

It is generally recognised that games play a vital role in the general cognitive and meta-cognitive development of children. Games stimulate and motivate young learners, providing them with a rich environment that stimulates curiosity, exercises a wide range of skills and fosters growth.

In foreign language learning, game playing brings a crucial added dimension: it provides a meaningful context for young children to engage in L2 activity and interaction. Such contextualisation is fundamental to Second Language Acquisition in general and for young learners in particular: for further discussion, see [The Natural Approach](#) (a brief overview of Krashen's theories, or for a more detailed analysis, Krashen & Terrell's Natural Approach) and [Modelli Operativi - A.L.L.A.S.](#), Maria Cecilia Luise (downloadable file).

The appeal to children of computer games (at least for entertainment purposes) is more than evident: video games played on consoles or PC now occupy a significant part of many children's leisure time. As a result, to children computers are almost synonymous with game playing, and using them in the classroom context is often considered as a kind of game in itself (although the initial novelty value may well wear off if the "game" does not meet sometimes high expectations).

So when it comes to adopting multimedia to foster and enrich children's language learning experience, the game playing approach would seem to offer enormous potential, characterised as it is by a rich blend of multimedia material and a high level of interactivity.

This study examines the opportunities for [game playing in multimedia English language learning software](#) : it is based on analysis of a number of recently published English language CD-Roms for children that include games (see [list](#)). In an effort to provide a comprehensive picture of the multimedia resources available for game playing, reference is also made to other [games software for children's English language learning](#), i.e. games software for learning English, for learning languages, for preschool and primary school education, and to [online games](#) available on the World Wide Web.

For an examination of multimedia software for children's English language learning, see [A proposito di software per...young learners of English](#).

Game playing & English language learning software

Game playing is certainly an essential ingredient in motivating young (language) learners and, as might be expected, it is commonly adopted within multimedia English language learning software designed specifically for children. Depending on the specific program, game playing may be marginal, secondary, complementary or central to language learning goals, but it is almost always present in one form or another. Indeed many children's English language programs are effectively a collection of games, while others are actually presented as games themselves.

In any case, almost all the exercises proposed in software of this kind are designed at least to appear to the young learner as games: this sense is usually conveyed through a lively graphical interface and a mode of interaction that emphasises movement and action, challenge and competitiveness, sometimes within a well-known game format. That said, the way that the game playing element is integrated varies from activity to activity: it may be limited to a mainly "decorative" role within the exercise or may even represent the principle focus of attention. To get a general idea of the different forms game playing takes in these programs, see [Integration of Games in English language Software](#).

The most common types of game proposed in the sample of English language software titles considered are:

- [Text games](#): gap filling, pairing, ordering & unscrambling
- [Picture games](#): colouring, jigsaw puzzles, spot the difference
- [Association games](#) (pairing & grouping)
- [Treasure hunts](#)
- [Board games](#)
- [Memory games](#)
- [Creative games](#)

Although these activities can vary considerably from program to program, they do share some [common features and characteristics](#) in the way they are structured and presented to the learner. As teachers well know, children react to different learning situations in very different ways, and this is also true of game playing; for a discussion of the factors that may effect learner response, see [Games & the Individual Language Learner](#).

Integration of games in English language software

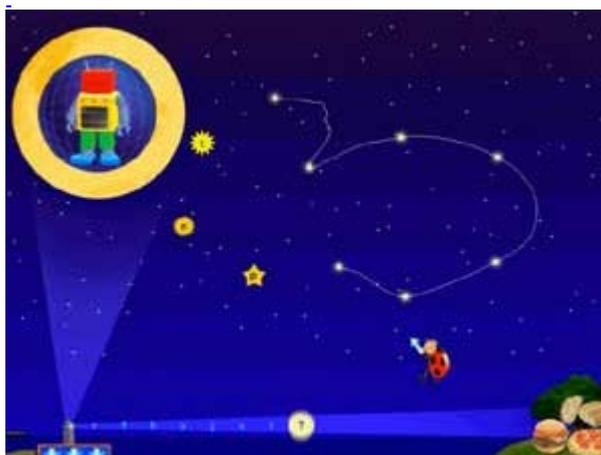
In its most limited form, the game playing element is conveyed through the feedback that is displayed during (or at the conclusion of) exercises. A typical example is where, with each successful step completed, an image is gradually displayed or an animation progresses. This is a sort of variation of the well known "hangman" game. In this case, however, the connotations related to the learner's performance are positive rather than negative, i.e. instead of penalising failure, the game rewards success.



Lexia Phonics Based Reading (Lexia Systems):

the learner listens to the target word and drags and drops the chosen letter into the gap. With each word successfully completed, an element is added to the castle illustration: this hangman-style progressive feedback heightens the game element.

In the example above, the learner's focus of attention alternates between the language exercise and the game element. However, in most cases game playing is an intrinsic part of the interaction itself. Many programs adopt game formats that are familiar to children, like jigsaw and crossword puzzles, colouring, joining the dots, treasure hunts, etc.



Tell Me More Kids (Auralog):

Pairing exercise presented as a join-the-dots game.

In some cases the activity takes the form of a fully fledged video game, requiring not only language competence but also manual dexterity and fast reflexes.

Zak's Word Games (Longman/Pearson):

Shooting gallery game with moving targets (letters and flash card illustrations). Learner first "shoots" a letter then attempts to shoot the corresponding flash card



picture as it moves across the screen. The shooting action, performed with arrow keys and mouse, requires eye-hand co-ordination and manual dexterity.

Some English language programs also propose games that have no language learning focus at all, but help to provide variety, reduce the cognitive load and, possibly, to develop general cognitive and motor abilities. Sometimes these games are offered as "rewards" for the successful completion of language-learning activities, so as to increase motivation, or as introductory warm-ups that stimulate curiosity (in some cases these games may also prove useful for exercising different types of "intelligence" - see Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences).

Magic Spell (Nicola Milano): form recognition game. Position the green shapes in the appropriate parts of the pictures.



Kiddy English (Mediaport):

"shooting gallery" video game: shoot the falling hearts.

Sometimes the whole program is presented as a game: the learner follows an itinerary and along the way encounters a series of challenges to complete, or information to gather, so as to complete the game cycle.

Zak's Word Games (Longman - Pearson) a series of word games presented in the form of a fantasy quest. To help Zak return to his home planet, the learner must complete all three levels of the game cycle.



Interactive English Junior (De Agostini):

Program theme

The program is presented as a narrative - a journey in the company of Leo and his band of friends in search of Leo's sister, who has mysteriously disappeared.



Interactive English Junior (De Agostini):

Game structure

As the learner completes activities and proceeds along the itinerary, he/she is presented with a series of clues that form a trail leading to Leo's sister.

Text games

Generally speaking, the activities proposed in English language programs designed for children focus more on language reception than on production, and they tend to emphasise communication codes other than text: graphics, animation and audio. Nevertheless, activities involving the manipulation and production of words and text are a fairly common feature. As with other types of language games, these are fundamentally exercises in which a (greater or lesser) degree of game playing has been incorporated within the graphic interface and mode of interaction in order to make the activity more lively, captivating and motivating.

Text manipulation games often centre on single target words presented individually. In programs aimed at very young learners, they provide an opportunity to exercise basic literacy skills, such as grapheme-phoneme correspondence, in an engaging and entertaining fashion. In programs for older children, word games represent a chance to practise spelling, and are often proposed as an activity for reinforcing vocabulary acquisition: in some cases the word/s to be formed may be presented within a text, i.e. a sentence or longer passage (see also [A proposito di software per... Young Learners of English > Spelling & writing](#))

In either case, word games sometimes draw on traditional formats that children are usually familiar with, like hangman, mazes or crosswords.

Text manipulation games typically proposed in children's English language software can be divided into three general categories, according to the type of activity involved and the level of support offered to the learner for forming the target word/s (and consequently the amount of student effort required):

[gap filling](#): complete the word/s by filling in a gap (often a single missing letter)

[pairing](#): form a word or sentence by pairing together two given segments.

[ordering & unscrambling](#): reorder scrambled letters to form the given word.

Text games: gap filling

Gap filling games present an incomplete word or sentence which the learner is to fill in either by writing on the keyboard or by choosing from a set of letters/words displayed on screen and dragging and dropping them appropriately into the gap/s.

