

Implementation of GBT Games to Improve Students' Speaking Skill

*Mariela Cedeño Vargas*¹¹

Universidad Nacional
maricitayo@hotmail.com

*Evelyn Valverde Marín*¹²

Universidad Nacional
egabrival@hotmail.com

Resumen: El uso de juegos en el aprendizaje de un segundo idioma es relacionado con importantes factores tales como ¿Cuándo?, ¿Cómo? y ¿porque usarlos en la clase? Incluso, va más allá de divertirse pues su contribución radica en la exposición de los estudiantes a un auténtico uso del idioma, la creación de un ambiente de enseñanza relajado, y la interacción significativa entre el profesor y el alumno. Basados en la clara contribución de los juegos, una investigación cuasi-experimental fue llevada a cabo en un colegio público en Pérez Zeledón. El estudio se desarrolló para investigar la efectividad de los juegos GBT (guessing, board and tell-tale) en el reforzamiento de la expresión oral en un grupo de octavo año del colegio nocturno de Pérez Zeledón. Finalmente, los resultados evidenciaron que, cuando se usa apropiadamente y con suficiente tiempo, los juegos GBT pueden convertirse en una buena herramienta para reforzar la expresión oral de inglés en los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: expresión oral, actividades dinámicas, juegos GBT, mejoramiento, aprendizaje

Abstract: The use of games in language learning deals with important factors such as when, how, and why to use them in the second language class. The implementation of games in the classroom goes beyond having fun; its contribution entails the exposure to authentic use of the language and the building of a relaxing teaching environment. It also promotes meaningful interaction between teachers and students. Based on the clear contribution of games, a quasi-experimental investigation was conducted in a public school in Pérez Zeledón. The study was directed toward researching the effectiveness of GBT (guessing, board and tell-tale) games to reinforce eight graders' speaking. Finally, the results evidenced that, when used appropriately and with enough time, guessing, board and tell-tale games are helpful tools to reinforce students' English speaking skill.

¹¹ Mariela Cedeño Vargas is a student in the Applied Linguistic Licenciante program at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension

¹² Evelyn Valverde Marín is a student of the Applied Linguistics Licenciante program at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension

Key words: oral expression, dynamic activities, GBT games, improvement, learning

I Introduction

Learning a foreign language helps to bridge the gap among people from different countries. In fact, mastering English is a common goal individuals look for in order to improve their knowledge and have better job opportunities. Because of this assumption, schools and high schools in different countries offer opportunities to study a second language as part of their curriculum. The Ministry of Public Education (MEP) in Costa Rica stated in the English syllabus (2001) that “the English program offers the students a second language which enables them to communicate within a broader social-economic context in and outside Costa Rica” (p 13). This governmental decision favors high schoolers directly since they are provided with language learning opportunities from early stages.

Speaking is one of the most difficult skills to master since it involves aspects such as pronunciation, intonation patterns, vocabulary, and fluency. Teaching speaking in high schools is essential to empower students to participate in active and real communication situations. Its importance lies on the fact that it is difficult to be communicatively competent. However, the relevance of speaking instruction in high schools is currently underestimated. Even though teaching this skill is a hard and time consuming task, it should always be emphasized as a means to prepare linguistically competent students so that they can use the language to communicate their ideas effectively.

The reinforcement of the speaking skill in English classes can be achieved by the use of different and interesting activities with varied levels of proficiency. It requires innovative teachers willing to implement creative activities to get students involved in class development. Moreover, games in the classroom can provide meaningful interactions between teachers and students, and create confident working environments. In regard to this, Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (1984) agreed that “games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work”(p. 2). By incorporating games in the lesson plans, students might feel that they are not actually working but playing in a relaxed environment while learning without even noticing it. Additionally, the level of anxiety and pressure that students may feel in the classroom can be lowered by using active oral games. Lee (1995) postulated that the way of learning is a serious process; consequently, fun and laughter are not part of learning (p.2). However, she also admitted that there are reasons why fun and games contribute positively to learning a language. She emphasized that “It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games” (p.2). Indeed, oral active games may improve students’ English learning and boost more confident and comforting environments for teachers and students.

Keeping in mind the previous conceptions, a study about the role of games in the classroom as a way to improve speaking abilities emerged. The objectives postulated for this investigation are:

1.1 General objective:

To improve the speaking skill of students through the use of GBT games (guessing-board-tell tales) in group 8-6 at Pérez Zeledón Night High School.

