

PART - II

English grammar games

Uta Papen and Ulrike Zeshan

In the field of second language teaching the question of whether grammar should be taught explicitly or via immersion has been much researched and debated. How to teach grammar is part of a wider debate about the kind of learning environment and input to offer in lessons, whether teaching of grammatical patterns is to be explicit or implicit (Dewaele 2013). An explicit approach has also been described as a ‘focus on forms’ (Long 1996, Loewen 2018). This means that grammatical structures (forms) are explicitly taught through lessons that are devoted to grammar, with the teacher explaining to the students the characteristics and rules of a specific pattern, for example how the past tense is created. In this approach, grammatical structures are often taught in a predetermined sequence (Loewen, 2018), using a grammar textbook to guide the curriculum. This way of teaching a second language is different from approaches that use a ‘focus on meaning’ (Long 1996). With a focus on meaning, the emphasis is on students engaging in communicative activities, that ‘should be meaningful and relevant, ideally mimicking real life’ (Dewaele 2013: 81). Such an approach is also known as ‘communicative language teaching’ (Richards and Rodgers 2014).

The debate about a focus on forms, i.e. grammar teaching, versus an emphasis on meaning-based communicative activities is also reflected in the work on Deaf Literacy/Multiliteracies that is the subject of the contributions in the *READ WRITE EASY* volumes. In the earlier stages of this research, the intention was in fact to work on functional English with learners, where the focus is squarely on what learners can do with the language they are acquiring, rather than on what they know about its grammar.¹ Our approach was focussed on ‘real literacies’ (Street, Baker, and Rogers 2006; Street 2012) and authentic uses of English, closely linked to students’ prior experiences and everyday life. Grammar rules were to be introduced in the context of work on authentic texts taken from students’ everyday lives. Isolated grammar lessons, without link to authentic communicative situations, were to be avoided.

¹ Hence the logic was in terms of ‘can-do’-statements adopted from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for second language learning (see the contribution by Waller, Jones and Webster in the first volume).

This way of teaching ‘embedded grammar’, as we had called it, was part of the wider approach that informed the pedagogy which we had developed and which we tried out in two subsequent projects, a one-year pilot and a three-year follow-on project (see the introduction by Webster & Zeshan in this volume for a summary of the trajectory of this work). However, in both projects it became clear that deaf learners not only had a genuine need for some form of explicit instruction on English grammar, but they actively requested that our classes should include such grammar teaching. In the groups of young deaf adults in all three participating countries (Ghana, Uganda and India) there was increasingly vocal feedback from deaf learners about their need for explanations of the basics of English grammar. This was particularly noticeable with respect to writing, while reading comprehension was more feasible without explaining grammar overtly. With respect to writing, it was not satisfactory for learners to be shown that ‘this is how you write it’; learners wanted to know why something they had written was correct or incorrect. At the same time, this was also driven by their need to perform well in standard exams in some of the learner groups.

This chapter describes the prototyping of a solution that addresses these issues by embedding explicit learning of grammar in a gamified environment with authentic texts. This experiment was carried out with young deaf adults in India. Section 1 introduces the overall approach to teaching English that we developed, how we had planned to teach grammar as part of this, and what happened in the lessons. Section 2 gives an account of the rationale behind the subsequent design of the English grammar games. The game process is described in section 3, and section 4 provides examples and experiences from developing and experimenting with the games. A conclusion is attempted in section 5, where we evaluate our activities and discuss the implications of our observations so far. We also elaborate on the potential for future deployment of English grammar games. The appendix at the end of this chapter provides examples of English grammar games that have been played by groups of deaf learners.

1 Background: The real literacies approach and our plans for grammar teaching

The approach to teaching English that underpins our work with young deaf adults is based on the curriculum centring on students’ ‘real life’ uses of English. The cornerstone of the lessons were ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ texts (Hewagodage and O’Neill 2010), such as a shopping receipt, a street sign or a rail ticket. As explained elsewhere (Papen and Tusting 2020),

our pedagogy drew on what is known as the ‘real literacies’ approach (Street, Baker, and Rogers 2006; Street 2012). Real literacies are authentic, everyday uses of English, taken from the students’ environment and allowing lessons to build on students’ prior experiences and knowledge of English. The curriculum was made meaningful by this close link of the lessons to everyday uses of English. The students were to collect texts from their environment and bring them to the lessons. In a real literacies approach, explicit grammar teaching is de-emphasized, the focus being on what in second language research is called ‘communicative practice’ (Ellis 2006).

In our project, this meant creating lesson activities around authentic texts, with a focus on the kind of communicative situation such a text would be part of. In the training for our pilot project, an example was a customer feedback form the trainees had collected while visiting a shopping mall. We created a lesson plan including vocabulary work (to support understanding of the form), a role play, and an exercise that included completing the form. The real literacies approach was originally developed for work with adult literacy learners (see Nirantar 2007). It had not previously been used with deaf students. In its original version, the approach had privileged what may best be called ‘useful’ non-fiction texts from students’ everyday lives, for example an application form to open a bank account or, as mentioned above, a rail ticket. Based on the experience of our pilot project and feedback from students and tutors, we broadened the concept of real literacies to include everyday uses of English that relate to leisure, fun and creativity (Papen and Tusting 2020). Accordingly, in the follow-on project, while we still used non-fiction texts such as signs or forms, other genres were included.

A real literacies approach is similar to communicative language teaching. Our approach also shares much with what is known as ‘task-based language teaching’ (TLBT, which is itself a form of communicative language teaching). Both these approaches focus teaching on the aim of developing communicative competence, not on students knowing and mastering structures (i.e. grammar) (Richards and Rodgers 2014). This is not to say that grammar teaching has no place in TLBT or in our approach. In our work with deaf students, grammar teaching was not to happen through separate grammar lessons, guided by grammar textbooks. Instead, grammar teaching was to be ‘embedded’ in the lessons on real literacies. In the training, we introduced the deaf tutors and research assistants to the concept of real literacies. We showed them how to use authentic texts in their lessons and how to connect these with grammar teaching. We developed with them lesson plans that started from an authentic text.

