

Macrostrategies for Language Teaching. A Sample of Lesson Analysis

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Abstract

This study is a casual sample of lesson analysis based on the model offered by B. Kumaravadivelu in his book *Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching* (published by Yale University Press in New Haven and London in 2003), and it is meant to raise awareness that there is no “best method” ready to be used in the classroom, and that teacher beliefs, reasoning and cognition play a crucial role in shaping the whole process of student acquisition.

Keywords: teaching, learning opportunities, referential questions, display questions, mismatches, interaction, autonomy.

A highly literate man once said that “teachers who love teaching teach children to love learning”ⁱ. For many years, I have been struggling to become one of those teachers who “can inspire hope, ignite the imagination and instil a love of learning”ⁱⁱ to the children. At first, I used to believe that being a good teacher meant nothing else but being a good technician.

From a historical perspective, one can glean from the current literature on general education and language teaching at least three strands of thought: (a) teachers as passive technicians, (b) teachers as reflective practitioners, and (c) teachers as transformative intellectuals. (Kumaravadivelu 2003:8)

Then I felt that what I had received needed to be shared with my learners and therefore I started to act like a reflective practitioner by attempting to maximize my own “learning potential at the

same time as my students', through classroom-oriented action research and problem solving activities" (Kumaravadivelu 2003:11).

Considering the fact that a teacher is a life-long learner, I keep on hoping that someday I will be acting as an undeniable transformative intellectual and try to educate myself and my students about various forms of inequality and injustice in the wider society and to address and redress them in purposeful and peaceful ways. Still acting like a reflective practitioner, I have thought of consolidating my 6th elementary students' knowledge concerning the past tense simple – regular verbs in a different manner, moving beyond the limitations of the Snapshot Elementary text bookⁱⁱⁱ.

The aims of the lesson were to help pupils to move from passive learning to active learning and to find better ways of engaging the students in the learning process.

The objectives were that by the end of the lesson the students would be able

1. to consolidate their '-ed' pronunciation as [d], [t] or [id];
2. to ask questions and give negative/positive answers using past tense simple structures;
3. to use the new vocabulary in productions of their own;
4. to develop listening and speaking skills (when referring to actions in the past).

I used various materials as textbook, worksheets, hand-outs, blackboard, sheets of paper, video projector, and the skills involved were writing, reading, speaking, listening, in different patterns of interaction: pair-work, group-work and individual work.

Initially, I had thought of a lesson based on a language-centred method meant to provide opportunities for learners "to practise preselected, presequenced linguistic structures, the past tense form of regular verbs in our case, and thus, the applied microstrategies, practising drills"(Kumaravadivelu 2003:25) mainly, would have assured me that my students would accurately acquire these structures only. Finally, I managed to carry the lesson in a learner-centred manner, trying to combine the above mentioned preselected structures with communicative functions through meaning-focussed activities, for instance the TPR miming section, listening to the story or the song.

I tried to create and generate as many learning opportunities as possible inside the classroom, aiming to promote my students' involvement and consequently their language

acquisition, but I still have the feeling that I did not challenge their communication skills enough and I did not ask the right type of questions that would have triggered more meaningful interaction stages.

As an overall view of the lesson development, I can say that the atmosphere was mainly friendly and positive and the class was interactive even though I had the tendency to dominate the conversational turns. Of the one hundred and eighty-six conversational turns there were ninety-five my turns and ninety-one my students' turns, and unfortunately, a large amount of my questions were the display type, due to the fact that the level of my learners is elementary (that is the second year of English) and I felt that, at least at the beginning, I had to help them consolidate their knowledge about the Simple Past Tense – regular verbs in a semi-controlled manner. I also used referential questions which asked for my learners' opinions and interpretations and which were meant to activate their personal schemata and to elicit information from them, for instance: episode 4, turn 1 'Do you believe in ghosts?' and turn 2 'What is a ghost? Hmmm?' or turn 45 'How come the little boy had died two years before and he was still there to save his own mother?'^{iv}

At a more detailed level of analysis, it is noticeable that from the very beginning I tried to get the students closer to the topic - which is speaking about past events - by asking a series of product and choice questions as shown in the script in episode 1, turn 5 'What did you do yesterday?', turn 6 'Did you go to school?', turn 8 'Did you sleep?', turn 12 'Did you dance?' and turn 14 'Did you do your homework?'. At the same time several linguistic mismatches occurred as I was expecting to get full short answers ('Yes, I did / No, I didn't') which had already been taught and some of my students answered simply 'No' or 'Yes'. I perceived this mismatch as a perfect opportunity to clarify how to use short past tense answers, but I did it inappropriately as another mismatch came up in episode 1 turn 9 when a student answered 'No, I did.', so I had to keep on eliciting the right answer from the other students.

