Introduction

The aims of this book: a summary
1 To provide a wide range of games.
2 To give examples which are suitable for all levels of proficiency, but with an emphasis on beginners to intermediate.
3 To minimise competition and maximise challenge, creation, play.
4 To minimise exposure to failure and maximise success for all learners.
5 To give examples of texts which are ready to use.
6 To help the teacher to use, adapt or invent games.

Who is the book for?

This collection of language games is mainly for learners from beginner to intermediate level, although many of the games can be adapted for use with advanced proficiency learners as well. The examples that are given are for learners of secondary school age and above, although teachers of younger children will be able to adapt many of the examples. We have tried to make the book of particular relevance to beginner teachers who would like to have a handbook of a wide selection of games. We also hope that more experienced teachers will find that the range of games (and variations of games) makes this a useful collection, which might inspire them to adapt or create games of their own.

What is a game?

For the purpose of all three editions of this book we have taken the word 'game' to mean an activity which is entertaining and engaging, often challenging, and an activity in which the learners play and usually interact with others. A testing question might be: 'Would the learners be happy to do this activity in their own language?' We would like all our games to pass this test. Competition against others is not an essential ingredient of games, but challenge often is. In selecting and describing our games we have tried to minimise competition, with winners and losers, and to maximise challenge, where everyone feels inspired to 'have a go' and do their best. Competition may be stimulating for some, but it can also be destructive, making players

1

Games for Language Learning

anxious, with losers categorising themselves as 'no good' and the winners categorising themselves as 'very good'. Neither of these things may be true, and neither helps learning.

Why games?

Language learning is hard work
Language learning is hard work. One must make an effort to understand, to repeat accurately, to adapt and to use newly understood language in conversation and in written composition. Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over a long period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.

Experiencing language
Games also help the teacher to create contexts in which the language is useful and meaningful. The learners want to take part, and in order to do so must understand what others are saying or have written, and they must speak or write in order to express their own point of view or give information. Games provide one way of helping the learners to *experience* language rather than merely *study* it.

Repeated use of language items
Many games cause as much use of particular language items as more conventional drill exercises; some games do not. What matters, however, is the quality of practice.

   The contribution of drill exercises lies in the concentration on a language form and its frequent occurrence during a limited period of time. Many games similarly provide repeated occurrence and use of a particular language form. By making language convey information and opinion, games provide the key features of 'drill' with the added opportunity to sense the working of language as living communication. Games involve the emotions, and the meaning of the language is thus more vividly experienced. It is, for this reason, probably better absorbed than learning based on mechanical drills.

Central to learning
If it is accepted that games can provide intense and meaningful practice of language, then they must be regarded as *central* to a language teacher's repertoire and not merely a way of passing the time.

2

Class, individual, pair, and group work

Opportunity for every learner to use the language
Of the four types of grouping, individual, pair, and group work are of
especial value in ensuring that each and every learner has optimum
opportunity for oral practice in using language, going beyond what is
possible in class work.

Pair work
Pair work is easy and fast to organise. It provides opportunities for intensive
listening and speaking practice. Pair work is usually better than group work
if there are discipline problems.

Group work
Some games *require* four to six players; in these cases group work is
essential. If there is to be competition between groups, they should be of
mixed ability. If there is to be no such challenge, the teacher might choose
groups according to ability: this is very much a personal choice. Many
teachers consider it advisable to have a group leader. However, it is our
experience that groups can operate perfectly well without a group leader.
The leader would normally be one of the more able learners. However, there
is much to be said for encouraging a reticent learner by giving the
responsibility to him or her. The leader's role is to ensure that the game is
properly organised, and to act as an intermediary between learners and
teacher.

What about mistakes?
The greatest 'mistake' (if oral ability is an aim) is for the learner not to speak
at all! Thus, although some mistakes of grammar or pronunciation or idiom
may be made in pair or group work, the price is worth paying. If the learners
are clear about what they have to do and the language is not beyond them,
there need be few mistakes.

The teacher's role
The teacher's role, once the groups or pairs are in action, is to go from group
to group listening in, contributing and, *if necessary*, correcting.
   If you have not organised group work before, then it is advisable to work
slowly towards it. First of all, make the learners familiar with work in pairs.
Add to this games in which rows of learners (if that is how they are seated)

3

Games for Language Learning

play against you or between themselves. Finally, after perhaps several weeks, ask the rows of learners to group themselves together to play a game between themselves.

To minimise difficulties, it is essential that the learners are very familiar with the games they are asked to play. (It is helpful if they are familiar with the game in their own language.)

