# DESIGNING AN ESP TASK-BASED SYLLABUS FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS AT THE BORDER TECHNIKON

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## SUMMARY

**Designing an ESP Task-based syllabus for First-Year Secretarial Students at the Border Technikon.**

Keywords: electronic office, secretary, English for Specific Purposes, subject-specific, syllabus-design.

We are currently experiencing a salient evolutionary phase in syllabus design in which the questioning of established and well-tried types of syllabus coincides with a wealth of innovative proposals from theory, research and classroom experience. A review of the literature indicates that one particular syllabus type, task-based, seems to hold special promise. The main reason being its unit of analysis, namely the task. The task receives much support in second language acquisition research as a viable unit around which to organise language teaching and learning opportunities.

Various departments and faculties at the Border Technikon have different language needs. It, therefore, seems inapproopriate to subject all the students to the same Commnication in English syllabus. Secretarial students, specifically, have a different set of needs, especially because of the sophistication and complexity of the modern electronic office.

The purpose of this study, therefore, to:

* determine the appropriateness of a task-based syllabus for the secretarial course at the Border Technikon,
* determine the target tasks and task types secretaries need to undertake and
* devise a task-based syllabus for these students.

The results of the descriptive study indicated to appropriateness of designing a task-based syllabus for the special needs of secretarial students. Various target tasks (e.g., basic listening and writing skills, logical reasoning, oral skills, life skills and electronic media usage) and task types (e.g., note-taking, summarising, assessing an argument, interviewing, getting to know other people and mass media) were identified by means of questionnaires to the students as well as to prospective employers. On the basis of the results obtained an ESP task-based syllabus was designed for the secretarial course.

# OPSOMMING

**Die Ontwerp van 'n T2 Engels Taakgerigte Sillabus vir Eerstejaar Sekretariele Studente aan die Border Technikon.**

Sleutelwoorde: elektroniese kantoor, sekretaris, Engels vir 'n spesifieke doel, vakgerig, sillabus-ontwerp, taakgerig.

Ons ondervind deesdae 'n belangrike evolusionere fase in sillabusontwerp, waar die bevraagtekening van gevestigde en beproefde sillabusse saamval met 'n menigte vernuwende voorstel uit teorie, navorsing en klaskamerondervinding. 'n Oorsig van die literatuur wys dat een spesifieke sillabussoort, die taakgerigte sillabus, lyk asof dit belofte inhou. Die hoofrede hiervoor is die sillabus se eenheid van ontleding, naamlik die taak. Die taak ontvang meer ondersteuning in tweedetaalverwerwing navorsing as 'n eenheid waarom taalonderrig en leergeleenthede georganiseer word.

Verskillende departemente en fakulteite aan die Border Technikon het verskillende taalbehoeftes. Dit is daarom onvanpas om al die studente aan dieselfde Kommunikasie in Engels sillabus te onderwerp. Veral sekretariele studente het 'n ander stel behoeftes, veral omdat die moderne elektroniese kantoor gesofistikeerd en, kompleks is.

Die doel van die studie was, daarom, om:

* die geskiktheid van 'n taakgerigte sillabus vir die sekretariele kursus aan die Border Technikon vas te stel,
* die doeltake en taaktipes wat die sekretaris benodig, vas te stel en
* 'n taakgerigte sillabus vir hierdie studente op te stel.

Die resultate van die deskriptiewe studie het die geskiktheid van 'n taakgerigte sillabus vir die spesifieke behoeftes van sekretariele student aangetoon. Verskillende doeltake (bv. basiese lees- en skryfvaardighede, logiese denke, mondelinge vaardighede, lewensvaardighede en die gebruik van elektroniese media) en taaktipes (bv. die maak van notas, opsommings, die beoordeling van 'n argument, onderhoudvoering, om ander mense te leer ken en die massamedia) is deur middel van vraelyste aan studente sowel as voornemende werkgewers vasgestel. Hierdie resultate is gebruik om 'n taakgerigte T2 Engels sillabus vir die sekretariele kursus op te stel.

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# CHAPTER ONE
# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Problem statement

According to Breen (1987 : 81) it is fair to say that we are experiencing a salient evolutionary phase in syllabus design in which the questioning of established and well-tried types of syllabus coincides with a wealth of innovative proposals from theory, research and classroom experience. Currently, there seem to exist two major paradigms or frames of reference for the design of a language syllabus. These two paradigms are distinct and the second represents a recent antithesis to more established syllabus types.

Formal and functional syllabus types are exemplars of a conventional paradigm in syllabus design. Task-based and process syllabus types, on the other hand, are exemplars of a paradigm which is antithetical to the more established alternatives.

The latter two syllabus types are distinguishable from most earlier syllabus types by the fact that part of their rationale derives from what is known about human learning in general and/or second language learning in particular rather than as in the case with structural, notional and functional syllabuses, primarily from an analysis of language or language use (cf. Nunan, 1988; Long & Crookes, 1992).

All first-year students at the Border Technikon are exposed to a general "Communication in English" syllabus which is primarily of the structural, notional and functional type. This seems to be an unfair practice to students doing courses which are as diverse as Catering Management, Engineering and Secretarial Studies. One of the disadvantages of this course seems to be its general nature and its main focus on structures and functions

(i.e., conventional paradigm). Students are, therefore, often unable to transfer the skills they learn in it to their mainstream courses.

Secretarial students seem to be more disadvantaged than other students because "the sophistication and complexity of the modern electronic office has made it essential to obtain a higher level of skills" (Ogilvy, 1990). The secretarial student has a different set of needs and will be expected to operate in an environment in which his/her efficiency will be judged by the manner in which he/she is able to apply the skills acquired while in training.

The question, then, is whether, after determining the needs of first-year secretarial students, one could design an ESP task-based syllabus that could enable the average secretarial student to cope effectively and efficiently, as a secretary, using English as the language of communication. Task-based language teaching bases arguments for an analytical syllabus on principles of course design made explicit in the 1970s, chiefly in English First Language (EFL) contexts, for the teaching of languages for specific purposes (Mackay & Mountford, 1978; Widdowson, 1979).

The following questions need to be addressed:

(1) Is a task-based syllabus appropriate for the secretarial course?

(2) What are the target tasks and task types secretaries are preparing to undertake? (e.g., taking notes, writing minutes, etc.)

## 1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

* determine the appropriateness of a task-based syllabus for the secretarial course.

* determine the target tasks and task types secretaries need to undertake.
* devise a task-based syllabus for secretarial students.

## 1.3 Method of research

This is a descriptive study which involves a detailed literature review on syllabus design, as well as a needs analysis conducted by means of questionnaires and interviews in order to collect information from students and their prospective employers. Basic descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency counts/ percentages) were used to analyse the data.

## 1.4 Programme of study

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the important features involved in syllabus design.
Chapter 3 discusses task-based syllabuses within an ESP context.
Chapter 4 focuses on the methodology employed in the study.
In Chapter 5 the collected data are presented and discussed.
Chapter 6 contains an outline for a proposed ESP task-based syllabus which can be implemented at the Border Technikon.
Chapter 7 contains a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER TWO
# SYLLABUS DESIGN

## 2.1 Introduction

In our experience as teachers, we either design our own syllabuses or we have to adopt a previously established syllabus which serves the institution within which we work. Breen (1984 : 47) states that: "any syllabus is typically a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our students' learning".

The aims of this chapter are to define the term "syllabus", to discuss various schools of thought on syllabus design, and to provide a comparative interpretation of two types of syllabus which represent most syllabuses currently being used and developed. Finally, the principles of organisation which are applied in the construction of a syllabus are discussed.

## 2.2 Defining the term "syllabus"

Opinion is still divided on what constitutes a *syllabus* or *curriculum*. The European term "syllabus" and its North American counterpart "curriculum" sometimes appear to be very close in meaning and sometimes further apart, depending on the context in which they are used.

*Curriculum* is a very general concept which involves consideration of the whole complex of philosophical, social and administrative factors which contribute to the planning of an educational programme, while a *syllabus*, on the other hand, refers to that subpart of the curriculum which is concerned with a specification of what units will be taught (as distinct from how they will be taught, which is a matter for methodology).

The line of demarcation between *syllabus* and *curriculum* has, in fact, never been a very clear one. A *curriculum* has been seen in some quarters as the relatively standardised ground covered by students in their quest for a degree or diploma of proficiency. However, it is naive to think of a curriculum as a race course of subject matter to be mastered.

According to Breen (1984 : 82), a *syllabus* is primarily a plan of "what is to be achieved through teaching and learning. Such a plan maps out that body of knowledge and those capabilities which are regarded as worthwhile outcomes from the work of teachers and learners in a particular situation for which the syllabus is designed." Pauw (1976 : 46) states that a syllabus is "an indication of what is to be done in a specific subject at a particular level during a particular period of time".

Wilkins (1976 : 5) also offers another definition of the term *syllabus*. According to Wilkins (1976 : 5) : "The term 'syllabus' is used ... to refer to the linguistic content of language teaching and the principles that underlie the selection of that content. A syllabus usually takes the form of a set of inventories - of the grammatical (structural) and lexical forms to be taught ... syllabus construction, in this sense, is not concerned with methodology, although inevitably, it will be expected that the approach to classroom teaching will be consistent with the view of language embodied in the syllabus".

In most cases, therefore, the plan or *syllabus* details the objectives or selected outcomes of teaching and learning work. It might also address the route towards these objectives and thereby functions as a guide during teaching and learning. This definition makes allowance for the fact that teachers and learners exercise considerable control over the operational syllabus. Consequently, Zais (1976 : 477) asserts that "it is a pitifully naive professional who assumes that what appears in the textbook or syllabus, or

course of study, is what is taught".

Van der Walt (1981 : 6) states that a syllabus cannot be designed without taking note of the theory of curriculum design. He views the syllabus as part of the curriculum with many common elements.

A syllabus can thus be said to be a plan for a specific course. It specifies the content, and also the aims and objectives. The content will also determine the learning activities and methodology.

## 2.3 Various schools of thought on syllabus design

An overview of the various schools of thought on syllabus design is given in this section .

### 2.3.1 The 'Lancaster School' of thought

The 'Lancaster School' of thought, led by Candlin (1984) and Breen (1984) reacted strongly against the notion of a fixed syllabus which could be planned, pre-ordained, and imposed on teachers and students. The principle of any fixed inventory of language items, such as the Council of Europe syllabuses, is unacceptable to them. They regard the syllabus as open and negotiable. Breen's (1984 : 30) ideal syllabus focuses on the learning process and assists learners to draw "their own route maps". Candlin (1984 : 30), even more radically, rejects a syllabus which requires learners "to bank received knowledge" and "to attain predetermined states of knowledge". A syllabus should encourage interactivity and problem-solving.

According to Breen (1987) a good syllabus design emerges after the teacher's preplanned syllabus, the individual student's syllabus and the

syllabus as a whole have been taken into account. The dominant factor in the Lancaster model is an emphasis on the question of freedom and constraint.

