

**Survey**

**Unit 4**

Write out a questionnaire and complete for other students.

*Example:*

1. Who's your favourite author?  
Agatha Christie.

QUESTIONNAIRE				
	Student A	Student B	Student C	Student D
1. Favourite Author	Agatha Christie			
2. Favourite Singer	Dennis Roussos			
3. Favourite Film Star	Humphrey Bogart			
4. Favourite Sport	Tennis			
5. Favourite Colour	Blue			



**English for the classroom - Pronunciation**

Ask your teacher about six difficult words in Unit 4.

*Example:*

How do you pronounce C-H-R-I-S-T-I-E, please?



**Write sentences**

Write three sentences about books or films you like.

Write three sentences about books or films you don't like.

*Example:*

I like detective stories. They are very exciting. My favourite author is Agatha Christie.

Language Study Exercises 4.1 4.3

Fig. 1. (From *Encounters* by J. Garton-Sprenger *et al* (Heinemann Educational Books))



Another characteristic of real language use is that the user normally has a greater receptive ability than productive ability. That is to say, he can understand things that he would not be able to express easily. For instance, I might be able to understand a car repair manual, but I would find it difficult to write one because I would lack the productive ability to use the correct terminology. The writers of *Encounters* suggest that:

... if the development of all four skills is tied to the rate of learning of productive spoken language, much of what is required for the other three skills will not be learned.

Their aim is for understanding to develop faster than speaking and for reading to develop faster than writing, so that the learner's performance in the different skills to some extent reflects that of the native speaker. So, the learner is not expected to be able to say everything that he hears or reads, nor is he expected to be able to write everything that he hears or reads. This allows the learner to develop his reading strategies, for example, to a point where at the end of the book he can read and understand a simple letter or questionnaire, even though he might not be able to write either.

So far as equipping our students to use English effectively is concerned we may fairly conclude that *Encounters* goes a very long way in meeting the need and makes great efforts to provide meaningful presentation and practice.

Our *third principle* (4.3) was to keep our students' learning needs in mind. So far as selection, grading, presentation and practice are concerned, we have already made our evaluation, so let us now consider the extent to which the intellectual and personal needs of our learners are met. That is, whether the coursebook interests and involves the student. The writers claim to adopt a *learner-centred approach* which encourages the teacher to make use of the knowledge and interests of the students so that the classroom activities become 'relevant and spontaneous'.

The Survey activity from Lesson 22 already referred to meets these criteria and so do these projects and discussion activities, taken from lessons 61 and 62 respectively:

**Discuss**

When do you give and receive presents in your country?  
How do you thank someone in English for a birthday present, a wedding present, etc?

**Project: Customs regulations in your country**

An English-speaking friend is coming to visit you from abroad. Make a list of what he/she can bring into your country without paying customs duty.

Fig. 2. (From *Encounters* by J. Garton-Sprenger et al (Heinemann Educational Books))



One of the most difficult aspects of writing materials at elementary level is providing exercises and activities which are structurally simple enough for beginners and yet intellectually stimulating enough for intelligent adults or children. The writers of *Encounters* have gone some way towards solving this difficulty, but it remains a problem, and some of the activities which are intended to engage the interest of the learners may seem rather thin and insubstantial to the more sophisticated among them. One partial solution is to treat the activities as something of a game rather than as something very serious. Fortunately this problem becomes much less difficult to cope with at intermediate and advanced levels.

Our *fourth principle* (4.4) concerns the learner and the language, and the learning process which, as it were, brings the two together. We are looking here for a balance between the needs of the learner on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the constraints imposed by the necessity of learning the structures and vocabulary of English. It is all very well talking, as we have done, about learning useful functions of English, but it must always be remembered that these functions cannot be expressed without a good working knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary, not to mention the sound system, of English.

