CHAPTER 1

Language Games— In Celebration of Creativity!

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THE UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF LANGUAGE GAMES

Many of us can remember holidays, sick days, or long winter evenings when we passed the time by playing card games and board games around the table with family and friends. Most of us also have played social games that liven up a party, help guests become better acquainted, and make everyone present feel comfortable. More recently, computer games have emerged on the scene, generating a dedicated following. Watching game shows on television is another common pastime, and reality shows are replete with competitions featuring common yet highly skilled mortals battling it out for glory or huge cash prizes.

Games certainly have not gone out of fashion, although they have evolved to encompass an enormous range of possibilities. Recently, games have become characterized by the use of technology. Some computer games may involve solitary players or individuals engaged with competitors who are hundreds or even thousands of miles away. In this respect, playing some games is solitary, yet global. The universal appeal of games makes them highly attractive to language teachers who can implement them in the classroom for a variety of purposes. Although factors such as culture, age, proficiency level, and curricular goals vary, teachers can find a game to enhance almost any aspect of language learning.

The wide range of games, competitions, contests, and challenges also creates difficulty in defining the term *game*. Some researchers have identified challenge as an essential component to a game while acknowledging that competition is not necessary and can have negative learning effects (Shameem & Tickoo, 1999; Wright, Betteridge, & Buckby, 2006). Many games, in fact, require cooperation to accomplish a common goal. In this volume, games are conceived of in their broadest sense, encompassing individuals or teams and ranging from puzzles and self-challenges to team competitions or projects, role playing, and debates. They engage the learner, stimulate discovery, and involve interaction.

Part of the appeal of games is that they lend themselves to a variety of learning styles to support and develop students' interpersonal, intrapersonal, linguistic, spatial, musical, logical-mathematical, and bodily kinesthetic predilections (Gardner, 1983). Some language teaching methodologies, such as total physical response, for example, are based on the idea that movement helps learners absorb and retain language (e.g., see Larsen-Freeman, 2000). For example, in this book one of the games described in the chapter "Add, Mix, and Shake: Content, Vocabulary, and Games in the Language Classroom," by Lan Hue Quach and Scott P. Kissau, involves students in creating the materials for the game by cutting out and gluing circles. Students receive bean bags for correct answers and then toss them at targets. Movement, which supports a bodily kinesthetic learning style, is but one possible element of a game.

Other games in the volume support alternate learning styles. "Logical Use of Logic Puzzles," by Kurtis McDonald, supports the logical-mathematical form of intelligence, whereas Mary E. Hillis' get-acquainted bingo game focuses predominantly on intrapersonal intelligence as students interact with each other, and also visual intelligence as students see a visual representation of the information they collect by visiting with their peers and filling in bingo cards. Because learners (and teachers) have different learning styles, not everyone will like every game. Learners have multiple learning styles and may vary in their preferences at any given time. Games can be designed to accommodate a variety of learning styles and preferences, and if used consistently, can become an integral feature of the language classroom.

The universal appeal of games—and the influence of teachers' own cultures, education, experiences, talents, skills, and teaching–learning preferences—means that, among any group of teachers, an extremely diverse set of games for the English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom can be realized. As evidenced by the chapters in this volume, using games for language learning is limited only by one's imagination.

GAMES AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Using games in the ESL or EFL classroom contributes to lowering the affective filter (Krashen, 1981). In other words, factors that might negatively impact language learning, such as inhibitions, doubts, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation, are ameliorated. When students can relax, have fun, and focus on the purpose of a game, their anxiety is lessened and defenses lowered; they begin to have more confidence in using the language and increased motivation. By sustaining learners' interest, games also lessen some of the hard work involved in learning a language (Wright et al., 2006). Games potentially encourage students to take risks and learn by trial and error as they experiment with the language. Experimentation leads to language development (Oxford, 1990). Risk-taking, a natural component of many games, generally is considered a positive factor in

language learning. In the classroom, risk-taking occurs in a safe environment with trusted peers and teacher.

