

The EFL Lesson Stages. Linguistically Connected?

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Abstract: Starting from Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) theory of lesson stages, this paper focuses on teacher talk, mainly on the language used to introduce the new lesson and to round it off. The two sequences are considered to be connected not only in terms of teaching logic, but also in terms of the language a teacher uses when initiating, going through and concluding these stages. The small scale study this paper describes aims at analyzing to what extend and how exactly the connection between the two stages is made, in teacher's language terms, by focusing on ten EFL lessons taught by two Romanian teachers to beginner and, respectively, to lower intermediate students.

Key words: lesson stages, mirroring expressions, teacher talk, EFL

1. Introduction. Mirroring in the foreign language teaching context

Starting from Sinclair and Coulthard's theory referring to lesson stages, more precisely to the *transaction* (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975: 22) between them and having in mind the pedagogic purpose of the language used during the teaching process, it seems meaningful to analyze how teachers of English as a foreign language use *communication units* (Richards 2015: 519) to introduce a new lesson and to round it off. In referring to this, I prefer using the term *mirroring*, which, in this case, stands for using complementary linguistic structures in order to have a one-to-one correspondent, in different lesson stages.

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Originally, according to wiki psychology, this term belongs to psychology and refers to “the unnoticed behaviour in which one person subconsciously imitates the gesture, speech pattern, or attitude of another”. Since it indirectly involves “the other”, mirroring has a social dimension that has the potential to lead to building a certain relationship / rapport with the people around one. But could it also lead to building a conscious rapport within a teacher’s own self, during his/her own EFL class, when going through the lesson stages s/he has planned? Mirroring being a subconscious replication, it takes place in everyday interactions, and often goes unnoticed by both the person enacting the mirroring behaviour and by the individual who is being mirrored. It activates a certain connection and understanding with the individual who is being mirrored. If happening within oneself, will it lead, in the particular case of a teacher, to a smoother transition and a more logical flow of the lesson?

Mirroring is distinct from conscious imitation. The former is subconsciously done, with often no awareness that it has even taken place, while the latter implies a conscious effort to copy another person, which makes it exclusively external. Being aware of this, an EFL teacher could change his/her linguistic behaviour and, at least at certain points in the lesson, move from a quasi-automatic language production to a fully-controlled one, more exactly, to consciously using mirroring expressions from his own precedent output in order to reinforce what has just been taught, thus reiterating the elements that s/he considers worth being more emphatically pointed out and remembered by the learners. To give a brief example, the formula “Today we are going to learn about how to use technology” mirrors in “Today we have learnt about how to use technology”.

One of a multitude of questions that could be asked about mirroring in the teaching context is whether teachers of EFL use mirroring expressions in order to stay close to the lesson plan they have prepared as the scaffolding of the lesson they (intend to) teach or they rather prefer to check the students’ understanding, thus granting more importance to the teaching result rather than to the teaching process.

2. Mirroring at various stages of the EFL lesson

The aim of this small-scale research is to analyze to what extend and how exactly the connection between the introduction and the rounding off of the lesson taught is established by two non-native (Romanian) English teachers. The material I have investigated has been audio-video recorded in 10 EFL lessons taught by the two teachers - named Anne and Mary here - to beginner

and, respectively, lower intermediate students, in two different schools. My presence in the classroom could have led to a lower degree of naturalness and implicitly could have impeded on the authenticity of the teachers' talk, but, based on my own experience as a teacher, I can say that both the recordings and the students' reactions in class showed that the language choices the teachers made were what they were familiar with.

The method used for the analysis of the data gathered is qualitative and descriptive. The research focuses on two main lesson stages: introducing it and rounding it off. Table 1 below offers a synthetic view of the linguistic formulas used by the two teachers to clearly mark the beginning and the ending of the lessons they taught, accompanied by an indication of whether there was or there was not any kind of mirroring between the two.