### 2.3.2 The 'London School' of thought

The 'London School' of thought, spearheaded by Widdowson (1984) and Brumfit (1984) find the Lancaster view extreme and unrealistic. Widdowson (1984 : 23 - 27) agrees that a syllabus is necessary, economical and useful if the intention is to ensure the smooth functioning of the learning process. However, he does not support the idea of "negotiating" the curriculum.

The syllabus provides the framework with a good deal of latitude for "teaching-learning" activites because Widdowson (1984) separates the concept of syllabus which is confined to content specification from teaching methodology which is not part of his syllabus concept.

Brumfit (1984) argues that a syllabus must be based on concepts of language, language learning and language use. The syllabus must specify content (i.e., linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, cultural and substantive).

### 2.3.3 The 'Toronto School' of thought

This group of theorists, led by Allen (1984), was not concerned with the question of the learner's role in syllabus design. They accepted that the need for a syllabus was undeniable, but they were more concerned about the question of constructing a theoretically sound and practically useful curriculum. The *immersion* experience that involved experiential language learning through the teaching of subjects other than the language itself as a means of language learning was the brainchild of the Toronto School.

### 2.3.4 Yalden's (1984) approach

Yalden's (1984) version of syllabus design is a bridge between the London School of thought and the Toronto school of thought. Yalden accepts the practical social necessity of a syllabus, as well as the fact that a syllabus is a public statement and that the learner may have an input to make into the curriculum. However, unlike Candlin (1984) and Breen (1984), she is not obsessed with the learner's role in syllabus development. For her the syllabus is primarily a teacher's statement about objectives and content.

From the above discussion it seems clear that most of the theorists agree that the term "syllabus" is concerned with content and objectives. One aspect about which there is no consensus yet, is whether instruction and methodology should also form part of the "syllabus".

## 2.4 Syllabus types

According to Wilkins (1976) syllabus types can be divided into two superordinate classes - synthetic and analytic. Synthetic syllabuses segment the target language into discrete linguistic items for presentation one at a time in a step-by-step manner so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of the parts, until the whole structure of the language has been built up (Long & Crookes, 1992). The onus is on the learner to resynthesize what has been taken apart and presented to him or her in small pieces, with the synthesis generally taking place only in the final stages of learning (i.e., the advanced level).

Analytic syllabuses offer the learner target language samples which, while they may have been modified in other ways, have not been controlled for structure or lexis in the traditional manner. Wilkins (1976:13) states that analytic syllabuses: "are organised in terms of the purposes for which

people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet these purposes".

The analytic/synthetic distinction is partly reflected in White's (1988) classification of Type A and Type B syllabuses. The A syllabus focus on what is to be learned: the L2. the B syllabuses, on the other hand, focus on how the language is to be learned.

White (1988: 45) summarises the salient characteristics of the two syllabus types in the following way (cf.Table 1).

**Table 1: Characteristics of Type A and Type B syllabuses**

| TYPE A SYLLABUSES | TYPE B SYLLABUSES |
|---|---|
| What is to be learnt? | How is it to be learnt? |
| Interventionist | Non-interventionist |
| External to the learner | Internal to the learner |
| Other directed | Inner directed or self-fulfilling |
| Determined by authority | Negotiated between learners and teachers |
| Teacher as decision maker | Learner and teacher as joint decision makers |
| Content=what the subject is to the expert | Content=what the subject is to the learner |
| Content=gift to the learner from the teacher or knower | Content=what the learner brings and wants |
| Objectives defined in advance | Objectives described afterwards |
| Subject emphasis | Process emphasis |
| Assessment by achievement or by mastery | Assessment in relationship to learner's criteria of success |
| Doing thing to the learner | Doing things for or with learner |

Certain points emerge from this summary. An approach which emphasises process, while giving attention to socially desirable behaviour and the formation of approved attitudes, may lose sight of culturally valuable content, while an approach which stresses the acquisition of approved content may be orientating learners towards conformity rather than divergence and independence. The one approach tends towards intervention in the learning process through the pre-selection, specification and presentation of content, while on the other, the approach eschews such intervention by an authority, such as the teacher (cf. White, 1988).

The next section focuses on a comparative discussion of notional functional syllabuses (Type A) versus process and task-based syllabuses (Type B). The task-based syllabus is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 .

### 2.4.1 The Functional syllabus

A functional syllabus aims at producing a learner who will become accurate in using the language to achieve certain purposes and also learn how to be socially appropriate in language performance. Many functional syllabuses exploit functions as the primary organising category while using notions, or topics, or even situations as the frame for the subdivision of content wherein the range of functions and their exponents may be located (White, 1988).

In the mid-70s, functional syllabuses began to be seen as a valid and workable alternative to formal syllabus types. With this new development in linguistics language philosophers became interested in the problems of meaning and the use of language and came to regard the functional approach to language teaching and learning as a particular response to the

seemingly "mechanistic" methodology associated with the "grammar-translation and audio-lingual" concepts with which people had become disillusioned. The notion of speech acts and, in particular, the actual - and sometimes hidden - meanings which people attributed to what they or other people said became an issue that was of paramount interest to language scholars. People became less concerned with how language was used to convey meanings, but more concerned with the "force" or "value" that was either intended in the utterances or which are given to the utterances of others (Levinson, 1982). Hymes (1971; 1972) echoed the feelings of the time vividly when he stated that: "our knowledge of language also embraces a knowledge of how to use language in appropriate ways in order to achieve particular purposes and participate in particular everyday events and situations". The notion of competence in language was, thus, broadened to include not only knowledge of the code and knowledge of the conventions of social use of the code, but also knowledge of the particular conventions of meaning or semantics which was shared with other users of the code.

If the syllabus represents a functional view of language, then "usefulness" or "frequency" criteria will guide the sequence in which the content would be covered. The functional syllabus designer might be obliged to start out with the most generalisable and most commonly used vocabulary, speech acts or communication events and from there move on to what may be less frequent or even rather specialised uses of the language (cf. Breen, 1987).

Like the formal syllabus, the functional syllabus identifies proficiency with the accurate and appropriate use of the four skills and the process of developing a repertoire of functions is similarly identified with a sequential development from receptive to productive skills. However, the functional syllabus does not move from "basic" or finite knowledge which is generative, but from general sets of functions to more specific functions and

the most common linguistic realisations of certain functions to more varied or "refined" realisations of these functions. It could, therefore, be said that sequencing of a functional syllabus is from the general to the particular, or, more precisely, cyclic in nature. Thus, a learner dealing with the function "Greeting" may begin with: "Hello", "Hi", "How do you do?", etc. and move to a more comprehensive repertoire of types of greetings which would enable the learner to achieve the function of greeting in, for instance, formal or informal settings or in situations which require more elaborate expressions of greetings (cf. Breen, 1987; White, 1988).

One rationale of the functional syllabus is the sociolinguistic view of the purposes which language can achieve. The functional syllabus was adopted by the language teaching profession to improve upon the old methodology which was seen to be synonymous with the structural or formal syllabus. Another related justification for the functional syllabus is the concern for meaningfulness as an important element in the language learning experience. The functional syllabus represents the wish to enable learners to use language - virtually from the beginning of their learning - to use language to achieve objectives in an interpersonal or social way. In this way, language as a means for getting things done is given priority over linguistic knowledge in itself. There is the feeling, at this stage, that fluency is valued as much as accuracy (cf. White, 1988).

In requiring the learner to perceive and develop the new language in terms of categories of use, and to map onto these categories their various linguistic realisations, the functional syllabus could be used to present material that appeals to the learner's cognition. The acceptance of these ways of imposing order in a new language becomes palatable once the learner notices that he or she is able to use language successfully in interpersonal and social interactions.

### 2.4.2 The Process syllabus

The advocates of this task-based and method-based approach to syllabus design are many. They include Breen (1984; 1987), Candlin (1984; 1987), and Candlin and Murphy (1987).

The process syllabus extends the focus upon procedures for learning to account for the actual social situation in which learning will take place. The process syllabus is primarily a syllabus which addresses the decisions which have to be made and the working procedures which have to be undertaken for language learning in a group. The designer of a process syllabus is not directly concerned with organising the subject matter of language. A major priority of the designer is to provide a framework which enable the teacher and learners to focus, select, subdivide and sequence themselves and, therefore, create their own syllabus in the classroom in an ongoing and adaptive way (cf. section 2.5).

The process syllabus addresses three interdependent processes: communication, learning, and the group process of the classroom. The process syllabus does not favour the view of teaching as the transmission of preselected and predigested knowledge. It sees teaching as a social and problem-solving orientation with explicit provision for the expression of individual learning styles and preferences. It also addresses the ways in which learners may achieve objectives and how they navigate the route itself.

Candlin (1987 : 53) referred to teaching as "one of a set of differentiated, sequenceable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in

some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu". According to Candlin (1984) what a syllabus consists of can only be discerned after a course is over by observing not what was planned, but what took place.

Both Breen (1984) and Candlin (1984) claim that any syllabus, preset or not, is constantly subject to negotiation and reinterpretation by teachers and learners in the classroom. Breen (1984) and Widdowson (1984) want to see the traditional conception of the syllabus as a list of items making up a repertoire of communication replaced by one that promotes a learner's capacity for communication.

A few criticisms, however, have been levelled against the process syllabus. According to Kouraogo (1987) and White (1988) the process syllabus lacks a formal field evaluation, assumes an unrealistically high level of competence in both teachers and learners, implies a redefinition of role relationships and a redistribution of power and authority in the classroom that would be too radical and/or culturally unacceptable in some societies. There is also the claim that the need it creates for a wide range of materials and learning resources may be difficult to meet and that the process syllabus poses a threat to the traditional reliance, however undesirable, on a single textbook which is the syllabus for most teachers, learners, and examiners.

It could be said for the process syllabus, however, that these criticisms are concerned with the logistical feasibility of implementing process syllabuses in certain contexts, not flaws in the process syllabus itself. Moreover, there is nothing wrong with people's desire to take control of their own learning.

The more serious problem with the process syllabus is that it deals in pedagogic tasks whose availability (in the task "bank") is not based on any prior needs identification. This raises problems of selection. Breen (1987) and Candlin (1987) suggest that the range, criteria and parameters of choice should be made known to teachers and learners but these should be so flexible that they allow for learners and circumstances changing.

## 2.5 Syllabus construction

The four basic principles that guide a syllabus designer when it comes to syllabus construction are: focus, selection, subdivision, and sequencing (i.e., grading).

### 2.5.1 Focus

The syllabus designer is obliged to focus on particular aspects of the target-language knowledge and capability. This is because the need to peg the syllabus around a linguistic, phonological, lexical, grammatical, situational unit is acute and inevitable. What the syllabus focuses upon most directly reflects the objectives which the syllabus is intended to serve. In general, any language syllabus will express certain assumptions about language, and the process of learning.

### 2.5.2 Selection

Given a specific focus, a syllabus designer sets out to select materials for

the teaching and learning work such as particular structures, sets of functions or a range of communication events. The teacher must bear in mind that even though teachers may have predesigned syllabuses, every teacher inevitably interprets and reconstructs the syllabus in such a way that it becomes possible to implement it in his or her own classroom and that learners create individual learning syllabuses from their own particular starting points and their own perceptions of the language learning and the classroom.

