

Language Teaching:
A Scheme for Teacher Education

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Syllabus Design

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SECTION ONE

Defining syllabus design

The scope of syllabus design

1.1 Introduction

We will start by outlining the scope of syllabus design and relating it to the broader field of curriculum development. Later, in 1.4, we shall also look at the role of the teacher in syllabus design.

Within the literature, there is some confusion over the terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'. It would, therefore, be as well to give some indication at the outset of what is meant here by syllabus, and also how syllabus design is related to curriculum development.

● TASK 1

As a preliminary activity, write a short definition of the terms 'syllabus' and 'curriculum'.

In language teaching, there has been a comparative neglect of systematic curriculum development. In particular, there have been few attempts to apply, in any systematic fashion, principles of curriculum development to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of language programmes. Language curriculum specialists have tended to focus on only part of the total picture — some specializing in syllabus design, others in methodolo-

fragmented approach has been criticized, and there have been calls for a more comprehensive approach to language curriculum design (see, for example, Breen and Candlin 1980; Richards 1984; Nunan 1985). The present book is intended to provide teachers with the skills they need to address, in a systematic fashion, the problems and tasks which confront them in their programme planning.

Candlin (1984) suggests that curricula are concerned with making general statements about language learning, learning purpose and experience, evaluation, and the role relationships of teachers and learners. According to Candlin, they will also contain banks of learning items and suggestions about how these might be used in class. Syllabuses, on the other hand, are more localized and are based on accounts and records of what actually happens at the classroom level as teachers and learners apply a given curriculum to their own situation. These accounts can be used to make subsequent modifications to the curriculum, so that the developmental process is ongoing and cyclical.

1.2 A general curriculum model

TASK 2

Examine the following planning tasks and decide on the order in which they might be carried out.

- monitoring and assessing student progress
- selecting suitable materials
- stating the objectives of the course
- evaluating the course
- listing grammatical and functional components
- designing learning activities and tasks
- instructing students
- identifying topics, themes, and situations

It is possible to study 'the curriculum' of an educational institution from a number of different perspectives. In the first instance we can look at curriculum planning, that is at decision making, in relation to identifying learners' needs and purposes; establishing goals and objectives; selecting and grading content; organizing appropriate learning arrangements and learner groupings; selecting, adapting, or developing appropriate materials, learning tasks, and assessment and evaluation tools.

Alternatively, we can study the curriculum 'in action' as it were. This second perspective takes us into the classroom itself. Here we can observe the teaching/learning process and study the ways in which the intentions of the curriculum planners, which were developed during the planning phase, are translated into action.

Yet another perspective relates to assessment and evaluation. From this perspective, we would try and find out what students had learned and what they had failed to learn in relation to what had been planned. Additionally, we might want to find out whether they had learned anything which had not been planned. We would also want to account for our findings, to make judgements about why some things had succeeded and others had failed, and perhaps to make recommendations about what changes might be made to improve things in the future.

Finally, we might want to study the management of the teaching institution, looking at the resources available and how these are utilized, how the institution relates to and responds to the wider community, how constraints imposed by limited resources and the decisions of administrators affect what happens in the classroom, and so on.

All of these perspectives taken together represent the field of curriculum study. As we can see, the field is a large and complex one.

It is important that, in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a given curriculum, all elements be integrated, so that decisions made at one

level are not in conflict with those made at another. For instance, in courses based on principles of communicative language teaching, it is important that these principles are reflected, not only in curriculum documents and syllabus plans, but also in classroom activities, patterns of classroom interaction, and in tests of communicative performance.

1.3 Defining 'syllabus'

There are several conflicting views on just what it is that distinguishes syllabus design from curriculum development. There is also some disagreement about the nature of 'the syllabus'. In books and papers on the subject, it is possible to distinguish a broad and a narrow approach to syllabus design.

The narrow view draws a clear distinction between syllabus design and methodology. Syllabus design is seen as being concerned essentially with the selection and grading of content, while methodology is concerned with the selection of learning tasks and activities. Those who adopt a broader

communicative language teaching the distinction between content and tasks is difficult to sustain.

The following quotes have been taken from Brumfit (1984) which provides an excellent overview of the range and diversity of opinion on syllabus design. The broad and narrow views are both represented in the book, as you will see from the quotes.

■ TASK 3

As you read the quotes, see whether you can identify which writers are advocating a broad approach and which a narrow approach.

1 . . . I would like to draw attention to a distinction . . . between curriculum or syllabus, that is its content, structure, parts and organisation, and, . . . what in curriculum theory is often called curriculum processes, that is curriculum development, implementation, dissemination and evaluation. The former is concerned with the WHAT of curriculum: what the curriculum is like or should be like; the latter is concerned with the WHO and HOW of establishing the curriculum.
(Stem 1984: 10-11)

2 [The syllabus] replaces the concept of 'method', and the syllabus is now seen as an instrument by which the teacher, with the help of the syllabus designer, can achieve a degree of 'fit' between the needs and aims of the learner (as social being and as individual) and the activities which will take place in the classroom.
(Yalden 1984: 14)

- 3 ... the syllabus is simply a framework within which activities can be carried out: a teaching device to facilitate learning. It only becomes a threat to pedagogy when it is regarded as absolute rules for determining what is to be learned rather than points of reference from which bearings can be taken.
(*Widdowson 1984: 26*)
- 4 We might ... ask whether it is possible to separate so easily what we have been calling content from what we have been calling method or procedure, or indeed whether we can avoid bringing evaluation into the debate?
i
- 5 Any syllabus will express—however indirectly—certain assumptions about language, about the psychological process of learning, and about the pedagogic and social processes within a classroom.
(*Breen 1984: 49*)
- 6 . . . curriculum is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational program. Syllabus, on the other hand, refers to that subpart of curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology).
(*Allen 1984: 61*)
- 7 Since language is highly complex and cannot be taught all at the same time, successful teaching requires that there should be a selection of material depending on the prior definition of objectives, proficiency level, and duration of course. This selection takes place at the syllabus planning stage.
(*op. cit.:* 65)

As you can see, some language specialists believe that syllabus (the selection and grading of content) and methodology should be kept separate; others think otherwise. One of the issues you will have to decide on as you work through this book is whether you think syllabuses should be defined solely in terms of the selection and grading of content, or whether they should also attempt to specify and grade learning tasks and activities.

Here, we shall take as our point of departure the rather traditional notion that a syllabus is a statement of content which is used as the basis for planning courses of various kinds, and that the task of the syllabus designer is to select and grade this content. To begin with, then, we shall distinguish between syllabus design, which is concerned with the 'what of a language

programme, and methodology, which is concerned with the 'how'. (Later, we shall look at proposals for 'procedural' syllabuses in which the distinction between the 'what' and the 'how' becomes difficult to sustain.)

One document which gives a detailed account of the various syllabus components which need to be considered in developing language courses is *Threshold Level English* (van Ek 1975). van Ek lists the following as necessary components of a language syllabus:

- 1 the situations in which the foreign language will be used, including the topics which will be dealt with;
- 2 the language activities in which the learner will engage;
- 3 the language functions which the learner will fulfil;
- 4 what the learner will be able to do with respect to each topic;
- 5 the general notions which the learner will be able to handle;
- 6 the specific (topic-related) notions which the learner will be able to handle;
- 7 the language forms which the learner will be able to use;
- 8 the degree of skill with which the learner will be able to perform. (van Ek 1975: 8-9)

• TASK 4

Do you think that van Ek subscribes to a 'broad' or 'narrow' view of syllabus design?

Which, if any, of the above components do you think are beyond the scope of syllabus design?

1.4 The role of the classroom teacher

In a recent book dealing, among other things, with syllabus design issues, Bell (1983) claims that teachers are, in the main, consumers of other people's syllabuses; in other words, that their role is to implement the plans of applied linguists, government agencies, and so on. While some teachers have a relatively free hand in designing the syllabuses on which their teaching programmes are based, most are likely to be, as Bell suggests, consumers of other people's syllabuses.

● Study the following list of planning tasks.

In your experience, for which of these tasks do you see the classroom teacher as having primary responsibility?

Rate each task on a scale from 0 (no responsibility) to 5 (total responsibility).

– identifying learners' communicative needs	0 1 2 3 4 5
– selecting and grading syllabus content	0 1 2 3 4 5
– grouping learners into different classes or learning arrangements	0 1 2 3 4 5
– selecting/creating materials and learning activities	0 1 2 3 4 5
– monitoring and assessing learner progress	0 1 2 3 4 5
– course evaluation	0 1 2 3 4 5

In a recent study of an educational system where classroom teachers are expected to design, implement, and evaluate their own curriculum, one group of teachers, when asked the above question, stated that they saw themselves as having primary responsibility for all of the above tasks except for the third one (grouping learners). Some of the teachers in the system felt quite comfortable with an expanded professional role. Others felt that syllabus development should be carried out by people with specific expertise, and believed that they were being asked to undertake tasks for which they were not adequately trained (Nunan 1987).

■ TASK 6

What might be the advantages and/or disadvantages of teachers in your system designing their own syllabuses?

Can you think of any reasons why teachers might be discouraged from designing, or might not want to design their own syllabuses?

Are these reasons principally pedagogic, political, or administrative?

1.5 Conclusion

In 1, I have tried to provide some idea of the scope of syllabus design. I have suggested that traditionally syllabus design has been seen as a subsidiary component of curriculum design. 'Curriculum' is concerned with the planning, implementation, evaluation, management, and administration of education programmes. 'Syllabus', on the other hand, focuses more narrowly on the selection and grading of content.

While it is realized that few teachers are in the position of being able to design their own syllabuses, it is hoped that most are in a position to interpret and modify their syllabuses in the process of translating them into action. The purpose of this book is therefore to present the central issues and options available for syllabus design in order to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills for evaluating, and, where feasible, modifying and adapting the syllabuses with which they work. At the very least, this book should help you understand (and therefore more effectively exploit) the syllabuses and course materials on which your programmes are based.

■ TASK 7

Look back at the definitions you wrote in Task 1 and rewrite these in the light of the information presented in 1.

In what ways, if any, do your revised definitions differ from the ones you wrote at the beginning?

In 2, we shall look at some of the starting points in syllabus design. The next central question to be addressed is, 'Where does syllabus content come from?' In seeking answers to this question, we shall look at techniques for obtaining information from and about learners for use in syllabus design. We shall examine the controversy which exists over the very nature of language itself and how this influences the making of decisions about what to include in the syllabus. We shall also look at the distinction between product-oriented and process-oriented approaches to syllabus design. These two orientations are studied in detail in 3 and 4. The final part of Section One draws on the content of the preceding parts and relates this content to the issue of objectives. You will be asked to consider whether or not we need objectives, and if so, how these should be formulated.

2 Points of departure

2.1 Introduction

In 1 it was argued that syllabus design was essentially concerned with the selection and grading of content. As such, it formed a sub-component of the planning phase of curriculum development. (You will recall that the curriculum has at least three phases: a planning phase, an implementation phase, and an evaluation phase.)

The first question to confront the syllabus designer is where the content is to come from in the first place. We shall now look at the options available to syllabus designers in their search for starting points in syllabus design.

■ TASK 8

Can you think of any ways in which our beliefs about the nature of language and learning might influence our decision-making on what to put into the syllabus and how to grade it?

If we had consensus on just what it was that we were supposed to teach in order for learners to develop proficiency in a second or foreign language; if we knew a great deal more than we do about language learning; if it were possible to teach the totality of a given language, and if we had complete descriptions of the target language, problems associated with selecting and sequencing content and learning experiences would be relatively straightforward. As it happens, there is not a great deal of agreement within the teaching profession on the nature of language and language learning. As a consequence, we must make judgements in selecting syllabus components from all the options which are available to us. As Breen (1984) points out, these judgements are not value-free, but reflect our beliefs about the nature of language and learning. In this and the other parts in this section, we shall see how value judgements affect decision-making in syllabus design.

The need to make value judgements and choices in deciding what to include in (or omit from) specifications of content and which elements are to be the basic building blocks of the syllabus, presents syllabus designers with constant problems. The issue of content selection becomes particularly pressing if the syllabus is intended to underpin short courses. (It could be argued that the shorter the course, the greater the need for precision in content specification.)

2.2 Basic orientations

Until fairly recently, most syllabus designers started out by drawing up lists of grammatical, phonological, and vocabulary items which were then graded according to difficulty and usefulness. The task for the learner was seen as gaining mastery over these grammatical, phonological, and vocabulary items.

Learning a language, it was assumed, entails mastering the elements or building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence.

(Richards and Rodgers 1986: 49)

During the 1970s, communicative views of language teaching began to be incorporated into syllabus design. The central question for proponents of this new view was, 'What does the learner want/need to do with the target language?' rather than, 'What are the linguistic elements which the learner needs to master?' Syllabuses began to appear in which content was specified, not only in terms of the grammatical elements which the learners were expected to master, but also in terms of the functional skills they would need to master in order to communicate successfully.

This movement led in part to the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Here, syllabus designers focused, not only on language functions, but also on experiential content (that is, the subject matter through which the language is taught).

Traditionally, linguistically-oriented syllabuses, along with many so-called communicative syllabuses, shared one thing in common: they tended to focus on the things that learners should know or be able to do as a result of instruction. In the rest of this book we shall refer to syllabuses in which content is stated in terms of the outcomes of instruction as 'product-oriented'.

As we have already seen, a distinction is traditionally drawn between syllabus design, which is concerned with outcomes, and methodology, which is concerned with the process through which these outcomes are to be brought about. Recently, however, some syllabus designers have suggested that syllabus content might be specified in terms of learning tasks and activities. They justify this suggestion on the grounds that communication is a process rather than a set of products.

In evaluating syllabus proposals, we have to decide whether this view represents a fundamental change in perspective, or whether those advocating process syllabuses have made a category error; whether, in fact, they are really addressing methodological rather than syllabus issues. This is something which you will have to decide for yourself as you work through this book.

■ TASK 9

At this stage, what is your view on the legitimacy of defining syllabuses in terms of learning processes? Do you think that syllabuses should list and grade learning tasks and activities as well as linguistic content?

A given syllabus will specify all or some of the following: grammatical structures, functions, notions, topics, themes, situations, activities, and tasks. Each of these elements is either product or process oriented, and the inclusion of each will be justified according to beliefs about the nature of language, the needs of the learner, or the nature of learning.

In the rest of this book, we shall be making constant references to and comparisons between *process* and *product*. What we mean when we refer to 'process' is a series of actions directed toward some end. The 'product' is the end itself. This may be clearer if we consider some examples. A list of grammatical structures is a product. Classroom drilling undertaken by learners in order to learn the structures is a process. The interaction of two speakers as they communicate with each other is a process. A tape recording of their conversation is a product.

► TASK 10

Complete the following table, to indicate whether each of the syllabus elements is product or process oriented. Under the heading "reference", indicate whether this particular element would be selected by the syllabus designer with reference to the learner, the target language, or to some theory of learning. (The first one has been done for you.)

Element	Orientation	Reference
Structures	<i>Product</i>	<i>Language</i>
Functions		
Notions		
Topics		
Themes		
Subjects		
Activities		
Tasks		

Table 1

Did you find that some elements could be assigned to more than one orientation or point of reference? Which were these?

