

CHAPTER 4

TASK-BASED APPROACHES TO ESL SYLLABUSES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to elaborate on the process-oriented approach to syllabus design, and to investigate various proposals for task-based syllabuses. The theoretical bases of the task-based approach are investigated, and the models of Prabhu, Breen and Candlin, and Long and Crookes are discussed.

4.2 A DEFINITION OF 'TASK'

The most serious limitation in proposing a generally acceptable definition of 'task' is the variables that a task. A task may or may not involve language, real-life activities or activities specifically geared towards pedagogical outcomes, and may consist of one or more actions. Kumaravadivelu (1993:71) points out that much of the confusion stemming from the use of 'task' is that it is sometimes used to refer to content and sometimes to methodology. Breen (1987:160), however, points out that task-based syllabuses organise and present what is to 'be achieved through learning and teaching in terms of how a learner may engage his or her communicative competence in undertaking a range of tasks'. The task-based syllabus, therefore, crosses the theoretical divide between content and methodology, so that they become integrated.

Doyle (1983:161) emphasises that a task focuses attention on the products, processes and resources that are available to learners while they are generating answers. Clark (1987:63) describes communicative tasks as purposeful, interactive activities that involve 'information-processing mechanisms at some depth'. Candlin (1987:10) sees a task as a sequential problem-solving

social activity that requires the application of existing knowledge in order to reach the aims and objectives of learning. Prabhu (1987:24) defines a task as an activity that requires the learners to arrive at an outcome through a process of thought, so that teachers can control and regulate the learning process. Breen (1987:23) and Richards, Platt and Weber (1985:289) emphasise the achievement of a definite outcome as a prerequisite for a task. Long (1985:89) provides the following definition of a task:

a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, ... in other words, by 'task' is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between.

The fact that tasks are 'done' imply an important aspect of task description, namely the inclusion of a verb. Tasks, therefore, include the use of a verb by necessity, e.g. classifying, identifying, filling in, serving etc. Nunan (1989:10) points out that pupils should understand, manipulate, produce and interact in the target language while their attention is on meaning and not on form. Legutke and Thomas (1991:11) argue that tasks are 'pivotal forms of action in an educational process'. Ellis (1994:595) says that a task involves any activity that engages the learner in using the target language either communicatively (e.g. in interaction with peers) or reflectively (e.g. in interaction with a text) to arrive at an outcome other than the overt learning of language features. Barron (1994:143) simply calls tasks units of social interaction.

Skehan (1996:38) lists the following characteristics of a task:

- meaning is primary;
- the task has bearing on the real world;
- there is some priority on task completion, and
- the assessment takes place in terms of task outcome.

Clark (1996:252) points out that the task should challenge the existing knowledge of the learner. The learner should have the opportunity to observe an expert doing the task in order to imitate the task later; Clark calls this supported apprenticeship in the use of knowledge.

The terms 'task' and 'activity' are used interchangeably in literature. Barron (1994:144) proposes the following distinctions:

ACTIVITIES

- have short-term aims
- they may or may not be part of tasks
- often individually constructed

TASKS

- have the long-term aim of maintaining culture
- mostly socially constructed
- critical for the development of cognitive skills
- initiate the novice into culture
- purpose is to produce competent members of society

Based on the preceding discussion, the following definition of 'task' in language learning is adopted in this study:

A task

- is purposeful;
- is interactive;
- involves a process (physical or mental) that utilises and challenges existing knowledge parameters;
- is contextualised in culture;
- develops both fluency and accuracy skills;
- produces measurable outcomes, and
- it contains a verb.

4.3 THEORETICAL BASES OF A TASK-BASED APPROACH TO ESL

The rationale for a task-based approach to ESL syllabuses comes from a variety of sources, all of which provide a theoretical

basis for this type of syllabus.

4.3.1 Input theory

Krashen's creative construction model (cf.2.2.5) includes the hypothesis that learners can't benefit from input if they don't understand most of it. As pointed out, Krashen (1981:27) proposes that the input should be slightly higher than the learner's present level of understanding ($i + 1$) in order for acquisition to take place, but this input need not be of an interactive nature. The learner's affective filter should be as low as possible to allow the input to penetrate, but fine-tuning or the presentation of grammatical structures is not needed. Krashen hypothesises that learner output does not directly aid acquisition.

The importance of comprehensible input is supported by SLA writers such as Lightbown (1985:101-112), Pienemann (1985:23-76), Chaudron (1988:158), Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:67), Legutke and Thomas (1991:61-62, 119) and Cook (1993:60). It seems obvious that prolonged incomprehensible speech cannot promote language learning. Krashen's input hypothesis has led to more focused research on the effect of the type of input, the context of input, and the effect of these on learner acquisition.

Two of Krashen's hypotheses are disputed, however: the nature of input and the importance of learner output on acquisition. Candlin (1987:58-60) points out that beginners (often the school beginner who hears English for the first time in his life) will benefit by classroom input as opposed to non-classroom input. He points out that classroom input is usually modified and that regular comprehension checks ensure progress, whereas informal environments do not provide such opportunities. Classroom input cannot, however, supply the amount or variety of input of the informal environment. The effect of input by teachers, peers and L1 speakers on learners has been researched extensively and, although modified interactional input seems to aid the

acquisition of vocabulary, there is still little or no evidence that the acquisition of morphological or syntactical structures is aided by input (Candlin, 1987:58-60; Ellis, 1994:286; Sheen, 1994:135). The importance of learner output is, therefore, also increasingly stressed.

4.3.2 Output theory

Comprehensible learner output, especially output that involves the straining of available language resources to mediate or negotiate meaning, may be equally important in supporting acquisition (Pica, 1994:57; Lightbown & Spada, 1994:567). Swain (1987:61-72), Candlin (1987:59) and Tarone and Swain (1995:175) point out that L2 learners in immersion programmes need more than comprehensible input (which they have in abundance) to become proficient in productive skills. It seems that learners also need the opportunity to use their linguistic resources in a purposeful and meaningful manner.

Candlin (1987:60-61) regards the indirect benefit of learner output as more interaction opportunities. The quality of output is also influenced by the modifications that more proficient interlocutors bring about to assist the L2 speaker. Output is only possible after some acquisition has taken place. Output provides a domain for learning, as errors are detected and can be corrected.

These views have produced research on the kind of output that assists acquisition and how to bring about such output. The role of interactive processes has been researched in some depth. The deliberate manipulation of interaction between peers and teacher and peers have been found to provide opportunities for learning to take place (Pica, 1994:60). Interaction with texts or people that leads to active involvement through task completion, a *posteriori* reflection and quick feedback from the ESL teacher regarding errors, seems to be most beneficial, as is reported by Palmer (1964:159), Allwright (1984:169), Lightbown (1985:108),

Platt and Brooks (1994:508), Appel and Lantolf (1994:449-450) and Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994:480). Donato and McCormick (1994:463) stress the importance of involving learners in strategies that force them to mediate through language and the metacognitive reflection on learning tasks that such mediation leads to. Similar findings are reported by De Guerrero and Villamil (1994:484-496), who argue that L2 learners seem to benefit from interactive processes of cooperative learning with peers at differing levels of proficiency. They recommend:

Teachers need to provide students with opportunities to interact with peers who are at different levels of regulation. Because individual regulation is highly variable on the troublesource to be solved and the task instructions, teachers should make sure that students can interact with a variety of peers. What one peer cannot provide in terms of strategic assistance, another one could.

The implication of this finding for the constitution of groups is that learners of mixed ability and/or proficiency should benefit more from interaction than homogeneous groupings.

Candlin (1987:17-18) says that educational tasks should be selected which raise learners' awareness of language use, arouse their interest regarding their responsibility as learners and language users, develop tolerance for other users of language and lead learners to self-fulfilled and self-confident life-long learners.

4.3.3 Discourse theory

Widdowson (1978:64-74) stresses the importance of covert as well as overt language behaviour through the use of language for inner speech or thought and for communicative purposes. He also underlines the importance of language in a real communicative context and with a real communicative purpose. Widdowson regards

the recoding of L1 knowledge into L2 knowledge '...not as the acquisition of abilities which are new but as the transference of the abilities that have already been acquired into a different means of expression'. Because SLA is to some extent a recoding of existing abilities, there is a real danger that learners may find the classes boring, unless there is also a cognitive challenge. The cognitive challenge is established through content that really interests the learner, whether this is academic content that he may need later for other subjects, or tasks that are inherently interesting and challenging. Widdowson (1978:3) also makes it clear that language usage or the knowledge of the linguistic rules by which a language functions, does not necessarily lead to language use or the ability to use the language in such a way that the user communicates effectively.

The importance of output is emphasised by Widdowson (1979:62), who claims that the creation of discourse 'bring(s) new rules into existence' that the learner may otherwise not have used or learnt. It is often the unpredictability of discourse and language in communication that forces the learner to extend himself and develop further than his present level. The learner should, therefore, be confronted with situations and tasks that challenge his existing levels of knowledge. Widdowson (1990:159) says:

...(the functional/notional) definition of course content is not enough to ensure that there is an emphasis on doing in the language classroom. There also needs to be a methodology which will implement this course content in such a way that learners will be activated to realize the notional and functional character of the course specifications.

