

Ghost House: A Kinesthetic Game to Practice Prepositions of Place in Speaking

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Abstract

In this paper, I highlight that it is possible to teach a grammar lesson in a communicative way without limiting oneself to written activities. At the end of a grammar lesson on prepositions of place, I decided to think about an activity that could engage students as I teach English as a foreign language (EFL). That activity I had been reflecting on proved to be a kinesthetic game I named *Ghost House*. As they are efficient to entertain children, games might also be good motivators for learning when used as a communicative tool and an icebreaker. This game offers EFL teachers a pedagogic means to assess students' mastery of prepositions of place in speaking but it also gives way to a specific learning strategy that could meet different students' needs. In addition to the game, *Sketch it* is another activity that helps use prepositions of place in real life situations. In short, in this paper, I defend the idea that all EFL teachers must be innovative, proactive and creative (IPC) in order to be unique.

Keywords

Kinesthetic Game, *Ghost House*, Prepositions of Place, Grammar, IPC

1. Introduction

A main objective in teaching EFL is to enable students to communicate effectively in many situations and contexts (Ting, 2009). For five years without a break I had taught the same grammar lesson on the use of prepositions of place to students in their third year in junior high school. I managed to teach that lesson as communicatively as possible giving students exercises that always assessed communication. As the routine activity became boring, I realized I could make this lesson more communicative. This was how the idea of creating a game in which prepositions of place would be used in conversation crossed my mind.

I have made this game as engaging as possible hoping to make it better and better in the future. The idea of role-playing a ghost itself is not dull as dishwasher. When an activity stimulates both attention and interest, students generally engage naturally (Sher, 2006) and game-based activities can bring numerous benefits to language learners (Quy, 2019; Bay Atlantic University, 2022).

In an attempt to bridge the gap between teaching a grammar lesson on prepositions of place and practicing those very prepositions, a research question arises: how is it possible to practice the prepositions of place in a game that will prompt students to move and gesticulate in the classroom? After reviewing the literature on games, kinesthetic learning and grammar lessons, I will introduce the game, present it, demonstrate it and then show how to practice it in a very simple way. I will also add another drama-inspired interactional activity.

2. Literature Review

Many non-classroom games are language-based and therefore lend themselves to use or adaptation in the language classroom (Thornbury, 2006: p. 90). In fact, in real life people, from childhood to adulthood, play different types of games in order to interact, build relationship and give meaning to their lives. Language itself is a means of human interaction (Thiam, 2011: p. 69). Through these interactions, kinesthetic learning occurs. I personally know many teachers, not of the English language only, who would not beat around the bush to send some students out because they were doodling, drawing or keeping their hands busy on things other than taking notes during the lecture.

Kinesthetic learning gives several benefits: cognitive development, increased comprehension through physical activities, social skills development, stronger creative thinking, better problem solving and better observation (Bay Atlantic University, 2022).

Teaching itself, and teaching grammar in particular, requires teachers to be as flexible and tolerant as possible. While vocabulary improves all skills and subskills, grammar redresses distorted uses of all skills and subskills. Grammar asks to do things and not to do things. Teaching and learning grammar then is a demanding task.

Thornbury (2006) gives a four-pronged definition of grammar: prescriptive grammar prescribes correct usage of the language; descriptive grammar not only describes morphology (the way words are inflected, contracted, etc.) and syntax (the way elements are sequenced in a sentence) but portrays also formal grammar and functional grammar; pedagogic grammar reflects the way teachers use the standard English language in the classroom avoiding all non-conventional features of the language; mental grammar refers to the way language is represented in our minds (p. 92). **Figure 1** below shows all these types of grammar.

This paper probes both prescriptive and descriptive grammar as it underscores the practice of prepositions of place in speaking through a game. In the