An instructional mismatch occurred, shown in episode 2, turn 3 'T: ... Did you manage to do it?' and turn 4 'S1: Complete the text [*waif*]... 'when I wanted to know whether S1 managed to do his homework (knowing that he often forgets to do it or 'forgets' to take it with him) and he instantly started reading the first exercise. Other linguistic mismatches^{vi} followed as in episode 2, turn 28: 'Were you angry with me?

Yes, she did.

29 T: Well ..., the subject of the question is 'you', so you should probably answer 'yes, I...'

30 S6: did

31 T: The question is 'Were you angry?'... 'Were you angry?' and I say 'Yes, I...'

32 SS: were

33 T: it's not 'were' but it's...

34 SS: was...'

or turn 38 S1: Was the film good? Yes, I did...'.

Regarding the talk management, I mainly followed the typical Initiation-Response-Feedback sequence where the teacher initiates, the learner responds, and finally the teacher provides feedback (praises mostly, as: 'good', 'great', 'well done', 'very well', 'perfect' 'OK' and so on...), although at the miming game it was the leader of the group who initiated (by miming the activity), then his/her group responded (by guessing the verb, answering the question and placing the verb under the right heading) and I provided feedback. I also must confess that even though it was a student initiation – student response – teacher feedback sequence, I permanently guided them as shown in episode 3.

There were several interactional modifications which were made possible through negotiation of meaning as comprehension checks e.g. episode 3 turn 8 '...Is that clear?' or episode 4, turn 13 'Do you understand me?' or episode 6 turn 1 'T:... Is it clear what you have to do?' and confirmation checks e.g. episode 5, turn 47 T: 'Do you mean ... her guarding angel?' and which may be considered to facilitate L2 development.

I cannot say that my lesson was a good example of promoting my students' autonomy^{vii}, but as long as autonomy is neither independence, nor context-free, or a steady state, at least I tried to encourage them to work cooperatively and to motivate them to interact within the activities, as I know they love games, stories and songs. I also tried, (but was not completely successful) to activate my learners' intuitive heuristics and critical thinking in episode 4 turn 45.

T: '...Now, what do you say about that? How come the little boy had died two years before and he was still there to save his own mother?

46 S7: He is ... mmm... angel...

47 T: Do you mean ... her guarding angel?

48 SSS: Yes.

49 T: Well, you're probably right.'

As regards contextualizing linguistic input^{viii}, I managed to introduce, use and recycle a series of past tense regular verbs within thematic contexts that reflect the natural use of language. As it is acknowledged, language skills are essentially interrelated and mutually reinforcing, thus I integrated all the four skills even though in the miming game the focus was placed mainly on productive skills, whereas in the next two activities: the story and the song, respectively, the focus was on receptive skills. I have chosen this strategy due to the fact that I am aware that my students have various learning styles, therefore, I offered different opportunities for different types of learners, for example, the extroverts who were the leaders of the groups in episode 3 preferred speaking and playing, whereas the introverts handled the listening tasks more easily in episode 4 and watching the video and performing the task in episode 5.

As a conclusion, if I were to carry the lesson again, I would do it differently, I would struggle more to create as many learning opportunities as possible, meant to activate my learners' intuitive heuristic curiosity, their critical thinking, and consequently foster their language autonomy.

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

The scenario of the lesson went on as follows:

Episode 1 (greetings, warming up)

1 T: Good morning, children!

2 SSS: Good morning, teacher!

3 T: How are you today? Fine?

4 SSS: Fine, thanks.

5 T: Now, tell me, please. What did you do yesterday?

...

6 T: Hmm? What did you do yesterday? Did you go to school?

7 SSS: Yes.

8 T: (suggesting full short answers): Yes, I ...??

9 SS: I did

10 T: Did you sleep?

9 S: No, I did.

10 T: No, I ...

11 SSS: No. I didn't.

12 T: OK. Great. Did you dance?

13 SSS: No, I didn't.

14 T: Did you do your homework?

15 SSS: Yes, I did.

16 T: OK. Great. Now, speaking about homework, let's see the homework.

Episode 2 (checking homework)

1 T: OK. What exercise?

2 S: Two, page forty-seven.

3 T: Now, volunteers? Adelin.

Did you manage to do it?

