مجلة جامعة تشرين للدراسات والبحوث العلمية _ سلسلة الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية المجلد (23) العدد (16)2001

Tishreen University Journal for Studies and Scientific Research-Arts and Humanities Science Series Vol (23) No (16) 2001

Syllabus Design and Learners' Needs

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(Accepted 22/7/2001)

□ ABSTRACT □

Designing a syllabus should essentially be based on answers to a number of questions, which should also be used in writing materials as well as in classroom teaching and evaluation. A syllabus must do at least two things: it should specify both the content of the course of instruction and the order of the presentation of the content. This dual quality of the syllabus establishes its strong connection with language theories and teaching methods. Given this, the specification of the content and the order of its presentation are always informed by a language theory and a teaching method. This is why there are a number of approaches to syllabus design, reflecting the different learning theories and teaching methods. This paper is primarily concerned with the major issues or factors affecting syllabus design, especially ESP syllabus design, focusing on the students, their needs, and the situation in which learning takes place as well as on the major types of syllabi.

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مجلة جامعة تشرين للدراسات والبحوث العلمية _ سلسلة الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية المجلد (23) العدد (16)2001
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تخطيط المنهاج وحاجات المتعلمين

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(قبل للنشر في 2001/7/22)

□ الملخّص □

يجب أن يعتمد تخطيط المنهاج أساساً على أجوبة لعددٍ من الأسئلة التي يتوجّب أن تُستخدم في المواد المكتوبة، وفي التعليم والتقويم أيضاً. وعلى المنهاج أن يفي بأمرين على الأقل، إذ يجب أن يحدد مضمون البرنامج التدريسي وتسلسل عرض المضمون. إن هذه الصفة المزدوجة للمنهاج هي التي تجعله مرتبطاً ارتباطاً وثيقاً مع نظريات اللغة وطرائق التدريس، ذلك لأن تحديد المضمون وتسلسل عرضه يعتمدان على نظرية أو طريقة ما. ولهذا يوجد عدد من الطرائق لتخطيط المنهاج تعكس النظريات التعليمية والطرائق التدريسية الم ختلفة. إن هذه الورقة تُعنى أساساً بالمسائل والعوامل الرئيسة المؤثرة في تخطيط المنهاج، خاصة منهاج اللغة الإنكليزية لأغراض خاصة، وتركّز على الطلاب واحتياجاتهم وعلى الحالة التي يتم التعلّم فيها، وكذلك على أنواع المناهج.

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Introduction:

It seems appropriate at the outset to point to the general tendency among linguists to use the terms "syllabus," "course," and "curriculum" interchangeably. The term "syllabus" is sometimes so misleading or interchanged with the terms "curriculum" and "course" to the extent that Altman (1980), for example, frequently parenthetically places the term "syllabus" after the term "curriculum." This confusion is partly due to the somewhat different uses of the terms by British and North American linguists. In his attempt to sort out the confusion and clarify differences, Stern (1993:20-21) defines the term "curriculum" from a North American perspective and points out that it can have two meanings: the first is general, referring to "the programme of studies of an educational institution," whereas the second is more restricted, describing "the substance of what is taught in a given subject, say mathematics, history, or French." This second restricted sense involves three aspects: "(a) defining objectives, (b) determining content, and (c) indicating some sort of sequence or progression." The restricted interpretation of curriculum is widely described as "syllabus" in all kinds of educational contexts.

Nevertheless, "in more recent years," as (Ibid:20) further explains, "British applied linguists have used the term 'syllabus' to characterize the content, or the underlying principle of selecting and sequencing, of second language courses." A course, as defined by Hutchinson and Waters (1996:65), is "an integrated series of teaching-learning experiences, whose ultimate aim is to lead the learners to a particular state of knowledge." Similarly, David Nunan (1988:14) distinguishes the two terms by pointing to the British and American perspectives:

> In the United States, it is customary to use the term 'curriculum', rather than 'syllabus', to refer to all aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation of curriculum. The term is also used for a particular course of instruction. In Britain, the term 'syllabus' is used to denote that part of curriculum activity concerned with 'what' of the curriculum.

