

BILINGUAL LANGUAGE GAMES

B Janagammal

Jessie Michael

Asma Yusoff

Institut Teknologi MARA

Introduction

Language games have often been used in classrooms to facilitate the learning of a language. The games as teaching materials however, have not come under much scrutiny except for the end product, i.e. language structures learnt, which were the goals of the games, which have received some attention. In the context of bilingual education the possibility of applying materials used in learning one language, to the learning of another language raises pertinent questions.

- a. Would the same materials designed for one language be suitable for the teaching / learning of another language?
- b. What would be the problems encountered and what problems could arise from using the same language games in the teaching of two different languages in a bilingual context?

The Present Study

A. AIM

The main purpose of this study was to see whether a language game would be equally acceptable among two separate groups of Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and English language learners studying under the Malaysian system. The extent to which the game was acceptable to either group of language learners was determined through

- a. an analysis of the language generated during the play.
- b. observation of the performance and physical reactions of the players during the game.
- c. an interview with the students after the game.

B. METHOD

1. Materials

Two play-boards with identical pictures of people doing various things, interspersed with boxes having instructions such as "Miss a turn", "Have another turn", "Have another throw at the die".

- a. On one board the instructions and captions were in BM while in the other, they were in English. Die and chips were provided.
- b. Response Sheet One was used to collect background information on subjects, i.e. personal particulars, languages spoken, interest in English, etc.
- c. Response Sheet Two was used to compile the subjects' responses to the game.
- d. (The response sheets were in English for the English Language group and in BM for the BM group).
- e. A checklist for teaching was also used to record information on the administration of the task, the problems encountered and teachers' views.

2. Subjects

The subjects comprised eight students, all mother tongue speakers of various Malay dialects. Four students were studying English and four students were studying BM at the MARA Institute of Technology. Both groups were studying report writing and practised oral report presentation in their English course. Details of the subjects are as follows:

	Age	Semester	Language Spoken		
			At home	In school	In classroom
English Language Group	18-19	3	BM and English	BM and English	BM and English
BM Group	21-22	1	BM	BM and English	BM and English

Both sexes were equally well represented - there being 2 males and 2 females per group.

3. Procedure

- a. All eight subjects were asked to complete response sheet one.
- b. The English language and BM group were separately instructed in English and BM respectively, on the basic rules of play, the language task that they were required to perform and the conditions under which they would be playing.
 - i. Each player had to take turns to throw the die and move his/her chip along a corresponding number of boxes on the board. The picture on which her / his chip landed would be the stimuli. The student had to create an oral report of a situation based on this picture. The others in the group had to judge the validity of that report based on its accuracy, (whether it suited the picture) and its appropriacy (whether it used the language of reporting). If the others rejected the report the subject missed a turn. They could not use the reports of others and the player who reached 'Home' or 'Finish' first, won.
 - ii. They were told that their playing would be video-taped.
 - iii. Playing time was limited to 30-35 minutes.

- c. Both groups were given a trial run of the game for about 10 minutes, to familiarize them with the game and to put them at ease.
- d. Then the Bahasa Malaysia group followed by the English group played the game for 30-40 minutes each.
- e. Each group was video-taped while at play.
- f. Both groups played in the same room under similar conditions, but at different times. One group was not allowed to watch the other group playing. Only the studio technician and two researchers of the study were present. The camera was stationary.
- g. The researchers wrote down their observations during the game.
- h. At the end of the game, each group was interviewed immediately to find out what their responses were towards the game and what problems they encountered.

C. Findings

Data from this study were compiled and analysed in three different ways.

1. The videotaping was studied to compare and contrast similarities and differences between the two groups in intra-group reactions.
2. Transcripts from relevant portions of the videotape were analysed to study the nature, complexity and amount of language generated by both groups.
3. The responses obtained from the interview (Response Sheet Two) and from Response Sheet One and the observation notes made by the researchers were analysed to see if there was correlation between them and also with the observations made from the videotape.

Analysis of the Videotape (1)

An analysis of the videotape and of the notes taken during the initial observation showed variation between the two groups in their physical responses, their performance level and in the language generated.

a) Physical responses

i. BM Group

The players in this group were very relaxed and unselfconscious. Their attentiveness and eagerness in play was evident in their physically craning over the board to check out the pictures each student was reporting on. Often they squinted at the pictures on the board and later reported that this was because they were thinking hard about what to say.

ii. English Language Group

The players in this group were in comparison, tense and self-conscious. Anxiety was visible on their faces when they had to make their reports, and surprise, whenever their reports were rejected. There was much nervous laughter, clearing of the throat and mutterings under their breath. They too squinted at the pictures but reported that it was because they could not think of what to say.

b) Performance

I BM Group

This group's responses to the pictures were spontaneous. Their reports were generally valid, reasonably long and complex in content and structure. Most were formal in nature and based on current topics, and contained more than one idea. e.g.1

"Kempen membaca yang dijalankan oleh kerajaan telah mendapat gubahan daripada semua golongan masyarakat tak kira muda atau pun tua".

