Teaching English as a foreign language lesson plan

Vasiliki Anna Kiousi

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Part I: Lesson Plan
Context

I am teaching a group of twenty Greek students, aged 16-18, possessing an upper intermediate level of English knowledge. The lesson takes place in a college in Greece, where the students are prepared to study in the UK with all subjects taught in English, English language lessons, IELTS training and preparation for the UK university student life. This lesson takes place during their penultimate year of study before applying to universities. This college separates groups based on their area of interest, the group I teach being students interested in Humanities. [60-minute lesson plan]

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Lesson Plan: Preparing for UK University Life through Reading and Listening to Real-Life Materials

Activity & Timing	Objective(s)	Materials/Equipment	Step-by-step Details	Interaction/Seating	Contingency Plans/Other Notes
Activity 1: Reading Authentic Materials: University-Related Texts in Humanities 10 minutes	1. Practice engaging with authentic English texts from UK universities 2. Practice reading for meaning & understanding	Handout A	1. Brief announcement of today's topic*: Preparing for UK University Life through Reading and Listening to Real-Life Materials*. 2. Give students Handout A and ask they read the texts once to understand their meaning. Start a timer. 3. After 2 min, ask students to stop reading. 4. Tell students to raise their hand if they finished reading in time. 5. Have a 5' discussion about what was interesting in these texts and name their favourite.	Students sit in groups of 4-5 but work on their own at this stage.	Explain there is no need to write their name on handout, it will be collected at the end. If ¼ or more of the class did not finish reading on time, focus on increasing reading speed in future lessons. If students struggle with vocabulary, prompt other students to give definitions of unknown words.

Activity 2: Group Activity: Re-reading Texts for Understanding & Discussion 15 minutes	1. Practise addressing L2 meaning-related queries about the texts 2. Students evaluate own level of understanding and confidence in materials	Handout A	1. Students re-read the text and highlight parts that are difficult to understand in groups of 4-5. They discuss their questions in English for 5-7', and a group leader is assigned to note them down. They should try to solve them together first. 2. Ask students to bring up all questions (even the ones solved within their group) and encourage other groups to answer their classmates' questions. 3. Ask class to give a thumbs up if they now feel confident with their understanding of all extracts.	Students work in groups of 4-5.	If ¼ or more of the class does not give a thumbs up, consider revisiting vocabulary and/or bringing less challenging extracts in future lessons.
Activity 3: Listening to Authentic Materials: University- Related Videos in Humanities 15 minutes	1. Practice engaging with authentic listening materials 2. Understand the challenges of authentic listening practice	Videos A, B and C Handout A	1. Tell students they will now watch three videos about Humanities courses in UK universities. Explain the goal is to listen for understanding & meaning. 2. Students are asked to use Handout A to complete exercise 2 while listening to	Students work alone, still seated in groups for convenience.	Make sure everyone understands what they need to do before videos start playing to avoid pauses and questions during the activity, which will disrupt the flow.

			the videos. Notes are to be taken *after* each video. 3. Play videos, leaving a minute between each for everyone to complete the exercise before moving on to the next.		
3. Practice listening for global understanding.					
Activity 4: Post-listening Group Activity: Discussion of Materials 15 minutes	1. Feel comfortable with problem-solving in groups 2. Students evaluate own level of understanding and confidence in materials	Handout A	1. Students split into groups and discuss their answers and notes for 10' in English. The group leader notes down the questions the group wants to ask the teacher. 2. Answer each group's questions like before. 3. Ask class to give a thumbs up if they now feel confident with their understanding of the videos' content.	Students work in their groups of 4-5.	If not enough time, skip Step 1 of next activity to answer more questions. If ¼ or more of the class does not give a thumbs up, consider creating more similar activities for future lessons and/or consider less challenging videos next time.

Activity 5: Conclusion 5 minutes	1. Students review how they felt about the lesson 2. Set the direction for future lessons	N/A	1. Brief concluding discussion about the main challenges and highlights of today's lesson. 2. Students give handouts back before leaving.	Students remain seated in groups for convenience.	Use students' answers in discussion and handouts to plan future lessons.

