Students' Attitudes Towards the Use of Games in Grammar Learning

Nisreen Salah Elfeitouri

Lecture, Faculty of languages
University of Benghazi

ABSTRACT

Games are one of the tools that teachers can use for language teaching not only because they provide enjoyment and relaxation for students and teachers, but also because they encourage students to use their language in a creative and communicative way. The primary aim of this study is to explore the effect of using games in teaching grammar to university students from the points of view of the students. Students opinions were collected through a questionnaire and the results of this study demonstrated that students find learning grammar through the use of games effective, motivational and entertaining.

Key words: games, grammar, motivation.

ملخص الدراسة

هذه الدراسة تهدف الي استكشاف مدي فعالية استخدام الالعاب والانشطة الترفيهية في تدريس مادة القواعد النحوية للغة الانجليزية من وجهة نظر الطلبة. آراء الطلبة جمعت من خلال استبيان وخضعت للتحليل البياني. اظهرت النتائج ان الطلبة يجدون ان تعلم مادة القواعد النحوية للغة الانجليزية عن طريق استخدام الانشطة الترفيهية له اثر فعال بشكل ايجابي علي تحصيلهم العلمي للمادة, وأيضا علي تحفيزهم وترغيبهم في دراسة المادة بشكل عام.

الكلمة المفتاح: القواعد النحوية, الانشطة الترفيهية, الحوافز.

Introduction:

Language learning is a challenging task which requires constant effort. Therefore, teachers adopt various methods and approaches that can simplify and improve the teaching and learning process. Accordingly, traditional approaches for teaching grammar which are based on the memorization of rules without paying attention to the communicative aspect of language can be problematic in two ways. First, they may result in lack of students' motivation. Second, students might not be able to use the grammar rules for communicative purposes i.e. in speaking or writing.

As Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011:71) put it "the hard fact that most teachers face is that learners often find it difficult to make flexible use of the rules of grammar taught in the classroom. They may know the rules perfectly but are incapable of applying them in their own use of the language".

Moreover, it seems from my experience as a teacher that students' attitudes towards grammar learning are usually negative. Students frequently complain that learning grammar is both difficult and monotonous.

It follows that the purpose of this paper is to explore the effect of incorporating games and group activities in grammar learning from the points of view of the students. The effect is to be measured in terms of students' opinions on whether learning grammar through games improves their ability to use grammar rules for communicative purposes and whether it has an impact on encouraging and motivating them to learn grammar.

Games in Language Learning

The National curriculum in the foreign languages in Iceland sheds light on the importance of using a variety of teaching methods in order to keep students interested and engaged in learning. Accordingly, games such as role play and problem solving are a good way of changing the learning pace and to ensure more involvement from the students (Sigurðardóttir, 2010).

Vernon (2006) stated that

> ***The theory of intrinsic motivation may also give some insight as to why teaching grammar through games actually works. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal factors that encourage us to do something. Most young learners will not internally decide that they want to learn grammar. They don´t yet understand the concepts of why it´s important to know proper grammar, so these external factors won´t affect them much either. Instead, intrinsic motivation can encourage them to play games. If these games are good then they will be learning while they are playing. (cited in Musilova, 2010: 16)***

There are many advantages for using games in language teaching. Kourilova (2015:17) stated that

> ***Games can be described as a play which is governed by a set of rules. Games bring certain kind of experience and for that reason information is easier to remember. Games also bring a meaningful communication to the lesson. Moreover, they can focus on all the four basic skills(speaking, reading, writing and listening).***

In addition, Kourilova (2015) pointed out that the use of games is not restricted to learners of young age but can be used with all age learners. Moreover, games can be used at any stage of the lesson whether as a lead-in, at the end of the lesson or during the practice stage.

Klauer (1998) pointed out that not any act of playing can be considered a game. In other words, a game has to have specific rules and a pre-determined goal. When applied to grammar teaching, a game that is to be used in order to teach must have a set of rules that are easy and clear to the participant.

Also, the game must have a linguistic aim that the students will be familiar with. The game should not be hard to explain or to play. It should not be time consuming either in preparation or playing (cited in Musilova, 2010).

According to Sigurðardóttir (2010) there are many advantages for using games in teaching grammar. First, games can lower anxiety and improve the process of acquisition. In other words, by integrating games into the grammar lesson, students will be more motivated because they are learning as well as having a good time. Teaching will not be effective if the teacher does not get students' attention. Therefore, games can be considered as a good tool for achieving that

Second, The use of games can have a good impact on the classroom atmosphere and learning environment in general because games can strengthen the relationship among the students and allow them to know more about each other, creating an opportunity for a more cooperative learning experience (Sigurðardóttir, 2010).

