

Matching Auditory Description with Visual Objects in an Interactive Setting

by **MONISHA BISWAS**

Suppose you have taught students how to describe objects. Now, how will you help them practice? Will you ask them to describe objects that you may have inside the classroom, like the clock or a poster? Perhaps you will show objects through audiovisual aids and ask the students to describe them. Or maybe you will bring objects from your home or office into the class and ask students to describe those. These are common activities. How about combining these into a matching exercise that will allow the students not only to speak as they describe an object, but also to listen, to visualize, to interact, and to connect?

When it comes to the description of objects, I created an engaging matching exercise where the students have to match visual objects with auditory description. I have used it in my tertiary-level English as a foreign language (EFL) classes on improving oral communication skills; the learners come from a Bangla-medium background, and many of them struggle with English speaking. However, instructors can also use the activity with children by adjusting the difficulty level of the material and the style of description. I like the activity as a way to give EFL students practice after they have learned the basics of giving descriptions; it is also possible to follow up with discussion on what and how the students have described and with reflection on the exercise and their English usage.

This matching exercise requires students to work individually and in groups. It is divided into three sections: pre-speaking, while-speaking, and post-speaking. To prepare, instructors will need to have a way to show a collection of objects to students. One option is to make a collage of images and show it on a screen or a poster; another way is to place actual objects on a table or desk in the classroom.

PRE-SPEAKING ACTIVITY

At this stage, the students are shown various objects without the objects' names. The instructor can select an image with different objects or use a collage of images (see Figure 1 for a sample, but many options are possible). Such materials can easily be found on the internet; images can be taken from openly licensed sites like pixabay.com, unsplash.com, and pexels.com. Instructors can choose commonly found items known to the students, and items can be selected based on the vocabulary that the class is studying or has studied recently. A few unusual items can be selected to add complexity. It is important to include as many objects as possible in order to avoid too much repetition during the activity. Including similar-looking (in size, shape, color, etc.) objects will make the activity more complex and challenging, but also

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interesting and engaging, especially for students at more-advanced levels.

Students should look at the items carefully and draw a grid on a piece of paper or in a notebook, with one square in the grid for each item. They use the grid to record each item's name or note a few describing words. Doing so will familiarize them with the objects/items. Once that is done, the instructor should take a couple of minutes to review the names of the objects/items. Thus, students not knowing the name of any item will be able to add it to their grids.

Next, the teacher will ask the students to choose—silently—one object/item from the collage and write its name down on their notebook or put a tick mark on the item name in the grid. Students can choose any object they like. This activity will be individual.

Essential instructions for the students

- Do not ask others for suggestions in choosing an item. You can choose any item you want to!
- Do not share the name of your chosen object with anyone else.
- Do not have any discussion with your classmates about the chosen item.

Purposes of the activity

Practice using vocabulary: Students practice using their English vocabulary—especially descriptive terms. If any student does not know the name of an object (or objects), the instructor should encourage them to write related or descriptive words. They will learn the word when the instructor reviews the item names.

Create suspense: The students at this stage think that the activity is about knowing the items' names. They do not know what will come next. Also, they do not know which item any of their classmates have chosen. Thus, it creates suspense among the students.

Break the ice: As the students look at the objects/items carefully, then select one, they become comfortable and prepared for the next phase. Since they are already thinking of their chosen object, they do not feel hesitant to start talking about it, as opposed to when someone is asked suddenly to describe an object.

What if there is no audiovisual aid?

In some classes, instructors may not have a multimedia projector or other sort of audiovisual aid. In such situations, the



Figure 1. Sample collage of various objects

Students get to connect their auditory and visual senses by matching the spoken description with the image or object they see.

instructor can simply use realia. The objects can be put on the front desk/table or be arranged at the center of the classroom. Other instructions for the activity will be the same. Using actual objects can make it easier for students to see details; on the other hand, using images can increase the variety of objects that can be included in the activity.