Once the learners are familiar with group work, new games are normally introduced in the following way:

1 explanation by the teacher to the class
2 demonstration of parts of the game by the teacher and one or two learners
3 trial by a group in front of the class
4 any key language and/or instructions written on the board
5 first 'try out' of the game, by groups
6 key language, etc., removed from the board
7 the game continues.

Types of game

Being aware of the essential character of a type of game (see below) and the way in which it engages the learner can be helpful in the adaptation of games or the creation of new games.

The games in this edition of the book are grouped according to their family type within each of the eight sections. The family name is always a verb. This verb summarises the most important way in which the learners are engaged in the game, for example, IDENTIFY or CREATE. In every case this verb refers to the mental engagement on the part of the learners. The use of language arises out of the way the learner is engaged.

CARE AND SHARE
'Caring and sharing' games include all those games in which the learner feels comfortable while sharing personal information with other learners. These games relate more to invitation than to challenge. The striving implied by challenge is incompatible with the notion of 'caring and sharing'. The origin of this established phrase is the title of the classic book written by Gertrude Moskowitz, *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class* (Newbury House 1978).

See games 1.1–1.12.

DO: *MOVE, MIME, DRAW, OBEY*

The learner is expected to do something non-verbally in response to a read or a heard text.

See, for example, games 3.1, 5.1, 7.1.

IDENTIFY: *DISCRIMINATE, GUESS, SPECULATE*

The learner is challenged to identify something which is difficult to identify or to hypothesise about something which is then compared with the facts.

See, for example, games 2.1, 5.2, 7.4.

DESCRIBE

The learner is challenged to describe something to another learner, by speaking or writing, so well that the other learner can do something, for example, draw a picture. The learner may describe something objectively or subjectively, communicating his or her own feelings and associations.

See, for example, games 2.3, 4.2, 7.15.

CONNECT: *COMPARE, MATCH, GROUP*

The learner is challenged to connect, compare, match or group various items of information, perhaps pictures or texts, objectively or subjectively. He or she uses language to describe or comment on the pairs or groups of information.

See, for example, games 3.6, 6.7, 7.16.

ORDER

The learner is challenged to put various bits of information into an order of quality and importance, subjectively or objectively, or to put texts, pictures, objects, into a developmental sequence, also subjectively or objectively.

See, for example, games 5.6, 6.10, 7.18.

REMEMBER

The learner tries to remember something and then communicate what he or she has remembered.

See, for example, games 5.8, 6.11, 7.21.

CREATE

The learner is challenged or invited to make a story, write a poem or produce some other kind of material using their imagination. Here the distinction between 'challenged' and 'invited' is worth making. 'Challenged' might

5

Games for Language Learning

include those story-making starters in which you stipulate certain features: for example, you stipulate that a certain tense form must occur very often, or that the story must be exactly 50 words long. 'Invited', because sometimes the best way to stir the creative forces is to 'invite', 'encourage', 'show interest', and so on.

See, for example, games 3.9, 4.3, 7.22.

Learning styles

For some years now the idea that we all have different emphases in the way we perceive and learn has become part of every teacher's life. Learning styles are not considered to be exclusive. For example, the same person may sometimes want to be analytical and at other times may want to be creative. However, each person will probably have preferences. In any one class there can be many different preferences. The teacher is like a gardener responsible for many different types of plant, some requiring a lot of sunshine and others shade, some requiring pruning and others to be left alone. You can treat all your plants in the same way and watch some die while others flourish, or you can try to offer a range of different approaches and give succour to each and all of them. We have attempted to help you to do this by providing games involving a wide variety of learning styles, from 'visual' to 'dramatic'.

Visual
Some people respond best of all to information which is seen: pictures, writing, diagrams, etc. Note also: colour, size, design, etc. *'I see what you mean.'*

See, for example, games 2.1, 6.4, 6.6, 7.14.

Auditory
Other people might respond to information which is heard: dialogues, songs, rhythm, etc. *'I hear what you are saying.'*

See, for example, games 2.13, 3.3, 7.7, 7.25.

Kinaesthetic
Others might need to move and to touch in order to learn efficiently. *'I've put it together, at last.'*

See, for example, games 1.1, 5.1, 5.8, 6.1, 6.9.

6

Creative

Some people need to use the language creatively even from the beginning. *'Let's have a go.'*

See, for example, games 2.5, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11.

Analytical

Some people like to analyse language forms, looking for rules. Having understood the 'bricks' of the language then they might feel able, tentatively, to use them. *'Let's stop messing about and get down to the basic rules.'*

See, for example, games 2.4, 2.6, 3.7, 3.8, 7.18.

