

## 1.5. Content and Sequencing

# in language teaching → **syllabus design**

*practical sense* → an actual plan for a course, that is, the choice and sequencing of instructional content

*theoretical sense* → a specific way to conceptualize what language is and how language is learned so that materials can be selected or prepared

# overall: syllabus is a general statement as to the pedagogical arrangement of learning content:

*horizontal curriculum* → what is studied within one level, and

*vertical curriculum* → what is studied across levels

### 1.5.1. Contrasting pairs of syllabuses

**Product- vs. process-oriented**

**product-oriented**

# learning is supposed to result in a product – a set of knowledge and skills (e.g., a list of grammatical structures; a list of functions; etc.)

# they may look very dissimilar from each other, but the basis for each does not vary, since the focus is still on objectives to be achieved

# the direction of development:

Objectives >> Content >> Methodology

choosing learning experiences which will lead to mastery of the linguistic content

# determined in advance of teaching → a priori syllabuses

# implication >> focus on learning content is such that it fails to prepare learners for real-life communication

**process-oriented**

# focus on processes through which knowledge and skills might be gained → specification of the tasks and activities that learners will engage in in class

# an example is negotiated syllabuses → teacher and the learners working together to make decisions at many parts of the curriculum, e.g., purposes, content, ways of working, evaluation

# interest in negotiated syllabuses arises from

humanistic methodologies

needs analysis

work in individualization and learner autonomy

learner strategy research

# situations where a negotiated syllabus is almost unavoidable:

- the teacher and students have different backgrounds
- time is short and the most useful choices must be made
- there is a very diverse group of students and there is a need to find common ground
- etc.

## # criticisms:

- lack of knowledge or experience with such a syllabus
- assumes a high level of competence in both teachers and learners
- implies a redefinition of role relationships and a redistribution of power and authority
- needs a range of materials and learning resources
- does not attach much importance to syllabus construction

**Synthetic vs. analytic syllabuses (Wilkins)****Synthetic – linguistic content**

# language system is analyzed into building blocks and presented to language learner one by one

# language that is mastered in one unit of learning is added to that which has been acquired in the preceding units

# learners synthesize these discrete pieces of language into a whole and use in communicative situations (Kumaravadevelu: get “the totality of language”)

**Analytic – non-linguistic content**

# starting point not linguistic content but experiential content, e.g., projects, tasks, situations, topics, themes or academic subjects → organized in terms of

the purposes for which people learn the language

the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet those purposes

# provides opportunities for language learners to encounter the target language naturally in communicative interaction

# units of language teaching material are based on behavioral metalanguage → non-linguistic base, e.g., in CBI the focus is on context text and the language applied in the text

# the assumption is that the learners’ analytic abilities will be equal to the task of discerning regularities in the input and to induce rules, since little may be explicitly explained about the formal aspects of language

**Type A vs. type B syllabuses (White)**

Type A: What is to be learnt?	Type B: How is it to be learnt?
- Determined by authority = interventionist = external to the learner = other directed = doing things to the learner	- Negotiated between learners and authority = non-interventionist = internal to the learner = inner directed = doing things with the learner
- Objectives defined in advance	- Objectives described afterwards
- Content = what the subject is to the expert	- Content = what the subject is to the learner
- Content = a gift from the teacher to the learner	- Content = what the learner brings and wants
- Product-oriented	- Process-oriented
- Assessment by achievement or mastery	- Assessment in relation to learners’ criteria

Type A → reconstructionist synthetic syllabus ;; focuses on *what* is to be learned: the L2

Type B → progressivist analytic syllabus ;; focuses on *how* learning can be brought about through:

learner-centeredness (emphasis on psychological aspect)

learning-centeredness (emphasis on the types of activities– pedagogical aspect)

### 1.5.2. Types of syllabus

# syllabuses are organized around units of analysis or units of progression → used to grade the progress of the course

# types:

those that progress in a definite series, e.g., vocabulary

those that represent a field of knowledge that could be covered in any order, e.g., topics

# purposes:

(a) to set targets

(b) to check the adequacy of selection and ordering

(c) to monitor and report on learners' progress and achievement

#### *Grammatical syllabus*

selection of content is not a major problem, but sequencing is:

complexity – regularity – productivity

#### *Lexical syllabus*

criteria for selecting vocabulary:

frequency, teachability, similarity, availability, coverage, defining power

#### *Notional-functional syllabus*

Notional categories: semantico-grammatical categories

*Point of time* → adverbs (e.g., yesterday, on Monday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, last month)  
time clauses (e.g., When I came back, by six o'clock)

*Duration* → reference to inception or termination (e.g., until 6 o'clock, since noon)  
lexical constructions (e.g., all the day, this week)  
clausal construction (e.g., she stayed until before the clock struck one)

*Frequency* → adverbs of frequency  
time expression (e.g., on Mondays, on the first Friday of each month)  
embedded expressions (e.g., Whenever it looks like raining, I go ...)

