

ESSENTIALS AND ISSUES IN LANGUAGE SYLLABUS DESIGN

J. Anene NWANKWEGU

jeremiah.nwankwegu@ebsu.edu.ng

Department of Languages and Linguistics
Ebonyi State University, (EBSU), Abakaliki, Nigeria

Abstract

Several distinct types of language teaching syllabi that may be implemented in various teaching situations exist. This paper attempts to critically inquire into these different existing syllabi with the view to examining their contents and merits in the faces of some essentials and issues considered imperative in syllabus design. Each syllabus type is presented and critically examined. It is a significant underlying proposal of this paper that syllables must be flexible, practical and possible to be designed and implemented and since it is rare for one type of syllabus or content to be used exclusively in actual teaching setting, it is therefore suggested that syllabi should combine contents of different types of syllabi in more or less integrated ways.

1.0 Introduction

The choice of a syllabus is a major decision in language teaching and as such, needs to be made as consciously and with adequate information as possible. Regrettably, oftentimes, teachers and relevant language teaching authorities lack adequate and necessary information to make this all-important decision.

A well-designed syllabus, featuring strong and achievable learning objectives, is the key to a successful language teaching. A complete and engaging syllabus represents both a contract

and an instructional roadmap outlining what students are expected to know and be able to do as a result of having participated in the course. However, according to Gannon (2018), a syllabus is more than just a checklist or collection of policies and procedures. Therefore, approaching syllabus as analogous to a contract, as has become popular in higher education is not the best way to create an effective syllabus (Gannon 2018). In what follow, we will provide a number of types of syllabi while discussing the question that shape an effective language teaching and learning activities.

Some of the central issues in the design of an effective syllabus include the development of course objectives, how to organize course content, how to design appropriate learning activities and their sequences and the elements of successful assessment and evaluation. Also very central to syllabus design are the concepts of **forms of specification** i.e. what types of items described and in what depth; **coverage** of the language representative of the target discourse setting; **bankruptcy** of some types of syllabus; **high and low surrender value** concerning the type and order of items in a syllabus; **accessibility and audience**, bordering on who the syllabus is written for; **accountability** - to sponsors, future employers, testers and **generative capacity** - how far will the learner be able to build on what he/she has learnt and redeploy it to suit their own circumstances? We may only be able to deal with all these in depth here, because a detailed treatise demands a work of much wider scope than this.

1.1 What is a Syllabus?

To promote a better understanding, it seems of great importance to begin a discourse of this nature with a clear definition of the major key term – syllabus. Apart from providing us with the actual meaning, a clear definition will also provide us the aspects and dimensions of language teaching to which a syllabus is related. In fact, the unique and even proper definition and elaboration on the concept of syllabus pose many challenges. For example, as

Far (2008) points out, during the recent years, the focus of syllabuses has shifted away from structure to situations, functions and notions to topics and tasks. This has posed more than a few theoretical squabbles to linguists generally and has put teachers, particularly, into confusion. In connection with these shifts in focus, as Nunan (1988) highlights, obviously, “the traditional distinction between syllabus design and methodology has become blurred” (Far, 2008:1). Accordingly, though it is a bit difficult to describe a syllabus, it seems possible to make an attempt to define it, at least, in an understandable way. How should we define a syllabus?

Rabbini (n.d) describes a syllabus as an expression of opinion on the nature of language and learning which acts as a guide for both the teacher and the learner by providing some goals to be attained. Hutchison and Waters (1987:80) define syllabus as “a statement of what is to be learnt.” As Rabbini observes, this is a rather traditional interpretation of syllabus focusing, as it does, on outcomes rather than process. He points out that a syllabus, however, can also be seen in the light of Yalden (1987:87) as a “summary of the content to which learners will be exposed.” Syllabus is seen as the appropriation of what will be taught but which cannot accurately predict what will be learnt. In Wilkin’s (1981) view, syllabuses are “specifications of the content of language teaching which have been submitted to some degree of structuring or ordering with the aim of making teaching and learning a more effective process.” A syllabus, according to Breen (1984:48), can also be seen as “a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students’ learning.” Its function is “to specify what is to be taught and in what order” (Prebhu, 1984:273).

