



# READY? KADIMA<sup>1</sup>!

## THE USE OF GAMES IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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### Abstract

The use of games in the language classroom can create a multimodal environment, where students are encouraged to engage in different learning experiences, including visual, auditory and verbal interactions. This paper investigates the advantages of incorporating games into language classes to cultivate proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The paper highlights two games, Bingo and Trivia, which can be adapted in various ways to facilitate language teaching and practice.

### Keywords

Multiliteracies; Language Acquisition; Creative Thinking; Problem Solving; Risk Taking

### Learning through Play

Learning another language, for most college students, is an intentional and thoughtful process. It can also be quite challenging, especially when a student's valid goal is to reach a certain level of proficiency. The *multiliteracies framework*<sup>2</sup> explains that in today's world meaning is constructed in ways that are increasingly multimodal (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015). One example from the language classroom is when students play a game, and in the process make use of different learning experiences, such as visual, auditory and verbal.

A game is an activity, or a set of activities designed to entertain or engage individuals or groups of people. Games usually involve one or more players who participate in an interactive and competitive or cooperative environment, with a set of rules and objectives that determine the outcome of the game (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). Games can take many forms, such as board games, video games, card games, puzzles, role-playing games, etc. They can be played for fun, for educational purposes, or as a means of socializing (Moriarty and Kay, 2019). Games often require the players to use their skills, knowledge, and creativity to achieve a goal or solve a problem, making them a popular tool for learning in various fields of study.

In line with the guidelines established by the *American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages* (ACTFL), the use of games in language learning can effectively address the "5-Cs": communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities (ACTFL, 2011). Incorporating games in language learning can equip students with the necessary skills to apply their knowledge in new ways. By integrating game-based activities in language classes, students can enhance their analytical abilities, which ultimately leads to the development of higher proficiency levels, as defined by ACTFL's proficiency guidelines (ACTFL, 2012).

A pedagogical approach that involves games in language teaching can be beneficial for the development of additional skills, for instance: problem solving, risk taking and creative thinking (Emerson et al., 2020). Simultaneously, it promotes more language use and production, enabling students to exercise the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Many times, this can be achieved during a game without students even realizing they are practicing the language while playing (Ermawa and Trianasari, 2019).

An important aspect of a good game is its originality and character, because it provides depth and richness to a player's experience (Moriarty and Kay, 2019; Figueroa Flores, 2015). A well-designed game should leave the students with the ability to discuss and evaluate the overall happening. Instructors can ask questions such as,

<sup>1</sup> Kadima = "Move forward" or "Let's go" in Modern Hebrew

<sup>2</sup> The "multiliteracies framework", also known as the "pedagogy of multiliteracies", is a term that was introduced by the New London Group in 1996. It refers to an educational approach that sees the development of literacy skills as connected to the various uses of language, in different sociocultural contexts (Paesani et al., 2016).

“Was the game challenging enough?” “Was it too hard?”, “Was it too easy?” to gather feedback and make adjustments.

This evaluation process helps the instructor to better understand the needs and preferences of their students. For instance, if students find the game too easy, instructors can increase the level of difficulty or introduce new challenges. On the other hand, if the game is too difficult, instructors can simplify the rules or provide additional support to help students overcome the challenges (Figueroa Flores, 2015). Through encouraging students to evaluate the game, instructors can promote critical thinking skills, and help students develop a sense of ownership over their learning.

I would like to address two games that can be modified in multiple ways for language teaching and practice: Bingo and Trivia. These games are perhaps the most long-standing activities in many second language classrooms, for the purposes of practicing numbers, vocabulary, verb forms and more (Colgan, 1988; Crawford, 2002).

In the Modern Hebrew courses I teach, I often use bingo games for exercising verb conjugations, and for retaining new vocabulary. Similarly, I use trivia-style questions to practice new words and phrases and “test” students’ general knowledge on various topics. I find that the competitive atmosphere of the game raises students’ motivation and participation levels, improves their focus and helps them interact more in the target language.

### **Bingo Games**

One popular game that is often used in language classes is Bingo. A traditional bingo game is a game of chance, played with randomly drawn letters and numbers, which players match against a pre-printed 5x5 board. The goal of the game is to be the first player to complete a specific pattern on their card, such as a straight line horizontally, vertically, or diagonally (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020).

In the language classroom the instructor can facilitate a “traditional” bingo for the sake of practicing letters and numbers, a “vocabulary” bingo by matching words with pictures, a “verb form” bingo by requiring students to conjugate verbs correctly, and so on and so on. As a matter of fact, nearly any kind of linguistic structure can be practiced using this approach to bingo. According to Colgan (1988), bingo games have become widely used among language instructors because of their “recyclable” nature.