#### *Situational syllabus*

three types of situational syllabus:

**limbo situation** → the specific setting of the situation is of little or no importance, e.g. "introductions" at a party

**concrete situation** → the situations are enacted against specific settings, e.g. "ordering a meal"

**mythical situation** → depends on some sort of fictional story line, frequently with a fictional cast of characters in a fictional place

### ***Content-based instruction (CBI) & content and language integrated learning (CLIL)***

# CBI → content is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct effort to teach the language separately from the content

# CLIL → content is incidental and serves merely as the vehicle for practicing language structures, functions, or skills

### ***Competency-based syllabus***

# competencies are a description of the essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for effective task performance

# used in adult education ESL programs, e.g., social survival and work-oriented language programs for immigrants and refugees (e.g., *housing, food, health, social services, law*).

# competences are somewhat independent of a more general language ability

# efficiency and relevance of instruction (to learners' felt needs) are major strengths

### ***Skills-based syllabus***

# based on the belief that learning a complex activity such as "listening to a lecture and jotting down the main ideas" involves mastery of a number of micro-skills that together make up the activity

# major ways of defining sub-skills:

- look at the range of activities covered by a skill and use these as a starting point for defining subskills, e.g., speaking → interactional & transactional (monologue, dialogue, etc.)
- look at the skill as a process and to divide it into the parts of the process, e.g., process writing
- use levels of cognitive activity, e.g., Bloom's taxonomy
  - **Knowledge:** exhibit memory of previously learned material by recalling facts, *Can you name the...?*
  - **Comprehension:** demonstrate understanding of facts by organizing, comparing, paraphrasing, or summarizing main ideas, e.g., *Can you write a brief outline...?*
  - **Application:** able to solve problems in new situations by applying acquired knowledge and rules in a different way, e.g., *What factors would you change if...?*
  - **Analysis:** able to break information into components as well as make inferences, e.g., *What do you see as other possible outcomes?*
  - **Synthesis:** able to compile information in a different way by combining elements in a new pattern or proposing alternative solutions, e.g., *Can you create new and unusual uses for...?*
  - **Evaluation:** able to present and defend opinions by making judgments about information, e.g., *Is there a better solution to...?*

### ***Procedural syllabus***

# a precursor of the task-based syllabus – Bangalore Project (Prabhu, 1980)

# teaching *through* communication rather than teaching *for* communication → teaching should be concerned with creating conditions for coping with meaning → learners are involved in doing a set of tasks → analytic

# example:

*Draw a line, from left to right.*

Write **b** at the right end of the line, and **a** at the left end.  
 Draw another line below **ab**.  
 Write **d** at its left and **c** at its right end.  
 Join **bd**.

### Task-based syllabus

# task criteria:

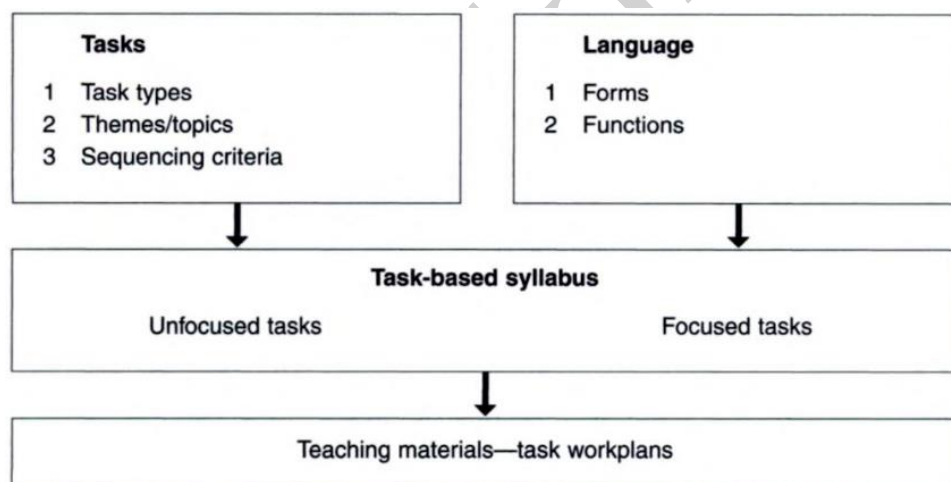
- focus should be on *meaning*
- some kind of *gap*
- learners rely on their own resources (linguistic and nonlinguistic) to complete the activity
- a clearly defined *outcome* other than the use of language

# learners treat the language as a *tool* for achieving a communicative outcome rather than as an *object* to be studied, analyzed and displayed → they receive comprehensible input and deliver modified output

# two types of tasks:

**Unfocused tasks** → no attempt to specify the linguistic content to be taught

**Focused tasks** → aim is to induce learners to process some particular linguistic features, e.g., consciousness-raising tasks



