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Language games to develop the speaking ability in senior high school students.

Juegos lingüísticos para el desarrollo de la expresión oral en estudiantes de preuniversitario.

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Abstract

The authors of this article conceive a system of language games to contribute to the development of the speaking ability on tenth graders at Miguel Espinosa Cabrera Senior High School in Campechuela Municipality. The practical value has its grounds on the solution it offers through a system of language games to one of the problems in tenth graders' English teaching learning process today- the development of students' speaking ability taking into consideration the current educational transformations and the demands of the Cuban society. In spite of teacher's preparation and taking into account all the hard work carried out, there are still insufficiencies that tenth graders present according to the speaking ability. In this article, the authors demonstrate the usefulness of language games at the time of teaching a foreign language.

Keywords: speaking ability; tenth grade; language games; teaching learning process.

Resumen

Los autores de este artículo conciben un sistema de juegos lingüísticos para contribuir al desarrollo de la habilidad oral en los estudiantes de décimo grado del preuniversitario Miguel Espinosa Cabrera del municipio Campechuela. El valor práctico tiene su base en la solución que ofrece a través de un sistema de juegos de lenguaje a uno de los problemas existentes en el



proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje del idioma inglés- el desarrollo de la habilidad oral de los estudiantes teniendo en cuenta las transformaciones educativas actuales y las demandas de la sociedad cubana. A pesar de la preparación de los docentes y teniendo en cuenta el trabajo ejecutado, aún existen insuficiencias en el desarrollo de la comunicación oral de los estudiantes. En este artículo los autores demuestran la utilidad de los juegos de lenguaje en el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje de un idioma extranjero.

Palabras claves: expresión oral; décimo grado; juegos lingüísticos; proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje.

Introduction

The National System of Education in Cuba includes within the curricula of all the educational levels, the teaching of the English language for the integral formation of future generations. The primacy of the oral language remains in its natural objective reality as a social phenomenon and a verbal communication aid. This priority means that the teacher should present the oral language first, at least in the elementary level of knowledge.

To develop the speaking ability on tenth graders is very important because they are stimulated to speak and to express orally what they have learned. The varied and continuous work permits students to fix vocabulary and grammatical patterns that motivate them to speak and to communicate. The contemporary teaching-learning process of English demands for the student-centered lessons rather than the teacher centered ones, being the role of the teacher to assess students so that they express their ideas accurately, reasonably, intelligibly, that is, to use the language freely and actively.

The teaching of English contributes to students' formation regarding the scientific conception of the world, which grants knowledge about nature and society. The teaching of



English widens students' knowledge culture and educative horizon; that is why, the basic goal of teaching this foreign language is to open up a new world for them , so that they can read about other civilizations and their cultures, they can listen to news, ideas and traditions from other lands , they can write and speak to other people in order to share their dreams, values, and research findings, to negotiate agreements; in short, to exchange designs and visions on the future, all this sustained on the precepts of the Marxist Leninist theory.

The English subject in tenth grade helps to develop Senior High School students' knowledge, habits, and oral skills. Many researches have been done to improve the speaking ability; yet, few of them have been targeted to make up a system of exercises aimed at developing and integrating communicative skills. The objectives of the English subject for tenth graders are mainly concerned to the improvement of the oral abilities. English should also contribute to the integral formation of the younger generations, taking into consideration the ideology of the Cuban people.

In spite of the investigations already carried out in the communication field, students still face problems at the time of communicating. That is why, it is important to request if all the investigation results have been properly applied to improve student's speaking ability. By means of interviews and observation to classes the authors of this research work could identify that the problems related to the communication of students are closely related to the lack of activities directed to acquire knowledge and develop habits and skills for proper communication, and to the fact that most of the time the activities planned do not surpass the reproductive level.

Most of the students are not motivated towards the subject because of the ways some teachers use to teach their lessons. Besides, some of them think that the time devoted to the English lessons is not enough for developing communicative skills; that is why, students are



afraid of making mistakes at the time of speaking in the foreign language, and of being a motive of joke for the rest of the class. In spite of teacher's preparation and taking into account all the hard work carried out, there are still some insufficiencies that tenth graders present according to the speaking ability such as:

- Students' inhibition at the time of speaking in the English Language.
- Limited vocabulary of students to express themselves orally in a free way.
- Inadequate management of students' strategies to activate their acquired knowledge.
- Poor mastery of learning how to communicate or process the messages when they use English language in communicative contexts.

For these reasons, it is difficult for them to express in a coherent and spontaneous way. As a result of a bibliographic study, it is significant to say that games are important not only because they help those that learn how to feel naturally motivated, but also because they help professors to be closer to students. They are considered advantageous as teaching learning activities, especially in the language lesson because:

- They help to eliminate inhibitions.
- They strengthen the professor-student relationships and student-student. They motivate the interest toward the learning in a pleasant and entertaining way.
- They help language professors to create contexts in which the language is useful and significant.
- They help to reduce tensions and anxieties.

