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Original research paper

ВИДОВИ НА НАСТАВНИ ПРОГРАМИ ПО СТРАНСКИ ЈАЗИЦИ

д-р Нина Даскаловска ¹
д-р Билјана Ивановска ¹

Апстракт: Наставниците по странски јазици отсекогаш барале ефективни начини за учење на јазикот. Како резултат на таа потрага по најдобрите и најефективните начини за учење на странските јазици се развиле голем број на различни приоди и методи. Овие приоди влијаеле на креирањето на наставните програми, што резултирало во развој на различни видови на наставни програми. Во овој труд се дискутира за различните видови на наставни програми и нивната поделба врз основа на начинот на кој ја дефинираат содржината и ги одредуваат селекцијата и организацијата на лингвистичките елементи и на задачите и активностите. Поаѓајќи од поделбата на наставните програми на тип А и тип Б, се анализира по еден пример од двата типа и се дискутира за нивните добри и лоши страни. Се нагласува потребата наставниците да ги познаваат различните видови на наставни програми за да бидат во состојба да прават правилен избор на начинот на кој предаваат и на методите кои ги користат.

Клучни зборови: *наставна програма, синтетички/аналитички наставни програми, тип А/ тип Б наставни програми, појмовно-функционална наставна програма, процедурална наставна програма.*

TYPES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING SYLLABUSES

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Biljana Ivanovska, Ph.D. ¹

Abstract: From early times language teachers have been seeking effective ways to promote their students' language learning. A variety of different approaches have developed in the search for the best or the most effective way to teach English and other languages. These approaches have influenced the syllabus design, which has resulted in the development of many different types of syllabuses. This paper discusses the different types of syllabuses and their

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division on the bases of the way they define linguistic content and specify the selection and organization of language items and learning tasks and activities. Taking White's division of syllabuses into Type A and Type B syllabuses as a starting point, it analyses one example of each type in greater detail and discusses its advantages and disadvantages. It stresses the importance for language teachers to know about the different types of syllabuses in order to be able to make informed choices about how they teach and which methods they choose.

Key words: *syllabus design, synthetic/analytic syllabuses, Type A/ Type B syllabuses, notional-functional syllabus, procedural syllabus.*

1. Introduction

Syllabus is an essential prerequisite for every course of study. There are different views on what comprises a syllabus. Nunan (1988) states that '...it is possible to distinguish between a broad and a narrow approach to syllabus design.' According to the narrow view, syllabus is concerned with the selection and grading of the content, while the broader view also includes the selection of learning tasks and activities. Graves (1996: 3) highlights the importance of including theories of language and learning: 'A syllabus specifies content and/ or detailed objectives of a course; it specifies what is to be taught and what order it is to be taught in and it is underpinned by theories of the nature of language, theories of learning and the needs of the learners. In other words it is the specification and ordering of content of a course or courses'. When discussing the importance of syllabus, Breen (1987: 82) says that it provides the teacher with an accessible framework of the knowledge and skills on which teachers and learners will work – in other words, it places boundaries around the vast area of language. It also provides continuity for the learners as it provides a sense of direction through the way it orders content to be covered. Moreover, it can represent a retrospective account of what has been achieved. It also provides the basis for evaluating learner progress because tests and other forms of assessment can be based on what the syllabus covers.

Depending on the type of the course, the need of the learners, and the beliefs of the syllabus designers, different types of syllabuses may be designed: structural, lexical, task-based, functional, notional, skills, situational, topical, procedural, process, content-based and various combinations of these. Wilkins (1976) described the syllabuses as a continuum with the synthetic syllabus at one end and the analytic at the other. The synthetic syllabus divides the content into small units/ parts, which Wilkins assumed would be grammatical constructions, but others have included functions too. These units are then



graded and presented step-by-step. The learner must synthesize these parts into a coherent whole in order to communicate. The analytic syllabus, on the other hand, uses language behaviours, such as apologies and descriptions, for communicative tasks based on topics, themes or situations. Learners must analyze the language used in the activity to discover particular aspects and patterns. Wilkins (1976) says: ‘A synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which the different parts of the language are taught separately and step-by-step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts until the whole structure of the language has been built up.... In analytic approaches there is no attempt at this careful linguistic control of the learning environment. Components of language are not seen as building blocks which have to be progressively accumulated.’

White (1988) divides them into Type A and Type B syllabuses. Type A syllabus is product-oriented and consists of a fixed content, which is graded and sequenced by an expert or linguist. The syllabus is presented step-by-step to the students who learn the language through mastery of its rules and linguistic content; it is somewhat similar to a synthetic syllabus. Structural and notional-functional syllabuses belong to Type A. On the other hand, Type B syllabus is process-oriented and experiential; it focuses on communicative purpose and stresses the processes of how to communicate a message and how language is learned. It is not linguistic, but psychological and pedagogical. In this group belong process and procedural syllabuses. Long and Crookes (1993: 12) explain that ‘there is a close, but not complete match between synthetic and analytic syllabuses, on the one hand, and Type A and Type B syllabuses, on the other hand’.

