

Using Origami and Magic Tricks to Teach English

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This article presents the pedagogical value of origami and magic tricks to English teachers. First, rationales for using origami and magic tricks to teach English are discussed. Second, some ideas of how origami activities and magic tricks can be incorporated in English teaching are illustrated. Third, free online resources of origami and magic materials are provided with description.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the pedagogical value of origami and magic tricks to English teachers and provide teachers with ideas that lend spice to their teaching. Origami is an art of cutting and folding papers into different decorative or representative forms. Origami activities, often viewed as childlike and non-content activities, actually promote language learning among not only young but also adult learners (Ho, 2002). Meanwhile, the mysterious nature and spectacular outcome of magic tricks are certainly appealing to learners who are motivated by curiosity and the ability to impress others.

Nonetheless, origami and magic trick materials are usually not developed for language teaching purposes. Teachers need to alter and incorporate such materials to fit their teaching contexts or spend time to seek appropriate and ready-to-use materials. In this article, I offer some examples of how origami and magic trick materials can be incorporated in language teaching and useful resources of such materials that are appropriate for English teaching and learning.

Rationales

Learners' success in folding an origami and performing a magic trick is basically attributed to their comprehension of the text that contains the folding and performing instruction. The value of this attribute is two-fold. First, the teacher can assess learners' language learning by examining their visible outcome (i.e. final origami product and successful trick performance). Second, such activities readily lend themselves to task-based instruction. Task-based instruction emphasizes communication, negotiation of meaning, collaboration, and use of the language as a means to an end (Shrum & Glisan, 2005). While the end is the origami and trick outcome, the means is the process of engaging with the target language to comprehend the origami and trick instruction and negotiate meanings with teachers and other learners.

Origami and magic activities can be flexibly adapted for separate macro skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) or integrated skills which promote communicative language teaching and learning. For example, a series of pictures of how to fold a particular origami shape are shown to learners who then write an instruction in their own words or by incorporating key related words taught before this activity. To embrace a communicative method, teachers can group students according to what magic tricks their groups want to perform to the others and have them discuss with their group members how to execute the trick.

Origami and magic activities also address diverse needs of learners in the language classroom. Gardner (1993) posited that learners possessed multiple intelligences, but their intelligences were not equally developed both within an individual and between individuals. Some learners learn better when they do and create something, while some others need to discuss new information with others. In the same vein, Oxford (1990) proposed five key dimensions of language learning styles. To address this inevitable diversity in the classroom, the teacher needs to use activities that incorporate multiple intelligences and dimensions. Origami activities will open the class to different learning modes such as kinesthetic and visual auditory (Ho, 2002). Origami and magic tricks can be adopted as both cooperative and competitive activities.

Finally, origami and magic activities are naturally stimulating. Young learners are attracted to such shapes as lovely animals and toys, while adult learners may desire something less juvenile and more complex. Magic tricks are the love of learners who want to impress their friends and are curious about the mystery behind tricks.

Some Pedagogical Ideas

Origami

Basic origami materials needed for a language class include a visual (i.e. a series of pictures showing how to fold an origami) and written and verbal origami instruction. For low level or young learners, the teacher provides both the visual and instruction text to learners. The teacher can pre-teach difficult words before an origami activity by either explaining or demonstrating action of the difficult words. To explain the phrase "accordion fold", I would fold a paper into an accordion shape in front of my learners and invite them to follow to make sure that they understand. Select words with a focus to help learners comprehend the instruction text. Pre-teaching difficult words and the visual are scaffolds for low-level learners. To make an origami task challenging for higher level learners, the teacher can remove the visual, and ask the learners to develop the visual from the instruction text given in pairs or groups.

To focus on writing, the teacher provides a visual on which learners base their origami instruction writing. Different groups may have different visuals and produce different sets of instruction. Each group tries an origami instruction different from their own. The teacher can pre-teach key words.

When the learners are familiar with origami activities, the teacher can ask the learners to learn an origami folding from their families, relatives, or friends, and produce a set of instructions for other learners.

Magic Tricks

Last summer I introduced two card tricks to a class of mine. Due to complexity of the tricks and text, this lesson is for intermediate and upper intermediate learners. The instruction text for the tricks is in the appendix.

First, I pre-taught such words as "spade", "club", "diamond", "heart", "shuffle", "cut", "pick" by using a deck of cards. I wrote those words on the whiteboard. I showed different cards especially picture cards and called out their names. I also performed actions (i.e. shuffle) related to the verbs I was teaching. I checked their comprehension by showing some cards and performing some actions and asking some students to name the cards and provide the verbs for the actions.

