

IMPLICATIONS OF PERCEPTIVE AND PHONETIC GAMES UPON VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL AGE

Claudia STOICA^{a *}, Liliana MĂȚĂ^b

^a Lunca-Ciugheș Kindergarden, Grades I-VIII School of Palanca, Bacău, Romania

^b “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău, Mărășești Street, 157, RO-600115, Bacău, Romania

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to highlight the role of perceptive and phonetic games in the development of the vocabulary of pre-school children. These games contribute to differentiate sounds phonetically and perceptively and to pronounce them correctly during teaching language activities, determining a dynamic reception of contents in kindergarten. The research method used is the pedagogical experiment of an ascertaining and formative type. The outcomes, after implementing perceptive and phonetic games, indicate that a progress regarding the correct pronunciation of words without omissions or inversions of sound groups and a progress obtained in vocabulary, regarding perceptive and phonetic elements. The integration of the perceptive and phonetic games in language educating classes led to the achievement of some real progress in what concerns pre-school children's ability to correctly pronounce sounds, groups of sounds and whole words.

Key words: perceptive and phonetic games, pre-school age, pedagogical experiment, vocabulary development

1. Introduction

The didactic game represents a means of passing from game to teaching and is an activity that is different, through its specific structure, from other resembling activities, constituting a valuable means of instruction and education of preschool children, because it helps them solve complex instructive tasks in a way that is appropriate for their age. The game is an indispensable activity, without which the child's physical and mental development would be badly affected, the playful

* E-mail address: liliana.mata@ub.ro

activity occupying most of the day: the game is spontaneous, satisfactory and enjoyable. Lepădatu (2008, p. 71) claims that, in reality, conducting a game is not a fun, superficial, meaningless and irresponsible way of teaching, but one of the few teaching methods adjusted to the preschool student's level of psychic maturity.

Glava and Glava (2002, p. 11) defines the didactic game as a “a form of accessible activity for the child, which supports the accomplishing of educational tasks and binding activities, as well as the building of a fun, engaging, and motivating atmosphere“. Huizinga (2002, p. 80) considers the game as “the highest expression of human development in childhood, because it is the only free expression of a child's soul”. The didactic game represents a particularly valuable means of shaping the future personality, because it offers the opportunity to know and form the child as we like. By playing, the child acts spontaneously and honestly, reveals his/ her attitudes, interests and contributes, in a broad sense, to shaping and enriching the vocabulary phonetically, lexically and grammatically. The teacher's role is to identify the games which support the development of the children in his/her group, to challenge them by arranging appropriately the resources available and to guide the game indirectly (Vrășmaș, 1999, p. 118). The teacher should have an accurate view of the game's objectives and create the most suitable situations for a free choice of the game. Glava and C. Glava (2002, p. 205) argue that the success of the didactic game depends upon the pedagogic training of the teacher who organizes, designs and ensures its methodological realization, provides the children with game opportunities and gives them the possibility to choose freely toys and games, thus stimulating their intrinsic motivation for the activity, for taking decisions and responsibilities.

In order for a ludic activity to become efficient, preschoolers should obey the rules of the game, namely “*those internal and external regulations which organize and correlate the children's actions*” (Șchiopu, Verza, 1997, p. 106). The rules of the game and respecting it determines more difficult, spoiled children to give in to these rules; they accept them only for the mere wish of taking part in the game. Children become aware of the fact that breaking the rules of the game has serious consequences: ending the game. Obeying the rules turns the child into “a future disciplined, but not a conformist person, a man who listens but who is not slavish, a worthy man, aware of his role” (Pâslaru, 2003, p. 68). The didactic games for educating language are paramount in developing language in preschoolers and are usually characterized by: building skills in for; a positive impact upon knowing the formal dimension of language; making use of exclamatory, interrogative, affirmative and negative sentences to add a personal touch to one's speech.

According to Ilie (2006), there are three general categories of didactic games for developing language in the pre-school age: games for using the subsystems of language; games for developing oral communication and literary didactic games. Table 1 presents the types of games for using the subsystems of language.

Table 1. *Categories of didactic games for using the subsystems of language in the pre-school age*

Subsystems of language	Types of games
Phonetic system	games for perceptual-phonetic differentiation and pronunciation of sounds
	games for phonetic analysis and synthesis
Lexical semantic system	lexical didactic games
Grammatical system	lexical-semantic didactic games

By means of games for perceptual-phonetic differentiation and pronunciation of sounds, the child:

- performs a specific activity, in the sense of his personal identity, following his basic demands and determinations;
- performs coarse and fine motor movements, as well as ocular-motor coordination;
- communicates, enriches and practices his vocabulary, develops language;
- solves life problems in his physical and social environment;
- experiments possibilities for adaptation, solves problems, creates solutions;
- communicates with oneself, the others, expresses feelings, reacts emotionally, perceives and learns to identify the feelings of others;
- use the objects around for the purposes they were created, but also for other purposes (build creativity), develop attention, motivation, interest.