By going beyond structured, teacher-centered talk to create meaningful, student-initiated interaction, games generate opportunities for interaction, which plays a critical role in language learning. As students negotiate meaning in peer–peer communication, they receive the comprehensible input necessary for language development (e.g., see Krashen, 1985), but also may be pushed slightly beyond their current levels through exposure to new vocabulary and structures, particularly if more proficient students are grouped with those less proficient. Teachers must be aware of students' actual level of target language compared to their potential level and emphasize meaningful interaction and relevant content for second-language development. Through the use of games, learning may occur incidentally without the student even realizing it (Rinvolucri & Davis, 1995; Shameem & Tickoo, 1999) as peers work with each other to solve problems and construct meaning.

One advantage of incidental learning is its support of language acquisition as opposed to language learning. Krashen (1982) views language acquisition as a natural process in which items pass through the affective filter and become internalized. In contrast, learned items such as grammar rules are conscious and become part of a monitor. They are used only if they are simple, if the learner is focused on form, and if the learner has enough time to apply the monitor. However, it is difficult to monitor output in the flow of discourse. Classroom contexts can provide formal instruction as well as input that is comprehensible and relevant, thereby supporting language acquisition.

When games present situations in which students must communicate with each other to accomplish a goal, the language of the classroom becomes more authentic. Rather than teachers asking students inauthentic questions to which they already know the answers, games can be used to create opinion gap situations to approximate more relevant language exchanges (Wright et al., 1983). Through games, teachers can create realistic contexts for language to be practiced—situations that require learners to understand each other, express their own viewpoints, and provide information (Wright et al., 1983, 2006). Games often have repetitive elements that are similar to language drills but more meaningful (Wright et al., 1983, 2006). When language is meaningful, it will be better remembered. Communicative activities should assist students in learning new language features and also practicing those already acquired (Shameem & Tickoo, 1999). Teachers can design games to focus on practicing communicative language, reviewing vocabulary and structures already presented, and introducing new language features. Creating situations that bring language to life through pictures, dramatization, and stories helps link language to action (and to communication), and work and play merge (e.g., see Lee, 1979).

The use of games for language learning is based largely on a constructivist approach in which knowledge is developed through active learning (e.g., see

Richard-Amato, 2003). Students can ask questions, search for answers, collaborate, identify multiple solutions to problems, take charge of their own learning, play the role of the teacher, and engage in thought-provoking activities to use language and create knowledge. Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development is the foundation of the constructivist movement in education. The latter suggests that learning is a social process that is a step ahead of development. Learners move from their actual level of development to their potential level through problem-solving, guidance, and collaboration with slightly more advanced peers.

Games and activities that take into account students' current levels of proficiency can be designed to push learners beyond these levels to create optimal learning environments, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) theory. This active learning process also involves fostering collaboration as team members help each other and work toward a common goal. When students are engaged socially in a fun, interactive activity, learning will occur (Shameem & Tickoo, 1999). Teachers should use techniques to create good feelings and build a community of learners. A friendly atmosphere should prevail, even when games involve competition and players are involved in surpassing others and improving their own performance (e.g., see Lee, 1979).

Teacher Considerations

Teachers need to acknowledge that some people like games more than others and that students may be focused on learning English for a specific purpose, such as increased employment opportunities, and resist games (Wright et al., 1983). Teachers must focus on learning objectives rather than incorporating games solely to have fun (although this may be appropriate occasionally) or use up class time. If the latter occurs, students will rightly view games as largely a waste of class time. When games are clearly tied to objectives and appropriate to the focus of the lesson, and teachers demonstrate their usefulness, they will be more successful. So learners will perceive it as legitimate, the rationale for the game or activity must be explained because it may not be readily apparent (Shameem & Tickoo, 1999).

Other considerations for using games are: preparation time, the value of the game in accomplishing curricular aims, the time needed to set up the game in class, and the students' perceived interest (Wright et al., 1983). Teachers also need to ensure that learners have the vocabulary and linguistic structures to play the game and that the instructions are clear. Teachers can write out the instructions to the game to develop students' reading skills and enable them to refer back to the instructions if they have questions as they play, give the instructions in a dictation format, or provide minimal instructions and allow students who understand the rules to help others as the game is played (Rinvolucri & Davis, 1995). These ideas reinforce language learning on a number of levels, add variety to class procedures, and demonstrate creativity. Depending on the level of the

students, a demonstration by the teacher or other students may be needed before play begins.

