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Participation Patterns in Games and Tasks

Namiko Sakoda

Hiroshima University of Economics

A variety of games or tasks are used in general education or the business world as well as in language teaching. However, the distinction between games and tasks is not always clearly presented. If we know some elements that only games have and some that only tasks have, it will be useful when teachers choose, adapt or invent games or tasks according to the objectives or the characteristics of their students. The main purpose of this study is to establish the effectiveness of using games and tasks for language learning with Japanese students. A second purpose of this study is to see how differently the factors that only games or tasks contain can affect learners' participation patterns. Firstly, games are defined

with a view to distinguishing them from tasks. In my experimental research, the performance of Japanese students on a game and a task were investigated by analyzing their discourse to see their participation patterns. The results show that the students participated differently in the game and the task.

ゲームとタスクは英語教育に限らず、教育一般、もしくは企業研修など広く使われている。しかし、この二者の違いは明確に示されていない。ゲーム、又はタスクの特徴を知っていれば、授業の目的や生徒の特徴に合わせて、どのゲームもしくはタスクを使うか、選んだり、改良するとき役に立つと考える。この研究の主な目的は、日本人学習者が英語を学習する際、いかにゲームとタスクを効果的に使用するか、その方法を確立することである。また、もうひとつの目的は、ゲーム、またはタスクのみが持つ要素が、いかに学習者の参加パターンに影響を与えるか調べることである。まず、ゲームとタスクを比較しながら、定義する。実験では、日本人学習者にゲームとタスクを行ってもらい、参加パターンを分析した。結果は、ゲームとタスクでは異なる参加パターンが見られた。授業の目的や学習者の特長により、いかに効果的にゲームとタスクを使えばよいか提言する。

Introduction

Many of my students say that they want to be able to speak English. I then ask them “How many years have you studied English?” Their answers are at least six years or even more. This is the common case not only in my university, but also in many high schools and universities in Japan. Some people might wonder whether they are lazy or stupid. Others might conclude that Japanese are weak at speaking English.

However, I have a different opinion about this. The reason why many Japanese say that they cannot speak English despite having studied for years is because they did not have the opportunities to practice and use English in the classroom. Traditionally, in Japan, classroom interactions tend to be one-way from a teacher to students. Students spend time memorizing a great deal of grammar and vocabulary, but they have few chances to use them in a practical manner. Furthermore, some students become bored with studying English and lose motivation.

Therefore, many student-centered activities such as games and tasks have been introduced recently to promote and encourage communication skills. I have found that these activities can involve and motivate students to use more English in my lessons. Games and tasks contain different elements and participation patterns of students are different. When teachers choose or adapt some activities, they must set up a goal and know the effectiveness of these activities.

What are games and tasks?

The variety of benefits gained by the use of games and tasks is argued in general education or the business world as well as in language teaching. Khan (1991: 142-143) defines games by pointing out their key characteristics such as *rules*, *goals*, *a contest*, *fun* and *play*. On the other hand, Nunan (1989: 11) states that the task is a piece of *meaning-focused* work and tasks are analyzed or categorized according to their *goals*, *input data*, *activities*, *settings* and *roles*. It would appear, therefore, that certain characteristics of tasks overlap with those of games. For example, both games and tasks have goals. Let us compare features of both games and tasks in order to make a clear distinction between them from the following four aspects.

Goals

Games as well as tasks have a goal; however, some features are likely to be different from each other. Games involve a goal, which means winning or succeeding in doing something that is in itself interesting and engaging (Rixon, 1998). As Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993) point out, language learners must negotiate in order to convey their own message clearly with a goal of carrying out and completing a task. Thus, the process is more important than reaching a goal in tasks.