In the practice of Romanian preschool education, the main forms of ludic activity have been experimented for several decades, with good results, in order to educate language in a manner which suited the creative and dynamic spirit of preschoolers.

The purpose of our study is integrating games for perceptual-phonetic differentiation and pronunciation of sounds during teaching language activities in order to generate a dynamic reception of contents by kindergarten children.

2. Research methodology

2.1. The research hypothesis and objectives

To determine the role that perceptive-phonetic games have in the development of vocabulary with preschool children, we applied the observatory-formatinal psycho-pedagogic experiment.

The research objectives are:

- knowledge of the initial level of kindergarten children as initial point in organizing the pedagogical experiment;
- the use of perceptive-phonetic games to shape and develop language with kindergarten children;
- the assessment of preschool children's progress after applying the progress factor.

2.2. Participants

The group of subjects included a number of 15 preschool children, 9 girls and 6 boys, aged 3-4 years, who attended the Kindergarten with Normal Program of Lunca Ciugheș, Bacău, during the scholar year 2011-2012. The children studied are in the small-age group.

2.3. Methods

To accomplish the objectives of the investigation, we used the following methods of research with which we gathered information, processed data and interpreted results: the formative experiment and observation as a method of research during the pedagogical research. Usually used by teachers, the psycho-pedagogic experiment provides quantitative and qualitative data, with a high degree of precision and rigor; they are conclusive and easily processed by means of statistical-mathematical methods and techniques. It can also be used to diagnose and highlight individual psychic differences. For example, a story presented through a series of cards/images may help identify certain types of perception: analytic/synthetic; explanatory/descriptive. By organizing and conducting sequences of independent activity of students, in a peaceful and a disturbing environment, there may be studied the changes occurring in the activity's productivity, as well as the impact upon developing language at preschoolers.

2.4. Procedure

During the pedagogical experiment, there were applied 10 perceptive-phonetic games, in order to develop vocabulary. The games were selected according to the syllabi from pre-primary education (*Curriculum for early education*, 2008) and the theoretical model referring to the didactic games for developing vocabulary in pre-school age (Ilie, 2006). These games have the

objective of clear and correct pronunciation of different onomatopoeias. Each game was interpreted to observe the manner in which the objectives were accomplished. Also, the didactic games were elaborated in correlation with the educational contents from the syllabi of pre-primary education: the perception and clear pronunciation of sounds and groups of sounds specific to Romanian language.

Table 2. *Training activities for developing the capacity of perceptual-phonetic differentiation in preschoolers*

No.	Objectives	Didactic games
1	Correct pronunciation of the groups of sounds which form the onomatopoeias specific to the “voices” of the animals from the story	“Box of pot!”
2	Perceiving and pronouncing correctly sounds which form the onomatopoeias “squeak!”, “meow!”	“Mice and cats”
3	Practicing the correct pronunciation of the vibrant consonant [r]	“In the forest”
4	Practicing the correct pronunciation of the vowel group “oa” (diphthong) and the consonant [c] in final position	“Frogs concert”
5	Perceiving and pronouncing correctly the groups of sounds [crow], [tweet]	“Sparrows and crows”
6	Perceiving and pronouncing correctly sounds which form the onomatopoeias “cluck!”, “peep!” and practicing certain elements of mimic-gestual language	“Hen, good mother!”
7	Perceptive-phonetic differentiation and correct pronunciation of the sound [z]	“Bee”
8	Perceptive-phonetic differentiation and correct pronunciation of the sound [z] and of the onomatopoeias “buzz!”, “hum!”	“In the world of insects”
9	Perceptive differentiation and practice of pronouncing vowels	“In the forest”
10	Correct pronunciation of words which contain various sounds in distinct positions	“Go on, you!”

For each didactic game for developing the capacity of perceptual-phonetic differentiation and pronunciation of sounds, there was formulated a set of performance descriptors with the help of the preschoolers who were evaluated for each training activity. Table 3 offers an example of integrating the perceptive-phonetic games in pre-primary education.

Table 3. *Example of integrating the perceptive-phonetically games in pre-primary education*

Components	Description
Theme	“In the world of insects”
Objective	the perceptive-phonetic differentiation and correct pronunciation of the sound [z] and of the onomatopoeias “buzz!”, “hum!”

