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Foreword

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At the Yokohama chapter of the Japan Association for Language Teaching, we hold regular My Share events. The most recent was in December 2024 and was held on the Hiyoshi Campus of Keio University. Three presenters shared their experiences and practical ideas for language teaching and learning. This Special Issue consists of a paper from each of those presentations, detailing their ideas and expanding on the theoretical background.

The first paper encourages risk-taking in grammar classes by use of multimodal games. Kriti Arora shows her methods for teaching adverbs of certainty beginning with concrete explanations, developing into collaborative practice, and expanding to discussing futures. Using dice, paper, engaging video-based games, and an online scoring system combine to make an activity which is sure to engage and motivate students. Mira Liyanage also aims to engage and motivate students and to develop their communication skills through inviting visitors to the language classroom. She gives a detailed rationale for inviting guests, and argues that having clear reasons for the tasks is necessary for making them work well. She stresses the importance of careful planning for all stages, and gives clear advice on how to set up the activities, run the class with the visitors, and how to follow it up effectively. Finally, John Shaw shares a "rough gem" of a task - a highly-adaptable, student-centred game. Word Diamond begins as a word association game but can be used for review, grammar practice, controlled or fluency practice. The sequence, structure, and variations are explained in detail. Further advice is given about when, how, and how often to use the activities. With minimum set up and a wide range of applications, I am sure many readers will be trying this out soon.

Many thanks to the authors of these papers for their contribution to the My Share event last December, and for all of the time and effort put in, not only in writing their own papers, but in collaborating with each other through the review process. Thanks also to the YoJALT team for their hard work in making My Share events an on-going success.

To participate in Yokohama JALT events, or learn about the Chapter, visit https://jalt.org/groups/chapters/yokohama.

Sincerely,

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Editor, *Yokohama JALT My Share 2025 Special Issue*

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Maybe? Probably. Definitely! Teaching Adverbs of Certainty

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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines a series of activities for teaching adverbs of certainty to English as a Foreign Language learners. The activities, which include mathematics-based modelling, interactive prediction tasks, and collaborative games, integrate various pedagogical concepts, such as risk-taking, game-based learning, and multimodal pedagogy. While structured risk-taking in game-based activities lowers affective barriers and increases willingness to communicate , incorporating multimodal elements (visual, tactile, and collaborative modes) provides authentic language and enhances conceptual understanding. Implementing these strategies in collaborative settings helps nurture a motivated and engaged community of learners.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching grammar poses various challenges as learners often struggle with abstract rules (Larsen-Freeman, 2003), limited contextual application (Waltz, 1989), low engagement (Ardi & Rianita, 2022), and anxiety about making errors (Ekinci Çelikpazu & Taşdemir, 2022), all of which can hinder retention and effective language use. This paper examines how the intersection of risk-taking in second language acquisition (SLA), game-based learning, and multimodal instruction can enhance teaching of grammar, specifically, adverbs of certainty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Risk-taking in SLA

Risk-taking in SLA is a critical factor in developing communicative competence. Ely (1986) defines language learning risk-taking as the lack of hesitation shown by the learner in using newly encountered target language. Learners who take risks are not averse to being wrong and, consequently, seem to enjoy more gains in developing oral proficiency, particularly fluency (Cervantes, 2013), and even display increased Willingness to Communicate outside the classroom (Lee & Lee, 2019). English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Japan, however, tend to hesitate to participate in oral tasks perhaps due to the fear of social evaluation (Anderson,

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1993). Hence, encouraging risk-taking in the language classroom is of particular relevance in EFL settings where risk-aversion is the cultural norm.

Game-based Learning

Game-based learning involves the use of games or game elements as primary tools for educational purposes. Games present interactive content which not only stimulates learners' interest (Reinders, 2012), but also boosts motivation and strategic action, thereby contributing to the development of self-regulated learning (Mahayanti et al., 2019). Games provide opportunities for meaningful language use (Escudeiro & de Carvalho, 2013) and encourage the learners to synthesise knowledge from different areas for decision-making (Pivec et al., 2003). In the Japanese context, game-based approaches offer a more interactive and engaging alternative to traditional teaching methods (York & deHaan, 2018).

Multimodal Pedagogy

Multimodal pedagogy is an instructional approach based on the theory of multimodality, which explains that communication involves various modes, such as visual, aural, and spatial, in addition to linguistic ones (Kress, 2009). Helping learners develop multimodal literacy is particularly relevant in this era of increasing exposure to multimodal digital input (Li, 2020). Furthermore, multimodal texts can enrich linguistic input as they not only provide authentic contextualised language (Peng, 2019), but also positively influence students' emotions, engagement, and motivation (Levasseur & Kanan Sawyer, 2006). In the Japanese EFL context too, multimodal approaches have been successful in improving comprehension and student contribution (Lewis III & Lewis, 2020).

ACTIVITIES

Context

The following activities, which progress from guided to independent language production, were conducted in an elementary-level (CEFR A2+) EFL class at a Japanese university. Students had prior experience using "will" for making predictions but had not yet explicitly worked with certainty markers, such as adverbs of certainty. Adverbs of certainty help develop probabilistic thinking, i.e., the ability to assess and express likelihoods or uncertainties rather than making absolute statements, which in language learning, helps communicate nuanced opinions and predictions. However, introducing too many adverbs at once can overwhelm and confuse the learners. Therefore, these activities focus on three key adverbs of certainty ("definitely", "probably", and "maybe"), which were chosen as they represent a clear, intuitive range of certainty (high, medium, and low respectively) and are frequently used in everyday communication.

Materials Needed

- Several dice

- Whiteboard and markers
- Sheets of paper
- A device for projecting videos
- Internet access

Activity 1: From Probability to Certainty

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory, people understand abstract concepts through concrete experiences (Kövecses, 2020). Probability is a mathematical concept generally known to university students and can serve as a conceptual metaphor for expressing the more abstract notion of certainty. By linking numerical probabilities (concrete) to adverbs of certainty (abstract), students can develop a clearer understanding of how different adverbs reflect varying degrees of certainty. This activity utilises the concept of probability to introduce selected adverbs of certainty.

