

《論 文》

Authenticated Language Through Games that Contribute to the
Interest and Language Acquisition of Learners of
English Speakers of Other Languages

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ABSTRACT

In this particular University classroom setting and in the classes being taught, have been placed in the lowest level in regards to English exposure with my class being their first interaction of a new language, taught purely in English. These particular students in this study were first year Economic students and of Japanese ethnicity being taught at a Japanese University. In this case, one of the major obstacles faced by professors and English language teachers to second language learners is that of low intrinsic motivation, and an of understanding the needs of the learners being taught; from their perspectives (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 89 – 94). Students of any age learn much the same as early ages in what is known as the “Questioning Cycle” (Paul, 2003, p. 11). The proposed model of using games and objects (including realia) in the classroom to develop language and grammar skills has proven personally successful for the students who have attended my classes. However, when games or realia are introduced to students of University ages, some difficulties may arise within the classroom and may disrupt the lesson plans themselves. One difficulty that has been an issue is that students can possibly become overly motivated; losing focus on the lesson and the content itself. Adversely, another issue is that the students may feel that such games that include realia are “childlike” and may refuse to involve themselves at all. Both of those aforementioned negative outcomes can be allayed by the use of stating clearly that this activity can be taken as either or all of an active participation mark, in-class participation mark, or bonus point, and that when made as a competition the game becomes more involved for the students. Once the grammar is acquired through physical action and the students are ready to use their texts all three learning senses will have been engaged and the students of the second language: Audial, visual, kinesthetic and with the textbook, written reiteration of that which has already been learned. The benefits of using games and realia in class are that the students are given more chances to verbalize the target language; creating a resulting decrease in teacher involvement with students being given more opportunity for creative thought, initiating the natural thought process of native speakers.

Key words : Authentic tasks, accuracy, self-guided discovery, feedback, Experiential Learning Cycle

INTRODUCTION

There has been a long-standing debate regarding the health benefits of sitting versus

standing in all areas of life, from home to work and, with recent medical findings, (Saeidifard et al., 2018) the debate is leaning more towards the mental and physical health benefits of standing and even actively moving round, that can increase the cognitive function as well as the physical well-being of people. By using realia and game centered classes students are not only cognitively engaged but also physically up and out of their seats; creating an atmosphere that shows that learning at any age can be fun. If we stopped learning as teachers, what kind of model would that be for your students? (Paul, 2003, p. 59). We need to grow and adapt to the needs of our students and if our desired goals of that particular class are not being achieved then we must reassess the methods through which we are developing our lessons. When our students are engaged and motivated, their learning comes naturally.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Findings that state facilitators of learners see students as natural learners, as long as a teacher provides a stimulating environment (Paul, 2003, p. 138) were found also in other texts. In a more recent book it was written that teachers will generally fall under the three categories of Explainer, Involver, Enabler (Scrivener, 2011 pp. 16-18). Following these two texts is another which has an informative section on the types of teaching and methodology available when teaching speakers of other languages. It was noted by Harmer, that regarding the application of second language teaching, Harmer had researched through David Nunan, who discussed both the “why” and the “how” questions of task-based learning from its inception and structure to the application, outcomes and benefits (Harmer, 2015, pp. 60-62). Each of these texts discuss the benefits of an active classroom for adults with less teacher centered lessons. By reducing teacher involvement, the students are then guided towards self-discovered learning with facilitation and redirection as needed using activities, tasks and games. The activities themselves vary from the type of teacher (Scrivener, 2011 p. 18), and understanding the learners and their needs (Harmer, 2015, pp. 1-9). The activities used for each skill can be found in a range of Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Content Based Language Integrated Learning (CBLIL) books, and even in children’s books. The concepts behind CLIL and CBLIL are to veer away from text-based learning and more into naturalized learning of language, such as through math, science experiments, cooking and physical education; it is to engage all senses rather than learn from texts (Paul, 2003, pp. 181-211). All of the aforementioned literature reiterates the same ideologies and methodologies when approaching the learning of students of any age: That is to stimulate and engage the

learners while reducing teacher centered classroom time.

