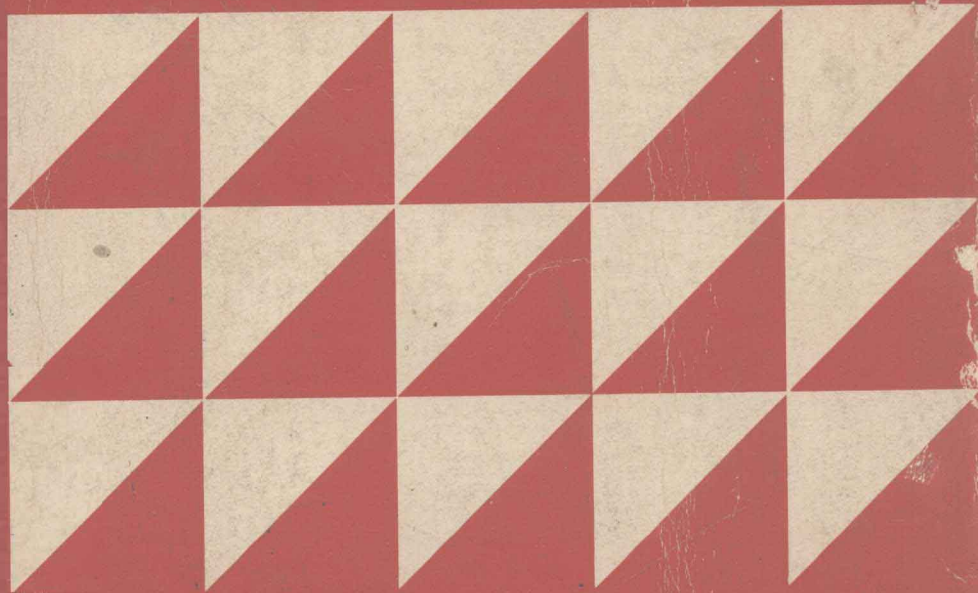


101

WORD GAMES



George P. McCallum

101 WORD GAMES

For Students of English as a
Second or Foreign Language

George P. McCallum

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G.P.M.

INTRODUCTION

Why use games in the English as a Second or Foreign Language classroom?

There are many valid reasons for using games in the language classroom, not least among them the sheer enjoyment of a moment of relaxation after some arduous drilling, or as a short respite after prolonged deskwork.

When one considers the importance of communicative competence in the target language, a major goal of all language acquisition, and the need for spontaneous and creative use of that language, one recognizes the significant role of word games in achieving these objectives. Students, in the informal atmosphere of game play, are less self-conscious and therefore more apt to experiment and freely participate in using the foreign language. In addition, games automatically stimulate student interest; a properly introduced game can be one of the highest motivating techniques.

Other reasons for including games in the language class are:

1. They focus student attention on specific structures, grammatical patterns, and vocabulary items.
2. They can function as reinforcement, review, and enrichment.
3. They involve equal participation from both slow and fast learners.
4. They can be adjusted to suit the individual ages and language levels of the students in the class.
5. They contribute to an atmosphere of healthy competition, providing an outlet for the creative use of natural language in a non-stressful situation.
6. They can be used in any language teaching situation and with any skill area whether reading, writing, speaking or listening.
7. They provide immediate feedback for the teacher.
8. They ensure maximum student participation for a minimum of teacher preparation.

Having justified the use of word games in the language class, accepting the fact that they provide not only a learning experience but an enjoyable one as well, we may then ask, when should a game be introduced? The logical time is toward the end of the hour—the “dessert” after the main course. However, there is no hidebound rule about this and whenever an instructor feels it is the appropriate moment for a more relaxing activity, that is the time for a game. All this is relative, of course, and it will be the good judgment of the instructor that determines the appropriate time.

Choosing the Right Game

Which game should be played, once we’ve decided it is time for such an activity? Many factors enter into deciding the answer to this question:

1. the size of the class
2. whether it is a class of adults or one of children
3. the class level—elementary, intermediate, advanced
4. the structures being studied at the moment
5. the physical space you have to work with
6. the noise factor—will you disturb the classes around you?
7. the students’ interests, in and out of class
8. the equipment and materials available
9. cultural considerations
10. the time available for a game

Teacher Preparation

A game should be planned into the day’s lesson right along with exercises, dialogs and reading practice. It should not be an afterthought.

Some games require the use of additional equipment or materials, such as flash cards, small, easily identifiable objects, a bean bag, stopwatch, blindfolds, or pencil and paper. These are noted at the top of each game. In most cases the equipment will already be available in the classroom. Where advance preparation is required for successful game play, it is recommended that the teacher assemble these materials prior to introducing the game.

Certainly the teacher should understand the game and how it is to be played before explaining the rules to the class. With certain

games it might be wise to have two or three students give a short demonstration first, before the entire class participates. This will avoid confusion and cause the game to move along as smoothly as possible from the very beginning.

