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Teaching language systems

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" asked Alice.
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cheshire Cat.
(Lewis Carroll: "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland")

Without preliminary planning and its precise fulfillment, without continuous professional development, the journey to achieve the goal for a teacher may actually become a long one, and the final destination may be "somewhere" that he did not expect at all. Hence, lesson planning is an important and integral part of the teaching process. From this perspective, the authors of the given paper give great importance to sound understanding of different lesson structures, strictly differentiating skills (receptive, productive) lesson frameworks from systems (grammar, vocabulary, functional language) lesson shapes.

The article is focused on a detailed study of systems lesson diagrams; more precisely the TTT (Test -Teach -Test) and TBL (Text -based lesson) approaches are presented. The categories of clarification or presentation are especially noteworthy, as clarification of the target language (Meaning, Form and Pronunciation) is considered one of the main stages of the lesson plan. To help students to learn the target language, the method of Guided Discovery is presented and clarified based on the example of a grammatical unit.

Finally, the means to check student's understanding of what you have just explained to him have not been left unaddressed either. The authors give special priority to the application of CCQs (concept checking questions) for checking or guiding the student's understanding of the meaning of the target language.

Based on Cambridge CELTA course (the most widely recognized English teaching qualification in the world) Lesson Plan template, the authors present detailed analysis of grammatical, lexical and functional units.

Key words: *Concept checking questions, lesson planning, Target Language clarification, 'Text-based' approach, 'Test - Teach - Test' approach.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

A lesson plan is a driving force for creative exploration, a means for lesson effectiveness and its implementation, a foundation of inspiration and talented improvisation. The success of the lesson depends not only on the ability of a teacher to get ready to it and stick to the plan, but also the ability to deviate from the plan at the right time and in the right place. **T h e   t o p i c a l i t y** of this paper is conditioned by the fact that there are teachers who believe there is no need to make lesson planning, as they are able to think on their feet, or there are those who make a thorough planning and are deeply concerned with following their lesson plan ignoring what is actually happening in class. But, as Skrivener states [6, p.109] "Prepare thoroughly. But in class, teach the learners, not the plan". Of course, good teachers are flexible and respond creatively to what happens in the classroom, but they also need to have thought ahead, have a destination they want their students to reach, and know how they are going to get there [4, p121].

In order to make a precise planning, teachers need to differentiate various approaches for teaching either skills or systems. Accordingly, **the aim** of this paper is to present different lesson frameworks covered by trainers during the CELTA course (Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages - the best known and most widely taken initial 'TESOL/TEFL' qualification in the world) and model an effective planning of systems lessons.

The **o b j e c t i v e s** of this paper are:1) to study the lesson frameworks of the three systems lessons, 2) to make a thorough examination of the target language clarification stage and 3) to present the analysis of the MFP of the target structure based on CELTA systems lesson plan template.

T h e   o b j e c t of the paper is the analysis of the TTT (Test-Teach-Test) and TBL (Text-based lesson) paradigms and approaches and **t h e   s u b j e c** t of our research is the clarification of the target language based on a context. **T h e   m a t e r i a l** used is the CELTA lesson plan template.

2. TEXT-BASED AND TEST-TEACH-TEST LESSONS

When teaching *grammar, vocabulary* and *functional language*, there are different approaches to choose to plan the structure of the lesson.

If the teacher is sure the target language (TL) is unknown to the students, he may want to start with some context, as students need to see where and when the language is used in real life. But the teacher may also want to first check the current level of knowledge of his students, identify problems and then undertake appropriate actions to contribute to a better understanding of the material.

Accordingly, there are two very common ways to do this:

• to put the TL in **a text** (a Text-based approach)

• to have students do an exercise with the TL, **a 'test'** (a Test-Teach-Test approach)

2.1 *A Text-based approach*

When the TL (some grammar, vocabulary or functional language) is new to students, it can be 'presented' to them in a reading or listening text. For the lesson to succeed, the text must be short enough and relatively simple. If, for example, it is a grammar lesson, the text selected should be such for the students not to waste time on new vocabulary or other complex grammar that is not the focus of the lesson.