Learning sequence	The preschool children perform breath adjustment and imitative exercises: the prolonged pronunciation of the sound [z]; the pronunciation of the sound [z] in direct syllables: <i>za-ze-zi-zo-zu</i> and in indirect syllables <i>az-ez-iz-oz-uz</i> . The preschool children are organized in groups of 4 and they will play the part of bees and bumble-bees, pronouncing the onomatopoeias “buzz!” and “hum!”
Didactic strategy	Didactic methods: didactic game, conversation, explanation. Didactic means: bumble-bees wings, black T-shirts, bees’ wings, black striped yellow T-shirts. Organize forms: frontal, individual, divided into groups

2.5. Results

Following the initial evaluation, serious deficiencies were found in the correct pronunciation of sounds and groups of sounds, only 20% of the preschoolers from the youngest group being able to pronounce words and sounds correctly, without omitting or inverting sounds or groups of sounds. The final evaluation test revealed the fact that 33% of the preschoolers included in this psycho-pedagogical research pronounce words correctly, without omissions or inversions of sounds or groups of sounds. The comparative analysis of the results obtained by preschoolers in the initial and final evaluation tests reveal the fact that the use of perceptive-phonetic games generated progress concerning the correct pronunciation of words, without omissions or inversions of sounds and groups of sounds, as well as progress in terms of vocabulary, also in relation to perceptive-phonetic elements. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 1, if according to the initial evaluation test 40% of the preschoolers from the youngest group had serious problems in pronouncing sounds, groups of sounds and words, after the use of perceptive-phonetic games only 27% of them would still display such difficulties.

Table 3. *Results of the initial and final evaluation*

Behavior	The results of initial evaluation	The results of final evaluation	Percentage of initial evaluation	Percentage of final evaluation
<i>Accomplished behavior – A</i>	3	5	20 %	33 %
<i>Developing behavior - D</i>	6	6	40 %	40 %
<i>Needs support – S</i>	6	4	40 %	27 %

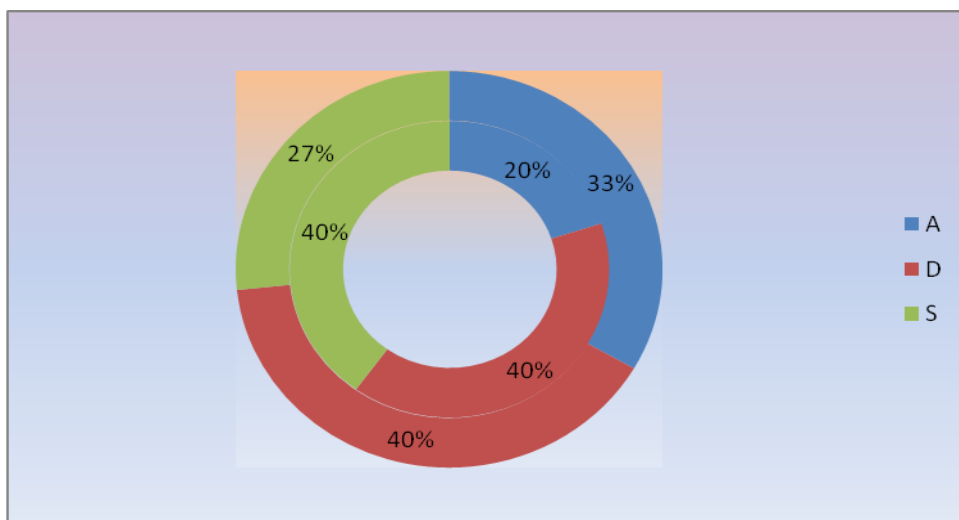


Figure 1. *The graphical presentation of the results from the initial assessment and final evaluation*

Conclusions

Theoretically, there were created the premises for conceptualizing the didactic game in preschool education. The analysis of contemporary theories and approaches generates a series of conclusions. Game theory and methodology is particularly important for teachers, irrespective of the educational level, because it is an efficient way of animating the passive classroom atmosphere. The role and relevance of the didactic game consist of the fact that it supports the process of assimilation, fixing and consolidating knowledge and, due to its formative nature, influences the preschooler's personality development.

The practical section of this paper represented an attempt to demonstrate the necessity of using perceptive-phonetic games for the discipline of language education, by means of the ascertaining-formative psycho-pedagogic experiment. In this respect, we have formulated examples of didactic strategies characteristic of perceptive-phonetic games for language education activities. The application of these strategies led to progress in preschoolers from the experimental class. All these evaluation methods eventually confirmed the fact that the elaborated didactic theory triggered significant progress. Applying a methodological process based on the creative use of didactic games, a set of formative learning activities particular to each unit will lead to real progress in terms of the preschoolers' ability to perceive and pronounce various sounds, groups of sounds or words correctly.

As a conclusion, we can state that applying perceptive-phonetic games for teaching language, using observatory-formational psycho-pedagogic experiment has led to real progress regarding the preschoolers' ability to pronounce sound, groups of sounds or words correctly. That is why no matter how we apply the teaching game during teaching activities in kindergarten, the effects are positive because they represent the activity of expressing psychic life at the preschool age and the practice and development of personality.

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