2.3 Learning purpose

In recent years, a major trend in language syllabus design has been the use of information from and about learners in curriculum decision-making. In this section, we shall look at some of the ways in which learner data have been used to inform decision-making in syllabus design. In the course of the discussion we shall look at the controversy over general and specific purpose syllabus design.

Assumptions about the learner's purpose in undertaking a language course, as well as the syllabus designer's beliefs about the nature of language and learning can have a marked influence on the shape of the syllabus on which the course is based. Learners' purposes will vary according to how specific they are, and how immediately learners wish to employ their developing language skills.

■ TASK 11

Which of the following statements represent specific language needs and which are more general?

'I want to be able to talk to my neighbours in English.'

'I want to study microbiology in an English-speaking university.'

'I want to develop an appreciation of German culture by studying the language.'

'I want to be able to communicate in Greek.'

'I want my daughter to study French at school so she can matriculate and read French at university.'

'I want to read newspapers in Indonesian.'

'I want to understand Thai radio broadcasts.'

'I need "survival" English.'

'I want to be able to read and appreciate French literature.'

'I want to get a better job at the factory.'

'I want to speak English.'

'I want to learn English for nursing.'

For which of the above would it be relatively easy to predict the grammar and topics to be listed in the syllabus?

For which would it be difficult to predict the grammar and topics?

Techniques and procedures for collecting information to be used in syllabus design are referred to as needs analysis. These techniques have been borrowed and adapted from other areas of training and development, particularly those associated with industry and technology.

● TASK 12

One general weakness of most of the literature on needs analysis is the tendency to think only in terms of learner needs. Can you think of any other groups whose needs should be considered?

Information will need to be collected, not only on why learners want to learn the target language, but also about such things as societal expectations and constraints and the resources available for implementing the syllabus.

Broadly speaking, there are two different types of needs analysis used by language syllabus designers. The first of these is learner analysis, while the second is task analysis.

Learner analysis is based on information about the learner. The central question of concern to the syllabus designer is: 'For what purpose or purposes is the learner learning the language?' There are many other subsidiary questions, indeed it is possible to collect a wide range of information as can be seen from the following data collection forms.

Appendix A

Sample needs analysis survey form.

This form was developed for use at the Pennington Migrant Education Centre, South Australia. Students complete the form with assistance from bilingual information officers.

Date:	_____ ASI.P.R. _____	
Name:	_____	Address: _____ U.S.R.W.
Age:	_____	Country of Origin: _____
Family (M.S.W.D):	No. of Children: _____	Ages: _____
Other relatives in Australia:	_____	
Elsewhere:	_____	
Education:	No. of years: _____	Qualifications: _____
	Why study finished: _____	
	English study: _____	
Employment:	Main occupation: _____	
	Other jobs held: _____	
	In Australia: _____	
	Type of work sought: _____	
Interests:	e.g. hobbies, sports, leisure activities: _____	
	Skills: _____	
First language:	_____	Others spoken: _____
		Others studied: _____

Language learning:

A. Do you like to learn English by READING
WRITING
LISTENING AND SPEAKING
OTHER

which do you like the most? _____

B. Do you like to study grammar
learn new words
practise the sounds and pronunciation?

Which do you like the most? _____

C. Do you like to learn English by:
_____ cassettes
_____ games
_____ talking to English speakers
_____ studying English books
_____ watching T.V.

Which is the most important (1-3) to you? _____

D. Macroskills

1. Reading:

(a) Can you use a dictionary
— a little _____ very well _____

(b) What can you read in English:
simple stories
newspapers
forms: bank
P.O.
C.E.S.
advertisements: shopping
housing
employment
his timetables
maps/directories
school notes

(c) What are the most important for you to learn now: _____

2. Writing:

(d) Do you ever write letters
notes to teachers
fill in forms

(e) Which is the most important for you to learn now: _____

3. Listening and speaking:

(f) Who do you speak with in English? _____
(g) How much do you understand?

0 a little a lot 100%

Shop assistants
 Neighbours and friends
 Bus drivers
 Medical people
 Teachers
 Employers
 Others

(h) Who is it most important for you to learn to speak with now? _____

(i) Do you watch T.V. _____

listen to the radio _____

(j) How much do you understand? _____

E. How do you learn best?

	No	A little	Good	Best
alone				
pairs				
small group				
class				
outside class				

F. What do you feel are the most important things for you to learn in the: _____

short term _____

long term _____

G. How much time is available for study now: _____

per day _____

per week _____

Where would you like to study: _____

J.L.C. _____

Home _____

H. Agreement: _____

Length _____ / _____ / _____ to _____ / _____ / _____

How often do you want supervision: _____

I. Date of first supervision _____ / _____ / _____

Comments (may include impressions of interviewer/interpreter): _____

J. Interviewer: _____

Interpreter: _____

Date: _____

Interviewer:	Date:
Name:	
Current proficiency level:	
Age:	
Years of formal education:	
Number and type of previous courses:	
Nationality:	
Marital status:	
Length of time in target country:	
Present occupation:	
Intended occupation:	
Home language:	
Other languages spoken:	
Preferences relating to methodology:	
	course length:
	intensity:
Learning style:	
Purpose in coming to class:	
Language goals:	
Life goals:	

(Nunan and Burton 1985)

1* TASK 13

Which of the above information do you think is likely to be most useful for planning purposes?

What are some of the purposes to which the information might be put?

The information can serve many purposes, depending on the nature of the educational institution in which it is to be used. In the first instance, it can guide the selection of content. It may also be used to assign learners to class groupings. This will be quite a straightforward matter if classes are based

solely on proficiency levels, but much more complicated if they are designed to reflect the goals and aspirations of the learners. In addition, the data can be used by the teacher to modify the syllabus and methodology so they are more acceptable to the learners, or to alert the teacher to areas of possible conflict.

- **TASK 14**

What sort of problems might the teacher be alerted to?

HOW, in your opinion, might these be dealt with?

With certain students, for example older learners or those who have only experienced traditional educational systems, there are numerous areas of possible conflict within a teaching programme. These potential points of conflict can be revealed through needs analysis. For example, the data might indicate that the majority of learners desire a grammatically-based syllabus with explicit instruction. If teachers are planning to follow a non-traditional approach, they may need to negotiate with the learners and modify the syllabus to take account of learner perceptions about the nature of language and language learning. On the other hand, if they are strongly committed to the syllabus with which they are working, or if the institution is fairly rigid, they may wish to concentrate, in the early part of the course, on activities designed to convince learners of the value of the approach being taken.

- **TASK 15**

Some syllabus designers differentiate between 'objective' and 'subjective' information.

What do you think each of these terms refers to?

Which of the items in the sample data collection forms in Task 12 relate to 'objective' information, and which to 'subjective' information?

'Objective' data is that factual information which does not require the attitudes and views of the learners to be taken into account. Thus, biographical information on age, nationality, home language, etc. is said to be 'objective'. 'Subjective' information, on the other hand, reflects the perceptions, goals, and priorities of the learner. It will include, among other things, information on why- the learner has undertaken to learn a second language, and the classroom tasks and activities which the learner prefers.

The second type of analysis, task analysis, is employed to specify and categorize the language skills required to carry out real-world communicative tasks, and often follows the learner analysis which establishes the communicative purposes for which the learner wishes to learn the

language. The central question here is: 'What are the subordinate skills and knowledge required by the learner in order to carry out real-world communicative tasks?'

● TASK 16

Dick and Carey (1978) describe a number of instructional analysis approaches, including procedural analysis, which is used when an ordered sequence of behaviours is required to achieve a particular task. The tasks below must be carried out to make a long-distance phone call. In what order do you think these tasks need to be carried out for a long distance call to be made successfully?

- Dial the appropriate area code.
- Ask for the desired person.
- Lift the receiver and listen for the appropriate dial tone.
- Locate the telephone number of the desired person and write it down.
- Listen for call signal.
- Locate the area code and write it down.
- Dial the telephone number noted.

What sorts of communication tasks might be amenable to such an analysis?

One of the things which many second language learners want to do is comprehend radio and television broadcasts. Using the above list as a guide, write down the various skills and knowledge which would be required for a learner to understand a radio weather report.

The most sophisticated application of needs analysis to language syllabus design is to be found in the work of John Munby (1978). The model developed by Munby contains nine elements. According to Munby, it is important for the syllabus designer to collect information on each, of these components:

1 Participant

Under this component is specified information relating to the learner's identity and language skills. These will include age, sex, nationality, mother tongue, command of target language, other languages, etc. It is therefore similar in some respects to the learner analysis which has already been described.

2 Purposive domain

This category refers to the purposes for which the target language is required.

3 Setting

Under this parameter, the syllabus designer must consider the environments in which the target language will be employed.

4 Interaction

Here, the syllabus designer needs to consider the people with whom the learner will be interacting. (See the discussion on role sets in Wright: *Roles of Teachers and Learners* published in this Scheme.)

5 Instrumentality

Instrumentality refers to the medium (whether the language is spoken or written, receptive or productive), the mode (whether the communication is monologue or dialogue, written or spoken, to be heard or read), and the channel (whether the communication is face-to-face or indirect). (See Bygate: *Speaking* published in this Scheme.)

6 Dialect

Here the variety and/or dialect is specified.

7 Target level

Here is stated the degree of mastery which the learner will need to gain over the target language.

8 Communicative event

This refers to the productive and receptive skills the learner will need to master.

9 Communicative key

Here, the syllabus designer needs to specify the interpersonal attitudes and tones the learner will be required to master.

■ TASK 17

Do you think that the Munby approach is principally concerned with the collection of objective or subjective information?

The Munby approach has received criticism from many quarters for being too mechanistic, and for paying too little attention to the perceptions of the learner. As it is also developed with reference to individual learners, it may ultimately be self-defeating for classroom teaching.

Criticisms of early needs analysis work led to a change of emphasis, with a greater focus on the collection and utilization of 'subjective' information in syllabus design. This change in emphasis reflected a trend towards a more humanistic approach to education in general. Humanistic education is based on the belief that learners should have a say in *what* they should be learning and *how* they should learn it, and reflects the notion that education should be concerned with the development of autonomy in the learner. Apart from philosophical reasons for weaning learners from dependence on teachers and educational systems, it is felt, particularly in systems where there are insufficient resources to provide a complete education, that learners should be taught independent learning skills so they may continue their education after the completion of formal instruction.

Like most other aspects of language syllabus design, needs analysis procedures have attracted criticism from a variety of sources—from teachers who feel learner independence detracts from their own authority and status in the classroom, from some education authorities who feel that syllabus decisions should be made by experts not learners, and by some learners themselves who feel that, if a teacher or institution asks for the learner's opinion, it is a sign that they do not know what they are doing.

The discussion relating to the role of the learner in syllabus design illustrates the point made in 1, that most decisions are underpinned by value judgements derived from the planner's belief systems. All syllabuses, indeed, all aspects of the curriculum, including methodology and learner assessment and evaluation are underpinned by beliefs about the nature of language and language learning.

- **TASK 18**

What views on the nature of language and language learning do you think underly the Munby view of needs-based syllabus design as this has been described above?

The approach to syllabus design promoted by Munby has led, in some instances, to syllabuses with a narrow focus such as 'English for Motor Mechanics' and 'English for Biological Science'. The assumption behind the development of some such syllabuses is that there are certain aspects of language which are peculiar to the contexts in which it is used and the purposes for which it is used. For example, it is assumed that there are certain structures, functions, topics, vocabulary items, conceptual meanings, and so on that are peculiar to the world of the motor mechanic and which are not found in 'general' English.

It is also assumed that different areas of use will require different communication skills from the learner, and that these need to be specifically taught for the area of use in question.

- **TASK 19**

Do you have any reservations about these views?

For most people, the idea that a given language is divided into lots of subordinate and discrete 'universes of discourse' or 'mini-languages' is unsatisfactory. It does not seem to be consistent with their own experience of language. Analysis of the language used in different domains seems to indicate that, apart from certain technical terms, linguistic elements are remarkably similar. It is argued that, whatever learners' final communication
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'common core' of language.

It has also been pointed out that the great majority of learners want 'general English' rather than English for the sorts of specific purposes indicated above. However, there is controversy over just what it is which constitutes 'general English'.

■ TASK 20

Study the following quote:

If we say that X speaks Chinese ... we do not mean that X can only give a lecture on engineering in Chinese ... Rather, when we say that someone can speak a language, we mean that that person can speak the language in the sorts of situations people commonly encounter. That is, there are certain everyday situations in which we, as human beings living in a physical and social world, are necessarily involved. We must all, for example, obtain food and shelter, we must find our way about, and we must establish relationships with other people. General proficiency, then, refers to the ability to use language in these everyday, non-specialist situations.

(Ingram 1984: 1)

How convincing do you find this description of 'general' language proficiency?

The difficulty here is in deciding just what constitutes the common, everyday purposes of English. It is conceivable that this 'general' component may, in itself, represent simply another domain of use for the second language learner. In fact, researchers have demonstrated that, for both first and second language learners, the contexts in which they are called upon to use language can have a marked effect on their ability to communicate effectively in that situation. For example, certain individuals, who are quite competent at 'social' or 'survival' English, as described by Ingram, are seriously disadvantaged when they have to use English at school. In fact, even children who are native speakers sometimes have difficulty when they begin formal schooling. It has been suggested that this is due to the unfamiliar uses to which language is being put. In other words, difficulty is not so much at the level of grammar and vocabulary but at the level of discourse. (See Widdowson (1983) for an extended discussion on this aspect of language.)

The debate over the nature of language has not been helped by a confusion between the nature of the language used in particular communicative contexts, the skills involved in communicating in these contexts, and the means whereby these skills might be acquired. Consider, as an example, the student who wants to learn English in order to study motor mechanics. It might well be that, apart from a few specialist terms, the structures, functions, and general notions used by an instructor in describing the

construction and functions of a carburettor are basically derived from the same common stock as those used by someone having a casual conversation with their neighbour. However, this does not mean that someone who has developed skills in conducting a casual conversation will necessarily be able to follow the unfamiliar discourse patterns and rhetorical routines underlying, say, a lecture on the structure and function of the carburettor. In addition, it does not necessarily follow that the best way to develop the listening skills required to study motor mechanics is to listen to repeated mini-lectures on the nature of carburettors and other such topics. It may well follow, but this is not self-evident.

● TASK 21

In answering the following questions, try and justify your position by stating why you think the tasks are or are not equivalent in terms of the skills the learner will need to carry out the tasks.

- 1 If someone were able to give a lecture on engineering in Chinese, do you think they would also be able to describe symptoms of illness to a doctor?
- 2 If someone were able to describe symptoms of illness to a doctor in Chinese, do you think they would also be able to give a lecture on engineering?
- 3 Would someone who is able to describe symptoms of illness to a doctor in English also be able to work as a waiter in an English-speaking restaurant?
- 4 Would someone who is capable of working as a waiter in an English-speaking restaurant also be able to describe symptoms of illness to a doctor?