# task types:

**Pedagogical tasks** → involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, or producing in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning

**Real-world tasks** → designed to practice or rehearse tasks that are found to be important in a needs analysis and turn out to be important and useful in the real world

### Genre-based syllabus

# analysis of the contexts in which the learners will use the language → identification of the texts → develop units of work

# another example is involving learners in analyzing texts

### 1.5.3. Multi-component (= integrated) syllabus

# syllabuses are based on a combination of two or more of the types:

a 'primary' (macro-level) and a 'secondary' (micro-level)

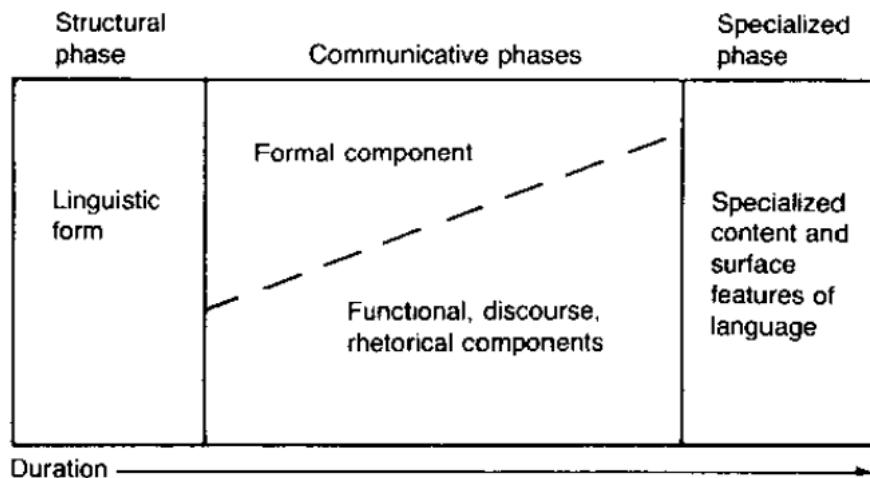
# proportional syllabus (Yalden, 1987) offers a close interweaving of structural and non-systematic elements:

formal meaning - knowledge of the systematic side of language

communicative work in oral language

rhetorical functions, especially in written language

recurrently troublesome surface features of language



### 1.5.4. Sequencing the content in a course

#### 1.5.4.1. Linear approaches to sequencing

# the material in one lesson depends on the learning that has occurred in previous lessons → how to sequence objectives

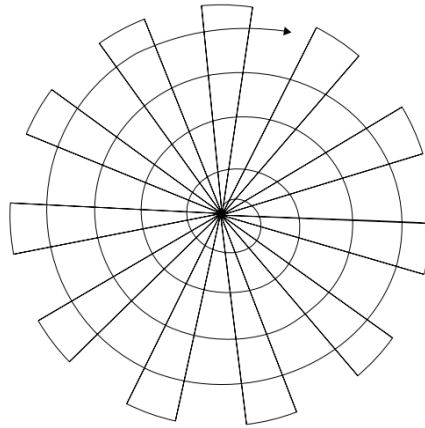
# material is dealt with once, presumably *mastered* by the students, and never directly taken up again

# weakness:

- ⊗ absenteeism
- ⊗ different styles and speeds of learning
- ⊗ recycling material

**Spiral curriculum** (Bruner, 1962) → deciding on the major items to cover → covering them several times over a period of time at increasing levels of detail

- ⊙ ensures the full value of the most important aspects of the language are dealt with



**Matrix model** → similar to a spiral curriculum ≠ the change when meeting old material again is one of diversity rather than complexity

# one unit of progression is systematically varied against another, so that the same items are met with different contexts

	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4
Item 1	Lesson 1	Lesson 2	Lesson 3	Lesson 4
Item 2	Lesson 5	Lesson 6	Lesson 7	Lesson 8
Item 3	Lesson 9	Lesson 10	Lesson 11	Lesson 12
Item 4	Lesson 13	Lesson 14	Lesson 15	Lesson 16

**Revision units** → at certain points in the linear progression, time is spent revising previously met material, e.g., supplementary readers

# the relative amount of time given to revision should increase as the course progresses

New	Old	New	Old	Old	New	Old	Old
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↪ The revision unit model matches Brumfit's (1985) syllabus with holes

**Field approach** → it involves:

- (1) deciding what items need to be covered i.e. make up the field,
- (2) providing a variety of opportunities to meet these items,
- (3) checking that each important item will be met sufficient times.

#### 1.5.4.2. A modular approach to sequencing

# breaks a course into independent non-linear units = each unit is complete in itself and does not assume knowledge of previous modules

# Ellis (2003): a parallel syllabus approach for task-based language courses:

*communicative module* → linguistically unfocused tasks: it provides message-centered activity

*code-based module* → a checklist of linguistic features that are potentially difficult for learners to learn