Candlin (1984) presents a different perspective to the concept of syllabus. He implies that syllabuses are “social constructions, produced interdependently in classrooms by teachers and learners.” They are concerned with the specification and planning of what is to be learned, frequently set down in some written form as prescriptions for action by teachers and learners”

(see Far, 2008:1). Graves (1996:3) adopts White's (1988) definition: "A syllabus will be defined narrowly as the specification and ordering of content of a course or courses." We can go on and on, but finally, in as simple words as Far (2008) puts it, a language teaching syllabus involves the combination of the subject matter (what to teach) and linguistic matter (how to teach). It actually functions as a guide for both teacher and learner by providing some goals to be accomplished. In fact, syllabus deals with linguistic theory and theories of language learning and how they are utilized in the classroom. Since, therefore, according to Far (2008), the design of a syllabus depends upon what is taught and in what order, the theory of language basic to the language teaching methodology plays a paramount role in choosing what syllabus is needed to be adopted. As we have noted earlier on, the choice of a syllabus is a key decision in language teaching and therefore, should be made carefully with adequate, reliable and authentic information.

1.2 Syllabus versus Curriculum

Pertinent to this discourse is the need to distinguish between syllabus and curriculum which are often misconstrued as same. Curriculum is, in fact, according to Wikipedia (2009) the set of courses, and their content, offered at a school or university. It is a broad specification and prescription of all the activities in which the students should engage in a school. It is important to note that a curriculum may be partly or entirely determined by an external, authoritative body – say, the Federal Government (Ministry of Education), the state ministry of education etc. On the other hand, a syllabus is subject-specific. This is to say that whereas curriculum embodies the totality of content to be taught, and sets a target to be realized within a school or a school system, a syllabus specifies subject matters and the order of teaching an individual course or subject. We may say that the curriculum is for the school/s while the syllabus is for the class.

1.3 Syllabus Design versus Methodology

Skelton and Willis (n.d) take our minds to a particular problem in contemporary syllabus design – the problem of differentiating between syllabus design and methodology, a task that is probably necessary to undertake at the level of broad outline. It is futile and frustrating if the attempt is made to delve into minutiae. Roughly, one would want to say that syllabus design is concerned with the content of what gets taught and the organisation of this (into bits of grammar, or functions, while Methodology is concerned with the “how.” This, however, is a question that is best not to be considered too closely. It is disingenuous in the extreme to suppose that the “what” of teaching is put together without reference to the “how”; contemporary syllabuses are almost always designed with a particular – generally broadly communicative – methodology in mind. And scholars have muddied the waters still further by misappropriating the word “communicative”, which ought to be a matter of methodology but is commonly used to refer to syllabus design (Skelton and Willis, n.d)

2.0 Syllabus Design and Types

Knowing the essentials and the basics of how to design a syllabus for a course of study or series of textbooks is an essential teaching skill which can have a profound effect on how well materials are applied in the classroom. In this section, we will provide some modest guides on how to design different need-oriented syllabuses/syllabi that are adaptive to learners/classroom or institutional need.

Wilkins (1976) makes a broad distinction of syllabus types. He distinguishes between *analytic* and *synthetic* principles of organization. According to McDonough (2002:1), “analytic referred to syllabuses in which the learners are presented with real useable language and to a certain extent, induce the grammatical abstractions themselves.” Of synthetic he also writes: “Synthetic referred to syllabuses that present grammatical items in isolation leaving the learner to put them together incrementally to form useable language.” As he rightly points

out, some methods deliberately leave long term learning plans to be decided by the participants, as in Counseling Learning and the Silent Way.

In line with our underlying proposal, we reiterate that a syllabus need not be a complicated affair. It should simply aim at ensuring that materials are organized into manageable ‘chunks’ while at the same time catering for opportunities to review, apply project and reading, and facilitate time to apply assessment/tests. The idea of a syllabus to many teachers and or institutes is the calculation of the number of pages in the recommended text and dividing them by the number of teaching days in a term/semester. The effort of the teacher in a case like this is to cover the number of pages that need to be covered in one lesson. Of course, a syllabus, this may be called, but far less than all there are to be importantly considered in designing a syllabus.