Part II: Rationale

Introduction

As an EU student in a UK university, I decided to design a lesson for Greek students preparing to pursue a university degree in the UK. This English language lesson focuses on refining the reading and listening skills of upper intermediate pupils in a practical way: exposure to authentic[1] written and auditory input. More experienced second language students ought to implement that challenge of real-world simulation in their studies to develop their skillset beyond textbook knowledge. I titled the lesson *Preparing for UK University Life through Reading and Listening to Real-Life Materials*. This aligns with the overall objective of the plan, which is to work on understanding real-world English language content. As for the teaching style, all activities follow the principles of task-based instruction (TBLT[2]), with a focus on engaging in goal-oriented tasks to solve problems and give answers. To achieve all the above, I created five activities with a 60-minute timeframe in mind. The idea here is to switch between independent work and group discussions to ensure students initially react and respond to the materials individually before incorporating peer help for query solving. Short evaluations of the students' self-confidence are implemented throughout the 60 minutes as well, to efficiently inform the teacher about everyone's current level. This essay's purpose is to thoroughly explain the rationale behind the decisions made for the lesson plan and it is split into three sections – minus the conclusion. Activities 1 & 2 and 3 & 4 are split into two paragraphs and explained in pairs, due to them being interlinked in this way. Then, there is a short account of Activity 5, the concluding activity which brings the lesson to a close before the essay's general conclusion.

Activities 1 & 2

During the first activity, students individually read exercise 1 in Handout A before it is briefly discussed in class. Activity 2 switches to groupwork: students re-read the texts in exercise 1 and work together in small groups of 4-5 to answer any meaning-related questions before bringing them to the teacher. Everyone's comprehension is then assessed with the thumbs up technique: students that now feel confident understanding the material give a thumbs up to the teacher.

Exercise 1 includes four extracts from different UK universities as the authentic reading materials of choice. These were taken from official university websites, with various courses or services being promoted and explained to prospective students. All four texts were picked because they exemplify university-specific vocabulary and Humanities-related linguistic terms in the target language: "scholars", "prose", "credits", "interpretive approaches", "digital language labs", "global ethics", "metaphysics", "semester"[3] . Since this group of students will be applying and studying at a UK university the following year, such extracts make the perfect authentic materials to work with. In other words, the choice of sample texts was made to accommodate this specific class: an English language learning

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1 Materials which are used in genuine communication in the real world, and not specifically prepared for the teaching and learning of English. Examples: written/audio-visual materials from the media, materials used in the professions, and even textbooks of other subjects (Long, 1996, p.128)

2 Task-based is a kind of instruction in which language learners, performing activities, are engaged in meaningful, goal-oriented communication to solve problems, complete projects, and reach decisions (Seyyedi and Mohamed Ismai, 2012, p.242)

3 Examples from Handout A. The website sources are: The University of Nottingham, The University of Surrey, The University of Birmingham Philosophy Department and The Newcastle University School of History, Classics and Archaeology (n.d.).

class involved in Humanities subjects. This is important because although authenticity is a theme throughout the lesson, selecting authentic but irrelevant resources would significantly decrease the usefulness of the activities as a whole (Scrivener, 2011). Relevant authentic materials were chosen because, as mentioned in the introduction, are proven to benefit more experienced students in second language acquisition. By nature, they present a legitimate language context since they are made to be received by native speakers of the language the class is learning (Berardo, 2006, p.60; Long, 1996, p.128). They also provide learners with a great sense of achievement when understood and successfully interacted with, given they mimic real-world scenarios (ibid). Understanding an authentic text in class makes it seem more likely one will understand it outside of class, too. This accommodates another reoccurring intention for this lesson, which is developing students' confidence in fully understanding the English language as upper intermediate users. In other words, contrived materials[4] would be impractical at this stage. The students' L2 knowledge is too high to profit from simplified and over specific content that does not genuinely depict linguistic behaviour and patterns (Widdowson, 1979). Exercise 1 is about 350 words. Most of the class should read it in about 2 minutes since 200-250 words per minute is the minimum for understanding a text. Assessing reading speed by timing pupils is a quick evaluation method. It checks that students' reading speed is up-to-date with their L2 acquisition level. This lets the teacher know that both the low-level cognitive processes (such as word recognition and syntactic parsing) and high-level ones (like strategies to decode meaning and information evaluation) that are needed for text comprehension are working correctly at this stage (Maluch and Sachse, 2020, p.2). Not telling the class they are timed was a conscious choice since students can get anxious about finishing reading quickly and overall not truly focus on the content of the extracts.