WHILE-SPEAKING ACTIVITY

At this stage, the students will form groups of three to five (the number can be more or less depending on the class size). Once the groups are formed, the instructor will share the guidelines of the activity. Students will be instructed to describe the object/item they have chosen in as much detail as possible, *but without naming the object*. They should be reminded to focus on important points, like size, shape, color(s), and features. The students can also mention related information, such as where people may see the object and what it is used for. Instructors should emphasize that when each student describes an object, their group mates must listen carefully so that when the student finishes describing, they will be able to match the auditory description to the visual object.

The images need to be on the screen—or in view on a poster or a table—during the activity so that the students can see the objects. In classes without audiovisual aids, the students can simply check their grids or even go back to the realia arrangement. When a student finishes the description, others in the group will name the item that they think matches the description. At this point, the listening students may discuss together to identify the described object. The describer will then confirm or reject the answer. Just to make it more reliable, the describer should show the name of the object that they wrote or marked on their

notebook during the pre-speaking session. Once that is done, the next student will start to describe, and the process will continue until everyone has described their chosen object. Note that it is fine if more than one student in a group has chosen the same object.

Important notes

- The students in a group will describe their chosen object one by one.
- The students must not mention the name of the object they are describing.
- The students should focus on specific details while describing the object.
- The listeners must wait until the describer has finished their description before sharing their guesses about the object.
- After the other students guess, the describer should show the name of the object written or marked, for reliability.

Instructor's role during the activity

The instructor will work as a facilitator. Once the students start describing and matching the objects, the instructor should monitor the groups, taking note of common issues and providing support where and when needed.

Sample descriptions by students (based on objects in Figure 1)

Advanced level: The item that I have chosen looks like a chair and is composed of many parts. Unlike normal chairs, it has wheels. There are two big wheels, one on each side. There are also two smaller wheels at the front. There is a footplate where people can rest their feet. The chair also has two handles on each side. It is black, other than the frame, which is blue. This chair is used by people who

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have problems with mobility. It can be used and be seen both indoors and outdoors.

Intermediate level: The item I have chosen has two parts. It has a circle and a handle that holds the circle. The circle is blue, and it has patches of light yellow here and there. The handle is black. This item is commonly seen in schools and is used a lot in geography classes.

Beginner level: The item I have chosen is square. There are six sides. The sides have little squares of different colors. The squares are red, yellow, green, white, orange, and blue. The item is like an apple in size. Children like to play with it. Adults use it, too.

Advantages of the activity

- Students get to practice using the vocabulary and descriptive techniques they have learned.
- The activity gives listening practice.
- The activity allows students to visualize the object while listening to the speaker.
- Students get to connect their auditory and visual senses by matching the spoken description with the image or object they see.
- The activity creates suspense among the students, making it interesting to them.
- The activity engages all students because everyone has to participate.
- The activity promotes both teacher–student and student–student interaction.

POST-SPEAKING ACTIVITY

After the students have finished describing their object and guessing which objects their

classmates are describing, they can discuss the challenges they faced and ask questions about language elements such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and usage. Another idea is for students to take turns making categories that the items in the collage or collection can belong to. Examples include categories like “items that we use for writing,” “items for playing music,” and “items that tell people the time.” When one student mentions a category, their group mates will name the example(s) from the collage and explain how each fits the category. Doing so allows the students to say and hear the names of the objects repeatedly; it also gives them a chance to think and express themselves creatively. For example, if one student says, “Items that we use for writing,” others may name the notebook and the pen, and then say, “We can write down our ideas in the notebook with the pen,” or something similar. Categories can also be provided by the instructor.

The activity can be used with specific topics so that students can practice giving and listening to descriptions of, for example, people and places. Overall, this matching exercise makes students think, speak, listen, have fun—and actively participate in the learning process.

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All images from Pixabay: Stefan Schwehofer (flowers); Monika Grafik (globe); Andrew Martin (cube); Jean van der Meulen (wristwatch); Walter Bichler (pen); Albert-Paul (wheelchair); Pete Linforth (notebook); Clker-Free-Vector-Images (scales and piano)