The game playing element in gap-filling exercises lies mainly in "guessing" the target word with the help of multimedia support, i.e. textual, graphic, auditory information. In addition, children may find the drag and drop form of interaction that some programs offer more fun than actually typing out the missing letter/s. Where multiple choice options are available, the activity is certainly less demanding both linguistically and cognitively. To enhance the fun factor, some programs adopt familiar word game formats such as hangman (with each step successfully completed, a picture is pieced together or an animation progresses towards conclusion) or crosswords.

At single word level, a target word is presented in which one, several or all the letters are missing. To help the learner, the target is usually paired with an illustration or icon, and it may also be possible to listen to the spoken word as well. The presence of an illustration suggests that, apart from exercising spelling, the activity is also aimed at word recognition, while the audio support puts the emphasis on transcription and thus phoneme-grapheme correspondence (more common in programs designed for very young learners).



Lexia Phonics Based Reading (Lexia Systems): the learner listens to the target word and drags and drops the chosen letter into the gap. With each word successfully completed, an element is added to the castle illustration: this hangman-style progressive feedback heightens the game element.

Where all the letters of the word are missing, the activity is more demanding, both in terms of spelling and word recognition.

Read, Write & Type (Talking Fingers Inc.): Word writing drill. Each time the learner types a given word correctly, the animated figure moves a step further along the trajectory. A special animation is played at the conclusion.



Wordbird's Word Land: (Longman Pearson): The learner types



in the letters to spell the target word shown in the selected picture. The target words are presented in identical fashion in the initial exploration phase ("READ").

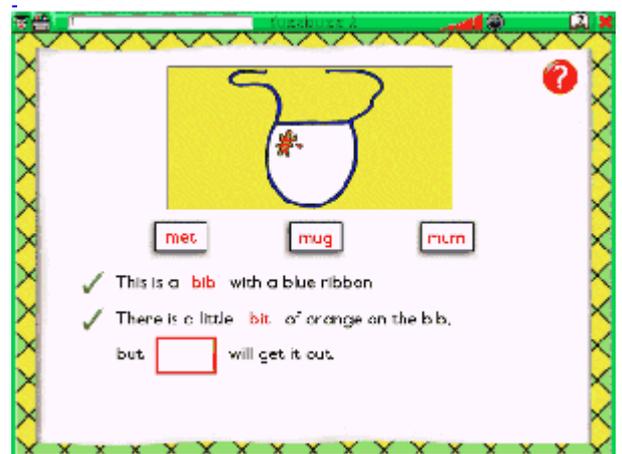
In crossword puzzles for young learners of English, the clues provided are usually graphic and/or auditory rather than textual; this further enhances the game-playing element.



English with Toby (ELI): crossword puzzle with graphic clues.

Sometimes, the target word is contextualised within a sentence to be read/listened to. In these cases more advanced language skills are required and the activity appears to be more of an exercise than a game.

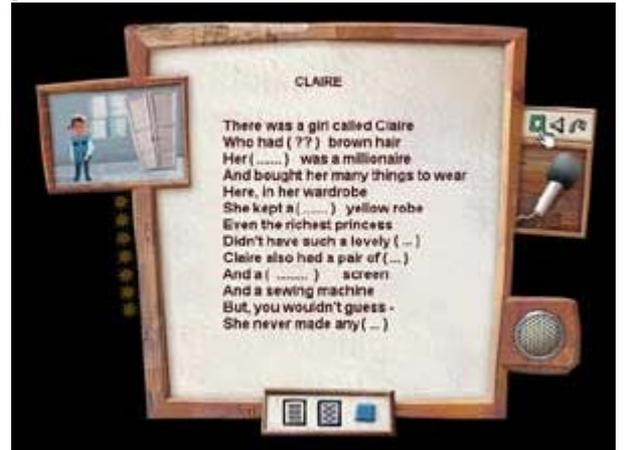
Fuzzbuzz (OUP): text completion exercise with multiple choice options.



Kiddy English (Mediaport): Target word contextualised within a sentence.



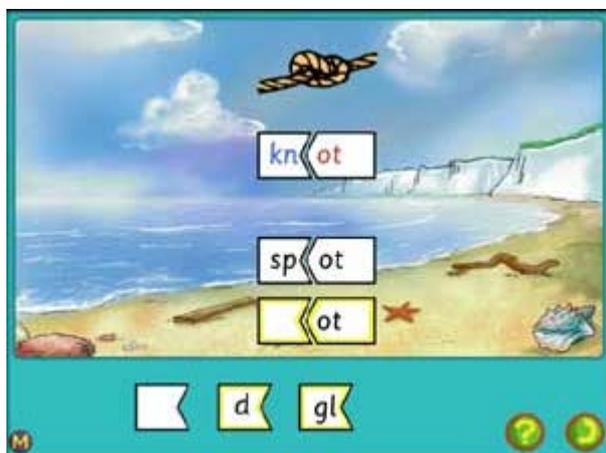
Happy English (Editori Riuniti): Nursery rhyme gap filling exercise. The learner first reads/listens to the whole text, then fills the gaps vocally via automatic voice recognition (right). A clue can also be displayed (left).



Text games: pairing

In this type of game the learner has to pair together two given segments in order to form a complete whole. This might mean combining word segments (clusters of two or more letters) to form a single word, or pairing phrases to make a sentence. The game is often presented as a multiple choice activity, in which the initial or final segment of the target is presented to the learner, and he/she must identify the matching segment among the options available. In other cases, a number of segmented targets are presented simultaneously for pairing up.

Pairing games involving single words are usually aimed at very young learners, and are often designed to help them acquire basic literacy skills (for more on this matter, see [A proposito di software per...young learners of English > Basic Literacy](#)). The segmentation of target words may isolate syllables or significant graphemes such as digraphs (e.g. TH, CH, SH). Some pairing games aimed at older students involve the joining up of compound nouns and hence have a vocabulary building aspect as well.



Rhyme & Analogy Software (OUP, Sherston): Choose the appropriate initial word segments to create complete words. The game element lies mainly in the "drag & drop" interaction.

Tell Me More Kids (Auralog):

Match up word segments to create words. The activity is presented as a kind of maze game, in which the student has to create paths for the segments to pass along. The dynamic nature of the interaction focuses the learner's attention strongly on the game playing element.



At a more advanced level the learner is required to combine phrases to form whole sentences.

Let's Go (Dyned):

Working with sentences. Read/listen to the reply and construct the related question by selecting the appropriate word group.

Let's Go Home
File Options



What does	he	like to do?
What do	she	have to do?

What does she have to do?

She has to wash the dishes.

⏪ 🔍 ⏸ 🔄 📖 🗑️ EXIT

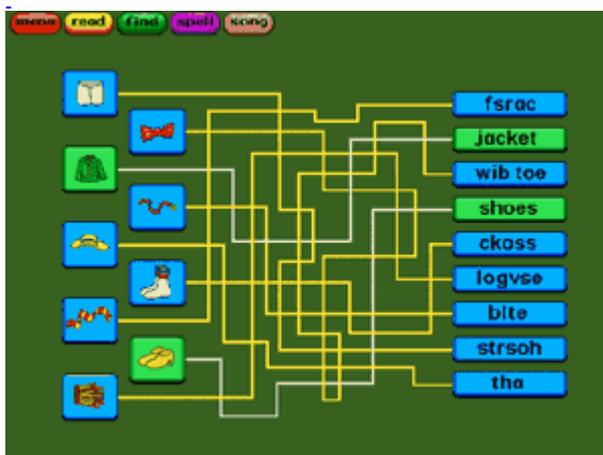
Text games: ordering & unscrambling

In ordering games, the learner is presented with a set of letters, words or sentences that need to be put into the correct order: when these are displayed in an erroneous (scrambled) sequence for reordering, the activity is known as unscrambling. As well as providing an opportunity to practice language skills like spelling, comprehension and syntax, these activities may also exercise general cognitive capabilities like spatial and logical skills.

Word unscrambling games are a challenging and entertaining way to practise spelling and to develop recognition of vocabulary and word morphology.

