GAMES AND ROLE PLAYS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING AT A NON-LINGUISTIC UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The author describes her own experience in foreign language training at a non-linguistic university. The main aims of the work were to support foreign language learning motivation and to make educational process more interesting for the students. The main attention is drown to the choice of different games: it is not a random one, but is connected with the topics studied by the students. For example, such topic as “appearance and character of a person” is connected with the game “Guess who” in which the students describe famous people. The other examples are given, such as games like “Mafia”, “Alibi”, “Bluff club” and others. The main idea was to demonstrate to the students how they could use their foreign language skills and knowledges in different situations. The author also draws attention to gamification using Internet resources. The techniques of working with them is briefly described. The author suggests her own methodology of didactisation some of resources in the frame of computer-oriented language learning. It is also demonstrated how to use those Internet sites, which are addressed to native speakers but not to foreign-language students. Different ways of games are described according to in which year are the students. The games for those who are in the last two years are more professionally oriented unlike games for the first- or second year students. The integration of game-based learning was implemented in the foreign language training practice and the author was observing this process during some years. The result was that the students realized the possibilities of using foreign language for solving communicative tasks. The main conclusion drawn is the following: games and role-plays can influence the educational process positively if students get a possibility to implement language knowledge and skills in situation that are more interesting than ordinary exercises.

Keywords: Foreign language teaching and learning, gamification, computer-oriented language learning, games and role-plays in education, communicative approach.

1 INTRODUCTION

The education in modern world is not like the education for fifty or one hundred years ago. The society in all the countries has being changing rapidly and this trend will continue. This fact means that teachers and lecturers must take in account the changes in our life and new challenges, which are connected with these changes. Modern pedagogical human oriented approach means that the student is the main subject of educational process. The primary goal to achieve is to let the person develop her- or himself according to individual educational purposes. Modern society needs people who are capable to solve different problems connected with their professional activities, to create original ideas, to implement their knowledge and skills in difficult situations and to manage problem-oriented tasks. In this connection, pedagogical stuff has to search for new methods to make the education more effectively. It does not mean that we must invent something very new. It only means that we should also apply (like the student we teach) our knowledge and facilities to new educational conditions. As for the last ones, we must take in account as innovations in pedagogical science as such an important part of our life, which are Information and communication technologies (ICTs). Modern generation is a generation of digital technologies. The ICTs are integral part of their life. That is why we must use computers and other devices in teaching and learning process. Modern students make new demands to education and to us, teachers and lecturers. In these conditions, we must search for new forms of pedagogical methods to support motivation and to make the educational process not only useful but also interesting. As for me, I teach German language at a non-linguistic university. But although foreign language is not the main subject, we pay much attention to it. The most important problem for me is how to maintain the motivation by the students and make foreign language training more effective. Based on my own experience (I have been teaching foreign language for more than twenty years) and modern pedagogical research I tried to integrate some games in the topics the students were studying. The details and some examples of games I implemented in my lessons will be described below.

2 METHODOLOGY

Using games in foreign language training is not a new idea by itself. Almost all the teachers and lecturers integrate games into educational process. But I decided to do so that it should be not the game for the game. My intention was to connect a definite game with a definite topic in such a way that it could be an integrative part of the topic. For this purpose, I did the following. At first, I analyzed the learning program thoroughly. After that, I searched for some games, which were not so difficult but could be connected with very definite situations. Noto forget that besides so called “traditional games” we can use computer based games for educational purposes. As a result, I had collected a great amount of games. The next step was to connect each game with topics in program. Bellow I will give some examples describing implementation of some of them. I would like to share my experience hoping that my research in this filed helps the colleagues to make their educational process more interesting and effective.

2.1 “Traditional” games

I called these games “traditional” because they have been using for a long time, not only in education but first of all in everyday life. My purpose was didactisation of some games and their integration in educational process in foreign language teaching and learning. Now I would like to give some examples.

One of the topics for the first-term students is “Appearance and character of a person”. After the students have learned the words to this topic it was time to use them in situations. I considered, the best way for it was to use the words in a game “Guess Who”. The game was invented about forty years ago by Ora and Theo Coster. Each student choose a person, which is known by everyone. The person is described without mentioning the name. The main condition is too use new words according to the topic. The other students try to guess who the person is. They can ask additional question. The game does not suppose a winner. Its purpose is to motivate students to use the words they already know under certain conditions.

