

THE USE OF A SITUATIONAL PRESENTATION IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this paper is to highlight one of the lesson frameworks that can be used in an English language class in order to teach grammar, while also integrating into the lesson the practice of language skills. A situational presentation teaching method is used in English language teaching contexts and is also known as a Presentation-Practice-Production. The aim of such a lesson is to introduce to students a scenario that will enable them to discover the target language, which they will later on practise in the lesson. Thus, this teaching format will give the students the opportunity to acquire new grammar knowledge that will be further practised along the lesson in restricted and freer practice activities. In the freer practice the students will be able to integrate the new grammar into activities designed to stimulate the practice of productive skills, such as speaking, while interacting with their peers. The article will include self-made samples of tasks and resources used in an English language class focused on teaching grammar and a clear description of the lesson stages for the full comprehension of this lesson framework, while pointing out the benefits and some of the drawbacks of such a method in the realm of English language teaching.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching (ELT), English grammar, second conditional clause, situational presentation, Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)*

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1. An Outline of a Situational Presentation

In English language teaching a Situational Presentation is also known as a Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) lesson, where the teacher uses a situation, a context or a scenario to introduce the target language to be taught. Usually, such a lesson framework consists of multiple stages. At the beginning, the teacher makes use of various resources such as pictures or drawings as input in order to help students create the context themselves. As a matter of fact, by asking the students well-guided questions that elicit ideas or examples as a response, the teacher enables them to generate the context and leads the students to discover the target language by themselves. To formulate example sentences with the target language based on the situation is the aim of this stage. When this aim has been achieved, a few other stages in the lesson follow such as: the clarification of the meaning, form and pronunciation of the target language, then two more practical stages, where the students get the chance to use the target language in controlled and freer practice tasks.

In the literature this approach is also called Present-Practise. For instance, Jim Scrivener (2011, p. 159) describes what this lesson framework consists in as follows: “the teacher first presents/ introduces/ explains/ clarifies/ inputs the language point that the lesson is aiming to work on, and then, when it seems to be reasonably understood, moves on to give learners a chance to practise using the language themselves”. Furthermore, the author explains that a production stage follows, this being made up of practical activities in which students use the language point in self-produced examples or contexts, thus creating an “authentic output [which] is also known as production or simply as speaking and writing skills work” (Scrivener, 2011, p. 159). As such, this is argument enough that a situational presentation can also integrate the practice of productive language skills.

Another view on this teaching method belongs to J. Harmer (2015, p. 65), who describes it in roughly similar terms: “the teacher introduces a situation which contextualizes the language to be taught. The language is then presented. The students practise the language, using accurate reproduction techniques such as choral repetition (...) and individual repetition. Later, in

production phase, the students use the new language to make sentences of their own". Moreover, Harmer (2015, p. 66) argues that the production phase allows students to "use language to talk about themselves and how they feel and what they do, [which is called] *personalisation*".

2. A Situational Presentation: Lesson Stages

There is a certain sequence of stages or an "activity route map" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 40) that a Situational Presentation lesson framework has to follow, in this particular order.

1. *Lead-in*. In a language class every teacher's aim is to stir the students' interest in the topic and to motivate them to participate in the lesson. In order to get this result, the teacher designs a task to get them involved by providing prompts for discussion in the form of questions they have to answer, or by displaying pictures or images that stimulate discussion and stir their imagination or creativity, thus enabling the teacher to elicit vocabulary and grammar points to be dealt with during the lesson.

2. *The situation*. This stage is also referred to as the context or the scenario that the teacher has to design so as to create a smooth transition from the lead-in. Alternatively, these two stages can be designed as a single stage. Again, in creating the scenario, the teacher needs to resort to visual input, such as drawings or pictures, in order to enable students to infer the target language (TL) from the situation presented.

3. *Clarification of meaning, form and pronunciation (MFP)*. Once the target language has been elicited from the students or introduced to them by the teacher in the second stage, then it has to be clarified in terms of meaning, form and pronunciation. The clarification stage itself follows a certain pattern, namely it starts with conveying and checking of the meaning of the TL and it continues with the clarification of form and pronunciation. It is advisable to make the clarification stage as student-centred as possible. Thus, teachers can use concept checking questions (CCQs), guided-discovery tasks (such as matching word with definition, fill-in the gaps, exercises with synonyms or antonyms, choose the correct answer, substitution tables etc.) or drilling in order to get students to understand the TL from all three perspectives (meaning, form, pronunciation).