In syllabus design some important questions that border on the essentials of a syllabus need to be asked by the teacher or syllabus designer. Some important questions that address some basic issues in syllabus design are:

- i. What parts of the course content or text-material are worthy or in need of more attention and time than others?
- ii. How can an organization of the material create both a rhythm and a routine that can apply to any given period of study?
- iii. How much sufficient time does the syllabus allow for the learners to engage in more production-based activities, such as project and task-based learning?
- iv. How can the syllabus be designed in such a way that a new teacher (or indeed, a student’s parent) could glance at it and get a quick overview of what is going to form the focus of any given lesson as well as what was studied over the course of a given period in the past?

- v. How can the syllabus be designed so that a relief teacher can walk into the classroom and know what to do with the class and how (based on the sort of languages areas and activities the students have already covered)?

The above questions boil down to the most important one:

- vi. What are the needs of the students and the possible contents of the syllabus?

In answering this last question, other problems emerge. Skelton and Willis (n.d) outline four of such problems as follows:

- What we want the students to learn. (What we assume could be their need) could be extremely varied;
- Some of the things we want them to learn are easy to articulate;
- Others are not; the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of learning are intimately, and perhaps inextricably, bound up;
- Our formulation assumes that we do indeed want a pre-established list of things to be learned.

All these form the basic questions every language teacher and/or syllabus designer must bear in mind. We will try to pay attention to all these questions/issues as we proceed. Let us begin by looking at what these pre-established lists of things might consist of and giving some overviews of the ways in which people have attempted to classify and organize them.

3.0 How to Specify Contents of a Language Syllabus

Graves (1996:12-25) categorizes possible syllabus content using a syllabus grid which she built up gradually. A similar but slightly more systematic attempt at an overview is to be found in Robinson (1991:35). Willis (Forthcoming) summarizes major approaches to syllabus design, making an explicit distinction between discrete items and holistic modes, and looking at focus and conduct for each. Ours here, however, is to provide some considerations and or

practical steps required of the language teacher and language textbook writer in making a choice or design of language syllabus.

3.1 Syllabus Choice and Design

Nowadays, one is unlikely to find a course book or indeed a course that uses only one of the forms of specification. But more often than not, even in the "Multi-syllabus" Course books, there will be one or two major organising factors, such as grammar and/or functions, with topics selected to illustrate the grammatical or functional items. Other features like lexis, phonology, and skills practice are often subservient to the main strands and are built in along the way.

Prabhu (1987), by contrast, bases his syllabus on sets of tasks, each set grouped around a specific topic, such as school timetables or journeys. This is an example of a totally holistic approach: his syllabus contains no overt itemistic linguistic specifications at all; words, meanings and patterns arise naturally out of the topic and task and are supplied or explained by the teacher when needed, in the same way as a subject teacher would. Yalden (1987), in her "Proportional" syllabus, takes discrete item structures as an initial starting point, then gradually introduces tasks. Conversely, one could instead take as a starting point, a set of simple tasks that are built around the use of known words or cognates, and from this lead on to the study of naturally occurring phrases and grammatical patterns - for examples, see Willis (1996: 119-123).

Mohan's recommended starting point for ESL learners is topic and content (Mohan (1986) described briefly in Nunan (1988:49-51)). Each topic is exploited systematically within a given framework leading to the production of language teaching materials. All these approaches have a rationale behind them which stems from what we knew or now

know about the 'how' of learning - revealing some truth in the problem statement –of how's and why's – in 1.2 above, which we will not go further into details here.

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3.2 Some Practical Guidelines to Choosing/Designing Syllabus

It is clear that no single type of content is appropriate for all teaching settings, as the needs and conditions of each setting are so idiosyncratic that specific recommendations for combination are not possible. In addition, the process of designing and implementing an actual syllabus warrants a separate treatise. Several books are available that address the process of syllabus design and implementation both practically and theoretically (see the references at the end of this paper). These sources can help language course designers make decisions for their own programmes. However, provided below is a set of guidelines for the process:

3.2.1 Ten steps in preparing a practical language teaching syllabus (Adapted from Skelton and Willis, n.d)

1. Determine, to the extent possible, what outcomes are desired for the students in the instructional programme, i.e. as exactly and realistically as possible, define what the students should be able to do as a result of the instruction.
2. Rank the syllabus types presented here as to their likelihood of leading to the outcomes desired. Several rankings may be necessary if outcomes are complex.