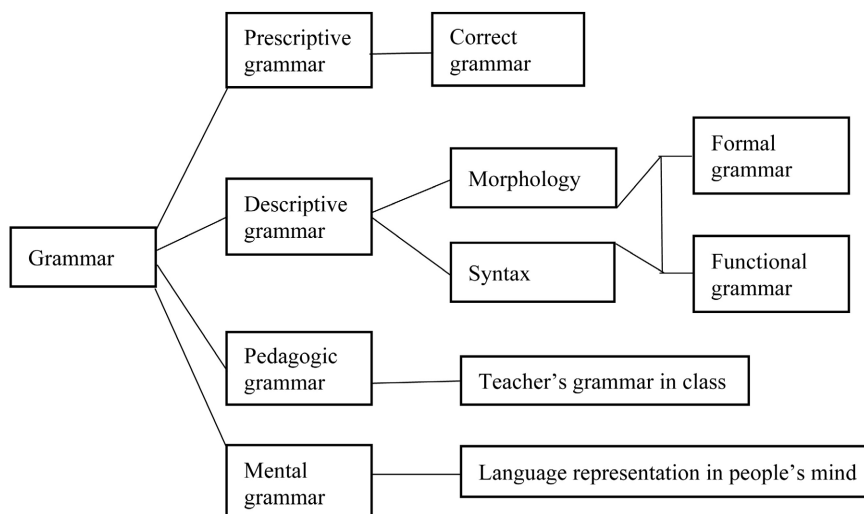


Figure 1. Four different types of grammar.

presentation and practice model of communicative grammar teaching, [Scrivener \(2010\)](#) proposes three interesting scenes to present a grammar lesson on prepositions of place in which teachers will be using Cuisinaire Rods, Lego bricks, action figures or other toys (p. 85). In the practice stage, teachers have the latitude to engage students into activities such as story-telling, picture dictation, etc. ([Scrivener, 2010: pp. 85-86](#)).

The literature on grammar concentrates more on defining prepositions of place, giving examples of their use and giving exercises for practice ([Sergeant, 2007](#); [Naylor & Murphy, 1996](#)). A few authors share good practices though presenting lesson plans that favor interactional and entertaining activities ([Woodward, 1997](#)). [Thiam \(2011: p. 79\)](#) advocates the rehabilitation of mechanical transformations of grammatical structures to give them communicative value.

Many grammar books that are either for learning or teaching also use relevant pictures of objects placed differently to explain as efficiently as possible how prepositions of place should be used ([Scrivener, 2010](#)). Confronted with such a scarcity of materials on how to practice the grammar lesson taught, teachers need to be IPC. Being IPC in a school that you share with old-school and authoritarian colleagues create clashes sometimes ([Lorenzutti, 2016: p. 2](#)) but this should no way act as a curb to teachers' most powerful dormant energy, that of transforming students positively.

3. Ghost House

As specified above, I created this game after deep reflections about how I could make my students practice what they have learned. As materials to play this game, just students' tools laid on their tables will be enough (pens, rulers, rubbers, bags, pencils, books, etc.). Approximately between 30 minutes and 1 hour will be necessary to play this game according to the classroom size and atmosphere. As long as students show interest, each one of them would want to vo-

lunteer so as to role-play the main character and have fun. So the time the game will take to be practiced depends on the classroom engagement, mood or reaction. The game can be practiced with pre-intermediate students.

3.1. Presentation

Ghost House is an interactive game that mostly fosters the kinesthetic learning strategy, among others, as students will be moving and making different gestures. In this game, the classroom itself represents a frightening house in which lives a kind and playful ghost who takes pleasure in making his guests' personal things vanish. But once you ask for a lost thing, the ghost gives it back to you. Playing this game is simple. One student will volunteer to role-play the ghost and the others will be remaining at their places keeping their eyes shut while the ghost is hiding their belongings. Students also will be swapping roles. The details will be explained thoroughly in the lines below.

3.2. Preparation

Prepare students psychologically. They need to know they are about to play a game using the prepositions of place as written in **Table 1** below for a reminder.

To be certain that students will not forget the meaning of the prepositions, you could give their meaning in their L1. Here I used French bearing in mind that using translation in the classroom is a vexed issue (Thiam, 2011). Explain to students that they are about to play a game called *Ghost House*. It is not a bad idea to explain to them what ghost means in order to have them focused. Write down the game's name on the board, and then, the dialog (just for weaker students), the classroom objects and students' tools in **Table 2** and **Table 3** below because you will need these later on.

In **Table 2**, "bag" and "under" are in bold because they are just examples of what the student role-playing the ghost might hide and where he might hide it in the classroom.

3.3. Teacher's Demonstration

Show students what to do and how to play the game. Ask all students to watch

Table 1. A short list of prepositions of place.

Behind - in front of - next to - between - near - above - below - in - on

Table 2. The game dialog.

Ghost: What do you want? Speak now!

Victim: I can't see my **bag**.

Ghost: Where is it?

Victim: It is **under** the teacher's desk.

Ghost: Go and take it.

Victim: Thank you.

Table 3. Classroom objects and students' tools.