During the development of the games, the students can make errors and lapses caused among other aspects by the urgency of the activity. It is very important that the professors be aware of the fact that they should not interrupt the game unless it is an extremely necessary



matter. The students should play without the feeling that they will be punished for answering incorrectly. It is necessary to remember that unless the objective of the game is certain aspect, the error should not be corrected at first sight. Maybe students realize the error, perhaps at the end; the professors should also refer to this.

For this reason, the teaching learning process of English oral skills in tenth grade at this school is where the research is developed. The objective is to design a system of language games for the improvement of the speaking skill.

Population and Sample

For supporting the scientific data needed to back up the information required for this research, 33 students of tenth grade at Miguel Espinosa Cabrera Senior High School were selected as population representing 100 percent of the current register of this grade. The students from a group that consists of 33 students made up the sample representing 100 percent of the population.

Analysis of the Results

Carrazana A. (2010) states the basic principles that rule the formation and application of didactic games, among them:

Participation: expresses the active manifestation of the player's physical and intellectual forces. Participation constitutes the special context that is introduced with the application of the game.

Dynamism: expresses the meaning and the influence of the time factor in the game. The game implies movement, the development of the intellect, and the active interaction among students in the dynamical and pedagogical process.



Entertainment: reflects the interesting manifestations shown by the game which exercise a strong and emotional effect on the students, and it can be main reasons that offer the active participation in the game. The entertainment reinforces greatly the interest and the cognitive activity of students; it means that the game does not admit the students get bored, repetitions or the common and habitual vagueness.

The roles performance: it is based on the participation of the students in the game, and reflects the phenomena of imitation and improvisation.

Competition: the students report specific results and express the main kinds of motivations to participate actively in the game. Without competence there is no game for it makes influence on the independent work, and it mobilizes all the physical and intellectual potential of the students.

In regard to the development of the speaking ability, Guerra, (2012) states that in any speech act, speakers make use of their communicative ability at processing the complete situation involving them.

Byrne, (1989) refers to the process of ideas formation and its verbal expression through speaking, that language learning should be associated to the learners' needs. They say that fluency derives from the experience of trying the language out for oneself. It is considered by them as the smooth joining of elements at an acceptable speed of delivery, though it is not simply a matter of speed. It relates not only to pronunciation but to other aspects of language as well, including grammar, vocabulary, style and discourse. It also indicates that the speaker is using linguistic elements with a minimum of effort, and with a minimum of conscious decision taking into account what comes as a result of practice.



Games add interest to what students might not find very interesting. Sustaining interest can mean sustaining effort (Thiagarajan, (1999). After all; learning a language involves long-term effort.

Uberman, (1998) considers that the variety and intensity that games offer may lower anxiety and encourage shy learners to take part especially when games are played in small groups.

Through the *observation* of 10 English lessons it was corroborated that all of them (100%) made possible to determine that although the teacher used some methods and procedures of recognized efficiency, the objectives were not totally fulfilled. The lessons were not motivating, so some students did not react accordingly while the teacher was teaching the lessons. Additionally, students' participation was not satisfactory because most of the them were not really interested in classroom activities; they had several shortcomings in applying the pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary speaking subskills which were not solved by the activities which were designed taking into account just the recognition and reproduction levels of assimilation.

In fact, students' oral performance in class was lower than expected. All these provoked that the students could not go over the reproductive level, limiting the needed development of both their language and communicative speaking ability. The lessons showed the prevalence of a process with an essentially instructive and cognitive character.

It was observed a very limited development of the speaking ability and the possibilities for the critical reflection and self-criticism of learning were ignored, thus students' learning and preparation levels did not meet the expectations of the process. On the other hand, the educational actions carried out during the lessons were not integrated to the process in a natural



way, turning very weak the work towards the formation of values and the evaluation of students' development of speaking ability. In addition, the teacher did not relate the treated topics to students' necessities and experiences; therefore their motivation to talk in class was really poor.

In the *interview* to the teachers, when asked about tenth grade syllabus conception, they answered that it was well-conceived, but it was necessary to deepen on the use of productive methods and techniques demanding students' interaction as pair and group work to develop the their speaking ability through oral exercises. They stated that the linguistic contents included in the syllabus respond to the development of students' speaking ability, but the time allotted to teach them was not enough to develop the expected ability.

They also answered that the most commonly used activities to develop students' speaking ability were dramatization of dialogues and acting out transpositions. The answer to the third question reinforced the veracity of the existence of the problem. They answered that they did not treat topics related to student's necessities and experiences due to the fact that they have not developed their oral skills to cope with them. When they were asked about their opinion related to the use of language games to improve the speaking skill, they asserted that games offer wide possibilities to develop students' skills and capacities in an actual motivating way taking into consideration their age.

The *survey* was applied to 33 tenth graders. The results proved that 14 students, representing 42, 4 %, liked English lessons; the recurrent answers about the reason why they liked them were that they were interested in learning a foreign language as a way to get in contact with other cultures, especially, those of the English speaking countries; the other 19 students, representing 57, 5 %, assumed that they disliked them because they were not able to understand the foreign language since it is very complicated to pronounce some words. In



addition, they claimed that the lessons were too boring for them. When asked about the exercises they developed in class, they all responded that true or false exercises; repetition and dramatization of dialogues were the commonest ones. Regarding their wish to talk in English with their classmates, 33 students, representing 100 %, answered that they would like to talk more with them, and they all stated that they would like very much practicing English through games in class.

