditional grammar exercises ?

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2. What are the advantages of using grammar games ?

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3. Choose any grammar exercise from a grammar textbook written before 1960. Do
    you find in these exercises, any of the advantages of grammar games, listed in
    section 21.2 ? Do you find any other intrinsic merits in them ?

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21.3 GRAMMAR GAMES

In this section we shall present to you a few grammar games

Game 1 Super Duper.

Level Beginners/Elementary.

Grammar Parts of speech: Verb

Procedure Ask one child to leave the classroom. Let the others choose a verb. (eg)snore.
Now ask the child to come back. He has to guess the verb by asking questions, where, in
the place of the verb he uses "super duper".

(eg) Do we super duper at all times of the day ?

   Do we all super duper ?

   Can you super duper when you are eating ? etc.

Make sure that the questions require only "Yest" or "no" as answer. Do not ask
"Why" question (eg) When/Why/How do you super duper ? When the child makes the
correct guess, he has won. Now ask another child to go out.

Compare this with a traditional exercise on verbs :

(eg) Fill in the blanks with suitable verbs.

The sun _____ in the east.

Many people_____ heavily when they sleep.

Game 2 Noughts and Crosses

Level Secondary

Grammar Determiners

Procedure Most of your students should be familiar with the game 'noughts' and 'crosses'. Draw the following on the black board.

some	all	both
much	any	an
many	the	a

Divide the class into 2 groups. The first group should choose one of the words and construct a sentence with it (eg) Some people love grammar. Now the second group should the selection of words so that they win the game and not allow the other group to win. That is, they should select words across a row, down a cloumn, or diagonally.

This game can be adopted to apply to any grammar area.

(eg)   Parts of speech, prepositions, conditionals etc.

                              (adapted from Rinvolucri M.)

Game 3 Yes or No ?

Level Higher Secondary/Tertiary

Grammar Interrogatives - Yes/No questions

Procedure Ask a student to volunteer to come forward and face the class. Now ask the rest of the class to five questions at him in rapid succession. The questions must be so framed that they require a 'yes' or 'no' only as an answer. (eg) Did you have breakfast today ? Do you like grammar ? etc. Do not allow 'wh' questions. The volunteer student should answer the questions without using the words 'Yes' or 'No'.

(eg)   Do you like grammar ? Of course/not at all/I'm not sure etc. The moment he uses the words 'Yes' or 'No' he's out. This game is based on the psychological tendency to respond with a 'yes' or 'no' automatically.

Game 4 Silly Stories

Level All levels

Grammar Past Simple, Past Progressive

Procedure The teacher beigns a silly story with the first sentence and then asks the learners to continue.

(eg)   Teacher : I saw a horse sitting in the kitchen. It was eating....

        Student 1: a piece of cake

        Student 2 : and drinking a cup of tea

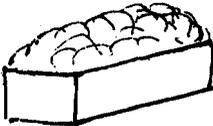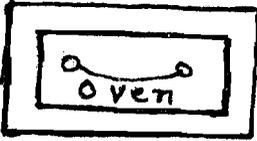   Teacher : I asked the horse

        Student 3 :Don't you have milk in your tea ?

                              (Adapted from Wright et al)

Check Your Progress 2

Given below are two exercises. Compare them with the grammar games presented above

and discuss the relative merits of each.

Exercise 1 Fill in the blanks with the appropriate determiners.

1. _____ day would suit me.

2. _____ girl in the library is my best friend

3. _____ the boys have to pay a fine

4. _____ men are born great

5. _____ apple _____ day, keeps _____ doctor away.

Exercise Change the verbs in the following passage into past tense :

> There is a tree in front of my house. A crow lives on the tree. It steals vadais from an old lady. A fox sees this and wants to take the vadai. It tells the crow "Can you sing a song for me ?" The crow is flattered. It opens its mouth to sing. The vadai falls down. The fox snatches it and runs away !

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21.4 GRAMMAR PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

a) Level : Primary

Grammar : Prepositions

Draw a picture with a no. of chuldren hiding in different places (eg) behind the door, on the roof, under a tree, in the basket, near the window etc. Also draw the picture of a mother looking for them. Tell the students to help the mother to search for the children. They will come out with sentences using different prepositions.