The advantages of this approach are that students see examples of the TL in a full and recognisable context, the context helps demonstrate meaning and can be used when asking CCQs (concept checking questions). Dr. P.Mickan in his "Text-Based Teaching: Theory and Practice" [3, pp18-21] gives the following reasons for text-based curriculum design and teaching

1.Familiarity with texts: The contexts, visuals, and formats of texts enable recognition and assists interpretation.

2.Making sense of texts from the beginning: Learners' familiarity with certain texts positions them to make meanings from texts in a target language from the commencement of a program.

3.Use of language for real purposes in lessons: Simulated dialogues and pretend personalities are replaced by reading for information, speaking to get a task done, researching texts for sharing with others.

4.Make meanings for beginner to advanced classes: Texts are accessible for reading, for action, and for information at all age levels and proficiency levels.

5.Language awareness: analysis of the lexico-grammar of texts: The idea is to build learners' awareness of how wordings and meanings are interconnected: a change in the choice of words changes the meaning potential for a listener or reader.

6.Learner autonomy: Texts release students from dependency on a textbook or teacher's directions. They have opportunities to select texts out of interest and to read them.

7.Integrated skills and multimodality: Text-based instruction integrates spoken and written language as in natural language use. It is normal for people to combine reading and writing, just as listening and speaking occur together.

Disadvantages of this approach include the extra time it takes to cover the content of the text before shifting the focus to the TL, the possibility of distracting unknown lexis in the text and the chance of creating classroom texts which are overloaded with language examples and therefore less natural. Teachers may also find it difficult to prioritise clarification in the way that test-teach-test allows.

The structure of the lesson:

➢   Lead-in / Pre-text: As J.Harmer mentions [5, p.206] "If we can get students engaged in the task, there is a much better chance they will read with commitment and concentration, whether or not they were interested in the topic to start with".

➢ Reading for content (gist): Students first need to understand the main idea of the text. Then they will be ready to analyze the TL in it. As a gist activity they can choose a title for the text, or answer some questions.

➢ Noticing TL/Clarification: The TL is highlighted and clarified by using CCQs and eliciting.

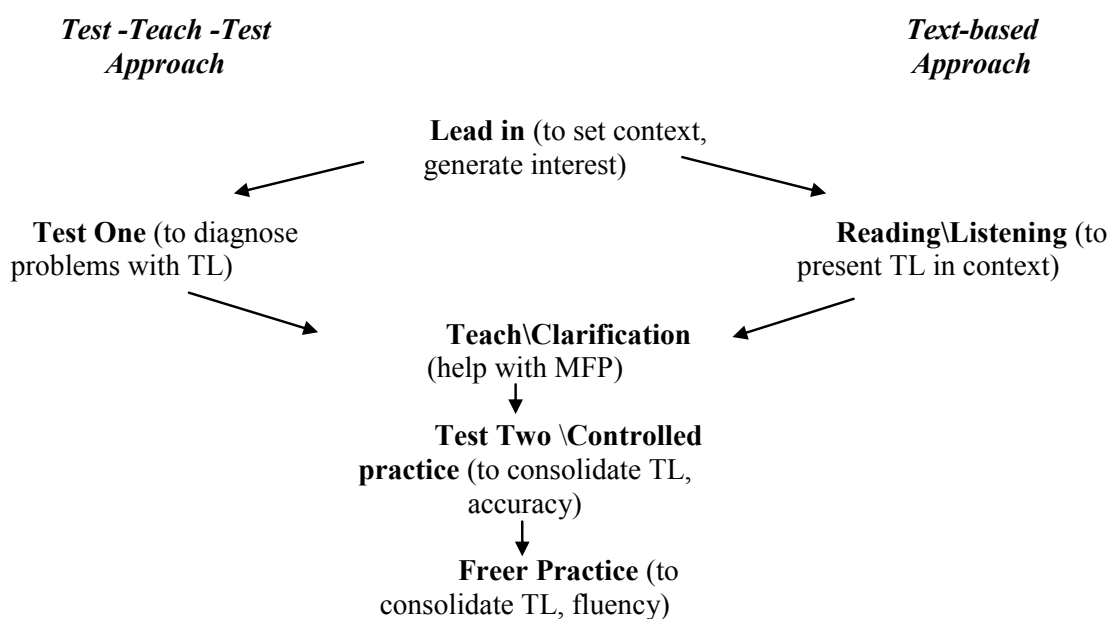➢ Controlled practice: After clarification students use the TL controlled by the teacher.