When played as a “vocabulary” or “verb form” game, bingo has the advantages of creating a context which helps students focus on the task at hand. It makes for a game that is both interesting and challenging (Ermawa and Trianasari, 2019). The activity captures the attention of the students, especially because it features an element of surprise, since the bingo game is not played in the “traditional” way. This leaves more space for creativity and experiment and contributes to a positive learning environment.

For example, I often play a “verb form” bingo game with my students in my Elementary and Intermediate Modern Hebrew courses (see images 1 and 2 for an example). I set up the bingo board in such a way that showcases questions that the students need to ask each other, in order to complete their board and win the game. Each game varies in topic and difficulty level, however, what they have in common is that the students must ask and answer each question correctly to be able to understand, and be understood, by their classmates.

As students scour the room in search of classmates who can answer their questions and bring them closer to completing their bingo board, they are consistently using the target language and making modifications as needed. Even though they are in pursuit of the win, they keep using the target language in a meaningful context. Therefore, this activity goes a step further by teaching students how to communicate effectively. The students are not simply memorizing vocabulary or phrases for the sake of the game, but rather are developing their ability to express themselves and to comprehend the responses of others. In this way, the game becomes a practical application of the language skills they are learning.

The game concludes when there is one declared winner, and perhaps another one or two runner ups. At this point, it is a good idea for the instructor to summarize the game by reading each question out loud and repeating the correct sentence structures and verb conjugations back to the students. By doing that the instructor can ensure that students hear the correct pronunciation and intonation of the target language. This can help reinforce the students’ listening skills, which are an important part of language learning. Additionally, the instructor can solidify the grammar rules and structures that were used during the game.

_____ את/ה (ללמוד) עברית בשנה שעברה?	_____ את/ה (לשיר) עם חברים/ות השבוע?	_____ את/ה (לקרוא) הרבה ספרים בסוף השבוע?	_____ את/ה (לגור) בקליפורניה בעבר?
_____ את/ה (לקנות) מילים חדשות במחברת?	_____ את/ה (לשמוע) מוזיקה אתמול בערב?	_____ את/ה (להיות) בספרייה אתמול אחרי הצהריים?	_____ את/ה (לרוץ) בפארק בשבוע שעבר?
_____ את/ה (לאכול) במסעדה לפני שבוע?	_____ את/ה (לטוס) לארץ אחרת בקיץ שעבר?		

**Image 1:** An example of a “Bingo Board” designed for Elementary Modern Hebrew students. The questions are phrased in a way that students need to conjugate each of the verbs in parentheses in the PAST tense, while also taking into account pronoun and gender match

_____ Did you (to learn) Hebrew last year?	_____ Did you (to sing) with friends this week?	_____ Did you (to live) in California in the past?
_____ Did you (to listen) to music last night?	_____ Did you (to read) many books this weekend?	
_____ Did you (to write) new words in a notebook?	_____ Were you in the library yesterday afternoon?	_____ Did you (to run) in the park last week?
_____ Did you (to eat) in a restaurant last week?	_____ Did you (to fly) to a new country last summer?	

**Image 2:** The same Bingo Board from “image 1” translated into English

### Trivia Games

Another popular game that is often used in language classes is Trivia. A traditional trivia game, also referred to as a quiz, is a type of game in which players are asked questions on various topics, with the goal of answering as many questions correctly as possible. The questions can cover a wide range of subjects, including history, geography, pop culture, sports, and science, among others (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2021).

In a trivia game, players typically compete against each other or work in teams to answer the proposed questions. The questions can be in the form of multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, true-or-false, a short written or spoken answer, etc. The game may be timed, with points awarded for each correct answer, and a winner or winning team declared at the end of the game. Trivia games are often used in educational settings, including language classrooms, to help students develop their knowledge of a subject or language. Nowadays, trivia games can be played in various formats, including online (in-person or remotely).

Crawford (2002) explains that trivia games are ideal tools for teaching conversation. Firstly, since questions are a type of grammatical structure that arises naturally in conversation, the novelty of the trivia style question has the potential to excite and interest the students. Secondly, because much of the speaking practice that happens in conversation classes, especially at the Elementary and Intermediate level, is focused on getting the students to talk about themselves (for instance, their studies, their friends and families, their likes and dislikes, etc.), changing it up to a trivia game, that still introduces the same linguistic structures, can liven up the discussion.

Thirdly, a trivia-based activity can bring about a wide range of topics into the language classroom, which can lead to a free conversation that is more in line with students' real-life day-to-day experiences outside of the classroom.