Likewise, while Dubin and Olshtain (1986:3) see the terms "curriculum" and "program" interchangeable, describing the broadest contexts of language planning, they view a "syllabus" as a "more circumscribed document, usually one which has been prepared for a particular group of learners… although recently the term syllabus has taken on a special meaning concerning the specification of language content alone." Thus, despite the confusion and interchangeability of terms, the tendency is that a syllabus is more "specific" and more "concrete" than a curriculum and that the latter encapsulates the former. Therefore, a curriculum may contain a number of syllabi. As Krahnke (1987:2) explains, "a curriculum may cover an entire school year, while a language teaching syllabus may make up only one part of the curriculum. Or the overall curriculum of a full-time intensive language-teaching program may include three or more specific skill-area syllabi at any one time. A curriculum may specify only the goals (what the learners will be able to do at the end of instruction), while the syllabus specifies the content of the lessons used to move the learners toward the goals." Moreover, taking many of these points on board, Graves (1996:3) comes to an even more specific conclusion, regarding the relationship of those terms in terms of design and planning: "Thus syllabus design is a part of course development, and a course is part of a curriculum." Nevertheless, she, too, acknowledges the difficulty of a strict application of those definitions in practice. In this paper, the terms "course" and "syllabus" are used interchangeably.

Designing a syllabus should essentially be based on answers to a number of questions, which should also be used in writing materials as well as in classroom teaching and evaluation. A syllabus must do at least two things: it should specify both the content of the course of instruction and the order of the presentation of the content. This dual quality of the syllabus

establishes its strong connection with language theories and teaching methods. Given this, the specification of the content and the order of its presentation are always informed by a language theory and a teaching method. This is why there are a number of approaches to syllabus design, reflecting the different learning theories and teaching methods. But before that stage is reached, an analysis of the learners' needs should be conducted, especially in the light of an ESP course.

ESP, as Hutchinson and Waters (1996:7-8) came up in the 1960s with the following guiding principle: "Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need." In other words, the learners' needs for learning the language determine the approach to language teaching as well as all the decisions regarding the content of the course. However, learners do not always form a homogenous group. This is why much of the teachers' or practitioners' work in an ESP course is with designing suitable courses for different learners. Thus, as Hutchison and Waters (1996:21) have further noted "whereas course design plays a relatively minor part in the life of the General English teacher – courses here usually being determined either by tradition, choice of textbook or ministerial decree – for the ESP teacher, course design is often a substantial and important part of the workload." Therefore, asking a variety of questions of "general," "specific," "theoretical" and "practical" nature is the basis of syllabus or course design.

This paper is primarily concerned with the major issues or factors affecting syllabus design, especially ESP syllabus design, focusing on the students, their needs, and the situation in which learning takes place as well as on types of syllabus.

Needs Analysis:

The basic rationale for needs analysis is the generally accepted fact about the impossibility of learning the whole of a language. Only part of it can be learned and perhaps mastered. This is why it is important to know why one needs to learn a language and the context within which he learns it, and later the situation where he will use it.

At core, needs analysis, as Graves (1996:12) puts it, "involves finding out what the learners know and can do and what they need to learn or do so that the course can bridge the gap (or some part of it.)" Any English course, whether general or specific, should be based on the recognition of a need of some sort. The fact that English is taught at schools and universities does in itself suggest that someone or some authority must have found a need for it. As Hutchinson and Waters (1996:53) argue, "what distinguishes ESP from General English is not the existence of a need as such but rather an awareness of the need." Thus, specification of the learners' functional or notional needs as well as their communicative competence lies at the heart of any ESP syllabus design. In fact, a lot of linguists have pointed to the importance of needs analysis in relation to ESP since its emergence in the 1960s. For example, during the 1970s, language planners, those working on The Council of Europe's Language Project made extensive use of needs analysis. But the most detailed model of learner's needs is presented in Munby (1978). The assumption underlying needs analysis is that if designers know what the students of a particular department need to do with their English, then a syllabus could be designed to meet those needs. In other words, the content of a language syllabus is mostly determined by the learner's requirements.

Nevertheless, needs analysis has been subject to a number of criticisms, some of which claim the analysis has originally been "developed within a political climate which demands accountability and relevance in educational programmes" (Nunan (1988:43)). However, later criticism is more concerned with pedagogy. For example, Widdowson (1987:97) warns that the expression "learner needs" can be interpreted in two ways:

> On the one hand it can refer to what the learner needs to do with language once he or she learns it. This is goal-oriented definition of needs and relates to terminal behavior, the ends of learning. On the other hand, the expression can refer to what

> the learner needs to do to actually acquire the language. This is a process-oriented definition of needs and relates to transitional behavior, the means of learning. It is the first of these interpretations which is favored in current ESP work.