Widdowson (1984:122) acknowledges that the L2 learner largely recodes, but in recoding in the target language, the learner has to learn to what extent known L1 rules apply to or differ from the L2. If the L2 rules are taught in isolation from their

discourse function, the learner will learn rules and not acquire a language that he can use easily and naturally. In order to bring about the desired discourse, Widdowson advocates tasks or activities that necessitate the use of language. The generated discourse, however, always occurs in a particular context, be it immediate (the real circumstances of the learners such as their time management) or removed (imaginary circumstances such as role plays or literature contexts). Widdowson (1978:22-55; 1979:139, 249) stresses the importance of teaching learners that language has meaning potential. The L2 learner should not only master singular meanings attached to concepts, but the intricate interaction between interlocutors. The meaning potential of utterances in discourse are not always realised, i.e. what is meant to be understood in one way is not always understood in the intended manner. A second factor in discourse is the relationship between the illocutionary and interactive function of language. The former term refers to the social environment that is not part of the actual discourse but contributes to the understanding of discourse, whilst the latter term refers to the organisation and structuring of the discourse. The example that Widdowson (1979:138) uses illustrates the distinction:

A Doorbell!

B I'm in the bath.

A OK.

The L2 learner needs to infer from the discourse that B is unable to open the door, and because A understands and accepts that fact, A will answer the door. The third factor that Widdowson describes is the difference between the utterances of real importance, versus those that provide the setting for the important information. Learners should, therefore, also learn what utterances are vital to make a point.

Widdowson, then, suggests that the L2 learner can and will not learn the target language as communication tool, unless he is involved in tasks and activities that expose him to a variety of

contexts and interlocutors that will enable him to use the language.

4.3.4 Language and thought theory

Much of the interest in interactionist theory has been sparked by theories put forward by Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1967:56-60) criticises psycholinguistic studies that do not take the interrelationship between thought and word into account. Constants, such as that perception is always connected in an identical way with attention, memory with perception and thought with memory, cannot be assumed to exist. Vygotsky (1967:56) emphasises that the essence of psychic development lies in the change of interfunctional structures of consciousness. Psycholinguistic studies should emphasise the developmental changes and relations that occur in language and thought. If, for example, thought and speech are studied independently of each other, the relationship between them is seen as a mechanical and external connection between two distinct processes.

Vygotskian theory suggests that language cannot be studied productively unless word meaning forms the basis of all study, because word meaning unites thought and speech into verbal thought. A word is already a generalisation, because it refers not only to one object but to a class or a group of objects. Vygotsky points out that meaning is an act of thought and an inalienable part of words and, therefore, belongs in the realm of thought and language (Vygotsky, 1967:58). Young children often find new words difficult to learn, not because of the new sound involved, but because the generalised concept is lacking that ensures understanding. Unlike the innatists, Vygotsky emphasises the essentially communicative function of language. Because language learners grow up in specific societies and acquire language for social interaction, the acquired language reflects the characteristics of the language of a specific society and era. Britton (1994:262) points out that social behaviour implies interaction in the group whose activities have been shaped to

cultural patterns. He summarises the central contention of Vygotsky's work in the following words:

...human consciousness is achieved by the internalisation of shared social behaviour.

Schmidt (1973:123) elaborates on the Vygotskian synpraxic nature of language, and points out that it can only be understood in the context of the action in which it is embedded. Schmidt (1973:126) explains:

The language we use in communication and the one we use in thinking is, after all, the same language. It is not either a means of communication or an instrument of thought; it is both.

Language in the Vygotskian perspective is primarily seen as an instrument of the mental regulation and refinement of individual behaviour. Communicative tasks reflect regulation by objects in the environment, other people and oneself. Speech (inner or overt) is used to control oneself or others (Foley, 1991:63). Foley (1991:67) explains that language is initially mastered in the presence of a more experienced peer or adult for the sole purpose of communication, but once it is mastered sufficiently, it can become internalised and serve under conscious control as a means of carrying out inner speech while learning. Interaction between the language learner and the interactant is of paramount importance as the process of interaction generates opportunities for learning.

Vygotsky (1967:56-60) maintains that as children mature the concepts or pictures they already have in their minds are as much part of language as attaching the correct words to the concepts. If the concept does not exist in thought or is not fully matured, the young learner may hear and even become familiar with new words, but these will have little meaning. As the young child learns, he matches concepts to words. The initial matching relies

heavily on real concepts or images that the young child experiences through the senses (Berlyne, 1967:259-270). In terms of Piagetian theory, the images or concepts that every learner has already differ from the next learner, because they are based on unique previous experiences and knowledge. The more abstract the concept, the more learners' understanding of them may vary. Thus learners may attach very different meanings to the word 'love', whereas fewer interpretations may be present in the understanding of the concept 'three' (Korzybski, 1933:371; Vygotsky, 1967:56-60).

Berlyne (1967:263) says that perceptual distortions can never be completely removed, but a greater degree of mutual 'meaning giving' can be obtained through an agreement of what concepts represent. Learning by doing interactive tasks is more concrete in approach than learning by exposure only, and aids agreement between members of what meanings should be attached to what concepts. The process involves negotiating the meaning of words, and this forms the basis of meaningful communication.

Foley (1991:62-76) argues that the Vygotskian hypothesis of regulation offers a psycholinguistic framework for task-based approaches to second language teaching. According to proponents of Vygotskian theory, a separate device such as the LAD cannot be responsible for language development while another cognitive function controls thought development, because language and thought are interrelated. Vygotsky regards language as something used by an individual who has developed from being like everyone else, and who initially uses language as shared social activity, to an individual who uses language as the 'principal means of mental regulation and refinement of individual behaviour' (Vygotsky, 1986:12-57; Foley, 1991:63). The maintenance of individuality through language lies in three types of regulation in communicative tasks:

- object-regulation (the person who uses language is directly regulated by the environment to fix attention on an object or

objects, and cognition is dominated at that moment by object-regulation);

- other-regulation (the person is dominated by others and uses language to fix attention on others. Paralinguistic features like facial gestures also fall into this category), and
- self-regulation (the person uses language to control others and self. This is often done by self-directed utterances).

Vygotsky (1967:56-60; 1986:86-88) also comments on inner speech or speech-for-oneself. He maintains that young children often talk aloud, as they find it helpful to achieve what they are doing. Whether the form of this speech is conversational or in monologue-form, the thoughts of the user take 'short cuts' to solutions in abbreviated structures that mean little to outsiders. Idiosyncratic word meanings emerge that don't conform to convention (Britton, 1994:260). Unlike Piaget, who suggests that this inner speech withers away, Vygotsky maintains that it becomes internalised as verbal thinking with age. When confronted with difficult problems the learner may externalise the inner speech to regulate or 'check' the progress he is making in solving the problem. The self-regulated learner also has access to object-regulation (e.g. through dictionaries) and other-regulation (e.g. through teachers or peers) that he gains mostly through interaction with more experienced members of his culture (Vygotsky, 1986:104-124; Foley, 1991:62-76; Schinke-Llano, 1993:121-129; Britton, 1994:259-263).

Vygotsky (1967:56-60) describes the development of language as a communicative act that goes through the stage of primary inter-subjectivity (the reaction of an infant by raising its arms in anticipation of being picked up) to secondary inter-subjectivity (the infant's realisation that its action is of interest to others and that his sounds elicit response from society members). The cry of an infant is usually correctly identified by the mother as a cry of distress, boredom or an invitation for interaction. Halliday (1975) describes this stage as proto-language or sounds of communicative intent. Already the infant

controls the differentiation between 'self', 'others' and a world in which 'others' are givers and recipients of meaning attached to sound. Sound as precedent to language is already used with propositional intent.

According to Vygotsky (1986:166-170), the actual emergence of language (the holophrastic stage) is characterised by pragmatic and functional intent (cf. Halliday's pragmatic and mathetic stages) (cf. 4.3.5). The learner gradually expands his grammatical and semantic command, because protolanguage is a limiting factor and the child wants more interaction. Gradually the mastery of written language in reading and writing has a profound effect on abstract thinking, as the constancy of the written word provides opportunities for metacognitive reflection and more critical control over thought and language.

Although these developmental stages are not rigidly delineated in practice, Vygotsky (1986:218-224) places the command of lexico-grammatical structures at 5-6 years of age. Development is also spiral rather than linear, and development takes place on both linguistic and cognitive level. When entering school, the child should already be mastering the fundamental skills necessary for language development. His advancement will only come through the tutelage of teachers, peers and more advanced members of his culture, and the task of the primary school teacher is mainly to scaffold the learning task so that the child can internalise external knowledge and convert it into a tool of conscious control (Bruner, 1972:163; Foley, 1991:67; Britton, 1994:260). This structured interaction with the environment enables the learner to reach higher and more abstract ground from where he can reflect on thought and meaning. This more conscious reflection, or the distance between what the learner can do without help and with the help of experts, is called the 'zone of proximal development' by Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1986:159) also believes that the patterns of access to the first and second language are basically the same as the passing on of knowledge - the fundamental vehicle of education being social interaction.