English with Toby:

unscramble the letters to form words. The game element lies in the "drag & drop" selection mechanism.



Wordbird's World Land:

Pairing of scrambled words with corresponding pictures. When the pair is correctly identified, the word is automatically unscrambled and the corresponding maze path is highlighted in colour: this hangman-style feedback gives the exercise an enhanced sense of game playing.

Unscrambling is a game commonly proposed for teaching young children numerical and alphabetical orders.

Lexia Phonics Based Reading (Lexia Learning Systems):

Alphabetical order - letters

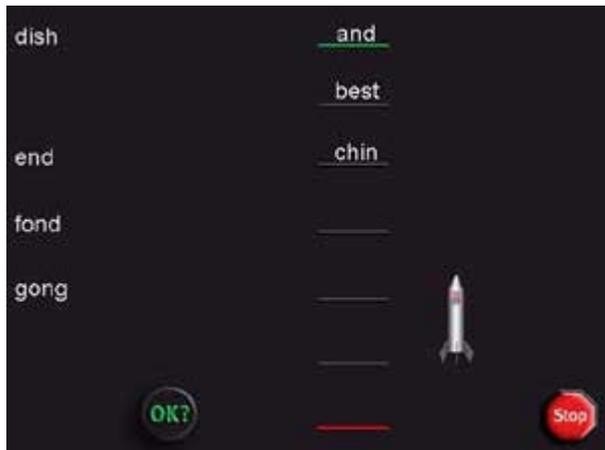
put the letters into alphabetical order. With each correct action, the racing car advances towards the finishing line.



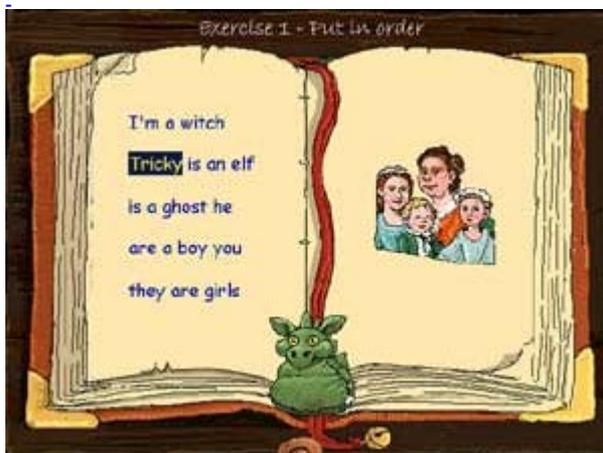
Lexia Phonics Based Reading (Lexia Learning Systems):

Alphabetical order - words

put the words into alphabetical order. With each correct action, the rocket advances further.



At sentence level, unscrambling games exercise reading comprehension as well as grammar and syntax.

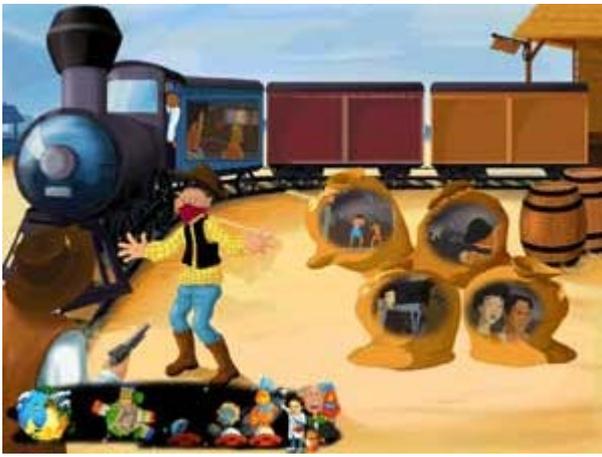


Magic Spell (Nicola Milano): Unscramble the sentences by identifying the subject and shifting it to the beginning of the sentence.

In ordering games presented at a more advanced level, the learner constructs a whole passage (text and/or audio) by putting the component phrases or sentences in the correct order. Apart from exercising reading comprehension, this game may also involve general cognitive capabilities like memory, logical thinking and deductive reasoning.

Tell Me More Kids (Auralog):

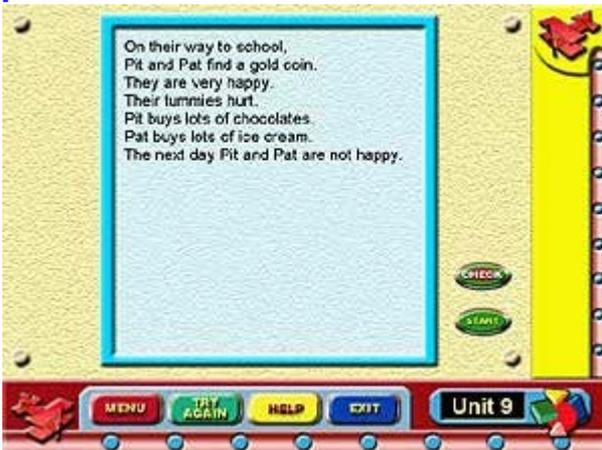
The learner clicks on each image to hear the corresponding line of dialogue and then places the cartoon frames on the train carriages in the correct order to reconstruct the story line. The activity can be performed in presentation, comprehension and expression modes.



English With Toby (ELI):

Initial observation phase

Comic strip story is displayed for a brief period



English With Toby (ELI):

Ordering phase

learner orders the sentences to reconstruct the story line. Memorisation of the comic strip supports the task and adds a game playing element to the exercise.

Picture games

Many games are centred on completing, recreating or analysing pictures: typical examples include [jigsaw puzzles](#), [colouring in](#), and [spotting the difference](#).

Often language learning is a central element in the game, for example in colouring games where the interaction is based on understanding and using correctly the names of colours. In other cases language learning is only marginal, or may even be absent: the role of the game in this case is to add variety, reduce the cognitive load, stimulate interest and increase overall motivation. Some programs offer such fun games as "rewards" for the successful completion of language-learning activities, so as to increase motivation, or as introductory warm-ups that stimulate curiosity. In any case, such games may be extremely useful for language learning activities when used with a projector in a whole class setting.

Picture games: jigsaw puzzles

The jigsaw puzzle is a classic game enjoyed by children and adults alike. Apart from offering a relaxing pastime, it also represents an excellent opportunity to exercise visual-spatial capabilities, including recognition, discrimination, association, etc.

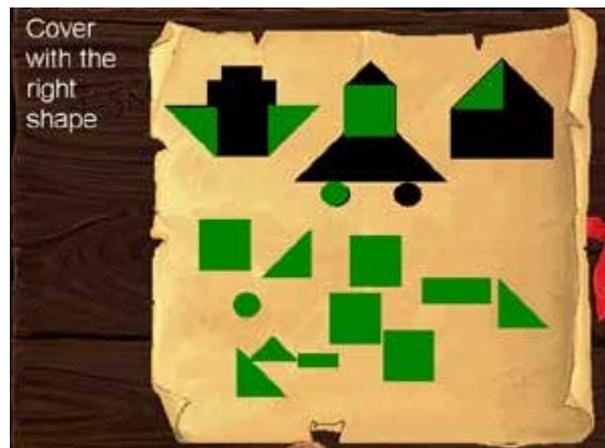
As with other picture games like colouring, the computer version of the jigsaw puzzle does not exercise fine motor skills in the same way as the manual version. However, it does offer some extra potentialities for educational application, as well as providing variation and a break from more intensive activities with a higher cognitive load.

Happy English (Editori Riuniti): Jigsaw puzzle to be played purely as a fun activity. No language interaction is foreseen.



Muzzy at the Disco (Vektor): Interaction is in the target language and the activity is timed for competitive playing at different difficulty levels.