Third, games provide a meaningful context for students to practice the target language in. Students need the language for real life purposes for example, for travelling. Games provide a suitable context for this kind of language practice. In addition, games allow more chance for students-centered classroom where students take more charge of their own learning. This in turn enhances students' autonomy (Langran and Purcell, 1994, as cited in Sigurðardóttir , 2010).

Fourth, using games can be very helpful for shy students or students who do not have enough confidence participating in classroom activities. By working in small groups or in pairs instead of with the class as whole, shy students can feel more comfortable and relaxed and therefore more willing to learn (Sigurðardóttir, 2010).

As Vernon (2006) claimed: "Pupils can learn to speak English 2 times as fast when they are excited about learning." It is also a great opportunity for the teacher to find out what his/her students learned in the lesson without excessive attention. The students are not aware of the fact that they learn grammar and do serious work. So everybody in the classroom is intensively involved in the activity (cited in Musilova, 2010: 16).

Factors Influencing the Choice of Games :

According to Sultanova (2011), an important factor when choosing games is preparation. First, the teacher should think about the topics. Not every game is suitable for all students considering their age. Second, the teacher has to think about the language level, interests and educational background of the students. What might be interesting and exciting for young learner, for example, might not be the same for adults. In addition, the teacher should also consider the materials which are needed for a certain game so she can prepare them in advance. Another factor is the nature of students' involvement.

In other words, whether students will be working in pairs or in groups and if in groups how many students will be put in each group. Consideration of time is also very important. Teachers need time for preparation and for the game itself.

With regards to organization, the teacher should make sure that the aims and the rules of the games are clearly defined and that all students understand them before students can actually start playing the game. Students must know that there is an educational purpose for the game and that it is not just a time filler. This will affect the way they play and participate. Moreover, the rules should be well demonstrated by the teacher to avoid frustration and waste of time on the part of the students. The division of groups and the seating of the students should all be well organized before the game starts. Finally, there should be a fixed time for the beginning and the end of the game (Musilova, 2010).

Methodology

This study was designed as a descriptive study with an aim to answer the following questions:

1. Do students believe that the use of games and group activities for teaching grammar improve their understanding of the subject and their ability to use their grammar knowledge for communicative purposes?
2. Does the use of games and group activities in grammar teaching make it more motivating and interesting for students to study grammar?

The study was conducted over a period of six weeks in September, 2019. The participants were forty-five 2nd semester students (male and female). They attended weekly grammar classes which were taught by the researcher in the English department at Benghazi University.

The process of measuring the effect of learning grammar through games in the classroom involved conducting different kinds of games in the grammar lessons.

Games and Group Activities

Six games and educational activities were used for each of the six lectures which were given to the students by the researcher. The games were each chosen carefully with a pre-determined purpose. The aim of the games was to reinforce and enhance students' understanding of grammar and to show them how to use the rules that they learned in their daily use of the language. i.e. writing and speaking. In addition, the purpose of the games was to motivate students and make them more interested in the subject.

A detailed description of the games and activities in terms of their aims and stages will be provided next.

Secret Charades

Language focus: past perfect continuous

Aim: to practice the past perfect continuous to guess what other students had been doing.

Procedure: the teacher asks one student to come to the front of the class and act out a daily activity while the rest of the class keeps their eyes closed. On the teacher's signal, the actor freezes in his charade and the rest of the class opens their eyes. The students then guess what the actor had been doing when they opened their eyes. The winner gets to play next (Verner, 2020).

"What have I been doing?"

Language focus: present perfect continuous

Aim: to use the present perfect continuous to guess what people have been doing from the mimes.

Procedure: students take it in turns to do a mime and other students guess what the person has been doing. The students are separated into two teams (A and B). A student from Team A comes to the front of the class and is handed a mime card (prepared by the teacher). The student asks the class, "What have I been doing?" The student then has two minutes to mime the sentence on the card to his or her team. During these two minutes, the members of Team A can ask the student questions about what he or she has been doing to which the student can nod yes or no. If Team A guesses the sentence in the allotted time, they score 2 points. If they don't guess the sentence or time runs out, it's Team B's turn to answer. If Team B guesses correctly, they score 1 point. Then a student from Team B comes to the front of the class and the game continues in the same way. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. This game can also be done as a speaking activity with students describing what they have been doing to their team without using the words on the card (https://www.teach-this.com/grammar-activities-worksheets/present-perfect-continuous).

"Who had been busier?" competition

Language focus: past perfect simple

Aim: to use the past perfect simple to talk about things which happened before a certain time in the past.