How does *Encounters* achieve a balance between the learner's communicative needs, the learning process and the structure of the English language? We have already seen how the syllabus of the course was determined in the first instance by functional considerations, and how the structural syllabus was derived from the functional syllabus and serves the purposes of the functional syllabus. The learners' communicative needs are quite well catered for by the functional syllabus; and indeed a glimpse at the contents page will show that the primary organisation of the course is in terms of communicative function. The structural grading within the functional framework is equally clear, and the Teachers' Book provides a structural reference list which identifies each structure taught and gives the unit in which it was introduced.

Additionally, at the end of each unit there is a Language Study component which revises and summarises the structures presented in that unit. This provides the student with practice in the manipulation of language form, which is necessary for the development of oral fluency, and with a convenient checklist of structures that he has learned. This very valuable reinforcement of language forms already presented and practised in a functional context helps to establish a balance of emphasis between *language function* and *language form* (see p. 15 for a more detailed discussion of this relationship).

So far as the learning process is concerned, the coursebook writers acknowledge that people learn in different ways and that learning is an individual process. Their strategy for coping with this is to provide as much variety as possible and to avoid dogmatically adopting one particular view of language learning or one particular methodology. This approach is intended to allow the teacher to select material that best suits his own students' approach to learning. Unfortunately, for practical reasons, no coursebook can offer a large number of alternative ways of teaching each item on the syllabus, and even when adopting an eclectic approach, coursebook writers must of necessity make their own value judgements and opt for one kind of presentation rather than another. As I have suggested earlier, it is really up to the individual teacher to be sensitive to his students' learning strategies and to adapt and supplement the main coursebook where necessary.

Our brief look at *Encounters* has highlighted many very positive features which make it an attractive coursebook for teenage and adult beginners (parti-



cularly from the western world) who are embarking on a general course and hope to be able to use the English that they learn at an early stage. No coursebook is wholly complete and *Encounters* is no exception. For instance, it only touches briefly on the *intonation* of English and supplementary materials would probably be needed in this area. But as no coursebook will be ideally suited to your particular style of teaching, it will almost always be necessary to supplement the material and adapt it. Some ideas on doing this will be found in Chapter 9 of this book.

## Conclusion

The advice offered in this book is based on these premises:

- (a) The learner is an individual who also functions as part of a group. He has individual needs and collective needs. These needs are both intellectual and affective.
- (b) English, like other languages, is a complex system of language forms which convey meaning and allow the speaker to perform communicative acts. Language behaviour is part of, and intimately bound in with, social behaviour and cannot be fully understood except in the social context.
- (c) The teacher's role is to promote learning through the use of his professional skills and knowledge of the students' learning processes. The teacher also needs to understand the structure of English and how it is used for communication between individuals.
- (d) The role of the coursebook is to aid the learner and the teacher in accomplishing this task.

## Exercises and activities

- (a) Look at the introduction to a coursebook which you use or which you know, referring to Teacher's Book if possible, and list the objectives which are stated in it.
- (b) How far do you think that the objectives which you identified in activity (a) are appropriate to the learning needs of the students or pupils for whom the coursebook was designed?
- (c) Note down three or four of the most important things that you would like to see in a general course. Discuss them if possible with your colleagues or with other members of your group, build up a composite list and try to put the items roughly in order of importance.



## 2 The Language Content.

In this chapter we are looking at *what* is being taught in terms of grammar and vocabulary and also in terms of meaning, function and appropriateness. Nor must we neglect to consider the different language skills being taught. It is clear that different students have differing needs so far as what they learn is concerned, so this chapter is largely descriptive and aims to establish the nature of the language contained in the course material. Evaluation of its suitability for particular types of learner is left until later when the content of the course material is matched with potential users of the material. This is dealt with particularly in Chapters 7 and 8.

### 1 Form and Function

What aspects of the language system are taught? To what extent is the material based upon, or organised around, the teaching of *language form, language function, and patterns of communicative interaction*?