➢ Freer practice: Students have the opportunity to practice using TL in a freer, less restricted environment. They work in pairs or small groups.

But what would happen if we 'turned around' the *present – practice* lesson, and put a *practice stage* first?

(Lead in – authentic output - clarification – authentic output). This lesson type is much harder to fully plan in advance, as one does not necessarily know what specific language items might come up and require work. For this reason, this is a lesson type that teachers tend not to try until they have gained a certain amount of experience.

So, the two approaches described above differ mainly in that stage where teacher brings the TL into the lesson, the other stages being similar. In both cases, the majority of class time is aimed to be spent on practice.

The two lesson structures can be seen bellow:

Test -Teach -Test Approach   *Text-based Approach*

Lead in (to set context, generate interest)

Test One (to diagnose problems with TL)   **Reading\Listening** (to present TL in context)

Teach\Clarification (help with MFP)

Test Two \Controlled practice (to consolidate TL, accuracy)

Freer Practice (to consolidate TL, fluency)

2.2 *A Test -Teach -Test approach*

If students are expected to have some knowledge of the TL, the teacher may first check how much knowledge they have. For this purpose, students do a diagnostic exercise. Usually this 'first test' is a controlled practice style exercise. While monitoring this exercise, the teacher should see where students are confident and/or have difficulties (Lead in – restricted output - clarification – restricted output).

The advantages of this approach are that students have a chance to demonstrate knowledge first and therefore don't feel patronised by a teacher 'telling' them something they already know. By monitoring very carefully, the teacher can select priority areas of meaning, form and pronunciation and focus clarification on those. It may also be more time efficient.

Difficulties with this approach are that the teacher must monitor very carefully and make real-time decisions on what to clarify. According to J. Skrivener [6, pp279-280] a "test-teach-test" lesson could also set learners a general speaking task without restriction of language; in this case, learners may reveal a much more unpredictable set of errors, problems, etc
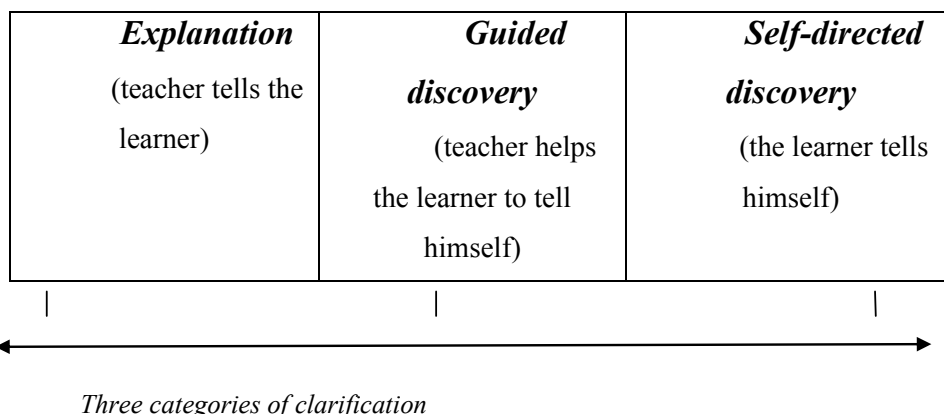
3. CLARIFICATION of the target language

When one is planning a grammar, vocabulary or functions lesson, he\she needs to be prepared to help students with these features to an appropriate depth. This stage is usually called **clarification** or **presentation.** Jim Skrivener, in his "Learning Teaching" [6, p.265] differentiates 3 general categories within the broad heading of "clarification".

One common approach to clarifying language (meaning, form and pronunciation), may involve the teacher standing at the whiteboard telling, asking questions and recording information on the board [teacher explanation]. In case of teacher-centered learning students passively perceive the amount of information transmitted to them. However, in nowadays, students play a more active and collaborative role in their own learning: there is a student-centred interaction, limited teacher talk and learner autonomy [self-directed discovery].