Competition vs. cooperation

Competition and cooperation is commonly discussed as one of the key features of games. Competition may be (a) against a direct participant, (b) against time, (c) against your own best performance, or (d) against a special goal (Palmer and Rogers, 1983). For example, in a football game, two teams compete against each other for a set period of time and each player strives to attain their best performance by scoring goals in order to win the game. On the other hand, it is likely that tasks aim to promote mainly cooperative behaviors rather than competitiveness as can be seen in typical tasks such as problem solving or simulations and decision making. Candlin (1987: 9) cites criteria for *good* language learning tasks. One of the criteria is co-operative element, which is developing social and management skills for learning.

Rules

One inevitable aspect of games is the existence of rules. Rixon (1998) refers to rules as a structure to work within. Taking an example of a football game again, players play football within the

fixed rules. Rules can also determine turn taking for participants. For example, turn-taking is predetermined in board games. In contrast, tasks are not so strictly rule-governed.

Authenticity

A more important aspect of tasks is authenticity. By this I mean the extent to which tasks require learners to rehearse, in class, the sort of skilled behavior they might be expected to display in genuine communicative interaction outside the classroom (Nunan, 1989: 59). Games, by contrast, are little concerned with authenticity to real-world communication.

The wide variety of features of both games and tasks has been described by comparing and contrasting them with each other. The similarities and differences of both are clarified in Table 1.

Methods

In the classroom, especially in a speaking lesson, each student participates differently due to his character, preference, language level, and so on. Despite all of these factors, the teacher should ideally give all students equal chances to speak. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to compare how differently learners participate when a game and a task are used.

This study was undertaken at the University of Warwick. The subjects are eight Japanese university students aged 21-22, at an intermediate level of ability in English. They were studying in the one-year Junior Year Abroad (JYA) program at the University of Warwick.

The students were divided into two groups. The students worked in-group in both the game and the task, which consisted of four players, and all utterances were recorded with a tape recorder and a videotape. After the data was transcribed by the

Table 1: Games vs. Tasks

	Games	Tasks
Goals	Winning	Completing
Cooperation vs. competition	Competitive	Cooperative
Rules	Essential	Not essential
Turn taking	Often fixed	Free
Authenticity	Not essential	Essential

writer, it was checked by her two supervisors (Richard Smith and Shelagh Rixon). In order to make the comparison easier, a clear game-like game and a task-like task were chosen for the experimental study. The main functions that the students were supposed to use were agreement and disagreement in both the game and the task.

The game and the task were selected from published books. The game, “Going on holiday” (adapted from Rixon, 1983:15), is a card game. Players decide on a holiday they want to take, *from a few* choices: climbing, seaside, skiing, or city. The cards are placed face down and each player in turn turns up one card and tries to justify the object. If the other players agree with his/her justification, he/she picks up the card. The player who collects as many cards as possible is the winner. A goal should be winning or succeeding by collecting as many cards as possible. The game chosen involved competition among players and therefore they were forced to disagree with each other.

The task, “Pack your luggage” (adapted from Ur, 1981: 70-73), is based on group work. The group is going to travel to Italy for the summer holiday and they have to decide what to take there. Firstly, each player marks down his/her own priority among 15 items. Then the players discuss the list and try to come to an agreement on choosing 10 items as a group. The students were encouraged to cooperate even though they might have disagreements in the process because they had to make an agreement in the end. Features of the game and task used in the experiment are presented in Table 2.

The data obtained from the experimental study was analyzed. Firstly, as a quantitative method, the number of turns of each student was simply counted to see how many times he spoke. By counting the number of turns, we can see whether chances to speak, which include both those given to the students and those that they took for themselves, are given equally to every student or if one student is predominant.