Once the rules are made clear, the teacher should see to it that they are adhered to. Changing rules in mid-game is bad strategy. If the rules as presented here seem too rigid for a particular group they can always be adjusted to suit the needs of that group, but this should be done before the game begins, not once it has started. No game has to be played exactly as presented; the teacher should always feel free to adapt it to the class. This is especially true when working with children. (See *Appendix: Games for Children*, 11 to 15.)

Teacher as Facilitator

No matter how much the teacher actually participates in the game, he or she always remains in charge and keeps the situation under control. This is especially true when playing some of the physically active games and certainly when working with younger people. Certain games, by their very nature, require the teacher or someone in authority, such as a teacher's aid or even one of the students, to control the playing of the game once the rules are made clear. This can be done, and a relaxed atmosphere maintained, if the person in charge assumes the role of one more player who is guiding the game in the direction it should go, rather than dictating what the others should do. In other words, this person's positive attitude will be an important factor in deciding the success or failure of the game.

Student Involvement

All of the class should be involved in one way or another. Choice of games will help here, of course, but it may be that for a specific reason—perhaps practice on a structure point—a teacher may want to use a game which is more effectively played by half a dozen students than by double or triple that number. Space permitting (not to mention noise level), there could be several groups around the room playing the same game at the same time. With other games, in which a few students only are required, the rest of the class could

be judges, score-keepers or audience. Everyone should be made to feel he has some part in the game, even though for the moment it is a passive role. If space does not permit more than one small group to play at a time, then groups could take turns playing for a designated period of time. A panel of judges could, at the end of the hour, decide which group has played best.

Do's and Don'ts

What do you do if you have chosen the perfect game for the perfect occasion and, lo and behold, it turns out to be a dud? You simply face up to the fact that today is not the day for that particular game (another day very likely will be) and as soon as possible you change activities. It may be, too, that an individual student does not feel like playing games that day, although the others do. Don't force him; he will neither enjoy nor benefit from the experience and will probably dampen the enjoyment of the others. Let him be an observer that day. No one should be forced to play games.

Looking on the brighter side, those times when you have great success with a game, and this is more usual, it is always wise to stop playing while the students are enjoying it and would prefer to continue. As far as repeating a popular game is concerned, discretion should be used. There is nothing wrong with playing a successful game on a later occasion but it is preferable to allow a decent interval of time before re-introducing it. Still better is the use of a different game the next time, though it could be a variation of one that students have especially enjoyed. *Buzz-Bizz* is a variation of *Buzz* that the class would undoubtedly enjoy even more than the original game, as it offers more of a challenge. This is also true of such games as *How's Your Vocabulary?* as opposed to *Catalogs*, and *Observe and Remember* as compared to *What Do You Remember?*

Teamwork

A number of games require the dividing of the class into two teams. The teacher may want to do this differently each time—the boys against the girls, the right side of the room against the left side, row A versus row B, etc. However, there are some advantages to having the same teams for a month or even a full semester, especially in respect to the time it takes to divide the class each time a team game is played. Also, a certain team spirit develops which aids

greatly in playing competitive games and promotes a free exchange of ideas both in- and outside of class. It is suggested that the teacher establish the teams, thus assuring that there will be an appropriate balance of faster students with slower ones in each group.

Using this Book

The games in this collection are some of the many that can be played in the language class, and although these are designed for students learning English, many of them can easily be adapted for use with persons learning other languages. They have been categorized by chapter as follows:

1. Vocabulary Games
2. Number Games
3. Structure Games
4. Spelling Games
5. Conversation Games
6. Writing Games
7. Role Play and Dramatics

These are somewhat arbitrary classifications. Certain games, such as *Hidden Words*, found in the spelling section, is also a vocabulary game, and *Neither Yes nor No*, placed in the structure section, also gives practice in conversation. Thus, the teacher, seeking a good game for a specific purpose, perhaps structure practice, may find just what he or she wants among the writing games. It is recommended that the teacher check first the desired category, then the **Appendix** of *Games by Language Level*, and finally skim the **Objectives** of the appropriate games to find the most suitable selection for his or her class.

As will be noted throughout the collection, certain games lend themselves to homework assignments. Because of the enjoyable challenge of this type of activity, there should be no difficulty convincing the students to do their homework on such occasions. (See **Appendix: Games for Homework.**)

Certainly the teacher should feel free to take the raw material as presented here and make all the changes necessary for maximum effectiveness and fun with his or her class. It is also possible that a game cannot be played with a certain class because of the size of the group, their command of English, or the age of the students, but it will suggest a variation that will be successful. Teachers should feel

free to experiment and use those games best suited to the individual needs of their students.