Magic Spell (Nicola Milano): form recognition game. Position the green shapes in the appropriate parts of the pictures





Tell Me More Kids (Auralog): Replace the missing "articles" (the external puzzle pieces) that the thief has stolen from the market. The game can be played in three different modes:

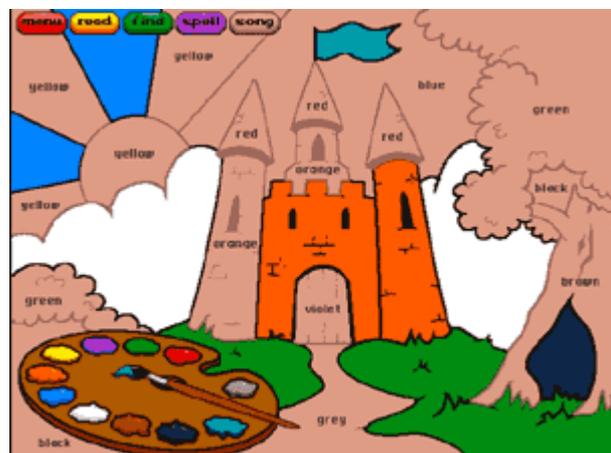
- (a) presentation - hear the names of the objects as they are replaced);
- (b) comprehension - listen to object nominated and replace it;
- (c) expression (voice recognition) - pronounce the name of the object to be replaced in a given position.

Picture games: colouring

Colouring is a favourite children's game, especially among the very young. On the computer it is performed with mouse clicks, so the fine motor skills are not exercised in the same way as with paper-based colouring. However, mouse-click colouring offers the advantages of immediacy, rapidity and versatility, making it possible to amplify the educational value of the activity.

As we all well know, colouring is an ideal way of practising the names of the colours in a foreign language. The flexibility of multimedia programs makes it possible to exploit colouring games in a variety of ways for language learning purposes.

English with Toby (ELI): in order to colour in the picture correctly the learner must understand and follow a set of spoken commands. As well as colours, this game focuses on the saxon genitive form and clothing vocabulary.



Wordbird's Wordland (Longman Pearson): in this colouring activity the learner needs to read the names of the colours.

Tell Me More Kids (Auralog): this colouring game can be played in three different modes:

- presentation - display the model hidden behind the curtain and copy it (colours are pronounced as they are used);
- comprehension - click on an area of the target picture and listen to the correct colour to use;
- expression (voice recognition) - check the model and pronounce the colour to be used for each area of the target picture. If the pronunciation is "acceptable" the action is performed.





English with Toby (ELI): learners make personalised picture cards by colouring in the chosen picture as they like. The result can be printed out. In this case the language focus is on selection of an appropriate slogan.

Picture games: spot the difference

Spot the difference is a popular game that commonly appears in magazines, puzzle books, comics, etc. It involves comparing two apparently identical pictures and identifying the slight differences that actually exist between them. The game exercises observation and discrimination skills in an entertaining and challenging fashion. In computer programs, spot the difference is often presented as a sort of [memory game](#), in that the two pictures are displayed consecutively rather than concurrently, increasing the difficulty of the game. Usually the language learning element is fairly marginal.

Happy English (Editori Riuniti): When the mouse pointer is placed at the top of the screen, a second version of the picture is displayed. Identify the differences between the two by clicking on the chosen detail. The illuminated suns show the number of hits, while the clouds represent misses. The game is intended as a warm up: it introduces the theme on which each of the learning units is based.

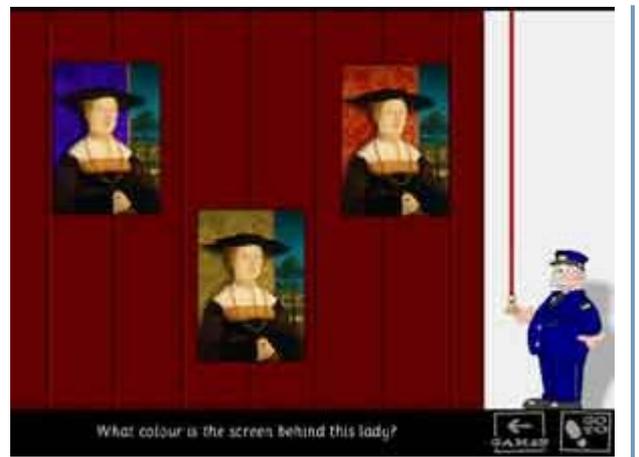


Tell Me More Kids (Auralog): Use the torch to identify the three differences between the two pictures.

The game can be played in three different modes:

- (a) presentation - hear the names of the objects as they are spotted);
- (b) comprehension - listen to target object and identify it;
- (c) expression (voice recognition) - pronounce the name of the object to be spotted.

My Oxford Picture Box (OUP): visual memory game. Select the picture that corresponds exactly to the one that has been hidden behind the curtain. The language learning element lies in the L2 interaction.



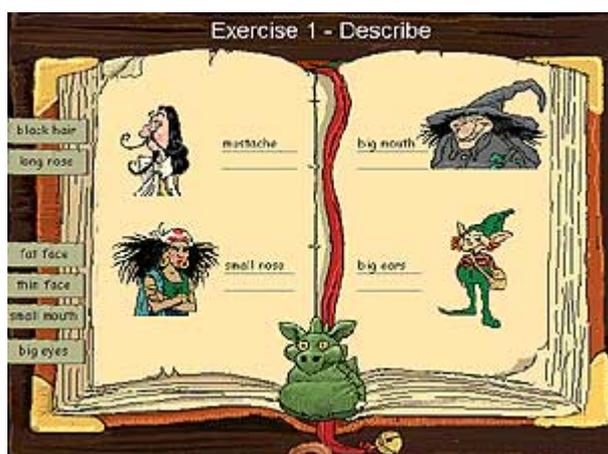
Association games

Almost every multimedia language program for children features exercise activities involving the association of different target items that are represented variously in the form of text (words), graphics (illustrative pictures or icons) and audio (spoken words or sound effects). These activities exploit one of the main learning potentialities offered by multimedia, namely flexibility in combining the various communication codes.

Association games basically fall into two categories: **pairing** (association of two target items among all those presented); and **grouping** (categorisation of all the items presented according to a number of given categories). In both cases the aim of the activity is to enhance and reinforce vocabulary acquisition.

In pairing games the learner is usually presented with a prompt (spoken/written word, illustration, etc.) and must find the corresponding target item. This type of game differs from the [treasure hunt](#) in that the prompt is presented explicitly and separately, not as part of a (spoken) command or request delivered by a mascot in a simulated interpersonal interaction.

Let's Go (Dyned): dress the creature by reading/ listening to the prompt and clicking on the corresponding piece of clothing.



Magic Spell (Nicola Milano): describe the portrait pictures by dragging and dropping the appropriate noun/adjective combinations (pronounced automatically when clicked)

English with Toby (ELI): match the moving pictures with the corresponding words. The movement and graphic interface enhance the game element of this exercise.



Zak's Word Games (Longman/Pearson): Shooting gallery game with moving targets (letters and flash card illustrations). Learner first "shoots" a letter then attempts to shoot the corresponding flash card picture as it moves across the screen. The shooting action, performed with arrow keys and mouse, requires eye-hand co-ordination and manual dexterity.

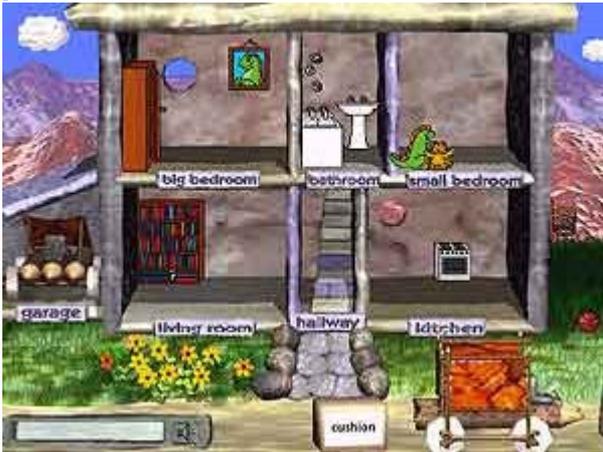
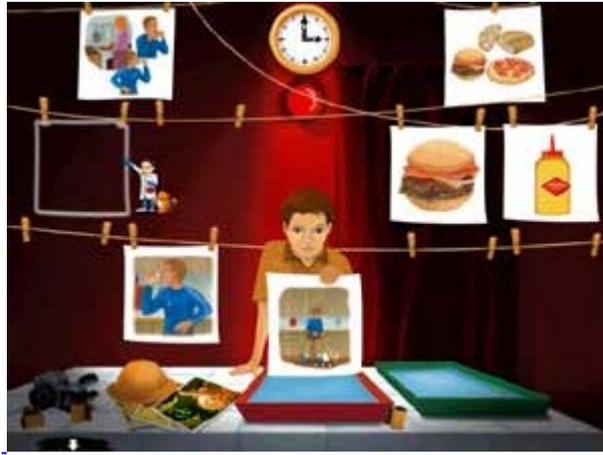


Word Bird's Word Games (Longman/Pearson): Learner reads the stream of moving words in order to identify the target that matches the picture (top right). When this arrives in the middle, the learner clicks on the frog, which either leaps onto the log and across the river or sinks if the word is not a match. The game requires timing and eye-hand co-ordination.



