

SOME GAMES FOR TEACHING BEGINNING TESL

by Judy E. Winn-Bell Olsen

PROBLEM:

What to do with a class labeled "ESL 1" that has *all* the following types of students:

those who are, at best, semi-literate;

those who have just gotten off the plane and don't know a word of English;

those who have been here for years and can communicate reasonably effectively in broken English;

those who really know a lot more than they'll admit, but don't want to be pushed very far very fast;

those who are highly motivated to learn as much as they can as fast as they can;

those who are in class mainly because it's a more enjoyable way to live out the rest of their years than sitting at home looking at four walls;

those who are there on time every, every day so they won't miss a single word you say;

those who straggle in during the first half hour of class and often leave 10 or 15 minutes early;

all of whom speak the same language, so they don't need English to communicate with each other.

How best to meet the needs of all of these types of students while maintaining general class interest and some semblance of unity?

What has worked best for me so far this semester has been 20-40 minutes daily of *bingo games* of three types:

- 1) Number Bingo
- 2) Spelling Bingo ("Quizmo")
- 3) Vocabulary Bingo

The important thing here, of course, is not the game itself as much as the communication activities that go on before, during and after the game. More about that later. First, an explanation of the games and how to use them.

1) NUMBER BINGO--can be bought almost any place games are sold--Usually

marketed as "Bingo."

We sometimes forget that *really* knowing the numbers past 10, when we hear them out of sequence, is a somewhat difficult task. Just try it on yourself in a foreign language you've studied. So this activity is more than just "funzies" for the beginning--and some not-so-beginning--students.

a) Have the students repeat the numbers after you, for pronunciation practice. You can take a few minutes out here and there for quick pronunciation drills on problems such as the "f/th" sounds for Chinese students, with numbers like "53" and "35" when they come up. After all, the game is really a means to an end.

b) Be sure to keep track of the numbers you've called. If some of the class members are having trouble recognizing the numbers on the cards, you might write the numbers on the board for a game or two. When someone says he has bingo, have him read off the numbers to be really sure he's got it (and for further pronunciation practice).

c) The next round, have the winner become the number-caller, if you think he's ready for it. More opportunity for directed pronunciation practice--you're right there to help the student if he stumbles and to repeat and clarify any numbers that the others can't understand.

d) When the class really gets going, you can also have the number-callers give out prizes while you talk about what they're doing. "Who is he giving the prize to?" "Should she give the prize to?" "Why?" "Class, tell him/her to" "(Name of number-caller), ask the class about what you're doing," etc.

2) SPELLING BINGO or LETTER BINGO (marketed as "Quizmo" by Milton Bradley Company.)

This one is more easily directed by the teacher than by students, but there are many ways

to handle it.

a) Name the letters. For a very beginning literacy class, have the alphabet on the wall or blackboard and ask the students to point out the letters in the alphabet before finding them on their cards. This helps the slower students without making them self-conscious. This is great for contrasting letters that beginning students confuse easily, like b/v, i/e, v/w, p/q, b/d, g/j. But after a few rounds of this, it gets pretty old.

b) Ask "What letter makes the sound /b/? The sound /p/?" "What letter can make all these sounds—/o/, /ɔ/, /ə/, /v/, and /ɛ/?" (answer: the letter o, as in home, dog, come, woman, and women.) "What letters together make the sound /tʃ/? (c,h) "What different letters can sound like /dʒ/?" (j,g) etc.

Judy Winn-Bell Olsen has an ESL Certificate and a MA in English from UCLA. She has taught ESL in Los Angeles and is currently at Alemany Community College Education Center in San Francisco, where the games mentioned in the article were developed.

Good for reinforcing the idea that most letters in English stand for more than one sound, and that the same sound can sometimes be represented by different letters.

c) Prompt the class with such questions as "What's the first letter in bus? The second letter? The third letter?"

Good for spelling and review. Hold up a picture: "What's this? What's the first letter in its name?" etc. Also good for teaching "first, second, third, last" etc. in text.

We've used this last game at the Alemany student Christmas parties the past couple of years, with great success. We get one of the advanced classes to make sets of "call-cards" so that we can just run through and call them out without thinking on that rather hectic day.

To have a class help you make the "call-cards": Give each student 26 slips of paper and an envelope. Then ask them to write any word with *a* in it on one slip, underline the *a*

and put it in the envelope. Then write any word with *b* on it on another slip, underline the *b*, put it in the envelope, and so on. Then during the bingo game, you've got *x* number of sets of call-cards that you can just read off: "the second letter in man" "the first letter in beautiful" . . . whatever is on the slips of paper. You can use a different set for each game. On the harder words, the more advanced students playing can help the beginners.

For bingo prizes at the Christmas party, we got donations from the teachers of all their old white elephants, which were wrapped by loving, and frantic hands in the office and put in a large grab bag. Watching the winner of each game choose his prize and unwrap it is part of the whole production.