1. The teacher (T) displays/writes three different outcomes of rolling a die (see Table 1). The outcomes are carefully selected to reflect distinct levels of certainty.
2. T asks students (Ss) to calculate the probability of these outcomes.
3. T confirms the answers as a class discussion.
4. T introduces the corresponding adverbs of certainty.
5. T presents example sentences to illustrate how these adverbs function within sentences.

TABLE 1

Probability and Corresponding Adverbs of Certainty

Example of outcomes	Probability	Adverbs of Certainty	Example sentence
It will be an even number.	$\frac{3}{6} = 50\%$	"maybe"	Maybe it will be an even number.
It will be less than 5.	$\frac{4}{6} \approx 67.7\%$	"probably"	It will probably be less than 5.
It will be between 1 and 6.	$\frac{6}{6} = 100\%$	"definitely"	It will definitely be between 1 and 6.

Activity 2: Collaborative Practice

The objective of this activity is to allow students to practice expressing certainty using selected adverbs.

1. T divides the class into groups of three to four students.
2. T gives a die to each group.
3. Within each group, one S can roll the die (hiding the result) while the others attempt to guess the outcome using different adverbs.
4. Ss take turns rolling the die and guessing the outcome.

5. T walks around and observes how groups are practicing, while providing support or prompting students to make more creative predictions (for example, instead of saying "Maybe, it will be 3", they can say "It will probably be an odd number").

This activity may be further scaffolded by providing students a list of possible outcomes, which serves as a guided support for the students, while allowing the teacher more control over the range of their output. Conversely, for added challenge, a second die can be introduced, expanding the realm of possibilities.

As students take turns rolling the die and guessing the outcome, they get repeated opportunities to practice producing output using new grammar in a gamified and collaborative setup, which provides a safe and comfortable, yet engaging, space for taking risks in language production. Furthermore, the action of rolling a die engages students in tactile learning, reinforcing the connection between language use and sensory experience, which can be particularly beneficial for learners who process information more effectively through hands-on engagement.

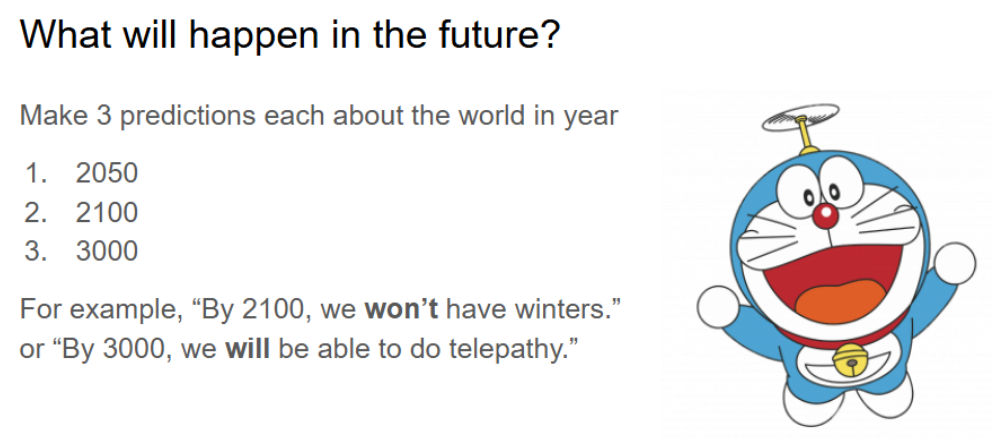
Activity 3: World in the Future

This activity engages students in collaboratively brainstorming about the future of the world, after which they use adverbs of certainty and their negative forms to express their opinions about the plausibility of predictions they made.

1. Each group makes predictions about the world, according to the prompt given in Figure 1.
2. T gives groups sheets of paper to write down the final predictions.
3. T collects the sheets and compiles the predictions by the year.
4. T creates an online form where students can cast a vote on the likelihood of other groups' predictions. One way to do this is to use Mentimeter (https://www.mentimeter.com/), a website for creating presentations with real-time feedback.
    a. Create a blank presentation.
    b. Select the *Scales* type of interactive question.
    c. Write "By year 2050," in the question field.
    d. In the response *Statements*, type in the predictions made by the Ss for the year 2050.
    e. In the response *Dimensions,* add six options, viz., "definitely not", "probably not", "maybe not", "maybe", "probably", and "definitely", thereby creating a Likert-scale poll.
    f. Add new slides and repeat steps from c to e for years 2100 and 3000.
5. T shares the automatically-generated QR code, which the Ss scan.
6. Each S individually votes on how likely the predictions made by their classmates are. As Ss vote, Mentimeter displays the results in real-time in a visually appealing format (Figure 2).
7. After everyone has responded, T and Ss (or Ss within their groups) can discuss the results, and which predictions are the most realistic and why.

FIGURE 1

Prompt for the 'World in the Future' Prediction Activity



Note. The Doraemon image in this figure is from "Doraemon png icon" by TransparentPNG.com, licensed under CC BY 4.0 (https://www.transparentpng.com/details/doraemon-icon_22575.html).

As students brainstorm and debate about future possibilities within their groups, they are engaged in negotiating meaning and expressing their ideas with clarity and reasoning. Furthermore, making predictions and assessing their likelihoods helps develop probabilistic thinking with the different time frames providing substantial latitude for creative and critical thinking. The Likert-scale type survey allows the students to interact with content generated by their classmates, while also serving as an introduction to the negative counterparts of adverbs of certainty. Teachers will find value in sharing the Mentimeter display during the voting, as students seem to enjoy watching the dynamic results screen, as well as using the reaction button, both of which reinforce learning and engagement by combining different modes.

