

TEACHING GRAMMAR THROUGH GAMES

by Duane Hurst

In teaching Thai to native English speakers for the past two years, I have become aware of various difficulties which a second language presents. One prevalent problem is getting students to avoid injection of English grammar into the Thai. I also notice a similar obstacle is experienced by the Thais learning English.

Since the challenge has and still does exist, I offer several exercises which, though they may be classified as games, are designed to stimulate individual confidence and initiative, by a means of student evaluation, and most important, aid in rapid, accurate use of grammatical patterns of a second language.

First, I will list and explain the Thai games I use. These will be followed by a section dealing with modification of the game's principle to suit English patterns.

One cardinal rule must be observed: Grammar patterns must be taught before

Duane Hurst, senior BATESL major at CCH, has taught Thai and English classes during the past two years.

any variation of the games are played!

A few ingredients are essential in producing an enjoyable and beneficial learning experience. They include:

1. Syntax or the grammatical patterns to be taught.
2. Teams or players: variations but never more than four per team.
3. Points: 5 if correct, -1 if wrong or not attempted. (may vary)
4. Time: start at 25 seconds and decrease to 10-15 seconds per pattern sentence.
5. Material: blank cards for writing down patterns, a blackboard and chalk for group games.
6. Purpose: To stimulate rapid thinking and correct sentence building in the target language and become familiar with the new grammar without reverting to native styles.

Writing Practice

Intended for evaluating and strengthening mastery of two or more grammatical patterns.

Teams of 2 or 3 students per team are seated

in one row about six feet from a blackboard which is equipped with two erasers and at least two sticks of chalk. Draw a line down the center of the board.

At the top of the board write one grammatical pattern and write a different pattern on the other side of the board. Patterns should be abbreviated with symbols which are familiar to the students, for example:

T S O V*

An example of this sentence pattern would be:

/wəi'ni· p'hom' thā-n' sǎb' pərod'/

"Today I eat pineapple."

Example:

S V O A*

/k'haw' thā-n' sǎb' pərod' si· kh'io·/#

"He ate a green pineapple."

Once the instructor has written the two separate patterns on the board, he calls a student from each team to write a sentence following the pattern on his side of the board. A limited lexicon is desired, this









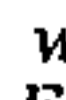
*T = time (today, now, next month, etc.)

S = subject (I, boy, he, book, etc.)

V = verb (speak, eat, walk, grab, etc.)

O = object (pineapple, ball, English, him, etc.)

A = adjective (delicious, large, white, torn, etc.)

Thai has five tones (arrow indicates pitch): mid , low , falling , high , and rising . Actually, there are two allotones in high position-- the high  and a high rising . The  is found only with short vocoids, whereas the  is found only with long (a held sound) vocoids. Examples: /mǎy/ = a question particle, /mǎy·/ = wood.

should be given before the beginning of the game. Students are told that they have 25 seconds in which to complete the pattern sentence; all sentences must follow the given pattern, be spelled correctly, and include the proper tonal symbols. Timing starts as soon as students are called.

I have been using this game for three months with groups of students and in each case observe that every student complains that 25 seconds is not enough time to complete a pattern sentence; however, after only three or four team turns, each student is able to accomplish a complete and correct sentence within this time limit. The time limit is reduced to 15 seconds per pattern after about five minutes of play. Students become extremely conscious of this time limitation.

I have found that:

1. Students adjust to the time element within minutes. One reason is because I merely smile at their complaints and keep the game going. They realize the only way to beat the other team and the clock too is to think and work, not only faster but also correctly.
2. Understanding of Thai patterns becomes well founded in one session, and students are confident in using the patterns outside the classroom. Exposure to and re-exposure to Thai patterns soon replaces initial attempts to incorporate English patterns into the new language.
3. Students gain greater speed and adaptability with continued practice.
4. Students enjoy studying by means of this and other pattern learning games. Previous to these new activities, the students were frequently drowsy since the class period was just after lunch and during the hottest time of the day. Since the use of these games, they remain alert as they actively participate.
5. The game becomes dull with repetition. To avoid this, a few unexpected twists are suggested:

a. Unpredictably alternate sides of the board which team member use, such as:

turn 1: team A team B
 S V O A T S V O
 turn 2: team B team A
 S V O A T S V O

b. Present new patterns once the students can manipulate the first.

Example:

turn 1: team A team B
 S V O A T S V O
 turn 2: team A team B
 T S V ? S A V O
 turn 3: team A team B
 S V O A T T S V O ?

(? = a Thai question particle such as /máy/ or /dây máy/)

c. Combine both a and b.

turn 1: team A team B
 S V O ? T S V ?
 turn 2: team B team A
 S A V O A S V O T ?
 turn 3: team A team B
 S A V O A S V O T ?

In addition, a substitute lexicon may be used. 6. Giving points to the teams increases interest in the game. I give five points if the sentence follows the given pattern, is correctly spelled, and contains all the right tonal symbols; if even one error is made, the whole sentence is considered wrong. The reason for this is that one wrong tone or pronunciation can create a completely different meaning.

Examples:

/k^haw yu· glay bá·n^h phóm^h/

Intended: He lives near my home.

/k^haw yu· glay bá·n^h phóm^h/

One mistake: He lives far from my home.