(b) Level : Primary

Grammar : Tenses

Using the following grid to write a paragraph about Mr. Rossi, the baker's day.

4.00 a.m.	4.15 a.m.	4.30 a.m.

5.00 a.m.	6.00 a.m.	7.00 a.m.
		Rossi's Bakery

Mr. Rossi arrives at the bakery at 4.00 a.m. First he lights the oven. Next he mixes the bread dough. After he puts the dough in pans, he leaves it for an hour. Next he bakes the bread. At 7.00 a.m., he open his shop.

(from McKay)

This can be used for teaching other tenses also.

c)   Level: Secondary

Grammar : Comparative adjectives

A graph shows daily high and low temperatures could be used for teachng comparatives.

Daily High and Low temperatures in Madras for the week May 7-13.

———— low temperatures _____ High temperature.

The students could be asked to construct as many sentences as possible

(eg) Monday was hotter than Sunday.

Thrusday was the hottest day in the week.

Wednesday was as hot as Thrusday etc. (McKay)

b)   Level : Primary

Grammar : Future Tense.

Imagine that you are in charge of organizing a 'Lucky dip' programme for the school fete. From the Lucky dip basket, people would pick out pieces of paper which would foretell their future. Prepare 20 statements about the future.

(eg)   You will win a prize today.

You will have a surprise visitor this week. etc.

e)   Level : Primary

Grammar : Adjectives

Many advertisements are catchy. Children love them. They can be used for teaching grammar. For example consider the advertisement 'Goldspot is a Zing Thing'.

Ask the students what words they could substitute for 'Zing' They would come out with adjectives (eg) delicious, tasty, etc.

1. Try out any of of the games/activities presented above. Carefully observe the reaction of students. Then write down how they differ from their response to traditional exercises.

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2. Choose any area of grammar and prepare a game/activity to teach it. You could use popular advertisement on T.V.

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21.5 GUIDELINES FOR USING GRAMMAR GAMES/ GRAMMAR PRACTICE ACTIVITIES :

a) To begin with, when learners are not familiar with the new approach, games could be used to supplement the main course. Later as teachers and learners acquire greater familiarity, they may be used as substitute for parts of the course.

b) We must remember to choose a game appropriate to the level of the learner. The instructions should be clear. We may also use the mother tongue to explain the rules of the game, if necessary.

c) At the beginning all learners may not participate enthusiastically. Some may feel shy and inhibited. Do not compel them to participate. A time will come when they would feel willing to participate.

d) The teacher should be alert and note when learners begin to get tired of a game. At this stage, he should stop and change over to another activity. Otherwise there is the danger that learners may develop grammar game fatigue.

e) In the course of playing the game learners are sure to make mistakes. However the teacher should not stop the game in order to correct the mistakes. He should quietly note down the mistakes without interrupting the game, and take them up for discussion later.

f) Grammar games could be used in three ways

    i)   before presenting a structure - to diagnose learner's knowledge

    ii) after presenting a structure - as feedback to find out how much learning has taken place.

    iii) as revision.

Each one of the above guidelines is based on an important principle of language teaching. Try to infer these principles. (eg) Guideline (a) Introduction of any change should be gradual; othewise it may fail due to learner/teacher resistance.

21.6 TYPES OF GRAMMAR GAMES

Rinvolucri divides games into four types :

a) **Competitive games** These include traditional games like "noughts and crosses", "snake and ladder", "double or quits" etc., which have been adapted to highlight a specific grammar point. Here students are asked to think consciously about grammar. These games pose a cognitive challenge.

b) **Collabarative games** In accordance with the humanistic approach, these games require warm co-operation among students rather than competition. The teacher generally remains in the background and plays the role of a facilitator.

c) **Awareness Activities** Here the students engage in activities which require them to think and feel about human relationships (eg) their childhood, friends, etc. Indirectly they practise grammar points. The students' focus is on what they are saying, not on the form they are using. On the other hand the teacher's job is to control the structures.

d) **Grammar through drama** During these activities, studnets are active; they practice grammar through movement,shouting or writing on each other's backs. When the class seems to be dull or disinterested, these games are ideal. Or when you have a set of lively youngsters with a lot of energy to spend, this is the best way of channelising it.