Allowance should also be made for the fact that the learners' individual versions of the route may or may not harmonize with the teacher's version. The classroom is seen as the meeting point of interaction between the predesigned syllabus and the individual learners' syllabuses and this interaction generates the REAL syllabus - or the syllabus in action (cf. Breen, 1987; White, 1988).

The predesigned syllabus is thus something of a paradox because it serves to gradually render itself redundant. Of the three syllabuses in the classroom (the teacher's version of the predesigned plan, the individual learners' syllabus and the unfolding syllabus of the classroom), the real one is the final plan that emerges from and is viewed from a particular frame of reference by the designer and the users.

With the knowledge that the actual teaching-learning process takes place only in REAL TIME, there seems to be a need to ensure that the selected content of the syllabus is further subdivided and sequenced.

### 2.5.3 Subdivision

Subdivision involves the breaking down of selected content into manageable units. This analysis is most often hierarchical, with superordinate units (of systems of grammar, themes or topics, or communicative situations) containing or entailing smaller units (e.g., rules, functions or specific vocabulary).

### 2.5.4 Sequencing

Sequencing involves the marking out of the content along a path of development. Learners are likely to need plans in order to have a sense of direction, continuity and security in their work even though it is a fact that they are always capable of creating their own plans if the teacher's plan does not suit them.

It is usually seen as a step-by-step procedure through more immediate objectives on the way to some overall achievement. The principles of selection, focus, subdivision and sequencing, however, are never applied to what is to be achieved in an objective or neutral way. The designer applies them as a designer or user of the syllabus - from a particular point of view or frame of reference. The final sequence adopted by the designer may, thus, reflect a general and, perhaps, an idealized view of the relationship between the subject-matter and the teacher and the learners who will work through it.

Sequencing is achieved often in a step-by-step way through more immediate or pre-requisite objectives towards some overall goal. The two ways of sequencing are:

(a) Cyclic, where the path from 'A' to 'B' is drawn as a sequence of overlapping circles or

(b) as a gradually widening spiral (cf. White, 1988).

Whilst a step-by-step mode of sequencing presents content in an additive way, a cyclic presentation assumes that content can be cumulative and worked upon by teachers and learners through a return to, and refinement of earlier steps along the route.

Learners are likely to need plans in order to have a sense of direction and continuity in their work. The form that the plans (or syllabuses) take depends,in part, on people's ideas about the nature of language, learning, and teaching. Each plan is a product of its time and the need to produce one to cater for the fulfilment of the aspirations of the day should not be taken lightly because where a pre-designed plan is "inaccessible" to students in terms of its "fit" with their own routes and their own frames of reference - learners are very likely to create their own plans, however naive or transitory these may be. At the end of the day, however, the genuine value of a "plan" or "syllabus" may be far less in what it tries to represent than in the actual uses it may serve in the classroom.

According to Breen (1987 : 161), "A major function of any syllabus is to provide a helpful means towards learning a language. The syllabus provides a route from a state of relative unknowing on the part of learners towards the eventual use of the target language for particular purposes in a range of situations. Propositional plans offer a route by the organisation of content so that it may harmonise with the objectives of the course. Process plans, on the other hand, more directly address the ways in which learners may achieve objectives and how they navigate the route itself".

## 2.6 Conclusion

The term *syllabus* is defined in various ways and is given different interpretations by scholars. In the main, however, a syllabus relates to people's ideas about a subject, how it should be taught and how it should be learnt. Broadly defined, then, a syllabus offers information about particular audiences of learners, their target needs for learning a subject matter in question, from which is derived the objectives and the people's state-of-knowing at the commencement of the syllabus activation.

Narrowly defined a syllabus is a collection of items of content, derived from a special view of a subject matter in question, broken down and sequenced in order to "facilitate" and "optimise" the learning of the subject matter in the classroom.

In the language field all language learners have communicative abilities which they share with all other users of a target language. Classroom activities should be geared to having them exercise these natural abilities. However, in order to spark communication in the classroom or anywhere else, one must have something to communicate about, and needs analysis procedures can contribute to determining what topics might be of interest.

This chapter also focussed on a comparison of Type A and Type B syllabuses. The main organising principles involved were also discussed.

# CHAPTER 3

# A TASK-BASED SYLLABUS

## 3.1 Introduction

It is the American educationist, Dewey, whom one associates perhaps most with the maxim: "Learn by doing". The idea, however, has been around for many centuries. Perhaps one of the first to state it clearly was the Chinese philosopher Lao Tze who is credited with the following quotation: "All true learning arises from one's experience - all else is but borrowed plumage".

Whitehead (1929) caused quite a stir in educational circles when he pointed out that a lot of educational practice in schools was simply providing students with "inert ideas", which might satisfy examination boards, but would certainly not provide the sort of active knowledge born of experience, that they would need in later life.

The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to provide an outline of and a rationale for the development of a task-based syllabus for ESP purposes (specifically for secretarial students).

## 3.2 The rationale for the task-based syllabus

The task- based syllabus reflects a broader view of the nature of what is to be achieved in language learning. While the formal syllabus prioritised linguistic competence (a knowledge of the rules governing the formal or textual nature of language) and the functional syllabus prioritised

communicative performance (a repertoire of language functions), the task-based syllabus sees the learner as someone who knows how to be accurate, appropriate and sound meaningful through the new language and also be able to interpret, express and negotiate meanings in speech and/or writing.

The task-based syllabus designer sees the task-based syllabus as the means whereby the learners' initial competence can be engaged as the foundation for the launching of new knowledge and capabilities (Breen, 1987).

Thus, taking tasks as the main "item" or element of the syllabus, the task-based syllabus designer assumes that language learning will proceed smoothly and effectively if the target language learner takes active part in communicative tasks which require him or her to mobilise and orchestrate knowledge and abilities in a direct way. The emphasis is on using language to communicate and learn.

In summary, therefore, the task-based syllabus represents efforts to relate content to how the content may be worked upon, and thereby be learned more efficiently. Through learning tasks, the task-based syllabus addresses knowledge and abilities in a problem-based and analytical way. It focuses on the individual's learning process by assuming that learners will locate their learning problems and difficulties, undertake chosen tasks for their solution, and carry out remediation at their own speed or pace (cf. Breen, 1987).

## 3.3 Definitions for the term "task"

A variety of syllabus types compete for attention in the 1990s: structural, notional, functional, procedural process, task-based, etc. According to Long and Crookes (1993) the issue is not which particular syllabus to adopt, but

which type, and that this in turn is a question of the appropriate unit of analysis in syllabus design. One of the approaches to course design which takes "task" as the unit of analysis is task-based language teaching (cf. Long & Crookes 1992, 1993). Task-based language teaching basis arguments for an analytic, Type B syllabus on what is currently known about the processes involved in second language teaching (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), and on the principles of course design, made explicit in the 1970s, mainly for the teaching of languages for *specific purposes* (cf. Widdowson, 1979, Swales, 1990).

Long (1985 : 89) defined *task* as: "... a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward. Thus, examples of tasks include painting a fence, dressing a child, filling out a form, buying a pair of shoes, making an airline reservation... In other words, by task is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life".

Long and Crookes (1992) adopt task as the unit of analysis in an attempt to provide an integrated, internally coherent approach to the various approaches to syllabus design, one which is compatible with current SLA theory. The definitions of (both target and pedagogic) task and task type used by Long and Crookes (1992) always focus on something that is said.

According to Richards et al. (1985 : 289) a *task* is: "an activity or action which is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (i.e., as a response). For example, drawing a map while listening to an instruction and performing a command... A task usually requires the teacher to specify what will be regarded as successful completion of the task".

Crookes (1986 : 1) sees *task* as: "A piece of work or an activity, usually with a specified objective undertaken as part of an educational course, or at work". Task-based syllabuses utilising such conceptions of task require a needs identification to be conducted in terms of the real-world target tasks that learners are preparing to undertake.

Thus Candlin's (1987 : 10) suggestion that: "a task is one of a set of differentiated, sequenceable, problem-solving activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a large range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu" and Breen's (1987 : 23) description of *task* as: "Any structural language learning endeavour which has a particular objective, appropriate content, a specified working procedure and a range of outcomes for those who undertake a task", seem to satisfy the call by modern SLA research for the need to respect learner syllabuses.

The best syllabuses for effective SLA will, therefore, seem to be a range of workplans with the overall purpose of facilitating language learning - from the simple and brief exercise type, to more complex and lengthy activities such as group problem-solving or simulations and decision-making -perhaps, workplans each of which covers: "an activity which requires learners to arrive at an outcome from given information through some process of thought, and which allowed the teacher to control and regulate that process..." (Prabhu, 1987 : 24).

## 3.4 Constructing a task-based syllabus

### 3.4.1 Focus

To participate in communication a person needs to know how meaning is coded in written and spoken text, in ways in which the meaning can be shared with other people within the same social or cultural group. In brief, the learner of the target language has to know the rules and conventions governing how meaning, their textual realisation, and interpersonal communicative behaviour are all systematically related in any communicative act or situation. A knowledge of linguistic form or a knowledge of discourse will help the task-based syllabus designer to plan the tasks in such a manner that any use of the target language will require the learner to continually match choices from his or her linguistic repertoire to the social requirements and expectations governing communicative behaviour and to meanings and ideas that he or she wishes to share (Breen, 1987).

The task-based syllabus plans what is to be achieved in terms of two major task types:

(i) Communication tasks, and

(ii) Learning tasks.

Communication tasks focus on the actual sharing of meaning through spoken or written communication where the purposeful use of the target language is given priority, while learning tasks focus on the exploration of the workings of the knowledge systems themselves and, in particular, how these may be worked upon and learned. A task-based syllabus is thus, in theory, two syllabuses side by side:

(a) a syllabus of communication tasks, and

(b) a syllabus of learning for communication tasks which serve to facilitate a learner's participation.

In practice the distinction is non-existent once tasks are worked upon during the learning stages.

A learner uses a task-based syllabus in order to learn how to be correct or accurate, to be socially appropriate, and to be meaningful or to share meanings. The aim is to achieve such things simultaneously through the target language.

Unlike the formal or functional syllabus, the task- based syllabus does not take the four skills as the important manifestations of a language user's capabilities, but calls on those capabilities which underlie all language use and which the four skills reflect in an indirect way. This is because the ability to interpret meaning from written or spoken texts and the ability to express meaning through writing or speech both rely on the crucial ability of negotiating meaning - and both mutually contribute to the learner's overall capacities as a communicator (Breen, 1987).

### 3.4.2 Selection

Communication tasks depend on an analyses of the actual tasks which a person intends to undertake when using a language. The syllabus designer of a syllabus based on communication tasks should therefore try to engage the underlying competence required of a participant in a range of communicative events.

The designer has to organise the needs analysis that are built around learner needs and interests and cluster those tasks for the syllabus which are most common in the target situation. Learning tasks could be selected on the basis of metacommunicative criteria rather than on criteria derived from the eventual competence required during communication. Learning tasks are analytical in relation to both communication and learning because they focus on the ways in which interpreting, expressing and negotiation may be done, whereas communication tasks require genuine participation in the use of the new language.