Burkhalter (1995:192-194) criticises primary school language syllabuses for avoiding persuasive writing, because it involves the formal-operational skills of formulating, analysing and synthesising reasons. These abilities are often regarded to be too difficult for preformal-operational learners. She maintains that a Vygotskian-based syllabus, that stresses that learning precedes development, may yield results which advance far beyond teacher expectations. Her research confirms that learners who were taught the skills of persuasive reading and writing excelled at post-test scores, while the control group scored significantly lower. If the learner has access to new knowledge through interaction with media or people, he will display a natural inclination to impose order on the new knowledge and capabilities which both have to be learned in order to make them manageable. The learner will impose his own structure on the teacher-presented syllabus, and will also superimpose preferred learning strategies on classroom methodology. The process of teacher-learner interaction becomes the significant substance of the lesson, rather than the content (Foley, 1991:68).

Task-based approaches to ESL represent how something is done and present communicative knowledge as a unified system in which communicative tasks focus upon the actual sharing of meaning (through the spoken or written word). The main difference between functional-notional approaches and task-based approaches lies in the approach to course objectives. The functional-notional approaches offer a route towards learning by organising content in such a way that it harmonises with course objectives. The task-based approaches address the way in which learners reach the objectives and how they navigate the route themselves. Learners have to work upon their systems of knowledge in order to access and rearrange existing knowledge and integrate new knowledge. Foley (1991:69) states:

This assumes that participation in communication tasks requires the learner to mobilize and orchestrate knowledge and abilities in a direct way which will

become a catalyst for learning.

Vygotsky's framework of learning by transaction allows the learner to learn through interaction, yet maintain the individuality necessary in order not to become overly controlled by others or objects. Foley (1991:70) claims that a task-based approach based on Vygotsky's transactional learning framework bridges the gap between the learner's competence as first language communicator and future second language user. This is because of the underlying assumption that the underlying competence is generative, 'in the sense that it is the means by which the learner can cope with the unpredictable, be creative and adaptive, and transfer knowledge and capability across tasks in ways that mastery of a fixed repertoire of performance might not facilitate' (Foley, 1991:70).

Vygotskian theory provides a rationale for task-based approaches. It is not only compatible with current research in SLA, but can inform research on task-based approaches, a revision of the traditional role of the teacher and an analysis of the types of mediation strategies that allow learners to become more self-regulatory in terms of cognitive and linguistic tasks.

4.3.5 Functional theory

Halliday (1981) documents similar ideas to those of Vygotsky, namely that language systems encode reality and our understanding of it; for this reason language systems cannot be studied as codes to which meaning is attached, but rather as meaning to which a lexicogrammar is attached. Halliday says that infant sounds are already intent on communication. He distinguishes the pragmatic and the mathetic functional categories during the protolanguage stage (Kress, 1976:16-25). Pragmatic functions derive from those functions that are instrumental, regulatory and interactive, whereas the mathetic functions refer to interactional language but with heuristic and personal intent. Halliday stresses that the language learner cannot be divorced

interactive, whereas the mathetic functions refer to interactional language but with heuristic and personal intent. Halliday stresses that the language learner cannot be divorced from the social context in which he learns the language, as the 'giving of meaning' is socially directed. If meaning is not part of language learning, Halliday maintains, learners will have problems with reading and writing as these are extensions of the functional potential of language. A learner's interpretation of meaning does not only depend on existing linguistic knowledge, but also on situational and social knowledge (Halliday, 1981:125-127; Dominicus, 1991:60).

Halliday (1985:xxviii) views language as an instrument for cultural transfer and refutes the existence of a Universal Grammar to which a set of rules should be added. He sees the language system as an in-born potential that has to be developed. Language as potential develops within a system of meaning-giving that the learner uses functionally. Because the learner is a person in entirety who uses language functionally, affective, cognitive and social aspects are part and parcel of the language system. If the learner is expected to learn content contradictory to his own experience of the target language, problems can be expected (Halliday, 1976:27; Halliday, 1985:xiii-xxii).

Halliday's (1985:xiii) view is that young children learn 'how to mean', and that the progressive mastery of semantic potential includes the means of translating meaning into form. What is clear is that meaning comes first and not form, as form without meaning is useless. According to Halliday (1985:xiii) the learner gains schematic knowledge of the language including ideational, interpersonal and textual or discourse knowledge.

This schematic knowledge develops through socialisation (which can be provided by a task-based syllabus). The learner can draw on communicative skills in the L1 because he already knows that he is capable of mediating meaning through the mother tongue. What are different, are the linguistic data and the circumstances

(pragmatic knowledge) as it is a potential system to be learnt (epistemological knowledge) - be it a first or second language (Dominicus, 1991:63-66; Halliday, 1994:8-14).

In keeping with the view that language is both unique to every individual and functions as the communicative medium of social interaction, Halliday does not prescribe a specific syllabus. He does insist, though, that the functions for which language is used should be included in the syllabus. Dominicus (1991:66) says that language as both a system of doing and a system of learning presupposes a communicative approach in which every learner participates as unique social beings. The existing pre-knowledge of every learner should be activated in a way that accommodates communal and cooperative learning as well as individual learning opportunities. Only in this way can new knowledge be applied to new situations.

Halliday (1964:253-254) emphasises the need for adequate language models, especially when the target language is used as the MOI. He is even more emphatic about learning a language while 'doing it' and states:

Teaching a language involves cojoining two essential features: first, the learner must 'experience' the language being used in meaningful ways, either in its spoken or in its written form; and secondly, the learner must himself have the opportunity of performing, of trying out his own skills, of making mistakes and being corrected.

The principle of learning through doing is emphasised through an approach that 'links the utterance with the experience of seeing and hearing the situation in which the utterance takes place' (Halliday, 1964:164). Expository teaching in classrooms often neglects other kinds of learning, and although Halliday is emphatic that grammatical and sociocultural knowledge is part of language learning, he insists that the discourse function (that

includes inner speech) of language is the focal point of language learning. Communicative competence includes the functional use of all aspects of language, and one skill should not be favoured at the cost of others.

Halliday provides a theoretical framework for the components of communicative competence, how they interact with one another and the way in which they are acquired (Dominicus, 1991:68-73). According to Halliday (1966:104-105), discourse should take place within text and context and learners will soon realise that isolated and decontextualised sentences are not sufficient for discourse interaction. The underlying relations between sentences are necessary to uphold discourse interaction (for both the written and spoken modes of language). Mediating meaning is part of the discourse process. Halliday (1966:266) stresses the importance of register in especially SLA, as the learner is not always aware of the variety of registers that are available.

Bruner (1986:127) argues that his original ideas on discovery learning are fully incorporated and explored in Halliday's theories. Halliday's theories imply that the ESL teacher should create tasks around social acts like telephone discourse, invitations and the like. These should be presented in the form of sequences, which include the interaction which may follow an invitation, such as accepting or rejecting such an invitation (Dominicus, 1991:69).

According to Halliday (1985:101), language also functions within situations which are never identical because of the 'meaning potential' that necessarily differs. Role play in the classroom develops the ability to deal with different 'meaning giving' situations (Melrose, 1991:41).

In conclusion, Halliday (like Vygotsky) sees language as an integral part of the social environment of the learner. The ESL classroom becomes a micro-society. Interactive tasks can be utilised to sensitise learners to the different societies in

which English functions. The variations in spelling and vocabulary that exist in different societies (e.g. U.K. and U.S.A. variations) should not be seen as 'wrong', but as valid ones. Multicultural and language variations should also be acknowledged and respected as different manifestations of the same 'meaning' (Dominicus, 1991:80-84).

A task-based approach to syllabus design adheres to both Vygotsky's and Halliday's views of language as functional organiser of the learner's environment. The ESL teacher should realise that the learner can only employ his existing knowledge, or his internal syllabus, and whatever scaffolding the teacher provides to construct knowledge. For this reason negotiation (even at elementary level) is desirable.

4.3.6 General learning theory

The idea that *learning through doing* is preferable to other learning methods has been advocated for many centuries. As early as 1903, Dewey (1903:27) proposed that learners should be confronted by problems that they should try to solve on their own within a broad field of possible solutions. Once they have selected a solution, a test of judgement is possible. From this principle, the 'discovery methods' of learning were developed in reaction against behaviourist models of learning (Hamachek, 1975:442-450). Piaget (1954), Bruner (1960), Gagné (1968) and Flavell (1971) are articulate spokesmen for this approach to learning. Lavatelli (1970) has developed a curriculum especially for young learners, based on the self-activity principle (Lorton & Walley, 1979:131).