3) VOCABULARY BINGO: This requires more preparation on the teacher's part, but I think it's well worth it.

a) First, make up a large bingo-grid (25 squares) on a ditto master. (No words, just the squares.) Run off as many copies as you can.

b) Take 25-40 vocabulary items already learned in class that you want the students to review. (I also use high-frequency short phrases, such as "to us", "yes, he does" "no, I'm not", "her book", etc.) Write each word on a separate slip of paper and put it in an envelope—you will choose the slips at random when you "call" the game.

c) Here's the tedious part: Write these words in random order on the grids. (I'd suggest making ten–fifteen more copies than you have students on an average day.) You can do it fastest and most neatly if you type the words as you draw slips from the envelope, occasionally re-shuffling the slips.

d) When calling the words, you can vary the procedure by showing a picture of the object instead of naming it or asking such questions as "Are we playing bingo?" "Does he have a bingo card?" Where the answers ("Yes, we are" "Yes, he does") are the phrase-items they must look for.

If you do this for every new unit or chapter you cover, pretty soon you'll have a

nice bunch of bingo-sets for vocabulary review and for the next time you teach the class. You can make sets to cover special groups of words, like parts of the body, kinds of food, different forms of a verb in a particular tense and the appropriate time-words. . .whatever is important to you.

This last game is also good for more advanced classes, where you can give students an empty grid, dictate the words, which they must write on the grids, in random order, and then begin the actual game.

CAUTION: For any semi-literate students in your class, this last bingo game is much harder than the number-game or spelling-game. *Do* circulate among the students as you call the words, and determine who is having trouble. Show them the slip of paper you have just read and let them compare it with what's on their paper. Talk about what's happening—they'll be talking to each other in their own

language(s). Gently guide them into English. ("Do you have it? Let's see. . .No, you don't have it." or "Yes, you do. You have it. I can see it. Keep looking. . .Do you see it now? That's it. Please read it to me. Good!")

I've really been excited to see how this has sparked some of my older non-readers. They're really trying now, and doing better all the time. They are so proud of themselves when they find a word without help from me or other students.

But, as mentioned earlier, the important part is not the game itself (except maybe in this last case) but the communication that can go on before, during, and after the game. There are lots of "situational reinforcement" possibilities, as well as opportunities for contextualized pronunciation practice. (Prime example: correcting the Cantonese speaker's "fank you" to "thank you" when he is given a

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bingo prize.) Within a limited but meaningful context, the students can be constantly exposed to structures heard in every-day conversation, some of which they would not ordinarily learn in a class until much later.

It's important not to attempt too many new structures or much new vocabulary at once. One or two new "bits" a week, thoroughly practiced, is enough. It's a cumulative thing—you keep repeating old structures as you add new ones. What follows is a list of what we've done so far in my class at Cumberland this semester, roughly in the order we've attempted it:

TEACHER	STUDENTS
(After "Bingo" has been called) Who has Bingo?	(pointing) She does! (or: he does! I do! we do! they do!)
(Giving a small prize to the student—individually wrapped penny candy is good for this.)	
What do we say to her? (him? them?)	Congratulations! (this word in itself is worth a few minutes of drill)
Is this my prize? (his, her, your)	No, it isn't.
Is this his prize? (her, your)	Yes, it is.
Whose prize is this?	It's my prize. (his, her)
Are these my prizes?	No, they aren't.
Are these their prizes?	Yes, they are.
Whose prizes are these?	They're our prizes. (their)
Okay, tell me what to do.	Please give a prize to him. (me, her, them, us) or: Give him a prize.
Okay. (pointing to a different student, not the winner)	
Should I give a prize to him? (her, you, them)	No, you shouldn't.
Why not?	Because he doesn't have Bingo. (she, I they, we, don't)
(finally pointing to the winner or winners) Should I give the prize to her? (him, them, you)	Yes, you should.
Why?	Because she has Bingo. (he, we, I, they have)
(to winner) Would you like a prize?	Yes, I would.

TEACHER

STUDENTS

(giving prize to winner so that both teacher and winner have their hands on the prize)

What am I doing?

You're giving a prize to

What did I do?

You gave a prize to.....

Why did I do it?

Because has Bingo.

Who gave the prize?

You did.

What did I give?

A prize.

Who did I give it to?

To

Where did I give it?

Right here. (in the classroom, etc.)

When did I give it?

Just a minute ago.

(before giving prize)

What am I going to do?

You're going to give a prize to

What isgoing to do?

..... going to get a prize from you.

What isdoing?

..... getting a prize from you.

What diddo?

..... got a prize from you.

What do you have there?

I have a card and some markers.

How many markers do you have? (they, we, he, she, I)

(the "ar" sound is a good one for practice)
I have markers. (You, We, She, He, They)

What's this? What are these?

This is a card and these are markers.

What's that? What are those?

That is a card and those are markers.

What kind of card?

A bingo card.

What kind of markers?

Bingo markers.

After the class acquires five or six structures, you probably won't want to use them all in every game as you add more. Just remember to practice them frequently. And as you get to know your students, you'll be able to direct the more challenging questions to the faster ones and easier questions to the slower ones.

Please don't expect a perfect chorus of answers, like a pattern drill. You're varying structures constantly (as we do in real conversation) and students won't always come back

with the grammatically correct reply the first time. Just keep fishing for it. Also, if your class is like mine, there may be a lot of other chatter going on at the same time. That doesn't mean that the students aren't learning. Many times they are checking with each other on the appropriate response or something else related to the game. Mild pandemonium reigns as students shout out answers, disagree with each other and get generally excited about the game. When that happens, it's fun. Enjoy!