

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Rationale of the Study

At present, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely accepted. The goal of this approach is to enable students to use a language to communicate appropriately in real contexts. In doing this, students have to apply knowledge of both language forms and functions to negotiate meaning in real communication. The development of communication skills should include not only the knowledge of language functions and skills but also adequate grammatical competence. Communication most frequently breakdowns when incorrect grammar makes the language incomprehensible as mentioned by Dickins and Woods (1988: 624):

One can therefore anticipate difficulties when second language learners try to operate at a higher level of understanding and communication in the language but find they are unable to do so because of an inadequate knowledge of a grammatical system of English and how to apply it.

A common problem English teachers in Thailand face in class is that their students have a low level of grammatical competence. They can not use it effectively in communication. In my English class, I have found that most of my students have difficulties in using grammar. In other words, they can not apply the grammar use in communication.

According to the English curriculum, Thai students are required to study several English courses in schools. Most of the students start learning English from the first grade through to the twelfth grade. Certain grammatical items such as present simple tense, pronouns, adjectives, etc. have been learnt repeatedly at several grade levels; still the students can not use them properly when they want to communicate. Therefore, it is essential for language teachers to search for effective methods of teaching grammar that enhance its communicative uses. The effectual way to do this is to involve students in communicative activities where they can interact and use grammar in communication.

Games are widely suggested as one of the effective activities to establish communicative language learning in a classroom. Games strengthen interactive and communicative grammar learning through their particular characteristics. Games are rule-governed and goal-defined so they help promote recognition of language forms and functions. With their competitive and co-operative characteristics, games engage students in real and meaningful communication. Games also have great advantages for grammar teaching and learning. They can be used for both extensive and intensive grammar practice. They can also be used as a revision, reinforcement and enrichment of grammar learning. Varieties of lesson plans and language activities can be furnished through games. While playing games students are exposed to and engaged in real and meaningful communication and this results in their long-term retention of grammar knowledge. It is believed that students will be able to apply this knowledge to their every-day communication and this knowledge will form a firm basis for their further studies. The present study is intended to find out whether learning grammar through games better increases students' grammatical competence.

## **2. Purposes of the Study**

This research aims to investigate whether linguistic and communication games enhance students' grammatical competence. The main focuses are:

2.1 to find out whether the use of these two types of games at the practice and production stages of grammar teaching will enhance the students' grammatical competence; and

2.2 to investigate the students' attitudes towards learning grammar through games.

## **3. Statements of Hypotheses**

It is hypothesized that:

3.1 grammatical competence of the students studying through games would be greater than that of the students studying through non-game activities; and

3.2 the students who study grammar through games would have a positive attitude towards grammar learning.

## **4. Research Questions**

The research asks two main questions.

4.1 Is the grammatical competence of the students studying through games better than that of the students studying through non-game activities?

4.2 What are the students' attitudes towards

- a. learning grammar through games,
- b. learning English in general through games, and
- c. game playing in language learning?

## 5. Scope and Limitations of the Study

There are three limitations in this study.

5.1 Grammatical competence in this study is limited to the knowledge of four grammatical items which require students to talk about past events (*past simple with ago and for*), experiences (*present perfect with ever and never*), necessity (*has/ have to, have/ has got to*), and rules and permission (*can, must, be allowed/ permitted/ forbidden*).

5.2 This study is classroom-based. It investigates a specific group of students in a particular context. The subjects participating in this study are the M.4 students in science program at Nawaminthrachuthit Taksin (NMT) School in Songkhla Province. Therefore, the outcomes may not be readily generalized or represent all Thai students who are studying at the same level in other schools throughout Thailand.

5.3 Experimentation time is limited by constraints imposed by the school's schedule. The study involves 10 class periods of 50 minutes each. Other data collection methods such as protocols, journal writing and interview, are not employed due to the aforementioned time constraints.

## 6. Expected Results

It is anticipated that the students studying grammar through games would have higher grammatical competence in the four grammatical items: the past events (*past simple with ago and for*), experiences (*present perfect with ever and never*), necessity (*has/ have to, have/ has got to*), and rules and permission (*can, must, be allowed/ permitted/ forbidden*), than those studying through non-game activities, and that they would have a positive attitude towards learning grammar through games.

## 7. Significance of the Study

Findings in this study will be beneficial and valuable for both teachers and students in the following ways.

7.1 If games are proved to be able to enhance the students' grammatical competence, it will be advisable for teachers to employ games to reinforce the learning of grammar in class. Games can be used to increase students' understanding, competence and confidence in using grammar communicatively.

7.2 If games are proved to create students' positive attitudes towards grammar learning, it will be useful to use games in grammar teaching to increase the students' interest and to motivate learning.

## 8. Definition of Terms

Five terms will be used in this study. They are defined as follows.

8.1 **Linguistic games** are games in which the players are encouraged to use language forms accurately at the practice stage of grammar teaching. These games are the Chain game, Card game, Break Down game and Verb game.

8.2 **Communication games** are games in which players are encouraged to interactively produce language forms and functions to complete a task at the production stage of grammar teaching. These games are Role Play, Find-The-Differences, Complete-It, Interview, and Find-Someone-Who.

8.3 **Experimental group** is the class of 42 science program M.4 students who were taught the four grammatical items : the past events (*past simple with ago and for*), experiences (*present perfect with ever and never*), necessity (*has/ have to, have/ has got to*), and rules and permission (*can, must, be allowed/ permitted/ forbidden*) through games by the investigator.

8.4 **Control group** is the class of 42 science program M.4 students who were taught the four grammatical items as the experimental group through non-game activities by the investigator.

8.5 **Non-game activities** are activities in the teaching of each of the four grammatical point items which follows the sequence of presentation, practice, and production. The learning activities move from more to less controlled. The activities require students to work both in pairs and in groups. The students were given opportunities to practice and use the grammatical items through various activities besides games.