<i>Bucket (pail):</i> un seau
<i>Calculator:</i> une calculatrice
<i>Compasses:</i> un compas
<i>Desk:</i> un bureau (de professeur)
<i>Eraser:</i> une gomme
<i>Pencil sharpener:</i> un taille-crayon
<i>Protractor:</i> un rapporteur
<i>Square:</i> une équerre
<i>Tissue (paper handkerchief):</i> un mouchoir en papier

you carefully as you will role-play the ghost. Make sure the students understand you are the ghost and they the guests. Tell them when you clap your hands one time, they have to close their eyes and then you will take three students' tools at random and hide them in different places in the classroom. The hidden tools could be behind the door, next to another student, under a table, on the teacher's desk, in the bucket, etc. When you clap your hands two times, they will have to open their eyes and some of them will realize their tools are missing.

At this stage, you do not want to mess things up, so students who realized their belongings are missing raise their hands and wait until you give them the floor, one by one. Seeing that some students may not be fluent in English, tell them what they have to say is written on the board (see **Table 2**). When the first student who raises his hand is taking the floor to speak to the ghost, he may look for his lost object everywhere in the classroom until he finds it. The ghost can help pointing out the place where the object has been hidden.

When role-playing the ghost, it is not a bad idea to simulate a loud and angry voice. The ghost ought to sound authoritative and demanding. The student who interprets the guest needs to simulate a frightened voice tight with emotion.

After writing the dialog on the board, underline with a piece of color chalk the lost tool and the preposition to use as examples. At the end of the dialog, the student who found his tool will go and take it. Then the game continues. Students will swap roles if necessary.

3.4. Practice

Now it is time to play. First, ask students to leave their tools on their tables. Second, tell students that to play this game they need one volunteer to role-play the ghost and the others the guests who should be sitting down keeping their eyes closed with their bare hands. For the sake of clarity, **Table 4** below shows the different steps to follow in a simplified way.

4. Sketch It

The most common grammar exercises on prepositions of place have the following instructions:

- Fill in the gaps of the sentences with the prepositions below (elementary level);

Table 4. A simplified process to play the game in the classroom.

<i>Ghost:</i>	Faces everyone.
<i>Guests:</i>	Leave all their things on their tables. Keep quiet.
<i>Ghost:</i>	Claps his hands one time.
<i>Guests:</i>	Close their eyes covering them with their bare hands.
<i>Ghost:</i>	Circulates in the classroom and picks up three guests' belongings to hide them in different places in the classroom. Claps his hands two times.
<i>Guests:</i>	Open their eyes to realize three of them have lost something.
<i>1st guest:</i>	Raises his hand to talk to the ghost.
<i>Ghost:</i>	Questions the first guest saying: "What do you want? Speak now!"
<i>1st guest:</i>	Says: "I can't see my bag."
<i>Ghost:</i>	Says: "Where is it?"
<i>1st guest:</i>	Says: "It is under the teacher's desk."
<i>Ghost:</i>	Says: "Go and take it."
<i>1st guest:</i>	Says: "Thank you!"
<i>Ghost:</i>	Questions the second guest, then the third guest.

The game continues with another volunteer to role-play the ghost.

- Choose the most appropriate prepositions in brackets to complete each sentence (elementary level);
- Fill in the gaps of the passage correctly with the missing prepositions (intermediary level);
- Complete the dialog below meaningfully (advanced level);

Although these exercises are formative, being aware of the difference between the sentence as an isolated syntactic unit and the value it acquires in larger stretches of connected discourse in context exposes students to real communication (Thiam, 2011: p. 79). There is more to filling gaps with prepositions of place than filling those gaps meaningfully; feelings and intentions as they appear in a given context need to be taken into account (Thiam, 2011). As shown in **Figure 2** below, Naylor & Murphy (1996: p. 87) propose a highly communicative activity from which the activity suggested for *Sketch it* draws inspiration.

If possible, teachers could support this activity with an elaborate picture from which students will produce clever ideas to complete the whole passage.

4.1. Presentation

Sketch it is a theatrical activity inspired by drama. It provides a pretext to practice prepositions of place in speaking with fun and energy. In a two-hour class, students might prepare it and present it in the classroom. In case of less than two

Some customers in the supermarket can't find what they want. You are the assistant. Complete the sentences.

1. I can't find the cereals.

YOU: They're **on** the left, **on** the bottom shelf, **below** the sugar.

2. Where's the rice, please?

YOU: It's the left, the top shelf, the pasta and the bread.

3. Where are the biscuits, please?

YOU: They're the right, shelf, the nuts.