From the start, students are told to read the extracts for the purpose of understanding their meaning. This explicit direction is included because not specifying a reading goal might result in some students reading the texts for a different purpose such as scanning, skimming or for the main ideas in them. It is also possible most of the class feels unmotivated or confused without clear instructions. For maximum productivity and clarity, then, the reading goal is explained from the start. Now, when group work ensues in Activity 2, students have 5-7 minutes to help solve any meaning-related questions amongst themselves ('Is philosophy of religion included in the BA programme?', 'Does "scholars" mean professors and lecturers?', 'What is a simpler word for distinguished?' et cetera) before the teacher steps in. This allows them to feel accomplishment and gain confidence through problem-solving with others. The activity echoes the principles of TBLT as the teaching style: making goal-oriented tasks the core to develop learners' ability to perform better in them (Seyyedi and Mohamed Ismai, 2012, pp. 242-243). Experts argue that TBLT oftentimes creates more beneficial circumstances for second language acquisition than solely focusing on learning vocabulary and grammatical rules (Long, 1985; Prabhu, 1987; Robinson, 2001b, as cited by ibid). Since students often have the same questions, task-based teaching is coupled with immediate group feedback. Pupils can correct others and be corrected right away in their small groups. They all have a shared objective, which helps coordinate their behaviour and make them feel connected and more comfortable engaging in correction (London and Sessa, 2006, p.2). Thus, peer discussion is used as a feedback tool, but also an anxiety

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4 Materials produced for pedagogical purposes, linguistically simplified and devised specifically for language teaching with specific features usually repeating in them for practice (Long, 1996, p.128).

defusing and motivating tool. Sharan and Shaulov take this idea further in their study: "[There is] unambiguous evidence that if a number of individuals form a social unit by joining in a group, […] the motivational level associated with this collection of people can significantly exceed the motivational level the individuals would have demonstrated if they had remained independent" (1990, p.28, as cited by Poupore, 2016). Finally, students give a thumbs up if they now feel confident about the extracts, which indicates how successful the activity was overall and how students received it.

Two L2 concepts underpin the choices behind Activities 1&2. These are the principles of narrow reading[5] and combining the top-down & bottom-up comprehension reading techniques[6]: the interactive approach[7] While more compact and speedy than narrow reading, the activities still provide the practice of engaging with different sources that discuss Humanities courses in English. The notion followed here is to give developing readers background understanding and context using repeated exposure to the same ideas (Cho, Ahn and Krashen, 2005, p.1). This can increase familiarity and confidence in their understanding of the texts, especially over time (ibid). As for combining the top-down and bottom-up processing of text, students must utilise top-down skills like decoding information and word recognition along with bottom-down techniques like critical evaluation and background knowledge. While working alone, the former technique likely dominates since the goal is the literal understanding of meaning, but when addressing their own and others' enquiries, they need to tap into bottom-down thinking to thoroughly break down the texts. This way, the students not only capitalise on their background understanding of Humanities but focus on what they can bring to this process to sample the materials for information; putting the interactive approach into practice (Abraham, 2002, pp. 1, 6).

Activities 3 & 4
Next, Activity 3 includes watching three videos targeted at prospective university students in the UK. Students are asked to gradually make their way through exercise 2 after watching each video. Activity 4 is group work once more, with pupils discussing their responses and queries in their small groups for 10 minutes before bringing their questions back to the teacher. The thumbs up technique to evaluate the understanding of the resources is used in the end.

Again, for authenticity purposes, the videos are derived from the institutions' official channels and represent different Humanities courses throughout the UK. Now, in this part of the lesson, the materials are auditory; this adds variety, but mainly an extra layer of challenge. Students will identify the differences that make listening to real spoken language more demanding than reading it: accents (British and non-British ones), talking speed, background noise or sound quality, content and vocabulary used. The first three factors do not pose a problem in a text, authentic or not. A text cannot have a distinct accent, the reader has control over how fast or slowly they read it, and the letters are clearly written out. However, listening to someone speak adds all these new difficulties that can greatly affect comprehension levels (Gilmore, 2007, p.109). To introduce the class to authentic listening

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5 Widely reading in only one genre, one subject matter, or the work of one author (Cho, Ahn and Krashen, 2005, p.1)

6 Top-down approach: Linear, piece-by-piece text processing // Bottom-up approach: Goal-directed, evaluative, interpretative reading

7 The interactive model stresses both what is on the written page and what a reader brings to it using both top-down and bottom-up skills (Rumelhart, 1977; Stanovich, 1980).