FIGURE 2

Example of Mentimeter Poll Results

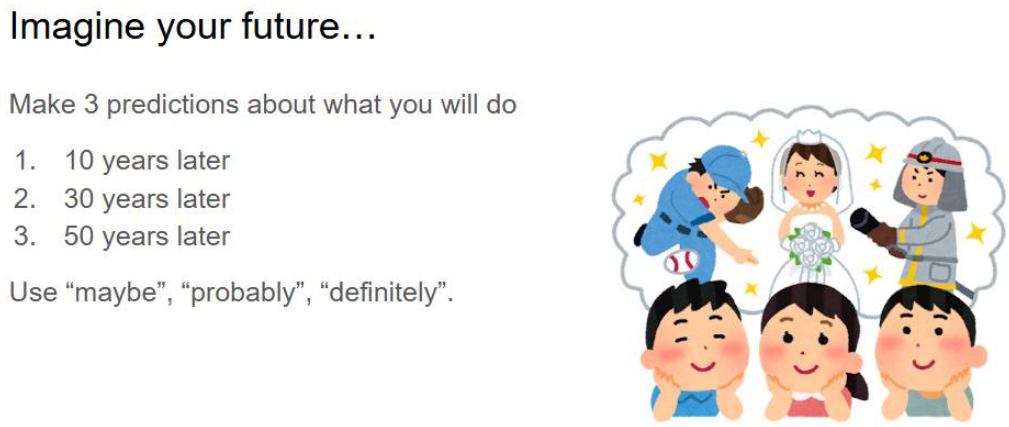
Activity 4: My Future

Students continue to make predictions, albeit this time they visualise their personal future, which encourages self-reflection and self-expression.

1. Ss individually think about how they envision their future using adverbs of certainty according to the prompt given in Figure 3.
2. Ss share their thoughts within their group.
3. T may ask Ss to share snippets with the entire class to summarise the activity.

FIGURE 3

Prompt for the 'My Future' Prediction Activity



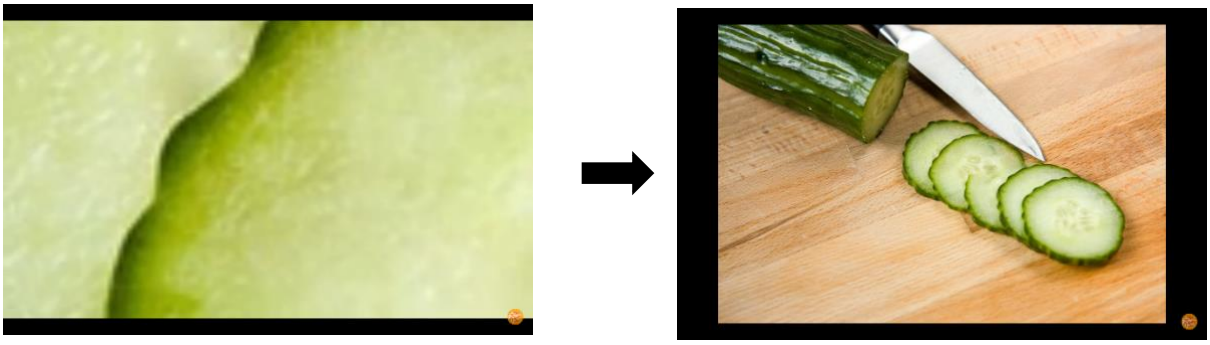
Additionally, students may create illustrations of their predictions, which may aid visual learners to understand their ideas more deeply, make abstract concepts such as predictions more concrete, as well as foster creativity and engagement. Furthermore, by sharing these predictions with other classmates, students not only get the opportunity to practice speaking and listening skills, but also develop a shared camaraderie, which is beneficial for building a classroom community.

Activity 5: Modified 'Guess the Picture' Game

This activity employs a simple game with a strategic twist to elicit spontaneous and independent (unguided) output from students and encourage them to take risks and work collaboratively in a fun, engaging environment. This game is a modification of 'Guess the Picture', where players look at a zoomed-in picture of a common everyday object (e.g., a car, an orange, or a pencil) and try to guess what it is, within a time limit as the image is gradually being zoomed out (see Figure 4). For this lesson, a total of ten images were presented in video format, sourced from a YouTube channel called *Guess the Picture*.

FIGURE 4

Example Question from the 'Guess the Picture' Game



Note. The images are taken from *Guess the Picture | Ep. 1* (Guess the Picture, 2020). Screenshot from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kffd0F1AYWU.

This game uses a special scoring system (see Table 2) which is designed to promote calculated risk-taking. Students can use any of the three adverbs of certainty introduced in class while making their guess (for example, "It is probably a crayon"), but their point gains and losses depend on the level of certainty expressed, i.e., their choice of the adverb of certainty. For instance, if a team confidently states, "It is definitely a dog," but the correct answer is a cat, they will lose three points due to the high level of certainty and risk involved. Conversely, if a team cautiously says, "Maybe it is a cat," and is incorrect, they will only lose one point, reflecting the lower risk taken. This risk-reward system mirrors real-life decision-making, encouraging students to weigh their confidence in linguistic choices.

TABLE 2

Scoring System for the 'Guess the Picture' Game

Adverb of certainty used	Correct answer	Incorrect answer
"maybe"	+1	-1
"probably"	+2	-2
"definitely"	+3	-3

1. Each group chooses a team name for the game.
2. T explains the rules and scoring chart.
3. T shows the zoomed-in pictures one-by-one.
4. Teams can raise their hand/say their team name before answering.

5. T awards/deducts points depending on the answer. (T may choose to reveal the correct answer if the response is incorrect and move to the next question. Or they may continue until another team correctly answers or until the time is up.)
6. The game continues until all questions are finished.

Students may be asked to justify their guesses to add a critical thinking element to the activity. Teachers can choose the total number of questions, the time limit, the images, as well as the method of conducting the game (for example, instead of using YouTube videos, an online quiz may be created, or images may be manually zoomed in before displaying). However, teachers should review the images and associated vocabulary in advance for appropriateness and relevance.

CONCLUSION

Integrating multimodal and game-based learning strategies that promote risk-taking provides an innovative framework for teaching grammar, such as adverbs of certainty. By grounding abstract grammatical structures in concrete frameworks, creating tasks that involve meaningful language production, and using multimodal interactive games that encourage risk-taking, these instructional activities may help lower the affective filter and boost Willingness to Communicate, thereby contributing to increased communicative competence. Furthermore, implementing these strategies in a collaborative setup can also foster a sense of community and peer support. Teachers may explore how multimodal approaches and game-based learning can be applied to other areas of linguistic and paralinguistic instruction, particularly in fostering risk-taking behaviour. Ultimately, creating authentic, collaborative, and low-anxiety learning environments that encourage risk-taking will not only improve language proficiency but also enhance students' overall communicative confidence, engagement, and motivation.