3. Evaluate available resources in expertise (for teaching, needs analysis, materials choice and production, etc.), in materials, and in training for teachers.
4. Rank the syllabi relative to available resources. That is, determine what syllabus types would be the easiest to implement given available resources.
5. Compare the lists made under Nos. 2 and 4, making as few adjustments to the earlier list as possible, produce a new ranking based on the resources' constraints.
6. Repeat the process, taking into account the constraints contributed by teacher and student factors described earlier.
7. Determine a final ranking, taking into account all the information produced by the earlier steps.
8. Designate one or two syllabus types as dominant and one or two as secondary.
9. Review the question of combination or integration of syllabus types and determine how combinations will be achieved and in what proportion.
10. Translate decisions into actual teaching units.

In making practical decisions about syllabus design, one must take into consideration all the possible factors that might affect the teachability of a particular syllabus. By starting with an examination of each syllabus type, tailoring the choice and integration of the different types according to local needs, one may find a principled and practical solution to the problem of appropriateness and effectiveness in syllabus design

There are dangers, then, with a 'prescriptive' approach to grammar teaching, but many people feel that it is still possible and useful to specify language syllabuses, at least in part, in terms of grammar. (You may like to consult some materials which touch on the themes of prescriptive and pedagogic grammars for clearer understanding). Of course, very few syllabuses these days are grammatical or exclusively grammatical: in fact no syllabus laying claim to modernity could be merely grammatical, as is shown by the rise

in the popularity of the "multi-syllabus" course book mentioned earlier, whose tables of contents include several other types of constituents.

There is, though, a further point here. The significant thing about a grammatical inventory is its accessibility. The technical terms are there, the facility is there, the psychological preparedness is there - teachers and learners alike believe in the possibility of grammatical analysis and item-based learning (despite what language acquisition researchers say). It can, therefore, often be articulated with ease, and with shared understanding. We may not know, particularly if we are the product of very different cultures, whether we share an understanding of the function "expressing dissatisfaction" (Council of Europe (1975) as reported in White 1988) or of "rational expositions" to name one of Wilkins' "categories of communicative function" Wilkins (1976). We all know the English past tense form when we see it. Thus the grammatical inventory is extremely tempting - to teachers, testers and course designers (as well as learners) because it is seemingly so accessible.

Another popular feature of the structural syllabus is that it is, supposedly, generative. Having learnt paradigms and pattern sentences, learners are in a position to use this knowledge to generate their own sentences to express their own meanings. Under what conditions this actually happens is another matter (there are instances of students who have spent five years at school learning a foreign language, have 'done' all the grammar but who are incapable of generating anything original), but the potential is there, given the right conditions. (These are summarised in Willis 1996 10-19).

However, the fact of the matter is that a structural syllabus appears, finally, to be bankrupt. If we base our syllabuses on pedagogic descriptions, there isn't, as it were, that much grammar to learn: and we have all the experience of our students running out of new bits of grammar to be taught before they have begun to master what they already know. Hence, according to

Skelton and Willis (n.d), the sterility of so much ostensibly "advanced" language teaching round the world, where students are locked into a perpetual cycle of grammatical revision because no-one can think of anything else to do. And in fact, grammar points become more and more arcane, and less and less cost-effective. The concept of bankruptcy, then, is a key concept in syllabus design and, therefore, needs to be put into serious consideration when designing a syllabus.

So what happens, one may logically ask, to advanced learners? Or indeed, to any learners who have only a short time to learn a foreign language? One suggestion is that they follow an itemised inventory which is not grammatical. So what other alternatives have been proposed? And how far would they be suitable for such learners? Answers to these questions are provided below.