Widdowson (1987:102) considers the goal-oriented definition of the learner's needs mistaken, because it leads to a limited kind of competence. Instead, he favours a process-oriented definition, which satisfies the "cognitive needs of the learners," so that it guarantees "the eventual attainment of the desired terminal behavior." Widdowson concludes by acknowledging that his criteria do not solve an old problem, but restate it so as to approach it differently. Nevertheless, Widdowson appears to prefer General Purpose English to ESP, because the latter is narrower and ends up producing learners who are unable to transfer their communicative skill to areas outside their training. By contrast, the General Purpose English produces learners with general transferable skills, i.e., learners with general communicative competence.

Another common objection raised against specification of the student's needs is that the assessments are subjective. But, as Alexander (1981:248-9) explains, "at least they are usually collectively subjective, reflecting, as they do, the input of many experienced practitioners." Nevertheless, "it should be pointed out," as Nunan (1988: 44) suggests, "that these criticisms are basically logico-deductive rather than empirical. As yet, we simply do not know the extent to which ends-driven syllabuses are likely to facilitate or impede learning transfer."
A rather different approach to needs assessment cited by Nunan (1988:44) is presented by G. Brindley (1984), where he, building on Richterich (1972), draws a distinction between what he calls "objective" needs and "subjective" needs of the learners:

> The 'objective' needs are those which can be diagnosed by teachers on the basis of the analysis of personal data about learners along with information about their language proficiency and patterns of language use (using as a guide their own personal experience and knowledge, perhaps supplemented by Munby-type specifications of macro-skills), whereas the 'subjective' needs (which are often 'wants', 'desire', 'expectations', or other psychological manifestations of a lack) cannot be diagnosed as easily, or, in many cases, even stated by learners themselves.

The objective needs relate to the target communicative situation which learners are likely to face in the future. Thus, most of the information gained from the analysis of this situation can be done in the absence of the learners. However, when it comes to analysing of the subjective needs, the learners are indispensable.

In their attempt to explain what is meant by "needs," Hutchinson and Waters (1996:54) claim that Munby's Communication Needs Processor, the procedure he uses to identify the target language needs of groups of learners, "showed the ultimate sterility of a language–centred to needs analysis," because it merely "produces a list of the linguistic features of the target situation." But needs analysis is more complex than that because the needs of the target situation can themselves be split into two types: "target needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do in the target situation) and learning needs (i.e. what the learner needs to do in order to learn)."
The target needs themselves can be further subdivided into "necessities," "lacks," and "wants." The necessities are the needs that are necessary to enable the learner to function effectively in a target situation. Such needs can be gathered by watching carefully the linguistic features used by people in a particular situation. For example, a course for people working in a hotel requires visits to a hotel by syllabus designers in order to observe and analyse the functions the personal perform and the type of discourse and language they use to deal with their customers. In other words, soliciting information from the learner is not demanded; therefore, the aspect of needs analysis does not require his presence. But the

learner's presence is vital in assessing his lacks, although his role in the assessment is not active. These include knowledge of his current level of the English necessary for him to function properly in the target situation. For Example, if the target situation requires a language skill or particular vocabulary the learner lacks, this gap should then be filled. In contrast, analysing the learner's target-situation wants demands his active participation. Since, as mentioned above, "awareness" of the learners' needs is what distinguishes ESP from a General Purpose Course, it follows that the learners' own notions and perceptions regarding their needs should be taken into consideration. In this sense, it should be noted that such perceptions might cut ice with those of the teachers, the course designers, or sponsors of the language program. This is because learners' perceptions are governed by their motivation for taking the course. Thus, it is essential for course or syllabus designers to bear in mind those differences between the learners' objective and subjective-target needs.

On the other hand, learning needs, as Hutchinson and Waters further elaborate, are concerned with learning the language skills and subject knowledge that would enable learners to perform competently in the target situation. They use the analogy of a journey, in which the target-situation needs are the destination and the learning needs are a series of actions that enable learners to get there. The assumption is that knowing how the expert communicators in a target situation learned how to do what they do is even more important than analysing what they do in that situation. In other words, in an ESP course, learning is more important than knowing or doing. For Hutchinson and Waters (1996:61), "It is naïve to base a course design simply on the target objectives, just as it is naïve to think that a journey can be planned solely in terms of the starting point and the destination. The needs, potential and constraints of the route (i.e. the learning situation) must also be taken into account, if we are going to have any useful analysis of the learner needs." Motivation is once more a factor. However, it may not be carried to the classroom, especially if the texts the learners are required to deal with are boring or dull. Thus, the litmus test for the designer's skill lies in his or her ability to find texts and devise activities that are both relevant to the learner's specialty or target and enjoyable or humorous. Nevertheless, learners may have to have motivation to study even longer and dull texts because of their feeling towards the subject in general or because of the examination or job promotion or certain requirements. Thus, the learning situation as well as the learners' motivation and their knowledge, skills and strategies are important signposts on route to reaching the target destination.