Method

The manner by which the students were engaged in language learning through the use of a ball and grammar games, and movement was quite simple. All classes were taught in English with myself feigning a complete inability to understand or speak Japanese, although I am actually a fluent speaker. Once this “English Only” point was established, bonding sessions took place at both the beginning and end of each class to allow for comfort and bonds by which the teacher can individually connect with their students (Scrivener, 2011, p. 15). This class consisted of primarily male, Japanese students with little to no exposure to English aside from rudimentary lessons in High School and Junior High School classes, who were majoring in Economics or in sports. It is essential at this point, to define the individual needs and abilities of students to better assist their individual language growth. Secondarily to that point, in the orientation class, each student is asked to write their name along with three likes and dislikes on a cue card (Scrivener, 2011, p. 35) their birthdate and age. A photograph of each student in the class is taken, printed, and then placed upon the cue card already bearing their name and preferences in the second class. This is setting the basis for the groundwork for the process of introducing the ball(s) game(s) for grammar and free speaking. The process itself goes as any introduction to a new form of grammar, game, or dissemination of factual information would normally proceed: Setting the scene, introduction, assisted practice, personal practice, assessment and input skill practice (when doing output-based activities). This is more commonly known as an Experiential Learning Cycle card (Scrivener, 2011, p. 19). Initially, a simple greeting or simple question of likes and dislikes, and a cline of possible responses is placed upon the board ranging from positive to negative responses from the students. At that point, the ball is brought out. With each student their orientation card is brought out and a student is chosen in random order from the pile of cards on the desk. With the photo the student was easily located, and with their name and preferences listed, asking yes or no questions and knowing the answers becomes simplified, thus giving the student a personal sense of confidence. A learner is chosen at random, their name called, and the ball thrown. The student reflexively catches the ball. With the information on the card a simple question is asked, and the student can choose from a range of possible answers; ranging from the positive to the negative. It is made clear that each student starts with a total of 5 points. For each refusal to catch the ball, or with any behavioral issue, such as throwing

the ball forcefully, a point would be removed. It rarely takes more than one or two removal of points before the learners become active and willing participants. With the introductory cards in place, the first teacher involved game of basic questions runs smoothly and quickly. As the language is supplied on the board most students feel comfortable in answering in longer utterances. As some dislikes were listed on the cards were a bit out of the expected “norm” of Japanese likes and dislikes, some students responded accordingly with words that were not supplied, such as “Shocked”, or “Crazy” and “Me too”. When expected answers are given, and the ball returned, the first phase of introduction is complete. The intent of the first phase is to familiarize the learners to a situation they would not usually expect in a University classroom setting, creating an atmosphere of relaxation and excitement more conducive to learning, especially at younger ages (Paul, 2003, p. 11). Once the introductions are completed, the students are then able to proceed onto scaffolding their language, with less teacher involvement and more student-centered learning. At this point, students work in groups of 2 teams constructed as a race, with the expected language target written clearly on the board. A spoken demonstration in English is given, and another physical demonstration is given, and a final demonstration without teacher involvement is given. The behavioral goal of the second exercise is to develop interaction between the students themselves with less teacher involvement. The linguistic goals are to have the students think more quickly, thus increasing the processing of information in a foreign language. Gradually, language is removed from the board, and a list of “banned” verbs introduced. The intent behind doing so is to have the learners veer away from overused verbs such as “play”, “eat”, “drink”, “wake up”, and think within their team of some new verbs before the next round of action. Once thought of the game resumes at a faster pace. Each student who has asked or answered sits, until the last student throws the ball back to the teacher. The team that throws the ball first is declared the winner and the losing team must draw a picture on the blackboard, or do a mini song of their favorite commercial. The winning teams are awarded points and need not do a mini song nor draw a picture on the blackboard. As the students have, by this time, taken accountability for their learning their enjoyment of this aspect of the game is more mature than that of the beginning of the active learning process. At the end of each class the students are given a bonding moment, in which we discussed the pros and cons of each section of class. During this time, the feedback is given by the students and future games are adjusted to suit the needs and wants of the learner. The teacher then allows a free chat time, during which conversational phrases are placed on the board to initiate partner conversation while the teacher walks and spends a few moments with each student giving constructive feedback and

asking bonding questions about their lives.

