

Bingo!

James Porcaro suggests some new guises for an old game.

'**Bingo!**' is a cry that has been heard in some form for nearly 500 years! The game is believed to have begun in Italy as a lottery and spread throughout Europe over the centuries. It was refined in the USA in the 1930s and became popular all over that country as well. The seemingly universally-known game is generally played on cards with a set of 5 x 5 squares with numbers in them. Numbers are randomly selected on balls and read out by a caller while players mark their cards if the numbers appear on them. When a player has marked five numbers in a row, column or diagonal on their card, they shout '*Bingo!*' and win a prize.

This relatively passive numbers game can be easily transformed into a fun, engaging and interactive English learning activity, using words rather than numbers. This form of *Bingo* can be developed in many creative and interesting ways for effective language learning, involving vocabulary, grammar, spelling, pronunciation or any other language items. All four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing may be integrated into the game.

While it is perhaps most appropriate for young learners, I have also used it with great success in suitable forms with both college and adult classes.

Word categories

Parts of the body

For young learners, playing *Bingo* with vocabulary categories, such as parts of the body, clothing, food, occupations, places, etc, is a very effective learning device. I sometimes find it more convenient to use cards with 4 x 4 grids, as the 5 x 5

grids, requiring 25 items, can be too cumbersome and lengthy for particular lessons. The following procedure could be used in a lesson on parts of the body for young children learning English at an early reading stage. It may serve as a general model for playing *Bingo* with words. Each child will need one *Bingo* grid.

For the core of the lesson on this topic, the teacher and children can have lots of fun with many different activities using physical responses with their own bodies, music and picture cards showing parts of the body labelled with words. These cards then can be used to play *Bingo* as reinforcement for learning the words, their spelling and their pronunciation.

In a preliminary exercise, the teacher holds up a card and says to the children, '*Show me your (arm).*' The teacher may also elicit fixed responses, such as '*This is my (arm)*' (with the children pointing). As each card is shown, the children copy the word down in any one of the squares they choose on their grid. In this way, one by one, the squares of the grid are filled during the exercise. Each child will then have set up their own grid, with the words placed differently in the squares from the other children's grids. Now, they are ready to play *Bingo*.

The teacher holds up the picture cards again one by one, covering the word on each so that only the picture is visible. This again can be interactive with the children either simply calling out what it is (eg *arm*) or using a simple structure, such as '*That's an (arm)*'. They locate the word on their cards and mark it. (Using coloured felt pens for the writing and marking is popular with many children.) This procedure involves, at the very least, whole-word reading. If any children have difficulty identifying the words, they can get help from others or the teacher. When they finally get a row, column or diagonal line of words marked on their grid, they call out '*Bingo!*' and get a small prize. I usually use pieces of candy or colourful seals, which are relished. The game is non-competitive. Everyone will win as the procedure continues until one by one all the children get a winning line of words and can call out '*Bingo!*' and get a prize.



Daily Routines Bingo!

Bingo!

Pictures

Another way in which the *Bingo* grid can be set up is with pictures. This will take more preparation time for the teacher, but once a set of pictures has been prepared, it can be used again and again. For learning place names, such as post office, school, park, beach, airport and so on, pictures can easily be found in English textbooks, dictionaries for children and clip art books. For a 4 x 4 grid, a sheet with 16 pictures (the correct size to fit into the grid squares) can be made on a large sheet of paper. The sheet is photocopied and a copy given to each child. They can then cut out and paste the pictures wherever they wish on their own *Bingo* grids, writing the place words in the squares as well. They do this square by square as the teacher practises the words with them using various interactive drills. Then the game can be played with the teacher using some form of oral review of the words, focusing on them one by one.

If you are using occupations, such as doctor, teacher, bus driver, mechanic, etc. for a *Bingo* game, please be sure to find and use gender-balanced pictures as far as is possible. Action verb pictures and simple line-drawn faces showing various feelings, such as happy, sad, angry, frightened, etc. are other categories that can be used successfully. In the latter case, I use a simple 3 x 3 grid with young elementary school children.

Another great category of words that can be used, with or without pictures, is prepositions of location, such as *in*, *on*, *under*, *behind*, *between*, etc. The initial teaching of these words can be lots of fun, again using physical response with various objects placed in relation to others in the classroom.

Grammar

Bingo can also be used to review and reinforce grammar items. This level of language work may be done with students from elementary to high

school (high school students like to cut and paste pictures, too!). Among the easiest, and most important, categories of words to use are the irregular past and perfect forms of verbs. Again, teachers can combine a wide variety of interactive activities with the *Bingo* game. They can simply ask questions and call on students to answer ('*What did you eat for breakfast?*' – '*I ate ...*'; '*What time did you leave for school this morning?*' – '*I left at ...*') As they give the responses, students fill the squares on their *Bingo* grids with the verb forms one by one. When they have finished, the *Bingo* game can be played with a simple chorus response to the simple form ('*eat*' – '*ate*'; '*leave*' – '*left*') or with another oral stimulus to elicit the correct usage.

The challenge of the game can be increased by making it necessary for students to have the correct form and spelling of the words (in the lines they claim for *Bingo* only). If there is an error, they do not get a prize. Even so, the game should still be played until all students get a chance at least to shout '*Bingo!*' This doesn't take very long, even in a class of 30 students, as several can call out '*Bingo!*' at the same time: there are 12 possible lines (with a 5 x 5 grid) to win at the call of a word.

Some other grammar points that are readily adaptable for playing *Bingo* are tag questions, *-ed/-ing* adjective endings, and mass/count adjectives: *much/many* and *little/few*. Adjective opposites is another interesting and important word category that can be used, and for pronunciation practice, *Bingo* can be set up with the use of words having regular past tense verb endings with different pronunciations: /t/ /d/ and /ɪd/.


Listening

Many coursebooks have pictures of a person going through the usual routines of a day: getting up, getting dressed, having breakfast, taking the bus to work or school, coming home, watching TV, etc. These pictures can easily be used to play *Bingo* and an example which you might like to use

with your classes is given on page 24. An overhead projector may be used beforehand to facilitate lots of oral practice, focusing on a single verb tense, such as present continuous, or utilising multiple tenses, including present habitual, past, and future. ('*He gets up at 7 o'clock.*' / '*He got up at 7 o'clock.*' / '*He will get up at 7 o'clock.*' '*He gets dressed.*' / '*He got dressed.*' / '*He will get dressed.*', etc.) As the oral practice proceeds, students can fill their own *Bingo* grids with the pictures and/or words in preparation for the game.

Setting up the *Bingo* grid allows many short pauses during the oral work and gives a chance for students to 'catch their breath' and not lose interest. Indeed, they eagerly anticipate playing the game. *Bingo* in this case may be played as a listening exercise with the teacher calling out whole sentences describing the action in each picture. The game can be made more challenging by increasing the pace at which the actions are called out. In this case, students should number the appropriate pictures as the game proceeds (Teacher: '*Number 1: He comes home in the evening.*' '*Number 2: He takes the bus to work.*') and the teacher should check the accuracy of the lines claimed for a win.



With imagination and ingenuity many, many varieties of *Bingo* can be devised and used as enjoyable and effective English exercises. I hope the ideas presented here will stimulate teachers to initiate or expand their own repertoire for this game. Perhaps the cry of '*Bingo!*' in these word forms of the game, too, will be heard for at least another 500 years! 



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