Hutchinson and Waters (Ibid:63) conclude their explanation of the needs by stressing the need for course or syllabus designers to take into account both the target situation needs and the learning needs: "Analysis of target situation needs is concerned with language use. But language use is only part of the story. We also need to know about language learning. Analysis of the target situation can tell us what people do with language. What we also need to know is how people learn to do what they do with language. We need, in other words, a learning-centred approach to needs analysis."

In analysing the objective needs, teachers or syllabus designers try to get background information about the learners, including their age, family, education, culture, country, profession, native language, knowledge of English, their specific field of study and the target situation in which they plan to use English outside the classroom. In this respect, not only can the topics and themes of the course be identified and therefore focused upon in planning a syllabus, but the required language skill or skills would also be prioritised. On the other hand, analysing the subjective needs involves information on personal or affective factors, such as the students' attitude towards the English language and culture and towards learning and themselves as learners. The analysis also gathers information from learners as to their expectations from the English course and their reasons for taking it as well as their learning and teaching styles and activities preferences. Naturally, the students' responses to the questions regarding these pieces of information may vary, but the information gathered

should help the designers make the proper choices that would help devise a syllabus that meets the needs of the majority of learners in a group. With this in mind, it should be emphasised that information about the learners' needs could also be gleaned from other parties, the educational establishment, the program sponsors and administrators, and, above all, from experienced teachers in the field of language teaching.

Other factors that come into play are the conditions of the situation where teaching takes place, both in terms of the physical as well as the social or educational settings. This includes the size of the classroom and availability of teaching aids and materials as well as technological equipment that help in the teaching process. Clearly, a class with a small number of students in a comfortable and well-equipped setting is at a better advantage than a large and poorly equipped class. In other words, syllabus designers should take account of this situation, for it can restrict the use of language skills. Moreover, for (Yalden 1983:86), "the circumstances in which the educational institution operates, even the society in which the language learning and teaching process is to be carried on" do also have a bearing on syllabus design. For example, English as backup for another course of study cannot be approached in the same way when it is the only course of study. The attitude of the school may determine the emphasis placed, for example, on writing. Another element that needs to be considered is the time allocated to teaching the syllabus; so is the time of the day during which the course is taught.

Regarding the time of conducting needs analysis, Graves (1996:14), like other applied linguists who list similar areas of needs analysis, suggests it can be done in three stages, depending on the particular context of the analysis: "in stage 1, the planning stage; in stage 2, the teaching stage; and also in stage 3, the replanning stage, if one determines that the assessment must be modified in some way." The last two stages are more important than the first, which can be difficult to conduct, because it is not always easy to see learners prior to the commencement of a course. In any case, teachers themselves can, based on their experience, provide a feasible first-stage assessment. Graves adds that the teacher's view of the needs analysis is another factor in determining the timing of the analysis. Using needs analysis as part of the ongoing process of language learning and teaching strengthens interaction between the teacher and his students. More importantly, the analysis can itself become a "teaching tool." On the one hand, it can help students understand the purpose of learning. For her (1996:15), on the other hand, it leads teachers to "develop activities that help students clarify and focus their needs."

There are a number of ways through which needs analysis could be conducted, the most common of which are the questionnaires addressed to students and teachers as well as informal interviews with them. Classroom observation is another viable method, so are general proficiency and formal testes as well as interviews to determine the students proficiency in the four skills. What needs to be underlined in relation to the design of questionnaires, as Graves (Ibid:15) further explains, is the choice of "questions that will be interpreted correctly and will provide the information sought, especially if one is seeking subjective data." This is perhaps partly the reason Graves adds that questionnaires "can be written in English or, when appropriate and feasible, in the native language of the students."