Procedure: Choose a time of the day yesterday. Students work in groups and try to prove they had been busier or more productive up to then than their partners. E.g. by 6p.m. yesterday, I had typed twenty A4 pages, I had made 10 phone calls. Etc.(https://www.teach-this.com/grammar-activities-worksheets/present-perfect-continuous).

"Guess the place at a point in time!"

Language focus: future continuous

Aim: to use the future continuous to talk about future plans

Procedure: students imagine a future holiday and describe what they will be doing there this time tomorrow/next week/next month until their partner guesses the place (Case, 2012).

Comparative and Superlative Survey

Language focus: comparative and superlative adjectives

Aim: to use the comparative and superlative adjectives to write the results of a survey about the students in the class.

Procedure: the teacher gives each student a copy of the worksheet (see appendix A) . The students answer six questions on the worksheet and write their answers in the second column of the table. Working in groups, students then interview the other members of the group using the same questions and complete the table with their answers. When the students have all the answers, they use the results to write three comparative and three superlative sentences about the students in their group. Finally, students compare their sentences and give feedback to the class on what they found out (https://www.teach-this.com/grammar-activities-worksheets/comparatives-superlatives).

Conditional Completion

Language focus: conditional sentences

Aim: to practice speaking using conditional sentences.

Procedure: In this entertaining conditionals game, students make conditional sentences in a chain format. The students sit in a circle. The teacher says an 'if clause'. One student begins by repeating the 'if' clause and adding a result clause. The next student makes a new sentence by changing the first student's result clause into an 'if' clause and adding a new result clause and so on. If a student cannot come up with a conditional sentence within a given time frame (e.g. ten seconds) or the student makes a mistake, they are out of the game (https://www.teach-this.com/grammar-activities-worksheets/mixed-conditionals).

Research Instruments

At the end of the six weeks, the participants took part in answering a questionnaire whose aim was to find out students'' attitude towards the use of games in terms of increasing their motivation as well as improving their understanding of the subject. Using a 'Likert Scale', the questionnaire consisted of eleven statements to which the respondents chose one of the responses that range from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree".

Participants were also asked to evaluate the efficiency of the activities that were used in terms of their role on improving their learning process for. Students were asked to rank the efficiency of the activities on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 5 being the most effective).

Preparation of the Questionnaire

The title of the questionnaire was " The use of games in learning English grammar". The questionnaire was composed of eleven questions. It included an introduction for which the aim was to give the respondents a background to the topic. The introduction also included the aims of the questionnaire and the instructions for how to answer it. The researcher explained to the respondents in their first language the meaning of each point in the questionnaire in order to make sure that the answers would be as genuine as possible and to avoid any misunderstanding. Finally, the researcher informed the respondents that their identities would be kept anonymous so that they can respond freely.

Data Analysis

Both the questionnaire and the students' evaluation of the activities were analyzed using the "Statistical package for the Social Sciences" or "SPSS".

Results of the Questionnaire

The results obtained from the analysis of data for each item in the questionnaire are represented in the following tables:

It was easy to understand the rules of the games

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	17.8
	Agree	15	33.3	33.3	51.1
	Strongly Agree	22	48.9	48.9	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 1. Question 1 responses

The games helped me to understand how to use grammar in spoken English					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	15.6
	Neutral	4	8.9	8.9	24.4
	Agree	18	40.0	40.0	64.4
	Strongly Agree	16	35.6	35.6	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. Question 2 responses

Playing the games was fun but it did not improve my understanding of the subject					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	15	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Disagree	17	37.8	37.8	71.1
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	82.2
	Agree	4	8.9	8.9	91.1
	Strongly Agree	4	8.9	8.9	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Question 3 responses

It was exciting to play games during the grammar lessons					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	13.3
	Neutral	4	8.9	8.9	22.2
	Agree	17	37.8	37.8	60.0
	Strongly Agree	18	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. Question 4 responses

I learned more about the lessons through the games that we played					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	3	6.7	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	6	13.3	13.3	20.0
	Neutral	5	11.1	11.1	31.1
	Agree	14	31.1	31.1	62.2
	Strongly Agree	17	37.8	37.8	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Question 5 responses

Playing games made it more relaxing for me to learn					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	8.9
	Disagree	1	2.2	2.2	11.1
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	17.8
	Agree	11	24.4	24.4	42.2
	Strongly Agree	26	57.8	57.8	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 6. Question 6 responses

I prefer learning grammar in a more traditional way without playing any games					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	27	60.0	60.0	60.0
	Disagree	6	13.3	13.3	73.3
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	80.0
	Agree	3	6.7	6.7	86.7
	Strongly Agree	6	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 7. Question 7 responses