3.2.2 The Notional-Functional Syllabus

The notional-functional syllabus is a semantically-based syllabus, which appeared as the first major alternative to be developed. Wilkins (1976) sought to identify the meanings that learners might need to express (the notions) and the communicative acts they would wish to engage in (the functions). Initially, this seems a far better way of organising a syllabus. Learning how to order for a meal, how to ask your way around town is obviously useful; this type of syllabus has 'high surrender value' in that even if you leave the course after one year, or even one term, you can still use what you have learnt in practical situations. This is in contrast with the traditional grammatical syllabus, where the past tense is often ignored until Year Two, and hypothetical uses of 'would' - a word more common than 'do' and 'does' - appear even later. Learners need to complete the whole course before they are able to do very much at all with the language, hence the notion of such a syllabus being of 'low surrender value' (*Surrender value is a metaphor taken from the language of Life Insurance Policy Sales talk; the initial costs of a policy are high, so if you cash it in (surrender it) after only a few*

years, it's worth very little and you lose out.)

The notional-functional syllabus seemed a very sensible idea at the time. Even Wilkins himself admitted that there are problems in defining and specifying such a syllabus - due to the enormous complexity of the task of planning the conceptual content of language syllabuses in this way (cf. Dubin and Olshtain (1986: 88-92), Nunan (1988: 36-37) and Willis (1990: 44-45)).

Besides, as Skelton and Willis (n.d) note, the notional/functional syllabus, like the grammatical syllabus, also risks becoming exhausted at a relatively early stage, and likewise succumbing to bankruptcy. Just as there is evidence in some grammatical syllabuses of more and more *recherché* points being hunted down and served up to the baffled student in a way that is no longer cost-effective, so there is a risk in the notional/functional approach of more and more elaborate confections (e.g. "I was wondering if I might possibly trouble you to" as an extra polite formal request) struggling into brief and etiolated life in order to fill an empty space on the timetable.

Another problem associated with the notional functional syllabus (see Skelton and Willis n.d) is that it is often taught using a phrase-book approach which, in itself, is not generative. If you know the phrase for the situation you are in, you are OK, but for anything more complex, if you don't have your 'kit of grammatical rules' (to adapt a phrase and a concept from Widdowson 1989:135) that allows you to combine phrases and generate new meanings, you are sunk. So, the lack of generative ability can be a problem with a notional/functional syllabus, especially if it is used on its own and with a 'presentation' style methodology.

3.2.3 The Relational Syllabus

One syllabus type not named explicitly in any of the overviews above is the relational syllabus - as proposed by Crombie (1985) and reported briefly in White (1988:78). This is

based on items such as "notional relations such as cause-effect, or discourse relations, such as question-reply, or clause structure...." White (ibid). To our knowledge, however, the relational syllabus has not yet been put into practice - at least not in a published format. A relational syllabus, like grammatical and notional/functional syllabuses, would seem only to account for certain parts of the total linguistic system. There are whole areas that it would not "cover". Let us digress for a moment on to the key concept of coverage - which is a vital one as far as syllabus design is concerned. Just what proportion of the language of the target discourse community will be accounted for by a particular type of syllabus? If we want to design a syllabus that really will prepare our learners to cope with the English they will meet in the world outside their classroom, we need to ensure that its coverage is adequate and well balanced.

3.2.4 The Lexical Syllabus

The lexical syllabus attempts to redress this problem of coverage. A lexical syllabus can be derived from a detailed analysis (normally these days done mainly by the computer) of a carefully selected corpus of language that reflects - as far as possible - the language of the target discourse community. This could of course be a specialist or general corpus. The analysis can offer the syllabus designer lists of the most frequent words, their meanings and information about their typical grammatical and lexical environments, i.e. the collocations and patterns that words occur in. So a lexical syllabus includes grammar, (which is identified through the common words that make up common patternings), expressions of notions and functions (and much more besides) but the organising principle is lexical, and as such it can account for a far higher proportion of text and offer a more thorough coverage of the language of the target discourse situation than other syllabus types (Skelton and Willis, n.d).