Types of Syllabus:

Once needs analysis is accomplished, a number of steps should follow: first, interpretation of the collected data; second, making a selection or choice; and third translating the selected data into a syllabus that meets the learners' needs and objectives. The last step involves not only organising the content, but also the activities that best convey the content and serve the interests and objectives of the learners. The theoretical views as well as classroom experience of those involved in the realisation of those steps are also factors in this overall designing process. That is why approaches to syllabus or course design are plenty, paralleling in number

course designers. This section is concerned with the application of the language learning theories and teaching methods as well as the needs analysis and approaches to syllabus design in the act of design itself- i.e., the selection and organisation of the content of a syllabus and the classroom application of that syllabus.
Richards and Rogers (1987:148) summarise the important issues of selection and gradation as follows:

> Within a design built on a structural theory of language, linguistic matter is identified with lexis and grammar, and the syllabus is an arrangement of linguistic units determined by such criteria as learnability, frequency of use, linguistic complexity, etc. Within a design built on a functional theory of language, linguistic content is organized conceptually. An explicit notional syllabus, for example, would contain a specification of the prepositional, conceptual, and communicative content of a language course, a selection of the linguistic means by which these are realized, and an organization of the product of such an analysis in terms of pedagogic priorities. Designs built on interactional theories of language and of language learning ostensibly use affective and interactive goals as organizing principles for the selection and structuring of content. The progression within the course might be rationalized in terms of developing patterns of relationships between teachers and learners.

Thus, selection and sequencing of the linguistic and thematic content material of the syllabus are of high priority. But because the selection and organisation of the syllabus, in turn, depend on the type of language learning theory and teaching method informing it, the subject matter making the syllabus varies from the structural or grammatical to semantic and notional or functional. The learner's type, together with his needs, equally affects the choice of a syllabus. This is why it is important to outline the major types of syllabus. The types are presented here as if they were totally independent of one another, but in practice they impinge on one another. Language teaching always combines at least two or more of the syllabi. Therefore, at the end of this section, an integrated approach is proposed.

1. The Structural Syllabus

The structural or grammatical syllabus is the most common of all language teaching and learning syllabi. It is basically concerned with the structural or grammatical aspects of language, and assumes that the learner's functional ability springs from his grammatical knowledge or ability. Language teaching methods have varied over the years, but the underlying principle of selection and arrangement of the language taught has been stable. Because of this stability of language form, it has always served as the basis for the content of a course. Thus, it has always been accepted that units of the language taught should be arranged in grammatical terms. The arrangement follows the Latin-based descriptive and prescriptive grammatical categorisation: "the usual grammatical categories are the familiar ones of noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, singular, plural, present tense, past tense, and so on" (Krahnke (1987:15)). Moreover, as Krahnke (1987:15-6) further notes, this syllabus is limited in scope to sentence structures: "A classification of sentence types usually includes semantically defined types such as statements or declaratives, questions or interrogatives, exclamations, and conditionals; and grammatically defined types such as simple, compound, and complex sentences".
The structural syllabus follows "a synthetic language-teaching strategy," in which, according to Wilkins (1976), cited by Yalden (1983:21), "the different parts of language are taught separately and step-by-step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of the language has been built up". As Wilkins (1981:82) elsewhere further explains, "the theory that such an approach is based on, whether it is explicit or not, holds that splitting the language into parts determined by the grammatical

categories of the language has psycholinguistic validity". This implies that learning a language is made simpler and easier if the learner is exposed to one part of the language at a time. For Yalden (1983:21), "the learner is exposed at one time only to a limited sample of the target language, and the sample is carefully controlled by the teaching situation. The learner's job is thus to re-synthesize language that has been taken apart and presented to him in small pieces; this synthesis generally takes place in the final stages of learning, at the so-called 'advanced' levels."

This synthetic strategy is used in the Grammar Translation, the Audio-lingual and cognitive learning methods or an eclectic approach, combining those methods in classroom. In the Grammar-Translation method, language patterns and forms are explicitly presented to the students in order to practice and apply their knowledge in the two way translation from and into the native language. To Krahnke (1987:17), "Audio-lingual methods use a behaviorist learning model to instill structural knowledge and behavior in learners… More recent cognitive methods dispense with the translation, but still call for explicit identification of the forms and structures of the language combined with application and practice focusing on forms."

Selection and sequencing the materials to be included in the structural syllabus have undergone some changes, starting intuitively and later getting influenced by recent developments in linguistic theory. Yalden (1983:23) explains the changes as follows:

> As a result, in grammatical approaches to syllabus design, the linguistic components of the types of performance we desire for our students are analysed, then the units involved are isolated. They are taught piece by piece to get back to the beginning: language as it is used in real life. Vocabulary has to be selected and ordered within this approach. Structures, however, are not selected, merely ordered, since all of the target-language structures must be taught sooner or later. Staging and sequencing are carried out according to criteria of simplicity, regularity, frequency and contrastive difficulty.

Other sequencing criteria may include communicative facility and even a degree of difference or similarity between a structure in the target language and the learner's first language as well as its relevance to the learner's communicative needs.