Playing games during the grammar lessons was boring for me					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	23	51.1	51.1	51.1
	Disagree	10	22.2	22.2	73.3
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	80.0
	Agree	2	4.4	4.4	84.4
	Strongly Agree	7	15.6	15.6	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 8. Question 8 responses

In the future, I would like to have games as a central part of grammar learning					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	8	17.8	17.8	17.8
	Disagree	1	2.2	2.2	20.0
	Neutral	3	6.7	6.7	26.7
	Agree	12	26.7	26.7	53.3
	Strongly Agree	21	46.7	46.7	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 9. Question 9 responses

Learning grammar through games made me feel more confident using the language

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	7	15.6	15.6	15.6
	Disagree	6	13.3	13.3	28.9
	Neutral	6	13.3	13.3	42.2
	Agree	15	33.3	33.3	75.6
	Strongly Agree	11	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 10. Question 10 responses

During this semester, I enjoyed learning grammar and my understanding of this subject has improved					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	6	13.3	13.3	13.3
	Disagree	4	8.9	8.9	22.2
	Agree	8	17.8	17.8	40.0
	Strongly Agree	27	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	45	100.0	100.0	

Table 11. Question 11 responses

	Mean	Std. Deviation	R.E(%)
It was easy to understand the rules of the games	4.044	1.296	80.9
The games helped me to understand how to use grammar in spoken English	3.867	1.236	77.3
Playing the games was fun but it did not improve my understanding of the subject	3.778	1.259	75.6
It was exciting to play games during the grammar lessons	3.978	1.177	79.6
I learned more about the lessons through the games that we played	3.800	1.272	76.0
Playing games made it more relaxing for me to learn	4.200	1.236	84.0
I prefer learning grammar in a more traditional way without playing any games	4.000	1.477	80.0
Playing games during the grammar lessons was boring for me	3.889	1.481	77.8
In the future, I would like to have games as a central part of grammar learning	3.822	1.497	76.4
Learning grammar through games made me feel more confident using the language	3.378	1.403	67.6
During this semester, I enjoyed learning grammar and my understanding of this subject has improved	4.022	1.485	80.4
Valid N (listwise)			

Table 12. Descriptive statistics of the questionnaire responses

The results of question one show that most of the participants, 82%, agree that it was easy for them to understand the rules of the games. The results of question two indicate that 76% of the participants think that the games helped them to understand how to use grammar in spoken English. According to the results of question three, 71% of the participants do not agree with the idea that games did not improve their understanding of the subject.

The results of question four indicate that 78% of the participants believe that it was exciting to play games during the grammar lessons. Furthermore, the results of question five show that 69% of the participants think that they learned more about the lessons through the games that they played .The results of questions six suggest that the majority of the participants, 82%, agree that playing games made it more relaxing for them to learn.

The results of question seven indicate that 73% of the participants do not agree with the idea that they prefer learning grammar in a more traditional way without any games. In the same respect, the results of question eight reveal that the majority of the participants, 73%, do not agree that playing games during the lessons was boring for them. The results of question nine show that 73% of the participants would like to have games as a central part of grammar learning in the future.

The results of question ten reveal that 58% of the participants think that learning grammar through games made them feel more confident in using the language. Lastly, the results of question eleven show that most of the participants, 78% , agree that they enjoyed learning grammar through games and that their understanding of the subject had improved.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that the majority of the students agreed that the use of games had a positive impact on their understanding of the subject and their ability to use grammar for communicative purposes. In addition, most students found the use of games to be exciting and motivating.

Evaluation of the Efficiency of Games

Following the questionnaire, the participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the games that were used in the grammar lessons. The participants were asked to rate them from a scale of 1 to 5 with number 5 being the most effective in helping them understand the lesson. The results of the participants' answers were as shown in the following table:

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	R.E
Secret charades	*4.089*	*1.164*	**81.8**
What have I been doing?	*4.022*	*1.055*	**80.4**
'Who had been busier?' competition	*3.778*	*1.312*	**75.6**
Guess the place at a point	*4.000*	*1.297*	**80.0**
Comparative and superlative survey	*3.978*	*1.288*	**79.6**

Conditional completion	*3.778*	*1.412*	75.6
Valid N (listwise)			

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics of the Evaluation of the Efficiency of Games

According to the above table, the participants' evaluation of the games was as follows:

1. "Secret Charades": 82% of the participants rated the game as very effective.
2. "What have I been doing": 80% of the participants rated the game as very effective.
3. "Who had been busier?" : 76% of the participants thought the game was very effective.
4. "Guess the place at a point": 80% of the participants evaluated the game as very effective.
5. " Comparative and superlative survey": 80% of the participants rated the game as very effective.
6. "Conditional completion" : 76% of the participants thought that the game was very effective.