The trainees identified grammatical patterns in that text. Work on these patterns was then to be added to the lesson plan, using explanations for the identified patterns and exercises to practice them. The use of such embedded grammar work, closely linked to authentic texts, has much in common with TBLT. In TBLT, students are given tasks that require them to use language for communication and real-world purposes. Similar to our work on real literacies with embedded grammar, in TBLT ‘grammar is not taught as an isolated feature of language but as it arises from its role in meaningful communication’ (Richards and Rodgers 2014: 180). Another way to describe our approach is to refer to it as ‘a planned focus on form’ (Ellis 2001). This means that while overall lessons focus on meaning and communication, grammar teaching is planned ahead of these lessons and does not just happen if and when learners ask about grammar or when they do not understand a specific structure.

It turned out though that teaching grammar in this planned and embedded way was more difficult than we had anticipated. While the identification of grammatical structures in the real texts worked well in the training, looking at grammar teaching that took place in the pilot project, we saw that it was quite rare to see explicit connections between the grammar being taught in class and the authentic texts that learner groups were drawing on (Papen and Tusting 2020). This is not to say though that no grammar teaching took place. Grammar lessons happened, frequently requested by students, but unlike what we had planned, they were rarely linked to a real text. In the longer follow-on project, we intensified training on how to identify grammar in texts and develop related learning activities.² In that way we tried to prepare tutors better for the planned focus on form.

Looking at the follow-on project, we can see that grammar was a regular part of the lessons. In some cases, the grammatical feature that the tutor introduced had been identified in the real text that the lesson focussed on. In other lessons though, what grammar was taught was the result of students asking to understand a specific form, such as possessive pronouns or past tense. In one of the classes in India, the students had been vocal about their need to learn the ‘basics’ of English grammar. Several students had left the class after the first few weeks of teaching, and the tutor suspected that this was the result of his focus on authentic

2 In the second project classes were also taught in Ghana and in Uganda but we focus on India only in this chapter because this is the context where the English grammar game development took place.

texts, with much discussion of their content (thus a focus on meaning) and little grammar work.

In their monthly reports and in informal conversations, tutors regularly commented on grammar teaching being difficult for them. Looking at the real texts used by some of the tutors, we can see some of the issues they faced. In some of these texts, such as notices (e.g. on streets or in a library) the grammar was simple. This could be a preposition or a negative construction such as ‘don’t eat in the library’. But other texts included complex structures, in addition to specific terminology. Explaining these structures required a high level of grammatical expertise. A deposit slip from a bank in India included this sentence: ‘Transfer instruments will be credited after realisation’. How would a tutor explain and practice with students a structure such as ‘will be credited’? This kind of passive, future tense structure is hardly ‘basic’ English grammar that the learners would need regularly, raising the question of whether such grammar should or should not be taught.

The various difficulties that tutors experienced with teaching English grammar are discussed in more detail in Nankinga (this volume). She identifies several sub-themes as problematic, including the tutors experiencing ‘difficulty in explaining English’, and challenges related to the ‘tutors’ own English competency’. In addition, she notes the absence of ‘resources for using sign language to explain English’. The observations in her chapter add to the scenario of the multiple barriers to accessing English grammar, both for tutors and for learners.

Another issue with some of the authentic texts that our tutors used is that they dealt with interesting and relevant topics, but that their content was difficult from a language point of view. This became apparent for example in a series of lessons in a young adult class in Indore. Much lesson time was spent on discussing, in Indian Sign Language (ISL), a poster on how to reduce one’s carbon footprint. Over a week in September 2019, Papen had observed these lessons. She noticed that there was little communicative activity in English around this text. Instead, the content of the poster and the meaning of specific words was discussed in ISL. This is not to suggest that there was no merit in the students engaging with the propositions made on the poster in their first language. But this is the class that several students had left, commenting on the discussions of authentic texts being too long and asking for more grammar teaching. There was no writing activity relating to the content of the poster. It is possible that the students felt that their level of English grammar was too limited to allow them to be productive users of the language, thus making meaning based communicative activities difficult.

Several insights emerge from the experience of grammar teaching in our projects. These match the concerns Nankinga raises in her chapter. A first point is that the focus on meaning and communicative ability that we had planned was sometimes difficult to realise because our students' prior knowledge of English limited their ability to engage in and benefit from such meaning focussed activities. The second insight, mentioned already, is that the real texts our tutors worked with could be grammatically complex and thus be a challenge for the tutors. The third insight is that a focus on communication and meaning was new to the students and that it may not have met their expectations and beliefs in how they should be taught. The approach we had chosen may not have matched their prior experiences of language teaching. This has been found to be an issue for others trying to use a communicative language teaching approach (Richards and Rodgers 2014).

In our context, it became apparent that those students who also had language lessons as part of their school education were familiar with a different approach, presumably with a greater focus on grammar. The idea that a more grammar focussed approach is needed for beginner learners is shared by many teachers. This stems from the belief that a more 'form-focussed' approach is required to help students generate sufficient knowledge of basic forms and structures to allow them to engage in communicative activities (Ellis 2006). This is matched by concerns about lessons that focus too much on learning by doing (learning to use the language by using it). Such lessons may help to develop fluency, but learners are likely to make many mistakes, not being aware of these and not learning much grammar (Higgs and Clifford 1982, in Richards and Rodgers 2014).

The final but no less important insight to take from our experience of the two projects is that when grammar was taught in the classes, it appeared to follow a specific practice or way of teaching. The tutors' monthly reports and the students' portfolios (samples of their work) give us a good idea of how grammar was taught. The use of grammatical terms was rare and limited to basic concepts such as word classes. In other words, grammar was not taught by introducing students to the meta-language common in grammar books. Instead, grammar was introduced via practice, using exemplar sentences. Tutors commonly searched for sample sentences on the internet, used them to introduce the structure in question and then requested students to create their own sentences based on the given model. Such exercises were done in class or given as homework. The emphasis was on students becoming familiar with the pattern. At times, the tutors tried to explain the grammar rule in

question. At other times, the group together tried to discover the rule. In their reports, the tutors often talked about how difficult it was for them to explain the grammatical structures that are used in the authentic texts. Using sample sentence was a way to 'explain' grammar and to introduce students to structures. It is important to note here that for sign language users learning English grammar is particularly difficult because of the mismatch between how grammatical structures are used in the English language compared to how this is done in sign languages (see section 2.1).

The strategy of working based on analogy, used by the tutors instead of introducing the meta-language of grammatical terms, is also a design feature of the English grammar games. Likewise, the real literacies approach is maintained in the game design. The games target both reading comprehension and writing skills while learners practice grammatical structures. We now explain the linguistic rationale behind the grammar game design.