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Improving Communicative Competence through English Speaking Guest Activity

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ABSTRACT

Dedicating a lesson for English speakers to visit the English class as guests and be interviewed by university students can yield multiple benefits. Students will gain first-hand experience speaking with fluent English speakers, have a chance for cultural exchange, and feel more motivated to study English to engage in more English conversations. Furthermore, being in the presence of role models who have mastered the English language will provide added incentive, showing students what they can aspire to achieve. This interactive experience not only improves students' language skills but also enhances their cultural awareness and communication abilities. By engaging with English speakers, students build confidence and practical knowledge that textbooks alone cannot offer.

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of English-speaking guest activities where proficient English speakers are invited to visit the English class as guests and are interviewed by learners should be an important consideration in designing a curriculum. The English-speaking guest activity can generate numerous benefits. Providing students with authentic language exposure, cultural insights, and practical knowledge that textbooks cannot usually offer are among those benefits. Students will gain first-hand experience speaking with fluent English speakers and feel more motivated to study English to engage in more English conversations. Furthermore, being in the presence of role models who have mastered the English language will provide added incentive, showing students what they can aspire to achieve. As straightforward as this activity may sound, it needs to be carefully administered with clear learning goals, and ample preparation with pre- and post-tasks designed comprehensively to ensure the engagement of learners before, during, and following the activity. This paper will discuss the theory behind this activity and provide a step by step guide on how to execute the English-speaking guest activity to maximize learner engagement.

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REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Integrative Motivation and Sociocultural Theory

The early work of Gardner et al. (1985) defines integrative motivation in second language learning as the desire to be like and interact with speakers of the target language. A genuine interest in learning the second language to come closer psychologically to the other language community is reflected in integrativeness. Since integrativeness involves emotional identification with another cultural group, the socio-educational model posits that it will be reflected in an integrative orientation toward learning the second language, a favorable attitude toward the language community, and an openness to other groups in general (Gardner, 2001). Sociocultural theory postulates that social interaction is crucial for learning. Learning is seen as a cooperative process in which people solve problems and create meaning together (Vygotsky, 1978). Engaging with a guest who speaks English gives students a practical chance to practice language in a social setting, co-create meaning, and negotiate communication. Moreover, integrative motivation to learn English can be further increased as a result of interacting with the guest provided that the experience is positive for the learners.

Authentic Language Exposure and Communicative Competence

Authentic materials and language exposure have been shown to be an effective tool for promoting communicative instruction (Hussein & Elttayef, 2018). By inviting an English-speaking guest, educators provide students with authentic communicative experiences that are central to CLT principles, promoting practical language skills and cultural competence. Students interact with language as it is spoken naturally, including colloquialisms, idiomatic expressions, and different accents, which improves their listening and comprehension abilities.

Language Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate

One important factor influencing EFL learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has been found to be language anxiety, especially when speaking. According to a study by Bensalem (2022), anxiety about learning a foreign language significantly correlates with the enjoyment of learning the language, which implies that improving language learning enjoyment could lessen the negative effects of anxiety on WTC. Thus, encouraging genuine interactions with native speakers through guest activities can be a useful tactic to lessen language anxiety and encourage EFL students to communicate.

Task-based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is an approach of language instruction that focuses on the use of real-world tasks as the main unit of instruction. TBLT emphasizes on helping learners use the target language to complete meaningful tasks, such as problem-solving, or decision-making (Ellis, 2003). In TBLT, communication and fluency is valued over accuracy, with tasks that encourage learners towards the practical use of language in authentic contexts (Willis, 1996)**.** The English-speaking guest activity is characterized by the TBLT approach, which simulates a real-life activity where authentic interaction is encouraged and executed. The

TBLT method also encourages learner collaboration by enabling group work that maximizes the overall benefit of the activity in terms of learner engagement.

Effectiveness of Guest Activities in the Japanese Context

The effectiveness of the English-speaking guest activity has been explored in the Japanese context previously. In a study conducted by Hasian et al. (2017), with over a hundred Japanese students in the Japanese EFL context, the analyses of the data revealed that accepting foreign students as guest speakers in English communication classes motivated learners to communicate in English and promoted their learning. Moreover, the students showcased both linguistic and pragmatic skills by somewhat clearly expressing themselves during their presentations and questions to the guests, and they were generally able to communicate effectively in group discussions with them.

CONTEXT

The activity was carried out in a private university in Tokyo with university students who were in their sophomore year and who belonged to the faculties of law, letters, and education. The general attitude of sophomore students regarding English classes was that English lessons were considered a burden or unnecessary, as the students were usually more engaged in their majors and were in the process of finding internships. The total number of students was ninety, spread across six classes, and their proficiency level was CEFR B level, which is considered a high beginner to lower intermediate level of proficiency. The six classes met with their teacher once a week for one and a half hours to study English. The exposure to English speakers for the students of this university was not low, as there were international students attending the university, as well as a university self-access center, where students were encouraged to partake in English conversations and other activities in English to promote self-learning. However, regardless of the facilities mentioned above, many students lack the motivation to engage in SAC activities due to time constraints or anxiety about speaking English.

METHOD

The English speaking guest activity consists of several steps starting from a series of pre-preparation tasks, the main task and post tasks. A first step would be to set realistic learning objectives that can be derived from executing the activity, such as increased learner motivation and engagement, improved willingness to communicate, and/or reduced learner anxiety associated with learning and speaking English, cultural exchange, and so on. The following step would be to design pre-preparation tasks based on the learning objectives to scaffold learners to perform the activity and create a supportive environment for successful execution. The activity should be followed up with post-task activities to ensure further learner engagement. It is also important to align the content of the activity to match learner interest for improved engagement through tasks such as learner-formulated questions for guests, with the assistance and refinement of the teacher. The English-speaking guest activity is characterized by the TBLT method, which simulates a real-life activity where authentic interaction is encouraged and executed. The TBLT

method also encourages learner collaboration by enabling group work that maximizes the overall benefit of the activity in terms of learner engagement. It is recommended to continuously gather feedback to improve and refine the English-speaking guest activity further.