Among this group there was also much peer and self-monitoring and extended discussion on the validity of a report.

e.g.11 Report: *Seorang lelaki bernama Azman B Salleh telah dipilih sebagai pen gakat yang terbaik di sekolahnya.*

Question: *Macam mana dia dipilih?*

(from group) (Reporter was to explain)

Question: *Adakah persaingan dan orang lain?* (Reporter gives further explanation)

Group: O.K.

The BM group was also quite innovative in that they devised additional rules to the game as they went along, to make the game more challenging and disciplined. For example, they imposed a time limit for making a response.

ii. English Language Group

These players were slower in responding to the pictures. In contrast to the BM group, the reports were shorter and more simple in content and structure and more informal, sometimes even trite, in nature. Most utterances contained only one idea. An example of an oral report based on a picture was:

"Girls between the ages of 5-7 love to read comics"

or

"It has been found that girls love flowers"

There was very little extended discussion and peer and self-monitoring in the form of questions, arguments and discussion. Most reports were readily accepted or rejected without objections or arguments.

e.g..

Report: Latif was caught peeping into the girls' toilet.

Response: (Laughter) Agreed!

The players did not attempt to create rules on their own but played by the basic rules.

c) Language Generated

i. BM Group

This group switched between using standard BM for the reports and colloquial or spoken Malay and even English, during their discussion.

Report: Hujan panas yang turun secara tiba-tiba minggu lepas telah menyebabkan beberapa orang kanak-kanak demam.

Response: Mana ada demam?

Objections: OK. Terima,

As evidenced above they used complex structures to make their reports while their responses to each other were contracted queries and comments, e.g.

"Macam mana?"

"Ta' tengok"

They also codeswitched lexically, especially in their discussions and queries, e.g.

"Di mana dapat INFORMATION mi?"

"Salah STATEMENT tu!"

"Itu YOU"

ii. English Language Group

These students used formal or 'school' English throughout their play, e.g.

Yesterday our Mayor gave a speech concerning the cleanliness campaign of the city".

The use of the word 'Mayor' instead of Menteri Besar or Chief Minister may be seen as a carry-over from school English. Even their jokes and comments were an attempt at proper English, e.g.

"Same boat as you are"

"A Pope won't wear this kind of hat"

There were only four instances of codeswitching in their comments,

e.g.

"Alamak" (interjection)

"Acceptable-lah (tag)

"Ya" (yes) Baby-nya" (tag)

The players did not use any other BM during the game. They later reported that they had been under the impression that they had to use only English. This also accounted for all their mutterings which were inaudible on the tape and which they said had all been in BM! There was a lack of variety in the structures used. The phrase

"It has been found that..."

was repeated quite often.

d) Interaction

i. BM Group

There was more peer teaching among the BM group. They exhibited a tendency to correct their friends, give clues and even examples of how a report should sound, in order to encourage better performance, e.g.

Report: Salmah menerima se ekor kucing pada harijadinya.

Response: Itu bukan lapuran.

An example of a report was then offered.

ii. English Language Group

The players did not have much influence over one another. It was individual play most of the time. The trend was to emphasise the passive aspect of report writing at the expense of the content aspect. Most of the time, acceptance of each others' answers was through the nodding of their heads.

A strong feeling of self-consciousness was prevalent as evidenced from their facial expressions, careful selection of jokes and formality of tone. It contributed to their inhibited playing of the game.

Analysis of the Interview(2)

1. BM Group

a) Enjoyment of game

All 4 players said they enjoyed the game because

it strengthened their relationship with one another;
it trained them to make and abide by collective decisions;
it trained them to think creatively and answer in an
impromptu manner;
and
it reminded them of childhood days of playing together.

b) Learning

All four agreed that they

learnt to voice their ideas freely without any interference from a teacher; and learnt the language of reporting.

c) Helpfulness of game in learning BM

All agreed that it did help in their learning of BM, in the sense that they had learnt to use standard BM to produce reports and to identify reports.

d) Use of the game by language teachers

They said the game had never been used by their language teachers in the BM classroom. All agreed that it should be introduced in BM classes in schools but not into tertiary institutions like ITM because the level of the game was rather simple. They felt school children might enjoy it more.

e) Difficulties faced during the game

All agreed that more time should have been allocated for playing. They felt the pictures were not suited to the task given and were vaguely portrayed. The penalties on the board were not challenging enough. They all felt that they would not have been comfortable playing the game in English as they would have had difficulty with vocabulary and sentence construction. While playing the game itself they felt they had difficulty forming reports.

2. English Language Group

a) Enjoyment of game

Two players said they had enjoyed the game to a certain extent because it provided exposure to something new and they had an opportunity to tease their friends. (They used their friends' names in the reports.)

