Communicative language teaching: CLT style lessons

For basic lesson design, a good way to start might be to adapt later variations of PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production techniques). Then we can consider the type of task or activity to be used. In CLT, some prefer tasks that are more like actual real-world tasks or activities – less structured, more open-ended, but with a specific communicative goal (as in TBLT). Others prefer classroom activities that may be less natural, but more conducive to practicing a form or structure being taught, especially for lower level students.

General tips.
The lesson plan should detail & focus on what students do, more so than what the teacher does.
The lesson plan should define a specific linguistic or pragmatic skill.
The ordering of a structural syllabus – or a notional-functional – is still difficult, since principled ordering criteria are still not available or known; probably depends on particular L1-L2 differences in grammar, pragmatics, etc., but tailoring texts to different L1-L2 patterns may not always be practical.

Lesson outline.

A simple framework for a lesson plan might look like this (after taking care of administrative matters or other business). Before starting the outline, however, you need to define a specific objective for the lesson, e.g., one specific skill that students are to master, how much they should master, and how they should be able to use it in actual speaking.

1. Introduction.
A lead-in, background question, “schema activation” or other interesting transitional or segway, or a brief explanation of the lesson and its practical use or purpose.

2. Explanation.
A brief explanation of the form or structure and how it might be used in a real situation for a real purpose. This could be a grammatical, pronunciation, or pragmatic topic. Another possibility is to contrast or compare the form/structure or use between the L1 and the L2. If it is a grammar structure, it would be helpful to explain what speakers actually use it for (e.g., relative clauses are for explaining or clarifying nouns and concepts being discussed).

3. Demonstration or Illustration [optional, depending on the type of lesson].
A demo or example of the structure as used in a real context, e.g., from authentic materials, rather than artificial textbook examples. Some authentic or even “quasi-authentic” materials might be media clips, sample conversations, songs, readings, poems, articles, children’s books, nursery rhymes, or so-called jazz chants. This section can also be part of, or combined with, the focused practice.
4. **Focused practice.**

Some practice activities to learn and rehearse the form being taught. This could be a somewhat traditional classroom practice exercise, but not just an ALM or GTM exercise for the sake of an exercise. This should involve items in some kind of meaningful context, e.g., practice items based on the demonstration/illustration portion. This should also be intended to lead to the communicative activity. Examples might include choral repetition, role plays based on the demo materials, and making new sentences patterned on the demo.

5. **Communicative practice.**

A communicative activity or other pair or group activity, either more classroom-like, or a more natural task, in the TBLT sense.

**Focused practice activities.**

The rationale for focused practice activities is for developing longer term memories, mental connections and associations, and reinforcement of connections or memories. The rationale should not be behavioristic, or repetitive for the sake of repetition; nor should they be for rote memorization. Some typical exercises might include:

- Comprehension questions
- Practicing / acting out a model conversation
- Doing variations on a model conversation
- Choral repetition
- Arranging sentences to form a coherent story or passage
- Songs, jazz chants
- Brief discussion of a topic, as a class
- Asking students questions
- Making guesses about pictures or advertisements (what they are about...)
- Students creating their own sentences

Materials or practice items should not be isolated sentences, but items drawn from or based on some kind of context, e.g., from demo material.

**Typical group activities.**

**Role play**

Students act out a situation or social interaction. This can be modelled after a demo activity, or more free-form and open-ended, where students act out a situation and have to figure out on their own what to say.

**Ice-breaker games**

Students have to go around and ask questions to get to know their classmates.

**Info gap**

A pair (or possibly group) activity, in which each student is given different pieces of information, i.e., each student has incomplete information, different from what the other(s) have; together, they must discuss and share some of their information to complete a task.
• Travel agent: Harmer, p. 359-360.
• Map task: giving directions, with two maps with different, incomplete info (Harmer, p. 356-7). E.g., one has a map of Canada, and the other has info on train timetables, and together, they must plan a trip and decide where to go.
• Crossword puzzle activity: Harmer, p. 233
• Info gap games (Harmer, p. 349): Student A talks to Student B, and B must complete a task based A’s description, e.g., B draws a picture, or solves a puzzle [describe and draw]; or they discuss similarities & differences between two pictures. Any kind of picture, photo, or diagram could work – a funny picture, a picture of a famous person, a diagram of A’s family tree, an abstract art picture, etc.