Table 2: Comparison of Features of Game with Task used in the experiment

	Game	Task
Goals	Winning: To get as many cards as possible and win the game	Completing: To make an agreement on packing luggage in a group
Cooperation vs. competition	Competitive	Cooperative
Rules	Fixed: Several rules, relating to goal, turn taking, roles of participants, etc.	Free: One rule relating to goal
Turn taking pre-determined	Pre-determined	Free
Authenticity	Not necessary	Essential

As a qualitative method, Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975/92) model is also used in order to analyze more detailed discourse patterns. They described the structure of classroom interaction by using a scale for the five elements. It is a hierarchical system, which consists of *lesson, transaction, exchange, move* and *act*. A *move* consists of *initiation, response* and *feedback*. A *move* also contains some *acts*. There are 22 *acts* altogether such as *marker, starter, elicitation, check, directive, informative, prompt, clue, cue, bid, nomination, acknowledge, reply, react, comment, accept, evaluate, silent stress, metastatement, conclusion, loop* and *aside* (pp.19-21).

Results

Turn taking

The numbers in Figure 1 show how many turns each student took. The time spent in each activity is different. Therefore, there were different numbers of turns, so percentages are used to compare the game with the task.

As Figure 1 shows in both Group A and B, the number of turns is distributed more equally in the game than in the task. While the percentage is widely dispersed between 10% (TK) and 35% (RM) in the task, the difference among the students became much smaller in the game, which is between 15% (TK) and 29% (KT). Whereas RM (35%) in Group A, AF (32%) and HK (34%) in Group B conspicuously took many more turns in the task, their numbers of turns decreased and came close to around 25% in the game (25% represents the equal distribution). On the other hand, AO (18%) and TH (19%) in Group A and TK (10%) in Group B, who took fewer or the least turns, took more turns in the game. Even though TK (15%) took the least turns in the game, the proportion has increased compared with those in the task.

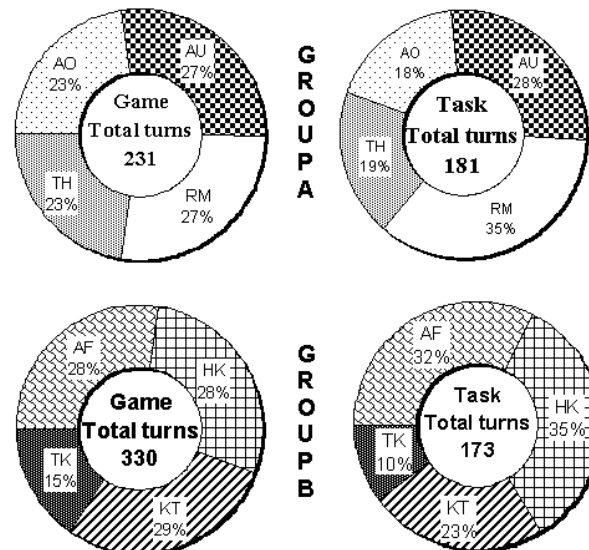


Figure 1: The number of turns in Group A and Group B

Moves

In order to see the interaction patterns of the game and the task, the students' utterances were categorized into moves, which include Initiation (I), Response (R), and Feedback (F). Table 3 shows the amounts of I, R and F individually. The percentages of turn-taking of both AF and HK in Group B were similar, which were 32% and 35% respectively. However, the results in Table 3 show different participation patterns for these two. Whereas HK exhibited more Initiation (50 times) than Response (20 times) in both the game and the task, AF recorded more Response (43 times) than Initiation (24 times) in both the game and the task.

Table 3: The number of moves (individuals) in Group B

	AF		HK		KT		TK		Total	
	Game	Task 32%	Game	Task 35%	Game	Task	Game	Task	Game	Task
I	16	24	30	50	22	18	12	7	80	99
R	19	43	25	20	22	30	8	14	74	107
F	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	4