Practice and Results

The actual running of the grammar game ball activity produced more constructive and positive results than earlier surmised. Initially, after stating the rules and the demerit system of active participation points, certain students as expected, initially avoided participation with negative responses to the games. However, the result of this was surprising. Those classmates who had garnered an interest in the idea of playing games in class began to encourage their classmates, taking ownership over both the learning of themselves and the learning of their less inclined classmates. The findings of the learning through active games centered on authentic and fluency based language as opposed to text based points of accuracy, using balls and competitive grammar games that utilized the energy of the students were successful. The students were not only exposed to the necessary target language, they were also able to develop personal language without interference that related situationally to the activity. This particular game was one of many used during class, however, it was found to be the most successful. Students began voluntarily using the target language in later classes and other students used verbs that were not on the “banned” list. Those students previously apathetic about the game quickly became a part of the “hive” feeling and began moving tables to enlarge the spaces between desks, creating an atmosphere of activity and excitement. When the students were told that the target phrases would slowly be erased after each round of the team toss, their excitement levels built. Once the familiarity had been created moving into the second aspect was done more quickly than anticipated. Many of the students enjoyed asking their classmates questions, however while monitoring both teams, I did notice that the “banned” verbs were frequently being used. After 10 minutes of actual throwing time, we paused the game and the students were given 5 seconds within which to find available team-seats and return both balls to the teacher. The target sentence had been fully erased at this point, and this time was used to list the “banned” words and use the next five minutes as an opportunity for each team to brainstorm a list of new verbs as substitutes that they could use in the final round of the game. It was interesting to see how quickly the teams delegated a writer, and how quickly they organized themselves. When the students had to ask a question of me what was acceptable, they had to pose it in English as they are unaware of my ability to speak in their native tongue. It developed confidence in the students. That situation offered them more opportunity for constructive thinking and less first language interference. We

very quickly moved into the final aspect of the game activity and the students had their list of acceptable verbs. The questions they came up with became more interesting and some quite original, as with new verbs they needed also new nouns. Those who were being asked answered more quickly because they had helped research the new verbs, also, as it was a race, the teams were vying for first place. The focus of the ball as a game became less and, instead shifted towards the language. Students seemed absentminded about throwing the balls, at times they dropped the grammar balls, answered the question first; then retrieved the ball, to throw to their seceding classmates. With each question asked and the ball thrown, the more language the students developed on their own. With the quickening of the pace, their own deliverance quickened in tandem. When the last student finished, and I was thrown the ball, he shouted, "I'm finished!!! We win!!!". This came as a complete surprise as it was situational and natural, and it came from a student with whom I'd had some issues in bonding with. He had also listed on his dislikes: English. That moment was one of surprise progress and reiterated the fact that classrooms with active physical learning and cognitive inspiration facilitate developmental beneficial atmospheres conducive to learning. Once the losing team had sung their commercial song and the winning team awarded their points, the students were genuinely enjoying themselves. The losing team worked together to choose a song and the winning team was looking forward to witnessing the song. After the physical exertion, the language practice and the 2-minute cool-down period the students were asked to return the desks as they were. It was interesting to see some students choose to sit next to others beside whom they had not sat next to before. The students had chosen for themselves to act outside of their comfort zones, showing natural bonding and a relaxation of self. This is an excellent sign of cognitive and behavioral progress that ties in strongly to acquiring a second language (Harmer, 2015, p. 113). At this point the students were asked to bring out their textbooks and refer to the language on the page. We worked together on one question from each section as a class, and the students were then asked to complete that section on their own, then compare with a partner using the target language and situational language used during the games.