Given below is a sample for each type :

a) **Competitive games**

Game : Find who

Level: Secondary

Grammar : Past simple - Active/Passive

Give such student the following sheet, which they have to complete: Find a person, who, when aged between 3 and 10.

a) rode a bike

b) bit his father

c) broke his leg

d) had mumps

e) fought with other children

f) slept in the afternoons

g) was sparked for stealing cookies

h) was often made to stand in a corner

i) disliked birthdays

j) was forced to drink milk.

Now the students must go around and find various people to whom these things happened. They should then write the name of the person on their sheet. Make sure that for each item they enter a different name. The winner is the person who gets the most names soonest.

(Rinvolucri)

b) **Collaborative games**

Game : Sentence Collage

Level : Any

Grammar : Word order.

Take a long sentence

(eg) Look dad, if you let me have my dress stiched the way I want, I'll have it done ny your tailor.

Put each work on a separate slip of paper. Divide the class into groups of seven. Give each group a complete set of words. Ask them to form a sentence into which all the words fit grammatically and intelligibly. They may come out with a different sentence, which is fine.   (Rinvolucri)

c) **Awareness Activities**

Game :   True name and False professions

Level :   Primary

Grammar : Sentences with copula; vocabulary (professions) Organise the students into groups of fiften. First give your real name and a false profession, beginning with the first letter of your name. (eg) I am Peter the painter.

Now ask the student next to you to repeat your name and profession and then add his own.

(eg) He is Peter the painter. I am Tina the Tailor etc.

The last person will have quite a few names and professions to remember !

(Frank & Rinvolueri)

d) **Grammar through drama**

Game :   One idea at a time

Level: Primary/Secondary

Grammar : Adjectives

Ask a learner to volunteer. He should think of an adjective and mime it. Others should try to guess what he is miming. (Eg)

Learner 1 :   Are you tired ?

Mimer   :   (shakes head)

Learner 2 :   Are you lazy ?

Mimer   :   (shakes head)

Learner 3 :   Are you bored ?

Mimer   :   (nods head) (Write et al).

Check Your Progress 5

Think of any popular game you have enjoyed playing. Can you adapt it to teach any specific area of grammar ?

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21.7 LET US SUM UP

1. Grammar should be enjoyable and help learners to improve their skills in reading and writing.

2. Gramma games provide practice in grammar in an interesting way.

3. Grammar Practice Activities provide practice in grammar in an enjoyable manner.

4. The advantages of grammar games : Motivating; Providing opportunities for meaningful use of language; Practice in the four language skills; useful at all levels of learning; diagnostic; offer genuine information gap.

5. In order to make grammar games effective, we need to follow certain guidelines: gradual introduction; appropriacy to learner's level' no compulsion; variety; incidental correction.

6. There are four major types of grammar games: competitive games; collaborative games; awareness activities; grammar through drama.

21.8 ANSWERS

Check Your Progress 1

1)

Traditional Exercises	Grammar Games
Serious	Both serious and enjoyable
Mechanical Practice	Meaningful Practice
Learners conscious of	Learners not conscious of
learning grammar	learning grammar
Contrived	Related to real life
Individual work	Collaborative work
No information gap	Genuine information gap

2) Advantages of grammar games

3) Open ended – no one correct answer possible

Check Your Progress 2

The answer would be similar to the answer to Check Your Progress 21.1.

Check Your Progress 3

Open ended.

Check Your Progress 4

(b) Learner centred; (c) don't force learners if they are not ready; (d) need for variety; (e) incidental correction.

Check Your Progress 5

Open ended.

21.9 SUGGESTED READING

1. Frank, Christine and Rinvolucri, Mario (1983) *Grammar in Action*. Pergamon Press : Oxford.

2.   McKay, Sadra L. (1985) *Teaching Grammar*. Peraman Institute of English, Oxford.

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4.   Ur. Penny (1988) *Grammar Practice Activities*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

5.   Wright, Andrew, Betteridge, David and Buckby, Michael (1984) *Games for Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

6.   *Channel* 1-10 (1990) Orient Longman Ltd., Madras.