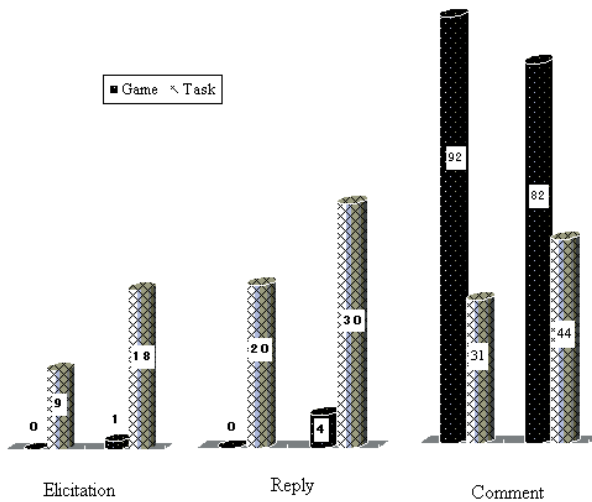


Figure 2: Acts – Elicitation, Reply and Comment

Acts

There was a considerable difference in the use of acts between the game and the task (see Figure 2). *Elicitation* and *reply* occurred frequently in the task. On the other hand, *comment* was the most frequent act occurring in the game.

Discussion

The results indicate that there is a difference in the participation patterns in games and tasks. In a game, the players had a relatively equal chance to talk, as can be seen in the total number of turns. One or two of them got significantly more chances to speak in the task. In the game, each player was independent, and played similar roles as competitors. The most frequent act was *comment*, and hardly anyone carried out *elicitation* to solicit others' opinions. All players tried to express on their opinions because if they were persuaded to change by other players, this meant they would lose the game.

On the other hand, in the task, it seems that the power balance was different for each individual, but participants tried to cooperate as a team. It might be said that their own personalities affected their roles more in the task. For example, HK in Group B obviously played the role of leader. This can be seen in the results for the number of turns and corresponding acts. He took the most turns among the students in either group and used mostly initiations, which are thought to be a teacher's role in normal classroom interaction. These different participation patterns in the game and task could have been caused by different features between these two activities. As stated in section 2, while games are governed by rules, tasks are not. Because of the rules, it was possible to predetermine turn taking in the game to some extent. As a result, students could obtain a more equal chance to speak. On the other hand, in the task, turn taking is unpredictable, and the route the students might take to reach the goal depends on the students themselves. As long as they could gain agreement in the group, some students do not need to show their opinions and take initiatives.

The competition vs. cooperation dimension also explains different phrases that the students used frequently. When the students were discussing in order to cooperate, common phrases were to elicit others' opinions such as *How about...?* and *Do you think...?* In contrast, they tended to use phrases to insist on their opinions such as *I want to...* and *I will...* when they competed with each other in the game.

Advice for deciding on tasks or games for particular learners

The results of the analysis of these participation patterns show that games gave relatively equal and balanced chances to speak for all students. This feature can be one of the advantages because there is an opportunity to speak for people who are not likely to initiate discussions by themselves. Teachers are not always able to check

their students whether they are participating in activities especially in a big class. By stating the rules in a game, teachers can ensure that all students have equal opportunities.

On the other hand, in the task, the chances to take turns were unbalanced and one person was dominant and played the role of leader. This feature can be seen as a disadvantage if it results in students having unequal chances to speak among the students. However, this aspect could simultaneously be an advantage if the teacher demonstrates how to play the role of leader and rotates the order to change the role of students in order to avoid the same person becoming the leader all the time. It is useful to learn how to do collaborative work effectively and it encourages not only language learning but also social relationships.

Teachers can choose which kind of activities they need to use for students according to the objectives or the characteristics of their own students. The criteria distinguishing games and tasks that were set up in Table 1 would be helpful when the teacher wishes to choose or adapt some game-like or task-like activities. For example, if the same students always speak dominantly, it might be useful to use a competitive game to give all students chances to speak more equally. If teachers want to enhance social relationships among students, they can use cooperative tasks.

This study was preliminary, so the findings cannot be universally applicable. As further research questions, we could compare on a larger scale. Different age groups or groups of different ability levels, for instance, could be usefully analyzed. Furthermore, based on the results obtained from this study, we may predict common and useful expressions when people agree or disagree and apply them when giving instructions.

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