Jigsaw task:
A variation on the info gap, in which a large task is broken up into separate components, and an individual student or smaller group works on each subcomponent; then they come together to share their results, or to perform the entire task together. E.g.,

Have groups demonstrate a lesson or skill, for something that can be broken up into separate parts or subsections, and assign each sub-component to a different person or group, then have everyone present the different parts of the lesson together (e.g., different stages of cooking a recipe, doing a science experiment, repairing a TV, creating your own Frankenstein monster...)

Students are divided into groups and each group is given a different set of info, different from the other groups. Then the groups are reorganized, with each new group having at least one student from each of the original groups. In the new group, students share their knowledge or experience with the others to complete a report or other task.

Problem solving task
Students are given a complex problem to discuss, and together they try to find or agree upon solutions, and then report on their findings.

Survey task
Students ask each other, or people outside class, their opinions on an issue; then they report their findings to the class.

Discussion or debate.
Students freely discuss or debate a given topic.
More on jigsaws - additional example

The Underlying Idea

Underlying this approach to encouraging students to learn is the Vygotskian notion that people learn from social experiences. Organizing small work groups is a proven way to encourage social experiences, particularly if (a) you want students to interact with one another, and (b) if your goal is to get everyone to participate. This method is especially appealing because it allows both for group work in problem solving and individual responsibility for reporting results.

Scheme of Organization

In this jigsaw, there are two levels of group work, the home group and the focus group. The home group meets first and is basically a study group that will, with input from each member, review the material at hand. If there are 20 people in the class, for example, there could be five home groups with four members each.

Step 1: Organizing in Home Groups

While in their home groups students are provided with their tasks (foci\(^1\)). Students quickly negotiate and divide the labor, making sure that at least one person from the home group has taken responsibility for each of the tasks listed. Since all of the home groups are engaged in the same process, i.e., each person is selecting a task to focus on, the focus groups are being formed at this time.

Step 2: Focus Groups

All of the students who selected task 1 are in focus group together. The same is true for all other foci. The focus groups meet for 10-20 minutes, and collectively complete the task.

Step 3: Reporting Back to Home Groups

At the end of that time, each student returns to his or her home group to share knowledge, examples, problem solutions, etc., with other members of the home group. Each focus should be covered, and time should be kept so that each home group member has an opportunity to provide information about his or her focus to the rest of the home group.

References.


\(^1\) Note: ‘foci’ = Latin plural of ‘focus’, in a more academic or technical sense.
CLT / TBLT activities

A sample CLT lesson (CLT or hybrid CLT-PPP design, with communicative goal), with the following outline:

1. Language presentation, i.e., demo (with authentic material)
2. Explanation & discussion
3. Focused practice
4. Activity (communicative practice, goal directed)
5. Student presentation [optional; more common in TBLT]
6. Discussion / Wrap-up

Lesson: Restaurant activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>stage</th>
<th>class activity</th>
<th>objective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intro topic, present authentic language sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>T introduces topic. T shows media clip of customers ordering food in a restaurant (e.g., from TV show or movie)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation &amp;</td>
<td>Ask general comprehension questions (what kind of restaurant, where it might take place, etc.) Explain non-familiar routines or food items mentioned</td>
<td>Make sure Ss understand dialogue &amp; culturally unfamiliar elements (e.g., names / types of Western foods)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused practice</td>
<td>Ask specific comprehension questions Choral repetition of phrases Role play the conversation as a whole class</td>
<td>Enhance understanding, practice forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group activity</td>
<td>Groups create their own restaurant dialogues / skits</td>
<td>communicative practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student presentation</td>
<td>One or more groups performs for the whole class</td>
<td>communicative practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Teacher goes over student performances, notes any errors, suggests alternative phrases or ideas</td>
<td>correcting errors, making Ss aware of other possible expressions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Variation: Use the humorous 'Soup Nazi' episodes from the American TV *Seinfeld* (probably available on youtube.com), which takes place in a soup cafeteria setting, and do humorous skits with oddly behaving servers or customers; or a restaurant scene from a sit-com like *Friends*. 
A task-based approach

Task-based earning offers an alternative for language teachers. In a task-based lesson the teacher doesn't pre-determine what language will be studied, the lesson is based around the completion of a central task and the language studied is determined by what happens as the students complete it. The lesson follows certain stages.

Pre-task

The teacher introduces the topic and gives the students clear instructions on what they will have to do at the task stage and might help the students to recall some language that may be useful for the task. The pre-task stage can also often include playing a recording of people doing the task. This gives the students a clear model of what will be expected of them. The students can take notes and spend time preparing for the task.