For those who want to go a step further with these principles, there is a different option when teaching grammar: **guided discovery worksheets**.

In this approach, students are provided with examples of language in context (most likely via a

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Explanation (teacher tells the learner)	*Guided discovery* (teacher helps the learner to tell himself)	*Self-directed discovery* (the learner tells himself)

Three categories of clarification

text-based presentation of language) and then are invited to work through a series of tasks on a paper worksheet. The tasks will refer to the examples of language and the context to address meaning, form and pronunciation.

3.1 **Designing a guided discovery worksheet**

If this method is to be successful, then the students must struggle only with the grammar and not with the format of the task on the worksheet. The design, layout and instructions must be very clear. It is recommended that only one side of an A4 sheet be used and that the sheet not be overwhelmingly full of text. It should appear attractive and manageable. Possible task types include:

• concept checking questions.

• select a timeline, match to timeline or label a timeline.

• circle the best term in a summary of meaning.

• complete a grammatical formula (by filling boxes, circling options).

• filling in a form table.

• categorising.

• select the correct pronunciation (stress pattern or phonemic transcription).

When using guided discovery worksheets, it is important to remember that this method *replaces* a teacher centred clarification stage. This has some effects on classroom management for that stage of the lesson:

Set up: Students firstly have to know that the focus of the lesson is shifting from the discussion of context (ie. the preceding text) to a discussion of grammar. It can be useful to start by having the class **notice** the example sentences which will be looked at on the worksheet. This can be done via a **'noticing task'**. Then they have to have very clear instructions on the worksheet tasks and they have to understand their purpose.

Monitoring: Although the worksheet can take some of the burden from the teacher, it is still necessary to 'teach'. The students will need assistance and the teacher is still responsible for making sure each student is gaining a better understanding of the target grammar.

One advantage of this approach is that the teacher can see concrete evidence of each student's progress and understanding.

'Micro-teaching': While students work, the teacher can assist by directing their attention to relevant information in the context, by re-phrasing concept checking questions or by pointing out the form of the example sentence. All of this is called micro-teaching. It may involve re-pairing students so the more confident can help the less confident. A good aim to have in mind is to micro-teach and promote peer-teaching so that, by the time feedback occurs, everybody has completed the sheet with correct answers.

Time: When first using this approach, teachers often allow the stage to take up more time than it should. This will most likely jeopardise students' practice time. Some tips to remember are:

• don't 'abandon' students to the worksheet; monitor and assist.

• *plan* how to 'micro-teach'.

• move to pair work and peer-teaching early. Don't wait too long.

• re-pair students to help with peer-teaching.

• anticipate effective pairings (ie. know who is strong or not).

• if a majority of students seriously struggle, switch to teacher-led clarification.

Feedback: The ideal situation is that the teacher has monitored, micro-taught and established all the students' understanding. If that is the case, feedback should involve no more than quick, efficient confirmation of answers. The real work has been done. If, on the other hand, there were problems, then feedback will involve quick confirmation where students were successful and more thorough discussion where students were confused. There should be no need to repeat the whole clarification as would have been done in a teacher-led whiteboard clarification.

3.2 **Guided discovery worksheet**

Below, you can see an example of a guided discovery worksheet which could be used to help students learn the common structure 'used to':

Robert **used to** play tennis.

Think about the sentence and the story you have read. Answer the questions with <u>one</u> word.
1. Is this about the past or the present?
2. Did Robert play tennis?
3. One time or regulrly?
4. Does Robert play tennis now?

Which timeline is correct?

(a) now	(b) now	(c) now
… xxxxxx…	… xxxxxx…	x
───────▶|	───────▶|	───────▶|
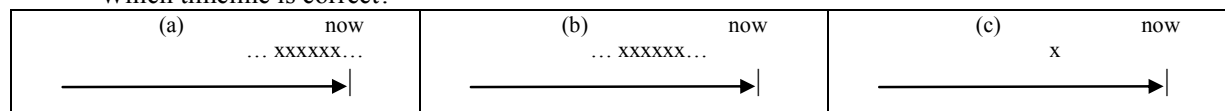
Look again at the text. Complete the structure for affirmative (+), negative (-) and question (?).
(+) Subj.   +   'used to'   +   _____.
(-) Subj.   +   _____   +   'use to'   +   _____.
(?) _____   +   _____   +   'use to'   +   _____?