Mayer (1987:6) maintains that a cognitive approach to educational psychology is not only more useful than behaviourist approaches, but also that this approach is currently the dominant approach in most fields of psychology.

Erikson (1950) identifies a child's sense of autonomy or a desire

to do things on his own as early as at 18 months. This is followed by the development of a sense of initiative, industry and the first stages of a sense of identity during the primary school years. During these stages the young learner learns mainly through doing things by establishing physical, emotional and intellectual boundaries. The following learning tasks occur during the primary school years (6-12 years): learning physical skills, building wholesome attitudes about self, others and institutions, learning socially acceptable behaviour and roles, developing the skills of reading, writing and calculating, developing concepts and achieving increasing independence (Hamachek, 1975:46,54).

Task-based learning theorists subscribe to the principles of a cognitive approach to learning, in which emphasis is placed on the unique cognitive ability of humans, who not only learn but also have insight into the process. These theorists emphasise that learning-by-doing, the use of learning strategies, the provision of structure and the discovery of one's own errors are essential. Hamachek (1975:442) says that pupils learn best when they are given a wide variety of examples of a certain phenomenon, and are then encouraged to find the underlying rule that ties them together. This can best be done through a hands-on approach in which the pupils are actively involved in tasks that force them to develop and apply cognitive learning and thinking strategies (Mayer, 1987:6; Dembo, 1991:396-402; Notterman & Drewry, 1993:143-160).

Discovery learning is the opposite of expositive learning, and instead of viewing the pupil as an empty vessel in which knowledge has to be poured, the pupil is seen as a capable (if inexperienced) learner who is able to improve constantly (Notterman & Drewry, 1993:168-169). Problem-solving is a central aspect of the discovery approach to learning (Mayer, 1987:201-239). Problem-solving reflects one of the most important underlying principles of learning through tasks or activities which generate purposeful opportunities for learning, i.e. giving

meaning to a new situation.

Lorton and Walley (1979:135-136) stress that people are generally involved in some activity or task, and the learning experience should reflect that. Classroom activities should exploit inherent learner potential to the full. This means an active role for the learner, especially in activities that he shares with other participants (and which will encourage his development as a social member of his culture). The most effective activities are characterised by hands-on learning through doing and discovery. This kind of learning consists of a series of planned, structured activities that emphasise analyzing and decision-making.

Andrews and Crow (1993:24), who refer to the South African context in particular, recommend the following changes in teaching to prepare a generation that can cope with the demands of the twenty-first century: a shift from rote, passive learning to active, experiential learning; a move from teacher-dependent to teacher-guided learning and problem-solving; practically oriented learning instead of reliance on textbooks. They say 'Action learning is based on real-life problems and is designed for learning from experience. Learning by doing prepares learners for the real, practical world where problems are often unstructured' (Andrews & Crow, 1993:25).

Korzybski (1933:59), founder of the school for General Semantics in the U.S.A., stresses the importance of structure, which he defines as the relations that exist between parts, a framework that supports a complex of ordered and interrelated parts. The ability of the learner to create this order between parts is best learnt through experience, because the words (and accompanying concepts) awarded to his experience are unique to the learner. Korzybski (1933:59) says:

As words are not the objects which they represent, structure and structure alone, becomes the only link which connects our verbal processes with the empirical

data.

Korzybski (1933:55-65) maintains, therefore, that structure is the only content of knowledge. Bruner (1960) also stresses that structure provides the fundamentals of comprehension. Structured content is retained much better than unstructured content and facilitates transfer of fundamentals from one learning situation to others. Structure also narrows the gap between existing and new or advanced knowledge. Task-based learning provides experiences from which learners create a structured framework leading to possible solutions. In this way new knowledge can be restructured to fit into an existing body of knowledge.

Discovering faulty judgement or error is an important ingredient of task-based learning. As the discovery is made by the learner himself through testing assumptions or solutions against a criterion he wants to reach, acknowledgement of the error may facilitate better alternative solutions to the problem. Learners are taught to accept responsibility for their own learning, judgement and behaviour. Instead of a passive recipient of knowledge, the learner becomes an active participant in organising and managing learning. Affective filters are lower and learners mediate better solutions in interactive tasks in the classroom (Hamachek, 1975:446; Mayer, 1987:6; Dembo, 1991:396-402; Notterman & Drewry, 1993:143-160).

As learners are led to rely on their own judgement by reconciling the available facts to predicted or desired solutions through problem-solving, they learn to create an organising scheme for their own learning. External authority becomes increasingly less important as the learner learns how to search for information and to rely on his own cognitive processes. He is conscious of relationships between what he is learning and his own experiences and reflects metacognitively on his own learning. Life-long learning is facilitated and strategies of learning are imbedded. Self-image is enhanced by a feeling of being in control of one's own learning and disciplined and motivated learning behaviour is

created (Hamackek, 1975:447; Mayer, 1987:161-162; Dembo, 1991:430; Notterman & Drewry, 1993:143-160).

Hamachek (1975:447), Mayer (1987:204-208) and Dembo (1991:301-320) report empirical studies that underscore the claims of the proponents of task-based learning. They report the following findings:

- retention of learning content is improved, because declarative knowledge (about things) and procedural knowledge (how to do things) are integrated;
- transfer of knowledge to new situations is facilitated, but declarative knowledge is easier to transfer to other problem-solving activities than procedural knowledge;
- if the transfer task is more advanced, task-based learning is relatively more effective;
- learning through task-based approaches accommodates later transfer more effectively;
- school-like materials are learnt better through task-based learning;
- task-based learning seems to be more effective than other types of learning if there is background knowledge of the subject matter;
- task-based learning is relatively more effective for less able students than other types of learning;
- reflecting on the learning experience facilitates better short and long-term learning results, and
- a reasonable degree of guidance is preferable to little guidance in task-based approaches.

Gagné (1968:408), who conducted an experiment requiring an experimental group of learners to verbalise (or reflect) while learning, reports:

The results appear to indicate that requiring students to verbalise during practice has the effect of making them think of new reasons for their moves, and thus

facilitates both the discovery of general principles and their employment in solving successive problems.

The following generalisations can be made about the theoretical bases for a task-based approach to language learning:

- comprehensible input on a level slightly higher than the learner's present level, motivates him to extend his language resources. However, comprehensible input + 1 is not enough to ensure that the learner processes language actively;
- learner output is important for the development of a language system;
- interactional input benefits the acquisition of vocabulary;
- interaction with media or text leads to learning opportunities;
- reflection on completed tasks leads to metacognitive development and insight into language learning processes;
- group constitution should reflect learners of differing ability in the same group, as weaker learners may benefit from the modified input of more advanced learners;
- tasks should present a cognitive challenge;
- language learning for communicative purposes involves learning the intricacies and nuances involved in giving meaning, and
- it must be borne in mind that all language is used within a sociocultural context.

Research bears out much of what the proponents of task-based approaches claim to be true. The preceding theories crystallised in task-based models of language learning. The models of Prabhu (1987), Breen and Candlin (1987) and Long and Crookes (1992) are discussed below.

4.4 TASK-BASED MODELS FOR SYLLABUS DESIGN

4.4.1. Introduction

The disillusionment with the functional-notional syllabus has

been influential in the search for a more effective syllabus. Widdowson (1990:132) has argued that functions and notions as units of analysis still represent a synthetic approach to learning (cf. 4.2.1.3). Functions and notions are learned in too many classrooms as disconnected bits of language that serve little purpose. This opinion is shared by various authors (cf. 3.4.3), who maintain that much of the teaching of functional-notional syllabuses results in formulaic and unnatural language learning.

The search for a model of ESL teaching that allows learners to use language for purposeful outcomes was given momentum with Prabhu's experiment with a procedural approach to language teaching. Other approaches followed, namely the process syllabus and the task syllabus.

4.4.2 Prabhu's procedural syllabus

One of the task-based projects designed to help both ESL teachers and learners to raise proficiency levels was Prabhu's Bangalore project, which investigated a replacement for Structural-Oral-Situational (S-O-S) teaching. S-O-S teaching was unsuccessful in establishing fluency - if learners were taught to use one structure in one context, they could do so, but they couldn't use the structure correctly and appropriately in other contexts (Prabhu, 1987:11).

Prabhu (1982:2) argues that form is best learnt when the learner focuses on meaning. To focus on meaning in a purposeful activity, the learner must be involved in an activity or task that produces an outcome. The syllabus is seen as an operational construct, i.e. a document that indicates a procedure that may be followed in the classroom; hence the name procedural syllabus. It consists of language tasks constructed around problems requiring the use of English, e.g. constructing and comparing time-tables, finding, naming or describing specific locations on a map etc. (Prabhu, 1987:138-139).

in the classroom; hence the name procedural syllabus. It consists of language tasks constructed around problems requiring the use of English, e.g. constructing and comparing time-tables, finding, naming or describing specific locations on a map etc. (Prabhu, 1987:138-139).

Prabhu (1987:91) describes the aim of language learning as follows:

to enable the learner to acquire an ability to employ language for a meaning exchange and, in the process, to achieve conformity to linguistic norms...