The structural syllabus has been subject to a number of criticisms, the most important of which are its generality as well as its failure to lead learners to develop communicative competence. To attempt to learn all the language system does not only ignore the immediate practical return that some learners require, but it also implies that language parts will be of equal value to learners, which cannot in practice be true. On the other hand, the failure of this syllabus to lead to development of communicative competence is partly related to the question of selection or sequencing, because learners may not be able to produce structures other than the ones they have been taught. Moreover, the high priority given to the teaching and learning of grammatical forms comes at the expense of grammatical meaning. Furthermore, for Wilkins (1981:83), "bringing together of grammatically identical sentences is highly artificial, since in real acts of communication it is sentences that are alike in meaning that occur together and not those that are alike in structure."

2. The Situational Syllabus

The situational syllabus is informed by interactional theories of language as well as by the theories of language acquisition and the audio-lingual methodology. It concentrates on language use or communicative competence. However, as Yalden (1983:34) points out, the situational syllabus has a long history: "It appears to run through the history of second language teaching, turning up in the Renaissance, in the work of Erasmus and of Comenius for example." In modern times, although the situational syllabus is presented as an alternative to the grammatical or structural syllabus, it complements rather than replaces the structural

syllabus. In fact, Krahnke (1987:41) agrees with Yalden's claim about the history of the situational syllabus, but he also explains that the it has always been associated with the structural syllabus in that many teaching methods, including Grammar-Translation and modern integrated textbooks "have used examples of the language being learned in situations and settings. These range from short dialogues to lengthy themes with casts of characters acting and behaving in complex ways. Many collections of conversation or communication activities are organized in terms of situations." In other words, the situational syllabus stipulates that language cannot be dissociated from its social context. According to Wilkins (1981:83), "the situational syllabus, therefore, is based upon predictions of the situations in which the learner is likely to operate through the foreign language." Prediction of those situations is based on assessment of learners' needs and objectives. This does not only imply that the situational syllabus is "learner-centred," but it, more importantly, entails that the forms and structures of the language taught are determined by the context within which language is to be used.

The situational syllabus is semantic in that it starts from a situational need and is concerned with language in a social context. As Yalden (1983:35) argues, "the situational model will comprise units indicating specific situations, such as 'At the Post Office', 'Buying an Airline Ticket', or 'The Job Interview.'" Thus, as noted earlier, the situational syllabus is mostly realised through dialogues, conversations or role-plays. In this respect, a distinction has to be born in mind between "realistic" and "real" situation in the instructional content. As Krahnke (1987:43) puts it, "language that is created for the classroom but intended to mirror actual occasions of language use is merely 'realistic' at best. Language that actually occurs outside of the classroom, with few artificial constraints, is 'real.' Most classroom dialogues are, at best, semirealistic."

A major concern with respect to selection and sequencing of materials in the situational syllabus and other communicative ones relates, among other criteria, to the simplicity or complexity of grammatical forms and structures as well as the communicative skills through which the situations are handled. Situational syllabus is mostly organised on the basis of social contexts or function, although some drills or exercises are provided at the end of each unit focusing on a relevant grammatical point. The problem is that some contexts and functions could be handled in grammatical structures and skills that vary in complexity. Thus, as Canale and Swain (1988:76) warn "the grammatical forms to be mastered will not necessarily be organized or presented in an effective manner," especially at the early stages of second language learning. On the other hand, as children's language acquisition suggests, one form could be used to serve different purposes or functions. But for the designer to opt for the simple forms is to risk monotony in the instructional program and difficulty of transferability at a later stage. A resolution to the problem may be through offering a situational or functional instructional content to learners who are already in possession of general language or grammatical proficiency. This is why, as Canale and Swain (Ibid:78-9) conclude, "factors such as grammatical complexity should be considered in the process of specifying the grammatical forms and communicative functions that relate to the learners' sociolinguistic needs."

3. The Notional/Functional Syllabus

In contrast with the structural syllabus, which prioritises language forms and structures, the notional/functional syllabus, like the situational syllabus, seeks to redress the balance by emphasising the communicative content or practical use of language. As Chamot (1987: 86) argues, "the notional/functional syllabus represents a radical departure from the grammatical/structural approach to second language curriculum design because it looks at language from a pragmatic rather than a descriptive point of view." This syllabus does not, however, attempt to replace the grammatical/structural; rather it adds to the structural