Listen to the teacher. Which pronunciation is correct?
       (a)   /   (b)   /   (c)   /
    ˈjus:tu/   ˈju:stə/   ˈju:zdə/

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4. MEANING, FORM, PRONUNCIATION

When teaching **systems** lessons (grammar, vocabulary or functions), teachers want to move students towards a position where they are able to confidently *use* the language item to express their own message. To do that they need:

• **Meaning**: knowing what message this grammar item expresses and therefore when to use a particular tense, structure or form.

• **Form:** knowing how the tense/structure is made ie. seeing the underlying pattern and relationships between the elements (eg. aux. verbs, verb forms, word order).

• **Pronunciation:** recognising the given structure when they hear it and knowing how to and being physically able to produce the form in order to be understood.

• **Appropriacy/Register** can also be covered, eg. to reveal if the language is formal or informal.

As the main aim is to help people communicate, meaning is most important and is covered first. In a lesson, students are given either a text [text-based approach] or a diagnostic test task [test-teach-test approach] the language point to be introduced in context. It's best when a teacher gives them a chance to discuss the target language among themselves first, then checks their understanding using CCQs (and other techniques as appropriate), then moves on to relevant aspects of form and pronunciation. This can be done using teacher-led or student-led processes.

Before class a teacher needs to analyse the MFP of the target structure, consider how the meaning will be conveyed and checked and get ready for questions or errors that students might have.

When analysing and teaching MFP, it is not necessary to teach everything one knows about the particular grammar item (same for vocabulary and functions). The level of students, the given material from the course book and the time set for the lesson should be taken into consideration. Teachers should remember to cover only what is useful to the students at the given stage of their development and what is achievable in the given lesson.

5. CONCEPT CHECKING

Another instinct to overcome for teachers is the seemingly well-intended question: 'Do you understand?'. A little time in the classroom will show that this question generally fails to do the job it is intended for. After conveying meaning of new language items, it is perfectly right to check if students have understood it. However, to do that more successfully, a teacher needs real concrete *evidence of understanding* and he needs techniques which will generate that evidence. He needs techniques for 'concept checking'.

Concept checking questions (CCQs): These are questions that require students *to prove* to the teacher that they have understood the meaning of a grammar or vocabulary item. They should be based on a teacher's careful analysis of meaning in the context of a given lesson. In advance, the teacher should analyze the meaning into component concepts and anticipate what students will be confused about. Then the teacher should produce questions that cover all those points. According to Graham Workman [7, p6] concept questions can also be used as a correction technique, either to remind the learner of a concept they have forgotten, or to get the learner to think about the concept of a piece of language they are using.

For conveying meaning, not only showing visuals but also drawing timelines can be helpful when checking understanding. Workman states [7, p2] "timelines are lines and drawings that provide a visual representation of different verb forms, showing when things happen or are happening in the present, past or future". Perhaps surprisingly, the choice of tense (past, present, future) and aspect (Simple, Perfect, Continuous) does not always depend on relationships in time. But for some

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verbforms and grammatical structures it does; here, a timeline can be useful. Teachers should remember that the symbols involved are conventional and not necessarily universal. Generally, timeline should always include 'now' and should be labelled clearly, using the information from the context of conveying. Teachers can use them in combination with CCQs and must feel certain students know what the symbols mean.

6. GRAMMAR, LEXIS AND FUNCTION ANALYSIS.

Cambridge CELTA Lesson Plan Grammar Analysis

GRAMMAR	TARGET LANGUAGE:
	'I wish' + past perfect to express regret.

EXAMPLE/S FROM MATERIALS:	
'I wish I hadn't done that.' and 'I wish I'd checked the address.'	