Language data have to be interpreted to be used for particular purposes. Prabhu (1987:23-26) specifies objectives as specific outcomes that must be achieved. Some preparation must precede the expected outcomes. At the same time, unexpected and unpredictable outcomes should be accommodated by the generation of a general and generative competence. For this reason, tasks are not pre-ordered but are adapted to the changing needs and circumstances of learners (Brumfit, 1984:235; Prabhu, 1987:23-26; Clark, 1987:66-69; Foley, 1991:70-71).

The question arises: how can learners, who have little command of the target language, be expected to address tasks when they lack the vocabulary and language structures to do so? The pre-task serves to provide the support needed to proceed with the task. Pre-task activities consist of the teacher performing a task similar to the one learners are expected to perform during the task phase of the lesson (this is similar to Bruner's concept of scaffolding). Some learners also perform the task, demonstrating procedures and providing the language needed. Simplified language is a characteristic of the lesson, and learners themselves indicate the language and the level of language required. This language may be provided by either the teacher or a more capable peer. After execution the task is assessed by the whole class to determine whether it has been

content that subsequently shows in a delimitation of the language (Brumfit, 1984:236; Prabhu, 1987:26-27; Clark, 1989:67; Foley, 1991:72).

Prabhu (1987:89) points out that the procedural syllabus differs from the product-oriented syllabus in that grammar is not formally taught and the learning of the language is seen as a process of 'organic growth'. Prabhu (1987:92-93) also defends the simplicity of the procedural syllabus by maintaining that if a syllabus is too detailed and complex, the language the learner is exposed to in the classroom is likely to be restricted.

Task selection in Prabhu's model differs widely from classroom to classroom and there is no general core of tasks. Depending on ability, circumstances and the teacher's intuitive reaction, beginner tasks may concern literacy or tasks that centre around numeracy skills. The prerequisite for selecting a task is that it must create a need to communicate (during which process L1 and L2 resources, gestures, conjecture, numeracy and the like are used) and it must support the learner's attempt to infer meaning (Prabhu, 1987:29). Prabhu (1987:29) states that the inference of meaning leads to the acquisition of the L2 resources and comprehension, because they 'set up explicit frames of reference, rules of relevance, recurrent procedures and reasoning patterns, parallel situations, and problem-and-solution sequences...'. .

The grading of tasks is done according to criteria for cognitive complexity, and Prabhu (1987:87-88) mentions the following aspects:

- the information provided. The amount, variety and sources of information influence task difficulty. The less information is given, the more difficult the task, but the more the support is, the easier the task becomes;
- the required reasoning. If the number of steps involved in the cognitive processing of information increases, the task becomes more difficult;

- precision needed. The greater the degree of precision required to interpret or apply information, exercise a choice between options or refine linguistic accuracy, the more difficult the task is;
- familiarity with concepts. The learner's familiarity with concepts greatly influences task difficulty - if the learner is unfamiliar with the concepts involved, the task will be more difficult, and
- degree of abstractness. The more abstract the concepts, the more difficult the task is for learners.

Prabhu (1987:39) states that tasks are sequenced according to increasing difficulty, but this is done by means of 'commonsense judgement'. Tasks may be recycled at a higher level of complexity, due to the reasoning activity involved or an increase in the above-mentioned criteria that make tasks more difficult. According to Prabhu (1987:46-47), three types of activities are used, viz. information-gap activities (e.g. learner 1 wants to make a booking for a family of 4 for a holiday, and learner 2 has the information of the hotel), reasoning-gap activities (e.g. preparing a time-table for studying based on the available information such as sporting activities, extra-mural activities and the like) and opinion-gap activities (e.g. verbalising a personal preference). He regards information-gap activities as easier than reasoning-gap or opinion-gap activities, and adds that spoken tasks are easier than written tasks. He prefers reasoning-gap activities, because they pose intellectual challenges (Prabhu, 1987:88-89).

Brumfit (1984:235) describes the most useful and valuable aspects of the Bangalore Project as the following:

- learners learn by using language (something that can be utilised in normal teaching situations);
- the Project has contributed to methodological debate and research, combining practice with evaluation and assessment;
- although the method was inspired, devised and executed for a

- learners learn by using language (something that can be utilised in normal teaching situations);
- the Project has contributed to methodological debate and research, combining practice with evaluation and assessment;
- although the method was inspired, devised and executed for a localised situation, a theoretical basis supports the experiment;
- the 'bottom-up' nature of the Project benefits teachers in similar situations from disadvantaged communities;
- realistic outcomes in realistic settings provide evidence about task-based approaches, and
- materials can be adapted for fluency activities in all language programmes, regardless of whether the underlying assumptions of the project are accepted.

Prabhu (1982:5) claims that the reliance on the reasoning capabilities of learners necessitates the limitation of possibilities to 'right' or 'wrong' answers. This is, however, counter-productive to the development of learning strategies (Brumfit, 1984:237; Clark, 1987:90; Low, 1989:136-154).

Dominicus (1991:37) sees the predetermination of tasks and the provision of language structures in the pre-task phase as nothing other than a semantico-grammatical syllabus that is linguistically divided into pre-tasks and tasks. Long and Crookes (1992:37) point out that Prabhu proscribes focus-on-form teaching, whereas research supports such intervention (cf. 2.2.6).

Prabhu uses tasks not as an end in themselves, but as a vehicle for teaching English (Clark, 1987:90). According to White (1988:103) and Long and Crookes (1992:36), Prabhu's approach is similar to that of the communicative approach as far as task content is concerned; however, he isn't concerned with the language used during a task, but only with completion of the task. Long and Crookes (1992:37) indicate concern for the rationale for syllabus content in the Prabhu model. They argue that the criteria for task selection are not objective or

possibilities of task-based approaches to ESL.

4.4.3 Breen and Candlin's process syllabus

Breen and Candlin (1980:90-110) subscribe to Halliday's view of the purposes of everyday communication, i.e. ideational, interpersonal and textual (cf. 4.3.5). They say that the affects that are part of such knowledge, interrelate with the social environment in which the L2 is learnt. They state that the L2 syllabus should specify its communicative purposes in terms of a target repertoire. The target competence on which such a repertoire depends and through which it is achieved, needs to be specified. The learner does not enter into the process with nothing to contribute - he contributes communicative knowledge (and affects) and communicative abilities (and the skills that manifest them) gained through learning his first language. For this reason, the ESL learner cannot be treated as a *tabula rasa* in the language classroom.

Breen (1987) addresses not only the outcomes of learning, but also the means towards the outcomes, which means that he subscribes to the disappearance of the division between content and methodology.

Breen (1987:157-174) suggests that the aim of the process-oriented syllabuses is to enhance communicative competence (consisting of the knowledge that language users have internalised to enable them to understand and produce language) rather than communicative performance (using language in comprehension or production). In order for the new language learner to work towards the solutions of problems, communication in the target language has to be accurate, appropriate and fluent. Not only communicative knowledge, but also communicative procedures are needed for the execution of tasks (Candlin, 1987:6). It is not enough only to communicate; the communication has to lead to comprehension by all participants (Foley, 1991:72; Dominicus, 1991:86).

Candlin (1987:15-16) suggests a selection of tasks that share a common core or task-focuses, and he proposes the following types of task-focuses:

- learner training (such as language awareness-raising tasks or tasks that directly address learner needs, course objectives and the utilisation of resources);
- information-sharing;
- research and experimentation (e.g. referential and inferential skills), and
- learner strategy (e.g. attending, making sense, going beyond the given, transferring and generalising).

Candlin (1987:19) also provides a proposal for the grading of tasks. The more difficult the cognitive load of the task, the more difficult it can be assumed that the communicative task will be. Candlin proposes that tasks be gradually advanced in terms of progress from familiar to unfamiliar experiences. As knowledge of new experiences becomes familiar, communicative stress can be advanced by providing a task involving a L1 interlocutor who is more knowledgeable about subject content, or a task that leads to open-ended and less generalisable outcomes. Code complexity, interpretive density as well as the continuity of content influence the grading of tasks. The less the learner has to fill in himself, the easier the task is judged to be. For this reason, some learner familiarity with the proposed task is a prerequisite if he is to complete it. Candlin (1987:20) also points out that the different levels from which learners attempt these tasks make it impossible to sequence tasks prior to learning - depending on learners' previous knowledge and experience, they themselves must sequence and complete the tasks. Breen (1987:166) emphasises that the syllabus should extend the focus upon procedures for learning to account for the actual social situation in which learning will take place. The context of language learning and the unique language learning procedures in a particular context need to be recognised in the syllabus.

Breen sees the process syllabus as a syllabus that deliberately encourages the process of reinterpretation of the official syllabus by teacher and learners.

The designer provides the following:

- a plan relating to the major decisions which teacher and learners make during classroom learning, and
- a bank of classroom activities which are made up by sets of tasks.