1.2 Specific objectives:

- To design creative GBT games.
- To implement the GBT games in group 8-6 in Pérez Zeledón Night High School.
- To analyze the impact of GBT games in the students speaking performance.

II Literature review**2.1 Language Learning**

Every person acquires his/her mother tongue, naturally. This process of acquisition takes time. Little by little children deal with the language and improve it until they are able to manipulate the language at will. Learning a foreign language is a very different process. Students do not pick the language from the environment, but they must force themselves into the language in order to be successful. This process can be sometimes hard and tiring. Nonetheless, throughout this development of language management there is a character who plays a main role: the teacher. Professors are the guides that help students to learn a language. However, they deal with factors regarding the learners, environment, and the language itself. Teaching is a very complex process. It cannot be described just as delivering information to someone, but includes a variety of aspects to consider.

When teaching a language, educators must be aware of the different students' features like intrinsic motivation, learning conditions, cognition, age, and sex. Fincher (1994) depicted learning as a progressive route from a certain point (unawareness) to another (knowledge) (p. 58). She defined learning as: "... a process of progressive change from ignorance to knowledge, from inability to competence, and from indifference to understanding." (p.58) Furthermore, Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) delineated learning in terms of interaction when expressing that "Learning is a social process that occurs through interpersonal interaction within a cooperative contest. Individuals, working together, construct shared understandings and knowledge" (p. 26-27). In addition, Svinicki, Hagen, and Meyer (1996) adjoined the importance of students' aim claiming that in order to start learning, students need to feel motivated to learn (p. 4). They consider students' intention to learn as a condition in order for the knowledge to be accessible.

The implementation of a communicative methodology provides opportunities for students to be in contact with real communication in the target language which leads to a holistic mastery of it. According to the MEP's English syllabus, teachers should follow the communicative approach which "provides the basis for the methodology used in the English classroom" (p. 23). The main characteristics of the communicative methodology are the use of authentic language that should be introduced to produce real contexts; the target language is vehicle for classroom communication; and games are important because they share some common characteristics with real communicative events. Then, the role of

a communicative methodology in the classroom is purposeful because it leads students to have real contact with the target language.

Teachers who intend to use the communicative approach should focus on goals that lead students to be able to communicate in real-life situations. According to Galloway (1993), the major goal of a communicative class is that students can become competent in communication in the target language (para. 3). Moreover, students must be able to use the language appropriately in specific social contexts and negotiate meaning with their interlocutors. Another important aspect of the communicative approach is the use of authentic material which serves students to feel that they are actually dealing with real situations as if they were native speakers. In sum, the relevance of a communicative methodology is visualized in the student's ability to produce the target language in authentic contexts.

2.2 English Teaching in Costa Rica

The main aim established by the Ministry of Public Education in the English syllabus (2001) regarding the teaching of this subject are “to offer students a second language which will allow them to communicate with people from other countries, both in Costa Rica and abroad, and to give students a tool for direct access to scientific, technological and humanistic knowledge” (pp.13-14). With this intention, this system gives equal opportunities to all students to develop their abilities, to reach social and personal growth. Education provides the tools and means by which students learn, experience, and then, shape their capacities to enhance their understanding of the world. In this syllabus, the general objectives are to develop the ability to use the language effectively in practical communication, to develop language skills and attitudes required for further study, to offer an insight of the culture of other countries where language is spoken, to develop awareness of the nature of the language, to provide enjoyment and intellectual development, to promote positive attitudes towards foreign cultures, and people, and to develop students' understanding of themselves and their cultures (pp. 13-14). In brief, the English syllabus was designed to led students go in a linguistic path that enable them to become communicatively competent and open mind toward other cultures.

2.3 Games to Reinforce the Speaking Skill in the EFL Classroom

The process of learning a second language can be tough, but there are ways to ease its complexity. Language learning requires a lot of effort and sometimes it causes frustration and hard work on the part of those involved in the process. Since language learning is a long-term process, teachers deal with difficulties and sometimes complicated situations in their classrooms. Mainly because students might feel frustrated not only towards the target language but also towards the teaching methods. There is a way to make language learning less complex and more interactive, which is by using games. Games can help students to reduce feelings such as fear, anxiety, frustration, dissatisfaction and anger. Ersoz (2000) pointed out that if games are well-chosen, they can become an invaluable tool for teachers because they give students a break and let them practice speaking, listening, reading and writing (p.5). Nonetheless, there are some aspects that contribute to the importance of using

games in the classroom such as the behavioral game theory, the use of games in language learning and speaking games in English classrooms.