MEANING/USE	*Anticipated problem(s) with **MEANING**. The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
1. Define the meaning: Expresses a desire that the past was different. The speaker regrets an action that was done or not done in the past. **2. State how you will convey the meaning:** Through a story of a misunderstanding in which Robert violently over-reacts to an innocent mistake and immediately regrets his actions. **3. State how you will check understanding:** Did he do it? [yes] / Did he check the address? [no] Was it a mistake? [yes] How did he feel? [bad, regret] Can he change it? [no, it's in the past]	**1) *Prob:*** Students may confuse this structure with 'I wish' + past simple and use them interchangeably. ***Sol:*** CCQ: Is this talking about now, general time or is it talking about the past? [past] **2) *Prob:*** If clarification is not precise, students could get the impression that 'wish' *means* regret (which would affect the affirm. /neg. form of the verb). ***Sol:*** CCQ: Does the sentence say what we *would like* or what *actually happened*? [would like]

FORM	*Anticipated problem(s) with **FORM**. The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
Subj + wish(es) + Subj + had/hadn't + past participle.	**1) *Prob:*** Students may use 'would' instead of 'had'. ***Sol:*** Refer them back to guided discovery sheet. **2) *Prob:*** Students may not use past participle. ***Sol:*** Elicit self-correction.

PRONUNCIATION	*Anticipated problem(s) with **PRONUNCIATION**: The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
/wɪʃaɪ/ I **wish** I **hadn't done** that. /wɪʃaɪd/ I **wish** I'd **checked** the **address**.	**1) *Prob:*** Students may use flat intonation/stress pattern. ***Sol:*** Model and drill during clarification, emphasise the emotional function of the grammar (regret). Correction: 'Remember the feeling.' **2) *Prob*:** Students may not use connected speech between 'wish' and 'I'd'. ***Sol:*** Offer reminder before freer practice and delayed correction after.

Cambridge CELTA Lesson Plan Lexis Analysis

LEXICAL SET: **WORD:** 'restaurant' [2]	Nouns describing places in a city, especially for social activity.
MEANING/USE	*Anticipated problem(s) with **MEANING**. The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
1. Define the meaning: a <u>place</u> where meals are prepared and served to customers. * ***2. State how you will convey the meaning:*** I will elicit the word from the picture ***3. State how you will check understanding:*** • I will elicit names of popular restaurants • CCQS: - Do you cook in a restaurant? (No) - Do you wash up after you've eaten in a restaurant? (No) - Do you pay for your food there? (Yes)	***Preb:*** The students might use the word "restaurant" when they refer to local street vendors. ***Sol:*** I will show them a picture of a street vendor and a popular restaurant and elicit the difference (e.g. "a restaurant is usually a building", or "a restaurant can't move around or go home in the evening")
FORM	*Anticipated problem(s) with **FORM**. The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
Noun, countable. pl = restaurants	***Prob:*** Ss may spell 'restaurant' as 'restorant'. ***Sol:*** I'll highlight spelling on the w/b and have Ss write the word down.
PRONUNCIATION	*Anticipated problem(s) with **PRONUNCIATION**: The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
/ˈrestrɒnt/	***Prob:*** Ss may want to pronounce 'restaurant' without the final /t/ sound. ***Sol:*** I'll model and write /t/ on the w/b to highlight the correct sound. Drill.

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Cambridge CELTA Lesson Plan Function Analysis*

*Functional language is language we use to achieve a particular goal, as opposed to simply expressing or seeking information. Some examples of functions include: apologizing, offering, seeking, permission etc. Usually, the exponents of a function are fixed or semi-fixed phrases and we choose the particular phrase depending on the social context.

Functions How about going for a walk? [1]	Functional exponent for making suggestion.
MEANING/USE	*Anticipated problem(s) with **MEANING**. The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
1. Define the meaning: Used to make a suggestion **2. State how you will convey the meaning:** Create context: We are at a restaurant and want to order dinner. I write on the w/b "**HOW ABOUT …-ing**", show pictures with food, make suggestions, students say yes or no. - Would you like some salad, Helen? - No. I don't like salad. - How about having a pizza? - Would you like a cup of coffee? - No, thanks. - How about taking some juice? **3. State how you will check understanding:** Show the picture, write on the w/b "*How about going to a restaurant?* "and ask CCQs: 1. Do I want to go to a restaurant? [Yes] 2. Do I ask you to come with me? [Yes] 3. Do I make you do it? [No] 4. Do I invite you? [Yes]	***Prob:*** Students may confuse and use it in formal situations. ***Sol:*** Explain that we use 'how about' when talking to friends, parents, colleagues etc. Ask questions to check students' understanding: -Will you say 'how about…' to your boss / teacher …? [No].