Lesson/ Teacher/ Level	Beginning	Rounding off	Mirroring between beginning and rounding off
Lesson 1/ Anne/ Beginner	<i>Today we are going to read a new lesson and it's called [Alvin's Day], so please open your notebooks and write down the title.</i>	<i>Ok, so, please remember, you need to remember these words [to wake up, to get up, to have a shower]</i>	Yes
Lesson 2 / Anne/Beginner	<i>... and now we are going to talk about how to form questions: in the interrogative form, to put sentences in the present simple ...so, please write down Present Tense Simple, interrogative form.</i>	<i>So, it's very easy! When we want to form a question, we put do or does, do for I/We/You, They and does for the rest: does he, does she, does it.</i>	Yes
Lesson 3/Anne/ lower intermediate	<i>Today we are going to talk about the ideal school, and, at page 82, we have a different type of school, it's a school on the sea, in fact, on a boat, so, please write down the title.</i>	<i>Good. [homework]</i>	No
Lesson 4/Anne/ lower intermediate	<i>Ok, now, we're going to watch a short video, please pay attention, I hope it starts soon, it does – ok, good, and please pay attention to the following thing. Please look at this person. What is he doing? (S: Flipping) – Flipping. Ok. Do you think that you can do the same thing as he? (S: no) Why? Why is it so difficult? S: unclear answer) ... Now, people can ... what does the verb can mean? (S: unclear answer) ...</i>	<i>I have a question that would be the last question: Do you think that in life we can do anything that we want? (S: yes, we can do anything if we practice). Give me an example of a thing a person can achieve in life; a thing that a person can achieve in life if he/she really wants to. For example, if you are told that you'll never be able to</i>	No

	<p>now, we're going to listen to a song too. [T presents some pictures] ... What do you have to do here? And then, I'm going to show you what they are actually doing – give me a second- what do you have to do here? You have to match the questions to the correct pictures, so please look at the four pictures ...[matching exercise]</p> <p>Now, as we talked previously, we said that are going to continue and to listen to a song called <i>Go on Fire!</i> [song + fill in exercises]</p>	<p><i>go to the Moon, do you think it's true?</i> (S: yes) Why? What do you think if I tell you you won't become an astronaut ... that means in the future you might become an astronaut, but that's the message of the song that you should believe in yourself, and no matter what, be positive and believe that you can achieve anything if you truly want to. Good. [stop the recording]</p>	
Lesson 5/Anne/Beginner	<p>Now, today we're going to do some exercises with the Present Tense Simple, so please write down today's date, title Practice and we're going to do some exercises with our Present Tense Simple, which we form by putting the person then the verb and don't forget to put the -s in the third person singular.</p> <p>It's very easy! Ok! And the task is the following: Complete ...</p>	<p>Pay attention! Mary is a she ... it's like she swim...s; Mary and John – they; My dog is he or it and the dogs, they ... more! [practice]</p> <p>Very Good!</p>	Yes
Lesson 6/Mary/ Beginner	[after checking homework] Now we go to page 18, please open your books at page 18, we have a new lesson called ...who can tell me the title of the new lesson? Page 18 ... what is the new title? Andrei ... Our World! Correct.	Thank you for this wonderful lesson; your homework is exercise 4 page 19.	No
Lesson 7/ Mary/ Beginner	Today we are going to learn new words, new things from page 20, page 20, so go to the lesson <i>My New Clothes</i> .	<p>Ok, thank you very much, we stop here; next time we are going to learn about we/you/they – the other persons, but it's enough for today. Is it difficult? (S: No!) No? (S: No!)</p> <p>You know the verb to be, you know the verb wear and you know -ing at the end; wearing [choral repetition], repeat please, wearing ... and then you know the clothes so it's not very difficult, but you have to be careful, be careful!</p> <p>Ok, thank you very much!</p> <p>Now, your homework for</p>	No

