

WORD

by **Greg Larkin**

Almost everyone likes play better than work, and ESL students are no exception. All too often, however, we as teachers are afraid that if we introduce any fun into our classroom we may lose control or not really be teaching anything. On the contrary, few classroom activities hold class interest better or leave a more lasting impression than a well managed game.

Some of the best classroom games for the language teacher are word games, in which the center of interest is language itself. Through an exciting word game students can come to appreciate the workings of language itself rather than seeing it as merely a difficult school subject. With a little imagination, teachers can make up many word games themselves, each of which is based on a different property of language. For instance, an appropriate game can effectively introduce a new grammatical unit. The best word games for the ESL classroom are those ones which focus directly on linguistic points being studied in class. Or a word game can be used midway through the lesson as a combination breather and check on the

students' comprehension. Whenever it is used the word game simply allows the teacher a change of pace that nonetheless continues the lesson.

Here are a few word games that I have used successfully:

ROLE-PLAYING GRAMMAR

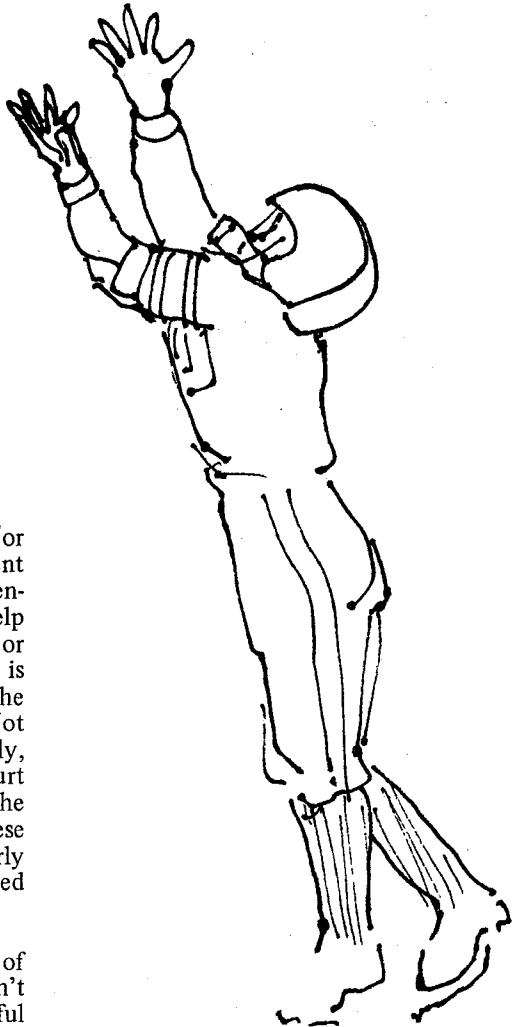
A small group of students is given a situation to act out, such as a boy asking a girl for a date or an employee asking a boss for a raise. The students write their own script; however, each line must contain specified grammatical forms, e.g., future tense, dependent clause, etc., etc.

CROSSWORD PUZZLES

Most students enjoy making or solving crossword puzzles. In the one I assign, all the down words must be one part of speech and all the across words must be another part of speech. Many other variations are possible.

NOUN

PLAY



DISGUISED WORDS OR SENTENCES

Various forms of garbled words and/or sentences are always popular. Each student creates seemingly nonsense words or sentences and then gives linguistic clues to help the other students figure out the word or sentence. For instance "MMAARRG" is "GRAMMAR." The city "Landattle" is the opposite of the city "Seattle," and "Not Julie luckily hurt was" is either "Luckily, Julie was not hurt" or "Julie wasn't hurt luckily," depending on the clue given. If the teacher spends some time creating these disguised words and sentences, many fairly subtle linguistic points can be internalized by the students.

It is easy to see that the number of possible word games is infinite. They can't make a whole lesson or substitute for careful preparation and sound teaching methodology. However, they can relieve the tedium of daily exercise and provide memorable reinforcement for almost any lesson. All it takes is a little imagination and time.