Pre-preparation Tasks

1. Setting Goals for the Activity

Setting goals for the activity is an important first step to determine the expected outcomes. Some example goals for this activity include increasing integrative motivation, facilitating communicative competence, reducing learner anxiety associated with learning English, and improving WTC. These goals set by the teacher can be broken down into simple and clear goals so that students understand the expected outcomes of the activity (e.g., to improve conversation skills, to feel more confident in speaking English, and to talk with people from foreign countries).

2. Creating Guest-speaker Profiles

In implementing the English speaking guest activity, six TESOL graduate students volunteered to take part as speakers. The guests consisted of the countries of Ghana, India, the US, Brazil and Nepal. The teacher sent out a mini questionnaire (see Appendix A) to the guests to collect their information along with their picture. Based on the information, the teacher created a profile for each guest. Showing guest profiles and getting the students familiarised with the guest will create a sense of rapport with the guest that can help to reduce their anxiety of meeting them.

3. Introducing the Activity and Guest Profiles to the Students

The next step is to inform the students about the activity program and show the guest profiles. Student reactions ranged from excitement to nervousness. The program was thoroughly described, and guest profiles (see Appendix B) were presented for students to discuss their impressions in groups.

4. Making Interview Questions

Interview questions were created as the next step. Students were divided into small groups of three or four and encouraged to write questions that they wanted to present to the guest. The questions included some general ones, such as their motivation to come to Japan and specific questions, such as a memorable cultural experience they had while traveling. All questions were written in a shared Google Document so everyone could see the questions being formed. A group leader was also assigned to each group to facilitate the interview between the guest and the group.

5. Scaffolding Language that Students will Use Throughout the Activity

The final step of the pre-task phase was introducing students to the language and the preparation that they needed to participate in the guest activity confidently and successfully. The language was introduced step by step and then scaffolded through activities such as a simulation where one group member acted as the guest and others asked and answered questions. This process could ideally take a couple of weeks until the students feel comfortable enough to participate in the activity.

Main Task

On the activity day, the class can do a warm-up that includes revisiting guest profiles and having a quick look at the questions they created to ask the guest. When the guest arrives, the teacher introduces the guest to the class and starts group interviews, where the guest will be interviewed by one group for about 12-15 minutes (this number can vary depending on the size of the class and the number of guests available per class). It is advised not to prolong the activity, as the students might not have sufficient language or may feel anxiety with silence, which can decrease the effectiveness of the activity. In individual groups, the group leader welcomes the guest to their group and introduces everyone in the group. After brief introductions from the students, the activity progresses to interviewing the guest with the questions the students pre-prepared. While one group is interviewing the guest, the class enjoys snacks and plays games initiated by the teacher. After the interviews, each group join the class and share some brief feedback about how the interview went.

Post Tasks

After a group chat about the guest speaker interviews as part of the post-task, students individually write a reflection based on a provided prompt. This prompt may include statements or questions such as: introducing the English-speaking guest they interviewed, noting some positive things they observed about them, sharing any interesting information they learned during the interview, expressing their feelings about meeting and talking with an English foreigner, and providing a conclusion. Depending on the students' proficiency level, the length of the reflection can be adjusted. In the present context, the reflection amounts to a short paragraph of five to six sentences.

DISCUSSION

The teacher’s own observations, analysis of students' post task reflections and comments from the guest speakers revealed the following. Students were highly engaged in the activity thus suggesting their increased motivation. Students who are relatively low in class participation also showed engagement in this activity compared to others. Student reflection essays attested to increased motivation to improve their English in order to communicate with foreigners thus improving their willingness to communicate in English. Overall positive attitudes were cultivated toward interacting with people from other cultures in English, increasing student curiosity to learn about different cultures. Students used communication strategies as a tool to compensate for their lack of fluency as a preemptive strategy and resolution strategy and understood the

usefulness of these strategies. Students also reported a decrease in their anxiety about speaking with foreigners as well as studying English.

CONCLUSION

As the existing literature suggests, the English-speaking guest activity is a valuable classroom activity that can be adopted in an English language classroom, particularly in an EFL context, to yield multiple benefits for learners. These benefits include increased integrative motivation to study English, improved willingness to communicate, and reduced anxiety associated with English language learning. Setting goals in advance and implementing the activity with pre- and post-tasks will enhance its effectiveness. Additionally, aligning the activity with the learning context and learner interests is essential for maximizing engagement. Incorporating post-task feedback can facilitate further refinement of the activity, ensuring continuous improvement. A potential challenge in this activity would be guests speaking English too advanced for the student level and/or speaking too fast, which will be counterproductive to the goals of the activity, increasing student anxiety. Therefore, it is important to communicate with the guests to speak mindfully in terms of their vocabulary and speed. This activity could be expanded to add multiple guests from different backgrounds for one class. When thoughtfully planned and executed, this activity has the potential to create an enriching and immersive language learning experience.

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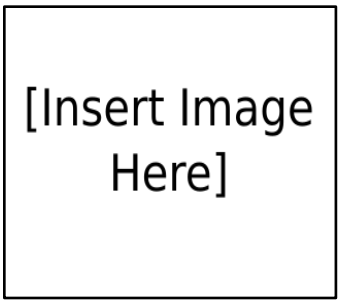
Appendix A

Sample mini-questionnaire for guests

1. Your nickname (if you have one):
2. Please share a little bit about yourself? (where you're from, what you do, or anything you'd like to share):
3. What inspired you to study TESOL or become interested in teaching and learning languages?
4. What is something you enjoy doing in your free time?
5. Please share a fun fact about yourself?
6. Do you have a favorite quote that you would like to share?

Appendix B

Sample Guest Profile



Gabriel

Hello, my name is Gabriel. Please call me Gabby.

I'm from ……. (country).

I'm a TESOL graduate student and I love …….

I like to …….. in my free time.

A fun fact about me is …….

My favourite quote is ……..

I'm so excited to see you guys soon!

Selman, A. (Ed.). (2025). Yokohama JALT My Share December 2024 [Special issue]. *Accents Asia, 20*(1), 1-29

Word Diamond, A Rough Gem: Polishing Systems and Skills with a Low Preparation Game.

