CHALK TALK

THE GAME'S THE THING

Paul Davies
Instituto Anglo Mexicano
Puebla, Pue.

Many teachers today are concerned with the "lack of real communication" in their classrooms. They worry that, although they try to "teach English communicatively", the focus of attention is seldom really taken off the language as a formal system and concentrated on the notions and communicative functions of the language. Role-playing, guided composition, guided discussion, and project work can redress the balance between work done on the language system (structure and usage) and work done on language use in social contexts (communicative functions).

However, a real problem is whether there is adequate attention at all, either on the language system or on communicative functions. The traditional teacher's exhortation "Now pay attention, please!" does not necessarily get attention, and if repeated often (as it frequently is) may have the opposite effect of producing instant slumber.

Games, if handled with clarity, credibility and ethusiasm, can increase the level of attention considerably.

A general knowledge game (handled, perhaps, as a team competition with the score kept on the blackboard) can get high attention for elementary structure practice:

A. Where's Paris?

B. It's in France. Where's Ottawa?

C. It's in the U.S.A.

B. No, it isn't. It's in Canada.

or for patterns of social communication:

A. Excuse me. Could you tell me where the nearest public telephone is?

B. Certainly. It's on the corner of Madero and Juárez.

A. Thank you.

C. Excuse me. Could you tell me where the nearest café is?

D. Certainly. It's on Reforma.

C. Thank you.

E. No, it isn't. It's on Cinco de Mayo.

The pieces that follow are about puzzles and games that can increase attention and make classroom language experience more memorable. The first is by Ronald Ridout, of Britain, a prolific textbook writer, and the second is by Ana Maria Madrazo of the CELE Unit of U.N.A.M. who reviews a popular commercially produced game, JABBERWOCKY.

A well-known reference book on games is Language-teaching Games and Contests by W.R. Lee, published by Oxford University Press. A number of useful articles on games are collected in the Special Issue of "Forum": The Art of TESOL, Part 2, Volume XIII Numbers 3 and 4, 1975.

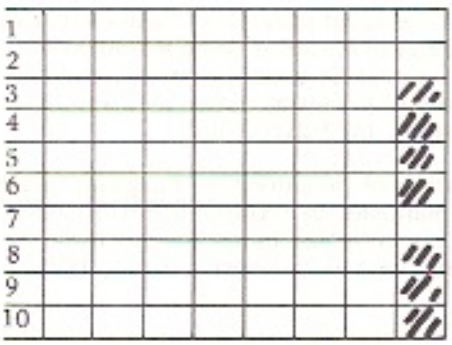
THE USE OF WORD PUZZLES IN TEACHING ENGLISH

Word puzzles have often been used in EFL teaching in the past, but almost invariably as light relief only. I want in this article to make out the case for their use as a serious and indeed powerful instrument for teaching the language.

The student cannot solve the kind of word puzzle I have in mind without first understanding the meaning of the English in which the clues are written. Consequently, if they are carefully devised so that he can in fact solve them, they provide excellent material for encouraging reading for meaning and for bringing the language into general active use.

But I can make my case much clearer with a few actual puzzles. I have taken my first example from Puzzle it Out, Grade 3 (Evans). It concentrates upon the past perfect tense in its more elementary sentence patterns, and is therefore appropriate towards the end of a normal third year course. Here it is:

To solve this puzzle, you have to find the right participle to fill the gap in each sentence. Choose from the list on the right.



1. When I had ---- reading, I turned out the light and went to sleep.
2. We reached Tom's house before he had ---- home.
3. The author had already ---- three novels when this one appeared.
4. We started playing again as soon as the rain had ----.
5. Ann had been ---- half an hour when her friend at last arrived.
6. Though I was late getting to the station the train had not yet ----.
7. He said that he had been ---- English for nearly four years.
8. I had been ---- several minutes before I realized that I had a flat tire.
9. The record player did not start because I had not ---- it in.
10. The officials discovered the plot before the prisoners had ----.