2 Linguistic rationale for English grammar games

The context where English grammar games were first developed was a capacity building programme held over six months in India with a group of aspiring deaf professionals from India, Nepal, and Uganda (see Zeshan, this volume). As the training revolved around language and literacy, it was only too natural that the long-standing issue of teaching grammar (in this case, English grammar) came up. The idea for English grammar games arose after training sessions where we discussed difficulties that deaf sign language users have with learning English grammar. The game process was invented by co-author Zeshan in response to these discussions, which covered some of the linguistic rationale set out in this section.

A common approach for teaching grammar with a sign language as the medium of instruction is to explain the 'rules' of English in sign language. In India, deaf people usually do not get any intelligible instruction in English grammar until very late in their education, often as young adults. Most schools are ill equipped for teaching English because in the absence of staff, methods and resources for using sign language in the classroom they struggle with intelligible communication between teachers and learners (Randhawa 2006). There are various interventions for deaf youths, typically carried out by NGOs, where English is taught through sign language.

However, it is not sufficient to merely use an intelligible medium of instruction. Ideally, interventions would also be based on a linguistic

rationale. This is the case with the English grammar games. To summarise briefly, each game starts with an authentic text. After reading the text for comprehension, the task in the game is to locate parts of the text that match abstract grammatical structures given as a set of prompts. Learners then write their own examples by analogy, using the same grammatical structures, and finally compare their solutions in a group. Figure 1 shows an example of the steps in this process.

 <p>The infographic shows the supply chain of a t-shirt. It starts in India with planting, growing, harvesting, and transporting cotton to China. Then in China, the cotton is woven, processed, dyed, and transported to Bangladesh. Finally, in Bangladesh, the t-shirt is made. Red circles and arrows highlight the structure 'from [PLACE] to [PLACE]' and '[MOVE]ing [THING] to [PLACE]'.</p>	<p>from [PLACE] to [PLACE]</p> <p>“from field to store”</p> <p>[MOVE]ing [THING] to [PLACE]</p> <p>“transporting cotton to China”</p>	<p>from school to home from Kampala to Mumbai from mountain to sea</p> <p>Sending money to Bangladesh Moving coal to the factory Taking books to school</p>
Step 1: Text to read	Step 2: Structures to find in the text	Step 3: Further examples of the same structure

Figure 1. Steps in an English grammar game

In addition to the use of authentic texts, there are two other aspects of the linguistic rationale underlying the games: the specific linguistic difficulties around word classes, their complexity in English, and their mismatch with sign languages (2.1), and the use of chunks and structural frames around which the games are constructed (2.2).

2.1 English grammar instruction and word classes

The most common way of structuring grammar resources such as in a reference grammar is largely dependent on and follows categorisation into word classes, also known as parts of speech. In English, this includes open word classes that are the main carriers of meaning in a sentence (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and closed word classes that mainly have grammatical functions (prepositions, particles, articles, conjunctions, etc). This makes sense because open word classes are distinguished by their morphology (word-building mechanisms), so that the grammar can be organised straightforwardly into sections such as the noun’s morphology (e.g. plural), the verb’s morphology (e.g. tenses), etc.³ When instructing

³ This is a simplified account of grammar, to convey the main idea of word class complexity and mismatches to readers without involving an overly technical background in linguistics, e.g. the differences between derivational and inflectional morphology.

deaf learners, often the same logic is used, and anecdotally, deaf learners report their struggles with learning ‘the tenses’ of English, for example. In English grammar games, the targets of learning are different and lie at an intermediate level between a fully specific utterance as it occurs in a text and a maximally generic pattern (e.g. ‘the passive voice’) as found in a typical reference grammar.

The problem with basing English grammar instructions on word classes in the traditional way when working with deaf learners is twofold. Firstly, the typical characteristics of word classes in sign languages make them rather different from word classes in English (see Meir 2012). There is of course linguistic diversity across sign languages but overall, the divergence from English is substantial, especially in the area of word formation processes (morphology) associated with different word classes.⁴ For instance, sign languages typically have different classes of verbs depending on the verb sign’s behaviour in three-dimensional space. In addition, there are other complex visual-spatial constructions that have no direct counterparts in spoken languages and do not map onto the familiar word classes of spoken languages. For example, adverb-like modifications of an action, event or property are often expressed non-manually (e.g. through facial expressions) or by way of modifying some aspects of hand movement, e.g. faster, larger or repeated movements; that is, these modification are simultaneously superimposed on the basic sign rather than being separate words as occurs in spoken languages (cf. English *drive* vs. *drive slowly*, *tired* vs. *very tired*, etc.). In addition, some of the closed word classes that English has, such as conjunctions and prepositions, are poorly represented across sign languages. The rather different characteristics of word classes in many sign languages may explain some of the great difficulty that deaf learners express when trying to learn English grammar.

Another issue with English word classes, from the point of view of our target group of deaf learners, is the considerable fluidity of open word classes in English, as well as their mismatch with the word classes of signs with corresponding meanings. Unlike most other languages, in English many nouns can be used as verbs, and vice versa, without any indicative change to the form of the word itself (i.e. without morphological change).⁵

4 Meir (2012) points out that although there are approaches to identifying word classes in sign languages, in particular verbs, nouns and adjectives, systematic studies of word classes are few and far between in the literature.

5 In addition, there is of course also morphologically marked word class conversion, such as *develop* (verb) → *development* (noun) or *strength* (noun) → *strengthen* (verb).

This is called ‘zero derivation’, for example *This is a difficult text.* vs. *I will text you later.* or *Ask me some questions.* vs. *She questions everything.* To a lesser degree, this also applies to adjectives, for example *We like a green campus.* vs. *Let’s green our campus.*

In addition, signs with an equivalent meaning often do not match onto English word classes. For instance, the Indian Sign Language sign DANGER corresponds to English *danger* (noun), *dangerous* (adjective) and *endanger* (verb). The sign AGAIN corresponds to English *again* (adverb) as well as *repeat* (verb).⁶

This level of fluidity and mismatch arguably makes it difficult for sign language users to identify given English words against their word classes, which interferes with using word classes as the basis for teaching grammar. In addition, of course, sign language users in India (as indeed in most other countries) have not been exposed to any meta-linguistic explanations in their first language because sign languages are not legitimised as school subjects. This makes it difficult to talk about grammar in the abstract, especially in the absence of established vocabulary for talking about the grammar of English.