Cooperative

Some people like to work with others. *'It's really good fun to work with other people.'*

See, for example, games 1.2, 4.3, 4.12, 4.13.

Individual

Some people prefer to work by themselves. *'I like to be left alone to get on with it.'*

See, for example, games 2.12, 3.7, 3.9, 8.9.

Serious

Some people can concentrate better if the approach is serious. *'I don't want to mess about, but get down to the real business of learning.'*

See, for example, games 1.9, 5.4, 6.12, 6.14.

Amusing

Some people concentrate better if there is an element of humour and lightness in the experience. *'I like a good laugh.'* *'Don't take it all so seriously.'*

See, for example, games 4.7, 4.8, 7.2, 7.11, 7.24.

Dramatic

Some people experience and absorb language associated with drama and story telling. *'I love a good story.'*

See, for example, games 3.2, 4.4, 4.13, 8.17.

Games for Language Learning

Real

Some people prefer to deal with real examples from everyday experience.
'*I want to prepare for the real world.*'
  See, for example, games 1.4, 2.8, 4.10, 6.13, 7.9.

Practicalities of organising games

Teachers experienced in using games in their teaching report the following, for which we are very grateful:

General ideas on using games

'*Don't think that the use of the word "game" is a guaranteed way of motivating the students. They are too sceptical. It must be a genuinely engaging activity.*'
'*Don't tell the learners that they are going to play a game because they may not accept that some of them are games and they may protest and be distracted from a positive attitude to what should be a pleasurable experience.*'

The importance of making the game clear

'*Find a way of demonstrating the game as well as explaining it, perhaps demonstrating it with the class as a whole or with selected students so that everybody can get the gist of it. It is essential that all the students know what to do before you let them go into pair or group work.*'
'*It is particularly important to make sure everyone understands what to do when the game is quite complicated!*'
'*Once the game starts it is difficult to help, so try putting helpful phrases on the board or on an A2 poster.*'
'*Avoid games which need a long introduction and explanation. The students will just turn off.*'

Mistakes

'*Of course, they may make mistakes when you are not there to correct them. But the biggest mistake is not to speak at all, so group work and pair work are essential.*'
'*Normally, don't interrupt a game in order to correct a mistake, but comment on it afterwards or just make a note for yourself to do more practice of that point at a future time.*'

8

'It is not the right time to correct mistakes of language during the game if that impedes the involvement of the students and the flow of the game. Correct mistakes later or, better, do activities which practise correct forms, later.'

Pair work and group work

'Pair work is easier to organise and control than group work.'
'If there is competition between groups then make sure that each group represents mixed ability.'

Determining the composition of pairs and groups

'People naturally choose to work with people they know well, but sometimes you might prefer them to be open to new working relationships. Ask the learners to stand in a line and then to go through the alphabet with A the first person, B the second, and so on. If you want to have five groups then the learners call out from A to E and then begin again at A. When this is completed you point to one part of the room and say, "All As over there. All Bs over here. All Cs, etc." In this way random groupings can be made quickly.'
'Think about group dynamics. Sometimes adding or removing one or two individuals from a group makes that group so much more productive.'

Success … and particularly how to avoid failure

'The problem with some games is that they tend to make one person the winner and the rest losers. What we need in the classroom is for everybody to experience success as much as possible. Look for games or ways of playing games which allow for that.'
'Maximise ways of making every student experience success, for example, fewer games based on individuals playing against each other, and more based on team work.'
'Find the right level of game for the learners. This makes all the difference between success and failure.'

Justify the use of games

'When necessary, be prepared to justify the use of games to the students in terms of their efficiency: the frequency with which the language point occurs, meaningful use of the language, successful consequence if the language is used appropriately, memorability.'

Games for Language Learning

Discipline

'Discipline is important but cannot be established by shouting, which, in any case, ruins the whole spirit created by enjoyable games. Here are some approaches which help discipline:
– *Establish a set of agreed general class rules at the beginning of the year. Write these discussed and agreed rules on a poster and keep it on the classroom wall.*
– *If you need to stop the class, use the technique of raising your hand rather than trying to shout over the hubbub of a game in progress. The raised hand spreads peace and the shout raises tensions.*
– *Make the procedure for playing the game very clear to ALL the students.*
– *Be seen to be very fair to everyone.'*

How to use this book

Level: In the grey panel at the head of each game we give the language point focussed on by the game and you are the best judge of which class and level of learner to use the game with.

Time: Most games in the book are likely to last from 10 to 20 minutes, but different classes and teachers need different amounts of time.

Material required: This important ingredient is included for each game under the heading **Preparation**.

Index

If you have a particular language point or function in mind, look in the Index to see which games focus on it.