Many teachers would agree with Ingram that there is such a thing as 'general English ability' and that this can be defined as the ability to carry out commonly occurring real-world tasks. If asked to make a list of these tasks, they would probably list such things as asking for directions, asking for and providing personal details, describing symptoms of illness to a doctor, *understanding* the radio, reading newspapers, writing notes to a teacher, and so on. *In fact they could probably generate endless lists of 'common everyday tasks'.* Now, common sense would suggest that it is not necessary for each and every task to be taught in the classroom. In fact, it would be an impossibility. What the syllabus designer and the teacher must decide is which classroom tasks will ensure maximum transfer of learning to tasks which have not been taught. On the one hand, we can make a random selection of real-world tasks and teach these in the hope that the relevant bits of language 'stick' as it were, and that transfer to other tasks will occur. On the other hand, we can select tasks which may bear little resemblance to real-world tasks but which are assumed to stimulate internal psychological learning processes. The traditional classroom

substitution drill would be an example of a classroom task which is justified, not because the learner might want to engage in drills outside the classroom, but because it is assumed to result in learning which can be transferred to real-world communicative language use. (We shall return to this important issue later in the section.)

Widdowson has written extensively on the distinction between general purpose English (GPE) and English for specific purposes. He suggests that ESP has a training function which is aimed at the development of 'restricted competence', whereas GPE fulfils an educative function and is aimed at the development of 'general capacity'.

... ESP is essentially a training operation which seeks to provide learners with a restricted competence to enable them to cope with certain clearly defined tasks. These tasks constitute the specific purposes which the ESP course is designed to meet. The course, therefore, makes direct reference to eventual aims. GPE, on the other hand, is essentially an educational operation which seeks to provide learners with a general capacity to enable them to cope with undefined eventualities in the future. Here, since there are no definite aims which can determine course content, there has to be recourse to intervening objectives formulated by pedagogic theory... in GPE, the actual use of language occasioned by communicative necessity is commonly a vague and distant prospect on the other side of formal assessment.

(Widdowson 1983: 6)

TASK 22

How convincing do you find this line of argument?

Do you think it necessarily follows that teaching for a specific purpose will lead to a restricted competence?

2.4 Learning goals

An important step in the development of a language programme is identifying learning goals. These will provide a rationale for the course or programme. Learning goals may be derived from a number of sources, including task analysis, learner data, ministry of education specifications, and so on. The nature of the courses to be derived from syllabus specifications, the length of the courses, and many other factors will determine what is feasible and appropriate to set as goals, and will also largely dictate the types of communicative and pedagogic objectives which are both appropriate and feasible for the educational system in question.

TASK 23

Study the following goal statements:

'To encourage learners to develop confidence in using the target language.'

'To develop skills in monitoring performance in spoken language.'

'To establish and maintain relationships through exchanging information, ideas, opinions, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and plans.'

'To develop the ability to study, in English, at university.'

In what ways are these statements similar? In what ways are they different?

Based on these statements, how would you define the term 'goal'?

Although they could all be applied to language courses of various sorts, the above statements differ in their focus. They include an affective goal, a learning goal, a communicative goal, and a cognitive goal.

As it is used here, the term 'goal' refers to the general purposes for which a language programme is being taught or learned. While we shall take into consideration a variety of goal types, the focus will be principally on communicative goals. These are defined as the general communicative activities in which the learners will engage (or, in the case of foreign language learning, could potentially engage) in real-world target language use.

If some form of needs analysis has been carried out to establish the purposes and needs of a given group of learners or of an educational system, a necessary second step into translate them into instructional goals. This requires judgement, particularly to ensure that the goals are appropriate, not only to learner needs, but also to the constraints of the educational institution or system, and the length and scope of programme based on the syllabus. Titus, a syllabus designed for 900 hours of secondary school instruction will be able to incorporate more goals than a 150-hour course for immigrants or refugees. By examining the goal statements of a language programme, one can usually identify the value judgements and belief systems from which they are derived. It is also usually possible to identify whether the syllabus designer has taken as his or her point of departure the language, the learner, or the learning process.

2.5 Conclusion

In looking at starting points in syllabus design, I have suggested that the starting point can be an analysis of the language, information about the learner, beliefs about the learning process itself, or a combination of these.

The key question in relation to a linguistic perspective is: 'What linguistic elements should be taught?' From a learner perspective, the key question is: 'What does the learner want to do with the language?' Finally, from a learning perspective, the key question is: 'What activities will stimulate or promote language acquisition?'

These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent areas of relative emphasis, and a syllabus designer will usually incorporate insights from all three perspectives.

It has been suggested that there is a major conceptual distinction between product-oriented and process-oriented syllabuses, and that a given syllabus can be located somewhere along a process/product continuum. In 3 and 4 we shall consider product-oriented and process-oriented syllabuses in detail.

3 Product-oriented syllabuses

3.1 Introduction

In 2, I drew a distinction between product-oriented and process-oriented syllabuses. We saw that product syllabuses are those in which the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction, while process syllabuses are those which focus on the learning experiences themselves.

In 3, we shall look at syllabus proposals which are specified in terms of the end products of a course of instruction. As we shall see, these may be realized in a variety of ways, for example as lists of grammatical items, vocabulary items, language functions, or experiential content.

3.2 Analytic and synthetic syllabus planning

There are many different ways in which syllabus proposals of one sort or another might be analysed. One dimension of analysis which has been the subject of a great deal of discussion and comment is the synthetic/analytic dimension.

It was Wilkins (1976) who first drew attention to the distinction between synthetic and analytic syllabuses. He described the synthetic approach in the following terms:

A synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which the different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up.

(Wilkins 1976: 2)

■ TASK 24

In his work, Wilkins assumes that grammatical criteria will be used to break the global language down into discrete units. The items will be graded according to the grammatical complexity of the items, their frequency of occurrence, their contrastive difficulty in relation to the learner's first language, situational need, and pedagogic convenience. }

you think that grammar is the only criterion for selecting and grading content in a synthetic syllabus?

If not, what other criteria can you suggest for selecting and grading content?

Initially, people tended to equate synthetic approaches with grammatical syllabuses. However some applied linguists feel that the term 'synthetic' need not necessarily be restricted to grammatical syllabuses, but may be applied to any syllabus in which the content is product-oriented; that is, which is specified as discrete lists of grammatical items and in which the classroom focus is on the teaching of these items as separate and discrete (see, for example, Widdowson 1979). (Note that in this book, the terms 'grammatical' and 'structural' are used interchangeably.)

In contrast with synthetic syllabuses, analytic syllabuses:

are organised in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet those purposes.
(*Wilkins 1975: 13*)

In an analytic syllabus, learners are presented with chunks of language which may include structures of varying degrees of difficulty. The starting point for syllabus design is not the grammatical system of the language, but the communicative purposes for which language is used.

It is theoretically possible to conceive of language courses as being solely synthetic or solely analytic. However, it is likely that, in practice, courses will be typified as more-or-less synthetic or more-or-less analytic according to the prominence given to discrete elements in the selection and grading of input.

3.3 Grammatical syllabuses

The most common syllabus type was, and probably still is, one in which syllabus input is selected and graded according to grammatical notions of simplicity and complexity. Later in 3 we shall see that grammatical complexity does not necessarily equate with learning difficulty. In other words, what is grammatically complex will not necessarily be that which is difficult to learn, and that which is grammatically simple will not necessarily be that which is easy to learn.

The most rigid grammatical syllabuses supposedly introduced one item at a time and required mastery of that item before moving on to the next. According to McDonough:

The transition from lesson to lesson is intended to enable material in one lesson to prepare the ground for the next; and conversely for material in the next to appear to grow out of the previous one. i
(*McDonough 1981: 21*)

McDonough illustrates this point as follows:

Lesson (l)	has drilled copula and adjective combinations: <i>She is happy</i>
Lesson (m)	introduces the -ing form: <i>She is driving a car</i>
Lesson (n)	reintroduces existential there: <i>There is a man standing near the car</i>
Lesson (o)	distinguishes between mass and count nouns: <i>There are some oranges and some cheese on the table</i>
Lesson (p)	introduces the verbs like and want: <i>I like oranges but not cheese</i>
Lesson (q)	reintroduces don't previously known in negative imperatives: <i>I don't like cheese</i>
Lesson (r)	introduces verbs with stative meaning: <i>I don't come from Newcastle</i>
Lesson (s)	introduces adverbs of habit and thus the present simple tense; or rather, present tense in simple aspect: <i>I usually come at six o'clock</i>

(McDonough 1981: 21)

● TASK 25

As we have already noted, all syllabus outlines or proposals are underpinned by assumptions about the nature of language and language learning.

What assumptions about language and language learning do you imagine might underpin a grammatical syllabus of the type described above?

The assumption behind most grammatical syllabuses seems to be that language consists of a finite set of rules which can be combined in various ways to make meaning. It is further assumed that these rules can be learned one by one, in an additive fashion, each item being mastered on its own before being incorporated into the learner's pre-existing stock of knowledge. The principal purpose of language teaching is to help learners to 'crack the code'. Rutherford (1987) calls this the 'accumulated entities' view of language learning.

Assumptions are also made about language transfer. *his* generally assumed that once learners have internalized the formal aspects of a given piece of

language, they will automatically be able to use it in genuine communication outside the classroom.

One of the difficulties in designing grammatical 'chains' in which discrete grammatical items are linked is that the links can be rather tenuous. It is also difficult to isolate and present one discrete item at a time, particularly if one wants to provide some sort of context for the language. In addition, evidence from second language acquisition (SLA) research suggests that learning does not occur in this simple additive fashion.

"the dilemma for the syllabus designer who is attempting to follow some sort of structural progression in sequencing input is this: How does one control input and yet at the same time provide language samples for the learner to work on which bear some semblance at least to the sort of language the learner will encounter outside the classroom?"

This problem might be addressed in a number of ways. One solution would be to abandon any attempt at structural grading. Another might be to use the list of graded structures, not to determine the language to which learners are exposed, but to determine the items which will be the pedagogic focus in class. In other words, learners would be exposed to naturalistic samples of text which were only roughly graded, and which provided a richer context, but they would only be expected formally to master those items which had been isolated, graded, and set out in the syllabus. Another alternative, and one we shall look at in detail in 4, is to focus on what learners are expected to *do* with the language (i.e. learning tasks), rather than on the language itself. With this alternative, it is the tasks rather than the language which are graded.

■ TASK 26

At this stage, you might like to consider the different suggestions above and rank them from most to least satisfactory.

Can you think of any other ways of addressing the problem of controlling input while at the same time using 'naturalistic' language?

3.4 Criticizing grammatical syllabuses

During the 1970s, the use of structural syllabuses came under increasing criticism. In this section we shall look at some of these criticisms.

One early criticism was that structurally-graded syllabuses misrepresented the nature of that complex phenomenon, language. They did so in tending to focus on only one aspect of language, that is, formal grammar. In reality, there is more than one aspect to language as we shall see in 3.5.

TASK 27

Many structurally-graded coursebooks begin with the structure: 'demonstrative + be + NP' as exemplified by the statement: 'This is a book'.

How many different communicative purposes can you think of for this statement?

The most obvious purpose is that of identifying. This function is much more likely to occur in classrooms (including language classrooms), where learning the names of new entities is an important part of the curriculum, than in the real world. Other functions might include contradicting ('It may look like a video, but in fact it's a book'), expressing surprise ('This is a book? — Looks like a video to suer), or threatening ('This is a book, and your name will go in it if you don't behave). The list could go on.

Matters are complicated, not only by the fact that language fulfils a variety of communicative functions, but that there is no one-to-one relationship between form and function. Not only can a single form realize more than one function, but a given function can be realized by more than one form (see Cook: *Discourse* published in this Scheme).

TASK 28

Can you think of examples of a single structure fulfilling several functions and a single function being fulfilled by several structures?

In Tables 2 and 3, you will find examples of the lack of fit between form and function. In Table 2 a single form realizes a variety of functions, whereas in Table 3 a single function is being realized by a variety of forms.

Form	Functions	Gloss
The cliffs are over there	Directions	That's the way to the scenic view.
	Warning	Be careful of the cliffs!
	Suggestion	How about a walk along the cliff top?

Table 2

Function	Forms
Request	May I have a drink, please? Thirsty weather, this. Looks like an interesting wine. I'm dying for a drink. Is that a bottle of champagne?

Table 3

■ TASK 29

What are the implications for syllabus design of this lack of any predetermined relationship between form and function?

also on the communicative purposes for which language is used, developed from insights provided by philosophers of language, sociolinguists, and from other language-related disciplines. "The immediate reaction to such a wider view is to contemplate ways of incorporating it into the language syllabus. Unfortunately, the form/function disjunction makes the process of syllabus design much more complex than it would have been had there been a neat one-to-one form/function relationship. We shall look at the difficulties of incorporating formal and functional elements into syllabus design in Section Two.

In recent years, criticism of grammatical syllabuses has come from researchers in the field of SLA. Some of the questions addressed by SLA researchers of interest to syllabus planners are as follows:

Why do learners at a particular stage fail to learn certain grammatical items which have been explicitly (and often repeatedly) taught?

Can syllabus items be sequenced to make them easier to learn?

What learning activities appear to promote acquisition?

Is there any evidence that teaching does, in fact, result in learning?

■ TASK 30

Two important SLA studies carried out during the 1970s were those by Dulay and Burt (1973) and Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974). These studies showed that certain grammatical items seemed to be acquired in a particular order, that this order was similar for children and adults, and for learners from different language backgrounds. It also appeared that formal instruction had no effect on the order of acquisition.

What do you think are the implications for syllabus design of the notion that structures are acquired in a predetermined order?

One SLA researcher has this to say on the implications of the research for syllabus design:

Assuming the existence of stages of development, a logical step for syllabus design might seem to be writing these stages directly into a new syllabus. [i.e. ordering the syllabus in the same order in which items occur in the learners' repertoire.] On the other hand, if learners pass through developmental stages in a fixed sequence, then it might seem equally logical to disregard the question of how the syllabus is

written — at least as regards structure— since learners will organise this aspect of learning for themselves.
(*Johnston 1985: 29*)

In other words, assuming that learners do have their own Inbuilt syllabus', we could argue that the teaching syllabus should reflect this order. On the other hand, we could simply forget about grading the syllabus structurally, because this aspect of language development will automatically be taken care of.

Johnston argues that decisions on whether syllabuses should be sequenced or not can only be settled one way or another by more research into the relative effects of structurally-graded and non-structurally-graded syllabi

decisions before the relevant research has been carried out.

Research by Pienemann and Johnston (reported in Pienemann 1985; Johnston 1985; and Pienemann and Johnston 1987) has led them to conclude that the acquisition of grammatical structures will be determined by how difficult those items are to process psycholinguistically, rather than how simple or complex they are grammatically. They illustrate this with the third person 's' morpheme. Grammatically, this is a fairly straightforward item, which can be characterized as follows: In simple present third person singular statements, add 's/es' to the end of the verb. For example, 'I sometimes go to Spain for my holidays' becomes 'He sometimes goes to Spain for his holidays'. However, this simple grammatical rule is notoriously difficult for learners to master. Pienemann and Johnston suggest that the difficulty is created for the learner by the fact that the form of the verb is governed or determined by the person and number of the noun or noun phrase in the subject position. In effect, the learner has to hold this person and number in working memory and then produce the appropriate form of the verb. Thus the difficulty is created, not by the grammar, but by the constraints of short-term memory.

Pienemann and Johnston use their speech-processing theory to explain the order in which grammatical items are acquired. They suggest that structures will be acquired in the following stages:

Stage 1

Single words and formulae.