after authentic reading is an efficient way to build up real-world English language practice. Exercise 2 helps pinpoint how difficult each video was and why. It asks learners to rate the difficulty of each video from 1 to 5 and tick the boxes that match the challenges they had with comprehending the speaker(s) each time. They can also make notes in the designated areas, which they can later bring up in Activity 4. It is important to note that the same structure from Activities 1 & 2 is used here: individual response followed by group work with immediate group feedback, followed by a class discussion with the teacher. This is purposely done to provide a sense of familiarity to pupils; knowing similar steps are coming next can help balance out the concerns about this more difficult task. To mention some vital design details, video titles and durations are provided to increase motivation and curiosity. Videos were preferred over audio recordings for the same reason. Students are, then, less likely to wonder how long is left after the second or third clip or to forget which video was which. Exercise 2 was also specifically designed to be easy to complete (mostly circling and ticking) so students don't feel overwhelmed by multitasking. On the whole, these factors of visual support, organisation of information and topic familiarity, which are known to considerably affect listening comprehension, are thoroughly accounted for in this lesson plan (Gilmore, 2007, p.109). It is important to mention that like Activity 1 & 2, the lesson continues to follow TBTL principles and immediate group feedback, given the structure remains unchanged. Meaning continues to be primary and communication is the employed way to unlock it in class (Seyyedi and Mohamed Ismai, 2012, pp. 243-244). Continuing to work with the same groups but changing the stimuli was done due to the concept of group dynamics concerning feedback and adaptability. When a group is beyond the stage of development (Activity 1 & 2), it can then respond better to changes, be proactive and adapt successfully to different tasks as there is a common target and connection in place (London and Sessa, 2006, p. 3).

As for the listening goal, students are told to specifically listen for understanding. This is based on the core skill of listening for global understanding by Vandergrift and Goh (2012). Rost explains that "people listen for a purpose and it is this purpose that drives the understanding process" (1990, p.7 as cited Goh, 2014, p. 73). Centred around this idea, employing a strategy will improve students' drive and enthusiasm regarding Activities 4 & 5 (Goh, 2014, p. 73). Similar to the reading before, just having them listen to the resources would not only be too vague but would not give them a tangible purpose to work towards.

The top-down and bottom-up approaches to listening[8] and their combination comprise the rationale behind the lesson planning at this stage. It is done comparably to the explanation of Activities 1 & 2. On one hand, learners need to put more elementary skills to use: identifying words, grammatical structures and sentence boundaries to understand the speakers' messages in the videos. These are all bottom-up techniques (Yeldham, 2018, p.805). Top-down processing, although less linguistics-based, is especially useful in this case since the class is dealing with challenging listening resources. That is because top-down processing is in itself a compensating toolset. Vandergrift describes it as "[using] what [learners] already know to fill gaps in their understanding" (Vandergrift, 2004, pp. 10-11).

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[8] Top-down processing involves individuals utilizing their existing knowledge to guide and embellish their understanding of the spoken text // Bottom-up processing involves building meaning from the linguistic content of a text (Yeldham, 2018, p. 805)

That can come in the form of pre-existing schemata[9] they have as English language learners, Humanities students and future university applicants. It can also come in the form of metacognitive strategies such as monitoring and evaluating their own comprehension, which is asked of them in Activity 4 through group work and the thumbs up method (Yeldham, 2018, p.805). These tools help students make up for a good number of misheard words, missed sentences or ambiguities in the meaning of the listening materials.

A final note for this section concerns a potential opportunity related to this part of the lesson. While the teacher gives answers to the students' questions in Activity 4, it is wise to consider shifting the focus on coping strategies regarding input comprehension in future lessons. This will directly assess pupils' concerns about how to respond to tricky and new real-world situations of English language exposure.

Activity 5
This last activity concludes things with a chat about the lesson's highlights and most difficult parts. From the beginning, the students have been told there is no need to write their names on the handouts as they will be collected back. Activity 5 is the time that this happens before the lesson ends.

To explain the choices made here, although Activity 5 is designed to smoothly bring the lesson to a close, it serves another important purpose: future lesson planning. Reviewing the lesson's highlights and obstacles together allows everyone to express how they felt about the materials. The teacher can note down the main concerns the class expresses and take them into account for the future. Additionally, getting the handouts back gives the teacher clear data in their hands concerning where pupils struggled and what to focus on next. The choice to keep them anonymous from the start was so no one feels uncomfortable, given their answers do not come with a name attached.