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ABSTRACT

Games have many multifaceted uses in the classroom especially when it comes to reducing anxiety and promoting a positive learning environment. Still, many teachers use the wrong games at the wrong times for the wrong reasons, and to make matters worse, fail to exploit them fully. One game, known as *Word Diamond*, when implemented correctly, has proven to be flexible enough as a freer practice or revision activity to cover all skills and systems in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom and additional skills valued in EAP (English for Academic Purposes) like critical thinking and collaborative skills. It is also visually stimulating, easily adaptable and engaging. This article briefly recaps differing views about games in the classroom and how it is important to use the right one at the right time before demonstrating how to play Word Diamond. Following this, it is explained how it can be adapted for different levels and teaching contexts to teach systems and skills. Finally, pedagogical and cultural challenges are highlighted and how these have been addressed to make it compatible with the Japanese teaching context.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the dominance of the Grammar-Translation Method left little scope for games due to its emphasis on rote memorisation and reliance on literature (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). However, more modern methodologies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) such as Desuggestopedia use gamified techniques like role-plays and dramatisation as a means of promoting communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011) and nowadays interactive methodologies like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) utilise activities derived from influential resources such as Wright's (2006) *Games for Language Learning*, with the first edition being published back in 1979. Hadfield (1999) believes such games compliment a communicative approach as they are goal-oriented while Stojković and Jerotijević (2011) caution that games may lead to discipline problems; a lack of focus on learning objectives and a perception of childishness. Therefore, I adopt Lee's (1995) view that carefully chosen games can effectively balance engagement and learning. In this article, I explore the benefits and dangers of games which inform my usage of a game called *Word Diamond* drawing on research and

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experience. Following this, I demonstrate how to play the game followed by the rationale for its integration into teaching. Finally, its adaptability to various learning objectives and cultural contexts is considered.

BACKGROUND

What Makes a Classroom Game?

There is a clear distinction between *charades* and *pictionary*, which are widely recognised as games, and activities like gap fills and role plays, which may initially have appeared novel and gamified. This raises the question of what differentiates games from learning activities. Wright et al. (2006) define a game as an activity that is entertaining, engaging, challenging, and interactive. Similarly, Kapp et al. (2014) emphasise that games promote interactivity, opportunities for learners to reflect on their learning, and offer authentic situations that simulate real-world experiences.

Why Use Games?

Games can play a transformative role in the classroom and I have seen firsthand how games can elevate language acquisition by reducing learning anxiety and the 'affective filter' (Krashen, 1986). This includes not only the use of communicative games, but also the gamification of stages (Shaw, 2023). Additionally, games can be used in settling and stirring activities, both important in maintaining the attention span of younger children. Moreover, Kapp et al. (2014) argue that games can help some learners overcome disengagement. Similarly, for teenagers and adults, games incorporated into warmers and coolers act as smooth transitions, boosting motivation and setting a positive tone for learning, and Wright et al. (2006) go further arguing that games are central to learning as they provide intense and meaningful practice of language.

The Dangers

Newer teachers frequently fall into three major pitfalls. The first mistake is using too many games at the beginning of a course leading to overdependence, with Hanus and Fox (2015) arguing this could lead to a loss of intrinsic motivation. Conversely, I have experienced adults recoil at the word 'games' complaining that they had paid for serious lessons and Kapp et al. (2014) point out that some people just do not like games. Stojković and Jerotijević (2011) also argue that overfamiliarity can lead to boredom and unequal student involvement. Another closely related mistake is using games as a classroom management tool without considering learning outcomes and language exploitation. Lastly, Kapp et al. (2014) highlight the danger of 'stealth learning' arguing it is better when learners know they are learning as they can internalise and reflect. They also assert that gamification alone does not result in learning aligning with my prior conclusions in Shaw (2024) that using Virtual Reality had a negligible effect on language attainment but instead created conducive conditions for learning in the activities leading up to and following the task.

Why Word Diamond?

Word Diamond was initially introduced to me as a simple warmer activity; however, I have adapted it for use as a freer practice or review task taking into account the benefits and drawbacks mentioned above. When implemented correctly, the activity emphasises the aforementioned advantages of a game such as engagement, interactivity, and goal-oriented learning. I have yet to encounter a class that was not fully captivated by this activity which incorporates a variety of interactive stages, pair work and mingle patterns, promoting active participation and collaboration. It also encourages learners to critically reflect on their answers. Moreover, given the widespread popularity of quiz shows across the countries in which I have taught, I would argue that the game possesses a degree of authenticity.

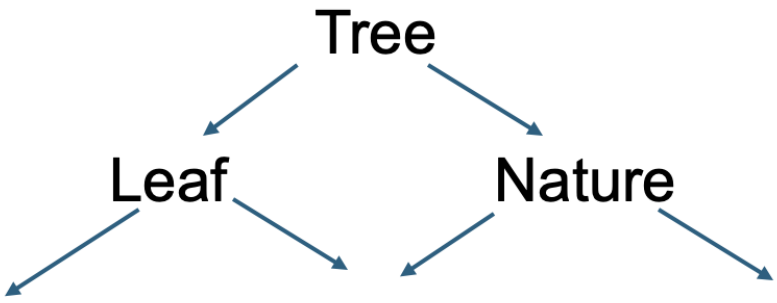
HOW TO PLAY

Part 1: Association Game

1. The activity begins as an association game with the selection of a starting word, e.g. tree. Students are then tasked with identifying two words associated with the starting word and providing justifications, e.g., "leaf" – leaves grow on trees; "nature" – trees are found in nature. The teacher writes these associated words on the board creating a branching structure shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

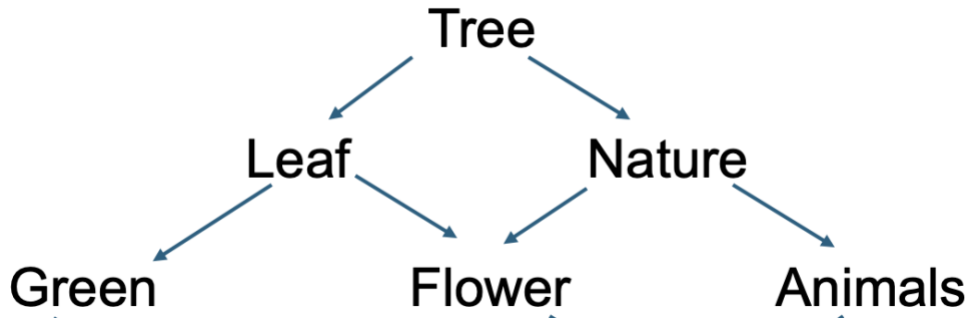
Top Part of the Word Diamond



2. Expanding on Figure 1, students identify one more association for “leaf” and another for “nature”, e.g. "leaves are green," "animals are in nature" expanding the branches as in Figure 2. After comes the trickiest part as they must now determine a word that connects both associations, e.g."flowers have leaves and are part of nature". The class has now created the upper half of the diamond structure.