In grouping games the learner is presented with a number of different vocabulary items (represented textually and/or graphically) that must be arranged into categories. This usually involves the classification of lemmas according to given hyponym classes: e.g. grouping *car*, *bicycle*, *boat* etc. in the *vehicle* family. Subsequently, the game not only provides an opportunity for practising vocabulary, but also exercises general linguistic and cognitive skills.

Tell Me More Kids (Auralog): the pictures that the boy holds up one by one must be grouped into one of two categories by dragging and dropping them into the corresponding zone of the screen. When the pictures are clicked the corresponding word is pronounced. The activity is timed.



Zak's Word Games (Longman/Pearson): Learner clicks on the vehicle for a target word (furnishings, household items, etc.) and then drags and drops it into the appropriate room of the house. If the operation is performed successfully, a picture of the target appears in the room. A dictionary is available to help the learner.

Treasure hunt games

One of the most common games is 'the treasure hunt'. The student listens to (and sometimes also reads) a request or command and then has to identify one or more target elements within an illustration (or virtual environment) by clicking on them and perhaps "dragging & dropping" them to a particular point on the screen. In most cases the learner can listen back to each request/command as many times as required.

This activity is often presented within a strongly contextualised game format. The (spoken) command or request is invariably delivered by a mascot, and this helps to create a sense of interpersonal interaction. The character/s, objects and actions involved often typify a particular theme or situation (see examples below). Like video games, the activity often concludes with a reward (or penalty) animation.

From the language learning viewpoint, the fundamental objective of the treasure hunt is listening comprehension and the acquisition and reinforcement of target vocabulary: at the very least the learner needs to recognise target words spoken in context and associate them with their graphical representation. The treasure hunt game provides a meaningful context for such activities.

A secondary (but certainly not unimportant) objective is comprehension of and response to the command expressed in the target language. At first this may appear beyond the ability of very young learners taking their first steps in English learning, but if the activity is presented in a clear and intuitive manner, most will cope with (and ultimately benefit from) target language interaction. Indeed, repeated exposure to a single target language structure in a meaningful context such as the treasure hunt represents a valuable learning opportunity, i.e. a chance for language input to become language intake, in accordance with the Second Language Acquisition theories proposed by Krashen and others: for a more detailed examination of the issues connected with interaction in the target language, see [A proposito di software per... Young Learners of English > Interaction](#) and [First Language](#).

Fuzzbuzz (OUP):

Explore the virtual environment to find all five hidden Fuzzbuzz mascots, each of which is associated to one of the five target words on the right. Game playing is the prime focus of this activity; reading and vocabulary are reinforced rather than exercised.



Interactive English Junior (De Agostini):

Click on the object that Leo nominates. The game represents a practice phase that follows presentation of target vocabulary. The game element is enhanced by interaction with characters and scenes forming part of a complete narrative. Text can be displayed or hidden.

Zak's Word Games (Longman/Pearson):

Vocabulary

The learner must help the fisherman catch each of the objects he nominates by hooking them one by one (dragging & dropping the "hook" over the target item).



Zak's Word Games (Longman/Pearson):

Positional prepositions and vocabulary

Following the parrot's instructions, the learner must drag & drop all the spiders overboard one by one before the pirate wakes up.



Wordbird's Wordland (Longman Pearson):

Learner reads and listens to the instruction, and then clicks on the target. In this activity the emphasis is on language practice: spoken text is displayed and a specific language structure (the plural form) is highlighted.



Board games

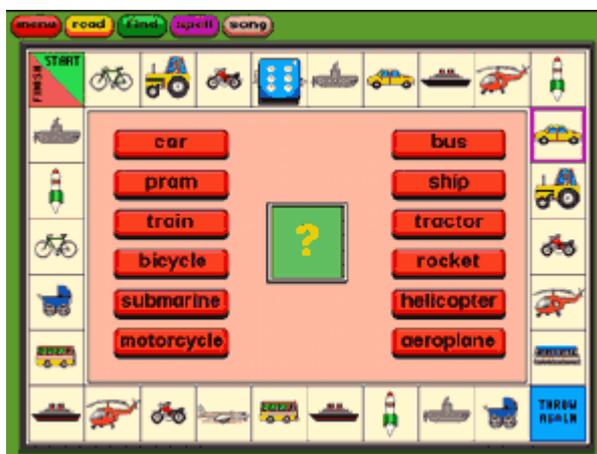
In children's English language software, well-known game formats are often adopted to make activities more entertaining; familiarity with the game procedure and rules can also make interaction more intuitive.

One such popular format is the board game, such as Monopoly, where the player/s roll a dice to advance along a path and each time they land on a new square they have to perform a particular task or action. Sometimes there are special squares with rewards or penalties.

While most language learning programs are designed for a single user, there are some that make provision for multi-user games (see example below). This feature greatly increases motivation, especially for those children accustomed to video games, most of which can be played in multi-user mode. In the case in point, players can select their own level of difficulty: this makes it possible for learners of different levels to play together and shifts the competitive focus from the interpersonal to the intrapersonal.

Word Bird's Word Game (Longman Pearson):

The player rolls the dice and advances around the board with each successful word-picture pairing.



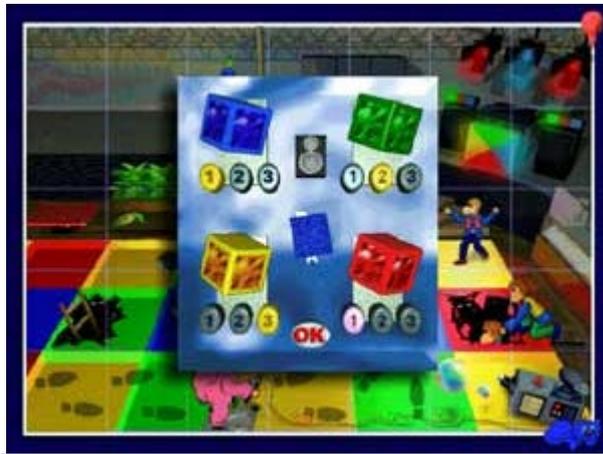
Zak's Word Games (Longman Pearson):

Word-picture pairing activity presented as a board game. The learner moves the chosen egg marker by rolling the dice and matching the word (bottom-right) with a picture. The game concludes when all the markers have reached the finish.

Muzzy at the Disco (Vektor Multimedia):

Multi-player option

The program proposes a sequence of different game activities presented within a single board game. Up to four players can play together, each at his/her own selected level of difficulty (3 levels).



Muzzy at the Disco (Vektor Multimedia):

Game sequence

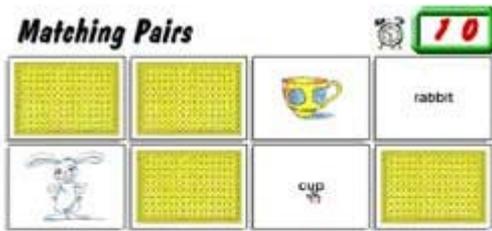
Each of the the steps on the board corresponds to a different game. Players advance when they have successfully completed a game within the time limit.