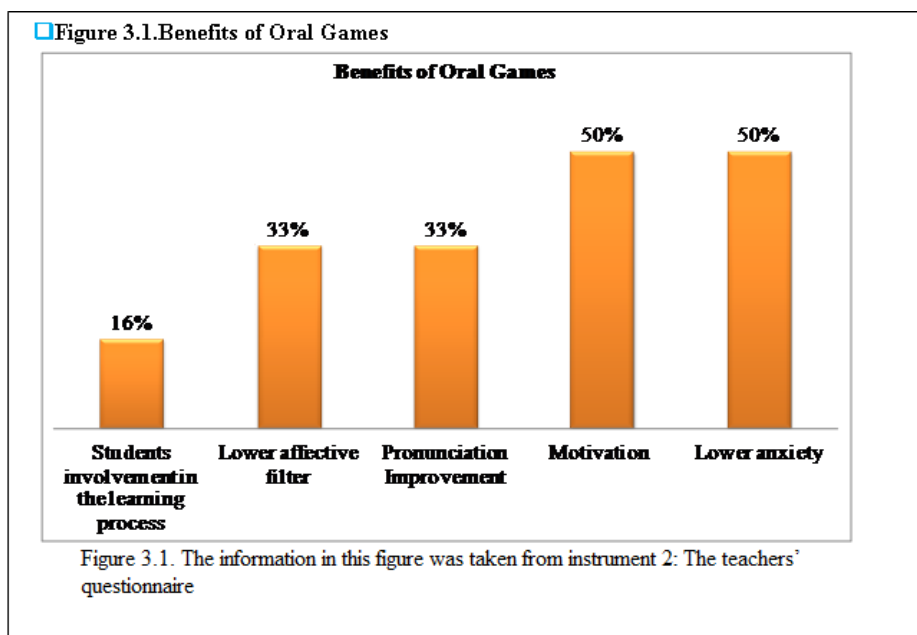
The Behavioral Game theory helps to understand how people and even students react or behave in different contexts where strategic situations are imposed by other mechanisms or people. Camerer (2007) said that “a person needs time to understand the situation; besides, he or she must anticipate what others will do and what others will infer from the person’s own action” (p. 10). In the classroom, students need time to understand instructions, methods and strategies to dig up the lesson. Thus, teachers’ tolerance is important to infer the students’ needs and support them in the class. In regard to game strategies, the educator in charge of the game requires to set a number of rules to make the game interactive and effective; otherwise, it will not work as a part of the teaching process.

One of the main goals of speaking games in English classrooms is to improve learners' communicative competence. In order to do this, teachers have to plan active and useful lessons where students can express themselves and learn how to make use of rules related to social and cultural environments. A distinguishing characteristic of effective use of games is that that students should not be allowed to use their mother tongue while playing. Thus, the use of conversational games in classrooms will succeed as part of teaching speaking process of second language learning. Teachers should not overuse classroom games, but they certainly have to know when and how to use them to avoid time waste and unsuccessful learning. Games can be useful tools because students can feel more confident and motivated to speak. Nonetheless, games are very helpful activities in that they provide fun, motivation and encouragement to second language learners to speak in the target language.

III Data Analysis

This study is quantitative in nature since its main goal is to find out events and results from the phenomenon observed and show a quantitative account of results. It followed a pre-experimental one-group pretest/posttest design where one experimental group received a treatment and took a pretest and posttest to measure the effectiveness of this aforementioned treatment. The population considered was eight graders (thirty six girls and twenty five boys) in a public night high school. This group was selected due to the principal and the collaborative teacher’s permission and willingness when carrying out the implementation of the methodology. The instruments administered to collect the information were questionnaires class-observations, a pre-test and a post-test. A description of the treatment is included in appendix one in this document.