4 S1: Complete the text [*wife*]...

5 T: with...

6 S1: with the verbs in bre ...

7 T: brackets

8 S1: brackets in the past simple tense.

Helen's birthday party...

9 T: birthday party...

10 S1: birthday party was very good. I really enjoyed it.

11 T: I really enjoyed it. Good. Thank you. Vasi?

12 S2: There were about fifty people there.

13 T: Good. Thank you. Roberta?

14 S3: I talked...

15 T: I talked

16 S3: I talked to a boy called Mick and we danced...

17 T: most of...? most of the...?

18 S3: the evening.

19 T: Very good.

Cornelia?

20 S4: At midnight everyone played silly games but we just listen...

21 T: listened...

22 S4: listened to music.

23 T: OK. Somebody else. Denisa?

24 S5: I missed the last bus so Mick walked home with me.

25 T: Thank you very much. And Adelina, the second one...

26 S6: Read the... hmmm

27 T: Yes, of course. Complete the short answers. Did Kate...

28 S6: Did Kate go out with Sam?

Yes, she did.

Were you angry with me?

Yes, she did.

29 T: Well ..., the subject of the question is 'you', so you should probably answer 'yes, I...'

30 S6: did

31 T: The question is 'Were you angry?'... 'Were you angry?' and I say 'Yes, I...'

32 SS: were

33 T: it's not 'were' but it's...

34 SS: was...

35 T: OK. Yes, I was. (writing on the blackboard)

Yes, I was. Good.

Next one?Vasi.

36 S2: Did you go to the cinema last night?

No, I didn't.

37 T: Thank you very much. Adelin?

38 S1: Was the film good?

Yes, I did...

39 T: Hmmm... The question starts with 'was' ..., how should I reply?

40 S7: Yes, it did...

41 T: Yes, it, it...

42 S7: Yes, it was.

43 T: Yes, it was. Very good... Yes, it was. (writing on the blackboard). OK. Izabela?

44 S8: Were the shops open?

No..... hmmm

45 T: pay attention to the subject... it's 'the shops' ... 'they'

46 S8: the shops ... they... No, they were.... weren't.

47 T: No, they weren't. Perfect. Gabi?

48 S9: xx (speaking hoarsely) ...

49 T: Gabi, are you OK?

50 S9: yes...

51 T: Oh, dear... That's all right. Thank you. Somebody else?

52 S2: Did your parents give you any money?

Yes, we did.

53 T: The subject is 'your parents'. So ...

54 S2: Yes, they did.

55 T: Yes, they did. OK... Iustina?

56 S7: Was Mark wearing his leather jacket?

57 T: leather jacket?

58 S7: his leather jacket?

No, he was.

59 T: 'No, he ...', well, it's negative...it is 'was', but it's negative.

60 S7: No, he wasn't.

61 T: Good. No, he wasn't.

Great.

Episode 3

1 T: Now, open your notebooks and write down the new title 'A Liverpool Ghost Story'.

This is a main title, and you'll find out more about past tense simple, regular verbs (T writes the subtitle 'Past Tense – Regular Verbs - Consolidation' on the board). So we are going to consolidate our knowledge about PT- regular verbs. OK?

Last time I told you that the past tense –ed ending may be pronounced like this: (T writes on the board [t], [d] and [id] and some examples accordingly) for example 'I worked much yesterday'. 'Worked'- the -ed ending is pronounced [t]. And 'I followed the route'. 'Followed' 'followed' ... and, finally let's take the verb 'to paint'. How do I say 'paint' in the past tense form?

2 S: Painted.

3 T: Painted. Good. So the ending is pronounced [id]. Painted.Great.

4 Now, let's play!

For the next activity, you have to work in groups. OK? So you have to form groups of four.

Come on! Come on! You four, you four, you, there, five ... and you four. OK? Do you manage? No, no, no, Iustina here, Denisa here and you two should turn around. OK? Now, you have to choose the leader of your group.

Who's the leader here?

5 S10: me.

6 T: And there?

7 S1: Bella. Mihăiță, dăbancamaiînfațăși vin-încoaci!

8 T: OK. Now, pay attention, please. You should take these sheets of paper and have a look at these pictures and at the verbs provided under each picture. Now, the leader has to pick up a ticket and mime the activity written on it. Then, the members of the group have to guess what verb it is. They have to answer the question: 'What did he/she do?' Let me give you an example. Supposing that the verb is 'to watch', ... 'to watch TV'. OK? I'm going to mime it. ... (T – miming the activity).

What did I do? And you answer 'You watched TV.', and I'm writing 'watched' under the correct heading, [t] in our case. Is it clear?