### 3.4.3 Subdivision

The subdivision of task-based syllabuses is done on the basis of task types. The subdivision can take different forms, for example:

a) A subdivision that involves the mapping of facilitative learning tasks onto or around one or more communicative tasks.

b) A subdivision that represents a cluster of obviously related Communicative tasks, i.e. those that exist in an everyday sequence in target language use.

c) A subdivision built around a single large activity which naturally entails subordinate tasks which together contribute to the completion of the overall activity (cf. Breen, 1987; Long & Crookes, 1993).

Target tasks are, therefore, classified into task types. For example, serving breakfast, serving lunch, serving dinner and serving snacks and refreshments, might be classified into serving food and beverages in a course for trainee Catering students.

Task designers, therefore, have several dimensions on which to base the relative familiarity or demand of any task - those of the three knowledge systems and those of ability use. Initial tasks are usually exploratory and diagnostic because they seem to aim at testing the learners' communicative knowledge and their communicative abilities based on their language and their knowledge of the target language. Subsequent tasks are sequenced in accordance with the development of knowledge and abilities from the learner's initial competence (Breen, 1987; White, 1988).

Thus, sequencing of communication and related learning tasks are planned as a syllabus in advance on the two sets of criteria or on the basis of relating the two, i.e.:

a) the relative familiarity of the task to the learner's current communicative knowledge and abilities, and

b) the relative inherent complexity of the task in terms of the demand placed on the learner (Nunan, 1993).

Diagnosis and remediation sequences cannot be worked out in advance. This is because learning problems or difficulties must be identified as they arise. They will then have to be put in an order of priority for solution. Finally, appropriate learning tasks to address the problem areas must be identified. These learning difficulties are unpredictable in relation to any main task because of the heterogeneous and scattered level of attainment that is evident among learners at various levels. For the syllabus designer this means he/she must provide an initial wide range of learning tasks of two types:

(a) those that may be seen directly to serve particular communication tasks - in a preparatory or consolidating way, and

(b) an unsequenced set of learning tasks which are identified by the specific problems that learners may have but which represent a set of optional supportive tasks (Breen, 1987; White, 1988; Long & Crookes, 1993).

## 3.6 Criticism of the task-based syllabus

This type of syllabus is, however, not without criticism. The following aspects have been highlighted by various researchers (e.g., Breen, 1987; White, 1988; Long & Crookes, 1992; 1993).

* Not much is known about this type of syllabus. Its research base is limited and some of its findings are ambiguous - with alternative interpretations.
* It is easy to establish a needs analysis for a group of students but it is difficult to propose parameters of task classification and to determine task difficulty for a group of students.
* It is not easy to determine task types.
* It is difficult to decide where one task ends and another begins. The overlap comes out clearly when we consider the fact that a task like "Doing the Shopping" could involve others like: catching a bus, paying the fare, choosing purchases, paying for purchases, etc.
* A task-based language syllabus is relatively structured. While the preplanned and guided nature of this syllabus can be said to be plus factors they may also be a disadvantage because they may affect the learner's autonomy.
* The task-based syllabus has not been tested well enough. It is still in the embryonic stages and so not much can be said about it at the moment.

## 3.6 Conclusion

A major function of all language syllabuses is to provide a helpful means towards learning a language. Widdowson (1987) suggests that the two syllabus archetypes - structural and functional-notional - exhaust the possibilities for the syllabus designer. Both types assume certain methodological practices. The structural syllabus "will tend to promote activities which serve to internalize the formal properties of language" (Widdowson, 1987 : 71).

The danger of this type of syllabus is that learners may not be able to use their linguistic knowledge in actual communication. The functional-notional syllabus, on the other hand, will promote activities which attempt to replicate in class "real" communication. Classroom activities thus become a "dress rehearsal" for real-life encounters. With the adoption of procedural, task-based, content-based and other non-linguistic approaches to syllabus design, however, the distinction between syllabus design and methodology has become blurred and the selection of *task* as a basic building block has been justified on several grounds, but most particularly for pedagogic and psycholinguistic reasons. It should be pointed out that even though studies in task-based syllabuses are still in their infancy and findings are inconclusive, they seem to point the way to the future in language syllabus design, because, as Wilkins (1976 : 13) conveniently points out: "Analytic approaches ... are organised in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performances that are necessary to meet the purposes". Indeed, the need for an approach that will supply to the learner an awareness of the meanings we convey when we use language in a social context cannot be over-emphasized.

A task-based syllabus has been recommended for secretarial students because they need an approach to language teaching that inculcates in the language learner an awareness of the meanings that people convey when they use language in the social context. The task-based syllabus concentrates on the needs of the language student and develops in the student communicative competence. Our secretarial students want nothing more than the ability to use language competently in the execution of their duties as competent secretaries.

# CHAPTER 4

# METHOD OF RESEARCH

## 4.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the methodology employed in this study. The methodology is discussed under the following headings:

* Design
  - Literature review
  - Needs analysis
  - Syllabus design
* Subjects
* Data collection procedure
* Analysis

## 4.2 Empirical study

### 4.2.1 Design

This was a descriptive study which involved the following steps:

#### 4.2.1.1 Literature Review

A detailed and critical review of the literature on syllabus design was undertaken in order to determine the appropriateness of a task-based syllabus for a course designed specifically for secretarial students. Whether we are talking about general learning or the learning of a second or foreign

language, we need to remember that "students learn what they do" (Glaser, 1992).

We need, therefore, to develop a range of "learning tasks" for students to "do", which are representative of authentic activity outside the classroom and related to the range of agreed learning targets. The design of such learning tasks has now become one of the central concerns of education (Glaser, 1992). Learning tasks are now seen as the fundamental building blocks of learning programmes.

Working from the premises of Mackay (1978 : 178) that "learners of English as an auxiliary to academic or professional skills are generally more aware of what they want to use English for" it seems obvious that what the literature review has revealed about task-based learning can be summed up as follows :

* The task-based syllabus sees the learner as someone who knows how to be accurate, appropriate and sound meaningful through the new language and who is also able to interpret, express and negotiate meanings in speech and/or writing.
* The task-based syllabus does not take the four skills as the important manifestations of a language user's capabilities which underlie all language use and which the four skills reflect in an indirect way.
* The task-based syllabus designer sees the task-based syllabus as a means whereby learner's initial competence can be engaged as the foundation.
* Thus, taking tasks as the main "item" or element of the syllabus, the designer assumes that language learning will proceed smoothly and effectively if the target language learner takes active part in communicative tasks which require him/her to mobilise and orchestrate knowledge and abilities in a direct way. The emphasis is

on using language to communicate and in order to learn.

In brief, then, the task-based learning syllabus design presents the target language in an authentic manner with whole chunks of language presented at a time without linguistic interference or control. The focus is on the learners who, it is assumed, have the ability to perceive regularities in the input and to induce rules because of "the continued availability to learners of innate knowledge of linguistic universals and the ways language can vary" (Long & Crookes, 1992 : 29).

#### 4.2.1.2 Needs analysis

A needs analysis based on questionnaires and interviews was carried out with the help of firms and industries that utilise the services of secretaries. Firms and industries selected at random from Bisho, King William's Town and East London as well as first, second and third year secretarial students were involved in a comprehensive exercise that was aimed at finding out the sort of activities secretaries would be expected to perform on a daily basis. It should be stressed that "the sophistication and complexity of the modern electronic office has made it essential for the secretary to obtain a higher level of skills" (Ogilvy, 1990). Secretarial students, as a result, have very specialized needs. Consequently, courses structured for them need to identify and address these needs.

A pilot scheme, in the form of a questionnaire to find out what employers expected from the "ideal secretary" proved unproductive because most of the bosses were vague about their expectations. Instead of talking about proficiency in the four basic skills most of them stressed personal qualities and "the ability to learn". These answers were deemed inadequate so the researcher decided to use a comprehensive checklist and questionnaire and

interviews to carry out the needs analysis exercises. Employers and students were asked to give information about the basic and professional language needs of the modern secretary (cf. Appendix A and B). A letter of introduction explaining the research project accompanied the checklist.

#### 4.2.1.3 Syllabus design

Based on the literature review and the needs analysis an ESP task-based syllabus was designed to meet the specific needs of secretaries (cf. chapter 6). Modules were designed that addressed the main needs of the students and each module was divided into "tasks" that students would be required to fulfil.

### 4.2.2 Subjects

Thirty firms, industries and employment agencies participated in the study along with students. The 75 students were selected at random with 25 coming from each of the three levels. There were 65 female students and 10 male students.

### 4.2.3 Data collection procedure

In an attempt to ensure a very high return rate the researcher booked appointments with thirty firms and industries selected at random in Bisho, King William's Town and East London between June 1996 and October 1996. During the interview the various tasks on the checklist to the prospective employers. However, getting those appointments confirmed was no sinecure. In some cases the aggression, suspicion, scepticism, hostility and those airs of condescension were almost palpable.

Some of the industries pleaded "unavailability of experienced personnel to talk to you", while, after lengthy interviews over the telephone, others politely asked for copies of the checklist and questionnaire to be faxed to them for perusal. The researcher was then asked to wait for anything between a week and ten days for invitations.

Most of the "kind" and co-operative respondents gave one the feeling that they were very busy and did not want to be disturbed. In most cases their attitudes towards the researcher improved after they had seen the Border Technikon staff ID and student's ID from Potchefstroom University and heard that distinctive West African accent. However, all this did not prevent the researcher from conducting thirty, and sometimes, forty five minute interviews from a standing position.

On a good day the researcher interviewed three potential employers and on other days five students.

The visits to the prospective employers started during the June 1996 holidays whereas the research work with assistance from students got seriously under way during the third semester of 1996 when some lecturers were not too busy with their students. The positive comments from those interviewed bear ample testimony to the high esteem in which most of the professionals hold the tasks that constitute the proposed secretarial syllabus at the Border Technikon.

The return rate of the questionnaires and checklists from the prospective employers, as well as from first, second and third year secretarial students was one hundred percent.

### 4.2.4 Analysis

The data were analysed by calculating the means and frequency counts (percentages) of each of the responses. The responses were, then, divided into post-hoc categories on the basis of similarity of response.

## 4.3 Conclusion

According to researchers (eg, Bachman, 1990) the methodology of a study is very important, because many studies haved "failed" as a result of methodological failure (e.g., inappropriate steps followed).

The methodological overview provided in this chapter was therefore aimed at providing an accurate description of the various steps undertaken in the research project to ensure future replicability as well as to facilitate the discussion of the results in chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 5

# PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

## 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present and discuss the data collected by means of the questionnaires and interviews. The purpose is also to answer the questions posed in chapter 1:

* Is a task-based syllabus appropriate for the secretarial course?
* What are the target tasks and task types secretaries are preparing to undertake?

## 5.2 Results of the needs analysis

When answering the questionnaire and when being interviewed respondents were requested to indicate which tasks were necessary and which ones were not necessary. Berwick (1989 : 60) calls this method "a fairly straightforward approach to locating areas of emphasis in programming". The responses to the questionnaires, and interviews, administered to thirty prospective employers and seventy-five secretarial students in training are given in the form of tables.