Deciding how the tasks are done, by whom the tasks are done (pairs, groups, individuals etc.), when the tasks are done, in what order they are undertaken, and for how long they are undertaken, rests with the teacher and learners entirely. Task content is, therefore, potential content until it is redefined (Breen, 1987:43). Breen (1987:167) describes the syllabus in terms of four tiers:

Level 1 represents the major focus of the syllabus itself: the decisions which have to be made by teacher and learners concerning language learning work in the classroom. *Level 2* represents two related outcomes from these decisions: the agreed working procedure(s) of the class and the on-going syllabus. *Level 3* is the bank of alternative activities which themselves entail alternative tasks. It is at this level of tasks - *level 4* - that the main classroom work is undertaken. Tasks therefore represent the meeting point of the decision-making process.

Candlin (1987:8) suggests that language learning should include the following elements:

- exploration of language and learning by the learner;
- the learner's metacognitive reflection upon the learning process, the language learning process and the syllabus;

- negotiation about the learning process, the language learning process and the syllabus;
- interaction and interdependence among learners, teachers, data, activities and resources involved in language learning;
- evaluation systems of the learning process, the language learning process and the syllabus;
- the provision of comprehensible input and procedures for engaging the input;
- accommodating differentiation among learners;
- problematising language, learning and classroom activity, and
- managing language learning.

The focus of the process syllabus is not the language or the language learning process, but the learner and the learning process (Long & Crookes, 1992:38). Syllabus content, therefore, cannot be determined prior to the course, but only during or after completion of the course. It will be based on the content negotiated with learners for the learning process (Candlin, 1987:35). Breen (1987:169) suggests that a classroom group adopting a process syllabus would need to arrive at and implement its own content syllabus (White, 1988:64; Long & Crookes, 1992:39).

No criteria for assessment are provided. The negotiated, expected outcomes for tasks seem idealistic, especially in situations where ESL teachers may not be very proficient, and may not be familiar with what task completion entails. The language that is used while completing tasks is as important as completing them.

The Breen and Candlin model proposes the continual evaluation of the process by all participants. Thus teacher and learners will evaluate and share impressions of the process, outcome and gains or demonstrated deficiencies in their own learning repertoire (to be addressed and overcome later). Adaptations and the selection of alternatives are by implication part of this syllabus.

The Breen and Candlin model differs from the Prabhu model in that

tasks are not merely seen as a vehicle for language teaching, but are judged to have inherent educational value. The methodology of task-based language teaching is more structured and tasks are not selected randomly. A rationale is provided for the grading of tasks, but the sequencing of tasks depends largely on what evolves in the classroom. They see the negotiation of learning, language learning and the syllabus as necessary to succeed. Unlike Prabhu, who does not intentionally develop a task-based methodology, Breen and Candlin attempt to structure a task-based methodology to language teaching.

It is difficult to predict discoursal patterns for open-ended tasks because the redefinition of these tasks by the learners is unpredictable. Certain tasks (especially those engaging informal discourse) seem to be more risky in terms of discourse outcomes than clearly delineated, more formally structured ones. Long and Crookes (1992:39) point out that the process syllabus makes unrealistically high demands on the level of competence in both learners and teachers. Logistical problems abound, such as the redevelopment of materials. The traditional roles of teacher and learner are not easily redefined and the negotiation process may not yield the promising results that Breen and Candlin foresee. The prespecification of tasks need not necessarily be a weakness (as Breen and Candlin suggest), and Long and Crookes (1992:40) recommend a needs survey to validate prescribed content. Long and Crookes say that the teacher and learners can still retain flexibility and negotiation within the preselected tasks (although, admittedly, some restriction in task choice is implied). The specific lack of a focus on form is another shortcoming of the Breen and Candlin model. Long and Crookes (1992:41) point out that, although general learning theory has much to contribute to SLA theory, the uniqueness of SLA is treated too lightly by Breen and Candlin.

4.4.4 Long and Crookes' task syllabus

Long and Crookes (1992) include a focus on form in their task

syllabus. They say that '...when the task syllabus is combined with a focus on form in task-based language teaching, the task receives more support in SLA research as a viable unit around which to organize language teaching and learning opportunities' (Long & Crookes; 1992:27). Long and Crookes (1992:34-48) point out that task-based approaches analyse language learning not in terms of any linguistic feature such as form, notion or function, but in terms of meaningful activities that generate chunks of language.

The aim of the task syllabus is the generation of language chunks through and around tasks. The assumptions are that:

- learners are able to perceive regularities in the input and to induce rules, and
- learners have a continued availability of innate knowledge of linguistic universals and the way language can vary. This innate knowledge is reactivated by exposure to naturalistic use of the L2.

Long and Crookes (1992:30-31) contend that interventionist or synthetic syllabuses produce stilted language, even when the selected organisational units (such as themes, situations or functions) are carried by tasks. They say that the assumption that learners acquire language in a linear and additive fashion, is the greatest flaw of synthetic syllabuses, as research indicates that language items are not acquired in separate and isolated groups (cf. 2.2.6). Progress in one area of language development seems to be intricately mapped to progress in other areas and learners move through developmental stages rather than mastery of one aspect. Rejection of form-based syllabuses, however, does not mean the rejection of focus-on-form teaching. The treatment of language as object and the singular focus on a linguistic aspect seems wasted, but 'awareness of certain classes of linguistic items in the input is necessary for learning to occur, and drawing learners' attention to those items facilitates development when certain conditions are met' (Long & Crookes,

1992:42). Long and Crookes, therefore, subscribe to the findings that indicate that formal instruction of language form can benefit acquisition.

The syllabus objectives are described in terms of target tasks that are based on a needs survey. From these pedagogical tasks are derived. Tasks are classified on the basis of common components, e.g. 'preparing breakfast, lunch and dinner' may resort under 'preparing meals'. Long and Crookes (1992:43) state:

(pedagogic) tasks provide a vehicle for the presentation of appropriate target language samples to learners - input which they will inevitably reshape via application and general cognitive processing capacities - and for the delivery of comprehension and production opportunities of negotiable difficulty. New form-function relationships are perceived by the learner as a result. The strengthening of the subset of those that are not destabilised by negative input, their increased accessibility and incorporation in more complex associations within long-term memory, adds to the complexity of the grammar and constitutes SL development.

Mohan (1986:36-37) proposes a knowledge framework (similar to the Long and Crookes model) of activities which emphasises the development of cognitive skills through and with the use of language. Perry (1987:285-296), however, warns against the assumption that all learners will benefit from an activity-based syllabus. He advocates a variety of tasks that may include reflective and meditative actions, and not always highly active tasks.

The grading of the tasks are related to aspects of the tasks themselves, such as the number of steps involved, the number of solutions, the number of interlocutors, the saliency of the interlocutors' distinguishing features, spacial and time

requirements, and the amount and kind of language involved. Although Long and Crookes suggest some grading criteria they do not propose a fixed set of criteria. The amount of support that is provided also influences the degree of difficulty. Long and Crookes (1992:45) mention the use of modified language that increases learner comprehension, certain question types that influence learner production (e.g. inferential questions that require greater cognitive application), the effects of whole-group and small group interaction on language use and the types of educational tasks (e.g. structured versus open-ended, planned versus unplanned) and negotiated tasks.

It is during the process of grading that Long and Crookes advise negotiation between teacher and learners (Long and Crookes, 1992:45). The classroom situation will determine how difficult a task is for a particular group and they have to negotiate with the teacher to sequence tasks from those that they find easy to those that they find challenging.

Carter and Long (1990:215-221) describe language-based approaches to literature teaching. They wish to promote closer integration between language and literature, and to support such integration through language-sensitive, learner-centred, activity-oriented classroom activities. They believe that such a procedure will develop independent interpretive and critical skills by 'reading through language to the wider meanings literary texts convey'. Such reading tasks include general comprehension questions that require close reference back to the text. Text focus questions that encourage and require inferences are included, and learners are led to find clues in language in order to deduce meaning. Personal response and impact questions attempt to measure the learner's imaginative response to the text, and to use language directly to register that response. Carter and Long (1990:220) believe that the target language, being both the vehicle and the object of study, should form the focus in classroom procedure, but all aspects of the communicative process should be served. Thus not only the form, but the social, personal and political

environment of the texts should receive attention.

Learners are assessed after the completion of tasks. Standardisation is left to an expert in the field and the learner is measured against the criteria that the expert provides (Long & Crookes, 1992:45). Criterion-referenced assessment (cf. 3.6.2) is advocated by Long and Crookes (1992:45). Learners' actions should be described in terms of measurable objectives, the prerequisites for the action should be stated, and the criteria according to which the learner will be assessed should be provided.

Long and Crookes' model offers a structured rationale for a task-based approach to ESL. If the needs analysis is adequate, the selection of tasks need not be complicated. The pre-planned syllabus provides a structured base for teachers to use. The use of tasks for their inherent educational value adheres to the principles of general learning theory. The Long and Crookes model differs from other models regarding the emphasis on formal language teaching. It is not clear though, how the formal language teaching should be organised, and if the teacher should teach language structures that emerge during the task, or should the planning of language teaching be done prior to task selection and classroom implementation? Long and Crookes do not propose a classification system of some kind to assist the teacher in structuring tasks. Tasks may also overlap and be difficult to break down into sub-tasks.