What, then, does the puzzle achieve? First of all, the desire to solve the puzzle gives the student a purpose for understanding the reading matter; it generates motivation. And I suggest that this motivation for practicing the language is a fairly strong one, compared, that is, with other means of generating motivation in a classroom situation. It is, after all, using language for a perfectly natural purpose-solving puzzles. Secondly, the student is given special practice with a particular structure or sentence pattern. He is given it with all the concentration of a language drill, but without any of the artificiality of a drill exercise. Thirdly, because the

whole idea behind the puzzle is to make the learner search for an answer, it provides a good deal of repetition, a good deal of going back over the clues, but in a way that is relatively free from the boredom of most repetitive language practice. Fourthly, it directs attention to the meeting and use of certain words and thus provides practice in vocabulary building as well as in reading, the two in any case being inextricably linked. Finally, the way the puzzle is devised and presented oils the whole learning process, since it is very largely self-solving and therefore self-teaching. The student is not only challenged to solve it; he is given the means of solving it. If the puzzle has been chosen to suit the level of the student's progress, he is in the end and with the help of his dictionary almost certain to be able to solve the puzzle. And in doing so, as he has been obliged to work with an alert mind, he can hardly fail to gain some insight into the language and vocabulary he has been handling and so strengthen, however little, his command of English.

My second puzzle, which comes from Puzzle it Out, Grade 1,[1] has two purposes. It shows first how the type of puzzle can be varied, and secondly how it can be adapted to a first year beginner's level. It is different in as much as the clues are this time the more traditional definitions and the emphasis is more on spelling and pronunciation. To enumerate, the puzzle is useful in four distinct ways, each of which, it seems to me, is important enough to transform a mere game into an effective teaching instrument.

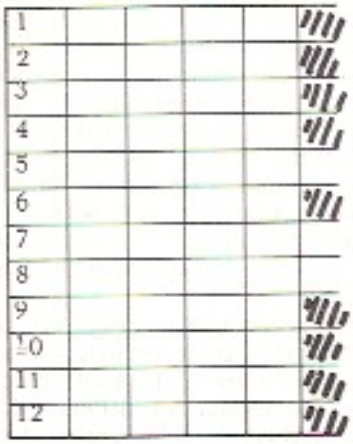
First, it clarifies three points of pronunciation based on the vowel sound common to each of the three groups of words. So, secondly, it establishes spelling patterns linked to pronunciation. Thirdly, the meaning of the 12 words is varified by their being brought into active use through the clues. Finally, the reading and use of English is practiced with in the limits appropriate to first year students, since the clues are controlled by the structures and vocabulary of a normal first year zero course.

As before, the student will be able to accept the challenge to solve the puzzle and will be likely to stay with it until he succeeds, largely because all the material he needs for its solution is available in the puzzle design itself, although a dictionary might also be helpful. This is the puzzle:

Can you solve this puzzle with these words?

brain	nail	weak	coat
rain	sail	meal	road
train	tail	clean	soap

[1] Ronald Ridout, Puzzle it Out, Grade 1 (London: Evans Bros., 1975)



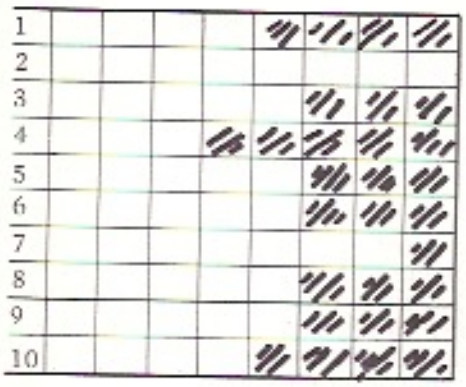
1. You wash with this.
2. Cars go along this.
3. This falls from the clouds.
4. You wear this.
5. You think with this.
6. Not strong.
7. This runs on rails.
8. Not dirty.
9. You eat this.
10. An animal has one.
11. Ships do this.
12. You hit this with a hammer.

I have chosen my other example to show the kind of twist that puzzles can be given at a more advanced level. It comes from Puzzle it Out, Grade 5 and has been designed for the direct purpose of teaching idiom. It is still a word puzzle since we are still searching for words, but there is little vocabulary building as the words are entirely subordinated to the idioms.