Memory games

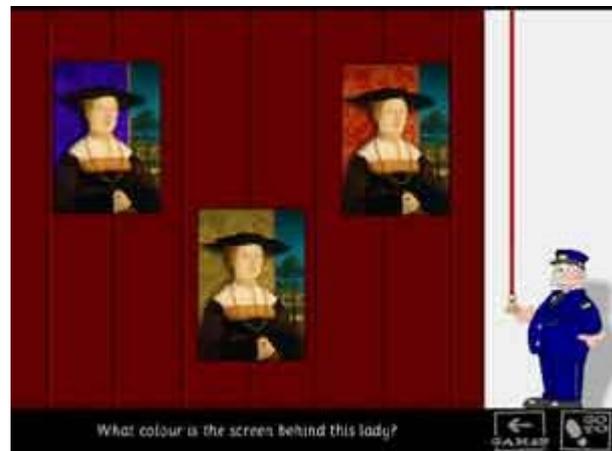
Memory games can be an entertaining and challenging way of reinforcing vocabulary acquisition. They may also help to exercise visual-spatial and cognitive skills.

Generally speaking, memory games are played in one of two ways: identify a series of word/picture pairs hidden in a grid by uncovering flip cards (one-sided flashcards) two at a time; observe a picture or animation and subsequently identify or reconstruct it.



Costruiamo i vocaboli? - Inglese (Eurotalk): Flip the cards two at a time to find the matching word-picture pairs. At each attempt, points are awarded or deducted, and at the end the final score is displayed.

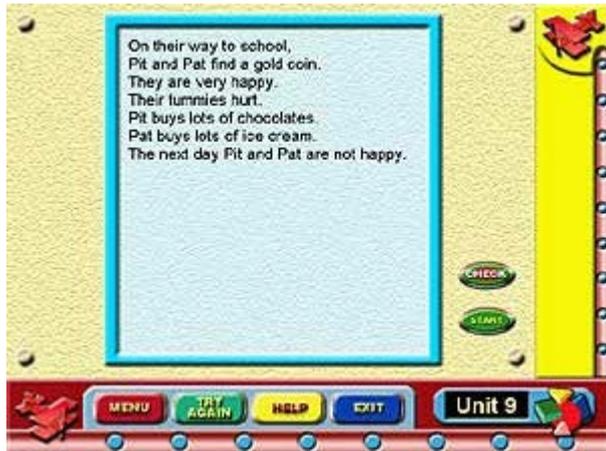
My Oxford Picture Box (OUP): visual memory game. Select the picture that corresponds exactly to the one that has been hidden behind the curtain. The language learning element lies in the L2 interaction.



Tell Me More Kids (Auralog): The learner must reproduce the short dance routine he/she has just seen by selecting the appropriate movement icons in the correct order. The game focuses on verbs of movement.



English With Toby (ELI): Memory game - initial observation phase
Comic strip story is displayed for a brief period



English With Toby (ELI): Memory game - reconstruction phase
learner orders the sentences to reconstruct the story line. As well as memory, this game involves reading and logic skills.

Creative Games

Some programs feature activities that allow learners to create personalised "products" such as pictures, postcards, speaking comic strips, etc. As well as helping to develop and reinforce language skills, these games permit a degree of creativity and personal expression, a characteristic that may well facilitate integration into classroom activity.

Although these activities may be quite strongly guided, there is no actual "correct" response to be reached, nor is there usually an ideal model for comparison. Consequently, no feedback is provided about the appropriateness and correctness of any language output, which needs to be checked by the teacher (or indeed by classmates). Often the output can be saved and possibly printed out for classroom or personal use.



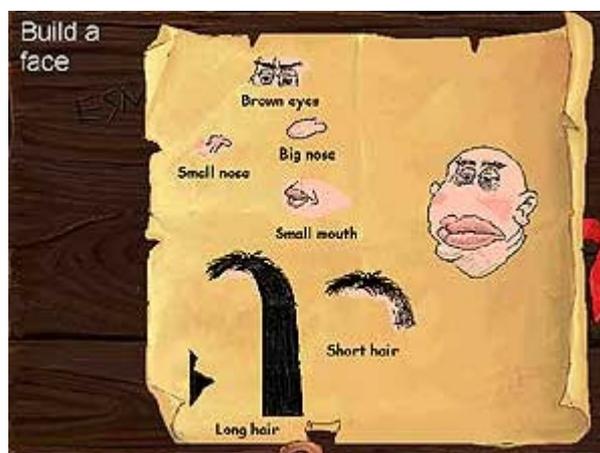
English with Toby 2 (ELI):

learners make personalised picture cards by colouring in the chosen picture and adding a slogan. The result can be printed.

Magic Spell (Nicola Milano):

Face making

learners create a funny face by dragging and dropping chosen features.



Magic Spell (Nicola Milano):

Talking cartoon strips

learners create a story-board by inserting a character in each of the frames in the strip sequence (bottom) and then recording their voices to construct a conversation.



Costruiamo i vocaboli? Inglese (Eurotalk):

The learner can attach a voice recording to individual vocabulary flash cards and then play these back in sequence to create a sort of cartoon show.



Games in language software: common features & characteristics

The games proposed to young learners in multimedia English language learning software can vary considerably from program to program, however they do share a number of common features and characteristics. These are listed here (in **bold**) and are further illustrated with some examples ([see below](#)).

One fundamental characteristic common to games of all types (with the possible exception of [creative games](#)) is the **element of challenge**. This is often enhanced by features designed to instill a sense of competition: learners are challenged to beat the clock, beat their own top score, beat their companion/s (not literally, of course!). Different learners will respond to the challenge posed in different ways, some positively, some negatively, and such reactions can have a strong impact on the educational effectiveness of language games: for a discussion of these matters, see [Games & the Individual Language Learner](#).

In games to be played "against the clock", a **time limit** is set for completing the task, with a clock or bar graph that displays the passage of time. Most children, even younger ones, are familiar with this (and other features of multimedia language games) from television game shows.

Feedback about student performance is sometimes given in the form of points: a progressive **score** is displayed during the game and/or a total score is shown at the conclusion. Scoring is another element that can enhance the competitive spirit. The focus may be individual (register a personal highest score and/or reach a given target total) or interpersonal (outperform one's companions). In any case, whether or not scoring is adopted, successful performance usually results in some kind of "**reward**", usually in the form of a special picture or animation being displayed.

Almost all the programs considered in this study propose games designed primarily for **single-** rather than **multi-player** use (i.e. where different players take turns at the same game and their relative performance is automatically compared, as in most video games). That said, some programs display a table of "top scores" that can show the best performances of different players, and it is usually possible (though perhaps bothersome) to take turns logging on and take note of the game result.

In some programs the learner (or the teacher) can choose the **level of difficulty** at which the game is to be played. This not only enhances personalisation (learning material matched to the individual needs of the learner), it also gives the student a clearer sense of the progress he or she is making.

A scuola con Adibù. Imparo l'inglese, 4/7 anni (Coktel):

Game levels

For every game in the program, the learner can choose the level of difficulty he/she wants to play at: this can be changed at any time. The program is also *adaptive*: at the end of the game, the player may receive suggestions about changing to a more appropriate level, depending on performance.



A scuola con Adibù. Imparo l'inglese, 4/7 anni (Coktel):

Rewards for successful operation

Each time an operation in a game is completed successfully, the program reacts by displaying a brief animation as a reward (in



this case the monkey-like character with the ball). These rewards are many and varied, and the expectation of receiving a novel response induces the player to carry on.

A scuola con Adibù. Imparo l'inglese, 4/7 anni (Coktel):

Game Rewards

When a game is complete successfully, the Adibù mascot does a special song and dance in English.



Find the card



Costruiamo i vocaboli? - inglese (Eurotalk):

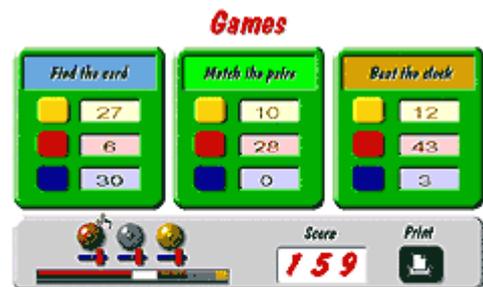
Game timing and game scoring

Click on the appropriate flashcard as the object is nominated. The bar at the top displays time remaining to complete the game, while the point score reflects the number of "hits" achieved so far.

Costruiamo i vocaboli? - inglese (Eurotalk):

Points score and overall results

Individual learner scores displayed for each game played at the 3 available levels of difficulty. The total score varies with the result of each game tackled. The aim is to gain enough points for one of the 3 achievement certificates (bronze, silver, gold). The strong focus on personal progress can motivate the learner to improve performance.