syllabus. This is actually suggested by Wilkins (1981:92) when discussing the then emerging notional/functional syllabus and the already established ones: "I would therefore be content if, for the present, notional and functional considerations were to be regarded as simply providing another dimension to the existing grammatical and situational parameters—a way of ensuring that general courses do not lose sight of the fact that linguistic forms provide a means to an end and that the end is communication." The pragmatic view of notional/functional syllabus is obviously informed by interactional theories of language learning and the communicative teaching methods. It does not, however, neglect grammar, but for Crawford-Lange (1982:92), "the functional-notional syllabus defines the content for language study by consciously and formally combining the purposes to which language is put and grammatical analysis." In other words, once notions and functions are identified, then, as van Ek (1987:79) notes, "we can determine what actual language forms (structures, words and phrases) the learner will have to be able to use in order to do all that has been specified." Thus, the notional/functional syllabus marks an improvement on the structural syllabus, especially in its utility for the development of ESP courses.

Therefore, rather than focusing on how language works grammatically, the focus in the notional/functional syllabus is on what a language does; hence the functional side of language becomes primary, while the formal secondary: "For example, rather than regarding the future tense form (with will) in English as basic and discussing the uses to which it can be put (e.g., talking about the future, making promises) as secondary, in a functional view of language, notions such as future and functions such as promising are considered basic and the future tense form is discussed as one way of realizing these notions and functions" (Krahnke (1987:30)). Thus, as Chamot (1987:87) also argues, "a single language function can usually be expressed with more than one grammatical structure or set of vocabulary items, and for that reason it is possible to use simpler structures and limited vocabulary for a given function at the beginning stages of second language instruction, saving more complex structures and vocabulary for more advanced levels." The implication here is that there is no one-to-one relationship between the notions or functions expressed and the grammatical structures or vocabulary used to express them.

Against the formal categories of nouns, verbs, tenses, etc. of the grammatical syllabus, the notional/functional syllabus has notions or categories of meaning. As classified by Wilkins (1981:86-90), these categories are of two types: "semantico-grammatical categories" and "categories of communicative function." Notions involve interaction between grammatical forms and categories of meaning in language. Among other things, these notions include time, quantity, instrument and place. On the other hand, the categories of the communicative function involve the uses to which the language may be put or the practical uses of language forms. Of examples of categories involving communicative function are agreement, greeting, approval, prediction, apologizing and requesting or giving information. Each of these functions and notions has a variety of grammatical features associated with it. Krahnke (1987:31-2) gives a number of such varying forms: "Instrumentality can be expressed with prepositions (e.g., 'by bus,' 'with an axe'), verbs (e.g., 'used an axe,' 'chopped'), and with prepositional phrases (e.g., 'by chopping it'). Future time can be expressed by future tense forms (e.g., 'I'll go tomorrow,' 'I'm going to go tomorrow'), present tense forms (e.g., 'I leave tomorrow'), or present continuous forms (e.g., 'I'm leaving tomorrow')."

Naturally, the choice of functions and notions to be incorporated to the syllabus as well as the sequence in which those notions and functions are presented are partly determined on the basis of the needs analysis, which specifies the type of discourse or language interaction and forms that are required to express the functions and notions needed. The most accepted criterion of sequencing of functions is the simplicity of forms. However, as Johnson (1982:92) points out "it does not seem to be generally the case that the language used to expound one function is structurally any simpler or more complex than the language used to

expound any other." This is important since, as just shown, a function could be expressed in a number of forms or in structurally dissimilar sentences. However, there is here the risk of ignoring more complex structures of discourse, thereby leaving learners in a weak position. Related to this is the other danger of teaching students what is called "routines" and "patterns" in second language acquisition. In the end, these two risks point to some potential difficulty, regarding transferability of the learned functions-forms into proper discourse. Johnson (Ibid:92) tries to resolve this conflict by suggesting organising the syllabus in a way in which "many structurally dissimilar sentences may be presented in the same unit, while what may be taken to be key examples of particular grammatical structures will be scattered throughout the course." In other words, as Yalden (1987:97) concludes, when the organisation of the syllabus tends to be semantic rather than formal, "the linguistic component is treated systematically in early stages and nonsystematically in later ones."

4. Skill-Based Syllabus

Unlike the syllabi discussed so far, the skill-based syllabus does not appear to be informed by any particular language learning theory, although one can claim that it may fall under the penumbra of communicative language teaching and learning, because it is concerned with language use. Traditionally, the term "skill" is used to describe one of four modes of language use: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In a skill-based syllabus, the term, as Krahnke (1987:49) defines it, "is a specific way of using language that combines structural and functional ability but exists independently of specific settings or situations." The examples that Krahnke (Ibid:49) gives are of "reading skills such as skimming and scanning; writing skills such as writing specific topic sentences and certain kinds of discourse (e.g., memos, research reports, work reports); speaking skills of giving instructions, delivering public talks, giving personal information for bureaucratic purposes, asking for emergency help over the telephone; and listening skills such as getting specific information over the telephone, listening to foreign radio broadcasts for news or military information, taking orders in a restaurant, an so on." The list suggests that such kind of syllabus is highly limited or specific in its communicative or functional scope.