Figure 2

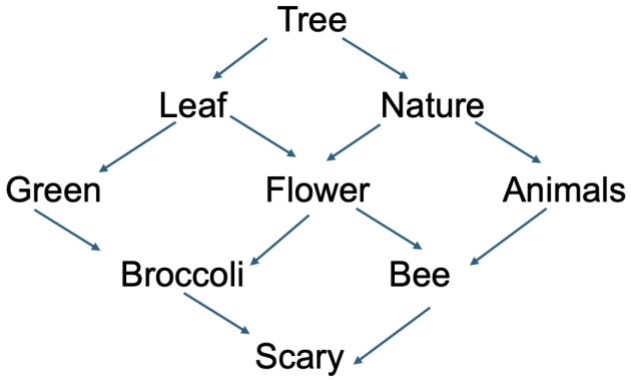
Top Half of the Word Diamond



3. Students then work from the middle to the bottom completing the diamond, finding new associations that lead back to a single word. For example: "Broccoli is green and has flowers," "Bees are animals and are attracted to flowers," and finally, "Broccoli and bees can both be scary." This leads to a completed Word Diamond as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3

A Complete Word Diamond

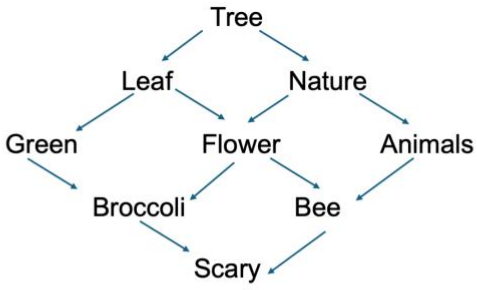


Part 2: Gap Fill Exercise

1. The second stage of this activity involves putting students into pairs or small groups. The teacher then shows a model of the kind of gap-fill task they want the students to emulate. An example would be, “While I was eating _____, a _____ stung me and made me cry.” Students then collaborate to find the right answers from the words in the Word Diamond.

Figure 4

A Complete Word Diamond and Example Gap Fill Sentence and Corresponding Image



Target Language: Past simple and past continuous

While I was eating broccoli, a bee stung me and made me cry.

Note. Image generated using Bing Image Creator. The image was generated in response to this prompt: 'Create an image of “while I was eating broccoli, a bee stung me and made me cry”'.

2. After this, the teacher tells the pairs or groups that they need to create their sentences or a paragraph with gaps that include words from the Word Diamond and they are going to test their classmates. While the students work on creating their tasks, the teacher monitors and quietly gives hints, or gives hot error correction to make sure that the sentences are accurate.

3. The groups then take part in a mingle task where they read out their sentences and instead hum the sound of the missing word while their counterparts need to work out the missing word from the diamond before changing partner and repeating.

CONSIDERATIONS

Systems and Skills

Earlier it was established that games in the classroom have to be meaningful. Whether used as a production or a revision activity, Word Diamond flourishes because it covers a range of systems and skills. Most teachers are aware of the four primary skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, more experienced teachers understand that critical thinking, collaborative, socio-linguistic, among other skills are just as vital. Systems such as grammar, vocabulary, and phonology, while supplementary, are also crucial as their role is to give the skills meaning, form, and intelligibility. There is also discourse which looks at language at a multi-sentence level focusing on cohesion and coherence. This is an important consideration for higher-level learners.

Systems in Word Diamond

When giving instructions I often limit the scope of the game to a topic and encourage vocabulary from a recently covered unit, hence consolidating the lexis and allowing students to use it productively. When arriving at the gap fill creation stage I usually give a grammatical item or function that the students have freshly studied. This is prudent as they are practising two systems at the same time. However, with higher levels, I often eliminate the use of a single grammatical structure as the focus is more on discourse. Authentic texts contain a variety of grammatical structures, so students are encouraged to write natural paragraphs with all nine gaps from the diamond. This is far more challenging and requires more attentive monitoring but ultimately more rewarding for the learners. Regarding pronunciation, in the initial stage, it is possible to drill words that students come up with, focusing on syllables, stress and other segmental features like individual consonant and vowel sounds, and this can be done visually on the diamond as seen in (Appendix A). In the second stage, the teacher can review suprasegmental features like connected speech and tone in feedback using the students' examples.

Skills in Word Diamond

Receptive skills are primarily practiced in the second stage when listening to a partner's example or reading, depending on the focus. The same is true for productive skills depending on whether the teacher wants the students to read out their sentences or exchange written gap-filled examples. In the latter case, handwriting skills are also to be emphasised. During the first stage and question creation substage, speaking and collaboration skills should be encouraged. I promote this by getting students to brainstorm word associations in small groups before whole-class feedback. I often write collaborative language on the board to facilitate this as seen in (Appendix B). With more familiarity, I then invite them to challenge each other's associations promoting critical thinking and confidence to justify their answers. I have also used Word Diamond in teacher training and while this may seem just to be a fun warmer for those looking for more games, the question-creation phase of the game sheds light on test reliability and construct validity. Common issues are that participants will change the form of the missing word or that multiple answers from the diamond may apply to the gap. This is not only useful for raising the awareness of colleagues but also for higher-level learners who should look at their materials critically.