In the English grammar games, these difficulties are addressed by drawing learners’ attention to grammatical constructions that are immediately available as examples in the authentic texts that learners choose to read. Grammatical patterns are not presented in the abstract and illustrated with out-of-context example sentences but are embedded in a real communicative context. The targeted structures are also more specific than what is found in traditional grammar books. The next section elaborates on these points.

2.2 Learning English grammar through chunks and frames

The mismatch of word classes and other areas of grammar between English and sign languages in the countries of our research is not the only difficulty facing sign language users. Another area is the issue of collocations, that is, the way in which certain words fit together in phrases. For example, we say that *people in need are housed in a shelter* or *accommodated* therein but not **homed*.⁷ On the other hand, abandoned pets are *re-homed* but not **re-housed*, and we can *accommodate a choice* but not **home a choice*. The use of larger chunks of language as occurring in the game materials means that learners are directed to focus on collocations

⁶ It is the convention in sign language linguistics to use glosses in capital letters to represent signs.

⁷ An asterisk * indicates a grammatical error or collocation error.

as a whole. Another difficulty is that in English, many structures that learners need to master have unpredictable elements. This includes many instances of word formation rules, which often use word endings to create new words with related but different meanings. For instance, *forgetful* is correct but **rememberful* is not a possible word (though *mindful* is). From *rich* we can derive *enrich* and *enrichment* but the same is not possible with its opposite *poor* (instead, there is *impoverish* and *impoverishment*). When word formation rules are targeted in grammar games, learners are naturally exposed to a range of words that the rule can apply to because each game generates several examples of the same structure.

These difficulties with English are of course not unique to deaf learners. However, the deaf sign language users involved with our research have been disadvantaged by insufficient exposure to English. Learning songs, watching movies (except with subtitles) and overhearing all kinds of conversations is not accessible to them, and the above-mentioned lack of quality education severely undermines early access to reading for pleasure, which would be essential in order to be exposed to English with sufficient frequency.

With the English grammar games we aimed to design a low-threshold learning activity with easy access to enjoyable interactions with texts and constructions. In order to make explanations of grammatical structures accessible and easier to understand, the English grammar games operate on the basis of larger chunks with a focus on the entire construction rather than its component parts.⁸ The approach also avoids grammatical terms, which often do not have established counterparts in our target sign languages. Instead, the constructions are expressed on the basis of more or less abstract and generic categories of meaning (see examples of games in sections 3 and 4, and in the appendix).

There are two differences between this approach and a traditional reference grammar. Firstly, the focus is on meaning and not on grammatical categories; hence terms like [DO], [QUALITY], [MOVE] and [OWNER] appear rather than verb, adjective, or possessive. Secondly, learners are invited to focus on the entire construction (here called 'frames') when playing the game. For instance, the frame '[MOVE] to [PLACE]' is used to generate a number of similar phrases such as *fly to China*, *walk to the market*, and the like. The aim is to practice the entire chunk by replacing the meaningful words (content words) in a given example with other

⁸ This is in line with a view of grammar known as 'construction grammar' (e.g. Fillmore, Kay & O'Connor 1988, Goldberg 2006). Construction grammar argues that grammatical constructions are the building blocks of language, rather than words and rules for putting words together.

content words that make sense. Using abstract meta-language is not excluded and can be introduced as and when learners feel comfortable or develop an interest in such explanations, but this is not necessary for playing the game and learning from the process.

As learners play more and more games, they will come across these categories of meaning (that is, the expressions in square brackets) in many different frames, and they will practice expressing meaning and context repeatedly. This is not unlike children's natural language acquisition, where children are exposed to complete constructions and may only derive abstract grammatical rules subsequently, on the basis of broadening the database of examples they have encountered (cf. Tomasello 2009). Learners operate by way of analogy when they create new examples using the same grammatical frame.

The implication from this method is that the explanations that a teacher would provide when leading the games are specific to the frame and its meaning and context. This avoids having to explain whole areas of grammar that may have no direct counterpart in the language of deaf sign language users, for example the tense system, the passive voice, the use of auxiliaries *have* and *be*, or the separate sets of subject pronouns, object pronouns, and reflexive pronouns. Instead, the target of learning is a local pattern mapped onto a specific example in an authentic text, and not generic rules without context. Students are expected to learn about grammar in bite-sized chunks. This is particularly helpful because grammar in English is often subject to sub-patterns that apply to specific sub-groups of expressions, for instance with short and long adjectives (*smaller/smallest* vs. *more/most interesting*), or *bag-s* vs. *box-es* vs. *cit-ies* for plural endings, or regular vs. irregular verb forms. Instead of being exposed to the entire paradigms, it is easier to learn and practice sub-patterns separately. Learners can be supported to draw larger generalisations later on, when they have become more familiar with the various forms.

In the next sections, we describe how the game is played (section 3), and then elaborate on the successive phases of experimentation with English grammar games (section 4). In addition to the linguistic rationale presented above, the game method is also motivated by general considerations about the effect that gamification of learning has on motivation, peer support, confidence, and memory (cf. Zeshan 2020). Moreover, the method has implications for the level of training and knowledge of English grammar that game facilitators need. These factors have been visible throughout the development process and the various

trial runs that we undertook with several groups of deaf learners in India to validate the game methodology.

3 Playing the game

When the English grammar game method was first invented, the games were played face-to-face around the table, with the target text shown on a laptop and grammatical structures written on slips of paper. Each game session is linked to a single text and consists of several game rounds, each of which relates to a single grammatical pattern to be identified within the text. At the beginning of a session, the game facilitator explained the aim and process of the game, and the text was presented to the learner group to read on the laptop screen. Game rounds were then played as follows:

- The grammatical patterns, which were prepared in advance on slips of paper, were placed in a circle in the middle of the table, with the abstract structure (e.g. ‘from [PLACE] to [PLACE]’) on one side and face-up and the ‘solution’ from the text (e.g. *from field to store*) face-down on the other side.
- Players took turns to pick up a paper slip and to find the part of the text matching the grammatical pattern on the paper, checking on the back of the paper that they got it right.
- After discussing the structure in the group, all players wrote additional examples of their own with the same structure, and then compared what they had written. They also compared their own examples with additional examples that were part of the prepared game materials (written on the inside of the folded paper slip), to make sure that they had not misunderstood the target structure.
- Having completed a game round, the next player was selected to continue with the new grammatical pattern, until all had been covered.