4. Where's the water, please?

YOU: It's the right, shelf, the cola.

5. I can't find the tea.

YOU: It's the right, shelf, the cola.

6. And the cakes?

YOU: They're the cola, shelf, middle, the biscuits and the chocolate.

Now you say where the coffee is.

7. The coffee is

And the flour?

8. The flour is

Figure 2. An example of a communicative activity on prepositions of place (Naylor & Murphy, 1996: p. 87).

hours, the preparation may take place at home. The activity can be practiced with all levels, from elementary to advanced. In a context-based approach, **Figure 2** above illustrates the kind of exercise students must do first before performing any sketches. In the hope to help students between adolescents and young adults be able to stimulate purposeful, creative literacy engagement, Murray, Salas and Thoghdha (2015) advocate applied theater. So theater-inspired activities are so motivating and so efficient against emotional filters that only IPC teachers design them for their classrooms.

4.2. Preparation

Tell students they need to perform sketches. Give them the drama plot. For example, "Two customers in the supermarket can't find what they want. They have decided to ask the kind assistant for help." Make sure students understand they must use prepositions of place in their performances and evidence they master them.

Explain to students in detail all they have to do because many of them might be exposed to this sort of activity for the first time. Tell students then they must form groups of four members. They must agree about roles: three members will role-play the customers and the other the assistant. Take notes of all student names of each group. To prod students into working seriously, inform them that their performances will be graded.

They might prepare the sketches and perform them in the classroom the same day but generally I ask them to prepare the sketches at home. This both spares

time and increases productivity. When students form work groups and prepare projects at home, they have time to double check everything, improve, proofread and revise. Give students one week at least for the preparation and do insist on using prepositions of place.

A sobering reminder of successful group works is to put emphasis on cooperation and collaboration. Individual achievement is generally the top priority in educational settings (Kozar, 2010). So teachers ought to encourage students to cooperate, i.e., to work individually and interact in order to achieve shared goals. In addition, teachers should incite students to collaborate, i.e., to interact directly in order to achieve the same goals.

4.3. Teacher's Demonstration

On performance day, insist on speaking articulately and aloud for the whole classroom to hear and to focus their attention. Students should understand the contents of their sketches only will not be graded but their intonation, their energy deployed and their ability to simulate. You can read a text passage as an example to show them the way they have to perform. In my experience, I saw students who memorized their entire speeches while others were obliged to read.

4.4. Practice

After demonstrating what you expect students to do when performing the sketches, give each group between 10 or 15 minutes to present their work. Some schools may have a special room dedicated for extracurricular activities such as video screening, drama, gymnastics, conference, panels, etc. If your school has such a room, it is better to use it because this activity creates noise, uproar and an electric atmosphere. I remember that I was always surprised to see the weakest and least motivated students be the best performers in the way they articulate the words, show courage and incarnate charisma. One day, I even discovered that the student who made the best performance was a daughter of a famous Senegalese musical artist. Though that student was not good at English, she demonstrated her other hidden talents, which commanded respect.

5. Conclusion

Playing *Ghost House* not only offers students an opportunity to practice a new lesson learned in the classroom, but it also enables them to learn some language functions. For example, students will learn how to declare losing their belongings and to give orders. Furthermore, they may not be aware of all the language features they will be learning when playing, but they will realize in the future that the game helped them learn new things. In the same vein, with *Sketch it*, making a polite request and asking for service are the language functions students will learn.

Both activities *Ghost House* and *Sketch it* prompt students to practice the use of prepositions of place by moving, taking the floor, doing things and gesticu-

lating. However, they present some singularities. *Ghost House* does not require creativity from students but individual engagement and concentration. *Sketch it* instead obliges students to work in groups. It is then more challenging for the teacher in terms of organization. Students as well will be compelled to put aside their divergences and small feuds between classroom clans in order to cooperate and collaborate for the success of the work assigned to them. Kozar (2010) suggests five social classroom activities to help students overcome obstacles in the path of cooperative and collaborative work along with recommendations to teachers. Kozar's (2010) idea is bright but he underestimates pair work as a classroom interaction which is elaborately explained by Thornbury (2006: p. 152). I believe that before asking students to do group work, teachers should initiate them into working in pairs until they familiarize themselves with pair work.

Students can reach their objectives if their teachers are willing to help them do so. Teachers should understand the sky is the limit. Teachers who never care about innovating, sharing experiences or applying other teachers' teaching practices have intellectually given up the ghost. Therefore, all teachers should aspire to be IPC.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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