Teaching and reinforcing vocabulary items through word games

Loredana Bloju [*]

University of Pitești [Romania]

Abstract

In school, and especially at the level of the young school ages, intrinsic motivation for learning does not appear forced and compelling students to learn is a risky thing that can lead to an extreme different than the one intended. Therefore, it is very important for students to learn with pleasure. And no method is more beneficial than the didactic game. Versification turns out to be equally useful and dynamic. This paper aims to bring to the fore some ways of understanding and reinforcing the main semantic relations of vocabulary (synonyms, antonyms, homonyms) through word games.

Key words: *vocabulary, game, synonym, antonym, homonym.*

The development of the oral expression of pupils by acquiring, understanding and properly using the meanings of terms and of lexical and word structures represents a framework-objective which should be permanently taken into consideration if we propose ourselves a continuous education of language and a development of communication skills. Acquiring and using Romanian language as a means of communication involve an overview of all aspects of language:

- phonetic aspects (pronunciation and phonemic hearing);

---

[*] Lecturer PhD., Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Pitesti, Romania.
Email: lorredana@yahoo.com

- lexical aspects (the conscious use of certain words and structures, activation of certain lexical structures, vocabulary refinement and enrichment, use of abbreviations, transfers);

- morphological and syntactical aspects (perception of oral and written messages, notification and motivation of errors, error correction, clear, logical, expressive, precise and consistent expression);

- stylistic aspects (reception of the subtle meanings of words or structures, decoding symbols, differentiating communication according to the context of communication).

In a child's everyday activity, his/her favourite activity is the game. As the adult feels fulfilled by his work, the child feels grown up through its ludic successes. In a child's everyday activities, the game occupies a favoured place. To wonder why, for a child, almost any activity is playing, is to ask ourselves why he/she is a child. In their everyday activity, a child's favourite activity is the game.

Knowing the place the play occupies in a child's life, the effectiveness of using it in the instructive-educational process is easy to understand. In school, and especially at a young school age, intrinsic motivation for learning does not occur on command and involvement in the lesson obtained by coercion may have worrying side effects that could only be remedied with great effort.

The components of the play, incorporated into a lesson, are a safe warrant of capturing the students' attention throughout teaching activity and removing boredom, considered by Herbart the "death sin of teaching". The game has always proved to be an effective means of education; being broken from the world of childhood, it manages to discipline without triggering any constraint on the player both from the viewpoint of the concrete operations carried out, and from the viewpoint of the interpersonal relations, of linking to other players in the game.

The game is the ideal way for the enrichment of speech expressivity, for activating vocabulary and stimulating the creativity of the pupils. It is extremely

desirable that the teacher try to lead the children in a process of knowledge, teaching and reinforcing the main semantic categories of Romanian language - synonyms, antonyms, homonyms - for inserting them in their active vocabulary. Carried out under the form of didactic games, through word games, these lessons make learning easier, children are strongly attracted to the word combinations, and the use of new terms in peculiar verbal structures provides a faster acquisition of information.

Thus, in view of understanding the relations of homonymy in the case of certain structures involving words that are accidentally written identically, but their meaning is different, the teacher can imagine various scenarios.

For example, the teacher can distribute copies of a set of various images representing different objects, but which have the same name: *toc* (*toc de scris, toc de uşă, toc de ochelari, toc de pantof*), *broască (broască râioasă, broască de uşă)*, *ochi (ochi de geam, ochi de ciorap, ochi de apă, ou în tigaie, ochi – organ uman*) etc. The teacher also has identical images, but of larger sizes; pulls them up one at a time and the child who has the token in question must designate the object if he or she knows it. If he/she doesn't know, he/she can ask their colleagues or the teacher may intervene. After clarifying the name of the object in the image and after the teacher makes sure that they understand, the children are asked to compile short sentences with the new word.

Children find these lyrics that combine the words connected via a relation of homonymy to be extremely funny. They listen to them with pleasure and with great curiosity, and, what's more, store them with a lot of ease, which facilitates and achieves the objective of the teacher. As examples, we can note the following:

*Munţii noştri aur **poartă*** / *Noi umblăm din **poartă**-n **poartă*** (Mihai Eminescu - *Doina*)

*Ia **zi*** / *Cine **zi de zi*** / *Ne va spune **nouă*** / *O poveste **nouă**.*

Tocul de-ochelari / *Tatei l-am pitit* / *Şi chiar **tocul uşii*** / *Azi l-am scrijelit.*

At other times, students may be required to look for new meanings of certain words already assigned by the teacher in versified structures. One of these words may be *vie*.