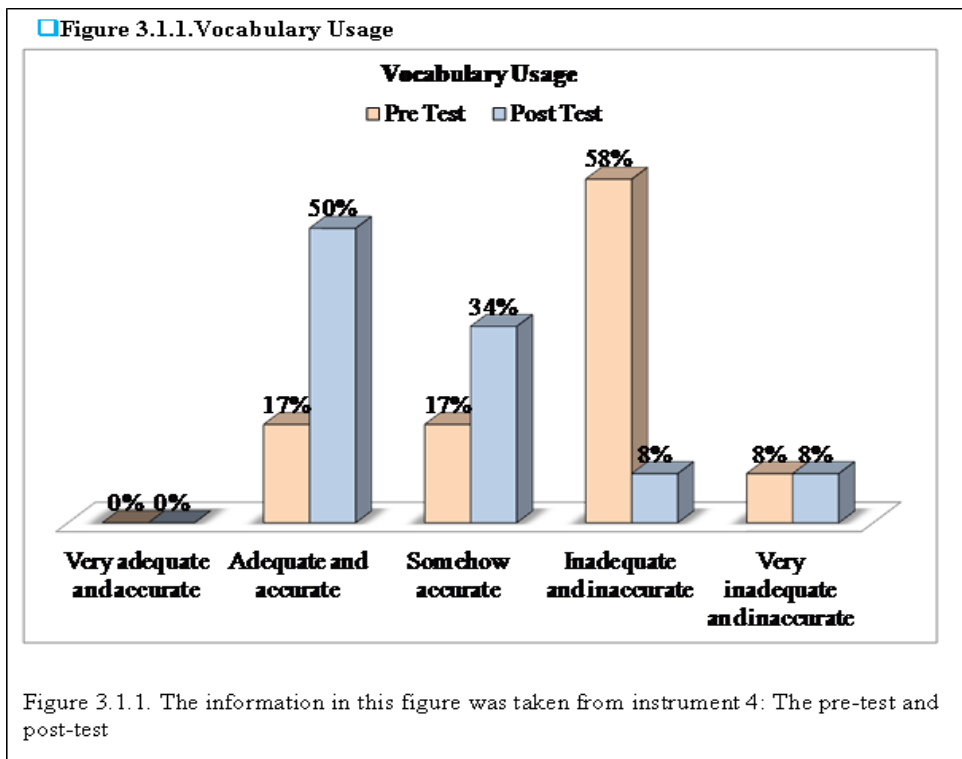
Teachers provided key information about the topic under investigation. They identified some direct benefits of using oral games in the EFL classroom. They believe that those games are appealing for students to learn the foreign language during English classes. The information reveals that motivation and the decrease of anxiety are considered the two main benefits provided by oral games. The next figure displays their answers clearly.



Motivation and low anxiety were recognized as a benefit by 50% of the informants, at the same time, they affirmed that games help them to feel more comfortable when participating in class. Also, a low affective filter and the improvement in pronunciation are relevant benefits based on the teachers' responses. In addition, students' involvement in the learning process is not taken as a remarkable benefit with the implementation of oral games since only 16% of the interviewed teachers mentioned this aspect.—Nevertheless, the information does not specify why the students' involvement is not a relevant factor for them.

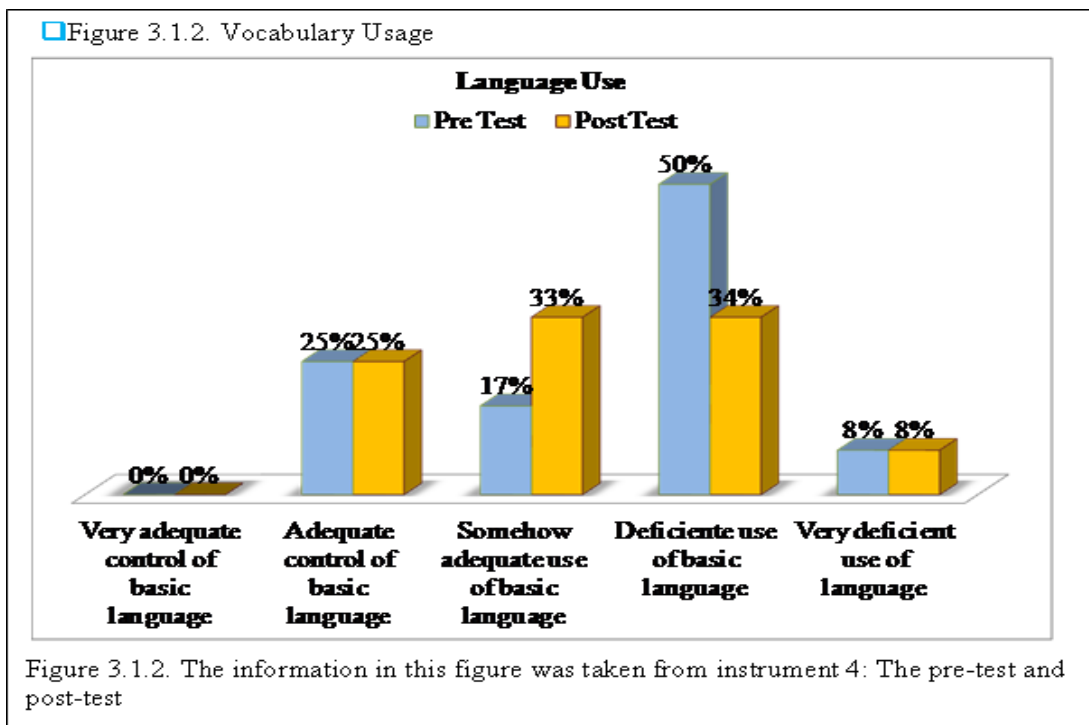
The data provided by the teachers reveal that even though there is a majority of teachers who implement games as part of their classroom activities, still some of them choose not to do so. A remarkable 83% of the teachers admitted the use of board games and guessing games to reinforce students' English learning. Though, tell-tale games are not part of teachers' preferences. Most of the informants agreed on the advantage of using games to reinforce the students' speaking skill and to provide them with opportunities to practice the language. Yet, they seem to favor active oral games, such as memory games or tic tac toe, over other activities, like debates.