These game sessions had 4–5 rounds and took between half an hour and an hour to complete. Some of the initial game sessions were video recorded. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse these recordings in detail. However, an excerpt from one of these early sessions is represented in Figure 2, to give an impression of what the interaction in the game is like. The Figure consists of screenshots from the video, with superimposed translations of what the players are saying.



Figure 2. A grammar game session

The game round starts by picking out the next player. Pictures 2.1 and 2.2 show how one of the group members spins a pen that is lying in the middle of the table, so that the pen ends up pointing to the next player (in this case, himself). Usually, games include elements of chance, so this simple procedure introduces the framing of the session as a game. Elements of chance work well to maintain everyone’s attention. In this case, each

player needs to be ready to take the next turn if the pen happens to point at them the next time.

Pictures 2.3 to 2.6 show how the target structure is identified in the text shown on the laptop screen, and how the answer is found to be correct. Although one player is responsible for this round, everyone around the table checks the match between the paper slip and the laptop screen, and they agree that the solution is correct. When the correct answer is found on the back of the paper slip, this functions like a reward, as it feels good to have been right. A reward is another game element, and seeking rewards is good for keeping up the players' motivation.

The game is designed to be a collaborative game, that is, there is no competition between the players and there are no winners and losers. The aim of the game is for the group as a whole to identify all the structures in the given text and to write down additional examples. In picture 2.7, the question 'All of us?' is addressed to the game facilitator (not visible in the picture). When all players have written their own examples, they take turns explaining what they have done (picture 2.8).

During later experimentation, several additional suggestions came up to increase the use of game features and introduce competitive elements into the game. In addition, we converted the game from its original face-to-face setting to an online setting. The development and experimentation process is described in the next section.

4 Developing and experimenting with the English grammar games

The first game sessions were played by the trainees participating in the capacity building programme and led by research assistants from India and Uganda. Subsequently, training participants took turns leading game sessions, including some players from outside the research group. In total, eight games were played in small groups of 4–5 participants. The texts were mostly factual and/or educational, for example a labelled diagram on drinking water, a poster on human health, a noticeboard with safety rules, but there was also an example of a personal letter and a paragraph from a narrative about the Indian Diwali festival.

The aim of this first development phase was to validate the game methodology in order to check whether players understood the game, how much time would be needed for each game, and whether participants could see what they needed to see without having their visual attention distracted or their line of vision blocked. As this validation was positive, we then moved to a second-phase experiment in 2021.

The next phase of experimentation was implemented with one of our Indian partner organisations. By this time, all our activities had changed to online mode due to restrictions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The partner organisation was running two training programmes, one Indian Sign Language teacher training course with 30 deaf students, and one Diploma in Education programme with 25 deaf students out of a total of 30 students. In the teacher training course, English was timetabled for one hour per day, so there was a ready time slot to use for the grammar games. The teacher was able to map some of the structures from the games on to the English language curriculum of his course (see Zeshan 2021 on the 'reverse curriculum' concept). The Diploma in Education programme did not have an English language component in the curriculum, so for these learners, English grammar games were an additional activity, and it was more difficult to engage students consistently.

Two research assistants worked with the teachers in these two programmes, who were also deaf, to test English grammar games. It was important to test the games with groups of learners who had not been exposed to all the theory on multiliteracies and the co-creative learning opportunities from our own training programme. The game approach could only be successfully applied more widely if it was doable for 'naïve' learners without specialised background knowledge. Indeed, using English grammar games with these two groups was quite challenging at the beginning, and we learned to adjust the methodology in several ways based on the feedback from the second-phase experiment.

A particular challenge was the fact that the game had originally been designed for face-to-face interaction. The layout and choreography had to be adapted for online communication. This involved the following modifications (see Figures 3 and 4):

- The grammatical target structures and associated examples were placed on one PowerPoint slide together with a picture of the text, and the slide shared with the learner group in a zoom call. The teachers first discussed the text with the students to make sure they understand what it says (reading comprehension).
- To play the game, the abstract patterns and examples were first displayed hidden under square shapes and uncovered one by one by the teacher as the game progressed (Figure 4).
- Individual students took turns to match the abstract patterns (i.e. the expressions involving square brackets) to sentences or phrases in the text, in the same way as in the face-to-face game. After the solution was found, all students wrote their own examples into the zoom chat.



Figure 3. Design of a slide for the online version of an English grammar game (all fields are to be covered up before the game starts)

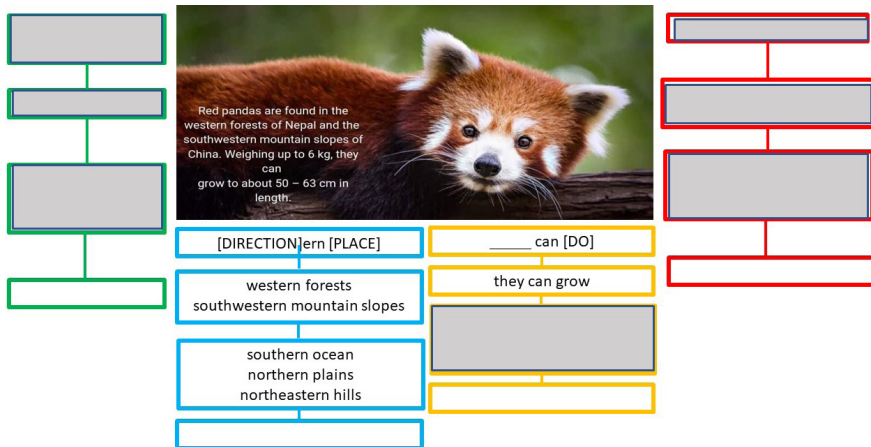


Figure 4. Online grammar game halfway through the game session, with fields uncovered successively.

This procedure works in principle, but there were a lot of practical problems, some technical and some related to the interaction. Some students did not have laptops but had to follow the session on smartphones, which is obviously difficult on a small screen. Insufficient bandwidth was also a problem for some. In addition, reading the text itself took too much time, as each session was timetabled for 45 minutes only. Moreover, when the group got to the stage of writing examples into the chat, teachers were unable to handle the sudden deluge of text appearing from so many participants at the same time.