This high limitedness of scope implies that the "skill-based instructional content," as Krahnke (Ibid:51) further adds, is "a reductionist theory of language, which views the overall language system as reducible, at least for teaching purposes, to specific skills or applications." This is why the reductionist approach can be helpful in the design of a syllabus for specific purposes. It is especially useful, for example, to students who need specific skills rather than "global language ability." Specification of the required skill or skills necessitates an accurate prediction of the learners' needs and wants as well as the situations or contexts within which the activity or skill is exercised. However, prediction may prove to be difficult to realise by a detailed needs analysis. Moreover, in practice, a reductionist approach is not feasible, because, as Johnson (1982:47-9) argues, the four skills or some aspects of one or two of them overlap. In other words, competency in a particular skill can be greatly enhanced if there is general language proficiency. This is why the reductionist approach can prove more fruitful if used at a later stage of language learning- i.e., when learners have some general language proficiency.

5. The Task-Based Syllabus

The task-based syllabus, sometimes called procedural syllabus, is a further example of communicative language instruction. As its name suggests, the syllabus uses the learners' involvement in task or problem solving activities as a means to learn language: "The defining characteristic of task-based content is that it uses activities that the learners have to do for noninstructional purposes outside of the classroom as opportunities for language learning" (Krahnke 1987:59). In other words, the attention is paid more to the performance of a task rather than to the language used to perform it. In terms of linguistic forms and structures, the

consequence of this focus on task performance, like the focus on contexts or notions and functions of the syllabi just discussed, entails great disregard for organisation of linguistic forms and grammatical structures as they would normally be sequenced in a structural syllabus. Johnson (1982:136), who uses the term "procedural syllabus," states the issue as follows: "If we impose a semantic and structural syllabus on classroom language, we are taking away the teacher's and students' freedom to interact in a way natural to the task in hand." The focus on performance of a task further implies that, if they are to be learned, linguistic features can be learned through attention being paid to meaning, provided that the tasks should give information, which learners do not have at the beginning of the instruction. Therefore, unlike other communicative syllabuses, the task-based syllabus does not have to be offered at a later stage of language instruction, because performance of the task does not hinge prior language proficiency. This makes the syllabus suitable for learners of different ages and backgrounds.

The communicative activities constituting a procedural or task-based syllabus must be developed for individual groups of learners in accordance with the setting in which the instruction takes place. Thus, as Krahnke (1987:60) illustrates, they could be of different levels: "beginning," which may include asking students to prepare "profiles of class members for other classes or administrators or teachers;" "intermediate," which may include "preparing a handbook to the school to be used by other students;" and "advanced," which may include "doing a price comparison survey of food stores." Drawing on N. S. Prabhu's project outlined in (RIE 1980), Johnson (1982:136) notes that such activities may also "include a variety of problem solving tasks involving map reading, the interpretation of timetables, solving simple whodunits, and so on." Thus, it is clear that the tasks are conceptually and by similarity grouped rather than by any linguistic specification. The underlying assumption of this order, as already mentioned, is that language is learned through performance of the tasks; that is, the tasks are used as excuses for language learning. The learning process can be made easier if the input provided by the tasks performed is comprehensible.

In practice, this syllabus places high demands on students, teachers and the setting where instruction is to take place. Performing the tasks, in fact, may prove very difficult to follow in a second language environment. This is partly because it requires the availability of resources other than textbooks. Inviting native speakers of the target language can, nevertheless, ease the problem. Thus, task-based instruction is not teacher-centred, but rather learner-centred. In order for comprehensible input to be provided, for Johnson (1982:138), the teacher must sometimes control "his classroom language in the same way that an adult controls language in conversation with a child."

Conclusion:

Other types of communicative syllabus that could be of some value do exist, but they are overlooked here, because they are basically designed for non-natives in a native speakers setting. However, we should always bear in mind that a syllabus should neither be viewed as a divine nor fixed and hard document, but one that is flexible. In practice, the desired flexibility called for here involves the need for any type of syllabus to incorporate elements of other syllabi. In other words, an integrated or balanced syllabus is always desired.

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