Teachers need to be aware of their students' personalities and abilities and not set up a game in any way to disadvantage students with lower levels of proficiency. If students are not comfortable participating in a game, they can be assigned other responsibilities, such as keeping time or tracking the score. As much as possible, however, teachers should design games that will be accessible and of interest to all students and create a positive classroom rapport so that students will feel comfortable playing and be willing to try something new. Similarly, cultural contexts must be considered and games adapted not only to respect students' cultures but to be of high interest. The aim of most games is to allow students to interact, make mistakes, work to communicate, and to provide some sense of challenge. Teachers should allow this authentic language use to occur naturally without overly structuring the activity, correcting students, or giving too much help.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The range of purposes for using games in the language classroom led to some difficulty in organizing this book. Whereas some of the games focus primarily on the four traditional language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—as well as the supporting areas of vocabulary and grammar, other games clearly have a different emphasis, such as critical thinking and content-based language instruction. Yet other games focus on objectives such as getting acquainted, and can be adapted for various purposes and types of content. The nature of the games led to dividing the book into two parts. The first, "Skills Focus," concentrates on traditional skills and language components (reading and writing, listening and speaking, grammar, vocabulary) while the second part, "Beyond Skills," features game templates, get-acquainted games, and games used for content-based instruction and critical thinking development. The two categories make the book easy to use and indicate primary areas of focus.

In Part 1: Skills Focus, the games are divided into skill and subskill areas including reading and writing, listening and speaking, grammar, and vocabulary. Five authors contribute games related to reading and writing. Shane Dixon's "Storyboarding for the Oscars" involves students in creating storyboards to help them brainstorm and organize a piece of narrative writing. Students share their storyboards and vote for those that should receive "Oscar" awards. Next, in "WARTS (Writing Activities Require Time and Satisfaction)," Nancy Tarawhiti describes two writing games. In the first game, which emphasizes brainstorming and fluency, students choose an item from a box and write about it for a set time period, after which they share and vote on their favorite. In the other game, students work in groups to complete the various stages of the writing process, resulting in a thesis statement and topic sentences. These are discussed as a class,

and one is selected as the best model. Next, Belinda Ho shares a team guessing game, "What Is It?," designed to elicit the defining characteristics of an object, which leads to definition writing. "Who's the Best Detective?," by Nancy Ackles, helps students develop argumentative writing skills as they determine who committed a fictitious murder. Those who solve the mystery win the game. Finally, in "Pass It On! Writing Games," Robb Mark McCollum explains the steps to participating in a collaborative writing game that involves drawing and sentence writing to reinforce the importance of clarity.

Also in Part 1, four authors share games related to listening and speaking skill development. Vander Viana demonstrates how students can improve their communicative abilities in a competition that involves creating a movie using a free online tool in his contribution, "In the Director's Shoes: Bridging Meaning and Pleasure in an English Language Teaching Game." "Tabletop Role-Playing Games," by Johansen Quijano, suggests ways to enhance students' participation as they interact in a collaborative narrative involving dice rolling and character creation. Next, Hayo Reinders and Marilyn Lewis explore creative ways to use MP3 players. "PodQuests: Language Games on the Go" explains how to engage students in a competition involving following directions, answering questions, and gathering, recording, and sharing information. Finally, Kevin Cross and Patricia Pashby share "The Survey Game," in which students gather cultural information from their classmates, compare responses, reach consensus, and make guesses about the most popular answers to survey questions as they build listening and speaking, vocabulary, and cross-cultural skills.

Vocabulary learning is the focus of the next five chapters in the volume. Hyacinth Gaudart involves students in a role-playing game in "Let's Go Shopping." Students learn vocabulary by "purchasing" items such as vegetables or furniture using teacher-produced illustrated playing cards. "Collocations in the Foreseeable Future" highlights three games—variations of crossword puzzles, concentration, and tic-tac-toe—created by Rachel Adams Goertel and Carole Adams to familiarize students with the meaning and use of frequently used collocations. Students practice and strengthen knowledge of target vocabulary as they read and retell stories and determine whether or not the stories are true in "Urban Myths: Fact or Fiction?" contributed by Timothy Doe. Barnaby Ralph's "Speaking Through Art" shares a series of activities with competitive elements that require students to rank, describe, discuss, and write about works of art, thereby contextualizing vocabulary study within a content-based approach. In "Define Your Terms," a guessing game by Michael Shehane and Michael Moraga, after students learn practical phrases for explaining a definition of a word, they give their teammates clues about specified vocabulary. Each team attempts to identify more vocabulary items than the opposing team.