That is not all. Another benefit of a lexical syllabus - with its inventory of words with their collocations, meanings and typical patterns - is that it is clear, unambiguous and accessible - everybody can recognise what a word is, and its phrases and patterns are fairly easily identifiable. But there is one big problem - if properly exemplified, a lexical syllabus would run to at least half a page per word, indeed far more for the common words with their many uses. Most of the 700 most frequent words (which would seem a reasonable target for a 120 hour course) have at least 3 different meanings, making an inventory of 2100 items. And you only need to take a look at the entries for some of the very common words, like of, thing, or take in a Learner's dictionary to understand the potential length and size of such a syllabus. And who – apart, perhaps from a serious text-book writer - is going to study a syllabus of, say, 350 pages?

So much, then, for discrete item linguistic inventories, which are referred to by White (1988) as 'Type A syllabuses' and by Nunan (1988) as 'Product syllabuses'. (You may wish to expand your knowledge on these; consult some basic readings that will help you flesh out these ideas and introduce other relevant concepts). At this juncture, permit us to add a note about itemised syllabuses and methodology here. Lexical syllabuses, along with other language based syllabuses described above, are indeed specified in an itemised way, but we are not saying that they (or for that matter any itemised syllabus) need to be taught one item at a time in an additive way.

3.2.5 Other Syllabus Types

In this section we will introduce briefly some other syllabus types. Some, like the content syllabus, are more common in the USA, where there is a larger proportion of Second Language learners than in the UK.

3.2.6 A Content-Based Syllabus

With content-based instruction, learners are helped to acquire language through the study of a series of relevant topics. Each topic is exploited in systematic ways and from different angles, as outlined in Mohan's "knowledge framework" (Nunan, 1988:49-50). Content syllabuses certainly give learners a lot of exposure to the language. Content-based syllabus are fully described in Mohan (1986) and Graves (1996:206). But is it sufficient to produce a syllabus that is merely a list of topics? How will teachers know which particular items of language to focus on more closely? Which items will, in the long run, be of more use to the learner? Or are Mohan and others like him who design content-based "immersion programmes", relying, like Prabhu (1986), entirely on natural acquisition happening, with no overt focus on language form? And if so, how do we ensure that the topics and texts chosen will give a sufficiently balanced exposure to the language that is representative of the target situation? This question is a vital one, and relates closely to the concept of linguistic coverage. How can adequate and balanced coverage be assured? The syllabus designer must, in all fairness, produce a syllabus that is accountable to sponsors, testers, future employers, and of course the learners themselves. Here we have another key concept - that of accountability.

3.2.7 Process Syllabuses

The above questions apply equally to the process syllabus, or in fact any type of syllabus that is largely based on project work, tasks or activities and can be, to some extent, negotiated by the learners. In some cases, learners are encouraged to choose for themselves, albeit with guidance, which "pathways" to follow through "banks" of activities and materials, motivated by their own interest. But the problem of checking that they each receive an adequately balanced exposure to the language of their target discourse community is indeed a difficult one. And of course drawing up a standardised test that will be fair to all students is another.

With a task-based or procedural syllabus as used in the Bangalore Project, (Prabhu, 1986), even though the tasks were chosen and led by the teacher, the problem is still one of ensuring suitable coverage of language experience for the learners. As Tickoo (1997:276) points out in his appraisal "Forward from Bangalore" there to be an imbalance of task types used; a high proportion of reasoning tasks and insufficient tasks of other types that would engage learners of secondary age, and give them broader experience of language in use. So both process and task-based syllabuses risk criticism when the criteria of coverage and accountability are applied.

3.2.8 Skills-Based Syllabuses

From the example of a skills-based syllabus (see Hutchinson and Waters 1987), the contents are not much more than a list of skills and micro-skills to be practised. But can we really depend on a syllabus which is merely a list of skills? And, more importantly, will teachers be satisfied with such a syllabus? When a pure skills-based syllabus was introduced, teachers felt obliged to supplement it with traditional grammar and vocabulary teaching. After all, in order to infer meaning from context, or to understand discourse signals and clause relations, there are linguistic operations to be made, and words to be learnt, not just skills to be performed. Teachers also felt at sea because they felt they had little or no guidance in the choice of texts to use in order to encourage students to practise these skills. More or less any text could potentially be used for any skill, and when reading or speaking we don't normally use only one skill at a time. Another problem is what list of skills could ever be understood in the same way by all likely participants? If the aim of a syllabus is to understand common uses of basic verb tenses, there will at least be approximate agreement about what is meant. On the other hand, if the aim is to "infer meaning from context" it would be harder to know what would count as success. If the aim is something as amorphous as to deal efficiently with customer complaints on the telephone, for instance, then one cannot even know for certain whether this will be

interpreted in the same way by teachers and students, or indeed by either on two consecutive days. Far more precision is certainly needed about the 'micro-skills' involved and of course look at some actual linguistic realisations of these skills being performed before we could get a handle on what might need teaching.