Stage 2

Canonical or 'standard' word order, e.g. for English, Subject + Verb + Object.

Stage 3

Initialization/finalization. Final elements can be moved into initial position or vice versa, e.g. words such as adverbs can be added to the beginning or end of clauses.

Stage 4

Semi-internal permutation. Internal elements can be moved to initial or final position, e.g. words can be moved from inside the clause to the beginning or end of the clause.

Stage 5

Fully internal permutation. Items can be moved about within a clause.

In Section Two, we shall look at the implications of this hypothesis for syllabus design, and compare the ordering of grammatical elements proposed by Pienemann and Johnston with those of some recently published coursebooks.

There are a number of complications which arise when we attempt to apply SLA research to syllabus design. In the first place, much of this work assumes that we shall start out with groups of learners who are at the same stage of grammatical proficiency, and that learners in a given group will all progress uniformly. Unfortunately these assumptions are not borne out in practice. Another problem which occurs in second language contexts is that learners need to use certain language structures (such as *wh*-questions) almost immediately. These need to be taught as memorized 'formulae' even though they are well beyond the learner's current stage of development. Finally, learners may need exposure to grammatical items in different contexts and over an extended period of time rather than simply at the point when the items become 'learnable'.

In addition to these arguments, there are the general arguments against grammatical grading of content (whether this grading be based on traditional criteria or more recent criteria stemming from SLA research), on the grounds that grammatical grading distorts the language available to the learner. It could well interfere with language acquisition which is more a global than a linear process, different aspects of grammar developing simultaneously rather than one structure being mastered at a time. The arguments against grammatically structured syllabuses are summarized by Long (1987).

At this point in time, then, the direct application of SLA research to syllabus design is rather limited. While the research has shown that the learner's syllabus and the syllabus of the textbook or language programme may not
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results of follow-up research become available.

In a recent excellent analysis of the status of grammar in the curriculum, Rutherford (1987) suggests that the abandonment of grammar as the pivotal element in the syllabus may be premature. He argues that:

The critical need for making these target language] data available to the learner therefore places a special burden upon the language curriculum and, by extension, the language syllabus.
(Rutherford 1987: 150)

In Rutherford's view, the learner needs direct contact with the target language. We know that it is neither necessary nor possible to provide learners with exposure to all target language constructions, and that a major task for syllabus designers is to identify those aspects of the grammatical system from which learners can generate the most powerful generalizations. These structures must be made available to the learner at the appropriate time (a problem, given the fact that learners will usually be at different stages of 'readiness') and using appropriate pedagogic instruments. In effect, what he is arguing for is a view of grammar as process rather than grammar as product. In other words, grammar learning should not be seen as the memorization of sets of grammatical items, the raising to consciousness in the learner of the ways grammatical and discourse processes operate and interact in the target language.

At this point, the view of grammar as process may seem rather abstract. However, we shall look at applications of Rutherford's grammar-oriented syllabus in Section Two.

3.5 Functional-notional syllabuses

The broader view of language provided by philosophers of language and sociolinguists was taken up during the 1970s by those involved in language teaching, and began to be reflected in syllabuses and coursebooks. This is not to say that functional and situational aspects of language use did not exist in earlier syllabuses, but that for the first time there was a large-scale attempt to incorporate this broader view of language systematically into the language syllabus. In particular, it gave rise to what became known as functional-notional syllabus design.

Many teachers, on first encountering the terms 'function' and 'notion' find them confusing. In general, functions may be described as the communicative purposes for which we use language, while notions are the concept's meanings (objects, entities, states of affairs, logical relationships, and so on) expressed through language.

■ TASK 31

To check your understanding of the distinction between functions and notions, which items in the following lists are functions and which are notions?

identifying	cause	denying
time	enquiring	ownership
agreeing	greeting	duration
direction	frequency	suggesting
offering	advising	size
equality	apologizing	warning
approving	existence	persuading

Finocchiaro and Brumfit suggest that functional-notionalism has the 'tremendous merit' of placing the students and their communicative purposes at the centre of the curriculum. They list the following benefits of adopting a functional-notional orientation:

- 1 It sets realistic learning tasks.
- 2 It provides for the teaching of everyday, real-world language.
- 3 It leads us to emphasise receptive (listening/reading) activities before rushing learners into premature performance.
- 4 It recognises that the speaker must have a real purpose for speaking, and something to talk about.
- 5 Communication will be intrinsically motivating because it expresses basic communicative functions.
- 6 It enables teachers to exploit sound psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, linguistic and educational principles.
- 7 It can develop naturally from existing teaching methodology.
- 8 It enables a spiral curriculum to be used which reintroduces grammatical, topical and cultural material.
- 9 It allows for the development of flexible, modular courses.
- 10 It pros-ides for the widespread promotion of foreign language courses.

(Finocchiaro and Brumfit 1983: 17)

- **TASK 32**

From your perspective, which three of the above reasons might prompt you to adopt a functional-notional approach as it has been described?

3.6 Criticizing functional-notional syllabuses

As we have already seen, the two central issues for the syllabus designer concern the selection of items for the syllabus and the grading and sequencing of these items.

- **TASK 33**

What do you see as some of the advantages of adopting a functional-notional rather than a grammatical approach to syllabus design?

What difficulties do you envisage for a syllabus designer attempting to address the issues of grading and sequencing from a functional-notional perspective?

Syllabus planners find that when turning from structurally-based syllabus design to the design of syllabuses based on functional-notional criteria, the

selection and grading of items become much more complex. Decisions about which items to include in the syllabus can no longer be made on linguistic grounds alone, and designers need to include items which they imagine will help learners to carry out the communicative purposes for which they need the language. In order to determine what these purposes are, in addition to linguistic analyses of various sorts, it is also often necessary to carry out some form of needs analysis. This is particularly so when developing syllabuses for courses with a specific focus.

In developing functional-notional syllabuses, designers also need to look beyond linguistic notions of simplicity and difficulty when it comes to grading items. Invoking grammatical criteria, it is possible to say that simple Subject + Verb + Object (SVO) structures should be taught before more complex clausal structures involving such things as relativization. However, the grading of functional items becomes much more complex because there are few apparent objective means for deciding that one functional item, for instance, 'apologizing' is either simpler or more difficult than another item such as 'requesting'. Situational, contextual, and extra-linguistic factors which are used to a certain extent in the selection and grading of content for grammatical syllabuses become much more prominent and tend to complicate the issues of simplicity and difficulty.

Many of the criticisms which were made of grammatical syllabuses have also been made of functional-notional syllabuses. Widdowson pointed out as long ago as 1979 that inventories of functions and notions do not necessarily reflect the way languages are learned any more than do inventories of grammatical points and lexical items. He also claims that dividing language into discrete units of whatever type misrepresents the nature of language as communication.

■ TASK 34

Is this a reasonable criticism of functional-notional principles as these have been described by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), or does the criticism relate more to the way in which the principles have been realized in practice?

3.7 Analytic syllabuses

As we have already seen, syllabuses can be characterized as being either synthetic or analytic. In this book, we shall follow Widdowson's lead and consider functional-notional syllabuses as basically synthetic. When such syllabuses began to appear, they looked very similar to the structural syllabuses they were meant to replace. In other words, while the units in such books generally have functional labels, the content itself and the types of exercises which learners were expected to undertake were very similar to

those they replaced. Instead of learning about 'the simple past' learners might now be required to 'talk about the things you did last weekend'.

Analytic syllabuses, in which learners are exposed to language which has not been linguistically graded, are more likely to result from the use of experiential rather than linguistic content as the starting point for syllabus design. Such content might be defined in terms of situations, topics, themes or, following a suggestion advanced by Widdowson (1978; 1979), other academic or school subjects. The stimulus for content-based syllabuses is the notion that, unlike science, history, or mathematics, language is not a subject in its own right, but merely a vehicle for communicating about something else.

The use of content from other subject areas has found its widest application in courses and materials for ESP. However, this adoption has had its difficulties. Very often the learner has extensive knowledge in the content domain and is frustrated by what is considered a trivialization of that content. In addition, as Hutchinson and Waters note:

In the content-based model ... the student is frustrated because he is denied the language knowledge that enables him to do the tasks set. Despite appearances to the contrary, the content-based model is no more creative than the language-based model. Although communication competence, linguistic competence is nevertheless an essential element in communicative competence.
(Hutchinson and Waters 1983: 101)

Dissatisfaction with the content-based approach, as it was originally conceived, prompted some applied linguists to focus on language as a process rather than as a product. Hutchinson and Waters developed a model combining the four elements of content, input, language, and task. The task component is central, and from it are derived relevant language and content.

The LANGUAGE and CONTENT focused on are drawn from the INPUT, and are selected primarily according to what the learner will need in order to do the TASK. In other words, in the TASK the linguistic knowledge and topic knowledge that are built up through the unit are applied to the solving of a communication problem.
(*op. cit.*: 102)

In 4.3, we shall examine in greater detail task-based syllabus proposals.

● TASK 35

What assumptions about the nature of language learning are likely to be held by someone adhering to an analytic approach, in which

learners are confronted with language which has not been linguistically graded?

One major assumption is that language can be learned holistically, in 'chunks' as it were. This contrasts with synthetic syllabuses in which it is assumed that we can only learn one thing at a time, and that this learning is additive and linear.

While analytic approaches take some non-linguistic base as their point of departure, it should not be assumed that analytic syllabus designers never use grammatical criteria in selecting and grading content. While some may avoid the use of grammatical criteria, others incorporate grammatical items into their syllabus as a second-order activity after the topics, situations, and so on have been selected.

3.8 Conclusion

In 3 we have looked at approaches to syllabus design which focus on the end product or outcomes of learning. In 4, we shall look at proposals in which learning processes are incorporated into the syllabus design. We shall see that, once consideration of learning processes is built into the syllabus, the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology becomes difficult to sustain.

4 Process-oriented syllabuses

4.1 Introduction

In 3 we looked at syllabuses in which the focus was on the grammatical, functional, and notional building blocks out of which courses of various types can be constructed. Initially, it seemed that functional-notional principles would result in syllabuses which were radically different from those based on grammatical principles. However, in practice, the new syllabuses were rather similar to those they were intended to replace. In both syllabuses, the focus tended to be on the end products or results of the teaching/learning process.

We saw that syllabuses in which the selection and grading of items was carried out on a grammatical basis fell into disfavour because they failed adequately to reflect changing views on the nature of language. In addition, there was sometimes a mismatch between what was taught and what was learned. Some SLA researchers have claimed that this mismatch is likely to occur when the grading of syllabus input is carried out according to grammatical rather than psycholinguistic principles, while others suggest that the very act of linguistically selecting and grading input will lead to distortion.

■ TASK 36

What alternatives do you see to the sorts of syllabuses dealt with so far?

In recent years, some applied linguists have shifted focus from the outcomes of instruction, i.e. the knowledge and skills to be gained by the learner, to the processes through which knowledge and skills might be gained. In the rest of 4 we shall look at some of the proposals which have been made for process syllabuses of various sorts.

This shift in emphasis has been dramatized by the tendency to separate product-oriented syllabus design issues from process-oriented ones. This has been most noticeable within the so-called 'British' school of applied linguistics, in which the focus tends to be either on process or product, but not on both. (This is despite the efforts of people such as Widdowson, Candlin, and Breen to present a more balanced view. For a useful summary of the range of positions which can be adopted on syllabus design, see the papers in the collection by Bruntfit (1984,0)

In 1, I argued that the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum should be seen as an integrated set of processes. If such a view is adopted, it becomes unnecessary to think in terms either of a product-oriented or a process-oriented approach. While relative emphases will vary depending on the context, environment, and purposes for which language teaching is taking place, both outcomes and processes will be specified.

Among other things, it was the realization that specifying functions and notions would not in itself lead to the development of communicative language skills, which prompted the development of process-oriented views. Widdowson suggests that a basic problem has been the confusion of means and ends.

It is not that the structural syllabus denies the eventual communicative purpose of learning but that it implies a different means to its achievement. It is often suggested that the designers of such syllabuses supposed that the language was of its nature entirely reducible to the elements of formal grammar and failed to recognise the reality of use. But this is a misrepresentation. Such syllabuses were proposed as a means towards achieving language performance through the skills of listening, speaking, reading and Writing. That is to say, they were directed towards a communicative goal and were intended, no less than the F/N syllabus as a preparation for use. The difference lies in the conception of the means to this end. Structural syllabuses are designed on the assumption that it is the internalisation of grammar coupled with the exercise of linguistic skills in motor-perceptual manipulation (usage) which affords the most effective preparation for the reality of communicative encounters (use).

(Widdowson 1987: 68)

Widdowson's argument here parallels the discussion in 2 on the nature of 'general English' and its implications for the syllabus. There it was pointed out that classroom tasks could be justified, either because they replicated the sorts of tasks that learners would need to carry out in the real world, or because they stimulated internal learning processes. (There are tasks which could do both, of course.) Widdowson argues that pedagogic tasks (i.e. those which would not be carried out in the real world) can be thought of as an investment to be drawn on to meet unpredictable communicative needs.

■ TASK 37

What assumptions about the nature of language learning can you discern in the above quote from Widdowson?

What are some of the implications of these assumptions for syllabus design?

In 4.2 we shall look at some of the ways in which these ideas have made their appearance as proposals for 'procedural' or 'process' syllabuses. In 4.3 we shall look at proposals for 'task-based' syllabuses.

4.2 Procedural syllabuses

Despite some differences in practice, the principles underlying procedural and task-based syllabuses are very similar. In fact, they are seen as synonymous by Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985), who describe them both as follows:

... a syllabus which is organised around tasks, rather than in terms of grammar or vocabulary. For example the syllabus may suggest a variety of different kinds of tasks which the learners are expected to carry out in the language, such as using the telephone to obtain information; drawing maps based on oral instructions; performing actions based on commands given in the target language; giving orders and instructions to others, etc. It has been argued that this is a more effective way of learning a language since it provides a purpose for the use and learning of a language other than simply learning language items for their own sake.

(Richards, Platt, and Weber 1985: 289)

Both task-based and procedural syllabuses share a concern with the classroom processes which stimulate learning. They therefore differ from syllabuses in which the focus is on the linguistic items that students will learn or the communicative skills that they will be able to display as a result of instruction. In both approaches, the syllabus consists, not of a list of items determined through some form of linguistic analysis, nor of a description of what learners will be able to do at the end of a course of study, but of the specification of the tasks and activities that learners will engage in in class.

● TASK 38

Which of the following planning tasks are likely to be most important to a procedural or task-based syllabus designer?

- needs analysis
- specification of real-world learning goals
- specification of linguistic content
- specification of topics and themes
- specification of performance objectives
- specification of learning tasks and activities

One particular proposal which has been widely promoted is the 'Bangalore Project' of which N. S. Prabhu was the principal architect. Until recently,

there was relatively little information on this project, but this has changed with the publication of Prabhu's *Second Language Pedagogy*.