2. Type A: Notional-Functional Syllabus

In a typical Type A syllabus the designer provides fixed linguistic content in terms of lists of graded grammatical and lexical items. The students do not influence the syllabus as they simply learn about the language through mastering the rules and linguistic content. Although the notional-functional syllabus is an example of a Type A syllabus, it has a broader focus than a traditional Type A syllabus. It developed in the 1970s in response to the Council of Europe’s need for a syllabus which could provide language learning credit equivalents for all European languages.

The notional-functional syllabus, as the name implies, is organized around notions and functions which are considered primary in planning the syllabus, while the grammatical structures are secondary and are chosen on the basis of the notions and functions they can express. Functions can be defined as communicative acts or categories of social behaviour, such as suggesting,



requesting, and apologizing. The speaker has a real purpose for communicating on a specific topic in a particular context or situation. Notions are categories or concepts which are needed for communication and answer who, when, where, how and why. They depend on the function, the situation and the topic and the resulting language utterances are called exponents. Notions include elements such as time, place or duration which relate to grammatical items. Comparing the grammatical and situational syllabuses with the notional syllabus Wilkins (1976) says: ‘In drawing up a notional syllabus, instead of asking how speakers of the language express themselves or when and where they use the language we ask what it is they communicate through language.’

2.1. Advantages of the Notional-Functional Syllabus

What are the advantages of the notional-functional syllabus? Since development of communicative competence is the starting point of this syllabus, one of the major advantages is that it fosters learner’s communicative ability from the beginning of the course, which is motivating for the learners. Another motivational factor is that the content of the syllabus is usually based on the learners’ needs. As White (1988: 75) emphasizes: ‘So, associated with functional syllabuses, though by no means unique to them, has been the incorporation of needs analysis as a stage in notional-functional syllabus design...’ Moreover, since there is no one-to-one correspondence of forms and functions, while learning one function students can learn different ways of expressing the same function. And finally, because the focus is on meaning rather than form, what is learned can meet the immediate needs of the learners.

2.2. Disadvantages of the Notional-Functional Syllabus

On the other hand, by emphasizing the communicative competence, the development of linguistic competence may be neglected. Widdowson (1990: 41) addresses the question of the importance of the grammatical factors: ‘The issue is not whether such factors will in some way be represented, because they are bound to be, but whether they are in pedagogic focus. The central question is how far and in what ways does a syllabus encourage the teacher to direct learners to an explicit awareness of grammatical factors. Much of the work that claims to follow a notional/functional line of approach leaves grammar as an implied presence: in sight, perhaps, but not in mind.’

Moreover, there are no clear criteria for selecting and grading the notions and functions, which makes it a difficult task for syllabus designers. Needs analysis can help in selecting the items, ‘...but 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*’ (Nunan, 1988: 37).



Furthermore, since one function can be expressed by different grammatical forms, students will encounter several different structures at once, some of which may be difficult for learners to grasp.

Finally, notional-functional syllabus cannot predict all the sentences learners will want to produce in future, and does not equip them with the ability to produce an infinite number of sentences, which is a prerequisite for a successful communication.

Long and Crookes (1993) criticize the notional-functional syllabus for lacking a sound psychological basis and ignoring SLA research. In addition, because the syllabus involves a complicated grading of functions, rather than structures, and presents functions and notions one at a time, the learners have to synthesize the fragments.

2.3. Summary

The notional-functional syllabus may be suitable for ESP courses for which specific objectives have been stated, so that it would be easier to determine the content of the syllabus. It may also be used for short courses aimed at supplying learners with immediate tools for communication. But it is not very suitable for general English courses which should give learners a sound foundation for developing both linguistics and communicative competence.

To sum up, the notional-functional syllabus is an example of Type A syllabus, but more and more it is being used in conjunction with other stands to form a hybrid syllabus.

3. Type B: Procedural Syllabus

Type B syllabuses are based not on linguistic items but on the psychological and pedagogical with stress on personal growth and self-realisation based in progressivism. They are personal and experiential with a focus on the process of learning to communicate in a language.