4.5 A SYNTHESIS AND CRITIQUE OF TASK-BASED MODELS

The models of Prabhu, Breen and Candlin and Long and Crookes show the following similarities:

- tasks are the unit of organisation in syllabuses;
- learning and language learning are not separate issues;
- language is both the object and vehicle of learning;
- the theoretical division between content and methodology has

disappeared;

- language learning is best served through purposeful learning tasks;
- the objectives of the syllabus are reflected in the tasks;
- tasks require the description of behavioural objectives;
- task-based language syllabuses are analytic in nature;
- tasks may be taken from real life situations or may be designed to teach a specific pedagogic point;
- the syllabus does not focus on the learning of discrete grammatical points, but rather on meaning, with an ensuing mastery of language form, and
- task execution is accomplished by interaction with peers and media.

The aspects in which the models differ can be summarised as follows:

- Prabhu utilises tasks as a means towards an end and the other proponents of task-based language learning argue that tasks are means within themselves;
- Prabhu prioritises task completion above language use during task completion, but the other proponents suggest that the language use during task completion is important;
- Prabhu as well as Breen and Candlin does not propose the formal teaching of language in the classroom, whereas Long and Crookes insist that there should be a focus on form;
- task selection in the Prabhu model is random, in the Breen and Candlin model it is negotiated with learners and described after syllabus implementation, and in the Long and Crookes model a prior needs survey is suggested;
- selected tasks in the Prabhu model include many tasks employing numeracy skills which pose a cognitive challenge, whereas Breen and Candlin propose four task-focuses. Long and Crookes propose the classification of tasks into task-types that share a common core;
- the grading of tasks is done randomly by Prabhu, whereas Breen and Candlin suggest negotiation between teacher and learners

to sequence tasks. Long and Crookes propose some definite guidelines for grading and a negotiated agreement for completing tasks;

- the assessment of tasks reflects the biggest differences in the various models. Whereas Prabhu has been criticised for the lack of any guidelines for task assessment (other than task completion), Breen and Candlin propose continual process evaluation and negotiation on expected task outcomes. They do not, however, propose a framework for task assessment. Long and Crookes describe the focus on form as an aspect of task assessment, and they rely on the description and assessment of task completion by an expert.

Task-based models of learning are not without their critics. Hamachek (1975:448-450) says that if learners are not guided, 'wrong' answers may be mistaken for 'right' answers. Although wrong and right should not be rigid concepts in task-based approaches, the issue of suitability or appropriateness does arise, and if learners are not supported by a firm structure they may fail to elect the most suitable or appropriate solution to a problem. This is even more so where L2 learning is concerned, because appropriate use must be acquired in the target language. Skinner (1967:318-325) points out the difficult role of the teacher in retaining the balance between what should be transmitted and what should be discovered. The issue of differentiation is also involved, and the teacher has to control the process so that the more able learners are not the only ones who discover the answers. The teacher must be sensitive to those who need more support and guidance during the learning process.

Atkin (1968:27-30) cautions against attempts to define behavioural objectives either too rigidly or too exhaustively, as the results of learning on every individual can never be fully premeditated or forecast. Task-based approaches don't encourage the articulation of all possible objectives. This may be disturbing to syllabus users who prefer syllabus intents to be easily manageable. Hamachek (1975:459) concludes that task-based

teaching and learning do not exclude the expository transmission of knowledge or reinforcement learning methods. The teacher has to find a balance between the two and adapt teaching accordingly.

4.6 DESIGNING A TASK-BASED SYLLABUS

4.6.1 The selection and grading of tasks

Nunan (1988:45) proposes a distinction between 'real-world' tasks and 'pedagogic' tasks; the former term referring to the sort of behaviour required of them in the world beyond the classroom, and the latter to activities devised by the teacher with a certain learning outcome in mind, i.e. activities that are unlikely to occur outside the classroom. Nunan (1989:6-10) also points out that communicative tasks may include only receptive skills like listening (drawing a map while listening to instructions), or productive skills like speaking, or both.

For the purposes of this study this distinction between real-life and pedagogic tasks is adopted. The former refers to tasks with short-term aims that the pupil can utilise quickly, such as establishing and maintaining relationships. Sub-tasks would, for example, include exchanging greetings. Pedagogic tasks are those tasks that are selected with a view to cultural transfer through knowledge and experience, and may have medium- and long-term aims, such as judging or evaluating. A pupil in Grade 4 and a pupil in Grade 10 can solve similar problems, but the level of cognitive input (for example) for each will differ vastly.

Widdowson (1987:96) suggests that tasks should provide learners with real, meaningful and authentic communication opportunities and situations that they may encounter outside the classroom. According to Phillips and Shettlesworth (1987:106), tasks should promote natural language use and realistic classroom discourse through relevant subject matter. Crawford-Lange (1987:120) says that individual learner needs can be met through a task-based language learning approach. Once a task is selected, pupils can

explore the task from different points of view through a general discussion. Nunan (1994:58) points out that the task-based syllabus favours the selection of tasks rather than linguistic content, but Spada (1990:308) reports results that indicate that opportunities to raise grammatical consciousness coupled with meaningful communication deliver best results. Allwright (1984:157) and Braidì (1995:164-165) suggest that learners acquire grammar from interactional discourse structures (e.g. the decreased rate of speech when an interlocutor is asked to repeat an utterance in order to clarify or modify discourse). Focusing on the task (meaning) rather than on the linguistic form of the message is stressed.

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun (1993:9) quote research and maintain that the task-based language syllabus provides learners with the most opportunities for negotiation of meaning and modification of interlanguage.

Turner and Paris (1995:672-673) report on tasks in the primary school classroom that were found to promote acquisition. These tasks:

- provide authentic choices and purposes, i.e. learners must feel they work towards a meaningful task;
- allow learners to modify tasks to suit their own interests and abilities;
- show learners how they can control their learning through self-monitoring, evaluation and reminders to focus on tasks;
- encourage collaboration in peer group activities;
- emphasise strategies (such as word-attack skills) and metacognition for constructing meaning, and
- use the consequences of tasks to build life-skills such as responsibility, ownership and self-regulation.

Legutke and Thomas (1991:15) point out that pupils contribute unintended and unplanned interaction in every communicative process and the more pupils absorb themselves in the learning

task, the more meaningful communication becomes.

The following are important criteria for the selection of tasks:

- tasks should provide for the language needs of pupils (in the short, medium and long term), often expressed by learners as the need of vocabulary (De Villiers, 1991:78);
- pupils' individual differences should be accommodated through an adaptable approach;
- the amount of scaffolding that should be provided while pupils are executing tasks (based on knowledge of the learners) should be kept in mind;
- the cognitive, social and affective maturity of pupils should be taken into consideration;
- content should initially allow for spontaneous learning through experience in the early years and should include an increasing mixture of experience learning, reflection, deliberate learning and awareness-raising for older pupils;
- relevant, real communicative tasks that involve pupils in activities that produce end results should be selected;
- tasks should expose pupils to the socio-cultural contexts of English and an increasing awareness of the role and nature of languages and cultures;
- tasks should be interesting and the level of comprehension required should not discourage pupils and
- pupils should have some input in the selection and management of tasks.

After tasks have been selected, they should be graded. Skehan (1996:52) proposes the following framework for grading:

TASK SEQUENCING FRAMEWORK

Code complexity (i.e. formal factors)

Cognitive complexity (content):

Cognitive processing

Cognitive familiarity

Communicative stress:

Time preserve (how long does completion take)

Modality (listening/reading/speaking/writing)

Scale (number of participants, relationships etc.)

Stakes (how important is doing the task)

Control (how much influence do participants have over process, procedure etc.)

Skehan also emphasises a balance between fluency and accuracy skills and says that teaching-learning opportunities should present the chance for pupils to apply previous restructuring (cf. 2.2.4), i.e. 'attentional spare capacity', to reflect on on-going language learning and employ a wider repertoire of language. The criteria mentioned in the Australian Language Levels Guidelines (Scarino et al., 1988b:26) distinguish between criteria related to the task itself, and criteria related to the pupil. These criteria are the following:

Factors relating to the task

- predictability
- static as opposed to dynamic descriptions
- experientially known vs. experientially new
- sociocultural specificity
- level of support
- level of linguistic processing
- level of cognitive demand
- other characteristics relating to the activity

Factors relating to the learner

- confidence
- motivation
- prior learning experience
- learning pace
- observed ability in language skills
- cultural knowledge/awareness
- linguistic knowledge

Brumfit (1984:119) also suggests that grading should emphasise oral/aural (fluency) work in the Junior Primary Phase and says that a gradual movement to more accuracy-based activities should take place in the Senior Primary Phase. This argument is in line with findings on the influence of age and acquisition order (cf. 2.2.6).

