

Learning through Play

— Skill Building in Game Inspired Competition —

Edmund W. Hoff*

Keywords : Covid-19, card game, Go Fish, language acquisition, Zoom

1. Introduction

One of the most common natural forms of language acquisition is through 'play'. (Nijoy 2020, Hwang 2018) With imagined worlds or contrived competition, youth (predominantly but not exclusively) will act out roles and recreate realities through methods that teach them how to communicate in new ways. The difficulty in learning through play is determining what is actually acquired by participants. A test on paper is much easier to mark than evaluating new terms learned while playing with friends in a park. Research does demonstrate, however, that game play can be effectively evaluated. (Kemaeddine 2020, Tuan 2012, Wibowo and Hanafi 2018) The following analysis is a preliminary framework for a quantifiable approach to language acquisition through game play.

Go Fish as a game has been a vehicle for study in the past. (Nurhayati 2015, Nurman 2018) The way the game is played can vary and the structure for this analysis will be provided in traditional 52 card deck collecting sets of 4 cards. Compared to other card games, Go Fish is a relatively easy to follow game and in North America, is often played by children at a young age in early elementary school.

Under the current pandemic conditions during the Covid-19 corona virus outbreak, it was not possible to play face to face for this study;

thus, games were played in an online format with a combination of the Zoom platform and the website *www.cardgames.io*. ("Go Fish", 2020)

2. Discussion

With practical implementation of the exercise requirements came a number of anomalies. Coordinating and recording 2 separate platforms in Zoom and the card game website led to some inconsistencies in play such as some players faces not showing on the video screen or the group host mistakenly sharing their card hands on screen during play for all to see. The continued developing nature of the analysis process also meant that the 3 classes of 88 students involved in this study could not all be evaluated in the same way for certain criteria. For the most part, 2 classes of 63 students formed the focus of the data. The number of students applicable to data sets will be clarified when introduced below.

Often, Go Fish is a game played with limited verbal interaction. The students were thus instructed to vocalize various plays in the game, however, at times some participants did not use verbal cues or used expressions that differed from those recommended by the instructor. These cases lowered the frequency of the expressions analyzed; thus, lowering the likelihood for some to make mistakes and skewing class averages.

*システムデザイン工学部英語系列講師 Lecturer, Department of English, School of System Design and Technology

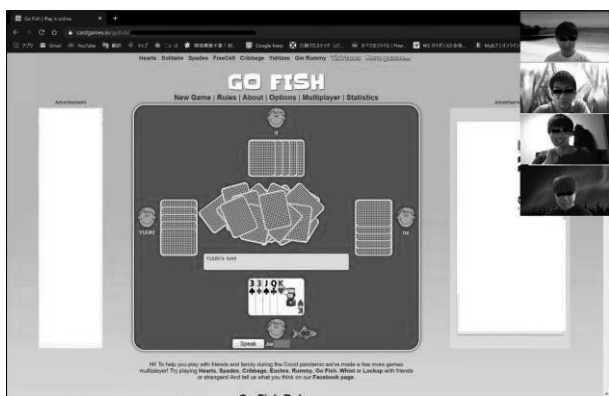


Figure 1: A group in which the host shared their own hand – demonstrating the coordinated use of 2 digital platforms: Zoom and *cardgames.io*

3. Research Format and Process

The game was administered as a homework exercise by the author as course instructor in classes at Tokyo Denki University in Japan. A questionnaire created through the Google Forms platform was assigned as a follow up homework assignment. Groups of 4 were set beforehand and the students agreed on a time to meet through Zoom to record the initial game. One student was selected to conduct the approximately 15 minute recording and send the video file to the instructor.

The students were predominantly Japanese of lower intermediate conversational ability on average. They each received a hand-out of useful terms to use in play from the instructor and were informed that the project was for research purposes to analyze certain responses. They were requested to use as much English as possible with the aspiration of completing the ‘perfect game in English’. The games were recorded, saved and analyzed as the first of two rounds of game play to compare change in 2 preliminary points of analysis. This article is to evaluate the potential effectiveness of the initial data grouping.

The game proved to provide simple yet extremely quantifiable data points that are common mistakes among Japanese speakers and

easy to understand for students. The 2 points of analysis which this study will focus on are 1) article (a/an/the) usage and 2) Do/Have responses to questions.

The video recordings were approximately 15 minutes on average but ranged widely from 10:50 to 26:11 in length. All games were uploaded to a private YouTube account and categorized into playlists which were set to unlisted status making them only viewable by students from the class possessing the specified URL address’.

In the follow up questionnaire, the students were asked to review each video and rank the 6-8 groups in their class. They were to provide a comment for each group and the reason they gave the certain group a ranking, as well as overall thoughts on the Go Fish game exercise. Criteria with which the instructor asked them to rank the groups were on 1) overall English use 2) lack of Japanese use 3) free conversational expressions and 4) game play banter. It was made clear to the students that the research criteria would focus on the 2 points of analysis listed above. The questionnaire responses showed that through peer/self analysis of these factors, the students demonstrated awareness of mistakes that classmates or they made themselves.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

Article usage was the first point of analysis and due to grammatical differences between English and Japanese this is notoriously missed by language learners. In Go Fish, the main question is a card request which normally includes an article as follows:

Correct: "Hiroshi, do you have **a** six?"

Incorrect: "Hiroshi, do you have **_** six?"

After analysis of 16 videos from 2 classes, the above question that should include an article was

verbalized 415 times in one class and a second class encountered 384 opportunities. With 8 game recordings in each of the 2 classes, approximately 50 card requests were made per game. On average, each of the 4 students in the group would initiate a card request 12 or 13 times. If this question was asked correctly, it could make for excellent practice in article usage. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

5 students in one class of 32 students in particular used an expression with 'any' 59 times. For example: 'Do you have any five_?' This question with the word 'any' makes (a/an/the) article usage unnecessary, but leads to an equally prevalent error; the exclusion of the plural 's' after the number. However, this strays into an area beyond the scope of proper article usage for this paper. Suffice it to say, these questions were not included in the total or average question numbers, meaning the number of questions asked overall should have been higher.