FORM	*Anticipated problem(s) with **FORM**. The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
HOW ABOUT + V_{ing} **?**	**Prob:** After 'how about' students may use Infinitive. **Sol:** Highlight on the board, draw their attention to the V_{ing} and generate more examples from them. Teacher monitors the controlled practice activity and promotes self-correction immediately.
PRONUNCIATION	*Anticipated problem(s) with **PRONUNCIATION**: The solution(s) for the anticipated problems:*
/haʊ w əˈbaʊt/ ○ **How about** going for a walk? Between sound /u/ and a vowel, there is a linking /w/ (it is not full /w/)	**Prob:** Students may put stress on the preposition 'about'. **Sol:** Explain that only content words (noun, verb, adjective…), which give meaning to the sentence, can be stressed. The rest is in a weak position. Demonstrate it on the same example. Drill choral, individual.

7. CONCLUSION

Drawing a conclusion, it must be emphasized that a good lesson plan needs to contain a sensible mixture of coherence and variety. Coherence is important not only for a teacher but also for learners to follow a logical connection of different activities within the one and the same lesson. But, to keep the interest and motivation of learners, there has to be a certain variety of activities. As Harmer states [4, p.122], "The ideal compromise is to plan a lesson that has an internal coherence but which nevertheless allows students to do different things."

As it was mentioned in the article, conducting systems lessons, teachers need to use only systems lesson frameworks, more precisely the TTT or TBL approaches, avoiding skills lesson diagrams. Thereby, when students are assumed to know the target language, the preference is given to a Test-Teach-Test diagram, and, vice-versa, when the TL is new, the Text-based lesson is preferred. It has to be underlined once again, that teachers need to realize a detailed planning of the TL clarification or presentation (Meaning, Form, Pronunciation).

The means of checking learners' understanding of the target language, particularly the application of concept checking questions was presented in the article. Thus, t h e   p r o s p e c t of further research involves the study of such aspects, like "how to combine skills with systems lessons, how to correct learners' mistakes and how to practice the language".

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ВИКЛАДАННЯ МОВНИХ СИСТЕМ

«Скажіть, будь ласка, яким шляхом я маю йти?» - запитала Аліса.
«Це залежить від того, куди ти хочеш потрапити», — сказав Чеширський Кіт.
(Льюїс Керролл «Пригоди Аліси у Країні Чудес»)

Без попереднього планування та його чіткої реалізації, без постійного професійного розвитку шлях до досягнення мети викладача може стати справді довгим, а кінцевий результат може виявитися «там», де він зовсім того не очікував. Планування уроку є важливою та невід'ємною частиною навчального процесу. З цієї точки зору, автори статті приділяють велике значення вірному розумінню структурних різновидів заняття, чітко диференціюючи структури занять спрямовані на розвиток рецептивних та продуктивних навичок від структурної направленості на розвиток мовних систем (граматика, лексика, функціональна мова).

Стаття присвячена детальному вивченню структури занять, спрямованих на розвиток мовних систем, дослідженню підходів «TTT» (Test-Teach-Test) та «TBL» (Text-based lesson). Особлива увага приділяється стадії «роз'яснення», оскільки роз'яснення цільової мови (значення, форма і вимова) вважається одним із основних планових етапів заняття. Щоб допомогти студентам у вивченні цільової мови, автори надають опис методу «Guided Discovery» та пояснюють на прикладі граматичної одиниці.

У статті також досліджені засоби перевірки розуміння учнем роз'ясненого матеріалу. Автори приділяють особливу увагу застосуванню «перевірочних питань» (CCQs – «concept checking questions») для перевірки або сприяння розумінню студентом значення нової лексичної або граматичної одиниці.

Керуючись «планом заняття CELTA» (поширена у світі професійна кваліфікація викладача англійської мови) авторами здійснюється детальний аналіз граматичних, лексичних та функціональних мовних одиниць.

Ключові слова: *Методи «TTT» та «TBL», перевірочні питання «CCQs», планування заняття, «роз'яснення» цільової мови.*