### 5.2.1 Target tasks and task types

The results are presented according to the target tasks and task types identified by the participating subjects. For ease of presentation the results of the questionnaires and interviews have been collated. The target tasks

have been reformulated as "skills", for example, basic listening and notational skills, reading skills, etc. The reason being the need for conciseness and the use of terminology such as Modules (target task) and study units (task types) within the syllabus (cf. Chapter 6). For example, answering the telephone was classified under the target task of oral skills.

#### 5.2.1.1 Target task: Basic listening and notational skills

The results of the needs analysis indicated that both employers (98%) and students (100%) agreed that note-taking and note making were very important basic notational task types (cf. Table 2). The results also indicated that employers (85%) and students (75%) felt that developing comprehension was an essential task type, both in the office, and also in the classroom. Employers (80%) and students (66%) also agreed that summarising was a very important skill. According to Stewart et al. (1996:90): "the ability to listen is a vital communication skill in the business world. Listening provides us with most of the information we need to do our jobs and our listening skills affect our relationships with other people at all levels and areas of our lives".

**Table 3: Task types for basic listening and notational skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TASK TYPES** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Note-taking and Note-making | 98 % | 2 % | 100 % | 0 % |
| Summarizing | 80 % | 20 % | 66 % | 34 % |
| Aural Comprehension | 85 % | 15 % | 75 % | 25 % |

Stewart et al. (1996 : 90) state that we spend 70% -75% of our working day in one of the four types of communication:

* Listening - 42%
* Talking - 32%
* Reading - 15%
* Writing - 11%.

Listening, however, should not be confused with the physical experience of hearing, which is the first step only in the complicated process of listening. Garland and Jones (1981 : 7) state that, "Unfortunately, it is very easy to listen to a lecture without taking in what is being said just as it is possible to copy from the board or take dictation without understanding what one has copied". It is a fact that most students experience problems with information processing. They are neither able to link new information with their background knowledge nor able to use strategies such as paraphrasing,

the creation of analogies, outlining, inferentials, analytic and synthetic reasoning skills to select the crux of a lecture.

It is common knowledge that when those students who have not been properly trained in note-taking try to take down notes at lectures they, invariably, end up writing down everything they hear from the lecturer or making a second edition of everything they read.

Note-taking involves putting onto paper the data received through any of our senses. The data can range from simple figures, letters, symbols, isolated words, or brief phrases to complete sentences and whole ideas.

Nwokoreze (1990:39-40) believes that: "It is during the note-taking stage that students reach the highest level of comprehension". According to Grellet (1986) note-taking and note-making are not the same, because when we make notes we write our reactions to what we perceive; and when we take notes, we record the information as we perceive it.

It is not surprising that there was unanimous support among both the secretarial students and the prospective employers surveyed, for the teaching of note-taking and note-making at the Border Technikon even though "it is a fact that students end up developing their own method of taking notes and use their own judgement as to what material to record" (Gilbert, 1989). When taught in a flexible manner, note-taking assists the listener, reader or observer to achieve a better understanding of what is presented. It facilitates recall of facts as well as oral and written expressions.

To crown it all, secretarial students see note-taking and note-making as skills that are doubly beneficial: useful as a skill for further studies and as a skill that is transferable to the secretarial profession. Irrespective of what people may have against note-taking it cannot be denied that it is impossible to expect to remember everything that we perceive. Thus, in order to reconstruct a complete account of what we perceive through listening, reading, observing, discussing or thinking, it is necessary to take notes either simultaneously with the act of perception or after an interval of a few minutes. McKeating (1981) sees note-taking as a complex activity which combines reading and listening with selective summarising and writing.

According to Winterowd and Murray (1985 : 134) a summary is:

> *a concise retelling or rewriting of the main ideas in a book, article, story, or speech. It answers the six basic questions: who? what? when? where? why? and how? Because a summary gives only the most important ideas from the original source, it is no more than one-fourth to one-third the length of the original.*

5.2.1.2 Target task: Reading skills

Employers (100%), (cf.Table 3) believed that the extensive reading tasks that required students to use questionnaires and language laboratory activities (eg., reading speed, comprehension, vocabulary, etc.) would help to address the reading "void" that exists in most students coming from a "disadvantaged" background.

Forty eight percent (48%) of the students, used in this survey, said that extensive reading was not necessary, while all of them (100%) were in favour of using the language laboratory for improving their reading skills.

**Table 3: Task types for reading skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Using questionnaires for extensive reading | 100 % | 0 % | 52 % | 48 % |
| Reading Techniques<br>- to scan<br>- to skim<br>- to analyse critically<br>- to infer | 86 % | 14 % | 88 % | 12 % |
| * Using the language laboratory for improving reading skills (e.g., reading speed) | 90 % | 10 % | 100 % | 0 % |

Interviews conducted with the students revealed that they saw the use of the language laboratory for reading as a great opportunity to have their first encounter with modern technology.

According to Brumfit and Johnson (1991 : 117) efficient reading involves understanding how language operates in communication. It is believed that students in developing countries lack the ability to read so they fail to

acquire this understanding during their years of learning English in the secondary schools.

Table 3 indicated that employers (86%) and students (88%) placed a high value on skills such as scanning, skimming, critical analysis and inferencing. According to Stewart et al. (1996: 6), "scanning is used for a quick search through a text to find a specific fact,figure or item of information. This method of reading calls for very fast reading. The reader should find what he or she is looking for and then read only the required information slowly and carefully. This is the method often used in comprehension tests".

Skimming is used to do a very quick exploratory reading of a text in preparation for more intensive study. The aim of this type of reading is to gain an **overview** of what the text covers and to identify the main ideas (Stewart et al., 1996 : 6).

The purpose of skimming a book, chapter or article is, therefore, to help to:

* decide whether or not a text is worth reading in detail. (Does it contain the information you need?)
* understand the approach,scope and direction of the text one is reading. (Does it apply to the field of the reader's research?)
* plan the amount of time needed for a thorough reading of the text. (Is it a difficult text or is it fairly easy to read ?) (Stewart et al., 1996 : 6).

Most students, however,are not familiar with these techniques and consequently, very often, use techniques which are very laborious,and do not aid their comprehension.

5.2.1.3 Target task: Grammar and language mechanic skills

The survey conducted among employers and students showed that 78% (employers) to 70% (students) supported conditionals; 92% to 72% prepositions; 92% to 80% direct and indirect speech; 85% to 75% punctuation; 88% to 90% vocabulary exercises; 96% to 50% spelling exercises (cf. Table 4).

**Table 4: Task types for grammar and language mechanic skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Grammar Tasks: | | | | |
| Conditionals | 78 % | 22 % | 70 % | 30 % |
| Prepositions | 90 % | 10 % | 72 % | 28 % |
| Direct/Indirect speech | 92 % | 8 % | 80 % | 20 % |
| Punctuation | 85 % | 15 % | 75 % | 25 % |
| Vocabulary | 88 % | 12 % | 90 % | 10 % |
| Spelling | 96 % | 4 % | 50 % | 50 % |
| Tenses | 92% | 8% | 95% | 5% |
| Concord | 89% | 11% | 82% | 18% |

Employers, 92% and 89% respectively, expressed great surprise and alarm at the ease with which students from a "disadvantaged" background tended to lose control over tenses and concord. Interestingly enough, 95% and 92% of the students surveyed said they were aware of the problem, blamed it on mother tongue interference and claimed they were "doing something about it".

Studies by Canale and Swain (1980) suggest that,"focus on grammatical competence in the classroom is not a sufficient condition for the development of communicative competence". Widdowson (1979) endorsed their view in his assertion that "knowledge of the grammar of a language does not necessarily imply that a learner can use that language". However, Rutherford (1982) argues that "the teaching of grammar in language teaching is unavoidable and that the main question that should be scrutinised is that of how grammar should be taught at various levels of language learning". In the case of the target group under scrutiny (post-matric students from the mainly "disadvantaged communities") some of the main problems with the English language revolve around grammar. The most serious grammatical problems centre around conditionals, preposition, direct and indirect speech, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, tenses, concord, etc.

These shortcomings became very glaring after students had been exposed to lessons based on simple stories that allowed them the freedom to use their own English to express their thoughts. It is, therefore, interesting to note that the teaching of grammar featured prominently on the list of needs for both prospective employers and secretarial students-in-training.

Hohenberg (1975 : 74) states that: "Except for pathological cases, those who spell poorly either were never trained correctly in school or are too careless now to change their ways". Even for the most poorly trained, it is not too late to improve. It should, ordinarily, be taken for granted that, "While dialectal pronunciations differ, the common spelling represents the fact that we can all understand each other. It is necessary for the written language to transcend local dialects" (Van Schalkwyk, 1982).

Experience over the years has revealed that most first-year secretarial students at the Border Technikon are neither too sure of their spelling nor of their ability to use the exact word at the appropriate time. In practice, "students employ their own strategies in spelling and most of them spell as they pronounce, overlooking the difference between English spelling and pronunciation. This leads to a lack of recognition of standard English orthography which slows down the students' reading speed and hinders their comprehension of English texts" (Van Schalkwyk, 1982).

The fact still remains that even though it seems easy to describe the sounds of English, or any other language, one cannot depend on the spelling of English words. It is impossible to construct any set of symbols which would specify all the minute differences between sounds. The sophisticated computers and other word processors still need input from a secretary who is well versed in communication skills. The secretary is required to produce reports,agendas and minutes of meetings. According to Ogilvy (1990) all these are documents that demand "impeccable spelling and grammar".

Any correspondence that leaves a firm or institution is expected to present a good image of the firm or institution in question. A letter full of spelling and basic grammar errors is, therefore, a luxury that a firm or institution bent on image-promotion will like to do without.

5.2.1.4 Target task: Reasoning skills

Eighty percent (80%) of the employers and eighty two percent (82%) of the secretarial students used in this study seemed to support the view that a knowledge of inductive and deductive reasoning may help people to reason

logically. Seventy percent (70%) of the employers and eighty four percent (84%) of the students surveyed said that a knowledge of the language of the advertiser is an invaluable asset to the modern business community. Employers (84%) and students (80%) favoured an understanding of the effects of the use of emotive language while an equally impressive rating of 92% of the employers and 82% of the students surveyed believed that it was important to know how to assess an argument (cf. Table 5).

**Table 5: Task types for reasoning skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Task types** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Inductive and deductive reasoning | 80 % | 20 % | 82 % | 18 % |
| To analyse the language of the advertiser | 70 % | 30 % | 84 % | 16 % |
| Use of Emotive language | 84 % | 16 % | 80 % | 20 % |
| Assessing an argument | 92 % | 8 % | 82 % | 18 % |

It is generally believed that the business community constantly has to contend with a host of people who try to use various arguments and other language forms to take unfair advantage of those involved in business. According to Little (1976) a knowledge of advertising and the language of advertising may help us to avoid being taken for a ride.