Task

The students complete a task in pairs or groups using the language resources that they have as the teacher monitors and offers encouragement.

Planning

Students prepare a short oral or written report to tell the class what happened during their task. They then practice what they are going to say in their groups. Meanwhile the teacher is available for the students to ask for advice to clear up any language questions they may have.

Report

Students then report back to the class orally or read the written report. The teacher chooses the order of when students will present their reports and may give the students some quick feedback on the content. At this stage the teacher may also play a recording of others doing the same task for the students to compare.

Analysis

The teacher then highlights relevant parts from the text of the recording for the students to analyse. They may ask students to notice interesting features within this text. The teacher can also highlight the language that the students used during the report phase for analysis.

Practice

Finally, the teacher selects language areas to practise based upon the needs of the students and what emerged from the task and report phases. The students then do practice activities to increase their confidence and make a note of useful language.

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3 The following is taken directly from: http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk//think/articles/a-task-based-approach.
The advantages of TBL\textsuperscript{4}

Task-based learning has some clear advantages – these also are true of CLT in general.

- Unlike a traditional approach, the students are free of language control. In all three stages they must use all their language resources rather than just practicing one pre-selected item.
- A natural context is developed from the students’ experiences with the language that is personalized and relevant to them. With PPP it is necessary to create contexts in which to present the language and sometimes they can be very unnatural.
- The students will have a much more varied exposure to language with TBL. They will be exposed to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms.
- The language explored arises from the students’ needs. This need dictates what will be covered in the lesson rather than a decision made by the teacher or the coursebook.
- It is a strong communicative approach where students spend a lot of time communicating. PPP lessons seem very teacher-centred by comparison. Just watch how much time the students spend communicating during a task-based lesson.
- It is enjoyable and motivating.

Consciousness-raising activities\textsuperscript{5}

The simplest way of raising awareness is by providing feedback (e.g. “you said X, but you should have said Y”). Depending on how it is done, there is nothing wrong with this, but (1) it can be perceived negatively, (2) does not particularly involve the students in the learning process, and (3) tends to become rather repetitive. Jane and Dave Willis\textsuperscript{6}, two of the most well-known names in TBL, suggest a much richer menu of CR activities to add to our repertoire. They include the following ideas in their list:

1. Ask students to search a set of data (this could be a text or examples you have selected yourself) to identify a particular pattern.
2. Ask students to group a set of language examples according to similarities or differences.
3. Give students a generalization about language (a language ‘rule’) and ask them to check it against a set of data.
4. Ask students to find similarities or differences between English language patterns and patterns in their own language.
5. Ask students to recall and reconstruct elements of a text that will draw their attention to significant language features.

\textsuperscript{4} http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk//think/articles/a-task-based-approach
\textsuperscript{5} The following is from http://www.onestopenglish.com/section.asp?catid=59430&docid=146389
\textsuperscript{6} http://www.willis-elt.co.uk
Sample lesson: Inductive grammar teaching.

A sample inductive grammar task (“consciousness raising task”). How could you modify or improve this lesson sample?

Look at the table below. The relative clauses are in italics, the prepositions are underlined and the relative pronouns are in bold. Talk about the sentences. Why are the sentences in the second column incorrect? Write an explanation in the last column. Then try to write 1-2 rules below that explain how relative clauses work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correct</th>
<th>Incorrect</th>
<th>Explanation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The place to which you will want to go is China.</td>
<td>That is the person from whom I got the letter from.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The place which you will want to go to is China.</td>
<td>The book in which you wrote in is mine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man at whom I shouted is deaf.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man whom I shouted at is deaf.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The girl who we gave the message to is not here.</td>
<td>The girl to who we gave the message is not here.</td>
<td>These are the books which I told you about.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The house that the girl lives in is pink.</td>
<td>The house in that the girl lives is pink.</td>
<td>These are the books which I told you about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. These are the books which I told you about.</td>
<td>These are the books which I told you about them.</td>
<td>These are the books which I told you about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The man who you were talking to is my uncle.</td>
<td>The man who you were talking to is my uncle.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rules:

Hints for explanation column (for less advanced students).
1. Don’t use prepositions both at the ___________ and at the __________ of the clause.
2. Don’t use prepositions before ________________.
3. For personal pronouns, don’t ____________.