One of type B syllabuses is the procedural syllabus which consists of tasks and activities that students will carry out in the classroom. It is based on the assumption that language is acquired subconsciously while learners are engaged in meaning-focused activities. Because the language evolves from completing the tasks performed in class, there is no prescribed structural or notional-functional syllabus and no planned recycling of language items. One of the advocates of this syllabus is N. S. Prabhu who implemented this syllabus in several schools in India. The three main types of tasks used in the project were: information-gap activities, reasoning-gap activities, and opinion-gap activities. He explains that ‘the stimulus for the project was a strongly-felt pedagogic intuition, arising from experience generally, but made concrete in



the course of professional debate in India. This was that the development of competence in a second language requires not systematization of language inputs or maximization of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication. ... The focus of the project was not, that is to say, on ‘communicative competence’ (in the restricted grammatical conformity) but rather on grammatical competence itself, which was hypothesized to develop in the course of meaning-focused activity. (Prabhu, 1987: 1)

The procedural syllabus is learning-centered rather than learner-centered, and involves no needs analysis. The tasks are based on problems which require the learners to interpret data from, for example, a map or a train timetable. In the pre-task, the teacher demonstrates a similar task using the necessary language. Then the learners perform the task, and the desire to solve the problem engages their thinking processes and language use. This process enables the learners to achieve grammatical conformity in the use of the language which is based in the subconscious.

3.1. Advantages of the Procedural Syllabus

One of the good sides of this syllabus is that it creates stress-free environment for learners since the focus is on the completion of the task, and learners are not so much concerned with the grammatical errors they make. Errors are corrected incidentally, but not systematically. Learners are free to ask teachers if they don’t know how to say something. ‘It was, that is to say, an instance of defeat if learners were unable to do the thinking, but not if they were unable to say what they wanted to say in the way some other learners or the teacher could’ (Prabhu, 1987: 60). This satisfies one of Krashen’s conditions for successful acquisition - the low affective filter (Krashen, 1987).

Another advantage is that since there is no fixed syllabus, teachers can make modifications of the planned activities, and there is room for negotiation of the tasks with the learners. By regulating the challenge offered by tasks, learners’ motivation is sustained by the success they achieve in solving the problems. Prabhu maintains that ‘if a task looks very easy to learners, they expect no sense of achievement from success in it and are likely to be less than keen to attempt it. If, on the other hand, the task looks so difficult that they feel sure they will fail in it, they are likely to be reluctant to make an effort at all. A task should, ideally, look difficult but attainable to learners. (Prabhu, 1987: 56)

3.2. Disadvantages of the Procedural Syllabus

A major disadvantage of this syllabus is that the only criterion for selecting and grading the tasks is their cognitive difficulty. As there are no specific objectives and needs analysis, it’s difficult to connect the activities



with the future needs of the learners. Another disadvantage is that there is no real communication in the classroom. The classroom activity consists of two stages: pre-task and task. The format of the pre-task activity is teacher-class interactions which consist of questions and answers, or giving and receiving instructions, while the tasks are carried out individually. Group work is avoided for two reasons. It is assumed that interaction between the learners is not as beneficial as the interaction between the teacher and the learners. Prabhu (1987: 81) explains it in the following way: ‘It is important for learners’ internal systems to be continually encountering ‘superior data’, so that the process of firming up is balanced by a process of revision and extension. Since differences between the internal systems of different learners are much smaller than those between the internal systems of the learners as a group and that of the teacher, sustained interaction between learners is likely to provide much less opportunity for system-revision’. The other reason is that it would save learners from losing face in front of their peers.

A third disadvantage is that this type of syllabus does not take into account the different learning styles. As Lightbown and Spada (1993: 40) point out: ‘... there is clearly some truth to the intuition that certain ways of approaching a task are more successful for one person than for another, and that when learners are given some freedom to choose their preferred way of learning, they will do better than those who find themselves forced to learn in environments where a learning style which does not suit them is imposed on them as the only way to learn’. So, we cannot expect that this type of syllabus will be suitable for all learners.

3.3. Summary

Procedural syllabus is intended for general English courses. However, except for the Bangalore Project, it hasn’t been tried and evaluated. The results of the evaluation of the Bangalore Project carried out by Alan Baretta and Alan Davies showed that acquiring grammar while focusing on meaning is possible, but definite conclusions and generalization are not possible because of the impossibility to control experimental variables as well as the potential for bias in test construction. Implementation of this syllabus requires a special training of teachers as there are no textbooks that can be used, so that teachers have to collect and devise tasks, as well as make modifications throughout the instruction process. Moreover, students involved in the project had one teaching period of forty minutes a day, in some schools five days a week, in others six. In most schools, students have English three class-periods a week, which may not be sufficient for this type of instruction.



4. Conclusion

It seems that a strict adherence to only one approach to teaching and following only one syllabus is not the best solution to equipping the learners with the necessary knowledge, skills, and competence. The best approach would be a kind of integrated syllabus which could take one syllabus as a basis, but would build in it the positive elements of other syllabuses. Furthermore, it is not so much the syllabus, but the methodology used to implement that syllabus. Even a structural syllabus can be made communicative if proper methodology is used. So, how the syllabus is implemented will depend on the teacher, the learners, the institutional demands and other factors. However, it is important that teachers are acquainted with different types of syllabuses and different methodologies so that they can draw their own conclusions about what could work or not work in the language classroom with their particular group of learners, and according to that change and adapt the activities in order to meet the needs of their students.

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