4. *Restricted practice.* This is a practical stage, where students have the opportunity to practise the language point in restricted (controlled) activities, which are specially designed by the teacher to check if students can use the TL accurately in the given contexts.

5. *Freer practice.* In this stage the students get the chance to produce contexts of their own in either of the two productive skills, speaking or writing, in which they have to integrate the TL. Usually, when the aim of this stage is to practise speaking, the students are presented with a communicative activity and the focus is rather on fluency than on accuracy of the TL use.

3. Teaching Grammar via a Situational Presentation. A Second Conditional Lesson Sample.

1. *Lead-in & Situation.* The aim of this stage is to engage the adult students (aged 20 and above) in the context of the lesson and to introduce the target language (TL) in the context of work and holiday (The topic of the lesson was inspired from Dummett, Hughes & Stephenson, 2013, p. 93).



Fig. 1. Lead-in & Situation

On the board the students will be presented the situation by means of a collection of suggestive images: *A character called Lisa is at the office and she is very busy. She cannot concentrate on her work and she starts daydreaming* (Fig. 1). The students will be asked to predict what she might be thinking about based on the other pictures that are shown on the board to expand the situation and to elicit the TL from the students, using clues, if needed.



Fig. 2. Lead-in & Situation (continued)

(The images in Fig. 1 are used for educational purposes in order to create the situation and are retrieved from online sources: (Online image of young woman in an office, n.d.); (Online image of young woman on a beach, n.d.); (Online image of summer hot sun, n.d.); (Online image of group young hipster friends, n.d.); (Online image of woman swimming, n.d.); (Online image of the great sphinx, n.d.)).

If unsuccessful, the teacher will give them the beginning of a Second Conditional clause so that the students guess the other half of the sentences that can be associated with the pictures in the situation. If students are not able to produce any sentence with the TL, the teacher will provide it for them. The teacher will ask the students what grammar structure the marker sentences contain and announce that this is the topic of the lesson. The students discuss in pairs and the answers are checked in class feedback (Fig. 2).

2. *Clarification.* The purpose of this stage is to clarify meaning, form and pronunciation of the TL. In this lesson the following use of the Second Conditional is highlighted: We use the Second Conditional or “hypothetical” or “unreal conditional” to refer to or speculate about something that is (or we perceive to be) unlikely or impossible. At the moment of speaking we see the action or event as being impossible. The Second Conditional has a present time reference (Murphy, 2012, p. 76; Parrott, 2010, pp. 274-275; Scrivener, 2010, p. 237)

Work and Holiday *Second Conditional*

If I were on holiday, I would spend time on the beach.
 If the weather weren't fine, I wouldn't swim in the ocean.
 If I wanted company, I would have fun with my friends.
 If I had enough money, I would travel to Egypt.

1. Look at the sentences above. Then underline the correct option in the following sentences:

1. We use the Second Conditional to refer to real situations/ unreal, imaginary, impossible situations.
2. We use the Second Conditional to refer to present situations/ past situations.

Fig. 3. Clarification of meaning

In order to convey meaning, when the grammatical structure has been identified, the teacher will ask the students to look at 4 marker sentences with the TL (that he/she elicits or provides for the students in the situation) and they will have to underline the correct option in two sentences in order to identify the meaning of the Second Conditional (Fig. 3).

In order to check the meaning of the TL, the students will have to circle the sentences that refer to an unreal, imaginary situation (Fig. 4). If there are still uncertainties after this task, the teacher will have to check the meaning further by asking concept checking questions (CCQs) for example sentences. Students work individually and then check their answers in peer and class feedback, when the teacher will project the answers on the board.

As mentioned before, among the problems the teacher may anticipate as being most likely to occur during the lesson is the students' confusion about the meaning of the Second Conditional, the solution of which consists in the teacher asking the following CCQs for an example sentence, such as: *"If I were on holiday, I would spend time on the beach."* (This is what Lisa is thinking right now).