After monitoring for help, assistance and mistakes, the students were asked to discuss their answers with each other with official feedback given at the end of this discussion period. This came so naturally as they had just been using the target language. Conversational support language was written on the board, and then select students were asked to write the correct answers on the board. This manner of checking the grammar varied from class to class so as to avoid feelings of repetitiveness, however no official checking was ever done without comparing answers with a partner so as to avoid embarrassment if a student were

to be verbally called on to answer and their answer was mistaken. When feedback was given at the end of the textbook target language/listening of the day it was done constructively and positively (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 386-389). The classes always ended on a high note, with good natured conversation surrounding the games and the actions of the losers.

As a result of the games the students gained confidence quickly. The students, rather than being corrected constantly without any support or listening to a CD with falsified speed and pronunciation, learned through self-guided discovery. They were listening to their peers with group pronunciation provided by the teacher, through meaning form and pronunciation if the mistakes were constant or group mistakes were continually being made. While each team was competitive, a lot of in-team support was given to their class/teammates and even to their opponents. It showed initiative and support. The teacher role in this section was that of monitoring for any accuracy mistakes. This game was to introduce the grammar and although there were a few minor mistakes, those mistakes were based more on fluency than on accuracy (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 285-290). As long as the grammar modal was achieved then the minor mistakes were verbally corrected at an appropriate time. The actual corrections for accuracy came from the textbook, so the students were getting an incredible amount of exposure. Many of the students in this particular class had a self-perception of being active learners, which means they see themselves as constructive learners and not restricted by the negative opinions of an extrinsic lack of motivation, if any, of those around them (Paul, 2003, p. 14) In future classes, the students when directly asked were able to come up with longer utterances, with their grammar being more precise. However, some mistakes regarding articles and prepositions, or grammatical themes were made as they had not yet been introduced as part of the grammar modal and would be in later classes. When the balls were brought out after the initial first class, the excitement level usually went up and all were active participants from beginning to end. There was a point towards the end of the term that the students themselves began recognizing the English pattern of subject, verb, object and had a greater range of language when speaking because the banned list of verbs grew as the students became habitual with those particular uses of verbs and nouns. Most interesting was to hear the students take personal initiative during the feedback sessions. As they were familiar with the basic structure of the target language through the games and, as it was scaffolded throughout the semester, when they were approached as adults and asked what they liked or disliked from the games they were able to construct their responses based on the target language. At the beginning and the end of each class, we had a warm up/cool down session which included student bonding. We discussed weekend plans and/or plans for the

evening. We talked about family, friends and what they enjoyed doing in their free time.

Their responses became less structured and their thought process less of translation and more natural; thinking in English. While I spoke with each student individually giving feedback, their classmates were engaged in a free conversation, using common phrases when talking about themselves naturally and without the constraint of constructed grammar. An example of this would be, "What're you up to after class?" as opposed to, "What will you do after class?". I found the students especially enjoyed the one-on-one time and also, the natural language. They'd often approach me with the aforementioned question, and were also proactive in taking notes. Overall, I found the games played in class to be a success with the goals personally set (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 135-142) achieved. These findings are based on the aural abilities that developed quickly, the increase of listening skills as no Japanese was used, as well as an increased range of verbs and nouns due to the banned list. A heightened thought process of speaking quickly in English with learned words and utterances from the games, rather than translating word by word, and as the voluntary use of previous language learned in preceding classes grew, fewer mistakes were made in their textbooks by the learners.