The next graph illustrates a contrastive analysis of the vocabulary management of the students before and after the implementation of the treatment. The data were gathered through the pre and post-test respectively.



The main finding in this analysis is that half of the students (50%) were able to use vocabulary adequately and accurately. Also, the percentage of students who presented somehow adequate use of the vocabulary increased. An important issue is that the percentage of the students who represented very inadequate use of vocabulary kept the same rank in both tests. It is also remarkable to notice the fact that despite the improvements, any of the students reached a very adequate and accurate use of the vocabulary. The information collected from the pre and post-test revealed the students' improvement in vocabulary after the implementation of the GTB games. This category is the one that presents a major fluctuation in the percentages. In regard to language use and communication of ideas there is improvement, but it is not remarkable.

Another aspect analyzed was the degree of the students' language use before and after the GBT games implementation which is represented in the next graph. Again, students' improvement was measured by contrasting their achievement in the pre and posttest.



The graph above demonstrates the degree of the students' language use before and after the GBT games implementation. There is some improvement in the language use from the pretest to the post-test. During the pre-test more than a half of the students showed to be deficient language users, but this percentage diminished during the post-test. Consequently, the percentage of students who managed somewhat adequate control of basic language structures increased. Furthermore, the percentage of the students who showed both, an adequate and a deficient control of basic language, did not increase. It is important to mention that any of the students reached the very adequate use of basic structures.

IV Conclusions

This section emphasizes the main conclusions drawn from the implementation of the GBT games (Guessing, Board and Tell-tale. First, a relevant finding is that most of the interviewed teachers are likely to use oral activities, including games to reinforce students' English speaking skill. Second, this study has found that teachers consider that oral games can bring benefits to students such as motivation and the decrease of anxiety. Third, the present study showed students' language improvement after the implementation of GBT (Guessing, Board and Tell-tale) games. Finally, the information gathered from this investigation reveals that the implementation of GBT games helps students to increase their vocabulary use in an average way. As a result, more time is necessary to be devoted to the implementation of the treatment.

4.1 Recommendations

The subsequent ideas are provided for teachers who plan to use GBT in the classroom:

1. Teachers should be very organized when performing oral games to keep students participating actively.
2. Teachers should take into account students' willingness and abilities to participate in order to perform the different activities to avoid students' possible frustration and rejection.
3. The use of GBT games in English classrooms should be implemented frequently in order to reinforce students' language use.

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V References

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Presenter's biography

Mariela Cedeño Vargas is currently enrolled in the licentiate's program in Applied Linguistics at Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension. She holds a bachelor's degree in English teaching from the same university.

Presenter's biography

Evelyn Gabriela Valverde Marín holds a bachelor's degree in English teaching from Universidad Nacional, Brunca Extension. She is a student of the licentiate's program in Applied Linguistics at the same university. She was a teacher assistant and a language instructor in the project TEAM-UNA Amistad for two years.

Appendix 1

Design

The design consists of the implementation of GBT games (guessing, board, and tell-tale) to enhance students speaking performance. The methodology involves speaking activities implemented in group 8-6 in Pérez Zeledón Night High school. The implementation of this procedure (GBT) took four weeks and was applied to this population with the purpose of improving their English speaking skill. The researchers analyzed the specific problem with a pre-test, proposed a treatment with speaking activities, and evaluate the results through a post-test. The activities involved in this technique are based only on guessing, board and tell-tale.