CCQs: Is Lisa on holiday? (No)/ Is it possible that she will go on holiday? (No, probably not)/ Will she spend time on the beach? (No, probably not)/ Why not? (Because she is not on holiday)/ Which word tells us that it is impossible? (were)

Work and holiday *Second Conditional*

Which of the sentences below is about an unreal, imaginary situation? Circle the correct answers:

1. If I go on holiday, I will spend time on the beach.
2. If I went on holiday, I would spend time on the beach.
3. I would have fun with my friends if I wanted company.
4. I will have fun with my friends if I want company.
5. Will Lisa travel to Egypt if she has enough money?
6. Would Lisa travel to Egypt if she had enough money?

Fig. 4. Checking of meaning

While drafting her/his lesson plan the teacher may also anticipate another potential problem which refers to the students not being familiar with the meaning of the structure *"If I were you, I'd..."*. The solution for this problem can consist in the teacher drawing the students' attention in an example sentence that this structure means that the speaker is imagining what it would be like to be another person and what they would do in their place. Moreover, the teacher should also point out that the structure is often used to give advice, as in the example: *"If I were you, I would spend time on the beach."*

All through the lesson the students will have the opportunity to compile a written record as they will receive a handout containing the tasks that will be used for the illustration and checking of meaning, form, as well as the tasks designed for the restricted (dual choice, circle the correct answer, fill in the table, complete the sentences with the correct word) and free(r) practice stages of the lesson.

The stage of checking the form of the TL will consist in highlighting the Affirmative, Negative and Interrogative forms of the Second Conditional. The students will be asked to look at several example sentences from the situation and to complete the rules of forming the Second Conditional in a substitution table (Fig.5). To prevent any errors from being left unclarified, their answers will be checked in open class feedback.

As with the meaning of the TL, the students might encounter difficulties regarding the form of the Second Conditional. On the one hand, they may be confused about the use of the form “were” in the “If Clause” for all persons. A possible solution would be to draw the students’ attention to the form of the “If X were...” and explain to them that the form “If X was...” is also possible, but that grammar books recommend “If X were...” as the correct form in order to express advice.

Second Conditional

Work and holiday

3. Here are some sentences about Lisa:
If I had enough money, I would travel to Egypt.
If I didn't have enough money, I wouldn't travel to Egypt.
If the weather weren't fine I wouldn't swim in the ocean.
Would she have fun with her friends if she wanted company?

Complete the rules:

Form	If Clause	Main Clause
Affirmative	If + Subject + <u>past simple</u>	Subject + <u>would</u> + short infinitive
Negative	If + <u>Subject</u> + weren't/didn't + <u>short infinitive</u>	Subject + wouldn't + <u>short infinitive</u>
Form	Main Clause	If Clause
Interrogative	Would + Subject + <u>short infinitive</u>	If + Subject + <u>past simple</u>

Fig. 5. Checking of form

When it comes to pronunciation, there are some problems that might occur during the lesson. One of them is that the students may not be familiar with the pronunciation of the weak form of - “were” from the structure “If I were ...”. Another problem that might arise is that the students will not be familiar with the pronunciation of the weak form of “would you” in connected speech in interrogative sentences. The solution, which the teacher may find, is to elicit a model of correct pronunciation, or to provide a model if the elicitation is not working and then drill it, first chorally and then individually.

3. *Restricted practice.* This stage aims to practice accurate use of the TL in controlled exercises and to scaffold language practice in preparation for freer practice. In this stage the students will be asked to complete the sentences in a gapped exercise with the correct form of the verb in either the “main clause” or the “if clause” type 2 (Fig. 7). First the teacher will do a demo together with the students. Then they will work individually and check their answers in peer and class feedback, when they will be asked to justify their answers.

Second Conditional

Work and holiday

4. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verb:

1. If I didn't have (*not / have*) so much work to do, I'd book a plane ticket to Spain.
2. If the travel agency made us a good offer, we would travel (*travel*) to an exotic place.
3. I would travel to a foreign country if I spoke (*speak*) the language.
4. If my family wanted to go abroad for a holiday, I would go (*go*) with them.
5. If the hotel didn't cost (*not / cost*) so much, we'd stay there.
6. We would visit (*visit*) our friends in London if my wife weren't afraid of flying.

Fig. 7. Restricted practice

The teacher will monitor the activity to check if the students have difficulties in completing the task and to adjust the timing. Whenever appropriate, before distributing the handouts, the teacher will ask instruction checking questions (ICQs). In open class feedback, if any meaning-related anticipated problem occurs, the teacher will ask CCQs to clarify the meaning.