The other two said they had not enjoyed the game because they had felt bored and uncomfortable and they found the pictures unstimulating.

b) Learning

All four agreed that they learnt something new. They had learnt

to speak up
to accept the opinions of others, and
to understand the difference between reporting and narrating.

c) Helpfulness of game in learning English

They all felt that the game had not been helpful to them as there had been no teacher to monitor their errors. They also found the task too restrictive.

d) Use of game by language teachers

Three of them said that such a game had never been used by their English teachers in schools. All agreed that such games should be introduced into English Language learning classes, but they also felt that the game would be more suited to L1 learners rather than to L2 learners.

e) Difficulties faced during the game This group found the time given sufficient but they agreed with the other group that the pictures were unsuited to the task. They found the lack of clues in the pictures to be a hindrance to interpreting them. Besides they felt that the requirements of the task restricted their thinking. AU four agreed that they would have been much more comfortable playing the game in BM.

AN ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEOTAPES

A comparison of the interview responses with the videotape evidence of physical reactions and performance was made to see if there was any correlation between them. *1. B.M. Group*

The B.M. group's response that they had enjoyed the game was supported by videotape evidence of their positive physical reactions of being relaxed, unselfconscious, eager and attentive. Their concept of enjoyment was constructive to the extent that it involved group interaction and collective decision-making, creative thinking and oral performance, and this was very much evidenced by their peer monitoring and by their efforts to produce accurate, complex reports.

Their response that they did learn to voice ideas without teacher interference, to use standard B.M. in reporting, to identify reports and to use the language of reporting is supported by an analysis of the

transcript. The language used indicates a clear understanding of the functional use of standard and colloquial B.M. and of the register needed for reporting. Whenever there was confusion regarding this they were quick to correct each other and get back on the right track.

Their statement that they had difficulty in forming reports was supported by the fact they needed peer monitoring. Hence there is evidence of a very high correlation between the B.M. group's interview responses and an analysis of the video and transcript.

2. English Language Group

A comparison of data for this group, too, indicated a high correlation between the two sources of information. The players' lack of enjoyment of the game was evidenced by their lack of attentiveness and eagerness. Their discomfort, tenseness and self-consciousness were related to their statement that they would have been more comfortable playing in B.M. It also accounted for their hesitations, clearing of the throat and for the artificial laughter.

Their concept of enjoyment was superficial. (learnt something new and teased friends.) Yet they said they did learn something - to share opinions and distinguish between reporting and narrating. In contrast to the B.M. group, they did not think about the type of language needed. While the B. M. group was happy to be without the presence of a teacher, the English Language group missed the teacher's presence. The simplicity of their reports and the errors they made reflected these two factors and could also have accounted for their lack of confidence.

They did not make much effort to produce more substantial reports. This coupled with their lack of enthusiasm contributed to the lack of discussion.

In the case of both groups, the playing board itself was considered a problem because the pictures were not definite, and the penalties were unchallenging.

LIMITATIONS

1. One variant factor among the players was that the B.M. group left school after Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran and the English Language group after Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia. This difference could have accounted for the English Language group's lack of confidence.
2. The groups had to play in full view of the camera, lights technician and two lecturers. This could have, on the one hand, made the English Language group self-conscious, and on the other, spurred the B.M. group to perform better.
3. The situation under which the games were played was unnatural. A classroom situation might have given a better sampling of the language generated.
4. Time constraints did not permit further games to be carried out to check against this study.

CONCLUSIONS

Bearing in mind the limitations under which the games were played we can conclude that:

The B.M. group performed better, were more confident and had a better attitude towards the game because they were competent in B.M. This competence is reflected in the fluent language generated in the making of the reports and in their appropriate use of colloquial and standard B.M.

The English Language group did not perform as well and were self-conscious and had a more negative attitude towards the game because their command of English was limited. This was reflected in their simple reports, the similarity in the structures they used and in the lack of variety in the register.

Based on this, we could further conclude that the game is more acceptable to learners of L1 (in this case B.M.) than to learners of L2 (in this case English) and that therefore the game is not equally acceptable among B.M. and English Language learners.

However the fact that both the groups did report having learnt something, (the B.M. group to a greater extent than the English Language group) and the fact that language competence and language limitations affected the quality of performance, necessitate that this conclusion be expanded. Since a command of language was a determining factor in performance and in the generating and non-generating of learning, we can say that the same language games are equally acceptable to B.M. and English Language learning and teaching, provided the goals for each are set at different and appropriate levels.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was felt that this study was too limited to be conclusive. The same groups could have switched languages to play the same game to see if the evidence offered in this study is supported.

Since both the groups complained that the pictures on the board and the penalties were unstimulating, the board could not be regarded as causing variability. However if different types of games (two or three) were played by the same groups, once in B.M. and once in English for each game, to see if the reactions and responses were similar, then we could see to what extent language competence, the type of game and the quality of material affected the acceptability of the material in the learning and teaching of both B.M. and English.