		<i>next time is exercise 4 page 21.</i>	
Lesson 8/ Mary/ beginner	<p><i>Now, today we are going to have a new lesson, let's go to page 28, page 26, to the lesson At the ... ? (S: animal park)</i></p> <p><i>At the Animal Park</i></p> <p><i>So, we are going to have a lesson about ... about what? What do you think? What is the lesson about? About ... about ... (S: animale) in English, please ... animals. About animals. Louder, please.</i></p> <p><i>Do you like animals? Yes? Everybody loves animals, but the animals in our lesson are wild, wild animals. What are wild animals? (S: animale salbatice). Ok! Very well!</i></p> <p><i>And I would like you to look at the list of animals, at the top of the lesson and we start with ... ? the first animal is a giraffe ... let's write down!</i></p>	<p><i>And we finished! Oh! Was it difficult? (S: Nooo!) Just in time! [sound of bell] Just in time!</i></p> <p><i>Your homework for next time is exercise 3 page 27. Look and complete! You have to complete! Is it clear? I hope this is not too difficult for you!</i></p>	No
Lesson 9/ lower intermediate/ Mary	<p><i>And now we are going to continue with a new lesson which is called What do you think I should ... do? What do you think I should do? So, today is the (date), [T writes on the blackboard], let's write the new title What do you think I should do? What do you think I should do?</i></p> <p><i>Now, let's remember what do you know about the word should, in our title. Should, please (S: should means trebuie) ... Is it correct, class? Do you agree with [Student's name]? Should trebuie? (another S: ar trebui)</i></p> <p><i>Attention, please, what do you know about the other verb trebuie? In English, it is must, yes, but today we are going to talk about the verb should. Ok, so attention to this tricky verb. Ok, now exercise A ...</i></p>	<p><i>[giving suggestions about homework] Is it clear what you have to do? Have you enjoyed the activities we've done today? Yes? (S: yes)</i></p> <p><i>What did you like most? (S: Larry) Larry ... Larry .. Hearing Larry on the tape? Yes, what else? The grammar? No, not the grammar! We just love Larry, but Larry helps us learn grammar easier and in a funny way.</i></p> <p><i>Well, that was all for today. Thank you for your attention!</i></p>	No
Lesson 10/ lower intermediate/ Mary	<p><i>Ok, today we are going to talk about pets ... Do you like pets? (S: Yes) Yes?</i></p> <p><i>Have you got pets? Yes? No? (S:</i></p>	<p><i>So, what do you think? Is this psychological test correct? (S: yes) This was a psychological test which</i></p>	Yes

	<p>(yes) Who has got a pet at home? Raise your hand up, please. Who has got a pet? Many of you have got a pet at home so I think we are going to have an interesting discussion about how it is to have pets at home. Ok, the title of today's lesson is Choosing a pet, page 64 ... today is the (date) I would like you to look at exercise 8, page 64 ...we have a question there. Who wants to read the question?</p>	<p>will help you find the best pet according to your personality type. You have different personalities and, at home, I would like you to make a list with adjectives for each type of personality. Is it clear what you have to do? (S: yes) to write a short description of yourselves using the information in the text., so, if you choose the circle, you have some characteristics, for example, you are sociable, let's say. It's written here. You are sociable. The rest of you are different according to the sign you have chosen. Ok? What do you think? Was it interesting talking about pets? Yes? [optional homework – pictures with pets] Thank you for your attention! Good bye!</p>	
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Table 1. Mirroring in beginning and rounding off the EFL lesson

2.1. Introducing the EFL lesson

In terms of the expressions used, both Anne and Mary adopted a pretty standardized formula: *Today, we are going to ... / Now we are going to ... (continue with, have a new lesson, learn new words, etc.)* to express future intentions that, at the moment of speaking, are based on a decision that has already been made. What such language employment indicated is, as I see it, the teachers' intention to stay close to the lesson plan. Also, the use of the personal pronoun *we* or the possessive adjective *our* (*our lesson, our title*) implies the feeling of togetherness, of a teacher – student collaborative endeavor in class. Regarding the collaborative potential of EFL learning/teaching, authors like Dragoeșcu Urlica and Stefanović (2018: 537) indicate that such endeavors can be best achieved by interacting and cooperating in co-relational educational processes. A cooperative classroom environment contributes greatly to maintaining a “close teacher – learner relationship, built by employing a way of teaching that appeals to the learners’ minds and hearts” (Frățilă and Jumanca 2011: 192). Not even once was the first

person singular pronoun *I* employed by the two teachers during the lessons I observed, its being avoided clearly emphasizing from the very beginning of the interaction that both the teachers and the students were playing an equal part in the scenario. Moreover, the teachers seem to have perceived themselves more as facilitators of the learning process or guides for their students, rather than as the main source of information and controllers of each and every step to be taken in class.

