

Activities for *Language evolves!*

Activity 1: Telephone game

Split the class into smaller groups - round about 6 is ideal.

Oral telephone game (at least 1 round).

Sentences selected at chance from a set like this (younger kids may need shorter sentences):

A dog named Moose ran loose through the forest chasing a goose
I saw an elephant in my pajamas. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know.
Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana.
I don't care much for blue carrots, but red cucumbers are better for the stomach.
The raft floated down the river sank.

Shorter sentences :

The best chips are chocolate ones

Two tiny toads ate fat flying flies

Procedure: The kid at the beginning of the chain will read the sentence in the paper. Each kid gets the message from the previous kid and whispers it to the next one, as fast as possible.

Outcome: The last kid will first repeat what they and then everyone will also repeat what they heard in order.

Graphical telephone game (usually 2 rounds).

The first child in each chain sees an abstract drawing (see abstract_drawings.pdf - we took these from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/cogs.12144>, they are basically moderately complex squiggles).

Procedure: Each kid has up to **10 seconds** to see the drawing (without drawing) and up to **10 seconds** to draw. The other kids don't get to look at the drawing when the first kid is working with it - get them to look away. Then you take the first kid's attempted reproduction and show it to the second kid in the chain, and so on.

Outcome: Arrange the drawings on table ourselves within the group to make sure they see the simplification over time and the potential increase in simplicity. This also visually allows

them to see that although each reproduction is actually pretty good, change nonetheless accumulates.

Activity 2: Communication game

Again, organise the class into small groups - 3-4 per group is better for this.

To play this game you need a deck of cards (or small slips of stiff paper) with three different monsters/aliens printed on them, and a selection of the novel words below printed on small slips of paper. We skew the frequency of the cards so the green monster is much more frequent than the red monster; we then give the monsters names which are initially anti-Zipfian (the green monster has the longest name), make them play with that lexicon, then allow them to rearrange the names to make the game easier.

Green monster	Gray monster	Red monster
24 (x 2) per deck	12 (x 2) per deck	6 (x 2) per deck

List of words:

6 syllable names: LOPADOTEMACHO, BOONAFELOOPOTA, MOTAYMASIBUBER, SCOTATALILOMA. DROPYBABATERMIS, MAGICACUDASAN, HIPPOPOOPOOMAJEE, SANDATEEPANDAZE, MOOPALLOOLATALU, KOLPRATOVANIDO

4 syllable names: BABADOOLISH, PATRAPARA, *TUDEPIVORO*, TURANIMI, FELOPOWA, CLARGUIPOOPI, PELTRIVANI, MERTAMIVO, PEEPEEPLUFFY, WOLPIDRAVO,

1 syllable names: WIDGE, NERK, GREP, ROOCH, PILK, SNAY, PLEF, TROK, SORP, MEEP

NB. We use repetitive rude-sounding 6-syllable words (e.g. poopoo...) because it's funny but also because this helps the kids actually say these long words - the main point here is that the long words take longer to say, not that they are impossible to say, so you may need to tweak the words for your audience.

Procedure: Each group is given three words, one from each length group, and we assign them to the monsters so the assignment is not optimal (green alien gets long name, red alien gets short name). Place one of each monster out face-up in the middle, with its name next to it - these are the starts of the piles that the cards will be placed in. The task is for the kids to sort the aliens into these three piles. Shuffle the deck then divide it among the kids. They take it in turns to say the name of the alien and put the alien on the correct pile - it's important to make them at least try to say something appropriate so that they notice that the green alien having the long name is annoying. Give them 1 minute to place as many cards

as they can. After the first round, ask whether they found the task difficult, and whether they could change around the monsters' names to make the task easier. They change the labels (ask why they changed them in the way they did) and play round two. Was the task easier in Round 2? They should be able to figure out that they will go faster if they use the short word for the green alien and the long word for the infrequent red alien.