I split the class into two groups. Each group held a secret of their trick. Each group received an instruction text of their trick. They discussed the trick and rehearsed the trick. I would facilitate any member who had difficulty. Discussion was effective with a group of 4 or 5 students. Then each member from one group was paired with a member from another group. One learner in the pair performed his or her trick while the other either paid attention or took note of steps taken by the trick performer. At the end, learners in each pair shared their secret behind their trick. Each learner wrote down the instruction they learned from his or her pair member. Their writing would be collected for assessment. The first card trick (see the appendix) even allowed learners to create and narrate their own story related to the trick to divert spectators' attention from their secret.

Resources

Some free online resources of origami activities and magic tricks can be found in the following websites.

<http://www.tammyyee.com/origami.html>

Tammy Yee's Origami Page provides numerous origami activities including textual instruction, visuals, and pages formatted with crease patterns ready to be printed. Each activity is assigned to a difficulty level. Origami projects are also organized into three categories: nature, holidays, and multicultural. Every month new origami projects are added into the database. Everything is free.

<http://dev.origami.com/diagram.cfm>

This is a huge origami database. The website has a search and a filter mechanism that filters origami models based on the difficulty level chosen. Many of its origami models are not suitable for young or low level learners. Its complexity may be appealing to adult and advanced learners. It is also free for all visitors, and the database keeps growing.

<http://www.origamitube.com>

<http://www.videojug.com/>

These sites contain videos of how to make origami shapes. For teachers who love incorporating short video clips into their instruction, these sites are their love. For the videojug.com, teachers need to type keyword origami to get a list of related videos. This site contains quality videos that are downloadable once you sign up as a member for free.

<http://www.kidzone.ws/magic/index.htm>

This website contains a dozen of free magic tricks for school children. Its easy trick instructions are suitable for English learners in many levels. Most tricks involve easy-to-find objects such as cards and coins. The instruction is usually short and thus stimulating.

<http://kids.mysterynet.com/magic/>

This site has several simple magic tricks with moderately long instruction but with simple words. There are also pictures to help illustrate the tricks.

<http://www.cardtricksite.com/tricks.htm>

This site has a wonderful collection of card tricks organized in neat categories. Teachers may find easy trick categories useful for their lessons, but other categories are also worth exploring.

References

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Appendix

Card Trick 1

All card Jacks, Queens, Kings, and Aces are used in this trick. The cards are arranged in four columns based on a story. The order of each column should be a Jack, Queen, King, and Ace. Each column is collected and placed on one another to form a deck. The deck now is placed on a table. The audience is invited to cut the deck as many times as they want. Then cards are dealt in four piles so that each pile will have four cards. The effect is that all the four cards in each pile belong to the same kind (e.g. all Aces).

How does it work? The story is intended to distract the audience's attention from the order of cards arranged in four columns. The story can be made up to match the interest of the audience. One excellent example is that one day four young men (four Jacks) had a party, but when the party became boring, they invited four young women (Queens) to join. As the party was still

boring, they invited four older male friends who were outspoken (Kings) to join the party. However the party got loud and the neighbors called the police. Four police officers (Aces) came to the party and took the party goers to the police station in four cars. When narrating, first place Jacks in four different locations (Each Jack will be the first card of each column). Queens, Kings, and Aces are handled in the same way so that each column should contain in order a Jack, Queen, King and Ace. Pile the columns on one another to form a deck.

Ask the audience to cut the deck. No matter how many times the audience cut the deck on the table, the order of the cards should always be Jack, Queen, King, and Ace. When dealt into four piles, the cards will always go into their group: All Jacks, Queens, Kings, and Aces. Cutting the deck on the table, the audience has control on the deck and is not suspicious of the order of the cards believing that random cut will jeopardize the order, which contributes to amazement of the trick effect.

Card Trick 2

Two cards are picked out by the magician from a fan of cards. While picking out the cards, the magician looks at the audience's eyes as if he or she were reading the audience's mind. In this example, the two cards to be chosen for the effect to happen are the Nine Spade and the Three Club. The two cards match in number with the top and bottom card in the deck, the top being Nine Club and the bottom being Three Heart in this example. This is the secret of the trick. The magician places the two cards face-up on the table. Then he or she places the rest of the deck card by card (from the top to bottom of the deck) on the table and tells the audience to stop him from doing this whenever the audience wants. When stopped, the magician places the Three Club face-up on top of the pile on the table and then places the deck in hand on that pile. The secret is that the Three Heart (the bottom card of the deck in hand) meets the Three Club. The magician then collects all the cards and places the cards one by one on the table once more. The audience is invited to stop him whenever the audience wants. When stopped, he places Nine Spade face-up on top of the pile on the table and then places the deck in hand on that pile. The secret is that the Nine Spade meets Nine Club. And then the magician hands the deck on the table to the audience who will shuffle or cut the deck. After that, the magician searches for the pairs, places the pairs on the table, and turn the cards face-up. To the audience's amazement, the cards match with the two cards picked out in number.

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