Further, the number of times articles were used correctly in the first group tested was 82/415 for a total of 20% of all opportunities to use an article before the card number. In the second class, the numbers rose to 147/384 or 38%. Greater standardization of informing classes of research expectations is one way to mediate variations in success rates, however, university wide level differences between classes should also play a role in future analysis. Nevertheless, both 20% and 38% success rates are low and it will be meaningful to observe after extensive self and group analysis if these numbers increase in a second round of game play.

The second data set criteria analyzed in this study is deceptively simple yet commonly mistaken by lower intermediate level students in Japan. It is the response to previously mentioned card request "Hiroshi, do you have a six?":

Correct: "Yes, I do." or "No, I don't."

Incorrect: "Yes, I have" or "No, I haven't"

The first class used the expression correctly 221 out of 346 opportunities for a success rate of 64%. The second class again demonstrated an even greater response rate of 218 out of 291 incidents for a 75% accuracy rate. This response is easily abbreviated with simply a "Yes" or "No" or potentially skipped entirely with a nod of the head. The number of anomalies will be a matter of focus in future analysis.

1	Student Name	Articles (a/an/the)	Do/Have	Article percentage	Do/Have percentage
28	Takeuchi	6/10 (an - 1)	11/11	60%	100%
29	Furukawa	0/14	12/14	0%	86%
30	Tomma	12/13	5/6	92%	83%
31	Matsuyama	14/16 (an - 1)	0/0 (y/n - 12)	88%	0%
32	Horino	2/5 (any/s - 5)	3/3	40%	100%
33	Niisa	47/20	12/12	20%	100%
34		Total		38%	64%

Figure 2: Illustration of the 2 accumulated data sets and corresponding student accuracy rates

By comparing the two above criteria, one can see that the success rates for the Do/Have responses are much higher than article usage in both classes. Instances of students not using the correct forms at all and accruing a 0% article usage vs. a 0% with Do/Have criteria mirrored the above mentioned accuracy findings. 12 article 0% scores to 5 Do/Have 0% scores in the first class and 9 to 6 in the second class were observed. Similarly, Do/Have responses were more likely to garner perfect 100% usage scores among students. Out of 2 classes of 63 students, 20 students used Do/Have perfectly but only 2 students used articles perfectly.

The granular nature of this method of recorded game play on video can provide for much more analysis than presented in these initial observations. Mistakes with usage of articles 'a' and 'an' were also common and use of the plural 's' can also be effectively quantified. Another dynamic that deserves further scrutiny is the mutually positive or negative learning that is apparent through some games.

5. Conclusion

With this first look at the work submitted by students, one can see there is room for improvement in the success rate of responses. Nevertheless, the dozens of questions and responses squeezed into an approximately 15 minute time frame made for quality practice and memorable moments. The students faces truly enjoying themselves through a digital platform in a learning environment impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and finding great suspense in a simple game was moving for the instructor. Questionnaire responses such as "It was a great experience! After recording, we played 2 more games on our own." were heartening to hear. Ultimately with games, if the students are enjoying themselves then learning is easy. (Tuan 2012)

This speaks to the 'perfect English' ideal aim of the game and how students took the exercise to heart. Being open with analysis criteria will undoubtedly influence results, however, the great prevalence of such errors as dropped articles and improper Do/Have responses (among others), as well as consideration of the students' ability level should be taken into account. With a second round in play, the hypothesis is that students will further focus on the exact expressions expected of them and accrue higher scores. The other side of this hypothesis is that due to the egregious nature of the errors, achieving perfection for everyone will be an extreme challenge. Ultimately, becoming conscious of one's errors is a part of learning and if the students are more self-aware as a result of the exercise, the author views this as improvement .

It is through the controlled nature of the game space that 'play' can provide a safe learning environment. With larger numbers of evaluation criteria a more demonstrative analysis will be

realized through this form of game play.

References

- "Go Fish." Go Fish | Play It Online, cardgames.io/gofish/. Accessed 27 October 2020.
- Hwang, Se He., (2018) "*Students' Perceptions about Gamified Methods in English as a Second Language Acquisition.*" University of Arkansas, Masters dissertation. Theses and Dissertations. <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/etd/2774/>
- Jose, Nijoy P. "*Role of Games and Activities in Second Language Acquisition.*" <http://www.njoylife.in/article.php>. Accessed 27 October 2020.
- Kemaleddine, Yara Sabrina. (2020). "*Authenticated Language Through Games that Contribute to the Interest and Language Acquisition of Learners of English Speakers of Other Languages.*" 札幌学院大学人文学会紀要 Journal of the Society of Humanities, vol. 107 pp. 123-132.
- Nurhayati, Dwi Astuti Wahyu. (2015). "*Improving Students' English Pronunciation Ability through Go Fish Game and Maze Game.*" Dinamika Ilmu (Journal of Education), vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 215-233.
- Nurman, Moh. (2018). "*Improving The Students' Vocabulary By Using 'Go Fish' Game.*" Jo-ELT (Journal of English Language Teaching) Fakultas Pendidikan Bahasa & Seni Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris IKIP, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 121-124.
- Tuan, Luu Trong. (2012) "*Vocabulary Recollection through Games.*" Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 257-264.
- Wibowo, Hanafi., Syarifah, Umi Laila. (2018) "*The Implementation of Go Fish Game in Improving Students' Vocabulary.*" Lingua Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa, vol. 2, no. 2. pp 11-2