A significant advantage of the trivia game is that it helps students focus on the meaning of the language being used. When the trivia activities are designed carefully, learners may become so engaged in the activity that they forget they are even in a language class. This level of engagement can lead to better language use, since students will be trying hard to understand the trivia questions and provide the correct answers. In addition, if they are assigned to work with a partner or as a group, they will often develop a greater sense of responsibility and will assist each other in order to succeed (Colgan, 1988).

Another benefit of the trivia game is that it can encourage students to take risks. For example, students who lack confidence in their language ability may still have a great deal of confidence in their knowledge of world history, sports, or music. By mixing trivia questions related to various topics into language learning activities, students may be more willing to take risks in answering questions, even if it means using the target language to provide very simple answers. This increased willingness to take risks can help students build confidence in their ability to communicate in the target language (Crawford, 2002).

For example, I often play a "who knows?" trivia game with my students in my Elementary and Intermediate Modern Hebrew courses (see images 3 and 4 for an example). I find it to be an effective way to introduce new topics or vocabulary, and to practice previously learned material. It is another great way to generate interest and engagement from students. This approach can be particularly useful when introducing more complex or difficult topics, as the trivia questions can help break down the material into smaller, more manageable pieces. When I ask students to work in pairs or in groups, I witness how they challenge each other and help each other understand the material.

By using "who knows?" questions, "true-or-false" statements, "guess who?", and other similar trivia-based questions, I keep the learning experience fresh for the students. Many times, in search for the answer to a trivia question students need to look up an unfamiliar word or a phrase and end up adding that word and/or phrase to their growing vocabulary. They also gain knowledge in specific areas of study, some known and some unknown, and broaden their horizons on current issues. All of this, in turn, builds up their confidence in their language abilities, with the purpose of leading them towards extensive language production.



### חידון - מי יודע? מי יודעת?

- (1) באיזו מדינה נמצא בית הספר הגדול ביותר בעולם?
- (2) איזו מדינה בעולם משקיעה הכי הרבה כספים במערכת החינוך?
- (3) באיזו מדינה תלמידים מקדישים הכי הרבה שעות לשיעורי הבית?
- (4) באיזו מדינה סריגה היא חלק מתוכנית הלימודים בבתי הספר?
- (5) איזו מדינה בעולם משלמת את השכר הגבוה ביותר למורים/ות?

**Image 3:** An example of a "Who Knows?" trivia quiz designed for Intermediate Modern Hebrew students. The questions are related to a course unit that deals with learning and education. The questions make use of the unit's vocabulary and provide students with an opportunity to learn about and research topics related to education worldwide. The trivia quiz can be assigned to complete in pairs or groups, it can also be limited in time and scored to add to the competitive atmosphere.

### Trivia Quiz - Who Knows?



- (1) In what country is the largest school in the world located?
- (2) What country allocates the most money to the education system?
- (3) In which country students spend the most time on homework?
- (4) In which country knitting is part of the school curriculum?
- (5) What country in the world pays the highest salary for teachers?

**Image 4:** The same Trivia Quiz from "image 3" translated into English.

## Feedback from Students

The students themselves often see the value of using games in the language classroom. When repeatedly asked in surveys at the end of each semester about the use of games in our courses, almost unanimously, students mention what a fun and engaging way it is to learn and practice their language skills through play. They attest to the fact that games help them develop their communication skills by providing opportunities to interact and communicate with their classmates while using the target language. Through playing games, they also improve their pronunciation by using words and phrases in a natural and relaxed setting.

Students note that the games we play in pairs or in groups help promote teamwork and collaboration. Games that are designed to be played with their peers, encourages them to work together and communicate with one another in order to achieve a common goal. This goes a long way into developing their social skills and learning how to work effectively with others.

Students mention that they are more inclined to learn new vocabulary and grammar structures in an enjoyable way. Therefore, by incorporating games into language lessons, instructors can create a more engaging and interactive way to learn new language concepts. As mentioned above, in the courses I teach, games are also used to reinforce previously learned material and help students review and practice what they have already learned.

Another advantage of using games in the language classroom that students pointed at is how it aids them in reducing anxiety and fear of making mistakes. Learning a new language can be a daunting task for many students, and the fear of making mistakes can sometimes hinder their progress. However, by using games, students feel more relaxed and comfortable as they practice and use the target language. This helps boost their confidence and encourages them to take more risks when communicating in the target language.

Using games as a tool for language acquisition, such as through adaptations of popular games like bingo and trivia, can offer numerous benefits for students. Not only can they help students improve their communication and pronunciation skills, but they also foster teamwork and collaboration. Furthermore, games promote the development of essential skills such as problem solving, risk taking, and creative thinking. By encouraging students to reflect on their experiences after playing a game, they develop a sense of ownership over their learning, which can have positive impacts on their future education. Overall, incorporating games into language learning can create an engaging, interactive, and effective learning environment for students.

## WORKS CITATION

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