Attempts to systematize inputs to the learner through a linguistically organized syllabus, or to maximize the practice of particular parts of language structure through activities deliberately planned for that purpose were regarded as being unhelpful to the development of grammatical competence and detrimental to the desired preoccupation with meaning in the classroom. It was decided that teaching should consequently be concerned with creating conditions for coping with meaning in the classroom, to the exclusion of any deliberate regulation of the development of grammatical competence or a mere simulation of language behaviour.
(Prabhu 1987: 1-2)

... the issue was thus one of the nature of grammatical knowledge to be developed: if the desired form of knowledge was such that it could *operate* subconsciously, it was best for it to *develop* subconsciously as well.
(*op. cit.*: 14-15)

. . . while the conscious mind is working out some of the meaning-content, a subconscious part of the mind perceives, abstracts, or acquires (or recreates, as a cognitive structure) some of the linguistic structuring embodied in those entities, as a step in the development of an internal system of rules.
(*op. cit.*: 59-60)

■ TASK 39

What assumptions about the nature of language learning are revealed by these extracts?

To what extent does your own experience lead you to agree or disagree with these assumptions?

(For a different perspective, you might like to read Breen (1987), and Somerville-Ryan (1987), who emphasize the role of the learner in process syllabus design. It is also worth reading Rutherford (1987) for a very different view of grammar-learning as process.)

Prabhu provides the following three task 'types' which were used in the project.

1 *Information-gap activity*, which involves a transfer of given information from one person to another — or from one form to another, or from one place to another — generally calling for the decoding or encoding of information from or into language.

- 2 *Reasoning-gap activity*, which involves deriving some new information from given information through processes of inference, deduction, practical reasoning, or a perception of relationships or patterns.
- 3 *Opinion-gap activity*, which involves identifying and articulating a personal preference, feeling, or attitude in response to a given situation.
(*op. cit.*: 46-7)

- **TASK 40**

During the course of the project, teachers came to prefer reasoning-gap activities over the other two types.

Can you suggest why this might have been so?

What would be the major differences between a procedural syllabus and a traditional grammatical syllabus?

One possible criticism of the Bangalore Project is that no guidance is provided on the selection of problems and tasks, nor how these might relate to the real-world language needs of the learners. In other words, the focus is exclusively on learning processes and there is little or no attempt to relate these processes to outcomes.

- **TASK 41**

Do you think that this is a reasonable criticism?

How important is it for a syllabus to specify both learning processes and outcomes?

Can you think of any teaching contexts in which it might be less important than others to specify outcomes?

4.3 Task-based syllabuses

We shall now look at some other proposals for the use of tasks as the point of departure in syllabus design. The selection of 'task' as a basic building block has been justified on several grounds, but most particularly for pedagogic and psycholinguistic reasons. Long and Crookes (1986) cite general educational literature which suggests that tasks are a more salient unit of planning for teachers than objectives; Candlin (1987) provides a pedagogic rationale, while Long (1985) looks to SLA research (although, as we saw in 3, SLA research can be invoked to support contrary views on syllabus design).

■ TASK 42

How do you think the term 'task' might be defined by language syllabus designers?

Despite its rather recent appearance on the syllabus scene, 'task-based' covers several divergent approaches. Two recent definitions of 'task' are provided below.

... a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation . . . In other words, by "task" is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life.

(Long 1985: 89)

. . . an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e. as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to an instruction and performing a command . . . A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task.

(Richards, Platt, and Weber 1985: 289)

TASK 43

A distinction which is not always made in the literature is between real-world tasks (i.e. those tasks that the learner might be called upon to perform in real life) and pedagogic tasks (those tasks the learner is required to carry out in the classroom).

To what extent are the authors of the above statements referring to real-world or pedagogic tasks?

Just as writers on task-based syllabus design have offered different definitions of 'task', so have they adopted different approaches to the selection of tasks. Thus Candlin (1987) chooses to articulate pedagogic criteria for task-selection while Long (1985) advocates a form of needs analysis as the starting point.

Candlin offers the following criteria for judging the worth of tasks. Good tasks, he suggests, should:

- promote attention to meaning, purpose, negotiation
- encourage attention to relevant data
- draw objectives from the communicative needs of learners
- allow for flexible approaches to the task, offering different routes, media, modes of participation, procedures
- allow for different solutions depending on the skills and strategies drawn on by learners

- involve learner contributions, attitudes, and affects
- be challenging but not threatening, to promote risk-taking
- require input from all learners in terms of knowledge, skills, participation
- define a problem to be worked through by learners, centred on the learners but guided by the teacher
- involve language use in the solving of the task
- allow for co-evaluation by the learner and teacher of the task and of the performance of the task
- develop the learners' capacities to estimate consequences and repercussions of the task in question
- provide opportunities for metacommunication and metacognition (i.e. provide opportunities for learners to talk about communication and about learning)
- provide opportunities for language practice
- promote learner-training for problem-sensing and problem-solving (i.e. identifying and solving problems)
- promote sharing of information and expertise
- provide monitoring and feedback, of the learner and the task
- heighten learners' consciousness of the process and encourage reflection (i.e. to sensitize learners to the learning processes in which they are participating)
- promote a critical awareness about data and the processes of language learning
- ensure cost-effectiveness and a high return on investment (i.e. the effort to master given aspects of the language should be functionally useful, either for communicating beyond the classroom, or in terms of the cognitive and affective development of the learner).

● TASK 44

From the above list, select the five criteria which seem to you to be the most useful for selecting tasks.

What guided you in your choice?

What are some of the things which might need to be specified when designing pedagogic tasks?

Doyle (1979; 1983), working within a general educational context, was one of the first to suggest that the curriculum could be viewed as a collection of academic tasks. He maintains that tasks will need to specify the following:

- 1 the products students are to formulate
 - 2 the operations that are required to generate the product
 - 3 the resources available to the student to generate the product.
- (Doyle 1983: 161)

A similar, though more comprehensive set of elements, is proposed by Shavelson and Stern (1981) who suggest that in planning instructional tasks, teachers need to consider:

- 1 the subject matter to be taught
- 2 materials, i.e. those things the learner will observe/manipulate
- 3 the activities the teacher and learners will be carrying out
- 4 the goals for the task
- 5 the abilities, needs and interests of the students
- 6 the social and cultural context of instruction.

This list is so comprehensive that with a little rearrangement, and the addition of assessment and evaluation components, it could form the basis for a comprehensive curriculum model.

• TASK 45

What, in your opinion, would need to be added to the list for it to form the basis for a comprehensive curriculum model? (You might like to review the discussion on curriculum in 1.)

Long, who uses needs analysis as his point of departure, offers the following procedure for developing a task-based syllabus:

The purpose of a needs identification is to obtain information which will determine the content of a language teaching programme, i.e. to provide input for syllabus design.

Inventories of tasks that result from the type of analysis described above are necessary for this purpose, but insufficient.

They are only the raw data and must be manipulated in various ways before they are transformed into a syllabus usable in classroom teaching. The steps in this process are as follows:

- 1 Conduct a needs analysis to obtain an inventory of target tasks.
- 2 Classify the target tasks into task types.
- 3 From the task types, derive pedagogical tasks.
- 4 Select and sequence the pedagogical tasks to form a task syllabus.

(Long 1985: 91)

• TASK 46

In terms of the process-product orientation already discussed, in what way is Long's proposal different from that of Prabhu?

Long's final step raises the issue of grading, which, as we have seen, is one of the central steps in syllabus construction. Given our discussion on the concept of 'syllabus' in 1, it could be argued that any proposal failing to offer criteria for grading and sequencing can hardly claim to be a syllabus at all.

● TASK 47

What difficulties do you foresee in grading the tasks and activities in a task-based syllabus?

It is generally assumed that difficulty is the key factor in determining the ordering of items in a syllabus. All things being equal, items are presented to learners according to their degree of difficulty. The problem for the task-based syllabus designer is that a variety of factors will interact to determine task difficulty. In addition, as some of these factors will be dependent on characteristics of the learner, what is difficult for Learner A may not necessarily be difficult for Learner B.

● TASK 48

Suggest some of the factors which you think might have a bearing on task difficulty.

Most of the applied linguists who have explored the concept of communicative language teaching in general, and task-based syllabus design in particular, have addressed the issue of difficulty, although the factors they identify vary somewhat. They include the degree of contextual support provided to the learner, the cognitive difficulty of the task, the amount of assistance provided to the learner, the complexity of the language which the learner is required to process and produce, the psychological stress involved in carrying out the task, and the amount and type of background knowledge required. (We shall examine the issue of task difficulty in 4.7.)

The development of process and task-based syllabuses represents a change of focus rather than a revolution in syllabus design. Until fairly recently the preoccupation has been with the outcomes of instruction rather than with the pedagogic processes which are most likely to lead to these outcomes. While any comprehensive syllabus design will still need to specify outcomes, and to provide links between classroom processes and real-world communicative goals, they will also need to provide principles for selecting classroom learning tasks and activities. We shall look at this issue in greater detail in 5.

4.4 Content syllabuses

In 3 we saw that the content syllabus is yet another realization of the analytic approach to syllabus design. It differs from task-based syllabuses in that experiential content, which provides the point of departure for the syllabus, is usually derived from some fairly well-defined subject area. It might be other subjects in a school curriculum such as science or social studies, or specialist subject matter relating to an academic or technical field such as mechanical engineering, medicine, or computing.

Whether content syllabuses exemplify product or process syllabuses is a matter for conjecture. In fact, most of them would probably be located at the centre of the product/process continuum. I have included them in the discussion on process syllabuses because it seems that the best work being done in the area focuses on process rather than product. (See, for example, the work of Hutchinson and Waters (1983) in ESP.)

● TASK 40

What might be some of the advantages, as you see them, of adopting another subject area as the basis for syllabus design?

By selecting subject areas such as those just mentioned, the syllabus is given a logic and coherence which might be missing from analytic syllabuses which are little more than a random collection of tasks. In addition, the logic of the subject may provide a non-linguistic rationale for selecting and grading content.

In Australia, much of the teaching in adult ESL classes is content oriented. Syllabuses take as their **point** of departure the skills and knowledge which syllabus planners and teachers feel is important for new arrivals. Units of work thus appear with labels such as 'health', 'education', and 'social services'. While the relevance of this content might seem obvious, many learners are confused by content-oriented courses, thinking they have strayed into a settlement rather than a language programme. In such cases, it is important for teachers to negotiate with the learners and demonstrate the relationship between language and content.

In a recent publication, Mohan (1986) argues for content-based syllabuses on the grounds that they facilitate learning not merely *through* language but *with* language.

We cannot achieve this goal if we assume that language learning and subject-matter learning are totally separate and unrelated operations. Yet language and subject matter are still standardly considered in isolation from each other.

(Mohan 1986: iii)

Mohan develops a knowledge framework which can be used for organizing knowledge and learning activities. The knowledge framework consists of a specific, practical side and a general, theoretical side. The specific side is divided into description, sequence, and choice, while the general side is divided into classification, principles, and evaluation. It is suggested that any topic can be exploited in terms of these six categories, and that the knowledge structure of a topic is revealed through the following types of questions:

(A) *Specific practical aspects*

(particular examples, specific cases within the topic)

- 1 *Description* Who, what, where? What persons, materials, equipment, items, settings?
- 2 *Sequence* What happens? What happens next? What is the plot? What are the processes, procedures, or routines?
- 3 *Choice* What are the choices, conflicts, alternatives, dilemmas, decisions?

(B) *General theoretical aspects*

(What are the general concepts, principles, and values in the topic material?)

- 1 *Classification* What concepts apply? How are they related to each other?
- 2 *Principles* What principles are there? (cause-effect, means-end, methods and techniques, rules, norms, strategies?)
- 3 *Evaluation* What values and standards are appropriate? What counts as good or bad?

(Adapted from Mohan 1986: 36-7)

The knowledge framework is reflected in the classroom through activities, which Mohan calls 'combinations of action and theoretical understanding', and which are realized through action situations. Mohan claims that any action situation contains the elements listed in the knowledge framework; that is, description, sequence, and choice, along with the theoretical counterparts of classification, principles, and evaluation. The action situations can be presented to learners through the familiar pedagogical tools of picture sequences and dialogues.

■ TASK 50

Mohan's proposal is yet another example of an approach to language teaching in which the focus is on the development of language through classroom activities which are designed to promote cognitive skills. What parallels are there between Prabhu's process syllabus, and Mohan's content-based proposal?

Do you have any criticisms or reservations about Mohan's proposals?

in a recent review of Mohan's book, it is suggested that:

One basic problem is the author's assumption that the knowledge structures included in his organisational framework are indeed the relevant structures. What evidence is there that there are three, and only three, relevant practical knowledge structures? . . . a second assumption made in this approach to the integration of language and content is that moving from the practical to the theoretical is the direction most desirable for teaching and learning. Is this direction

best for all learners, or do some learn better when they begin from a theoretical base? The level of maturity of the learner, individual learning strategies and previous learning experience may play important roles in optimal sequencing.
(Perry 1987: 141)

4.5 The natural approach

The so called 'natural approach' has been most comprehensively described by Krashen and Terrell (1983). Like Long's task-based proposal, the principles underpinning the approach are claimed to be based on empirical research and can be summarized as follows:

- 1 The goal of the Natural Approach is communication skills.
- 2 Comprehension precedes production.
- 3 Production emerges (i.e. learners are not forced to respond).
- 4 Activities which promote subconscious acquisition rather than conscious learning are central.
- 5 The affective filter is lowered.

(After Krashen and Terrell 1983: 58)

- **TASK 51**

Do you disagree with any of these principles?

Consider the principles you do agree with: Do you think we need empirical evidence on these, or are they just common sense?

Do you think that Krashen and Terrell can legitimately claim authorship of principles such as 'develop communication skills'?

For which of the principles would you like to see firm evidence?

Krashen and Terrell develop a simple typology, claiming that most learning goals can be divided into one of two categories: basic personal communication skills and academic learning skills, and that these can be further subdivided into oral and written modes.

- **TASK 52**

How useful is this typology?

Can you think of learning goals which do not fit the typology?

Do you think that the approach might be more suited to basic personal communication skills or academic learning skills?

The authors of the approach claim that:

The Natural Approach is designed to develop basic personal communication skills — both oral and written. It was not developed

specifically to teach academic learning skills, although it appears reasonable to assume that a good basis in the former will lead to greater success in the latter.

(*Krashen and Terrell 1983: 67*)

● TASK 53

Just how reasonable is the assumption that the development of communication skills will facilitate the development of academic learning skills?

What view of language would seem to underly this assertion?

The basis of this approach seems to be the assumption that language consists of a single underlying psychological skill, and that developing the ability, say, to understand the radio will assist the learner to comprehend academic lectures. (You might, at this point, like to review our discussion on the nature of language in 2.2.)

Another major weakness in the approach taken by Krashen and Terrell is the assumption that learning takes place in a social vacuum, and that social aspects of the learning environment (in particular, the classroom) are irrelevant to what and how learners learn. Such an assumption has been questioned by Breen (1985) who suggests that:

HOW things are done and why they are done have particular psychological significance for the individual and for the group. The particular culture of a language class will socially act in certain ways, but these actions are extensions or manifestations of the psychology of the group. . What is significant for learners (and a teacher) in a classroom is not only their individual thinking and behaviour, nor, for instance, their longer-term mastery of a syllabus, but the day-to-day interpersonal rationalisation of what is to be done, why, and how.

(*Breen 1985: 149*)

4.6 Syllabus design and methodology

It would seem, with the development of process, task-based, and content syllabuses, that the traditional distinction between syllabus design (specifying the 'what') and methodology (specifying the 'how') has become blurred.