The experiment continued for just over a month, with several sessions per week in each group, and several project meetings with both the research assistants and the teachers from the partner organisation. Research assistants joined the online sessions to support the teachers. A number of modifications emerged from these trial runs. Firstly, teachers decided to send pictures of the texts in advance of the sessions, so that less time would be needed in the session itself for text comprehension. Initially, translating the text into sign language and explaining it to students took too much time. To deal with the large number of examples coming up in the zoom chat, teachers only chose a few to discuss in the session, and then saved the chat with the rest of the examples and provided feedback to students separately outside the session. Adding both preparation time ahead of the session and review time after the session created a much better learning experience. In one of the groups, the teacher picked up some examples from the chat during the live zoom session and copied them onto the displayed slide to comment on them. He tended to pick examples with mistakes in order to explain how they should be improved.

The feedback provided by the teachers of the two online learner groups has been very useful in getting a first impression of the learning experience. The teacher of the sign language teacher training course commented that students were highly motivated in the game sessions. Their participation was much more intensive, with everyone raising their hands frequently, in comparison with the previous sessions on English grammar.

Indeed, the enthusiasm for the games extended beyond the online sessions. Some way through the games, several students, of their own initiative, decided to create their own games following the model they had experienced in class. This involved not only the top performers in English but also other students with lower literacy levels. The students created their own games complete with sample texts and patterns with square brackets. According to the teacher, there are quite a few 'mistakes' in these games but the initiative as such is remarkable.

In addition to difficulties with managing the visual environment in terms of what everyone was supposed to look at, the large diversity in the students' language and literacy background was a major challenge in both groups. Among the 30 students on the teacher training course, seven were more comfortable with English and made good progress, some having taught English themselves before. However, 11 of the learners found English very challenging. For them, the game method was still not resolving their barriers to learning. Similarly, the teachers of the second group commented that some of the students struggled greatly

with English, no matter what method was used. Managing diversity of learners is also noted as a major issue in the contribution by Nankinga in this volume.

Another interesting observation was that it seemed easier for students to learn about an abstract expression in square brackets when it had a direct counterpart in Indian Sign Language. There are individual signs that correspond to some of the concepts, such as [MOVE], [PERSON], [NUMBER], [DO], [QUALITY] and [PLACE]. However, some students were still unclear about the matching signs, or perhaps did not know some of the signs, for example the sign glossed DO.

The observation about Indian Sign Language (ISL) counterparts of abstract expressions was later included in the design of a virtual learning environment (VLE) in terms of defining the level of difficulty for each game. The VLE was implemented using Moodle as the platform software and was set up in order to allow further groups of learners to access English grammar game materials. When constructing the abstract grammatical frames, we prioritised expressions with such equivalent single-sign translations into ISL for the easiest, entry-level games on the VLE. Later on, further expressions were added that do not have single-sign equivalents in ISL but need to be explained.

In a further validation stage, our research team also worked with additional deaf collaborators across India. We organised two online workshops in mid-2021 where the grammar games approach was discussed. The first workshop had 20 and the second workshop 13 participants, who were a subgroup from the first workshop except for one new participant joining only for the second workshop. Each workshop generated recommendations. For instance, participants recommended that in the virtual learning environment the grammar games should be organised into themes according to the content of the sample text (e.g. history, social media, stories). The workshops also recommended a short-term training programme for deaf facilitators who could lead learner groups in English grammar games, so that the method could be taken up by other deaf learners.

Six of the deaf workshop participants were recruited to produce additional materials for grammar games. As they did not have specific expertise in English grammar, their task was to find further reading materials and to produce a sign language video for each text. The videos are translations of the texts into Indian Sign Language, and sometimes also explain the context. All texts are short, so that they can fit easily onto one laptop screen. The collected texts are in the form of pictures because they include other visual elements in addition to print, as in the examples

in Figure 1 and Figure 3. These collaborators were free to identify any reading that they thought would be interesting and fun for deaf readers. It seems therefore that a combination of print with other visual elements is the preferred format.

To generate the abstract grammatical patterns and supplementary example phrases, a non-deaf project member based in India was recruited for adding this material to the texts and preparing PowerPoint files for online sessions. This work was checked by project lead Zeshan to ensure it was suitable for deaf learners.

The Moodle virtual learning environment includes introductory materials (i.e. an explanation of the game method in ISL and a video recording of a game session), grammar game materials (i.e. the texts in English and PPT files for both offline and online use), with the theme of the text in the section heading, and a searchable ‘grammar dictionary’ where the labels for abstract grammatical structures are listed and explained (see Figures 5 and 6). The VLE was discussed at the second workshop to gain feedback about the best way of structuring the material to make it easily accessible for deaf learners.

