GAMES FOR DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS AT BEGINNING STAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the study of the peculiarities of using games for speaking comprehension in teaching FL, different types of games for the beginners have been recommended and investigated in detail.

Keywords: speaking games, pair work, communication, small groups, speech sounds, communication, situation, collaborate, role playing, dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

Many teachers seem to think that using games at elemntary level classes is almost impossible, and the lack of enough materials and game ideas for students under elementary in books and online reinforces this impression. The same is true for ideas on how to bring speaking and pair work into a class for beginners. Not only are there in fact plenty of speaking games for beginners, they are if anything even more important than in other classes due to reasons such as:

– The difficulty of having any free conversation (chatting) due to the students' limited language resources

– Often negative impressions of language education and a rejection of techniques such as grammar-based used in their previous unsuccessful language classes and so a positive impression of learning "conversational English"

– The need to compensate for negative feelings such as resistance to being reduced to "babyish language"

– The need to constantly recycle language, sometimes exactly the same sentences as they don't have the language resources to make variations on it

– To prove to them that they can really communicate, even with a limited amount of English

– As almost all the language is new, students quickly become "saturated" and needs lots of revision and many breaks

– Texts at this level are generally not interesting and motivating, and it can be difficult to find and make more interesting ones as authentic texts aren't useable etc. There is therefore a need to provide that interest and motivation through other things such as games and speaking

– Readings and listenings for these levels tend to be very short and so take up very little class time

Here then are some easy to explain and play games that can be used with the very limited amount of language that your students have and the basic language that you are teaching them

The Yes game

Students get one point for each question they ask that you truthfully answer "Yes" to, e.g. "Are you British?" "Are you a teacher?" and "Are you sitting down?" They can then ask each other questions in the same way. You can also move onto getting points for each "No" answer, e.g. "Are you a dog?" You can also make this more intensive language practice by telling them they must get a particular short answer from you, e.g. "Yes, I am" or "Yes, I have"

Question chains

This game is good for making a challenge out of tedious questions like "How old are you?" and "Where are you from?" Ask the student sitting at the end of the row a simple question such as "What is your name?" and pass them something to represent the question, e.g. a magnetic number 1 or a board pen. Gesture that they should ask the same question to you and pass the thing back to you. Answer the question, go to the other end of the class and ask the same question to the student sitting there, passing the same object. Then pass them another (different) object while asking another question, e.g. "How are you (today)?" After they have answered that question, demonstrate and explain that they should pass the same two objects in the same order to the person next to them, asking the same question each time. After they have done that, give them a third object and get them to make up their own question to ask the same person. When that person has answered, they should pass the same three objects while asking the same three questions, then add their own fourth question. Continue, increasing the number of questions each time. The game can finish when you reach a nice round number (e.g. ten objects and numbers), goes all round the class, or reaches such a large number that they give up. You can also play the same game in groups.

An easier to play variation is for each student to repeat just the last person's question then add their own, so that each person is remembering one question and making one question. You can add an element of challenge by telling them that their new question can't be one that has been used before. An even simpler version is to get them to take turns asking questions, with anyone who repeats a question that has already been used losing a point.

Find someone who

This is a well known language learning game where students mingle and ask each other questions to find which person the fact they have on their worksheet is true for. This activity is good for waking students up by getting them out of their chairs and is also good practice for "Nice to meet you" and introductions. In low level classes you can't do this with true information about the students as they will have told each other everything they can in the language they have available (e.g. names, jobs and ages) many times already. That being the case, you will need to give each person a role play cards with some personal information about their "new" self, plus one worksheet with the information they should be searching for. The Find Someone Who worksheets can be the same for each student or different for each person. They then stand up and go round the class asking questions until they find out that this person is Chilean, this person is 79 years old, this person is a seven year old film star etc, then sit down when they think they have found all the information. As you can see from these examples, it is possible to add a little humour by your choice of role play sentences. You can

add more speaking to the game by students passing on all the information they have found out so far to the person they speaking to.

Very simple role plays

This is another way of livening up revising the same old personal questions yet again. Ask students to give imaginary answers to all the questions that they have asked, giving them one or two prompts such as a name or job to get them started. While this on its own is fun, you may find that the person asking the question will have no real reason to listen to the answers. One way of taking away this problem is to ask the person who asked to questions to report back to the class, and then for everyone to find similarities between people's stories, e.g. how many answered "I am Spanish" when they were given the role play card saying "Your name is Esteban"

One lie

Another way to let students use their imagination and make sure they listen to each others' answers is to ask each other all the personal questions that you have covered so far, with the person who is answering lying just once in their answers. When all the questions have been asked, the people asking the questions say which answer they think was a lie (from their knowledge of that person or just guessing). This can be played in pairs or small groups, but is more fun as a whole class. There is more communication if the person answering the questions doesn't know what the questions will be or at least what order they will be in, but some students might not be able to cope with that much thinking on their feet.