9 SSS: Yes.

10 Good. Now, Iustina, come here. Pick up a ticket. This one? OK. Come here and mime the activity! Come on!

11 ... S7 – miming the verb 'to listen'

12 T: What verb is it?

13 SS: to listen

14 T: What did she do?

15 SS: She listened.

16 T: She listened. Very good. Now you have to write the verb 'listened' in the correct column.

17 ... S7 – writing on the board into [d] column.

18 Good. Next one.

19 S3 – miming the verb 'to cry'

20 T: What did she do?

21 S4: 'cry'.

22 T Yes, it is the verb 'to cry'. But what did she do? She...?

23 S2: She cried.

24 T: That's right. She cried. Where should I write 'cried'?

25 S2 - writing under the wrong column.

26 T: Are you sure?

...

27 T: Do you agree with it?

28 SSS: No.

29 T: But where should I place it?

30 SS: [d]...

31 T: Yes, of course, under [d] heading. Great. Thank you. Next one. OK. Hurry up!

32 S10 – miming the verb 'to lift'

33 T: What did he do?

34 S9: He to lifted.

35 T: without 'to'

36 S9: He lifted.

37 T: Very good. Thank you.

The students keep on miming the verbs: point, pull, smile, knock, stop, recognise, look, die, recover, start, thank, which are to be used in the next activity.

Episode 4

1 T: We are going to listen to a story.

But before that, tell me, please: Do you believe in ghosts?

....

2 T: What is a ghost? Hmmm?

...

3 S7: spirit

4 T: A spirit. Right. A soul haunting people. So, do you believe in ghosts?

5 SSS: Noooooo.

6 T: But do you like ghost stories?

7 SSS: Yeeeees.

8 T: Now, open your books at page 42 have a quick look at the text and think about how we should fill in the blanks with these verbs in order to complete the story. You just have to give numbers to the verbs used in the previous activity. Number one is given in the example: "It was late in the evening of December 16th 1878. Doctor Charles Blunden, a well-known Liverpool doctor, was still in his surgery. At about 9 p.m. somebody(teacher knocking)

9 SSS: knocked

10 T: Yes, ... knocked at the door. On the doorstep there was a boy of about twelve, wearing dirty trousers and no shoes. There was a dark blue scarf around his neck.

'Doctor', he....

...

11 T: (raising my voice) 'Doctor', he....

12 S7 cried.

13 T: cried, very well. So number 2 is cried. OK, you have only 5 minutes to guess where to place the verbs. Work in the same groups. Do you understand me?

14 SSS: Yes.

...

15 T: OK. Time's off. Stop here. Let's read the text. Who wants to start?

16 S 2: 'Doctor!', he cried. Please come with me! My mother's ill! I think she's dying.

17 T: Thank you. Denisa.

18 S5: The doctor followed the boy... to a street ...near... surgery.

19 T: The doctor followed... Good, very good... Thank you. Adelina.

20 S6: The boy....

21 T – pointing

22 S6: ... pointed to a woman on the ground. She was unconscious.

23 T: OK. Cornelia

24 S4: The doctor followed the woman...

25 T: Are you sure?

26 S4: The doctor looked at the woman... and then....

27: T-miming vb. to stop

28 S4: stopped a passing horse and cab.

29 T: The doctor and the boy... Izabela

30 S8: The doctor and the boy...

31 S2: lifted

32 T: Very well, Vasi. ... lifted the woman into the cab. At the hospital the doctor treated the woman for pneumonia and luckily she...

33 S7: recovered completely.

34 T: Some weeks later, the woman ...

35 SS: thanked

36 T: thanked. Very well. Doctor Blunden for saving her life. He....

37 S: smiled

38 T: smiled. Good. ...and said that the real person to thank was the woman's son. 'My son? She said, 'No, not my son! and she ...

39 S2: died...

40 T: I'm not so sure...

41 S7: started to cry.

42 T: started. Great. 'My son...

43 S7: listened...

44 T: Hmmm... from fever two years ago.

45 S7: died

46 T: Good. Dr. Blunden was amazed. The woman continued, ' This scarf is all I have to remember him by.'

Now, what do you say about that?

How come the little boy had died two years before, and he was still there to save his own mother?

47 S7: He is ... mmm... angel...

48 T: Do you mean ... her guarding angel?

49 SSS: Yes.

50 T: Well, you're probably right.

Did you like the story?