An initial pedagogical test was applied in order to get information about the current state of tenth graders regarding the speaking ability development. It consisted of three activities: first, they had to answer orally some questions related to communicative functions they were supposed to study in tenth grade; secondly, they had to follow instructions to make up a minidiologue with a classmate using the communicative functions asking and talking about likes and dislikes; and finally, to practice a given conversation with a classmate and act it out. It was verified that most of the students had difficulties while giving answers to the questions asked.

To facilitate the analysis of the application of the pedagogical test, the dependent variable, namely the development of the speaking ability, is framed into the following dimensions with their corresponding indicators and criteria of evaluation:

Dimensions.

- I. Pronunciation.
- II. Vocabulary.
- III. Grammar.
- IV. Fluency.

Indicators selected for dimension I.

- Articulate sounds accurately.



- Blend sounds and words together in speech.
- Stress syllables and words properly.
- Make stress shifts, use contracted and reduced forms.
- Make all necessary pauses.
- Express several communicative purposes, emotions and attitudes through intonational means.

Indicators selected for dimension II.

- Employ a general (everyday) or specific vocabulary.
- Choose the appropriate word in a given context.

Indicators selected for dimension III.

- Construct different types of sentences: affirmative, negative, interrogative.
- Organize the elements within the phrases.
- Correct use of grammatical patterns at the time of communicating.

Indicators selected for dimension IV.

- Make use of varied registers: formal, informal, familiar, polite.
- Use paralinguistic features to convey meaning when he/she cannot recall specific communicative expressions, structures or vocabulary items.
- Use of necessary pauses at the time of communicating.

Criteria of evaluation:

High level: students who performed properly in the three activities, showing mastery of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and communicative skills.

Intermediate level: students who performed in the three activities, but with slight problems in their pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and communicative skills.



Low level: students who performed in three activities, but with severe problems in their pronunciation grammar, vocabulary, and communicative skills.

Very low level: students who performed one or two activities with severe problems in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and communicative skills and those who did not do anything.

As a result of this test, it was verified that four (4) students representing 12,6 %, were in the high level, 8 students representing 24,2 %, were in the intermediate level, 14 representing 42,4 %, were in the low level and six (6), representing 18,1 % , were in the very low level. It was corroborated that some students did not comprehend questions one and two; that is why, they could not answer them. Some others understood the questions, but could not answer them because they did not know how to pronounce the answer.

In regard to the third activity, most of the students could not dramatize the conversation and had severe problems with their pronunciation and fluency. It corroborated *students' limitations* in oral communication, particularly in pronunciation what is an indicator of their low level of the speaking ability development.

The qualitative analysis of those results permitted the authors to target the recurrent students' deficiencies among them:

- In regard to pronunciation speaking skill, they had trouble at the time of articulating sounds accurately and blending sounds and words together in speech.
- In regard to vocabulary speaking skill, most of them were not able to choose the appropriate word in a given context.
- In regard to grammar speaking skill, the greatest problems were focused in the organization of the elements within the phrase.



- In regard to communicative speaking skill, they got confused when making use of varied registers: formal, informal, familiar, and polite.

The authors were driven to the conclusion that the English teaching- learning process needed a more practical approach to develop tenth graders' speaking skill.

The detailed analysis of the results obtained through the application of a final pedagogical test permitted the authors to reveal some quantitative information that expresses a positive outcome. It was verified that 20 students representing 60, 6 % reached the high level, nine (9) students representing 27, 2 % reached the intermediate level, and four (4) students representing 12, 1 % remained in the low level. The very low level turned deserted.

This quantitative analysis turned insufficient if it is not complemented with the qualitative analysis of the change operated in the sampled students with the application of the system of language games. Those students got a sound mastery of the communicative functions studied in class during the course, developed at a higher degree the speaking skill demanded for tenth grade, shared learning strategies that permitted the low achievers to better up, put into practice moral values while sharing the activities related to the games, got much more motivated towards the subject, and felt satisfied with the results.

The results obtained through the application of the second pedagogical two, let the researchers confirm that the system of language games applied permitted the development of students' speaking skill. This is showed when the results of the two pedagogical tests are compared in which it is appreciated that the quantity of the students

Graph 1



belonging to the middle and high level was increased, there were less students in the low level and there were not students in a very low level. **Graph 1.**

Conclusions

Through the development of the present article, the authors drew the following conclusions:

1. The theoretical references analyzed permitted to support the language games elaborated to develop a dynamic English teaching-learning process to work with the speaking ability in a practical way.
2. The limitations students faced in the development of the speaking ability were solved in the relations established among them and the teacher through the system of language games elaborated.
3. The application and validation of the system of language games constitutes a significant practical solution to the problem that originated the investigation.

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