Widdowson takes a rather traditional line on this matter, suggesting that a *syllabus is the*

- . . specification of a teaching programme or pedagogic agenda which defines a particular subject for a particular group of learners.

Such a specification provides not only a characterization of content, the formalization in pedagogic terms of an area of knowledge or behaviour, but also arranges this content as a succession of interim objectives.

(Widdowson 1987: 65)

He further suggests that the two syllabus archetypes, structural and functional-notional, exhaust the possibilities for the syllabus designer. Both types assume certain methodological practices. The structural syllabus, 'will tend to promote activities which serve to internalize the formal properties of language' (op. cit.: 71). The danger of this type of syllabus is that learners may not be able to use their linguistic knowledge in actual communication. The functional-notional syllabus will promote activities which attempt to replicate in class 'real' communication. Classroom activities thus become a 'dress rehearsal' for real-life encounters.

● TASK 54

The danger of the 'dress rehearsal' methodology, according to Widdowson, is that learners may not be able to transfer what they have learned to new situations but will only be able to perform in the limited situations which they have rehearsed.

Do you agree or disagree with this view? What evidence do you have for your belief?

To what extent do you think learners can transfer functional skills from one situation or context to another? (Do you, for example, believe that someone who has learned to provide personal details in a job interview will also be able to provide details to a doctor's receptionist? Would such a person be able to provide personal details about their child to a teacher? Would they be able to ask for directions?)

How do these issues relate to the discussion in 2 on 'general' and 'specific' English?

Widdowson proposes the following methodological solution:

(the methodology) would engage the learners in problem-solving tasks as purposeful activities but without the rehearsal requirement that they should be realistic or 'authentic' as natural social behaviour. The process of solving such problems would involve a conscious and repeated reference to the formal properties of the language, not in the abstract dissociated from use, but as a necessary resource for the achievement of communicative outcomes.
(op. cita 71-2)

■ TASK 55

Compare this statement to those made by Prabhu, Long, and Krashen and Terrell.

What are the similarities and differences between the various proposals?

What are the implications of Widdowson's view for syllabus design?

■ TASK 56

Widdowson's view would seem to deny that process or task-based syllabuses, in which the 'how' and the 'what' are intertwined, are syllabuses at all.

Do you accept the dissociation of syllabus design issues from those of methodology?

Do you believe that process and task-based syllabuses represent legitimate approaches to syllabus design?

In contrast with Widdowson's view that process considerations belong to methodology, Breen claims that process considerations (i.e. the means rather than the ends) can properly be considered the province of syllabus design.

An alternative orientation would prioritize the route itself: a focusing upon the means towards the learning of a new language. Here the designer would give priority to the changing process of learning and the potential of the classroom — to the psychological and social resources applied to a new language by learners in the classroom context. One result of this change of focus would be that the syllabus could become a plan for the gradual creation of the real syllabus of the classroom, jointly and explicitly undertaken by teacher and learners. Such a plan would be about designing a syllabus and, therefore, a guide and servant for the map-making capacities of its users. Primarily it would be a plan for the activity of learning within the classroom group.

(Breen 1984: 52)

4.7 Grading tasks

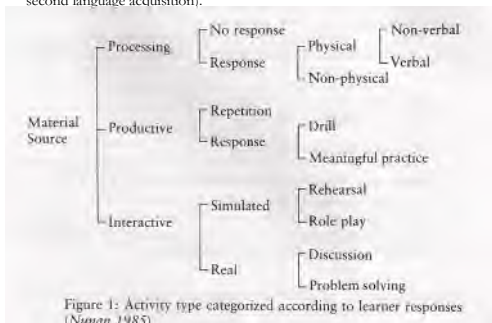
The issue of grading was touched upon in 4.3. Here we shall take a further look at the grading of elements in process syllabuses.

Standard texts on language teaching have tended to categorize classroom activities according to the demands they make on the learner. It has generally been assumed that the receptive skills of listening and reading make fewer demands than the productive skills of speaking and writing. Standard treatments of activity types, which are divided according to their

principal macroskill focus, can be found in Rivers (1968) and Chastain (1976). For a more comprehensive and contemporary treatment of speaking and listening, refer to Bygate: *Speaking* and Anderson and Lynch: *Listening* in this Scheme. Wright: *Roles of Teachers and Learners* also deals with task types and the sorts of language they stimulate.

The development of communicative language teaching with its focus on meaning has led to the use of more authentic materials. These, naturally enough, contain a range of linguistic structures, which has meant that grammatical criteria alone can not be used as a yardstick of difficulty.

Nunan (1985) presents a typology of activity types in which difficulty is determined by the cognitive and performance demands made upon the learner, i.e. activity type is categorized according to type of learner response (see Figure 1). The typology exploits the traditional comprehension/production distinction and adds an interaction element (recent classroom-based research suggests that interactive language use in which learners are required to negotiate meaning can stimulate processes of second language acquisition).



Using the typology, it is possible to take a given text or piece of source material such as dialogue, a map or chart, a radio weather report, a newspaper article, etc. and exploit it by devising activities at different levels of difficulty. At a basic level, with an aural text, learners might be required to respond non-verbally, by raising their hand every time a given key word is heard. Using the same text with much more advanced learners, the task might be to discuss and answer in small groups a set of questions requiring inferences to be derived from the text.

TASK 57

How comprehensive is this typology? Can you think of acti, types which are not covered?

How useful do you think the typology might be for grading tasks i process syllabus?

The following example illustrates the way in which a given text (in this c an aural text) is processed at increasing levels of sophistication follow the typology suggested by Nunan.

Material Source

Interview adapted from an authentic source

Interviewer: Have you got a family, Doris?

Doris: Family? Yeah, I've got a family all right. My father's alive: His name's Jack. He's still with us all right.

Interviewer: What about your husband?

Doris: Bert. That's my husband. That's him in the photo, thee,

Interviewer: I see. What about children?

Doris: Three, I've got three children. Two sons and a daughter. sons are Peter and Jack, and my daughter's called Nancy Nancy's the youngest — she's only eighteen.

Activities

Level 1: Processing

Response: physical, non-verbal

Pre-teach the words 'father', 'husband', 'sons', 'daughter'. Play the t Every time students hear these words they put up their hands.

Response: non-physical, non-verbal

Pre-teach the words 'father', 'husband', 'sons', 'daughter'. Students s, read the words on the grid. Play the tape. Every time students hear

father	
mother	
sons	
daughter	

Response: non-physical, non-verbal

Pre-teach the words 'father', 'husband', 'sons', 'daughter'.

Give the students a written gapped version of the text. Play the tape and get students to fill in the gaps.

Level 2: Productive

Repetition

Get students to listen and repeat.

- Cue: Have you got a family?
Have you got any children?
Have you got a son?
Have you got a daughter?

Response: drill

Get students to listen and complete.

- Cue: Have you got a family (any children)?
Response: Have you got any children?
Cue: a son
Response: Have you got a son?
Cue: a daughter
Response: Have you got a daughter?
Cue: an uncle
Response: Have you got an uncle?
etc.

Response: meaningful practice

Put students into pairs and get them to ask and answer questions using cue cards.

- A Have you got (a/an/any) _____) family/ children/ son
daughter/ uncle/ aunt/
niece/ nephew

Level 3: Interactive

Simulated: role-play

Give each student a role card which contains a persona and a family tree. Students have to circulate and find members of their family.

Real: discussion

Put students into small groups and ask them to take turns at describing their families using the structures already practised.

Real: problem solving

Students are given a blank family tree. They are split into three groups, and each group hears an incomplete description of the family. They work together to fill in their part of the family tree and then join with members of other groups to complete the family tree.

With ESP and content-based syllabuses, an obvious means of grading content is with reference to concepts associated with the subject in question. In subjects involving science and mathematics, there are certain concepts which should logically precede others. Whether in fact such conceptual grading is appropriate for second language learners is another matter, and one which will probably vary from subject to subject. It will also depend on the extent to which the learner is familiar with the subject.

In Mohan's knowledge framework, task difficulty is determined by cognitive complexity. On the specific practical side, tasks which focus on description are simpler than those involving sequence, and these, in turn, are simpler than tasks involving choice. On the corresponding theoretical side, classification is simpler than the identification of principles, which is simpler than evaluation.

Brown and Yule (1983) devote considerable attention to task difficulty. They suggest that listening tasks can be graded with reference to speaker, intended listener, and content.

When listening to a tape, the fewer the speakers, the easier the text will be to follow. Following one speaker will be easier than following two, following two will be easier than following three, and so on. According to Brown and Yule, even native speakers have difficulty following a taped conversation which involves four or more participants.

In relation to the intended listener, they suggest that texts, particularly 'authentic' texts which are not addressed to the listener, may be boring to the learner and therefore difficult to process. They go on to state that:

. . . it is, in principle, not possible to find material which would interest everyone. It follows that the emphasis should be moved from attempting to provide intrinsically interesting materials, which we have just claimed is generally impossible, to doing interesting things with materials . . . these materials should be chosen, not so much on the basis of their own interest, but for what they can be used to do.

(Brown and Yule 1983: 83)

In considering content, they confess that surprisingly little is known about what constitutes 'difficult' content. The problem here, as Nunan (1984) demonstrates, is that there is an interaction between the linguistic difficulty of a text and the amount of background knowledge which the listener or reader is able to exploit in comprehending the text.

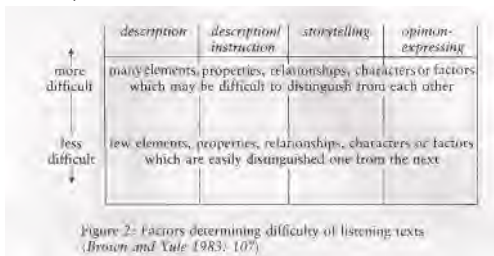
In summary- then, a listening text which involves more than one speaker, which is not addressed to the listener, and in which the topic is unfamiliar to the listener will be more difficult to comprehend than a monologue on a familiar topic which is addressed to the listener.

In relation to speaking tasks, Brown and Yule suggest that:

Taking short turns is generally easier than long turns. Talking to a familiar, sympathetic individual is less demanding than talking to an unfamiliar, uninvolved individual or group. Something one knows about and has well-organised in memory is naturally easier to talk about than a new topic or experience which has little internal organisation in itself.

(op. cit.: 107)

In addition, the text type will have an effect on difficulty. According to Brown and Yule, straight descriptions will be easier than instructions, which will be easier than storytelling. Providing and justifying opinions will be the most difficult. Also, within each genre, the number of elements, properties, relationships, and characters will also have an effect on difficulty, as is demonstrated in Figure 2.



Gandhn. (1987) offers the following factors as likely to be significant in determining difficulty:

- *cognitive load* (the complexity of the mental operation to be carried out; for instance Candlin suggests that tasks which require learners to follow a clear chronological sequence will be easier than a task in which there is no such clear development)
- *communicative stress* (the stress caused by the context, which will be determined by such things as the learner's knowledge of the subject at hand and relationship with the other individuals taking part in the interaction)
- *particularity and generalizability* (the extent to which the tasks follow a universal or stereotyped pattern)
- *code complexity and interpretive density* (the complexity of the language particularly in terms of the sorts of processing constraints described by SLA researchers and the extent to which the learners are required to interpret what they hear or read)
- *content continuity* (the extent to which the content relates to the real-world interests or needs of the learners)
- *process continuity* (the coherence, continuity, and interrelatedness of tasks)

Long suggests that tasks requiring a one-way transfer of information should precede those requiring a two-way exchange, that convergent tasks

should precede divergent ones, that tasks in the 'here and now' should precede ones involving displaced time and space, and that intellectual content should be a factor in grading tasks (Long 1987).

One of the most comprehensive treatments of listening task difficulty is that offered by Anderson and Lynch : *Listening* in this Scheme. They identify a range of factors which influence difficulty. These can be attributed either to *the listener, the listening material, or the task. The following factors have been extracted from their book (you are referred to the original for a com*

- the sequence in which information is presented
- the familiarity of the listener with the topic
- the explicitness of the information contained in the text
- the type of input
- *the type and scope of the task - to be carried out*
- the amount of support provided to the listener

● TASK 58

Review the work of Anderson and Lynch, Brown and Yule, Candlin, Long, Nunan, and Mohan presented in 4 and create your own list of all those factors likely to affect the difficulty of a task.

4.8 Conclusion

We have looked at proposals which focus on learning processes rather than on the end products of these processes. This does not mean that all such syllabuses do not, at some stage, include a specification of what learners should be able to do as a result of instruction. However, if and when grammatical, functional, and notional elements are considered, this happens as a second-order activity.

With the adoption of procedural, task-based, content-based, and other non-linguistic approaches to syllabus design, the distinction between syllabus design and methodology becomes blurred. We shall explore in greater detail the relationship between syllabus design and methodology in 5.

5 Objectives

5.1 Introduction

It may come as some surprise to those familiar with the theory and practice of syllabus planning to find that we are only now getting around to discussing objectives. I have postponed consideration of objectives until after the discussion of process-oriented and product-oriented syllabuses because the issues raised in those discussions are of particular relevance here. This does not mean that I am advocating the specification of content before the specification of objectives. Whether one moves from a specification of objectives to content and activities or the other way round will depend on the type of syllabus being developed, and the role which the objectives are made to play. In the so-called 'rational' curriculum process (Tyler 1949), objectives are specified before content and activities because their principal role is to act as a guide to the selection of the other elements in the curriculum. As we shall see, in the more interactive approaches to curriculum and syllabus design which have replaced the 'rational' approach, objectives can be useful, not only to guide the selection of structures, functions, notions, tasks, and so on, but also to provide a sharper focus for teachers, to give learners a clear idea of what they can expect from a language programme, to help in developing means of assessment and evaluation, and so on.

In 2, we looked at some of the starting points in syllabus design and at the relationship between learner purpose and syllabus goals.

Goal statements are relatively imprecise. While they can act as general signposts, they need to be fleshed out in order to provide information for course and programme planners. This can be achieved through the specification of objectives. In 5, we shall see that there is no conflict or opposition between objectives, linguistic and experiential content, and learning activities. In fact, objectives are really nothing more than a particular way of formulating or stating content and activities.

5.2 Types of objectives

The term 'objective' is a loaded one which has caused a lot of debate within the educational community. There is disagreement about the nature of objectives and also about the precision with which they should be formulated. Some curriculum specialists maintain that no sound instruc-

tional system could possibly hope to emerge from a syllabus in which content is not stated in the form of objectives. Others argue that the process of specifying content in terms of objectives leads to the trivialization of that content. There are, of course, different types of objective, and some of the controversy surrounding their use could well be a result of a lack of clarity about just what is meant by the term itself.

■ TASK 59

Study the following lists of objectives and see if you can identify what distinguishes one list from another.

List 1

- to complete the first ten units of *The Cambridge English Course*
- to teach the difference between the present perfect and the simple past tenses
- to provide learners with the opportunity of comprehending authentic language

List 2

- Students will take part in a role play between a shopkeeper and a customer.
- Students will read a simplified version of a newspaper article and answer comprehension questions on the content.
- Students will complete the pattern practice exercise on page 48 of *Elementary English Usage*.

List 3

- Learners will obtain information on train departure times from a railway information office.
- Learners will provide personal details to a government official in a formal interview.
- Learners will listen to and comprehend the main points in a radio news bulletin.