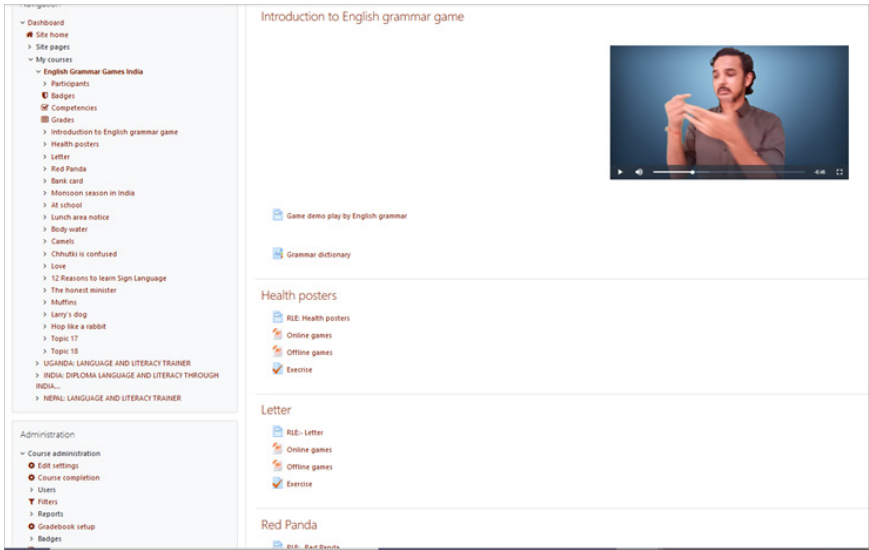


Figure 5. Main page of the English grammar games VLE

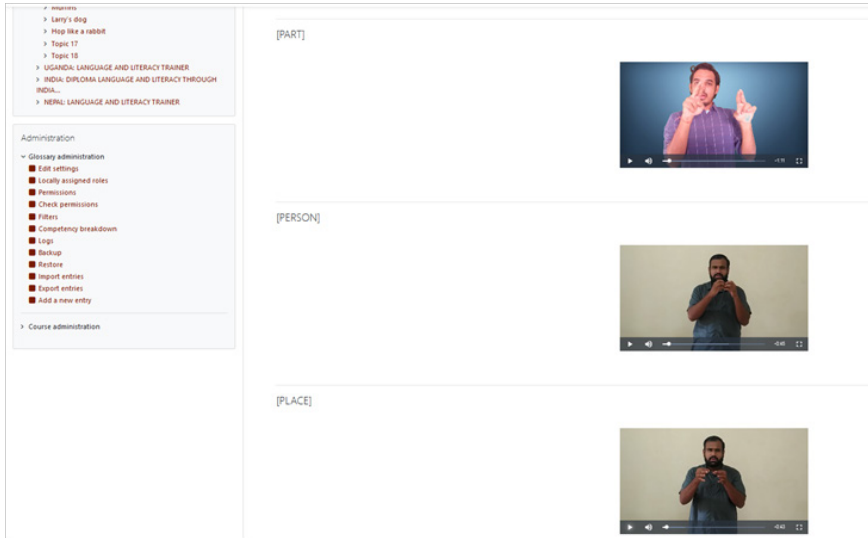


Figure 6. A page from the grammar dictionary

In the next re-design of the virtual learning environment, the games will be categorised by level of difficulty, and ISL translations of the texts will be added. On the basis of feedback and discussions, we have decided to group grammar games into three levels, which are defined as follows:

Level 1:

Short texts (ca. 2 sentences)

Mostly 2 abstract patterns per game, exceptionally up to 3

Mostly 1 [] expression per pattern, exceptionally up to 2

Prioritise [] expressions that correspond to single signs

Level 2:

Medium-length texts

4–5 abstract patterns per game

Mostly 2 [] expression per pattern, sometimes up to 3

[] expressions may or may not correspond to single signs

Level 3:

Long texts (a whole page of text)

4–5 abstract patterns per game

No limit on complexity of structures

Possibility of using formal grammatical terms (e.g. possessive pronoun, adjective, etc)

This design is supported by experiences from the two groups of learners. When we began experimenting with games, the very first games corresponded to Level 2. This was not ideal because students had to cope with the unfamiliar format along with more difficult texts and patterns. In fact, in one of the groups it took a whole week to work through a single game of Level 2. In future, learners would start with games at Level 1. Starting slowly with shorter texts and fewer abstract patterns to deal with will help learners getting to know the method first, before moving on to more difficult games.

5 Conclusion and outlook

Experimenting with the English grammar games has pointed to a viable alternative for deaf sign language users to overcome the considerable barriers to learning about English grammar. At the same time, using the game methodology has enabled us to preserve our original intention, namely that grammar should be embedded in authentic texts. The games maintain a focus on communication and uses of English relevant to students' everyday lives and interests, including both factual and fictional texts. So far the research team has assembled a wide variety of texts, from notices, advertisements, cooking recipes, online forms, dictionary entries and information posters to cartoons, movie subtitles, poems, and social media posts. For future work, we envisage that groups of deaf learners will identify sample texts themselves to use in games, ensuring that there is a genuine interest in the content of these materials and motivation to understand them.

The approach of learning grammatical structures by analogy rather than explanations in meta-language is another feature that has carried over from our experiences in the earlier projects. As explained in section 1 of this chapter, creating new sentences and phrases based on given examples is an activity that tutors used in their classes.

In further work with deaf learners, there are several development lines that would be suitable next steps. In addition to the next round of VLE development mentioned in section 4, training will be needed for deaf facilitators to work with the English grammar games. Such training would include not only how to use the English grammar game resources that are already available but also how to create additional games and use them with learners. For instance, as learners progress to more advanced levels of the game, they can be supported to draw generalisations across grammatical structures, when they have become familiar with a variety of forms. Tutors who would like to use English grammar games need

training in how to do this. It is not intuitively obvious at what point and to what extent explicit explanations and meta-language about grammar should be introduced.

The learner groups we worked with also suggested that it would be good to increase the game-like design features. In particular, some students and tutors suggested that there should be more competitive elements in the English grammar games. In how far the game design should be moved from collaborative to competitive needs further consideration. However, it is clear that there could be many options to introduce competitive elements. For instance, players could split into two teams and compare which team has produced more correct examples of their own. Alternatively, there could be a time limit within which an abstract pattern needs to be identified in the sample text. If the time has expired, there may be a penalty to the team, or the turn would pass to the next person or team.

So far, we have not used English grammar games with deaf primary school children. The situation of younger children acquiring literacy for the first time is obviously quite different from the young deaf adults in India, who are all constantly exposed to written English in their daily lives. A different approach may be needed for children, especially with respect to learners creating their own examples based on analogy with the given text. Younger children may not yet have sufficient exposure to English, including enough vocabulary to draw on for creating examples. Whether the game process as such would work with primary school children needs further research.

Another particularly interesting consideration is to think about the applicability of English grammar games to non-deaf learners. For instance, using such games with children who have English as their first language would allow them to think about grammatical structures while avoiding linguistic terminology that can be difficult to master in primary school. Meta-linguistic and meta-cognitive skills can be fostered in an engaging way through grammar games.

For second language learners, the use of grammar games has more parallels with the deaf learners. In particular, this method could be useful in contexts where professionally qualified teachers are not available. One of the advantages of English grammar games is that game sessions can be led by facilitators who are themselves not highly fluent in English, certainly not at the level of a university degree in English language or language teaching. The experiments in all groups of deaf learners have clearly established that the tutors do not need to have any advanced understanding of English grammar either. Therefore, a short-term

training programme would probably be sufficient to enable facilitators to guide learners using English grammar games, especially if there are sufficient game materials already available. There are many contexts where this could be very useful, for example in refugee camps where regular schooling may not be available, or in adult education classes for recent immigrants. Such learners may have difficult educational experiences, or indeed no experience of formal education at all, as well as psychological barriers to effective learning. A game format combined with the possibility of learners deciding themselves what to read could play a role in overcoming barriers to language and literacy learning in such groups.