Time-wise, the first part of this activity could be omitted if the previous runs over. This is written in the contingency plans to troubleshoot a possible problem that might occur since Activity 4 is full of Q&A and feedback giving, which can be time-consuming tasks.

Conclusion
This task-based lesson provided students with the opportunity to experiment with a more ambitious, but closer-to-reality L2 practice and receive support and feedback within their groups. By capitalising on their interest in UK Humanities courses, group dynamics and TBLT, a plethora of relevant material was supplied to make the lesson appealing, with clearly directed goals. To account for some of the plan's limitations, unless it is followed by a lesson that educates students on *how* to deal with these comprehension difficulties, its benefit is restricted. It is also likely that some more teacher-based teaching is needed for that next lesson, so taking a break from TBLT would be useful in the future to focus on the content. Having said that, however, this lesson plan accounts for the future of this group of students by providing opportunities for the teacher to evaluate the class's reading speed,

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[9] Schemata are […] interlocking mental structures representing readers' knowledge of ordinary events. In the reading process, readers integrate the new information into their pre-existing schemata. They influence recognition and storage of information (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011).

self-confidence and listening struggles. All of this information clearly illustrates where to focus on next as their English language teacher and make the most of their time in class.

Vasiliki Anna Kiousi

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Appendices
Handout A

Preparing for University Life through Reading & Listening to Real-Life Materials

Part One: Reading Authentic Texts from Universities

There are four extracts here. Read them all once first. Then, take 5-7 minutes to read them again in your groups and highlight anything difficult to understand. Discuss it together and we will answer all of your questions in class right after.

1. Classics and Ancient History at Newcastle University has a **long and distinguished reputation**. Latin and Greek have been taught here since 1874, and Ancient History and Classical Archaeology since 1910 and 1931 respectively. Our **staff** include scholars of **outstanding international reputation**. Our research covers all major aspects of the **study of the ancient world.**

   (Newcastle University, School of History, Classics and Archaeology)

2. 'Studying Literature' is a module that introduces the core skills for literary studies: reading, writing, researching and presentation. Topics covered include close reading, constructing an argument, handling critical material, introducing you to key critical questions about literary form. The texts are both poetry and prose and are selected from the full range of the modern literary period (1500 to the present). Across the year, you will learn about different interpretive approaches and concepts. This module is worth 20 credits.

   (University of Nottingham, English Language and Literature BA)

3. Our facilities include digital language labs, a multimedia lab, our own virtual learning environment and an e-portfolio system that appeals to the most creative among you. Between classes, you can use our Language Study Area, designed for independent language learning. This is located in our Learning Centre, which is open 24 hours a day, six days a week, as well as during most of Sunday during semester time.

   (University of Surrey, Facilities in English Literature and French BA Hons)

4. We offer all of the areas of philosophy you'd expect in a BA programme: ethics, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, political philosophy, philosophy of science and so on. We also have some areas of philosophy that you might not be so likely to find elsewhere, or that we consider particular areas of strength: sexual ethics, philosophy of religion, and global ethics.

   (University of Birmingham, Department of Philosophy)

Part Two: Listening to Authentic Materials from Universities

We are watching three videos. After each video, you will have time to complete the exercise below. First, circle the number that corresponds to how easy or difficult it was to understand the speaker(s) in the video. Then, ask yourself what made it challenging and tick the appropriate boxes. Any additional notes and questions, you can write in the notes section and discuss with your teams after.

Video 1: Discover English Literature at The University of Manchester - *2 minutes*

	Easy				**Difficult**
How difficult was it to understand this video?	1	2	3	4	5

What was challenging? accent   talking speed   vocabulary   content   background noise

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Notes:

_____

_____

Video 2: Archaeology at Cambridge - *3.5 minutes*

	Easy				**Difficult**
How difficult was it to understand this video?	1	2	3	4	5

What was challenging? accent   talking speed   vocabulary   content   background noise

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Notes:

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Video 3: Linguistics Lecturer Papastergiou at the University of Bangor - *1.5 minutes*

	Easy					**Difficult**
How difficult was it to understand this video?	1	2	3	4	5	

What was challenging? accent   talking speed   vocabulary   content   background noise

☐   ☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

Notes:

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Please give this handout back before you leave!

Videos A, B and C
o   <u>Video A</u> Discover English Literature at The University of Manchester
o   <u>Video B</u> Archaeology at Cambridge
o   <u>Video C</u> Athanasia Papastergiou – Linguistics Lecturer at Bangor University