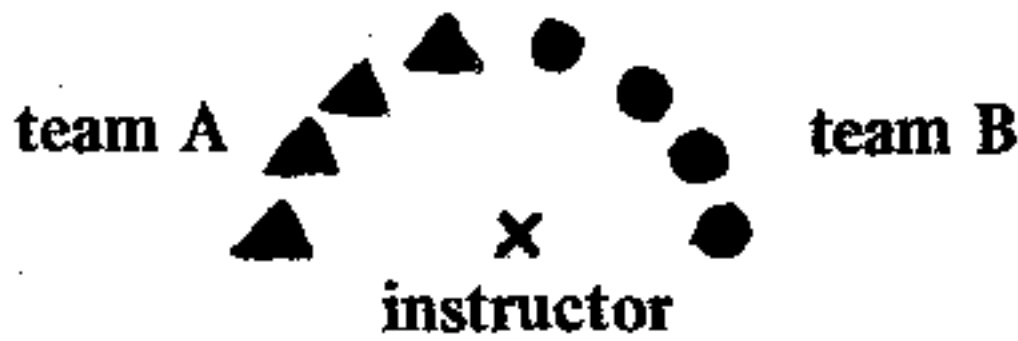
The team receives a minus point if no answer or only a fragment is given. This way students are encouraged to at least try to produce a sentence.

Adjusting for a large class, a tournament may be organized with several groups operating simultaneously.

Oral Production

The purpose of this oral exercise is to condition students to grammatical patterns in the second language. The student must answer rapidly—this necessitates thinking in the second language (a reflection of learned patterns.)

Teams of two to four students each are seated in a semi-circle as shown.



The instructor has a list of sentences which comply with one specific sentence pattern. (Different patterns can be taught or reviewed if there is time, a desire to do so, or if students show a firm grasp of mastering the pattern.) The pattern to be used is explained before the game begins. (With advanced students, no explanation is necessary.)

A question is read in English and then a student is called to give the Thai pattern equivalent. Careful selection of the lexicon is necessary so that sentences include only words which students have been taught.

The team may act as a panel in discussing among themselves what the correct answer is; however, since time is severely limited, it is unlikely much discussion will occur. The team member who receives the directed question must answer, even if other team mates supplied the answer to him.

Two examples of confusing sentence patterns are:

noun /pən^h/ N

NA

(predicate nominative)(predicate adjective)

/p^hōm^h pən^h khon^h/

/p^hōm^h di^h/

I am a person.

I am good.

(The word /pən^h/ determines whether the pattern is a predicate nominative or adjective.) If a student said /p^hōm^h pən^h di^h/, it would have no meaning. /p^hōm^h khon^h/ would make /khon^h/, a noun, become an adjective which would also have no meaning. These two patterns are often confusing to native English speakers. However, my students, after playing the pattern games, use them correctly.

Oral exercises require less time than writing; allot 15 seconds per turn for the first five minutes. The students will adjust to the pace and after five minutes, answers should be required within 10 seconds.

Five points are given if the answer is correct in pronunciation, tones, and translation of idea. A minus point is given if an error is made or if the team fails to answer. There are no "passed" questions.

If team A fails to answer correctly, team B can answer and scores 3 points if correctly answered and a minus 2 if wrong. No penalty is given if a team chooses not to use the second answer option.

The following variations of Written and Oral games may be used for both large and small classes with instructor supervision.

Writing Practice

1. Two persons. (dyad)

- Both will write 5 patterns on cards—one pattern per card. One or more patterns may be reviewed. Shuffle the cards to avoid boredom.
- One student flashes a pattern, the other has 15 seconds to write a sentence based on the revealed pattern.
- Other patterns may be added as time allows or as student ability dictates.
- Points: 5 if correct, -2 if wrong.

2. Individual testing.

The student will make a set of 20 grammatical pattern cards—some should be duplicates. Shuffle them and write a sentence based on the pattern within 15 seconds.

Oral Production

1. Two persons. (dyad)

- Both will list 5 sentences for each desired pattern to be reviewed.
- One student will read an English sentence, the other will answer correctly within 10 seconds—tones and pronunciation are important.
- Pattern changes are announced before giving the accompanying sentence. Advanced students are not warned about change of patterns.
- Points: 5 if correct, -2 if wrong.

2. Individual testing.

The student will have a set of 20 sentences which may follow one or more patterns. Sentences are on cards; the cards are shuffled and he has 10 seconds to translate. Answers are on the back of each card.

If the instructor elects to use the dyads he

will be free to wander around the room listening to each couple. This will also serve as a means of evaluation. Students should change companions after 10 minutes of review, thus avoiding boredom and becoming used to the same companion.

These activities are adaptable to learning any language. Listed are a few English patterns which may be taught by using these games.

Teaching the use of definite and indefinite articles.

1. Rules follow those of the Thai games as concerning teams, time, points, and procedure.

2. Several patterns: ID = indefinite article
DA = definite article Wh? = a WH form question.

ID S V DA O
A boy ate the orange

T DA S V ID O
Yesterday the girl saw an orange.

Wh? V DA O
Who saw the hat?

Wh? V ID O
Why eat a cookie?

ID A S V DA O
An old hat struck the lady.

DA S V DA A O
The horse kicked the small boy.

Shorter patterns (for beginners)

ID S V
A man walks.

DA S V
The dog barked.

DA S V T
The girl came today.

T ID S V
Friday a friend smiled.

For testing purposes a cloze test* may be given as a follow up exercise on any pattern taught.

Obviously, I have only scratched the surface of the pattern possibilities in teaching English. Patterns using verb tenses, plurals, possession, questions, etc. may be taught, focusing on any area where students have difficulty.

I challenge teachers to test these activities; I find them successful.

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Editor Alice C. Pack
Staff Api Hemi

Michael Foley

William Gallagher

Carol Gutzeit

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*See "Cloze Testing and Procedure." *TESL REPORTER*, vol. 6, no. 2. p. 1,2. Winter 1974.