Games and the individual language learner

The motivation to tackle and complete an activity proposed in language learning software may well depend on whether, and to what extent, the young learner perceives that activity as a game. This in turn will have a strong bearing on the eventual educational effectiveness of the activity. Some children, especially those who are enthusiastic game players, can be particularly sensitive to this aspect: they will soon abandon an activity if they feel they have "squeezed out the juice" and are left with what they perceive as a dull language learning drill. By contrast, other children find much game-style interaction distracting and confusing, especially when the game involves motor skills and hand-eye coordination.

A key determining factor in the fulfilment or otherwise of language learning goals is how the learner reacts to the challenge that the game poses: this should not be undervalued when deciding what software to use. Games often have a competitive element (see [Common Features & Characteristics](#)) and children respond to this in very different ways.

For example, the added pressure on performance that may be induced by **time limits** and **scoring** stimulates some children but inhibits others. Some prefer the focus to be restricted to **personal interaction**, i.e. in single-player games tackled individually, with scoring - if any - on a "personal best" basis. Others feel more comfortable when playing together as a group, in a **collaborative effort**. Others still thrive in the competitive atmosphere of **multi-player** games (or single-player games played in turns within a group), where one's results are set against the others'.

Some children benefit greatly when interaction is clearly structured, i.e. the games are clearly ordered and presented at graded **levels of difficulty** that can be tackled systematically, with explicit performance goals that are associated with **rewards** such as animations, achievement certificates, etc. By contrast, other learners will treat the program more like a sort of "buffet": they will explore the program more randomly, jumping from one game to another and trying out different ones until they find their favourite/s, without necessarily too much regard for the "results" achieved.

Such differences in reaction are considered by many to be an expression of the learner's preferred learning style/s and, increasingly, they are being interpreted in terms of multiple intelligences (for brief summaries of learning style/s, multiple intelligences and other learning theories, see [FUNDERSTANDING](#); for more details see [Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences](#)).

With such differences in mind, this study aims to shed light on the aspects that make games more or less captivating to the young learner, and therefore more or less effective from a language learning viewpoint.

Play games with EFL/ESL children's software

Here is a complete list of the software considered in this survey: click on the title to view details about that program.

These recently published programs for children's English language learning all propose games. The significance of the game playing element in each program varies greatly, ranging from a marginal role to a central one. To find out more about other software dedicated to (or strongly focused on) games that may be useful for learning English, see [Other Games Software](#).

Title	Publisher
A scuola con Adibù. Imparo l'inglese, 4/7 anni	COKTEL/SIERRA
Base L2 Inglese - Corso di base	SEI
Costruiamo i vocaboli? - Inglese	EUROTALK LTD
English with Toby 1	ELI - EUROPEAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
English with Toby 2	ELI - EUROPEAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE
Fuzzbuzz - level 1: word learning	OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK), GRANADA LEARNING - GRANADA TELEVISION
Fuzzbuzz - level 2: books 10, 11 and 12	OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK), GRANADA LEARNING - GRANADA TELEVISION
Fuzzbuzz - level 2: books 7, 8 and 9	OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK), GRANADA LEARNING - GRANADA TELEVISION
Give me 5	GHISETTI & CORVI EDITORI
Happy English	EDITORI RIUNITI
Inglese per le scuole elementari	BIG CHIEF
Interactive English Junior	DE AGOSTINI MULTIMEDIA
Kiddy English Stage 1	MEDIAPORT
Kiddy English Stage 2	MEDIAPORT
Kiddy English Stage 3	MEDIAPORT

Kiddy English Stage 4	<i>MEDIAPORT</i>
Kiddy English Visual Dictionary	<i>MEDIAPORT</i>
Kids' Word Bank 1	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
Kids! English. L'inglese per i bambini	<i>KNOWLEDGE ADVENTURE INC.</i>
Le prime mille parole	<i>ERICKSON</i>
Leonardo's Language Bridge - inglese/italiano	<i>OHIO DISTINCTIVE</i>
Let's go level 1	<i>DYNED INTERNATIONAL INC., OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (USA)</i>
Let's go level 2	<i>DYNED INTERNATIONAL INC., OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (USA)</i>
Let's go level 3	<i>DYNED INTERNATIONAL INC., OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (USA)</i>
Let's go level 4	<i>DYNED INTERNATIONAL INC., OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (USA)</i>
Let's go level 5	<i>DYNED INTERNATIONAL INC., OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (USA)</i>
Let's go level 6	<i>DYNED INTERNATIONAL INC., OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (USA)</i>
Lexia Phonics Based Reading	<i>LEXIA LEARNING SYSTEMS, INC.</i>
Magic Spell	<i>NICOLA MILANO EDITORE</i>
Muzzy at the disco (Age 6-12)	<i>VEKTOR MULTIMEDIA</i>
My Oxford Picture Box	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
My Oxford Word Box	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
Oxford Literacy Web - Big ABC	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK), SHERSTON SOFTWARE LTD.</i>
Oxford Literacy Web - Sound Activities	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK), SHERSTON SOFTWARE LTD.</i>
Oxford Literacy Web - Sound Stories	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK), SHERSTON SOFTWARE LTD.</i>
Oxford Reading Tree - Stage 2 Talking Stories CD-ROM	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
Oxford Reading Tree - Stage 3 Talking Stories CD-ROM	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>

Oxford Reading Tree - Stage 4 Talking Stories CD-ROM	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
Oxford Reading Tree - Stage 5 Talking Stories CD-ROM	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
Oxford reading tree - The baby-sitter	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK)</i>
Picture Dictionary	<i>ELI - EUROPEAN LANGUAGE INSTITUTE</i>
Primavoce inglese	<i>GARZANTI LINGUISTICA</i>
Q Steps	<i>THE Q GROUP PLC</i>
Read, Write & Type	<i>TALKING FINGERS INC.</i>
Rhyme and analogy activity software - vol. A	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK),SHERSTON SOFTWARE LTD.</i>
Rhyme and analogy activity software - vol. B	<i>OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS (UK),SHERSTON SOFTWARE LTD.</i>
Roddy on the road	<i>EF EDUCATION</i>
Tell me more Kids (5-7 anni)	<i>AURALOG</i>
Tell me more Kids (8-10 anni)	<i>AURALOG</i>
Tell me more Kids (11-13 anni)	<i>AURALOG</i>
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level II	<i>FAIRFIELD LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGIES</i>
The Rosetta Stone - American English Level I	<i>FAIRFIELD LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGIES</i>
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level II	<i>FAIRFIELD LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGIES</i>
The Rosetta Stone - British English Level I	<i>FAIRFIELD LANGUAGE TECHNOLOGIES</i>
Word Bird's Word Land	<i>LONGMAN PEARSON</i>
You & Me. A children's English course	<i>LADDER INTERNET & SOFTWARE</i>
Zak's Wordgames	<i>LONGMAN PEARSON</i>

Other games software

This study focuses on a sample of English learning software for children in which there is some element of game playing ([see list](#)). Depending on the specific program, this element may be marginal, secondary, complementary or central to language learning goals.

As a further guide to game playing in language learning, here are some examples of other children's software titles, which, in this case, are based largely or wholly on games. These programs are divided into three categories:

- [software for learning English](#)
- [software for learning languages \(including English\)](#)
- [multi-language & multi-disciplinary software](#)

For each program the **interaction language/s** are shown. Interaction in **English** may well help to enrich the experience and increase the effectiveness of learning, while the possibility of interacting in the **mothertongue** can enhance learner autonomy. **Multilingual** interaction capability may be of added value in a multi-cultural classroom. For a discussion of issues related to the interaction language, see [A proposito di software per...young learners of English > Interaction](#)

Underlying these considerations, as well as the above sub-division of software, is an awareness of the increasingly different ways and situations in which English is being learned in Italian primary schools: as a separate subject, within a multi-disciplinary or cross-curriculum context, as a sole foreign language or alongside other foreign languages, in classrooms with multiple language capabilities (different mothertongues and/or heritage languages).

For further reference and resources, you can also search the complete database of educational software in [Essediquadro](#).