In 1, the curriculum model of Tyler (1949) was referred to briefly. Tyler's model is based on the use of objectives, and his book was very influential in promoting their use. Tyler suggested that there were four ways of stating objectives:

- 1 specify the things that the teacher or instructor is to do
- 2 specify course content (topics, concepts, generalizations, etc.)
- 3 specify generalized patterns of behaviour (e.g. 'to develop critical thinking')
- 4 specify the kinds of behaviour which learners will be able to exhibit after instruction

■ TASK 60

Which of these ways of stating objectives do you think is likely to be most useful? Why?

What criticisms, if any, would you make of the other methods?

Can you think of any other methods of stating objectives?

Tyler criticized the specification of objectives in terms of what the teacher is to do on the grounds that teacher activity is not the ultimate purpose of an educational programme. He also regarded the listing of content as unsatisfactory because such lists give no indication of what learners are to do with such content. While he felt that the third alternative was on the right track in that it focused on student behaviour, he felt that the specification was rather vague. He therefore suggested that the preferred method of stating objectives was in terms of what the learner should be able to do as a result of instruction. The statement should be so clear and precise that an independent observer could recognize such behaviour if he saw it.

Other proponents of an 'objectives approach' to language syllabus design argue that specifying objectives in terms of teacher activity could result in courses in which the objectives are achieved but the learners learn nothing and that, with objectives specified in terms of classroom activities, the rationale is not always clear (in other words, the links between the instructional goals and the classroom objectives are not always explicit).

5.3 Performance objectives in language teaching

Objectives which specify what learners should do as a result of instruction are sometimes called 'performance objectives'. A good deal has been written for and against the use of such objectives.

In 1972, a book on the use of performance objectives in language teaching was published by Valette and Disick. In the book, arguments similar to those already outlined are advanced for the use of an objectives approach to syllabus design. In particular, it emphasizes the importance of stating objectives in terms of student rather than teacher behaviour, and of specifying input rather than output.

■ TASK 61

Complete the following tasks which have been adapted from Valette and Disick (1972: 12).

The following are examples of either student or teacher behaviours. Identify the four student behaviours by marking S next to them.

- 1 to present rules of subject-verb agreement
2 to explain the differences between singular and plural pronouns

- 3 to write answers to questions on a reading selection
- 4 to model the pronunciation of dialogue sentences
- 5 to repeat after the speakers on a tape
- 6 to mark whether a statement heard is true or false
- 7 to introduce cultural material into the lesson
- 8 to review the numbers from one to a hundred
- 9 to describe in German a picture cut from a magazine

The following are examples of student input and output behaviours. Write an 0 next to the four output behaviours.

- 1 to pay attention in class
- 2 to recite a dialogue from memory
- 3 to study Lesson Twelve
- 4 to learn the rules for the agreement of the past participle
- 5 to look at foreign magazines
- 6 to attend a make-up lab period
- 7 to write a brief composition about a picture
- 8 to read a paragraph aloud with no mistakes
- 9 to watch a film on Spain
- 10 to answer questions about a taped conversation

Most syllabus planners who advocate the use of performance objectives suggest that they should contain three components. The first of these, the performance component, describes what the learner is to be able to do, the second, the conditions component, specifies the conditions under which the learner will perform, and the final component, the standards component, indicates how well the learner is to perform. As an example, consider the following three-part performance objective:

In a classroom simulation, learners will exchange personal details. All utterances will be comprehensible to someone unused to dealing with non-native speakers.

The different components of the objective are as follows:

Performance: exchange personal details

Conditions: in a classroom simulation

Standard: all utterances to be comprehensible to someone unused to dealing with non-native speakers.

■ TASK 62

Indicate the performance, conditions, and standards in the following performance objectives:

- 1 Working in pairs, learners will provide enough information for their partner to draw their family tree. Enough information will be provided for a three-generation family tree to be drawn.
- 2 Students will extract and record estimated minimum and

maximum temperatures from a taped radio weather forecast. Four of the six regions covered by the forecast must be accurately recorded.

- 3 While watching a videotaped conversation between two native speakers, identify the various topics discussed and the points at which the topics are changed. All topics and change points are to be identified.

The specification of conditions and standards leads to greater precision in objective setting, and also facilitates the grading of objectives (objectives can be made easier or more difficult by modifying conditions and standards). However, formal four-part objectives can become unwieldy, with a course spawning many more objectives than a teacher could hope to teach (Macdonald-Ross 1975). One way of overcoming this problem is to specify conditions and standards for sets of objectives rather than for each individual objective.

■ TASK 63

What do you see as the advantages for language syllabus design of specifying objectives in performance terms?

We have already considered some of the advantages of specifying objectives in performance terms. Mager (1975), an influential proponent of performance objectives, sees them as curriculum 'signposts' which indicate our destination. He rather acidly asks how we are to know when we have reached our destination if we do not know where we are going. (A counter-question might be: 'How do we know where we are, when we end up somewhere other than our pre-specified destination?')

Gronlund (1981) argues that the effort to specify objectives in performance terms forces us to be realistic about what it is feasible to achieve, and that they greatly facilitate student assessment. In relation to this second argument, he points out the difficulty of writing a test if we do not know what it is that we wish our learners to be able to do as a result of instruction.

Other arguments in favour of objectives include their value in enabling teachers to convey to students the pedagogic intentions of a course. (Mager and Clark (1963) carried out an experiment in which students who knew where they were heading learned much faster than students who had not been provided with course objectives.) Their value in assisting with other aspects of course planning such as the selection of materials and learning objectives has also been pointed out.

In recent years, learner-centred approaches to language syllabus design have become popular. In such approaches, the learner is involved, as far as possible and feasible, in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum. This involvement is felt to increase the interest and

motivation of the learners. It is also felt to be a particularly effective way of developing the learners' learning skills by fostering a reflective attitude toward the learning process (see, for example, Candlin's (1987) list of desirable characteristics of learning tasks in 4.3).

Advocates of a learner-centred approach to education believe that, at the very least, learners should be fully informed about any course of study they are undertaking. Information (in the learner's home language where necessary) can be provided in a number of forms. It can, for instance, be provided in the form of a specification of course content. One advantage of *the provision of information in the form of performance objectives is that these are generally couched in terms to which the learner can relate*. If asked why he is attending a language course, a learner is more likely to reply that he wants to be able 'to understand the news on television', or 'to obtain goods and services as a tourist in the target country' than 'to master the distinction between the present perfect and simple past' or 'to use the article system appropriately'.

Proponents of learner-centred approaches to curriculum development also argue for the pedagogic benefits of training learners to set their own objectives (see, for example, Candlin and Edelhoff 1982; Nunan and Brindley 1986). In this context, Brindley (1984) suggests that:

Setting learning objectives serves a number of useful purposes: it enables the teacher to evaluate what has been learned since terminal behaviour is always defined in terms which are measurable; it means that learners (provided they have participated in the process of setting objectives) know what they are supposed to be learning and what is expected of them; it provides a constant means of feedback and on-going evaluation for both teacher and learner; and it provides 'a way of beginning the individualisation of instruction' (Steiner 1975) since learners can set their own standards of performance and evaluate how well these standards have been attained.

(Brindley 1984: 35)

TASK 64

Make a list of the various arguments in favour of an objectives approach as described here.

Which of these arguments do you find most/least convincing?

From your experience, how feasible do you think it is to teach learners to set their own objectives?

What type of learner is most likely to benefit from such an exercise?

What type of learner is least likely to benefit?

5.4 Criticizing performance objectives

Rowntree (1981), a persuasive advocate of objectives during the 1970s, has more recently accepted that there are many ways other than the objectives approach of providing a rationale for a programme or course, and that what may suit one teacher, subject, situation, or strident group may be inappropriate to another. His more moderate stance has been prompted by the realization that the setting of objectives is boils time-consuming and extremely difficult for many teachers. Shavelson and Stern (1981) also cite evidence suggesting that most teachers simply do not seem to think in terms of objective setting. Despite the difficulties involved, Rowntree asserts that:

I certainly believe that objectives must be considered at some stage of course planning. If they are not themselves used as the means for arriving at course content, then they can provide a powerful tool for analysing and elaborating content arrived at by other means.

(Rowntree 1981: 35)

The following lists provide arguments for and against the use of performance objectives.

List A — Arguments against the use of performance objectives

- 1 It is easiest to write objectives for trivial learning behaviours, therefore the really important outcomes of education will be under-emphasized.
- 2 Pre-specifying explicit objectives prevents the teacher from taking advantage of instructional opportunities unexpectedly occurring in the classroom.
- 3 There are important educational outcomes such as changing community values, parental attitudes) besides pupil behaviour changes.
- 4 There is something dehumanizing about an approach which implies behaviour which can be objectively measured.
- 5 It is undemocratic to plan in advance precisely how the learner should behave after instruction.
- 6 Teachers rarely specify their goals in terms of measurable learner behaviour.
- 7 In certain subject areas such as the humanities it is more difficult to identify measurable learner behaviour.
- 8 If most educational goals were stated precisely-, they would generally be revealed as innocuous.
- 9 Measurability implies accountability: teachers might be judged solely on their ability to produce results in learners.

List B — Arguments countering those in List A

- 1 While opportunism is welcome, it should always be justified in terms of its contribution to the attainment of worthwhile objectives.
- 2 Sophisticated measuring instruments are being developed to assess many complicated human behaviours in a refined fashion.
- 3 Teachers should be taught how to specify objectives.

- 4 Much of what is taught in schools is indefensible.
- 5 Teachers should be assessed on their ability to bring about desirable changes in learners.
- 6 Certain subject specialists need to work harder than others to identify appropriate learner behaviours.
- 7 It is undemocratic not to let a learner know what he is going to get out of the educational system.
- 8 All modifications in personnel or external agencies should be justified in terms of their contribution towards the promotion of desired pupil behaviours.
- 9 Explicit objectives make it far easier for educators to attend to important instructional outcomes by exposing the trivial which is often lurking below the high-flow.

■ TASK 65

Match the arguments from List A with the counter arguments from List B. (Both lists have been compiled from a variety of sources which are summarized in Stenhouse 1975: 72-7.)

These arguments were formulated in the context of general education, and those who advanced the arguments were not thinking specifically of language teaching. Stenhouse himself thought that language teaching was one area which could benefit from performance objectives.

To what extent do you think they are relevant to the teaching of languages?

During the 1970s, Raths sought principles for the selection of content which were not dependent on the prior specification of objectives. He came up with the following list.

- 1 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it permits children to make informed choices in carrying out the activity and to reflect on the consequences of their choices.
- 2 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it assigns to students active roles in the learning situation rather than passive ones.
- 3 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it asks students to engage in enquiry into ideas, applications of intellectual processes, or current problems, either personal or social.
- 4 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it involves children with realia.
- 5 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile

- than another if completion of the activity may be accomplished successfully by children at several different levels of ability.
- 6 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it asks students to examine in a new setting an idea, an application of an intellectual process, or a current problem which has been previously studied.
 - 7 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it requires students to examine topics or issues that citizens in our society do not normally examine — and that are typically ignored by the major communication media in the nation.
 - 8 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it involves students and faculty members in 'risk' taking— not a risk of life or limb, but a risk of success or failure.
 - 9 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it requires students to rewrite, rehearse, and polish their initial effort.
 - 10 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it involves students in the application and mastery of meaningful rules, standards, or disciplines.
 - 11 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it gives students a chance to share the planning, the carrying out of a plan, or the results of an activity with others.
 - 12 All other things being equal, one activity is more worthwhile than another if it is relevant to the expressed purposes of the students.
- (Raths 1971, cited in Stenhouse 1975: 86-7)*

■ TASK 66

To what extent do you think this list represents an alternative to the use of objectives in specifying content?

The list was written within a general educational context. Do you think the list is applicable to language teaching?

Are some of the criteria on the list more useful than others in your view?

Can you specify these? (Alternatively, you might like to rank the criteria from most to least applicable.)

5.5 Process and product objectives

A distinction which is not always observed by curriculum specialists is that between real-world objectives and pedagogic objectives. (See also the

discussion in 4 on the distinction between real-world and pedagogic tasks.) A real-world objective describes a task which learners might wish to carry out outside the classroom, while a pedagogic objective is one which describes a task which the learner might be required to carry out inside the classroom. Examples of both types of objective follow.

Real-world objective

In a shop, supermarket, or department store, learners will ask for the price of a given item or items. Questions will be comprehensible to shop assistants who are unused to dealing with non-native speakers.

Pedagogic objective

The learner will listen to a conversation between a shopper and a shop assistant and will identify which of three shopping lists belongs to the shopper in question.

■ TASK 67

What is the difference between these two objectives?

Rewrite the real-world objective as a pedagogic objective.

Another distinction which needs to be observed is between objectives which describe what learners will be able to do as a result of instruction (product objectives) and those which describe activities designed to develop the skills needed to carry out the product objectives (these might be called process objectives).

In 2, we considered the example of the motor mechanic undertaking study in connection with his trade, who might need, among other things, to follow a lecture on the structure and function of carburettors. A 'product' objective for a course for motor mechanics might read as follows:

The learner will demonstrate his knowledge of the parts of a carburettor by listening to a five-minute lecture on the subject and labelling a diagram. All parts to be correctly labelled.

A major problem with such objectives is that they give no guidance as to how the objective is to be achieved. On the one hand, the teacher might make learners perform the terminal task repeatedly in class until they are able to perform it with the required degree of skill. On the other hand, the teacher may wish to focus on activities which do not attempt to replicate in class the terminal performance, but which are designed to develop the receptive and interpretative skills which might be assumed to underlie the ability to comprehend lectures of the type described above.

Process objectives differ from product objectives in that they describe, not what learners will do as a result of instruction, but the experiences that the learner will undergo in the classroom. These experiences will not necessarily involve the in-class rehearsal of final performance, although

they may do so. The form that the objective takes will reveal the attitude of the syllabus designer towards the nature of language and language learning.

■ TASK 68

Study the objectives that follow. What do they reveal about their authors' beliefs on the nature of language and language learning?

What are the similarities and/or differences between these objectives and the real-world and pedagogic objectives already described? (Is there, in fact, a difference, or are real-world objectives the same thing as product objectives, and pedagogic objectives the same thing as process objectives?)

1 Students will study the picture sequence in the student's book and ask and answer *wit-* questions regarding location and time.

(Adapted from Hobbs 1986: 27a)

2 Students will study a railway timetable and solve a series of problems relating to departure and arrival times of specified train services.

(Adapted from Prabhu 1987: 32)

The specifications of process and product objectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. One type specifies the means, the other the ends. It could be argued that any comprehensive syllabus needs to specify both process and product objectives.

■ TASK 69

Can you think of any teaching contexts in which it would be unnecessary to specify product objectives?

Which type of objective is likely to be most useful to you as a classroom teacher?

5.6 Conclusion

In 5 we have explored the issue of objectives-setting in syllabus design, focusing in particular on performance objectives. Some of the arguments for and against an objectives approach were taken from general educational theory and presented within a language teaching context. In the final part of 5, a distinction was drawn between process and product objectives. In Section Two, we shall see how *these ideas have been applied*.