PRACTICALITIES

Student-Centredness

It is imperative to cultivate the aforementioned critical thinking as well as learner autonomy and agency by promoting student-centredness. This increases engagement and interactivity as well as socio-linguistic skills. While there is no doubt that the second stage of Word Diamond reflects this, it is questionable whether the word association stage is too teacher-centred. On the one hand, Teacher Talking Time is not a bad thing if used to extract language

from the learners, and in this case it is mostly modelling and instructions so that the students have the tools to discuss associations. Harmer (2007) also believes that the interactive exposure from a teacher facilitating activities can be more personalised and provides comprehensible input. It is also obvious that teaching pronunciation (Appendix A) requires closer teacher involvement. Nevertheless, this activity can be more student-centred by having larger groups create their own word diamonds and then working in pairs to test each other. This requires more coordination as the teacher has to monitor different groups with different diamonds working at different speeds and is only recommended when the students are already familiar with the game and delegating trusted students to lead the groups.

Staying on Task

On the other hand, entrusting the activity to the learners also has its risks. One of the biggest obstacles this game faces is that the students can go wildly off-topic if not well facilitated. This is only natural given that humans are creative beings and this can be a good thing. However, teaching learners to stay on topic is also a skill valued in English for Academic Purposes. Usually, this is more of a problem at higher levels with teachers being the worst offenders with the game degenerating into lewdness, though this is probably more a reflection on teachers than the activity! The facilitator needs to intervene appropriately depending on the learning outcomes.

Cultural Adaptability

Having primarily taught Italian and Slavic speakers, I experienced a cultural shift in willingness to communicate when I moved to the Japanese university context, especially when it came to learners volunteering to answer questions or speaking in front of their peers. It took time to develop new techniques to encourage participation and promote learner autonomy but I had much fewer problems with this activity, especially the second part which involves more group work and mingling which the students relished. The adaptations I made for the first part were to drill models of the language I wanted them to use; giving students time to brainstorm in small groups while I monitored and gave praise to their ideas; and giving them more thinking time. Extra microstages were added such as an opportunity to vote each time for the word they thought was best by holding up pieces of paper, which ultimately led to more participation. Given that most of my learners are lower-intermediate learners between A2-B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the current focus has been on sentence level, but the next goal is to encourage polite disagreement in the first part and then move onto two-sentence examples.

Replayability

As previously mentioned, there is a risk that a repetition of activities may result in diminished engagement, similar to the phenomenon known as the ‘Hawthorne Effect’ (Mayo, 1949). This concept, originating from a study on the impact of light levels on factory productivity, suggests that the introduction of new stimuli temporarily increases productivity, but diminishes as participants adjust to the changes. Hsueh (2002) provides further illumination, noting that chief methodologist Elton Mayo drew inspiration from the interview techniques of

Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. This connection brings us back full circle, as Piaget's work on cognitive development is influential on the critical role of play in education. In the case of Word Diamond, it has already been suggested that varying the topic and system focus each time, transitioning between sentence and paragraph levels, and making the activity more student-centered could enhance engagement. Despite this, it is advisable not to use this game more than twice a semester assuming classes are twice a week or fewer, unless the students specifically ask for it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, games have their place in the classroom but they must be appropriately chosen to meet learning outcomes and fully exploited. Word Diamond is one of many activities I have relied on over the years and it is almost universally loved by students and teachers. What elevates this game beyond just being warmer or cooler is that it practices many systems and skills and is adaptable for different levels and learning environments. This includes Japanese universities where after a few practical adjustments, the game was well-received by my lower-level students and which I will use as a springboard to consolidate valuable critical thinking skills when using it in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was a newly-qualified teacher at a large private school in Moscow when I first came across Word Diamond. I was fortunate to benefit from dozens of highly-qualified managers and teachers and a focus on training including one Saturday of every month being dedicated to workshops. During one of these the Director of Studies, Wayne Rimmer, presented a series of useful warmer and cooler games and it was Word Diamond that caught my eye but I would not understand until much later how special it was.

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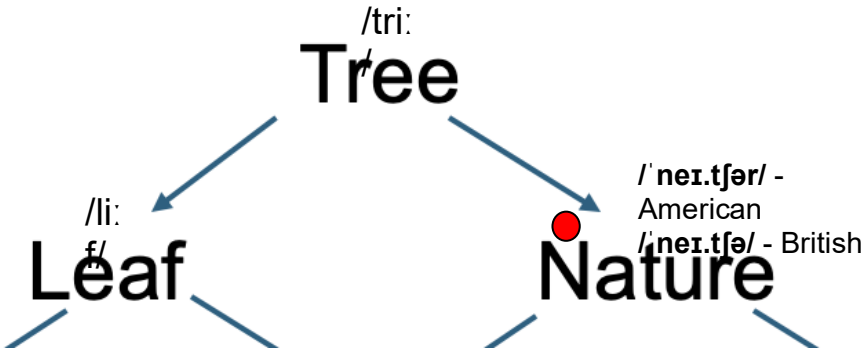
Appendix A

Segmental features that the teacher should highlight:



1) The long /iː/ sound is often confused with the shorter /ɪ/ sound. This is an issue in minimal pairs, e.g. /biːt/ (beat) and /bɪt/ (bit).
2) The stress is on the first syllable in nature. The second syllable is weaker and includes a schwa (/ə/), an unstressed vowel sound. The British and American pronunciations differ.

Appendix B

Possible examples of collaborative language:
How about + (V1+ing)…
Let's + (V1)…
Do you think it's a good idea to + (V1)...
I think we should + (V1)...
In my opinion, …

Model 1:
Teacher: What word is associated with tree?
Student A: Leaf.
Student B: Why is that?
Student A: Because leaves grow on trees.
Student B: Ahhh.

Model 2:
Teacher: What is associated with leaf and nature?
Student A: I think flower, because flowers have leaves and they are part of nature.
Student B: I see your point and agree.

Model 3:
Student A: How could we use the word broccoli?
Student B: You eat broccoli so something to do with eating or food.
Student C: Yes, or like or not liking, or wanting.
Student A: Those are great ideas. How can we use it in the past continuous?
Student B: While she was eating broccoli….
Student C: and the past simple?
Student A: She was stung by a bee?
Student B: Yes, this is very sad.
Student C: Yes, bees are scary… and so is broccoli!