

Chapter 7

Playing with Language

Opening Activity

In this activity (based on a simple example from pig Latin), students can work with a partner to begin to think about how people can “play” with language. Questions such as the role of language games in their country can be raised as can questions regarding other ways that people “play” with language. This should serve as a preview to the activities of this chapter.

Objectives for Students

Content

- Describe some language games in English
- Understand what euphemisms are and know how to use them
- Understand what insinuations are and know how to use them
- Understand some English puns and how to say some tongue twisters
- Describe some kinds of American humor

Language

- Pronouncing tongue twisters
- Knowledge of syllable structure
- Euphemistic vocabulary
- Idiomatic expressions
- Homophones
- Dangling modifiers

I. Language Games

A.

Techniques

If possible, this activity works best with students in groups from different language/cultural backgrounds. Before beginning this activity (unless this has come out as part of the discussion surrounding the opening activity), students can begin to think about when a secret language can be used. Are there occasions when knowledge of another language can serve as a type of “secret language”?

Answers

B.

1. Language games are games that stem from the rearrangement of sounds in words.
2. The most common use is to keep others from understanding.
3. Language games would not be used in class, at a meeting, etc.

C.

1. The general rule is that the first sound is moved to the end of the word and “ay” is added. If the first letter is a vowel, it does not move. Rather “yay” is added to the end of the word. Consonant clusters move together.
2. a. What is your name?
b. Do you like this country?
Students should be able to answer these questions in Pig Latin.
3. usicmay amilyfay ecretsay
oolschay importantyay eautifulbay
eachertay ountrycay andsomehay
omesickhay iendsfray icenay
4. Answers will vary.

D.

1. This is called Bop Talk. My teacher is very nice. Add -op- after every consonant.
2. This is called “K Talk.” Never do today what you can put off until tomorrow. Replace the initial consonants (if any) of each syllable with [k] and suffix the result to the original syllable.

E.

This listening exercise can be done as a cloze exercise with students listening to the lyrics and filling in the missing words. This can also be redone with more words being deleted. Depending on the level of the students, this part of the tape may have to be played more than once. After all of the words are understood, a form of karaoke can take place.

Hey, everybody, wherever you are
 There's a new way of talking, and it's gonna go far,
 You take the letters in the words,
 Turn 'em all around,
 Say the last one first and you check out the sound,
 Talk *backwards*

I know what you're thinking,
 That sounds *strange*
 You talked *forward* so long that it's hard to change.
 But it's just like *metric* once you get the drift,
 You *twist* your tongue and give your palate a lift,
 You take your favorite phrase,
 Read it in the *mirror*,
 Practice that about half a year
 And then *sdrawkcab gniklat mi em ta kool*,
 You're a regular talking bassackwards fool,
 Talk backwards.

Talking backwards is sweeping the nation,
 Talking backwards is the new *sensation*,
 You amaze your friends when you start to *rap*,
 Don't say pass the butter, say *Rettub eht ssap*.
Rettub eht ssap? Rettub eht ssap.
 And if you're out with a girl and she's a little bit shy,
 Don't say I love you, say *Uoy evol I*.
Uoy evol I and I always will.
 Now see if that doesn't *take off* the chill.
 Talk backwards.

The other day I was walking down the street,
 And there was this little girl I thought I'd like to meet.
 I said excuse me *miss* but
Sserd taht teg uoy did erehw .thgin ta tuo emoc
srats ekil era hteet ruoy.

And I said, Am I getting through to you yet?
She said you're a *gent* in the first degree,
And I love when you *talk backwards* to me.
Talk backwards.

You never can *tell* but one of these nights,
Those who talk backwards will demand their rights.
They'll rise up angry and get a solution
In the form of an *amendment* to the Constitution,
That guarantees them freedom of *reverse* elocution.
And every TV show that airs
Will have to be captioned for the forward *impaired*.
Talk backwards.

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F.

Rule: Reverse the letters in the sentence.
Sentences: Look at me talking backwards.
Pass the butter. Pass the butter?
I love you.
Come out at night. Where did you get that dress?
Your teeth are like stars.

II. Euphemisms

Answers

A.

Answers will vary.

C.

This activity is best done in pairs.

urination and defecation	deafness
handicapped	death
sick	regurgitation
pregnancy	firing

being a housewife
stupidity
euthanasia
fatness
buxomness
ugliness
old age
money
blindness
burial
mental illness
failure

D.

Answers will vary.

III. Insinuations

Techniques

Activity B is a difficult activity for some students. It might be better to do all the (a) and (b) exercises first, then go back and do (c) exercises.

Answers

A.

The passive voice.

B.

1.
 - a. teacher
 - b. Students were negligent.
 - c. The students haven't turned in their homework yet.
2.
 - a. politician
 - b. The other person is going to tape-record the conversation.
 - c. Are you tape-recording this conversation?
3.
 - a. investigating police officer
 - b. The defendant destroyed the evidence.
 - c. The defendant destroyed all the evidence.

4.
 - a. spouse
 - b. The spouse didn't send out the invitations on time and no one has come to the party.
 - c. You didn't send out the invitations on time.
5.
 - a. spouse
 - b. The spouse didn't pay the bills.
 - c. You haven't paid the bills yet.
6.
 - a. news reporter
 - b. The police hadn't found the missing people.
 - c. The police hadn't found the missing people by that time.

C.

Answers will vary.

IV. Puns and Tongue Twisters

Techniques

In this section, there will need to be some explanation of fixed/idiomatic expressions in English. An introduction to the difficulty of understanding humor cross-culturally is also appropriate.