Other games software: English learning programs

Here is a list of other EFL/ESL children's software titles which are either dedicated to or strongly focused on games. Click on the title to view details about the program.

title	interaction language
Alien tales	English
At home with KC	Multilingual
Bailey's book house	Italian
Fun with Eenglish	Italian
Learn English with Asterix and Son	Multilingual
Let's go read! 2 - An Ocean Adventure	English
L'inglese con Hickory & Monker	Multilingual
Rayman English	English
Story world 1	Multilingual
Story world 2 - Little Red Riding Hood	Multilingual
The English Game with Pappaconda	Italian
Triple play plus! - Inglese / Inglese full immersion	Italian

Other games software: language learning programs

These are programs designed to help young children take their first steps in learning different foreign languages. Most focus on the acquisition of essential core vocabulary and they all allow the learner to switch between indetical versions of the same program available in a choice of languages. This last characteristic is a feature shared with [multi-language/multi-disciplinary programs](#), but the software listed here differs in that it specifically addresses language learning needs in an L2 context (click on the title to view details about the program).

In contexts where more than one foreign language is taught, the possibility for multi-language use is clearly an attractive feature, from the point of view of the school, the teachers and the learners. There are additional advantages if the learner's mothertongue is included among the software's range of languages: familiarity with the structure and content of a program used in L1 can make integration of the software in the L2 classroom much easier, and certainly facilitates learner autonomy. On the other hand, it is important to recognise that there are limitations to the use of material designed for L1 learners within the foreign language classroom (for an examination of related issues, see [A proposito di software per...young learners of English](#) > [First language](#) and [Interaction](#)).

Title	language
Teo, Leo & Manda	Multilingual
Impariamo le lingue	Italian
Poliglotta per caso	English

Other games software: multi-language & multi-discipline programs

The programs listed here are primarily designed to help young children develop cognitive capabilities, literacy and basic skills, as well as abilities in some specific subject areas commonly studied in primary school. The important characteristic they share is that they are all examples of multi-language software: the learner can select the target language of the program content (and in most cases the interaction language as well), in other words he or she can switch between indetical versions of the same program, which is available in a choice of languages.

As to content, most of these programs are essentially electronic books (e-books), i.e. story books that the learner can read and listen to like the traditional paper version but with the added bonus of multimedia capabilities and a number of interactive activities (most often entertaining games designed to develop general cognitive capabilities).

Such multi-language software may well prove useful in the primary school setting, in a number of respects. It is suitable for the integration of foreign language study across the school curriculum and may provide significant opportunities for multi-disciplinary study. Learner familiarity with the structure and content of a program used in L1 can make integration of the software in the L2 classroom much easier, and certainly facilitates learner autonomy, though it must be remembered that there are limits to the suitability of content designed for L1 learners (for an examination of related issues, see "A proposito di software per...young learners of English" > [First language](#) and [Interaction](#)). Last but not least, it should be remembered that multi-language software is obviously an attractive resource in those schools where more than one foreign language is taught, from the point of view of the school, the teachers and the learners.

Click on the title to view details about the program.**mes sw Other games sw**

Title	specific subject focus	language
Aaron alla scoperta del mondo	literacy and basic skills	Multilingual
Payuta e il dio delle tempeste	literacy and basic skills	Multilingual
Plumo nella fattoria	literacy and basic skills, logical/mathematical skills, mathematics, Italian, French, Spanish	Multilingual
Plumo allo zoo	literacy and basic skills, logical/mathematical skills, mathematics, Italian, French, Spanish	Multilingual
Thinkin' things.Sky Island Mysteries	literacy and basic skills, logical/mathematical skills	English
Winnie Puh e l'albero del miele. Libro animato interattivo	literacy and basic skills	Multilingual

Language games online

Until quite recently, multimedia (language) education games on the web were no comparison with those available on CD-Rom. Without high-speed Internet connections it is simply impossible to propose the same richness of multimedia content and high level of interactivity that we have come to expect from even modest multimedia language programs. However, with the spread of ADSL and broadband, the situation is definitely improving and the most recent games are beginning to approach the sort of technical quality levels that characterise offline digital resources (although some argue that there is still a long way to go before we see full online integration of technologies like automatic voice recognition).

The main attraction of online resources is their abundance and the fact that, again until recently, they have mostly been free of charge. However, the situation is changing here too, with the gradual introduction of subscription fees at numerous sites, especially those that chiefly address users in the USA. Some sites have reserved areas for subscribers who pay a fee to access a full range of quality material that is updated on a regular basis (a limited selection or sample is usually freely available to non-subscribers). In any case, the web makes available an enormous number of multimedia games that may well prove useful for young English language learners. Most of these are for playing online, while some can be downloaded onto the computer for playing off-line (these usually have limited multimedia capabilities).

Perhaps of most interest, at least to teachers, are sites specifically designed for young EFL/ESL learners (still relatively uncommon) or special children's pages hosted on sites for English learners in general, which are becoming increasingly frequent. Publishers in particular appear to be dedicating ever more resources to young learners: GET ZOOM on kids. An increasing number of teachers too are publishing material online.

There is a vast number of sites that provide educational resources for primary school, and many of these offer language-based games (usually to be found within the pages dedicated to students or as a sperarate section of the site). With a few exceptions, these games are intended for mothertongue children and are often designed to help them develop basic literacy skills. Nevertheless, as with software on CD-Rom these activities may well prove useful in an L2 context.

The majority of educational and "entertainment" games available online for children are in English and among these the English teacher will find many that can be useful for language learning.

For a sample list of web sites that offer games for children to play online, see [Online Games: Web Sites](#). WEB GAMES SITES

Links to more games sites and related resources can be found at [Online Games: Links & Resources](#).

Online Games: web sites

The table below lists a sample of sites that offer games for children to play online. These may be designed specifically for learning English as a Foreign or Second Language (EFL/ESL), for practising English language skills in general, or for educational/entertainment purposes (in English).

To locate more opportunities for game playing, see [Online Games: Links & Resources](#).

Site	EFL/ESL games	General English language games	Games in English
I to Z Bubbles > Live demonstration			•
ABC Teach			•
Bembo's Zoo		•	
BBC Kids English Zone	•		
BBC Learning English with Ozmo	•		
Disney			•
Filastrocche.it > Giochi > lingua inglese		•	
Genki English > Fun Talking Pages	•		
L-Spy (Oxford University Press)	•		
Inglese.it - The Game Zone	•		
Kids' Domain > Kids > Games			•
Learn English - British Council > Games	•		
Literacy Center > Play & Learn		•	
Max-Club (ELI)	•		
One Stop English > Games (Macmillan)	•		
Tiddlywinks! > Speaking/listening Games	•		
Up to Ten		•	•
Win Kids (Winkler)	•		•
Young Learners Student's (Longman)	•		•

Online games: links & resources

The table below lists a sample of sites that provide resources for children's English language learning and/or links to sites of similar kind, with particular regard for game playing.

For a sample list of online games for children to play, see [Online Games: Web Sites](#).

[Trovarsinrete](#)

[Iperteca](#) :

Extensive searchable database of educational web games for children to play online or to download.

[Essediquadro](#)

[Materiali online > Inglese \(ESL/EFL\) > Kids](#) :

List of web sites and online resources for teachers and young learners of English.

[Portals & Links Pages](#) :

List of web sites that provide extensive resources for English teaching/learning.

[Centrofriend](#) :

Italian network of (mostly) infant and primary school English teachers: resources and discussion list.

[Education World Technology](#)

[Techoorial: Fun & Games Replace Drill & Kill \(Lorrie Jackson\)](#) :

Online tutorial that offers suggestions for improving academic skills through online games and activities.

[ESL cyberlinks \(Selected Primary Links for ESL students\)](#) :

Links to web sites useful for EFL/ESL teaching at primary school level, including games.

[Kids' Domain](#)

[Online games](#) :

Numerous teaching and learning resources, including games

[LearnEnglish Kids Zone \(British Council\)](#)

[Games](#) :

Numerous teaching and learning resources, including games

[PCLandia - inglese & multimedia](#)

[The Port](#)

Site created by Italian primary school teacher of English Giacomo Rotta, with games to download.

[Kidlink](#)

International education network linking children and teachers all over the world.