Another interpretation of a game I have used is called “Wer bin ich?” (“Who Am I?”). The rules of the game are the following. All the student make a circle. Each student becomes a sticky note where a name of a famous person is written. The notes are placed on his / her forehead so she or he doesn’t know who she / he is. The players ask questions one by one trying to find out which famous person she or he is. The answers could only be “ja” (“yes”) or “nein” (“no”). In their questions, the students use the new words. In such a way they can memorize them better because the words are used in a situation. The winner is the first one to guess who she / he is, but the game is going on until the third person finds the right answer.

“Alibi”. This game matches perfectly to the grammar topics “Past Tenses” (Präteritum, Perfekt, Plusquamperfekt), which are learned in the second term and motivates the students to use them in different situations. According to the rules, the students are divided in two teams: “the police” and the “suspects”. The teacher makes up a story, such as something was stolen somewhere (at the party, in the concert, in a restaurant etc.). The police tries to find the criminal. The suspects arrange what they will say. They must preliminary discuss their answers and memorize them. The police arrange what they will ask the suspects. The police question the suspects separately. If they answers match each other they are free to go. If not they are arrested and the police win the game.

The games I use for the third- and fourth-term students are more complicated. The reason is the following: students have already learned many words and from now one the main task is to develop communicative skills. In other words, they must activate their vocabulary. That is why I have chosen such games as, for example, “Bluff Club” and “Black Stories”. Both of these games are originally supposed not for using them in a lesson but for native speakers to play at the parties or at leisure. However, the practice has proved their effectiveness in foreign language training too. Because of these games are not as simple as the previous ones they need more serious approach. It means, the process is divided in some stages. At the first stage, I asked the students to invent some stories. For both of above-mentioned games it could be a real story from somebody’s life or an imaginary one. At the second stage, the student presented their stories at the lesson, but in a different way for each game type. As for “Bluff Club”, each student told a story and other students guessed if the story is true or false. If the story was true and the audience guessed right, the audience won. In the case, the audience was wrong, the storyteller won. “Black stories” is one of the “yes-no” games. The storytellers hade to invent a story or prepare a true one, but they did not tell the whole plot, their task was to intrigue the audience with a phrase, which makes the other think it over and guess what had

happened indeed. For example: “Rachel got eight babies, but Rocky killed them.” The audience tried to reconstruct what had happened indeed. The questions they asked could be: “Did it happen in a hospital?”, “Was Rocky a husband of Rachel?“ and so on. Indeed, Rachel was a hen, and Rocky – the neighbor’s dog. The number of question is limited by ten or some more ones depending on the story. In the case of “Black stories”, it does not matter, if the story is true or false. The main thing is the students have to recover the original one. If they do it, they win. If after asking the limited number of questions, they cannot guess what storyteller means, they have lost.

One more game, called “Mafia”, could be interesting for the student at faculty of law. As above described games, this one is not a didactical one. It was originally a party game created by Dmitry Davidoff in 1986. But it can be used at the lesson too. It is a role play, in which students play such roles, as innocent citizens of a town, mafia members, detective, doctor and others depending of number of players. Besides, there is a moderator, who leads the whole process. At first, the players get cards from the moderator, and in such way they get know which role each of them plays. Of course, they don’t’ show the card to each other. Nobody knows who is who. The moderator asks the players to close their eyes because it is night. Then “mafia member” open their eyes, identify each other a chose a “victim” In the morning everybody opens their eyes and learns that “mafiosi” “have killed” an innocent person. After that, a discussion begins. The detective is trying to find out who belongs to “mafia”. During the discussion, “mafiosi” try not to get under suspicion and the innocent help the detective. Depending on that whose arguments were more cogent, one of team wins the game.

Games are effective not only at the initial stage of foreign language training. They are also useful for senior students. At this stage, it is necessary to pay attention to the professional oriented games and role-plays. Here are some examples of such place according to the faculty.

At the faculty of international relations, upcoming politicians and diplomats are studying. They were suggested a role play “preparation for the elections”. The students became a task to create a party for imaginary elections to a parliament. The party had to have a name, a slogan and a program. During the role-play, the students represented their parties and held debate. The other group of students played the roles of jury members and decided whose arguments were the best and had more chances to be elected.