The final area of focus in Part 1 demonstrates how games are effective in reinforcing knowledge and use of grammar. Writing clues to lead their classmates to a treasure is the aim of "Treasure Hunting With Grammar." Xiao Lan

Curdt-Christiansen explains how the game teaches specific grammatical structures by requiring children to incorporate them into their clues. In Mark Wolfersberger's game, "Nice Tower, But It May Fall Down: A Game for Teaching Modals of Probability," students complete to build the highest tower, commenting on the process using modals of probability and learning to distinguish variations in their meanings. Karen Hilgeman addresses the problematic area of teaching participial adjectives in "The Teacher's Choice Game." Students make playing cards with words and phrases. The student playing the role of the teacher determines which of the words or phrases is the best match for a specific participial phrase. The last game in this section, "What's the Problem?," is contributed by Leong Ping Alvin. Working collaboratively in this game, students solve a puzzle in order to discover the usage of various grammatical structures.

In Part 2: Beyond Skills, the games are organized into four categories: game templates, get-acquainted games, games involving content-based instruction, and those that encourage critical thinking. First, for game templates, Amanda A. B. Wallace illustrates how a clothespin and a coin are used to generate excitement in a team competition called "Pass the Clothespin: Cleaning Up in the ESL Classroom." The purpose of the game is to review a given teaching point or topic of study. Next, Kevin McCaughey helps students review grammar, practice vocabulary, and gain speaking practice in "On-the-Spot Games From Student Content." Students supply the content for the game by identifying and describing an object or a topic and creating guessing cards; other students must guess what is being described. Karen Hilgeman describes eight games for review and practice of instructional points in her contribution, "Energize and Educate!" The games are adaptable to any content, learner level, or age, and they involve activities as diverse as relay races, line-ups, tic-tac-toe, bingo, and sportscasting as well as tools such as dice, flashcards, and drawings. Last, Susan Kelly presents "Do-It-Yourself Games," in which students create their own games and teach them to the class. This technique involves students in presenting the game to the class for oral skills practice and/or creating written rules. Through their involvement, students gain autonomy and practice target grammar and vocabulary.

At the beginning of each teaching term, teachers regularly look for creative ideas to help students become acquainted with each other. Mary E. Hillis' "BINGO: Building Interest and Negotiation Through Games From the Outset" does just that. Students create their own bingo cards with questions they would like to ask their classmates. Then, as the teacher calls out students' names, they share the information they have collected and mark off squares on their cards to get a bingo. In a similar type of activity described in "Flags of Ourselves: Using Student-Generated Props in the Classroom," Chad Kallauner asks students to create colorful flags representing different aspects of their lives. Through sharing their flags, students practice their English, learn about each other, and create community in the classroom.

To enhance content-based instruction, Lan Hue Quach and Scott P. Kissau

contribute the chapter "Add, Mix, and Shake: Content, Vocabulary, and Games in the Language Classroom" to introduce the next series of games—those that support both content and language learning objectives. The authors demonstrate how three different games can be used to review science content and engage students in expressing their understanding of topics. The games involve the use of visual aids and cue cards, a bean bag toss, and an identity-guessing activity. Lindsay Miller and Samuel Wu also share a game for reinforcing content knowledge in "Using Common Language Games in a Science and Technology Curriculum." Even university-level students studying science and engineering can benefit from such straightforward games as crossword puzzles, hangman, and oral presentation competitions. These games can be used to learn content-based terminology, recognize the differences between oral and written text, and improve speaking and presentation skills. Finally, Kimberly S. Rodriguez and Susan M. Barone build on a popular reality television show in their game, "The Business Apprentice." Business students work in groups to create a marketing campaign for a product, after which they are judged by business professors. The competition is language intensive, developing oral skills (particularly using language for negotiation) as well as business skills and cultural knowledge. All of the games in this section are adaptable for a variety of content areas.