Answers

B.

1. Power to the people! is a revolutionary cry. Power (in the electrical sense) is what electric companies are responsible for. (play on different meanings of the same word)
2. Curl up and die is what someone says when they have been extremely embarrassed. Dye is what is put in hair to change color. (play on spelling)
3. Spirits has three meanings. One is alcoholic beverages, another is "good feelings." As in "her spirits are high today"—she is feeling good today. A third has to do with one's soul.
4. Retire can have two meanings. The first and most common is when one leaves a place of employment and stops working. The second is a play on the use of the prefix *re-* meaning again. So, it is time to buy new tires.
5. Here the substitution is "money" for "mommy" because the rides at the park will cost money.

C.

1. The humor in this example is due to the common double meaning of “right”—opposite of “left” and “OK.”
2.
 - a. right
 - b. soft
 - c. old
 - d. short
 - e. rough
 - f. odd
 - g. dull
 - h. take
 - i. lose
 - j. hard
 - k. present
 - l. go
 - m. single
 - n. back

D.

1. The order on the tape is: 5, 7, 2, 8, 10, 9, 3, 4, 1, 6

Additional Activities

For homework students can be given the following to practice.

Rugged yuppie baby beepers
 Cheap chopsticks chapped Chuck’s lips.
 Six Swiss wristwatches
 Red letter, yellow leather
 Slippery swine slurp slimy swill
 You need unique New York
 Savvy samurai seldom steal stainless steel swords.
 Leisure lounge lizards
 Fred fried five fresh fish from Philip.
 Ike ate eight acorn cakes.
 Slippery sleet sweeps six sleeping sheep.
 Plump pesto pasta please.
 Snuggly yellow snowsuits stuffed in snuggly yellow snow boots.
 Right rear wheel well
 Literally leaving little Italy

Clark's question clearly clashed with the Queen's class.
Cheap shrimp shops seldom stock cheap chopsticks.
Full-fleshed fruit fermented fragrantly.
Throngs of tricky things threatened trendy threesomes.
Seth Smith missed Swiss myths.
Yucky little yellow lights
Charles' cook chopped cheap crispy chicken.
Shucks! Six stick shifts stuck shut.

V. Humor

Answers

A.

Answers could include ethnic groups, politicians, gender differences, current events, age differences, animals.

B.

1. Meaning: Jimmy's father was responsible for creating Jimmy.
Revised: Please excuse Jimmy for being late.
2. Meaning: Mary was sick and I had someone shoot her (kill her).
Revised: She was sick and I had to have her get a shot (injection).
3. Meaning: . . . and get an extra pair of ears to take home.
Revised: Now is your chance to have your ears pierced and get an extra pair of earrings to take home.
4. Meaning: Get rid of aunts (wife of uncle)
Revised: Get rid of ants (animals)
5. Meaning: Buy many so that you can save money. You can only buy one.
Revised: Save money. Limit: One
6. Meaning: You will never get your money again when you put it in our bank.
Revised: You'll never regret it.
7. Meaning: The cook has a round bottom and the cook can be beaten efficiently.
Revised: Mixing bowl set with round bottom for efficient beating is designed to please a cook.
8. Meaning: The person who buys the gasoline must be in a glass container.

- Revised: We will sell gasoline in a glass container to anyone.
9. Meaning: The women cooked their husbands and children as part of the supper.
- Revised: The women invited their husbands and children to their potluck supper.

C.

It sounds like the baby drove the car into the garage.

D.

The revised sentences:

1. Hearing her name called, the girl came forward and the audience applauded loudly.
2. While he was carrying a heavy pile of books, his shoe caught on the step.
3. While we were waiting, the train left without us.
4. Having cried for two hours, we were glad to see the sad movie finally end.
5. Coming up the front yard, we noticed that the flowers looked beautiful.
6. After hearing the dog barking for five minutes, George had to let the dog in.
7. Asking one stupid question after another, Bob made his teacher soon begin to dislike him.
8. While I was walking down the path, the sun shone brightly.
9. After scratching at the door, the cat had to be let in.
10. While she was studying in the United States, her family worked in Europe.
11. While I was reading, the doorbell rang.
12. After drinking a lot of beer, she felt a feeling of happiness come over her.
13. While we were sitting on the beach, the sun was shining brightly.
14. After we had walked in the darkness for two hours, the moon rose and it became easier to see.

E.

1. This joke exemplifies a power struggle between parents and children. In this case, the daughter has the upper hand and the father does not want to lose face so he adds the phrase "at your earliest

convenience” rather than the more typical “now” or “immediately.” Again, the expected is to say “I’m going to count to 10,” but he says “fifteen hundred.”

2. The teacher is saying that the way the child paints his mother is the way she actually looks.
3. The unusualness of seeing a kangaroo is countered by the “usualness” of the reply implying that the prices are too high.
4. The humor in this joke has to do with the dog’s matter-of-fact retort of being able to speak another language—that being the language of cats.

F.

- | | |
|----|---|
| a. | 1 |
| b. | 5 |
| c. | 7 |
| d. | 4 |
| e. | 2 |
| f. | 8 |
| g. | 6 |
| h. | 3 |

H.

Answers will vary.

Additional Activities

As part of this activity and the end of the chapter activity, students can be asked to bring in a joke or cartoon from their own country and see if other students understand it. If not, they can be asked to explain it.

Additional activities can be taken from newspaper comic strips: either another matching exercise, or giving students blank cartoons and asking them to write the dialogue.