In the same introductory part of the lesson, in terms of the teacher's announced focus, I could notice two different directions:

a) clearly informing the students about the content that was going to be taught or revised:

Today we are going to do some exercises with the present tense;
Today we are going to learn new words, new things on page 20, so go to the lesson "My New Clothes.;"
And now we are going to continue with a new lesson which is called "What do you Think I should do?";
Now, let's remember what you know about the word "should".

b) clearly announcing the students about the skills that the lesson will focus on:

Today, we are going to read a new lesson and it's called "Alvin's Day"; (focus on reading)
Today we are going to talk about the ideal school; (focus on speaking)

There was one instance in the mini-corpus recorded when the verb used by the teacher to give a hint at what will happen in class was, unlike in the examples in b) above, partly misleading. "To talk" in *Now, we are going to talk about how to form questions* did not really announce a lesson focusing on developing oral communication skills, but rather one focusing on grammar rules presentation and practice (it is true that, eventually, the interaction in class was adequately transformed into what students normally prefer: talking). This example may function as evidence for the linguistic stereotypes that have grown roots in teacher talk – the use of the verb "talk" to introduce a lesson, no matter what kind, has generalized and, therefore, often has a diminished referential value. More often than not, the formula "today we are going to talk about" is employed by teachers to introduce lessons whose main objective is not developing speaking skills. It is true, however that, in such cases, grammatically speaking, the part of the message given prominence is not the verb "to talk", but its objects, encapsulating the actual point of interest in the lesson. So, there is a big difference between *Today we are going to talk about*

the ideal school, where “talk” really means exchanging words, and *Now, we are going to talk about how to form questions*, where “talk” actually means “deal with”, “learn”, “focus on”, which becomes clear seconds after the introductory formula is delivered.

Another aspect that I considered in my research, for the initial stage of the lessons recorded, is the amount and type of information offered by the teacher at the very beginning of their classes. I could easily notice that these vary: in some cases, the teacher referred to the students’ previous knowledge; in others, she simply started the new lesson by announcing/writing its title on the blackboard.

In terms of the type of information offered by the teacher to her students at the beginning of the lesson, reference to its main objective (and topic) was signaled by, for example, the use of the adjective *new* (*new lesson, new things*). This clearly indicated that the lesson was neither a revision lesson, nor one adding extra information to another lesson, but a completely new one. On the other hand, the comparative *more* (*Today we are going to find out more about pets*) emphasized, without a shadow of a doubt, that the lesson was not going to be a totally new one, but rather a follow-up one. I can speculate that the use of *more* plays a role in stimulating students’ interest and motivation in learning – on the one hand, *more* means something has already been acquired, so the students are no longer powerless novices; on the other, this *more* to be learnt may be what makes the transition to gaining even more power given by the possession of more knowledge, and this is something that may be to the students’ liking.

Another way of increasing students’ participation in the lesson and their motivation that was evident in my data was the teacher’s eliciting information from them: for example, asking students to tell the lesson title after mentioning the page number where it was to be found two times, or asking them to say, based on the title, what they thought the lesson was about, as alternatives to introducing the lesson:

*Now, we go to page 18, please open your books at page 18, we have a new lesson called ... [Who can tell me the title?];
So we are going to have a lesson about [...] What is the lesson about?*

2.2. Rounding off the EFL lesson

If, in the introductory part of the EFL lessons that I recorded, the language used by the two teachers was quite formulaic and easy to detect (and to predict), in the final stage of these lessons, the introductory formulas did not

always find themselves a one to one equivalent. As can be seen from Table 1 above, in six of the ten lessons, they did not.

Perhaps the clearer instance when the teacher employed corresponding, mirroring language to mark the beginning and, respectively, the rounding off of her lesson was the following:

Beginning the lesson: *I think we are going to have an interesting discussion [about pets].*

Rounding off the lesson: *What do you think? Was it interesting to talk about pets?*

Asking for feedback from the students by prompting them to express their opinion about what has happened in class, which they did in some cases, although quite shy, is an indirect way of making them reflect on the content of the lesson. Instead of summarizing herself what has been taught (and thus positioning herself as the authority in class), the teacher made a doubly beneficiary, inspired move – she gave the students the opportunity to feel equal partners in the teaching – learning process and she indirectly refreshed the key points of the lesson in their minds.