The sequencing of tasks involves the ordering of tasks from easier to more difficult tasks, but tasks and the subsequent language focus (e.g. vocabulary related to the topic); the use of a tense, etc.) should be recycled regularly, always moving to a more sophisticated level of use.

4.6.2 Teaching-learning opportunities

As far as teaching-learning opportunities are concerned, Skehan (1996:53-54) proposes three different stages, namely pre-task activity, task execution and post-task activities.

STAGE	GOAL	TYPICAL TECHNIQUE
Pre-emptive work	Restructuring - establish target language - reduce cognitive load	Consciousness-raising Planning (task execution)
During task completion	Mediate accuracy and fluency	Task choice Pressure manipulation
Post 1	Discourage excessive fluency Encourage accuracy and restructuring	Public performance Analysis Testing
Post 2	Cycle of synthesis and analysis	Task sequences Task families

Skehan (1996:55) points out that the teacher is sometimes expected to withdraw during task-execution to allow natural language acquisitional processes to proceed, but the danger is that communication aims become so important that focusing on accuracy, taking syntactic risks, and the capacity to change and restructure become secondary or are discarded.

Skehan's proposed model for factors that influence task implementation is presented in Table 2.

Skehan, does not, however, mention the importance of the cultural context of task execution.

<i>Stage Goal</i>	<i>Code complexity</i>		<i>Cognitive complexity</i>
Pre-emptive <i>Restructuring</i> - establish target language - reduce cognitive load	<i>Pre-teach</i> <i>Consciousness-raising</i> -Conventional parallel tasks -rehearsal of elements		Processing <i>Observe</i> Solve similar tasks <i>Plan</i> - cognitively - linguistically Familiarity Activate
During <i>mediating accuracy and fluency</i>	<i>Accuracy focus</i> <i>Conformity pressure</i>	TASK CHOICE <i>Time</i> <i>Modality</i> <i>Scale</i> <i>Stakes</i> <i>Control</i>	<i>Support available</i> <i>Surprise elements</i> - additional - conflicting
Post 1 <i>Increases accuracy</i> <i>Encourages restructuring</i> <i>Discourages excessive synthesis</i>	<i>Public performance</i> - teacher - group - camera <i>Degree of analysis</i> <i>Testing</i>		
Post 2 <i>Cycle of synthesis and analysis</i>	<i>The task sequence</i> - repeating - parallel tasks <i>Task families</i>		

TABLE 2: Factors influencing task implementation

Clark, Scarino and Brownell (1994:43) suggest that tasks be grouped into units of work and modules by means of various organising features such as conceptual (e.g. a topic such as 'Entrepreneurship'), procedural, representational or metacognitive knowledge, (e.g. 'Writing for the school magazine'- a task that integrates all aspects of knowledge) (cf. 2.3.3.1).

4.6.3 Assessment

The following issues are relevant for the assessment of tasks:

- at what stage of task execution is a task assessed?
- what is the role of formative and summative assessment for

tasks, and

- what criteria are used for task assessment?

The stage during which task assessment is done is important. Sub-tasks can be assessed while the pupil is on his way to full task execution, or assessment can be postponed until the whole task is complete. Formative assessment should not be approached by breaking up tasks into minute parts and assessing each of these. Clark (1996:258) says in this regard

'(Effective learning) involves tackling complex tasks as a whole rather than breaking them down into parts'.

A more holistic approach to task completion and assessment is recommended. Formative assessment is best performed through self and peer assessment, followed by teacher assessment. Keeping records of these assessments may provide a profile of pupil progress. Brindley (1994:75) says that summative assessment reflects ongoing task performance, with a resultant emphasis on accurate record-keeping and explicit records.

Brindley (1994:73) argues that task-based assessment has the following advantages:

- the focus of teacher and pupil is on meaning;
- assessment is directly linked to content and objectives;
- useful diagnostic feedback is attained, because explicit performance criteria are usually provided. Collaborative learning and self-assessment are encouraged in this way;
- clear guidance is available in outcome reporting, which is done in terms of performance and is intelligible to non-specialists.

Problematic factors are, however, the following:

- task-based teaching promotes authentic language use, but assessment always introduces an unnatural aspect and,

therefore, truly authentic language is difficult to assess in an entirely objective way;

- if a pupil uses language in one task, it cannot be assumed that he will demonstrate the same capability in another, similar task - as Bachman (1990:317) puts it, demonstrated ability in one context is not the same as ability itself;
- task-based assessment criteria vary greatly;
- task-based assessment techniques that rely on judgement show significant and substantial differences between raters;
- task assessment is hampered by constraints of available time, money, teacher expertise and external accountability.

Brindley (1994:78-84) lists the following task-based assessment approaches and the most important criticism of each:

TBL ASSESSMENT APPROACHES

- 'expert judgement' approach
- rating scales
- genre-based approaches
- data-based assessment criteria

CRITICISM

- subjective evaluation
- absence of shared evaluative criteria
- lack empirical support for L2 use
- levels of capability and assessment criteria are the same, i.e. external criteria are lacking
- specification of differences between levels is difficult
- full description of the structures of most oral and written genres still unavailable
- checklist controls are cumbersome
- linguistic and non-linguistic factors are assessed
- discrepancies between what actually happens in real situations and what test developers think happens.

Brindley (1994:84) recommends that data of the skill components inherent in task execution be collected, and that pupils be assessed with reference to their mastery of each of the skill components (in essence the same as the BoPs). Clark, Scarino and Brownell (1994:52) suggest that bands of performance (BoPs) (cf. 5.7) be used that describe standards against which the pupil is measured. These are discussed in Chapter 5.

The Australian Language Levels project ESL scales (1994) give a general statement in terms of the language skills that pupils have to demonstrate during a stage (cf. 5.6). These outcomes are divided

into four categories, namely: communication, language and cultural understanding, language structures and features and strategies. Criteria for each of the categories, as well as for individual tasks are also provided. An example of this comprehensive assessment approach is given in Addendum 1.

An approach similar to the assessment approaches of the Target Oriented Curriculum (cf. 5.7) is recommended in this study, i.e. assessment that is target-oriented and the assessment tasks are the means by which learner progress towards the targets are monitored. The compilation of assessed tasks form a profile of learner capability. The profile can be converted into a mark (cf. Addendum 2). Although it is suggested by Clark (cf. 5.7) that marks be avoided, the South African school system may not accommodate the sophisticated assessment schemes of the Australian Language Levels project or the Target Oriented Curriculum (cf. Chapter 5).

4.7 CONCLUSION

Task-based teaching is a suitable teaching approach for the modern society that Clark, Scarino and Brownell (1994:6-7) describe, because it proposes a purposeful and meaningful approach to language teaching and learning. The task, as defined in this study, describes a purposeful, interactive action within a certain context. Both fluency and accuracy skills can be developed and measurable outcomes are produced.

Task-based language learning is underscored by firm theoretical bases. Input theory and output theory essentially regard the learner as an apprentice. During his apprenticeship he learns from experts (mostly teachers) by listening, watching, asking, confirming and emulating. He also engages in interaction with peers and this engages him in the creation of discourse. During this process, the learner should be involved in the negotiation and mediation of meaning which strain his existing language resources. Widdowson stresses the unpredictability involved in activities with real communicative intent. It is this unpredictability of discourse

that challenges the learner's parameters of knowledge.

Vygotsky's influential theories regarding language and thought underline the nature of language learning. Language learning cannot be severed from the cultural context in which it takes place. Language learning is, furthermore, the central instrument of mental regulation. 'Meaning giving' takes place during language learning. This is done best when it is purposeful, functional and when the learner is communicating with more experienced members of his culture. Halliday's functional theory stresses 'learning-by-doing'. His central point is that the pupil can learn language only by using it and by 'creating meaning'. The pupil must have the opportunities to make decisions about language use through his involvement in purposeful tasks that focus on meaning. General learning theory also supports an active involvement in learning; something which a task-based syllabus encourages.

Task-based models are advocated by Prabhu, Breen and Candlin and Long and Crookes. These models have elicited much interest. Prabhu's proposals were tried out with success in India, but many questions remain regarding the selection, grading and assessment of tasks. Breen and Candlin stress the learner as the central figure in language learning and suggest that tasks be negotiated between teacher and learner. Long and Crookes maintain that the target language should remain both the formal object and vehicle of study, and they suggest a reconciliation of the formal focus on language and the use of tasks for their inherent educational value.

Tasks are used as the unit of analysis or organising feature in the syllabus. Task-types may be stored in a task bank. The task bank stores tasks that are similar and progressively recycled.

Criteria for task selection should be clear to combat intuitive task selection. The grading of tasks should, likewise, be guided by clear and unambiguous criteria that enable the teacher to adapt, select and grade tasks for his unique learner group.

Assessment approaches for task-based language syllabuses are still largely untested, but it is generally accpeted that formative and summative assessment should be included. The assessment of whole tasks is suggested by Clark (cf. 4.6.3).