5.2.1.5 Target Task : Oral skills

The ability to enter into meaningful social discourse is valued very highly by student respondents and employers alike. Negotiation, public speaking and speeches, and debates/group discussions were regarded by employers (75%,92%,80%) and students (82%,88%,86%) alike as very important (cf. Table 6).

Employers and students (100%) also agreed that interviews, meetings and teletactics were essential (cf.Table 6).

**Table 6: Task types for oral skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Interviewing | 100 % | 0 % | 100% | 0% |
| Negotiating | 75 % | 25 % | 82 % | 18 % |
| Meetings | 100% | 00% | 100% | 0% |
| Public Speaking and Speech making | 92 % | 8 % | 88 % | 12 % |
| Debating/discussing in groups | 80 % | 20 % | 86 % | 14 % |
| Telephoning and practising teletactics | 100 % | 0 % | 100 % | 0 % |

To participate in communication a person needs to know how meaning is coded in written and spoken text in ways in which the meaning can be shared with other people within the same social or cultural group. In brief, the learner of the target language has to know the rules and conventions governing how meaning, their textual realisation, and interpersonal communicative behaviour are all systematically related in any communicative act or situation.

A knowledge of linguistic form or a knowledge of discourse will help the task-based syllabus designer to plan the tasks in such a manner that any use of the target language will require the learner to continually match choices from his or her linguistic repertoire with the social requirements and expectations governing communicative behaviour and with meanings and ideas that he or she wishes to share.

5.2.1.6 Target task: Life skills and conflict management

Ninety eight percent (98%) of the potential employers and all the secretarial students who participated in the research shared the belief that skills that cover assertiveness, public speaking, enneagram, the awkward customer, etc. all fall under "Life skills", and in the modern world where crime is on the increase and the business community the main target, a knowledge of life skills may prove invaluable (cf.Table 7). Enneagram ethics is a personality-typing system that helps practitioners to better understand themselves and others by providing a guide to people's differing emotional makeups and their various strategies for facing life. The enneagram categories are based on human psychology.

The belief is widespread that success in the modern business world depends, partly, on learning to know oneself and being able to adapt to changing

working, social and professional environments. Life skills, the argument continues,focus on the management of a person's personal interaction with colleagues, which in turn shapes the professional life of the business man or business woman.

**Table 7: Task types for life skills and conflict management**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Task types | | | | |
| Enneagram | 90 % | 10 % | 80 % | 20 % |
| *Getting to know oneself | 92% | 8% | 84% | 16% |
| *Getting to know other people | 90 % | 10 % | 80 % | 20 % |
| Analysing customer /client behaviour | 100 % | 0 % | 100 % | 0 % |
| Understanding the awkward customer (Video) | 95% | 5% | 100% | 0% |

5.2.1.7 Target task: Communication skills

The majority of the respondents stressed the need to delve deeply into problems related to the theory of communication (cf.Table 8).

**Table 8: Task types for communication skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Task types | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Verbal and Non-verbal Communication | 84 % | 16 % | 86 % | 14 % |
| Interpersonal Communication | 90 % | 10 % | 82 % | 18 % |
| Barriers to Communication | 96 % | 4 % | 88% | 12% |
| Organisational Communication | 87 % | 13 % | 89 % | 11 % |
| The good/bad communicators | 78 % | 22 % | 93 % | 7 % |

One of the most common perceptions in industrial relations today is to ascribe failure, conflict and other problems in an organisation to "inadequate communication". The term "communication breakdown" usually refers to ineffective or defective communication or to misunderstanding triggered by cross-cultural problems. It is, however, a well-known fact that people can sometimes speak volumes without uttering a single word and that at other

times people's utterances and actions can be misinterpreted because we missed certain communication cues.

The problem is that sometimes one of the two people or parties involved in the communication process initiates the communication process but the other partner or party may fail to respond because of cultural, semantic and/or other barriers.

Now, by definition, communication is a cyclic (two-way) process in which information is transmitted to a receiver, but in which the reaction of the receiver continuously alters or changes the sender's next signal. It follows logically that without feedback there cannot be effective communication.

The practitioner is made aware of his or her and other people's strengths and weaknesses and he or she gets to find out how to use these strengths and weaknesses for the betterment of the business.

5.2.1.8 Target task: Writing skills

Among the employers and the students surveyed,the approval rates for the teaching of writing skills range between sixty eight percent (68%) and a lowly fifty six percent (56%), respectively, for the teaching of telegrams to a unanimous one hundred percent (100%) for the teaching of how to write the minutes of a meeting (cf. Table 9).

**Table 9: Task types: Writing skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Task types** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Report writing | 96 % | 4 % | 73 % | 27 % |
| Article writing | 80 % | 20 % | 85 % | 15 % |
| Business Correspondence | 92 % | 8 % | 98 % | 2 % |
| Circulars | 78 % | 22 % | 65 % | 35 % |
| Assignments | 85 % | 15 % | 65 % | 35 % |
| Advertisements | 75 % | 25 % | 90 % | 10 % |
| Forms | 82 % | 18 % | 63 % | 37 % |
| Constitution | 66 % | 34 % | 52 % | 48 % |
| Testimonials | 86 % | 14 % | 66 % | 34 % |
| Curriculum Vitae (CV) | 96 % | 4 % | 92 % | 8 % |
| Letter | 75 % | 25 % | 80 % | 20 % |
| Memorandum | 86 % | 14 % | 78 % | 22 % |
| Telegrams | 68 % | 32 % | 56 % | 44 % |
| Questionnaires | 82 % | 18 % | 76 % | 24 % |
| Itinerary/ Timetables | 80 % | 20 % | 70 % | 30 % |
| Minutes | 100 % | 0 % | 100 % | 0 % |

The term "business correspondence" refers to all purposeful writing styles or writing situations. Just like in the informal social settings the basic requirements in business and professional situations demand that different

styles of writing letters, memoranda, reports, minutes of meetings and other types of business correspondence should be written in distinctive styles. These styles of writing have to be taught and learned.

According to Halliday (1992 : 93): "speech and writing impose different grids on experience. They create different realities. Writing creates a world of things; talking creates a world of happenings".

Both the employers and the students who were the target of this research agreed that these skills are necessary and should be taught as "skills" - skills that secretarial students can, literally, carry at their finger tips.

5.2.1.9 Target task : Electronic media usage skills

The results of the survey that covered the electronic media indicated that both employers (81%) and students (87%) agreed that mass media deserved a lot of attention from the business community. The results also revealed that employers (83%) and students (92%) felt that television was also very important to the success of business. Other electronic media tasks also received enthusiastic support. For example, 78% of the employers and 83% of the students said the radio was necessary; 92% of the employers and 77% of the students opted for newspapers; 87% of the employers and 68% of the students favoured the cinema; 89% of the employers and 91% of the students saw the dawning of the computer era as a blessing to business; while 87% of the employers and 90% of the students who were the subjects of the research see a lot of potential in electronic advertising (cf.Table 10).

**Table 10: Task types for electronic media usage skills**

| | EMPLOYERS | | STUDENTS | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Task types** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** | **Necessary** | **Not Necessary** |
| Analyse effects of Mass Media | 81 % | 19 % | 87 % | 13 % |
| Study advantages and disadvantages of Television | 83 % | 17 % | 92 % | 08 % |
| Analyse effect of Radio | 78 % | 22 % | 83 % | 17 % |
| Analyse effect of Newspapers | 92 % | 08 % | 77 % | 23 % |
| Analyse effect of Cinema | 87 % | 13 % | 68 % | 32 % |
| Examine impact of Computer * internet * E-mail, etc. on business | 89 % | 11 % | 91 % | 09 % |
| Evaluate effect of Magazines | 65 % | 35 % | 71 % | 29 % |

According to Anderson (1971 : 1), "Journalists, like historians, cannot be completely objective and there is more than one way of presenting news". It is also true that when reporting the same incidents the "popular" press and the "quality" press take different viewpoints and express different details. In general, the "qualities" prefer a concise, unemotional style, while

the "populars" may be guilty of using vivid, exaggerated, and flamboyant language. It should, therefore, not come as a surprise if we discern some degree of bias in the various activities that fall under electronic media. Electronic media, on the whole, represents interests which are anything but philanthropic. The business community is, therefore, very grateful to anyone who is willing to and capable of teaching these enthusiastic but "uninitiated" and, sometimes, highly gullible youths a thing or two about the "power" of the electronic media. This is because:

> *Success in business and in business communication requires a more critical understanding of the media than would be sufficient for the lay person. To remain responsive to our customers and ahead of our competitors, it is necessary to analyse and evaluate the role of the media to gain insight into its advantages and the way that its methods influence us and our environment* (Stewart et al., 1996 : 119).

## 5.3 Conclusion

A critical analysis of the various secretarial target tasks and task types identified by employers and trainee students has highlighted the point that it is wrong to adopt a monolithic attitude when it comes to the training of secretaries. This is because there are different types of industries and, the tasks an employer identified as being important depended on the type of industry he or she belonged to. The tasks offered should, thus, be flexible and cover a broad field so that, in the end, it could be possible for the metal industry, the textile industry, the legal firms, the service industry etc., to employ secretaries from, for example, the Border Technikon. This is the dynamism and magnetism that seems to be missing from the present Border Technikon syllabus.

The empirical research in this chapter provides the necessary information to fill the gaps and widen the content of the syllabus for the training of marketable secretaries. The results obtained, therefore, indicate that a task-based syllabus is indeed appropriate for a secretarial course. This, seems to open the way for an adapted syllabus for the training of secretaries. A proposed task-based syllabus that covers basic learning strategies, reading tasks, remedial grammar, human communication, oral skills, reasoning skills, writing skills, life skills and electronic media tasks is discussed in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER 6
# A PROPOSED TASK-BASED SYLLABUS FOR SECRETARIAL STUDENTS

## 6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a proposed task-based syllabus for an ESP course specifically for secretarial students. The following outline is used:

* Aims of the course
* Rationale
* Prerequisite
* General teaching approach
* Modules (target tasks)
* Study units (task types)

Target task are presented under the heading, Module, while task-types are presented under the heading, study units. Study unit objectives are provided in order to refine the syllabus for lecturers.

## 6.2 Aims of the course

The aims of this course are to:

* help students develop proficiency in all language skills areas.
* develop critical and logical thought and improve powers of expression.
* encourage students to express their own opinion about different topics.
* enable students to work together to solve problems.
* improve students' vocabulary ability and grammatical accuracy.

* improve students' reading, grammar, thinking, conflict management, oral, life, writing, general communication and media literacy skills.
* encourage students to broaden their outlook through active reading.
* read for both enjoyment, and for professional purposes.
* evaluate information and ideas critically.
* encourage students to see grammar as a process-based conception in which grammar is seen as a dynamic shaping force in an ever-changing context and process of communication.
* help students to see grammar learning as a gradual and progressive process.
* encourage L2 learners, in general, and secretarial students, in particular, to practise grammar as a means of communication rather than as a means for correcting the mechanics and surface accuracy of sentences.