SECTION TWO

Demonstrating syllabus design

6 Needs and goals

6.1 Introduction

In 6 we shall look at some of the ways in which the concepts and processes introduced in 2 have been applied.

6.2 Needs analysis

In 2 we saw that needs analysis refers to a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design.

The following sets of data, extracted and adapted from Munby (1978) show the sorts of information which can be collected through needs analysis.

Student A

Participant Thirty-five-year-old Spanish-speaking male. Present command of English very elementary. Very elementary command of Germ..

Purposive domain Occupational—to facilitate duties as head waiter and relief receptionist in hotel.

Setting Restaurant and reception area in Spanish tourist hotel. Non-intellectual, semi-aesthetic public psycho-social setting.

Interaction Principally with customers, hotel residents, and reservation seekers.

Instrumentality Spoken and written, productive and receptive language. Face-to-face and telephone encounters.

Dialect Understand and produce standard English; understand Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American.

Communicative event Head waiter attending to customers in restaurant; receptionist dealing with residents'customers' enquiries/reservations, answering correspondence on room reservations.

Communicative key Official to member of the public, server to customer. Formal, courteous.

Student B

Participant Twenty-year-old Venezuelan male. Elementary command of target language. No other languages.

Purposive domain Educational—to study agriculture and cattle breeding.

Setting Educational institution in Venezuela. Intellectual, quasi-professional psycho-social setting.

Interaction Principally with teachers and other students.

Instrumentality Spoken and written, receptive and productive. Face-to-face and print channels.

Dialect Understand and produce Standard English dialect, understand General American and RP accent.

Communicative event Reference material in English, reading current literature, taking English lessons to develop ability to understand agricultural science material.

Communicative key Learner to instructor.

■ TASK 70

How useful do you think these data might be for syllabus design? Which information might be most useful in syllabus design and how might it be used?

Do the participants have anything in common?

If these students were studying at the same language centre, *would* be possible for them to share part of a language programme?

Would the *Munby* approach lead to process-oriented or product-oriented syllabuses? Can you explain your conclusion?

Here is a rather different set of data.

Name: (Deleted)
Age: 26
Time in target country: 18 months
Nationality: Vietnamese
Education: Completed primary education
Occupation: Dressmaker
Proficiency: Elementary
Communicative needs: Basic oral communication skills; form filling; numerables; reading signs and short public notices
L1 Resources: Family; home tutor
Learning goals: Communicate with parents of children's friends
Preferred learning activities: Traditional, teacher-directed classroom instruction
Availability: 2-3 x week (mornings only)
Motivation: Brought in by family
Price: Average

(Adapted from Nunan and Burton 1985)

■ TASK 71

In what ways does the information provided here differ from that provided in the **Munhy** data?

Which do you think might be **more useful**? Why?

When might the information contained in the table be collected? By whom?

Which of this information might usefully be collected by teachers working in an institution with a set syllabus?

How might the information be used to modify aspects of the syllabus?

What additional information, if any, would you want to collect?

Here are some additional data extracted from the same source.

Name: (Deleted)
Age: 62
Time in target country: 12 years
Nationality: Russian
Education: Completed primary education
Occupation: Home duties
Proficiency: Beginner
Communicative needs: Basic oral communication skills; wants to understand radio and TV; wants to learn vocabulary and grammar; has difficulty with Roman script
L1 Resources: Grammar books; magazines
Learning goals: Wants to mix with native speakers
Preferred learning activities: Traditional, teacher-directed classroom instruction
Availability: Mornings
Motivation: Referred by family doctor
Pace: Slow

(Adapted from Nunan and Burton, 1985)

■ TASK 72

In what ways is this second learner **similar** to or **different** from the first learner?

Are there enough similarities for both learners to be placed in the same programme?

In designing or adapting a syllabus for this learner, which information would you utilize and which would you ignore?

Which data do you think a syllabus designer with a produce orientation might focus on?

Which data do you think a syllabus designer with a process orientation might focus on? What additional data might such a person require?

In 2, a distinction was drawn between 'objective' and 'subjective' information. We saw that subjective information reflects the perceptions and priorities of the learner on what should be taught and how it should be taught. Such information often reveals learning-style preferences by the learner.

In a major study of learning-style preferences among adult second language learners, Willing (1988) asked 517 learners to rate a series of statements according to how accurately they reflected the learners' own attitudes and preferences. (Interpreters were used where necessary.) Learners were asked to respond according to the following key: 1 = 'No'; 2 = 'A little'; 3 = 'Good'; 4 = 'Best'. The statements to which they were asked to respond are as follows (the statements are ranked here from (1) most to (30) least

1 I like to practise the sounds and pronunciation.	1 2 3 4
2 I like the teacher to tell me all my mistakes.	1 2 3 4
3 In class, I like to learn by conversations.	1 2 3 4
4 I like the teacher to explain everything to us.	1 2 3 4
5 I like to learn many new words.	1 2 3 4
6 I like to learn by talking to friends in English.	1 2 3 4
7 I like to learn by watching, listening to native speakers.	1 2 3 4
8 I like to learn English words by hearing them.	1 2 3 4
9 I like to learn English words by seeing them.	1 2 3 4
10 I like the teacher to help me talk about my interests.	1 2 3 4
11 I like to learn English in small groups.	1 2 3 4
12 I like to learn English words by doing something.	1 2 3 4
13 I like to study grammar.	1 2 3 4
14 At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.	1 2 3 4
15 I like to have my own textbook.	1 2 3 4
16 I like to learn by using English in shops/trains . . .	1 2 3 4
17 I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.	1 2 3 4
18 I like to go out with the class and practise English.	1 2 3 4
19 At home, I like to learn by studying English books.	1 2 3 4
20 In English class, I like to learn by reading.	1 2 3 4
21 I want to write everything in my notebook.	1 2 3 4
22 In class, I like to listen to and use cassettes.	1 2 3 4
23 I like the teacher to let me find my mistakes.	1 2 3 4
24 At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers, etc. 1 2 3 4	
25 In class, I like to learn by pictures, films, video.	1 2 3 4
26 I like to learn English with the whole class.	1 2 3 4
27 At home, I like to learn by using cassettes.	1 2 3 4
28 I like to learn English by talking in pairs.	1 2 3 4
29 In class, I like to learn by games.	1 2 3 4
30 I like to study English by myself.	1 2 3 4

● TASK 73

Which of this information do you think would be most useful, and which least useful in developing a programme for the learners who were surveyed?

What are some of the ways the most useful information might be used in syllabus design?

Which of the statements are designed to obtain information about (1) what they want to learn ;2) how they want to learn.

In general, do these learners seem to favour (1) a traditional (2) a communicative (3) an eclectic or 'mixed' approach to instruction?

The learners who were surveyed strongly disliked games and pair work. What would you do if your syllabus were heavily biased toward the use of games and pair work, and you found yourself with students such as these?

In what ways does the distinction between objective and subjective needs analysis parallel that between product-oriented and process-oriented syllabus design?

6.3 From needs to goals

As we saw in 2, goals come in many shapes and forms. They can refer to cognitive and affective aspects of the learner's development, what the teacher hopes to achieve in the classroom, what the teacher hopes the learners will achieve in the classroom, the real-world communicative tasks the learners should be able to perform as a result of instruction, and so on.

Product-oriented goals can be derived directly from the learners themselves, that is, by asking the learners why they are learning the language. Alternatively, they can be derived by syllabus designers through a process of introspecting on the sorts of communicative purposes for which language is used. These can either relate to a restricted domain (as in ESP) or to the more general purposes for which language is used. The lists of functional items developed by people such as Wilkins and van Ek were the result of attempts to describe and categorize all the different things that users of a language might want to do with that language.

In considering needs and goals, we should keep in mind that the teacher's syllabus and the learner's syllabus or 'agenda' might differ. One of the purposes of subjective needs analysis is to involve learners and teachers in exchanging information so that the agendas of the teacher and the learner may be more closely aligned. This can happen in two ways. In the first place, information provided by learners can be used to guide the selection of content and learning activities. Secondly, by providing learners with detailed information about goals, objectives, and learning activities,

learners may come to have a greater appreciation and acceptance of the learning experience they are undertaking or about to undertake. It may be that learners have different goals from those of the teacher simply because they have not been informed in any meaningful way what the teacher's goals are.

Some of the purposes which learners, teachers, and syllabus planners in the Australian Adult Migrant Education Program have articulated are as follows:

- to develop skills in learning how to learn
- to develop the skills necessary to take part in academic study
- to develop an appreciation of the target society and culture
- to develop sufficient oral and written skills to obtain a promotion from unskilled worker to site supervisor
- to communicate socially with members of the target or host community
- to develop the survival skills necessary to function in the host community
- to establish and maintain social relationships
- to be able to read and appreciate the literature of the target culture
- to comprehend items of news and information on current affairs from the electronic media.

■ TASK 74

To what extent do you think it possible for information such as this to be used to modify a syllabus which has been set by an outside authority?

Would it be possible to develop a common syllabus to meet all of the communicative needs incorporated in the above statements?

If not, what are some of the syllabus elements which might be similar, and which might be different?

Which of the statements could be accommodated by a single syllabus?

For those goals aimed at learners who were at roughly the same proficiency level, it might be possible to identify certain common elements, particularly in terms of grammar and common core vocabulary items. It is in the specification of experiential content (topics, themes, situations, and so on) that differences might occur. The macroskill focus might also vary, with some students wishing to focus on the development of literacy skills and others wishing to concentrate on the development of listening and/or speaking skills.

If learners were at a similar proficiency level, the following purposes could probably be covered by a single syllabus:

- to communicate socially with members of the target or host community
- to develop the survival skills necessary to function in the host community
- to establish and maintain social relationships.

■ TASK 75

Suggest a goal statement which could cover these three learning purposes.

The following nine general communicative goals were developed as part of a curriculum for students learning second and foreign languages at the school level. The goals were not derived directly from learners, but from analysis carried out by syllabus planners, experienced teachers, and educational authorities.

Instruction should enable learners to:

- 1 participate in conversation related to the pursuit of common activities with others
- 2 obtain goods and services through conversation or correspondence
- 3 establish and maintain relationships through exchanging information, ideas, opinions, attitudes, feelings, experiences, and plans
- 4 make social arrangements, solve problems, and come to conclusions together
- 5 discuss topics of interest
- 6 search for specific information for a given purpose, process it, and use it in some way
- 7 listen to or read information, process it, and use it in some way
- 8 give information in spoken or written form on the basis of personal experience
- 9 listen to, or read or view, a story, poem, play, feature, etc., and respond to it personally in some way.

These have been adapted from the Australian Language Levels (ALL) Project. For a detailed description of the project, see Clark (1987: 186-237).

■ TASK 76

To what extent do these statements represent the sorts of things which learners might wish to do in real life?

How comprehensive is the list?

Are there any omissions or areas of overlap?

Match the ALL Project goal statements with the units from *The Cambridge English Course, Book 1*.

Map of Book 1*

In Unit	Students will learn to	Students will learn to talk about
1	Ask and give names, ask and ask about (if) names, people, and jobs.	Names.
2	Ask, tell, identify, and identify: ask about and give personal information.	Time, age.
3	Describe people and places.	Family relationships.
4	Describe places, give complementary expressions, identify, explain and describe information.	Geography: countries, cities, etc.
5	Describe: location and time, make and answer telephone calls.	Time: duration, frequency, etc.
6	Describe: likes and dislikes in terms of food and drinks, including preferences.	Food and drinks.
7	Ask and give personal information.	Food and drink: describing quantities.
8	Ask for and give directions and ask for time, physical and emotional states.	Directions: way and time.
9	Express: opinion of certainty, like and dislike.	Like and dislike: how much you like and dislike.
10	Describe: points, compass directions, give complementary words and phrases.	Compass: points of the day, counting (numbers).
11	Use: directions to give location, directions.	Points of direction.
12	Ask for and give directions.	Personal history: differences (between past and present), health, etc.
13	Make and question: ask, give, and answer: direct information.	Shopping: shopping.
14	Use: personal information.	Analysis: comparing quantities and differences.
15	Ask for and give information, compare.	Change: history.
16	Ask for and give: compare: information, personal information, questions.	Change: a different type, comparison: problems, possible types, etc.
17	Use: personal information, compare: information, information, information.	Food: restaurant, different types (quality), health, quantity, etc.
18	Express: opinion: like and dislike.	Language: personal history and state: health, change, quantity and frequency.
19	Use: make, ask, and give information and information.	Work: history: going out.
20	Identify: information, identify: personal information, and make information.	Meeting: frequency: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
21	Ask for and give: personal information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
22	Describe: points and give personal information, use: information, information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
23	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
24	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
25	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
26	Use: information and information, make: information, information and information, information, information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
27	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
28	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
29	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
30	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
31	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.
32	Use: information and information.	Personal history: frequency: duration: being in, being out.

*The map of this curriculum is available to the students in the student book.

(Swan and Walter 1984: iv)

How comprehensive is the above list of tasks?

Were there any units which could not be matched with tasks?

The following goals were extracted from a syllabus for foreign as opposed to second language learners of English.

- 1 To contribute to the intellectual, personal, and vocational development of the individual.
- 2 To develop and maintain a sense of confidence and self-worth.
- 3 To acquire the competence to use English in real-life situations for the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships and to take part in interpersonal encounters through the sharing of factual and attitudinal information.
- 4 To develop communicative skills in order to acquire, record, and use information from a variety of aural and written sources.
- 5 To develop mastery over the English language as a linguistic system and to have some knowledge of how it works at the levels of phonology, morphology, and syntax.
- 6 To increase, through a common language, the possibility of understanding, friendship, and co-operation with people who speak English.
- 7 To be able to exploit one's knowledge of English to better inform the world of one's people and their concerns, and to be able to participate more actively and effectively in English in the international arena.
- 8 To foster the development of critical thinking skills and the development of learning skills so that students can continue their education beyond the school setting.
- 9 To develop the skills and attitudes to listen to, read, and write English for creative and imaginative purposes.

(Adapted from Nunan, Tyacke, and Walton 1987: 26)

■ TASK 77

What are the similarities and differences between this set of statements and the ALL Project goals?

Which goals relate to a product-oriented view of syllabus design and which to a process-oriented view?

Is this list more or less process-oriented than the ALL Project goals?

■ TASK 78

Study this final set of goal statements.

Participation in learning arrangements should assist learners to develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and confidence to:

- 1 obtain factual and attitudinal information from visual and print media and to use this information for a variety of purposes

- 2 interact with others for transactional purposes (i.e. to obtain goods, services, and information)
- 3 develop and maintain interpersonal relationships through the sharing of factual and attitudinal information (e.g. ideas, opinions, feelings, etc.)
- 4 provide information to others in written form
- 5 understand the social and cultural nature of living in the target culture
- 6 develop insights into English as a linguistic system
- 7 identify their own preferred learning styles and develop skills in 'learning how to learn'
- 8 continue learning independently once they have left the pro.

For what context do you think these goals have been derived (e.g. foreign or second language learning; adults or children; general or specific purpose syllabuses)?

Which goals relate to language products and which to learning processes?

6.4 Conclusion

In 6 we have looked at applications of some of the ideas and concepts introduced in 2. We have looked in particular at examples of needs analysis procedures and syllabus goals. From these examples, it can be seen that needs and goals can be analysed according to their orientation on the process/product continuum.