Suppose we wish to teach a particular function, such as 'expressing that others are not obliged to do something'. The term *function* really refers to the process of conveying the meaning that 'somebody is not obliged to do something'. It is clear that this meaning is ordinarily conveyed through language form (words and sounds organised according to the rules of the language) although it could in certain circumstances be conveyed by non-verbal means such as, in this case, a shrug of the shoulders or a shake of the head. The language forms available to us in English to express this particular function are quite numerous and include:

*You don't have to...*

*You needn't...*

*It's not obligatory for you to...*

*It's not compulsory for you to...*

*There's no obligation to...*

*It's up to you.*

*You're free to choose.*

*It's completely voluntary.*

Therefore we have to make a selection from the possible forms which can be used to express a function. Coursebooks must teach language form because meaning and function are expressed through form and without form there could be no verbal communication. The crucial question is whether language is presented solely or predominantly as form – in which case the material will concentrate on helping the learner to produce grammatically correct sentences without too much concern for how these sentences would be used – or whether the function of language items is also taught. Put another way, is language presented as a closed grammatical system or is it presented as a communicative system in a context of use and so as an integral part of the pattern of social behaviour?



It is orthodox now in writing on language teaching to contrast the structural approach to course design and the functional approach in terms of how the content is selected and organised: in units of language form in the first case and in functional units in the second. No one, however, can produce a functional course without also teaching language form, so we are not really choosing to teach *either* structures or functions: we should teach both. What needs to be looked at is not so much whether the material is wholly structural or wholly functional, but how the relationships, often very complex ones, between form and function are handled and put over to the learner. Whether we label 'could you shut the door' as an example of a modal verb plus a lexical verb with a complement, or as an example of the function of making a polite request, is less important than how successfully we teach the relationship between the form of the sentence and its effective use in a context of social interaction.

A further consideration is whether patterns of communicative interaction are taught. When we use language, we do not use sentences in isolation from each other. In any piece of natural language, whether it is a conversation or a written text, sentences relate to each other in their meanings and their functions; they do not simply occur as isolated bits of language. There are rules and conventions for the linking of sentences to form larger units of discourse, and we should expect to find built into a course models and examples of sentence linking (not sentence joining, but linking sentences which remain structurally separate). For example, in a coursebook for writing skills we should expect guidance on not only how to write sentences that are grammatical but also on writing paragraphs, including when to start a new paragraph and on writing longer passages of English composed of several paragraphs.

The following extract is an exercise in reading and, specifically, in recognising some of the links that are to be found between sentences in a passage of written English.

## 7 Reference: connectives

In writing, and especially when writing explanations, we often have to refer back to an earlier word or idea. To make it clear that it is something we have mentioned before, we often use *this* or *these*, or sometimes *the*. In addition, to avoid repeating exactly the same word again and again, we use another word – either a different part of speech (e.g. if we use a verb the first time, we may change it to a noun the second time), or a word that has a similar meaning, or a more general word.

For example:

*First Reference*  
The water evaporates.

It moves  
It enlarges

There are changes  
The temperature falls

The wood is cut with an axe.  
The numbers can be added, multiplied  
etc.  
The product can be advertised on radio,  
TV etc.

*Later Reference*

This evaporation  
This movement  
This enlargement

These variations  
This drop in temperature

This method of cutting  
These mathematical operations

These means of advertising



## 8 Petroleum

Read the following passage on petroleum.

In the shallow waters off the coast a few hundred million years ago, vast numbers of minute creatures and plants lived and died. Owing to the lack of oxygen, the remains of *these marine organisms* were unable to decompose. As a result of climatic changes, *these coastal areas* became buried under layers of earth, and *the organic remains* were subjected to high pressures and temperatures over periods of millions of years. *These conditions* caused the decomposition and the chemical breakdown of the fats, carbohydrates and proteins in the remains. As the conditions of

decomposition varied from one region to another, petroleum found in different parts of the world varies considerably in composition. In the course of time petroleum was squeezed out of the original source rock into more porous rocks, in *some of which* it accumulated.