The puzzle motivation, however, remains high; there is still a good deal of reading for meaning to be done; it is still selfsolving; it still produces insight into the language. Its main teaching purpose is,of course, to clinch the meaning and use of certain idioms that have been met previously but have not in all probability been mastered completely. It is made fully selfteaching by means of a word list and by means of a sample paraphrase of the sentence in which the idiom is used.

Here is the puzzle:

The clues explain the meaning of certain idiomatic expressions. If you find each missing word, the second column down will give you the title of a reader in Grade 4 of Evans Graded Reading. Choose your words from the list, which contains more than are needed.



ideas	noise
mouth	angry
well	still
skillful	capable
arm	eye
listened	cross
quiet	edge
sound	away

			Is the same as:
1.	Ann was on ---- having to wait.	=	She was tense and irritable having to wait.
2.	John was all ears.	=	He ---- very carefully.
3.	I have picked David's brains.	=	I have used his ---- .
4.	Mrs. Taylor kept an ---- on the child.	=	She saw that no harm came to him.
5.	Mr. Smith looked down in the ----.	=	He seemed in low spirits
6.	Rachel held her tongue.	=	She kept ----.
7.	Mr. Jay's hand has lost its cunning.	=	He has become less ----.
8.	It made my blood boil.	=	It made me very ----.
9.	He has a very keen ear.	=	He can pick up the slightest ----.
10.	Michael took to his heels.	=	He ran ----.

As I said at the beginning of the article, the puzzles need to be carefully devised. To be really effective, they need to be closely integrated with the whole language course, for it is clear that the student can handle them successfully only when he is in possession of the resources for their solution. The language, as in all early reading practice, must therefore be structurally within the limits of what he has covered in his course and, except for a few that are so basic that they can be taken for granted, all the words required must be available somewhere on the page, since the EFL learner cannot draw them out of a non-existent cultural memory.

Then, too, they , must be straightforward. Any playing with words, however simple for the native learner, will puzzle the EFL learner in exactly the wrong way. For him, the puzzle must always be to find meaning within normal usage, especially during the first few years. That is why the traditional crossword puzzle is not an adequate substitute here. It is not an effective teaching instrument. The need to make the words fit together both across and down inevitably forces the compiler to introduce material that is inappropriate to good EFL teaching. Artificiality and distraction creep in and there is, as a result, a diminution of learning.

But given this straightforwardness, given a presentation whereby the student is enabled to help himself to solve the puzzle successfully, given the appropriate control of structures and vocabulary so that the student is always working within the limits of what he has covered in his general language course, then these word puzzles will justify more than a casual place in the language program. They can be used at regular intervals, slotted in to reinforce particular sections of work, or they can be taken home as a rather different and more active kind of private reading. There is, incidentally, a notable further advantage to this kind of reading: it does not involve the time-consuming and often boring business of testing for comprehension. The puzzle is its own test of comprehension; nothing further is required by even the most fastidious quantifier of language learning progress'.

Ronald Ridout
Haslemere, Surrey, U.K.

"JABBERWOCKY"[1]

"What's Jabberwocky?" It is a large, red box full of cards, cards containing little words like prepositions, articles, and particles like yes, no; there are suffixes like -ed, -ied, -er, -ing, -ish, -ly, -ily etc., and what's more there are punctuation marks like commas, interrogations, apostrophes, and stars.

"Jabberwocky" is quite a fascinating game and has not only the advantage of entertaining, no mean feat in itself, but helps the students in word formation and in finding the order of words in an English sentence. This it does without reference to grammatical terminology or rules. It also helps the students, in a relaxed way, to work and advance with structures he found problematic before, and gives the teacher clues, through the student's mistakes in the game, to problem areas.

[1]"Jabberwocky: A Language Game," designed by Alan Wakeman (London: Longman's)

These possibilities are clearly explained in the "Notes to the Teacher" under the different names of the individual games, "Tinker," "Palover," "As it were, ..." "Jabberwocky" is recommended as a likely game for the EFL classroom to teach and to entertain at the same time.

Ana María Madrazo
CELE, Universidad Nacional
Autónoma de México
Mexico City