4. *Freer Practice*. The aim of this stage is to practice accurate use of the TL in a more personalised way and to allow students to integrate the TL into their everyday language use, while practising speaking fluency. According to Harmer (2015, p. 384), the benefits of practising speaking in class, apart from general fluency, consist in that our “students need to speak in a number of different contexts, and for a number of different purposes”.

Thus, the students will be engaged in a mingling activity in order to speak to as many classmates as possible to practise the TL and have the opportunity to personalise it. Here is the task: “Imagine you cannot go on a holiday right now. Still you are daydreaming about it and you would like to talk about your dreams with your friends. Your classmates are your friends. You will talk to as many friends as possible and while talking you have to make notes in a table about what they tell you. Here is what you will ask them: *If you had free time/enough money etc., where would you like to go on holiday? Why would you go there?; What would you do in that place/country/region etc. if you went there?*” (Fig. 8). The teacher will first make a demo of the task or use ICQs to make sure every student has understood the task and while the students are at work, the teacher will monitor the activity in order to collect language samples to discuss in delayed feedback. Students share what they found out about their classmates in open class feedback.

5. *Delayed Feedback*. In this stage the aim is to help the students learn from their mistakes and to encourage them to use the new TL correctly. During the previous stage the teacher collects language samples for the delayed feedback session and writes them on the board while the students are engaged in the activity in the freer practice stage. The students usually pair check the language discussed for errors in order to become aware of their own mistakes and then in open class feedback.

Work and Holiday *Second Conditional*

5. Imagine you cannot go on a holiday right now. Still you are daydreaming about it and you would like to talk about your dreams with your friends. You will talk to as many friends as possible and ask them:

*If you had free time/enough money etc., where would you like to go on holiday? Why would you go there?
What would you do in that place/country/region etc. if you went there?*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Where would you go if ...? Why?</i>	<i>What would you do if...?</i>

Fig. 8. Freer practice

4. Conclusions

Although it has gained some critical views in the literature, the Situational Presentation or the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) is a teaching method that is still an effective lesson framework, which can be employed with both lexis and grammar lessons, while integrating the practice of productive skills.

However, it cannot be denied that the Situational Presentation has some drawbacks that Harmer (2015) also acknowledges. According to him the PPP lesson framework is “highly teacher-centred and seems to assume that students learn in ‘straight lines’- that is, starting from no knowledge, through highly restricted sentence-based utterances and then going back to immediate production” (Harmer, 2015, p. 66). We cannot but agree that Harmer’s views on the Presentation-Practice-Production as being teacher-centred are justified as long as the teacher is the one that makes the presentation of the situation by building up a context and by inquiries addressed to the students in the attempt to the target language. Still, the students can actively engage in the presentation of the situation as they are those called to build it up from the input the

teacher provides by taking part in interactive activities, while being arranged in pairs or groups and allowed to discuss the clues received freely in order to create the situation themselves.

In addition, in the clarification stage, which may as well receive the reproach that it is teacher-focused, the teacher has the alternative of shifting the focus from the teacher to the students by designing guided-discovery tasks instead of making a presentation or using explanations, thus allowing the students to clarify the meaning, form, and pronunciation of the target language by themselves. Therefore, the teacher's role is limited to being a mere guide for his/ her students.

As mentioned above, this teaching method has some benefits as well, because it can bring along variety in the English language class, both in terms of the type of lesson it can be used for and the range of the students' learning styles in can cover. Thus, this lesson framework can be used for all types of lessons including those focused on teaching grammar or lexis and it can also give opportunity to the students to practise productive skills (speaking and writing).

Furthermore, the teacher has the ability to adjust the situation he/she creates to their students' interests, thus enabling them to personalise it and giving impetus to their active participation in the lesson. As a matter of fact, such a personalisation of the TL taught is not always possible with most English language textbooks as they contain topics or contexts that are not easily accessible to students or they cannot relate to.

To conclude, the Situational Presentation or the Presentation-Practice-Production method used for teaching grammar lessons requires a creative and resourceful teacher that is able to design a visually-appealing situation, which can be achieved by employing various formats, such as Power Point slides, printed images or even by drawing on the board. The situation designed should be able to trigger the students' imagination and their curiosity, as well as to motivate them to engage in building up the situation by discussing with their peers and, thus, coming closer to discovering and producing the target language.

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