To what earlier words or phrases do the phrases in *italics* refer?

Fig. 3. (From *Think and Link* by J. Cooper (Edward Arnold))

Language learning, then, may be seen as acquisition of the ability to participate in the dynamic and creative process of communication, and not just an acquisition of separate, isolated units of language, whether they are termed structural units or functional units. We should ask ourselves to what extent the teaching material reflects this view.

## 2 Aspects of language form

Which aspects of language form are taught: *phonology* (the production of individual sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation), *grammar* (morphology and syntax), *vocabulary* (lexis), *discourse* (sequence of sentences)?

One might expect that any course material which aimed to teach the spoken language would teach the phonology or sound system of English in the same ordered and systematic way that we are accustomed to finding in the teaching of grammatical structures. However this is not always the case, even in comprehensive general courses, and phonology is often at best taught incidentally and in random order. There seems theoretically to be little justification for this state of affairs: we would not expose our students to grammar in a random and unsystematic way and simply expect them to perceive the underlying patterns and rules. Why then do coursebooks follow this procedure with the teaching of the sound system of English?

The answer probably lies in the immense difficulty of producing a course that is well graded at several levels of language simultaneously. To grade the introduction of grammatical items and vocabulary, to present them in context and to give exponents of them that show coherent functional organisation so that the grammar, etc. is seen to meet the learner's communicative needs, is a difficult enough task for the coursebook writer to face up to and he often finds that incorporating a systematic and carefully graded phonology-teaching component simultaneously is well-nigh impossible. Considering, for example, the complexity of intonation, it seems hardly surprising that intonation patterns occur more or less randomly in even elementary coursebooks.

The practical answer for the teacher is to use specialised material produced for pronunciation teaching in parallel with the main coursebook, so that the learners do get a systematic familiarisation with the elements of phonology. For



our purposes this example identifies one of the positive benefits of materials evaluation and analysis: it spotlights both the strengths and weaknesses of coursebooks and identifies for the teacher areas of language teaching which require the use of supplementary materials.

Most coursebooks concentrate heavily on the teaching of grammatical structures and on the whole do it well. Grammar is immensely important, being the system of rules for the formation of correct sentences and it is essential that learners are able to both understand and use the rules of grammar. Few, if any, writers on language learning would disagree that the internalisation of grammar rules is central to language learning and that any teaching programme which omits grammar is not really teaching language in the full sense of the word. In order to create language which expresses what he wants to say, the learner must be able to use the rules of grammar.

The introduction of vocabulary in coursebooks tends to be variable. In some cases vocabulary items are seen as isolated units to be slotted into grammatical structures and bearing no relationship to other vocabulary items. Other courses do their best to teach vocabulary as part of a structural system by identifying and exploiting relationships between words. The latter approach would appear to be the better, as learning theory and empirical evidence suggest that items are learned and recalled more readily if relationships can be perceived between the items forming the system (see Stevick 1976, chapter 2). The lexicon of English is structured in various ways, both formally and semantically, and it is therefore desirable that this structuring should be exploited for learning purposes (see Richards 1976).

I have used the word *discourse* on page 16 as one of the aspects of language form to look for in a coursebook. (See 2.2 in the checklist in Chapter 10.) This refers to the way in which sentences are linked (but not joined) in order to produce a complete unit of language which forms a self-contained whole. This whole may be a newspaper article, a letter, an advertisement or even a public notice. What we are particularly concerned about here is whether or not the coursebook teaches the student to understand and produce whole units of language and if it indicates any of the rules and conventions for doing so. Many courses do this implicitly or partially, for example they may teach how to write a paragraph or how to begin a conversation with a greeting, but few explicitly set themselves the task of dealing comprehensively with this level of organisation of language.