51 SSS: Yeeees.

Episode 5

1 T: OK. Let's cheer up a bit. I have brought you a song, in fact a tale of a shy man called Mr. Morton, who fell in love with Pearl, and who didn't know how to prove it to her. Now, take these sheets of paper with the Tale of Mr Morton. You can see the lyrics with some missing verbs on the left, and the verbs to be used on the right. Listen to the song and give numbers to the verbs in order to match the text.

For example: walked – 1, 2.

THE TALE OF MR. MORTON

“This is the tale of Mister Morton

Mister Morton is who?

He is the subject of our tale

and the predicate tells what Mister

Morton must do.

Mister Morton 1..... down the street,

Mister Morton 2.....

Mister Morton 3..... to his cat,

Mister Morton 4.....

(Hello, cat. You look good.)

Mister Morton was lonely,

Mister Morton was

Mister Morton is the subject of the

sentence, and what the predicate says,

he does.

Mister Morton knew just one girl

Mister Morton knew,

Mister Morton grew flowers for Perl

Mister Morton grew.

Mister Morton 5..... very shy

Mister Morton 6.....

Mister Morton is the subject of the
sentence, and what the predicate says,
he does!

The subject is a noun,
that's person, place or thing
It's who or what the sentence is about

And the predicate is the verb
That's the action word
that gets the subject up and out.

Mister Morton wrote Pearl a poem,
Mister Morton wrote
Pearl 7..... in the afternoon,

Pearl 8..... by a note.

Mister Morton was very nervous

Mister Morton was. Mister Morton is the subject of the
sentence, and what the predicate says,
he does!

The cat stretched,
the sun beat down,
a neighbour chased his kid.

(come here kid - come on!)

Each sentence is completed when

you know the subject did.

Mister Morton 9..... on her door

Mister Morton 10.....

Mister Morton sat on her porch

Yes, he just sat and 11.....

when she opened up the door he ran.

Mister Morton 12..... up his stairs,

Mister Morton 13.....,

Mister Morton 14..... pretty words,

Mister Morton 15.....

Mister Morton was lonely,

Mister Morton was

until Pearl 16..... up with a single rose.

Who says women can't propose?

Now Mister Morton is happy

and Pearl and the cat are too

They're the subjects of the sentence

and what the predicate says, they do!"¹

showed

rhymed

¹The Tale of Mister Morton – video. YouTubeWeb. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qtDwgQd8tTI>>

was

climbed

replied

walked

knocked

talked

rocked

2 T: Did you like it?

3 SSS: Yees.

4 T: Did you manage to give numbers to the verbs?

5 SS: yes ... no...

6 T: Now listen again and check in pairs whether you numbered the verbs correctly.

7 T: Did you manage to complete the lyrics?

8 SSS: yes.

9 T: OK, Now let's check together. So, walked was number 1 and 2, and then...?
Nicoleta?

10 S11: Talked 3 and 4.

11 T: Great

12 S12: was, 5 and 6.

13 T: Good. And next?

14 S2: replied 7, 8 and knocked is 9 and 10.

15 T: Good. And then?

...

16 T: Yes, he just sat and rocked. OK. And then... Mister Morton 14.....
pretty words,

17 S: rhymed and showed.

18 T: Thank you. You were great.

Episode 6 (assigning homework)

1 T: For next time you have to do exercise 3 page 43. You have to use the verbs in brackets in the Past Tense form, and then reorder the sentences to make up the summary of the Liverpool Ghost Story. Is it clear what you have to do?

2 SSS: Yes.

3 T: OK. You were excellent. That's all for today. See you next Monday! Good bye!

4 SSS: Good bye, teacher!

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Biodata

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ⁱComment attributed to Robert John Meehan, an American educator and writer.<http://robertjohnmeehan.blogspot.ro/?spref=gb>

ⁱⁱBrad Henry quotes from BrainyQuote.com.
http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_teacher.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Snapshot: Elementary - Student's Book – February 2, 1998 by Brian Abbs, Ingrid Freebairn and Chris Barker - textbook for L2 learners

^{iv} According to Kumaravadivelu following Long and Sato, 1983 and Brock, 1986, there are two main types of teachers' questions: *display* questions, which permit predetermined answers already known to the teacher; and *referential* questions, which permit open-ended answers containing new information.

^vS1's pronunciation for the preposition 'with'

^{vi}Kumaravadivelu identified ten sources that have the potential to contribute to the mismatch between teacher intention and learner interpretation: cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional and attitudinal mismatches. Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 77-89.

^{vii}See chapter 6, 'Promoting Learner Autonomy', Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 131-155.

^{viii}See chapter 9, 'Contextualizing Linguistic Input', Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 204-224.