It can be concluded from the above analysis that the majority of the students found all the games to be very effective.

Conclusions:

This study was conducted in order to investigate the attitudes of the students towards the use of games in the teaching of grammar in the English department at Benghazi University.

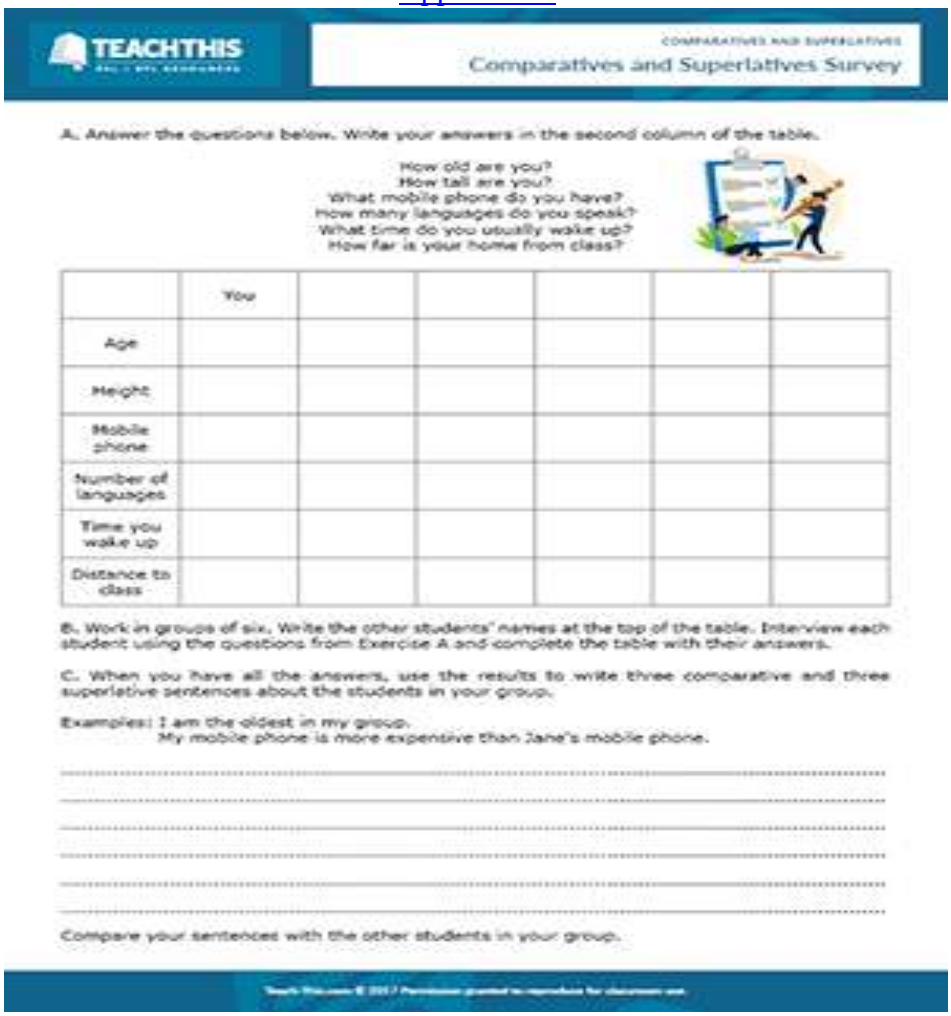
The analysis of the data revealed that the majority of the students had a significantly positive attitude towards the use of games and group activities in learning grammar. The majority of the students agreed with the facts that using games in grammar learning was encouraging and that it had a big role on improving their understanding of the subject and their ability to use grammar rules for communicative purposes. Furthermore, most students agreed that they would prefer to learn grammar through games in the future.

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Appendix A



TEACHTHIS

COMPARATIVES AND SUPERLATIVES

Comparatives and Superlatives Survey

A. Answer the questions below. Write your answers in the second column of the table.

How old are you?
How tall are you?
What mobile phone do you have?
How many languages do you speak?
What time do you usually wake up?
How far is your home from class?

	You					
Age						
Height						
Mobile phone						
Number of languages						
Time you wake up						
Distance to class						

B. Work in groups of six. Write the other students' names at the top of the table. Interview each student using the questions from Exercise A and complete the table with their answers.

C. When you have all the answers, use the results to write three comparative and three superlative sentences about the students in your group.

Examples: I am the oldest in my group.
My mobile phone is more expensive than Jane's mobile phone.

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Compare your sentences with the other students in your group.