### 3 Appropriateness

What explicit reference is there to *appropriateness* (the matching of language to its social context and function)? How systematically is it taught? How fully and comprehensively is it taught? This concept is familiar to most EFL teachers. *Appropriateness* or, as it is sometimes called, *appropriacy*, means in this context stylistic appropriateness. The concept really derives from work done on communicative competence and from the now classic statement by Hymes (1971, p. 278), 'There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless.' When we use language, we need to be able to perceive the social situation in which we are operating and to be able to match the language we use to the situation.

For the foreign learner, as for the young child acquiring his native language, there is a double task: to perceive the social situations and to select appropriate



language. One aspect of the task is non-linguistic and the other is linguistic, but they are so closely connected that the language teacher cannot afford to neglect either aspect. Cultural gaps pose problems to learners of English, particularly where the social, political or religious differences are great. I recall from my own experience a case where a Chinese speaker of English was looking after an American professor on a lecture tour of China. After the American's first lecture the Chinese, using a standard formula of politeness in China, told the lecturer that he looked tired and asked him to take a rest. The American interpreted this as a criticism of his performance and was somewhat displeased. When something of this nature happens, effective communication has not taken place.

We may therefore justifiably ask the extent to which a language-teaching coursebook teaches these important rules of use, how competently it does it, and how systematically.

#### 4 Varieties

What kind of English is taught: *dialect* (class, geographic), *style* (formal, neutral, informal), *occupational register*, *medium* (written, spoken)?

Much has been written on varieties of English and I will limit myself to identifying some salient points which are of importance to the language teacher. There are many dialects of English, both geographical dialects and class dialects, but the kind of English presented in coursebooks is usually either standard, middle-class, educated, southern British English or standard, middle-class, educated, American English. Other dialects of English do not figure prominently except in materials produced for a very localised market. Whilst there seem to be very good reasons for teaching one of the two dialects mentioned above (perhaps the strongest reason being that they have the widest intelligibility in the English-speaking world), there may be special situations where a *receptive* knowledge of a less widely used dialect is needed. Examples which spring to mind are students going to study in Glasgow, and businessmen going to make deals in Jamaica or Nigeria.

Stylistic variation, and in particular the difference between formal, neutral and informal language, is important in that it is necessary for stylistic appropriateness. This has been dealt with briefly above.

We may also ask ourselves if the material that we are evaluating has any instances of specific occupational register, i.e. a style of English characteristically associated, through, for example, its specialised vocabulary, with a particular occupation. We are likely to find this frequently with ESP material, but rarely elsewhere.

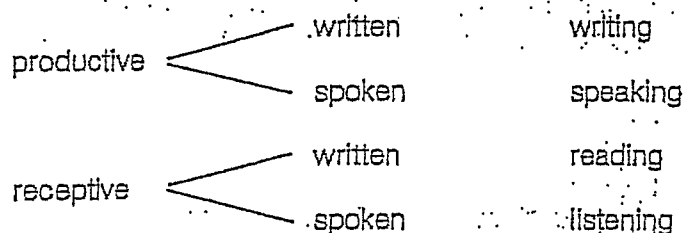
Differences between speech and writing are fundamental and far reaching and need to be taken into account in materials evaluation. Are the examples of English given characteristic of speech or writing, or does the material contain both? We may also ask to what extent dialogues which purport to be speech are in fact characteristic of authentic speech. It is probably mistaken to suggest that models of speech for EFL teaching should always be examples of authentic English, but they certainly should incorporate some of the features of authentic spoken English and should not be 'spoken written English', i.e. English which exhibits the characteristics of written English but is spoken. For a discussion of the relationship between speech and writing see Byrne (1979, chapters 1 and 2) or Stubbs (1980, chapter 2).



## 5 Language skills

What language skills are taught: *receptive* (written/reading, spoken/listening), *productive* (written/writing, spoken/speaking), *integration of skills* (e.g. note taking, dictation, reading aloud, participating in conversation), *translation* (into English/from English)?