Each game is marked for **Language level**: elementary, intermediate, advanced, or all (meaning appropriate for all three levels). These markings are also flexible. An instructor may decide that his or her elementary class is quite capable of playing a game designed for intermediate and/or advanced students. Again, it is the teacher who decides which game is most applicable for any given class.

Where special equipment and materials are required for a game there is an indication: **Equipment and material**. A teacher's aid or one of the more responsible students could help gather or prepare those items required for the successful completion of a game.

The **Objective** of each game will be found directly under the title. This indicates the goal or specific language activity that the game introduces and reviews. In the Structure Games section, the principal structure or structures emphasized are also noted, in *italics*, within the general **Objective**.

The use of *It*, an American convention of game play, to designate the "performer" or focal player who begins the action of the game has been employed throughout this book. Very often it is this player who must leave the room; guess the secret word; question the other players; or generally initiate game play. Teachers may wish to select a more experienced student to be *It* for the opening round of play. Other students may then take turns being *It*, once the rules of the game have been established.

The masculine pronoun forms, *he*, *his*, and *him*, have been used here for the sake of simplicity and ease in reading. They should be understood to refer to both male and female students.

In her article, "Try One of My Games" (*English Teaching Forum*, May/June, 1970), Julia Dobson sums up the subject of games nicely: "I myself have found that a good language game is a wonderful way to break the routine of classroom drill, because it provides fun and relaxation while remaining very much within the framework of language learning—and may even reinforce that learning."

G. P. M.

Madrid, Spain
April, 1980

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101

WORD GAMES

1

VOCABULARY GAMES

This section contains a variety of vocabulary games which give the students an opportunity to practice many of the high-frequency words and expressions they have learned.

I Packed My Bag for

Alaska

Observe and Remember

What Do You Remember?

The A to Z Banquet

Animal Squares

You'll Never Guess!

Seasons Greetings

Shopping Tour

Alphabet Identification

What's Your Hobby?

Color Call

I Like My Friend

Word Matching

How's Your Vocabulary?

Key Word

Tessie Billings

Vegetables and Things

In the Dark

Teakettle

Sally Smith

Catalogs

Words from Words

Simple and Compound

Dictionary Dilemma

Name Game

Earth, Air, Fire, and
Water

I Packed My Bag for Alaska

Objective: To increase the student's vocabulary by using a wide variety of common nouns and to provide practice with the indefinite articles, *a* and *an*.

Language level: all

Equipment and material: blackboard

This is a vocabulary building game that can be played successfully at any language level, though it is probably more fun for elementary and intermediate students than for advanced.

Begin the game by modeling the example sentence, "I packed my bag for Alaska and in my bag I put *an apple*." The first student then repeats the model sentence and adds the name of an object that begins with the letter *B*. For example: "I packed my bag for Alaska and in my bag I put an apple and *a book*." The game is continued around the classroom with each student, in turn, repeating what has been said before and adding the name of a new object which begins with the next letter of the alphabet. Students should be encouraged to use their imaginations as the more ridiculous the objects, the more fun the game. If there are more than 26 students in the class, just begin the game again with the letter *A*. You may wish to write the names of objects beginning with the letters *Q*, *X*, and *Z* on the blackboard, or eliminate those letters from the game.

The first time this game is played you may wish to write, or have a student write, the names of all the objects on the blackboard as they are said. Once the students are familiar with the game they should be able to repeat the words they hear without referring to the blackboard.

To make this game more challenging to advanced classes, you might ask the students to provide an adjective before each object, such as, *a beautiful book*, *a clean coat*, *a dirty dress*, etc.

This game also provides practice with the indefinite articles, *a* and *an*. At a later date it could be played again, this time using plural nouns.

Observe and Remember

Objective: To test the student's ability to observe and remember while reinforcing the vocabulary of high-frequency, common nouns.

Language level: all

Equipment and material: A variety of small, easily identifiable objects, as suggested below.

This is a good way to test a student's ability to observe and remember while building his vocabulary in English.

Before class, gather a wide selection of small, easily identifiable objects, such as a pencil, eraser, pen, wristwatch, teaspoon, notebook, keys, ruler, buttons, or whatever seems appropriate to the language level of the class. Place these objects on a desk or table at the front of the room.

Ask the students to come forward and look at the objects for a given length of time (no more than two minutes), and then have them return to their seats. Instruct the students to take out pencil and paper and write, in English, the names of as many objects as they can remember. At this point, cover the articles with a cloth or large piece of paper, thereby removing them from view. Allow approximately five minutes for the students to recall and write down the names of the things they have observed.

The number of items on the table, as well as the items themselves, should be appropriate to the language level of the class. About a dozen objects would be appropriate for an elementary class, fifteen to twenty for an intermediate group, and twenty-five to thirty for an advanced class.

When the students have finished writing, uncover the objects again and allow the students to come forward and check their work. Or, you may wish to hold up each individual item and have the students identify them in turn. The student with the most names, correctly spelled, wins.