3.3 Audiences for Syllabus Statements

We have so far taken for granted that the syllabus is a document that teachers, learners and text-book writers may want to refer to, but are there other possible audiences? What other possible groups of people may want to refer to a language syllabus? These are some more questions vital to syllabus design but which we cannot accommodate here for want of time and space. A separate treatise of these would not be a bad idea.

3.4 Summary

What we have tried to do in this paper is to reflect briefly on various approaches to syllabus design, to raise some questions about ways in which syllabuses can be specified, as well as considering what can and can't be clearly articulated. We have introduced and exemplified some key concepts in syllabus design. These include:

- **forms of specification** - what types of items described and in what depth,
- **coverage** - of the language representative of the target discourse setting,
- **bankruptcy** - of some types of syllabus,
- **high and low surrender value** - concerning the type and order of items,
- **accessibility and audience** - who is the syllabus written for?
- **accountability** - to sponsors, future employers, testers.
- **generative capacity** - how far will the learners be able to build on what he/she has learnt and redeploy it to suit their own circumstances?

These concepts give us the criteria to use when appraising, evaluating and comparing types of syllabus in the abstract and actual syllabus statements.

We have so far taken for granted that we do need some kind of linguistic specification - after all, we are in the business of teaching language, and we surely need to be able to specify what a course of language instruction should contain. What we have not touched on at all in this work are many but very outstanding is the influence of learning theories and implications of language acquisition research findings for syllabus design. These are important issues that require objective discourse.

3.5 Conclusion

Although, a limited number of language teaching syllabi are treated here in isolated contexts, as though each occurred "purely," in practice, these types rarely occur independently of each other. In other words, it is rare for one type of syllabus or content to be used exclusively in actual teaching settings. Almost all actual language teaching syllabi are combinations of two or more of the types defined here. Syllabi or content types are usually combined in more or less integrated ways, with one type as the organizing basis around which the others are arranged and related. Therefore, for a given course, one type of syllabus usually dominates, while other types of content may be combined with it. Furthermore, the different types of syllabi are not entirely distinct from each other. For example, the distinction between skill-based and task-based syllabi may be minimal. In such cases, the distinguishing factor is often the way in which the instructional content is used in the actual teaching procedure.

The characteristics, differences, strengths, and weaknesses of individual syllabi have been defined in the foregoing discussion. In the discussion of syllabus choice and design, we have tried to maintain the fact that the issue is not which type to favour/adopt but which types, and how to relate them to each other for the optimum benefit of the language learners and teachers.

Clearly, there is a vast amount of materials to disseminate when considering syllabus design. The various approaches touched on here all offer valuable insights into creating a language programme. The synthetic approaches of structuralism, situational and functional-notional, all have objectives to be attained, a content to be processed and learnt. The foundations of the product syllabuses remain fundamentally similar, whereas the underlying assumptions about language and language learning from the analytic approaches differ greatly: process type syllabuses assert that learning a language is transient and cannot be itemized; pedagogical procedure takes precedence over content.

Further points to consider when critically reviewing a syllabus are the objectives of the course as well as the needs of the learners. Ultimately, and perhaps ideally, a hybrid syllabus will result purely due to pragmatic reasons. As Hutchinson and Waters (1987:51) suggest: “It is wise to take an eclectic approach, taking what is useful from each theory and trusting also in the evidence of your own experience as a teacher.”

Thus, to what extent has an integration of the various approaches taken place? Does the syllabus specification include all aspects? If yes, how is priority established? These questions must also form part of the criteria when designing or assessing your own syllabus.

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