## 6.3 Rationale

Ogilvy (1990 : 60) states that:

> *While formal educational qualifications may not be stipulated or stressed in an advertisement for the post of a secretary in the New South Africa, in practice, it makes sense to give the average secretarial student the best specialist education possible because he or she is preparing for a diploma of proficiency that opens doors to a profession where he or she would receive reasonable and competitive remuneration and would be expected and be able, and prepared, to follow instructions and yet be capable of showing initiative: to be a good organiser; to stay cool-headed and resourceful, particularly in times of crises; to be loyal; tactful and discreet; to be able to protect the employer from trivia; to be capable of adapting to the employer's (reasonable) needs, to be*

*polite; intelligent and possess good business sense.*

The rationale for the present syllabus is that the secretarial student will be successful if he or she "is able to acquire language skills which are not restricted to the classroom but can be practised for a life time of out of class language learning" (Allwright, 1984 : 168). It follows, therefore, that to be a confident and successful secretary the secretarial student must become a competent reader, thinker and also be skilled at conflict management, and, above all, be well versed in discourse.

This syllabus provides the secretarial student with all the central skills that a secretarial student needs to become a more effective secretary.The acquisition of these skills will also assist the secretary in becoming a lifelong learner who can cope with the demands of the modern business world.

## 6.4 Prerequisite

The skills in this syllabus should help make the secretary independent, efficient, and highly marketable and competitive, even, on the international market. However, success will depend on a willingness on the part of the secretarial student to work hard. For example, a secretary's day encompasses so many incidental activities that it seems only a widely read secretary whose knowledge and interests span fields as wide and multifaceted as Chinese music, rugby, aviation, bird watching, French cuisine - to mention only a few - can be a great asset to any firm in the modern business global village.

## 6.5 General teaching approach

The approach recommended in this syllabus is based on the principles of task-based language teaching. Secretarial students have a different set of needs and will be expected to operate in an environment in which their proficiency will be judged by the manner in which they are able to apply the skills they acquired while in training. The extent to which the task-based approach is adapted, therefore, depends on their varied needs.

However, the following features of task-based language teaching are offered as a general guide:

* Teachers should base task selection on a needs analysis to ensure that they create a climate within which pupils can use English with interest, purpose, and enjoyment.

* In these task-based language interactions language should always be seen in relation to context; i.e., to purpose, audience, and circumstances.

Teachers should allow students enough room to experiment with diction in a learner-friendly milieu with efforts to correct errors made only when their choice or use of language is inappropriate.

## 6.6 An outline of the proposed syllabus

### 6.6.1 Module 1: Basic listening and notational skills

#### 6.6.1.1 Module Aims

The aims of this module are to :

* develop students' listening and notational skills.
* improve their ability to differentiate between fact and opinion.
* improve their ability to listen to lengthy discourse with understanding.
* increase their capacity to experience mental stimulation through listening.

(i) Study unit 1.1: Note-taking and note making

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* write down notes during a lecture.
* take notes from "the boss" for correspondence.
* distinguish between fact and fiction.
* carry out critical analysis during the listening process.

(ii) Study Unit 1.2: Summarizing

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* include the important ideas of an original source in their writing.
* write in their own words.

* sift through a long list of details for main points.

(iii) Study Unit 1.3: Aural comprehension

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* focus attention on the subject matter and think of themselves as participants in a conversation with the speaker.
* listen, actively and critically to a speaker's message.
* analyze a spoken message.
* show an improvement in their ability to understand the spoken word in English by registering high marks in tests, written and/or spoken designed to test comprehension.

6.6.2 Module 2: Reading skills

6.6.2.1 Module aims

The aims for developing reading skills among secretarial students at the Border Technikon are many and diverse and include the following:

* to promote the love for extensive and other types of reading among students from the historically "disadvantaged" background at the Border Technikon, in general, and the secretaries in training,in particular.
* to encourage students to develop a broad outlook through "active reading".
* to encourage students to read both for enjoyment and for professional reasons.
* to evaluate information and ideas critically.

(i) Study unit 2.1: Extensive reading

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* read actively.
* use different methods of reading.
* plan the amount of time needed for the thorough reading of a document or an abstract.
* read with comprehension.

(ii) Study unit 2.2: Language laboratory reading

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* read at a minimum rate of 250-300 words per minute, preferably faster.
* find out how the language laboratory can be used effectively for the honing of individual reading skills.
* read, both for enjoyment and for professional reasons.
* master various reading techniques such as scanning, skimming, analysing, and inferencing.
* apply the reading techniques in specified individual work activities.
* explain the use of scanning, skimming, analysing and inferencing.
* answer questions based on reading comprehension passages.

6.6.3 Module 3: Grammar and language mechanic skills

6.6.3.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are:

* to encourage students to see grammar as a process-based conception in which grammar is seen as a dynamic shaping force in the ever-changing context and process of communication.
* to help the student to see grammar learning as a gradual and progressive process.
* to help the language learner to be creative and attempt actively to extract regularities from what he or she hears or reads in the L2.
* to encourage the language learner to practise the conditionals and other grammatical forms as a means of communication rather than as a means for correcting the mechanics and surface accuracy of sentences.

(i) Study unit 3.1: Conditionals

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* express certain likely or probable imaginary results if certain conditions are fulfilled.
* express certain unlikely or improbable imaginary results, if certain conditions, which we imagine but which we know are not happening now, were to happen.
* express impossible results that we imagine would have happened if certain conditions, which we know did not happen, had been fulfilled.

(ii) Study unit 3.2: Prepositions

Objective

At the end of this study unit students should be able to select and use prepositions accurately, as well as idiomatically.

(iii) Study unit 3.3: Direct and Indirect speech

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* identify verbs, adverbs and pronouns.
* distinguish between "direct speech" and "indirect speech".
* change sentences from the direct into the indirect

(iv) Study unit 3.4: Punctuation

Objective

At the end of this study unit students should be able to use punctuation to enhance effective written communication.

(v) Study units 3.5 and 3.6: Vocabulary and spelling

Objectives

At the end of these study units students should be able to:

* increase their vocabulary and improve their spelling.
* use the dictionary accurately and appropriately.

(vi) Study unit 3.7: Tenses

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* describe the various moods that are expressed by different tenses.
* identify various verbs by their features.
* make verbs agree with subjects.
* use verb tenses correctly.

(vii) Study unit 3.8: Concord

Objective

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* use concord accurately.

6.6.4 Module 4: Reasoning skills

6.6.4.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are:

* to ensure that the modern trained secretary does not fall prey to the virtually continuous barrage of extremely skilful attempts to persuade us by those - such as advertisers, newspaper editors, politicians - who find it to their advantage to influence our thoughts and behaviour.
* to help the secretary to think clearly, to put his or her arguments forward logically and effectively, in speech or writing.
* to detect the fallacy in false arguments put to him or her and resist dishonest or illogical attempts to influence him or her.
* to increase the secretarial student's logical reasoning ability.
* to help the secretarial student develop a critical disposition.

(i) Study Unit 4.1: Inductive and deductive reasoning

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* differentiate between generalizations and statements built on a careful study of several samples of the same class.
* argue logically.
* distinguish between valid and invalid arguments.

(ii) Study Unit 4.2: The language of the advertiser

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* understand the business language of the advertiser.
* analyze the language of the advertiser.
* understand that the advertiser's language should appeal to the emotions that he or she has a product to sell or a cause to advance.

(ii) Study unit 4.3: The use of emotive language

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* distinguish between differnt types of emotive language.
* analyse all kinds of language, critically.
* discuss the effect of emotive language.

(iii) Study unit 4.4: Assessing an argument

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to :

* differentiate between false and logical arguments.
* recognise statements that assume the truth without proving them.
* avoid oversimplification or the habit of arriving at conclusions about problems without fully taking into consideration the causes behind the arguments.

6.6.5 Module 5: Oral skills

6.6.5.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are to:

* give students the opportunity to speak and experience English for themselves.
* provide them with an uninhibited platform for the free expression of their thoughts and feelings while using English as the medium of communication.
* give them the opportunity to speak during lessons through the use of student-centred activities.

(i) Study unit 5.1: Interviewing

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* conduct and participate in interviews.
* explain the different types of interviews.

* plan possible/probable questions and answers for an interview.
* create a good impression at an interview.

(ii) Study Unit 5.2: Negotiation

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to :

* reach amicable and fruitful compromise on issues of great importance.
* develop a spirit of cooperation.
* aim at conflict resolution.
* consider problems as opportunities for problem-solving that will benefit both parties involved in a conflict.
* discuss differences rationally and without emotion.

(iii) Study unit 5.3: Public speaking and speeches

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* consider the importance of audience analysis when thinking of public speaking and speeches.
* prepare speeches for delivery for both their managers and themselves.
* display self-confidence in public speaking.
* read or speak aloud, accurately, and with appropriate use of pause, stress and phrasing to convey nuances of meaning.
* speak English in ways appropriate to circumstances and situation, especially by the organisation and choice of words, idioms, register and intonation.
* present or challenge a point of view.

* disagree politely.
* ask questions to resolve uncertainty or to clarify an issue.

(iv) Study Unit 5.4: Debate/group discussions

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* take part in various types of debates with confidence.
* analyse both sides of an argument critically.
* develop an attitude of cooperation/cultivate a cooperative attitude - by recognising that every member's opinions and belief are equally important.
* express their views and allow others to express theirs.
* compromise and co-operate to meet the needs and desires of the group as a whole.

(v) Study Unit 5.5: Teletactics

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* answer calls with courtesy.
* listen in order to take down messages accurately.
* observe all the etiquette that portrays a good image of the firm or organisation.

### 6.6.6 Module 6 : Life skills and conflict management

#### 6.6.6.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are :

* to help students to learn to know themselves.
* to prepare students to face the complex demands of the world of business.
* to help students to know how to adapt themselves to the changing environment,changes at work and in the social environment.

(i) Study units 6.1 and 6.2: Enneagram and self-discovery

Objectives

At the end of these study units students should be able to:

* find out what type of people they think they are.
* find out what type of character their best friends in class think they are.
* interact confidently and positively with others.
* use creative problem-solving techniques to assert their personality.

(iii) Study unit 6.3: Getting to know other people

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* judge other people's behaviour in given situations.
* scrutinize and evaluate other people's behaviour in specific situations.
* interact successfully with people whose behaviour in specific situations is different from theirs.

(iv) Study unit 6.4: Analysing customer/client behaviour

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* interact positively with people who behave differently when faced with given situations.
* anticipate certain behavioural patterns when interacting with different customers.
* interact successfully with different types of customers.

(v) Study Unit 6.5: The awkward customer

Objectives

At the end of this unit that involves discussions and an extensive use of video material, the students should be able to:

* empathise with customers and clients who behave differently when faced with different situations.
* avoid some of the things that make certain customers seem "awkward" to us.
* listen to, and remain sensitive to, and empathetic towards clients/ customers who seem to be "awkward".

### 6.6.7 Module 7: Communication skills

#### 6.6.7.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are to:

* make students aware of the existence of different communication models;
* define communication.
* bring to the attention of students the fact that during normal communicative interaction, it is always advisable to listen to and, also, to be on the lookout for signs of non-verbal communication.
* know that certain barriers can make it impossible for people to communicate.