How many lies

This is the same as the game above, but the person answering the questions can lie as many times as they like and the people asking the questions have to add up or guess how many lies they heard.

I don't know

Students have to ask each other questions that they get the real response "I don't know" for, e.g. "What is this called in English" while pointing at a shoe lace or "When is his birthday?" with a classmate or a photo of a famous person. As all the questions are about things they aren't expected to know, this often helps students get over their embarrassment at not knowing the answers most of the time in class.

I don't know imagination bluff

In this variation of the game above, rather than saying "I don't know" the person answering makes up an answer and then the people listening guess whether that answer was just imagination or actually something that they knew. This works particularly well with photos of people, and can be played without using third person s by getting them to answer as if they were that person. A variation on this is giving just the person answering the question one piece of information on the person in the photo and getting the people asking the questions to guess

which answer was that one given piece of information. This works well with photos of the teacher's family, friends, (obscure) favourite actors, and pets.

Guess who

Prepare at least ten information cards about real or imaginary people on a worksheet, including data such as names, ages, nationalities, likes and jobs. Students ask Y/ N questions until they can guess which person on the worksheet you have chosen. The cards should be designed so that the people have lots of things in common, e.g. mainly from one country or only two jobs amongst the ten people. If you are sure they will know all the information, you can play the same game with just a list of famous people's names.

Puzzles

Draw up a worksheet similar to that described above, but with only between four and eight people on it. Make a blank version of that table for the students and a list of six to twelve hints by which they can fill in all the missing information, e.g. "Three people are British", "The person who isn't British isn't a dentist", "Two people are dentists and two people are doctors" etc.

Test each other on the text

Another thing that you can't do with very low level students is have very interesting comprehension questions for reading texts. You can partly make up for this by having students test each other's memory on what was written in the text, e.g. names, times they do things, jobs etc. If they haven't studied third person s yet, you can do the same thing but with the person answering the questions taking on the role of the person in the text.

Test each other on each other

You can do something similar to the activity above by students testing each other on what they know about their classmates. Again, if they don't know third person s yet they can take on the role of their classmate when they ask the questions and so answer them with "I…" and "My…"

Disappearing text

Another fun memory game with short reading texts and dialogues is to delete the text one word at a time, with the student whose turn it is reciting the whole thing from the words left on the board and memory and then choosing the next word to be deleted.

Shadow reading

Another way of making dialogues more memorable and interesting is to have students read it out while the tape is playing, trying to match the rhythm and speed of the recording. When they've got the hang of this, turn down the volume half way through and see if they are still more or less in time when you turn it back up right at the end. Try this a few times and stop when they have made a big improvement or got close

Sentence hangman

This is like the opposite of Disappearing Text above. Write the first letter of a dialogue that they haven't seen before (but that is made from language that they have studied before) or haven't seen for a while up on the board. All the students or just one team get one chance to guess the next letter. The teacher then writes that second letter up so that they can check if their guess was right, and this continues until the whole text is up on the board. You can make the challenge easier by always giving the first letter of the next new word after you finish the last one, so that they only have to guess from the second letter each time. If you want to score, you can give one point for each right guess or put a line into a hangman for each wrong guess- but note that for a long dialogue there will be many more mistakes than in a normal game of hangman so you'll need to give them more chances with a hangman that has fingers, eyebrows etc.

Say it happily

Low level students can need quite a lot of drilling and reading out of dialogues, which can quickly get boring and anyway they might have a negative impression of due to having done it in their previous, unsuccessful attempts at language learning. One way to liven it up is to ask them to do the same dialogue with different feeling in their voices such as "bored" and "excited". Their classmates can then guess which feeling they were trying to do and/ or compete to make the most extreme version

Dialogue substitution chains

After students have read out a short dialogue together, ask them to read it out again but changing one piece of information (without writing it down) such as a name. The next person reads it out with the last person's change and making one more change themselves, e.g. a time. This continues until students can't remember the previous changes or can't think of any new ones

Change the performance memory game

This is similar to the idea above, but with the students listening with their books closed and trying to spot the information that has been changed from their memory of the dialogue. You can also ask students to make the dialogue wrong by taking out words, putting extra words in, changing words around, changing lines of the dialogue around, etc.

Match the questions and answers pairwork dictations

Matching questions and answers ("How are you?" "I'm fine, thank you") is a tedious but perhaps necessary exercise at this level, but one you can add some more interest and speaking to. Give one student a worksheet with all the questions, and the other student a worksheet with all the responses mixed up. Without showing their sheets to each other, they have to match up the questions and answers by reading them out and agreeing which ones go together. You can add a puzzle element and therefore some fun to this by the letters that represent the responses making a word (e.g. (t)(a)(b)(l)(e)) when they are written in the same order as the questions.

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