*Maică-ta de-i **vie** / Bine-ar fi să **vie** / Pân' la noi la **vie*** (C. Negruzzi – *Amitiri de juneţe*)

After having decrypted the new meanings of the word "vie" from the lines above (*este în viaţă, să vină, plantaţia de viţă de vie*), students will make up sentences to consolidate them.

Also, students may also be provided with mixed sheets, and their task would be that of putting in correspondence the homonyms which they identify using different colours for each series. This way, the representations they have may also be observed.

Also in the case of *synonymy* (words which shall be written differently, but which have an identical or almost identical meaning) can be used in more types of games. A game that is aimed at uttering a word after certain suggested meanings would involve the following organization: a student is asked to get out of the classroom. The primary-school teacher, together with the colleagues, chooses a word, for example the adjective *potolit*. After selecting the word, the child outside is asked to come in the classroom and in an organized manner he/she will be suggested two or more meanings of the same word. The student must guess, starting from these clues, what the word is all about. For the word indicated the following clues may be given – one can be quiet, obedient, serious, dutiful – until the student guesses. If he/she does not guess, additional explanations may be given to him/her, using even certain contexts in which these directions should be integrated.

Verses of the type may also be exploited:

*Mama-mi pune masa / Ca **să mă hrănesc** / Îmi spune **să pap** / Mare eu să cresc / Sora mea cu fructe / **Mă alimentează** / Şi cu prăjituri / **Nu mă ospătează***.

Synonyms contribute to the specifying of the meanings of the words that make up vocabulary and increase significantly the expressive potential of language. Children are led to understand and notice that some of the words can be replaced in speech with others, with the same meaning, thereby avoiding annoying repetition.

For example: *copilaş – bebeluş – prunc – pui de om*

The study of antonyms (the relation between two words placed in opposition of meaning) may also trigger, in its turn, a series of tasks. For example, the game "*Cum este şi cum nu este….*" may be imagined: It is also possible to use pairs of antagonistic images showing clearly the feature concerned (*day - night, cheerful - sad*, etc.). After the mechanism of the didactic task has been understood, opposite words may also be used, without intuitive support, making use of working in pairs or in groups. The activity may be performed in the form of dialogue to confer density and dynamism to the game, to develop team spirit and confidence in one's own forces.

In the end, the children can enjoy listening to poems in which contrastive meanings appear:

*Am schimbat o **zi** pe **noapte** / şi cireşe **verzi** pe **coapte**, / am dat **iarna** pentru **vară**, / d**imineaţa** - pentru **seară** / să îmbrac o haină **nouă** / (din cea **veche** zdrenţe plouă) / şi-am fugit din **deal** în **vale** / **cu** noroc, **fără** parale, / să prind **lună**, să prind **soare**, / **zahăr** să le dau şi **sare**, / ca să fie **cald** nu **frig**, / când toţi **tac**, să pot să **strig** vorbe **dulci** şi **pipărate** / din **cer** şi **pământ** luate.*

The words used in the classes of vocabulary activation can either be stored or recited in dialogue in case of free-choice activities. Also, the lyrics can be rhythmicised on songs popular to the children, highlighting the words proposed for solving exercises or may equally be the starting point for other games that can be initiated by the children themselves.

In these few lines we dwelt on the most important aspects of vocabulary and on several ways of using them in lessons of teaching-learning-assessment.

The words represent the concrete coat of an idea or of a feeling and they should be chosen with craftsmanship and uttered with great care, otherwise they would be nothing else than mixed colours without meaning. Pupils do not develop their communication skills and abilities if they are not trained systematically in the learning activity. Therefore, we ought to demonstrate to them that vocabulary is the mirror of the dynamism of society by any means possible.

Anatole France once stated: "*L'art d'enseigner n'est que l'art d'éveiller la curiosité des jeunes âmes pour la satisfaire ensuite, et la curiosité n'est vive et saine que dans les esprits heureux. Pour digérer le savoiré avec apétit*". (*Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, 1881:258) (The skilfulness of the primary school teacher is solely that of waking up young minds' curiosity, only to satisfy this curiosity afterwards, a curiosity which is happy and healthy only with human beings. Knowledge crammed down the students' throat buries and represses this curiosity. To burn science, one must have swallowed it with relish.).

References

Antonovici , S., Nicu ,G., *Jocuri interdisciplinare*, Ed. Aramis, Bucuresti, 2004;

Craciun ,Constantin, *Metodica predării limbii române în învăţământul primar*, Ed. Emia, Deva, 2001;

France, Anatole, *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, Paris C. Lévy, 1881;

Tibrian, Constantin, *Structura vocabularului limbii romane in trecut si in prezent*, Tiparg, Pitesti, 2010.