The following chart shows the schedule for the implementation of the techniques:

Date	Activity
Week 1	1. Apple or Worm? (board game) 2. Catch me! (guessing game)
Week 2	3. Spin the roulette (board game) 4. Go ahead! (guessing game)
Week 3	5. Burn my Ride(board game) 6. Ball around (tell-tale game)
Week 4	7. Tell Me a Story(tell-tale game) 8. Smarty Me (guessing game)

Description of the activities:**1. Apple or Worm?**

This activity provides the students with the opportunity to express their ideas. The game can be done based on any topic previously studied. Students are asked to answer questions. It is a board game about good and services. The steps to follow are:

- a) The teacher sticks four big test tubes made of paper on the board.
- b) Students are divided into four groups and each group is assigned a test tube.
- c) Each group chooses a leader.
- d) The leader of each group throws the dice and the group that gets the higher number starts.
- e) The teacher asks a question and the group in turn chooses which of the other groups answer the question.
- f) If the group answers correctly, they will receive an apple in their test tube, but if they answer wrong, they will receive a worm.
- g) Then, the teacher asks another question and the group which just answered choose which of the other groups is going to answer.
- h) This process is repeated as desired by the teacher.
- i) The winner is the group that has more apples in the test tube.

2. Catch Me!

This game enables the students to develop their listening and speaking skill. Some students recite different riddles, the others guess. This game is played in the next sequence:

- a) The class is divided into two groups.
- b) The teacher gives different riddles to students.
- c) Each group reads the riddles aloud while the others guess in half a minute.
- d) The winner group chooses a punishment for the group that loses.
- e) This process is repeated as desired by the teacher.

3. Spin the roulette

This technique encourages students to develop vocabulary actively by either providing an idea of their own or answering the questions on the roulette. The steps are the next:

- a) The class is divided into four groups.
- b) Each group chooses a leader who is in charge of spinning the roulette.
- c) The roulette has either questions about Goods and Services or a word related to the topic.
- d) If they get a question they answer it; if not each member of the group provides a sentence using the word they get in the roulette.

4. Go ahead!

This activity emphasizes students' ability to find places and give directions. A map on the board is the means for students to accomplish the task. The steps are:

- a) The class is divided into three groups.
- b) The teacher assigns the name of some places to each group.

- c) Based on the map each group, one by one, explains the direction of one of the places they were assigned.
- d) The other groups guess as fast as possible
- e) The winner is the group that guesses more places.

5. **Burn my ride**

This game helps students to improvise and to use the vocabulary they already learned. The steps are the following:

- a) The class is divided into four groups.
- b) Each one is given a paper car.
- c) A paper speedway is placed over some tables.
- d) The teacher has questions and asks them out loud one by one.
- e) Each group writes their answer in a piece of paper. When all groups have the answer they show it in order to check the answers.
- f) The teacher decides which group, or groups, got the right answer.
- g) The groups that got it right will go forward on the speedway. The ones who got it wrong will also go forward, but will miss a part of the car.
- h) The winner group is the one that gets to the target with most of the car pieces.

6. **Ball around**

This technique's focus is on students' speaking performance when interacting among them. This is a telltale game. The steps to follow up are:

- a) Each student is given a picture.
- b) The teacher throws the ball and the student who catches it starts a story saying a sentence based on the picture.
- c) The teacher picks the ball up every time a student participates and throws it to another student.
- d) This process is repeated several times until the teacher asks one students to give an end to the story.

7. **Tell me a story**

For this activity, it was taken into account the need of development of individual unrehearsed speaking activities in group 8-6. The steps are:

- a) Each student is given a word.
- b) The professor will start the story.
- c) One by one, the students will add more incidents to the story by using the word they were given previously.
- d) There are no limits to the imagination and amount of information each student can add.
- e) At the end, all students will come up with an end for the story.

8. Smarty Me

This game enhances students' oral interaction, which is essential in the speaking learning process. Students have to guess what the presenter is. By developing this activity the listening skill is also improved, since both listening and speaking are involved. The directions for this game are the following:

- a) Students are divided into four groups.
- b) Students are assigned the name of a like or a dislike.
- c) They have three minutes to think about features to describe themselves, based on the given word in front of their classmates. The group that guesses