The students of Environmental Management Faculty were supposed a play “Umweltschutzkonferenz” (“Conference for Environment protection”). This role-play was organized in the frame of project work and included the main components according to project organization rules. The whole work was divided in some stages. At the first stage, the problem was defined: Recycling of industrial waste. After that the students were divided in four groups. Each group “represented” a German-speaking country (German, Austria and Switzerland) and had to analyze the problem in “their” countries. They had to prepare an analytical survey to present it at the conference. Inside the group, every student got a personal task, such as: to find relevant Internet resources, to select topical problems, to prepare a presentation (both oral and PowerPoint). The second stage was the “conference” itself, in which the “representatives” of each country shared the information and discussed some provocative questions concerning industrial waste recycling. The third stage was the evaluation of their work. Students evaluated the results, noted successful moments and what they had to improve in case of a further project of that kind.

Among other games successfully implemented in German language training I would like to mention the already known games but not originally supposed to be didactical ones. I mean such games based on TV-Projects such as shows “Wheel of Fortune”, “Jeopardy!” (both created by Merv Griffin) and “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” (created by David Briggs). All of them can be adopted for foreign language training. The didactical version for “Wheel of Fortune” is very effective for the initial stage of foreign language learning. It is very helpful to memorize the vocabulary. I used this game according to such topics as “Meal”, “Home furniture”, “Family” and some others. “Jeopardy!” is originally a quiz game. The player must use their general knowledge. But the game is good for didactical purposes too. As for my lessons, it is a teamwork, where the students prepare question for each other using the learning material connected with a topic, connected with history, geography or culture of German speaking countries. The students are divided in two teams, each of them prepares question for another one. For example, one team choose fables and legends, another one – famous people. At the lesson, they ask each other questions in turn. Each team gets some points for every right answer. The winner is the team which has the most points. As for the game “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?”, it is the teacher, who prepares questions. The questions are graduated from the simplest to the most complicated ones. Unlike TV-quiz, where one player plays, all the students participated. They were

given a worksheet with question numbers and multiple choice answers. I read a question, and the student had to mark the right answer. At the end, the answers were checked. The winner was the person who had got the most points.

2.2 Computer based games

There are many Internet resources addressed to native speakers, which contain interactive games. I do not mean such games as arcade games, games with animation and 3D technologies, but the games concentrated on language usage. Although these sites are addressed to native speakers, the students can use them for German language training. Of course, it is impossible to mention all the Internet sites in one article. That is why I only give some examples to illustrate the possibilities of computer based foreign language learning because my purpose is to draw attention to gamification using Internet resources.

Online game “Galgenmännchen” (“Hangman”) can be used to memorize vocabulary in very many topics, for example, “Tiere” (“Animals”), “Sport”, “Familie” (“Family”) and others. The students were offered the following links: http://www.hangman-online.de/ and http://hangman24.de/. They could use them at preparation for the lessons.

One more useful resource is de.akinator.com/. My students and I played the game when learning a topic “Famous people”. When using in educational process, “Akinator” is not just a game, but also an effective way to learn more about some facts from the life of famous people. This game needed some preparation work: the student had to learn as many as possible facts about outstanding people – representatives of German speaking society. After that they could play with “Akinator” and try to win.

Among many other Internet sites, I would like to mention https://www.helles-koepfchen.de. This site contains different types of online games. For German language training, I would recommend Quizzes where you can find very interesting question dealing with general knowledge. Such tasks can be recommended to motivate students broaden their outlooks.

3 RESULTS

As for results, I would like to speak about them in two aspects: the didactic aspect and the educational one. The first aspect is important for me as a teacher. For many years, I was collecting the games I could use in educational process for foreign language. As a result, I have analyzed and classified them taking in account the level of my students and the term they are studying. It was a good possibility for me to organize the learning process in such a way that I could use the games as effectively as possible to motivate my students and to make learning process more interesting at all stages. The second aspect concerns, of course, the students. Gamification allowed them to realize the possibilities of using foreign language for solving communicative tasks. Besides, they got a new experience how to learn vocabulary without any drill and how to make this work interesting. One more important thig is: they got a possibility to broaden their outlooks while doing some tasks like quizzes.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The main conclusions drawn are the following.

Games and role-plays can influence the educational process positively because of students get a possibility to implement language knowledge and skills in different situation. Such tasks are more interesting than ordinary exercises.

Games can be applied to the most of topics in foreign language training; they can be good motivators to study foreign languages.

Computer based games can contribute to educational process and make it more interesting and effective.

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