The final section in the volume consists of two contributions, both focused on the development of critical thinking skills. First, in "Logical Use of Logic Puzzles," Kurtis McDonald shows how giving students a story scenario and requiring them to piece together clues to solve a puzzle can promote mental engagement, increase motivation, and provide reading comprehension and vocabulary practice. Then, Alexander Sokol, Edgar Lasevich, and Marija Dobrovolska share games for developing critical thinking skills in "Three Games to Exercise the Brain." To Take Into My House, Feature Constructor, and The Most Useful Thing in the World involve learners in critical thinking, vocabulary practice, and authentic communication scenarios as they collaborate to discuss objects and their features and uses.

Although the games have been organized in the volume by their primary focus, it should be noted that none has a single focus. Each game clearly lends itself to addressing multiple language objectives, and many could be considered to integrate a variety of skills and support diverse curricular aims. Because of this wide range of possible uses, I have created a chart (p. iv) in which the games are categorized by their primary emphasis, with other areas of focus also listed. To use this book most effectively, I recommend referring to the chart to get an idea of the skill or curriculum areas potentially addressed by a particular game and then reviewing the game itself to see how it lends itself to a particular instructional purpose. Readers should keep in mind that the chart provides a guide only. It is important to recognize that almost any game can be adapted to suit a teacher's objective, content, or context. One needs but a little imagination and ingenuity to adapt a game for a particular purpose.

The chart (p. iv) also notes the most applicable proficiency level and age for playing each game. Once again, however, the games are adaptable to different levels and ages. If the chart denotes a beginning level and the teacher is instructing advanced-level students, it still is likely that the game can be adapted to be relevant. In most cases, the authors of the games share variations for adjusting the games to different levels and contexts. Similarly, the age categorizations in the chart represent a general age group. In reality, each game may be appropriate for higher or lower ages or may be modified to be suitable. Young adult–adult is descriptive of a secondary or tertiary education level and also would include adult education programs. Games designated as appropriate for children are aimed at those of primary school age (i.e., 6–12). Games appropriate for youth (i.e., middle school students, ages 12–14) may be found in both the child and young adult categories.

The book goes beyond the typical recipe book approach, which generally involves little more than a listing of materials, briefly stated procedures, and a designation of the applicable skill and appropriate proficiency and age level. Each game in this volume is characterized by an in-depth discussion including rationale; learning objectives; a description of ideal and alternate contexts; detailed procedures; variations for materials, procedures, content, skill, and/or curriculum emphasis; Web resources; cultural notes; language-learning and interaction tips; and reflections on the success and uniqueness of the game, including student response. The chapters also feature illustrations, diagrams, pictures, worksheets, templates, handouts, drawings, visuals, and other teaching aides to ease teacher preparation.

Because the games are contributed by a number of authors, they reflect many different contexts and cultures. A range of authors' voices describe their teaching experiences using games. Although the chapters follow similar formats, variations are evident and support the diversity of our profession. When integrating the games suggested in the pages of this volume into a specific language curriculum, consideration must be given to the learning context, including factors such as the age, background, proficiency level, and purpose of the learner, and adjustments made as needed.

This book also stands apart in that the contributions reflect multiple classroom uses. Themes evident throughout the book reflect pedagogical goals and practices for language learning such as communicative competence, interaction, authenticity, skills integration, content emphasis, and collaboration. The games focus on developing students' English skills, but more than that they focus on students learning language and content, engaging in collaboration, becoming active learners, and utilizing technology. They have been inspired by traditional games, cultural games, television shows, board games, party games, and card games, but they go beyond these to demonstrate how teachers are inspired by a number of sources and contribute their own unique talents and interests to their teaching. They represent creative methods for fulfilling curricular objectives.

The contributions also support and demonstrate the application of theoretical concepts such as problem-based learning (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980), the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), active learning (Cummins, 2000), vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2001), and learning collocations (Lewis, 2000). They demonstrate how both theory and practice inform our teaching approaches.

The purpose of this book is to encourage the enjoyment of learning. As each of the contributors has been inspired by a variety of sources and experiences, so can each of us be inspired to try out and adapt new techniques for the ESL–EFL classroom as we benefit from what our colleagues have shared in this volume.

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