#### (i) Study unit 7.1: Verbal and non-verbal communication

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to :

* use both oral and written language to express their thoughts and feelings.
* use means other than verbal communication to express their thoughts and feelings.
* decipher or decode non-verbal communication.
* use both verbal and non-verbal communication simultaneously for very effective expression of thoughts and feelings.
* identify the medium of communication.

(ii) Study Unit 7.2: Interpersonal communication

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* choose the appropriate code to communicate with different people.
* provide adequate and meaningful feedback to guarantee effective communication between individuals.

(iii) Study unit 7.3: Barriers to communication

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students will be able to:

* identify problems that give rise to communication breakdown.
* prevent communication breakdowns by finding out where, when and why these are likely to occur.
* analyse the barriers to effective communication.
* practise skills that will make them good communicators.

(iv) Study Unit 7.4: Organisational communication

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to :

* define organisational communication.
* explain how organisational structures operate.
* relate communication systems to business organisations.
* evaluate the various communication systems or channels that operate in organisations.
* explain the various terminologies and concepts that relate to organisational communication.

(v) Study Unit 7.5: The good/bad communicator

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* explain what makes a person a good communicator.
* explain out what makes a person a bad communicator.
* practise their communication skills in groups.

6.6.8 Module 8: Writing skills

6.6.8.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are to:

* develop the writing skills of students.
* inculcate the values of accuracy and efficiency.

(i) Study unit 8.1: Report writing

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* describe what is meant by a report.
* identify the principal facts of a report.
* distinguish periodic, progress (monthly, quarterly), formal and informal reports.
* write different types of reports using an appropriate style in the format accepted as standard for the course.

(ii) Study unit 8.2: Article writing

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* discern the differences between writing a "story" and writing to express facts and opinions.
* plan a structure for a logically planned article.
* describe terms like: journal, in-house magazine, etc.

(iii) Study unit 8.3: Business correspondence - letters, reports and telegrams.

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* describe and use an acceptable format for the various categories of business letters.
* use appropriate tone and suitable arrangement of the contents of common business correspondence.
* write business correspondence that convey good news and natural messages, bad news messages and persuasive messages by using a variety of methods for arranging the contents.
* distinguish between various international formats, i.e., Russian, British, South African, etc.
* evaluate items of business correspondence in terms of their style, tone, register, objectives and arrangement of contents.
* provide enough information in the "content" section of business correspondence to achieve positive results.

(iv) Study unit 8.4: Circulars

Objectives

At the end of this study units students should be able to:

* identify the different targets of circulars.
* distinguish between circular letters and other types of correspondence.
* distinguish between various techniques used in circulars.
* write unsolicited sales letters.
* write effective circulars.

(v) Study unit 8.5: Advertisements

Objectives

At the end of this study unit the students should be able to:

* describe some human needs that the advertiser appeals to.
* distinguish between informative and persuasive uses of language.
* describe and discuss some common techniques used in persuasive writing in general and advertising in particular.
* advertise in the classified and small display advertisement sections of the press and journals.

(vi) Study unit 8.6: Office correspondence - memoranda, notices, minutes.

Objectives

At the end of this study unit students should be able to:

* write memoranda, notices and minutes in acceptable format.
* structure the documents making use of the appropriate tone and concideration for human needs in business correspondence situations.

(vii) Study Unit 8.7: English for specific purposes - (forms, constitution, testimonials, questionnaires, itinerary and time tables).

Objectives

At the end of this study unit the students should be able to:

* write with an appropriate tone and consideration for human needs in business correspondence situations.

6.6.9 Module 9: Electronic media usage skills

6.6.9.1 Module aims

The aims of this module are to:

* define electronic media.
* analyse electronic media.
* use the services made possible by the electronic media.
* use the modern language of the electronic media.

(i) Study unit 9.1: Analysis of the effects of the Electronic media

Objectives

At the end of this study unit the students should be able to:

* describe the various types of electronic media.
* discuss the advantages and disadvantages of electronic media.
* exploit the electronic media to improve mass communication.

(ii) Study unit 9.2: The advantages and disadvantages of the mass media - television, radio, newspapers, cinema and computers.

Objectives

At the end of this study unit the students should be able to:

* define the term "mass media".
* describe how electronic media works.
* discuss the importance of understanding how mass media works.
* use mass media for easy storage,retrieval and dissemination of information.

## 6.7 Conclusion

As lecturers we either design our own syllabus or we have to adopt a previously established syllabus which serves the institution or department within which we work. Any syllabus is most typically a plan of what is to be achieved through our teaching and our student's learning (cf. section 2.2). However, it surely seems unjust to subject all the students at the Border Technikon, majoring in diverse subject areas, to the same syllabus. The language skills required by secretarial students differ from those required by catering management and science students. Each of these groups have highly specialised needs.

When it comes to preparing to help the learner acquire the ability to use a second languae in real life (and in many cases as quickly as possible) the lecturer's task immediately and dramatically expands beyond the traditional limits of the structure-based syllabus. This chapter provided an outline of a task-based syllabus, because it was felt that this type of syllabus takes into account the needs of the learners, and also specifically that of pot[illegible]tial

employers. it invariably creates a learner-friendly atmosphere that helps students to become confident in their various fields.

# CHAPTER 7
# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

## 7.1 Introduction

This study and its findings suggest the need to design specific syllabuses for different groups of students at the Border Technikon, bearing in mind the needs of the profession, the students and the community. It is, therefore, recommended that research to establish the various needs of the different professions and prospective employers should be carried out as a matter of urgency.

## 7.2 Conclusions

There is no doubt that a new type of syllabus and approach to teaching are called for because the concept of language and language teaching has changed. The structural type of syllabus served its purpose. However, it seems to have outlived its usefulness. English has now assumed a central role in learning. In this new role it is suppposed to facilitate the learning of other skills.

According to Brumfit and Johnson (1991 : 122): "English teaching has been called upon to provide students with the basic ability to use the language, to receive, and (to a lesser degree) to convey information associated with their specialist studies".

The efficacy of English in the task of preparing secretarial students for their role in the modern day business and social community would, therefore, among other things, depend on a very careful analysis of the students' needs

and on a sound teaching methodology which would ensure that the knowledge they acquire from their English language classes would be transferred to the efficient performance of their secretarial duties after they had acquired their diplomas of proficiency.

The results of this study indicated that secretarial students have very specialised needs. A variety of target-task and task-types were identified by both students and employers. On the basis of a detailed needs analysis a tak-based syllabus was designed.

## 7.3 Recommendations for future research

A task-based approach to teaching will, invariably, create a learner-friendly atmosphere that will help students to become confident in their various fields. There is no doubt that syllabus design must take into account the needs of the learners, the employers and the community. This study and its findings suggest the need to design specific syllabuses for different groups of students at the Border Technikon, bearing in mind the needs of the professions, the students and the community. The Communication in English Department has great potential for future research in this area fo syllabus design. It is, therefore, recommended that research to establish the various needs of the different professions and employers should be carried out as a matter of urgency.

The approach recommended in this type of syllabus should be based on the principles informing communicative language teaching. The extent to which this approach is adopted will depend on the varied circumstances and target groups. However, the teacher should create an ambiance within which students can use English with interest, purpose and enjoyment. In addition, language should always be seen in relation to context, i.e. to purpose, audience and circumstance. Last but not the least, the students

should have the freedom to experiment with the English language across a wide range of tasks with the teacher correcting only when the students' choice of language is inppropriate.

It is also recommended that the proposed task-based syllabus be subjected to rigorous field evaluation in order to assess its effectiveness.

Research has shown that the selection of tasks is relatively easy. However, it is felt that more attention should in future be given to sequencing criteria. In the past topics and situations were criticised for vagueness. However, tasks seem to suffer from the same problem. Future research should attempt to answer questions such as: are there a finite number of tasks ? Should tasks be broken up into subtasks ?

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**APPENDIX A : Letter**

Private Bag 1421
EAST LONDON
5200
25 September 1996

Dear Sir/Madam

NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR SECRETARIAL STUDENTS

In an ongoing research programme aimed at ensuring that Border Technikon-trained secretaries meet modern expectations and remain marketable, the researcher has decided to find out from you whether some of the topics taught at Border Technikon are still in line with market expectations.

Please find enclosed a checklist that represents some of the topics proposed by the Communication in English Department. You are requested to tick those topics you feel are relevant for the training of the ideal secretary. Also tick the appropriate box below, indicating your feelings about the course content. Suggestions of additional topics and areas to be covered will be acknowledged.

Any information which could be of assistance in the research would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Mr Winfred Dwamena Aboagye
SENIOR LECTURER: Communication in English

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Fair |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

**APPENDIX B: Checklist**

1. ORIENTATION
   - 1.1 Note-taking and Note-making

2. ON-GOING BRIDGING PROGRAMME
   - 2.1 Language Laboratory Exercises
   - 2.2 Stories for Reproduction
   - 2.3 Spelling Exercises
   - 2.4 Remedial Grammar
   - 2.5 Language Games
   - 2.6 Assessing an Argument - Logical Reasoning
   - 2.7 Vocabulary-building Exercises
   - 2.8 Composition through Pictures

3. THEORY OF COMMUNICATION
   - 3.1 Verbal and Non-verbal Communication
   - 3.2 Interpersonal Communication
   - 3.3 Communication Barriers
   - 3.4 Organisational Communication
   - 3.5 Mass Communication

4. LIFE SKILLS
   - 4.1 Self-discovery
   - 4.2 Conflict Management
     - 4.2.1 Different types of customers (video)
     - 4.2.2 In the face of aggression (video)

5. READING SKILLS

5.1 Intensive and Extensive Reading

5.2 Types of Literature

5.2.1 Comedy

5.2.2 Tragedy

5.2.3 Satire

5.2.4 Negritude

5.2.5 Protest Literature, etc.

6. WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

6.1 Summaries

6.1.1 Précis Writing

6.1.2 Memoranda

6.1.3 Telegrams

6.1.4 Fax, etc.

6.2 Business Correspondence

6.2.1 Questionnaires

6.2.2 Invitations

6.3 Report Writing

6.4 Article Writing

6.5 Advanced Uses of English

6.5.1 Curriculum Vitae

6.5.2 Testimonials

6.5.3 Constitution

6.5.4 Instructions

6.5.5 Forms

7. ORAL COMMUNICATION
   - 7.1 Debates
   - 7.2 Public Speaking
   - 7.3 Interviews (Different Types of Interviews)
     - 7.3.1 Preparing for interviews
     - 7.3.2 Conducting interviews
     - 7.3.3 Probable questions and answers
   - 7.4 Teletactics

8. MEETING PROCEDURE
   - 8.1 Meeting Terminology
   - 8.2 Notice and Agenda
   - 8.3 Minutes
   - 8.4 Conferences

9. ADVERTISING
   - 9.1 Language of Advertising
   - 9.2 Types of Advertising

10. TRAVELLING ARRANGEMENTS
   - 10.1 Preparing for Overseas Air Travel
   - 10.2 Itinerary and Time-Tables