Without being directly connected to the language used at the beginning of the lesson (*Today we are going to continue with a new lesson*), this way of encouraging the students to express their opinion seems to have been promoted by the other teacher, when she said, to round off her class:

So, it's very easy; Is it difficult?; It's not very difficult, you know them (rules), but you have to be careful, be careful; Was it difficult?

At a closer look, however, one can notice that the last of the teacher's questions remains unanswered. So, it is, after all, her own verdict, not the students', that the lesson was not difficult. This is not necessarily a minus, since, as long as the teacher is an authoritative figure in the class, her telling the students that something is not difficult may function as a stimulus for them to learn that thing. However, as compared to asking for the students' opinion and waiting for them to provide it, asking for it and actually providing your own opinion, as a teacher, may be less efficient in fueling the students' self-reflection on the content of the lesson and what they feel/ think about it.

If the two similar ways of rounding off the lesson mentioned involve the students one way or another, abruptly bringing the lesson to a conclusion certainly does not. This is what happens, I believe, when a teacher simply says:

Well, that was all for today.

which was how one of the teachers in my study rounded off one of her lessons, with no connection whatsoever with the language she used to initiate it. The

demonstrative pronoun *that*, anaphorically employed here, certainly has a much diminished capacity of making the students think about their learning experience just concluded than asking a question about it (even if the teacher herself answers this question, as we have just seen).

The use of the imperative to highlight key elements of the lesson can be noticed, in some cases with a mirroring effect, partly reiterating the introductory moment and reinforcing it. For instance, *remember, you need to remember!; don't forget!; so, we have to think back to our words (before doing homework!)* all referring to cognitive processes are used in terms of somehow conducting students towards what they have to do in order to achieve their (teachers' and students') common goal.

3. Conclusion

Although both teachers introduced their lessons in ways that were more or less obvious to the students, when it comes to rounding them off, this was not clearly marked in linguistic terms. I can only suppose that the teachers considered it unnecessary. But, as I see things, it would have been more efficient to have some sort of rounding off formula, since it is well known that pressing the conclusion button increases the audience's attention. For time management reasons, this stage of the lesson is slightly neglected as students lose interest and concentration towards the end of a class. A sum-up formula might, however, bring them back and help them visualize their newly acquired or revised information.

An additional comment may be made here concerning the use of the same standardized formula, either at the beginning of the lesson or at the end. As I see things, getting linguistically stereotypical may have both a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, it may be the reflection of a code between the teacher and her students which excludes any element of surprise (the students know exactly what to expect from their teacher); on the other, a teacher who never varies her linguistic formulas runs the risk of becoming a little bit boring, as her students can always anticipate what she is going to say. In this case, a monotonous atmosphere might increase students' lack of interest, even in the topics they would normally be curious about. Perhaps the argument of using formulaic language and repetitions in class could be further developed as suggested by Mureşan (2011) as part of the discourse that does not encourage more real life-like conversation, more dialogic discourse. Thus the repeated structure may not only affect student motivation and therefore class

participation, but it may also bear a mark on shaping student's communicative competence in the EFL context.

While watching the recordings, I noticed that the same teacher used the same linguistic formulas when teaching different classes. I can only assume that they used the same language in beginner and lower intermediate classes due to the fact that the students in these classes had quite similar language proficiency. I suppose that, had there been a more significant difference in terms of language proficiency, probably teacher's talk in general and the language used to introduce the lesson and to round it off in particular would have been adapted accordingly.

In conclusion, it remains a question of time, amount of teacher talk analyzed, student feedback to the teacher's language and their performance to draw a clearer conclusion as to whether lesson introduction – lesson rounding off mirroring plays a role in the EFL class (including in the sense hinted at in the introduction of this article, i.e. that of building a teacher – student rapport on the one hand, and a teacher – teacher's own self rapport, on the other) or it should be something that can well be disregarded. For the moment, this small-scale analysis has clearly pointed out that there are, for sure, differences in the ways it is resorted to by teachers.

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