Finally, in the context of extending English grammar games to non-deaf learners, it is interesting to observe how in this case, an innovation first arises in a special education context and may then be made applicable to contexts of mainstream education. The fact that deaf learners may have something valuable to share with non-deaf education is in itself an empowering notion.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Haryana Welfare Society for Persons with Speech and Hearing Disabilities for allowing us to experiment with the English grammar games in their classes. In particular, we thank the teachers of these classes Sapan Jain, Phoolmati Lamoriya and Ankit Vishwakarma. For details about the funding of this research, see the introduction to this volume.

References

- Dewaele, Mark (2013) Second and additional language acquisition. In Wei, Li (Ed.). *Applied linguistics*. Malden, MA: John Wiley & Sons Ltd. Chapter 3. p. 81
- Ellis, Rod (2001) Introduction: investigating form-focused instruction. *Language Learning*, 51 (Suppl.):1–46.
- Ellis, Rod (2006) Current issues in the teaching of grammar: An SLA perspective. *TESOL Quarterly* 40 (1): 83–107.
- Fillmore, Charles J., Paul Kay & Mary Catherine O'Connor (1988) Regularity and idiomaticity in grammatical constructions: The case of let alone. *Language* 1988: 501–538.
- Goldberg, Adele E. (2006). *Constructions at work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford University Press

- Hewagodage, Vineetha & Shirley O'Neill. 2010. A Case Study of Isolated NESB Adult Migrant Women's Experience Learning English: A Sociocultural Approach to Decoding Household Texts. *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 6: 23–40.
- Higgs, Theodore & Clifford, Ray (1982) The push towards communication. In Theodore Higgs (ed.) *Curriculum, competence, and the Foreign Language Teacher*. Skokie, IL: National Textbook Company, pp.57–79.
- Loewen, Shawn (2018). Focus on form versus focus on forms. In Lontas, John I. (Ed.) *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*, John Wiley and Sons Inc., pp. 1–6.
- Long, Michael (1996) The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In Ritchie, William & Tej Bhatia (Eds.) *Handbook of second language acquisition*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, pp.413–468.
- Nirantar (2007) *Exploring the Everyday: Ethnographic Approaches to Literacy and Numeracy*. Delhi: Nirantar.
- Papen, Uta & Karin Tusting (2020) Using ethnography and 'real literacies' to develop a curriculum for English Literacy teaching for young deaf adults in India. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 50 (8): 1140–1158.
- Meir, Irit (2012) Word classes and word formation. In Pfau, Roland, Markus Steinbach & Bencie Woll (Eds.) *Sign Language: An International Handbook*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. pp.77–111.
- Randhawa, Surinder PK (2006) *A status study of selected special schools for the deaf and identification of intervention areas*. PhD thesis, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India.
- Richards, Jack C. & Rodgers, Theodore S. (2014) *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Third edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 5 on Communicative Language Teaching and Chapter 9 on Task-Based Language Teaching.
- Street, Brian (2012) Letter: Learning for Empowerment through Training in Ethnographic-Style Research. In *Language, Ethnography, and Education: Bridging New Literacy Studies and Bourdieu*. Abingdon: Routledge. Pp. 73–88
- Street, Brian, Dave Baker, and Alan Rogers (2006) Adult Teachers as Researchers: Ethnographic Approaches to Numeracy and Literacy as Social Practices in South Asia. *Convergence* 39: 31–44.
- Tomasello, Michael (2009) *Constructing a language*. Harvard University Press.
- Zeshan, Ulrike (2020) *Serious Games in Co-creative Facilitation: Experiences from Cross-Sectoral work with Deaf Communities*. Lancaster, UK: Ishara Press.
- Zeshan, Ulrike (2021) The Reverse Curriculum: Game-led design for accessible learning. In Jenny Webster & Ulrike Zeshan (Eds.), *READ WRITE EASY: Research, practice and innovation in deaf multiliteracies (Vol. 1)*. Ishara Research Series No. 5. Lancaster, UK: Ishara Press.

Appendix: Examples of games

All games are shown in the online format but exist in the offline format too. Examples include games at Level 1 and Level 2 of difficulty. Level 3 is not included as the learner groups we worked with were not yet operating at this level of skills in English.

Games at Level 1:

This is your [PLACE]

This is your lunch area

This is your house
This is your school
This is your city
This is your room

NOTICE

This is YOUR lunch area

Keep it clean

Keep it [QUALITY]


Keep it clean

Keep it tidy
Keep it warm
Keep it safe
Keep it locked

Wait for [HAPPEN]

Wait for summer

Wait for rain
Wait for my birthday
Wait for the next match



we [MOVE] here

we come here

we arrive here
we walk here
we cycle here

Games at Level 2:

[THING]s and [THING]s

Chips and confectionary packets
Bottle caps and lids

shirts and pants
books and pens
doors and windows

Chips and Confectionary Packets Account for the Largest Share of Plastic Waste in India
% of total plastic waste

Category	Percentage
Chips and confectionary packets	19%
PET bottles	10%
Garbage bags	8%
Packaging	8%
Bottle caps and lids	12%
Others	43%

the [SIZE]est

the largest

the biggest
the smallest
the longest
the tallest

[NON-COUNT THING] in [COUNTRY]

waste in India

electricity in Japan
rice in Mexico
petrol in Sri Lanka
water in Bangladesh

Stop [DO]ing

Stop yelling

Stop watching TV.
Stop smoking.
Stop pretending.

© Dan Pinnau

turn [ON/OFF] the [DEVICE]

Turn off the light

Turn off the washing machine.
Turn on your phone.
Turn on the radio.

[DO]ing at me

yelling at me

looking at me
throwing things at me
frowning at me

[COUNTRY]'s [SEASON]

India's monsoon season


Russia's winter
Germany's spring season
China's autumn season
Egypt's summer

_____ is/are caused by [REASON]

The weather pattern is caused by differing temperature

Tsunamis are caused by large earthquakes.
Polio is caused by the poliovirus.
Poverty is caused by unemployment.

Monsoon Season in India



- India's monsoon season runs from June to September
- The weather pattern is caused by differing temperature trends over the land and ocean.
- Rain can come on suddenly, and hours of rain are common on most days.
- Mumbai and Kolkata receive the most rain of Indian cities during monsoon.

from [TIME] to [TIME]

from June to September

from 1985 to 2001
from Diwali to Holi
from noon to night
from Monday to Friday
from summer to spring

the most [WEATHER]

the most rain

the most snow
the most sunshine