DISCUSSION

As was mentioned previously, the assumed two difficulties faced with bringing games into a structured university setting were assumed to be a lack of interest or apathy towards the activity due to feelings of being treated like a child. Conversely and in addition, the opposite of over active students taking advantage of the game situation and allowing themselves to behave over excitedly with the ball, or not taking the game seriously. To successfully address both issues there needed to be a system by which both two situations could be addressed. As participation marks counted for quite a lot of their final points of this class, a demerit system was introduced. Each student was given 100% participation through the value of 5 points. With each behavioral difficulty, such as throwing intentionally hard at a friend, or refusing to catch the ball at all, a point was then taken off of their total. When the students realized how easy it was to maintain 100% participation, their attitudes changed. Those with positive attitudes encouraged those who did not want to participate on their teams. While simultaneously, those who were behaving irresponsibly with the ball and taking advantage of the relaxed atmosphere, were also being coached by their peers. It made a huge difference to have the students take responsibilities for themselves and their classmates. It came down to classroom management and how it would be approached. Would the teacher

be in control? Or the student? (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 54-58) As the idea behind the game was to minimize teacher talking time and involvement, it was initially left up to the students to be responsible for their own behavior, with any demerits being done quietly on the teacher's part. (Harmer, 2015, pp. 154-158). Within 5 minutes the students began to take accountability for not only their actions, but those of their peers. As further initiative to take the games seriously, the students' teams, depending on what was found during monitoring for language and behavior, were given incentive to do their best. This incentive was done by way of awarding bonus points to the winning team and a challenge to the team that did not perform as well. The term loser, was avoided as it has a possibility to minimize confidence for further games. This is something I have discovered since incorporating the game system in class. Those that did not finish as quickly or managed their grammar as needed were given 5 minutes to choose a popular jingle from a shop, TV commercial or variety show and perform it for the class. They could choose that or, draw their teacher on the board. All students enjoyed this aspect and the feedback at the end of the performances or drawings went well. There was no negativity involved which, once again, showed student to student bonding. There was much laughter in the classroom and the games finished on a high, rather than a low.

CONCLUSION

Classroom management is integral to the success of any class (Harmer, 2015 pp. 168-173), as well as building strong rapports with students. In the process of teaching with realia and games, without trust, , realia or authenticated language and personal engagement with individual students, is area very strong components of the self-led learning process. By knowing names, likes and dislikes of our learners through their photos and cue cards the teacher is able to help students who are struggling with language by assisting in the language elicitation process answers through personal likes and dislikes (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 73-75). In summation the process of using grammar and topical games to induce motivation, in the practice of this study class is was clearly successful, with results going beyond that of even the expectations of the teacher concerning situation language and natural language. The thought process of the students became more natural as the year proceeded. This was evidenced the bonding sessions that were held both prior and post classes, with students often asking more difficult questions or asking how to say things in English on their own accord. Motivation is key in learning; if there is no motivation or excitement, then the chances of learner interest, understanding and retention decline (Scrivener, 2011, pp. 89-94;

Harmer, 2015, pp. 89–94). By introducing games into university level classes, we assist with generating that motivation and excitement; with it coming the ability relax enough for the mind to naturally engage in a foreign language. Games can be adjusted to class sizes and the types of objects used can vary from class to class, depending on size and again, the importance of knowing and understanding the needs of the learners. It's also of great importance to understand the levels of the students and how to link new words and patterns with the ones they already know. This practice begins early in early childhood education of children who are learners of other languages (Paul, 2003, p. 24). Although the benefits of games do assist in motivating students it's also important to remember to keep the focus on learning (Paul, 2003, p. 50). Even with games the students may lose motivation so it is by using games wisely and varyingly that we can continue to maintain our learners' interest. The games should not become overly competitive, nor should the students be apathetic towards learning in new manners. It is the teacher's management of the classroom and the learning process that can avoid both of these adverse outcomes. Lastly and again, the teacher must thoroughly understand the needs of the learners and approach the lesson with games that are suitable to them and their needs. Overall, the success of these games and the use of objects and games within a university classroom setting has proven successful, since its introduction 5 years prior. It has given students chances to grow cognitively and behaviorally, learn the target language, develop new language and begin the foreign thought process; which is not that of translation.

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