We may reasonably ask what language skills the material teaches, using the conventional breakdown into receptive and productive skills, speech and writing. This gives us:



As we have seen earlier, it is necessary for teaching purposes to divide what is to be learned into small, assimilable units which the learner can absorb progressively. It is for this reason that we often talk about the four skills as separate entities which are sometimes taught separately, one lesson emphasising listening, for example, and another writing. However, most communicative interactions through language involve the use of more than one skill: consider normal conversation for instance which involves both speaking and listening in rapid sequence, or taking a telephone message requiring both the above skills together with writing. We should therefore ask not only what emphasis the material places on each of the four skills but also the extent to which it provides practice in integrating the skills in models of real communication.

### Summary

What we are looking for in a general course is material which presents different aspects of language as systematically as possible, having regard to the need to present new language items to the learner in small assimilable units, each unit related to what has gone before. The course should be as comprehensive as possible, including the teaching of pronunciation as well as the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. Some attention should also be given to linking sentences to form discourse and the learner should be prepared for real-life language use, such as taking part in conversations and other interactions. It is better for a coursebook to be too comprehensive than too insubstantial. A teacher can always omit to use material that is there. It is much more difficult to make good what the coursebook has left out.

### Exercises and activities

- (a) What is the balance in your coursebook between teaching the forms of English and the functions of English? Do you consider that more emphasis should be placed on form or function in your teaching situation? How does



the coursebook establish links between form and function? (See question 2.1 in Chapter 10.)

(b) Consider the extent to which your coursebook provides material for pronunciation (see question 2.2 in Chapter 10). Do you consider that pronunciation is adequately dealt with? If not, what would you like to see?

(c) What variety of English is taught by your coursebook? Can you place it geographically and socially? (See question 2.4 in Chapter 10)

(d) How far does your coursebook prepare the learner for real communication in English? (See question 2.5 in Chapter 10.)



# 3 The Selection and Grading of Language Items

## 1 Functional syllabuses and structural syllabuses

Does the material follow a *structural syllabus* or a *functional syllabus*? A syllabus is an ordered statement of *what* is to be taught, but not a statement of how it is to be taught. It is ordered because it does not simply list language items to be taught, it also puts them in a sequence for teaching purposes. The coursebook writer must order his material according to some system, and in general he will devise his own progression. The content of a coursebook, what it teaches and in what order, may well act as a syllabus for many of the teachers who use the book.

The relationship between function and form has been referred to already in Chapter 2 and here I want to relate both function and form to the syllabus. In a *functional syllabus* the functions are selected and sequenced according to their usefulness to the learner, the extent to which they meet the learner's communicative needs. So the earliest items in the syllabus will be those that the learner will need most in the situations in which he will use English. How the syllabus designer predicts what these situations will be is very much a matter of subjective judgement. Whether he makes intelligent guesses or does some research, the results he comes up with will depend largely on his personal decisions.

Some advantages of the functional syllabus are that the learning goals can be identified in terms which make sense to the learners themselves. To the average student, 'making requests for information' means more than 'interrogative form of modal verbs followed by infinitive'. Also, by using the criterion of usefulness rather than grammatical factors, the syllabus designer ensures that the learning process has an immediate practical result in that the students can use what they have learned outside the classroom at a relatively early stage. Students who do not complete a course will still take away with them something useful in the form of a limited communicative ability in English.

The *structural syllabus* reflects a more traditional approach, and, taking as its starting point the internal structure of the language rather than its use, may be called subject-centred. The structural syllabus sequences the items of language to be taught in order of presumed difficulty, largely on the basis of complexity of structure. Structural syllabuses in traditional coursebooks show a striking uniformity in the sequencing of the items that they teach. This seems to depend on tradition and the accumulated practical wisdom of teachers, rather than on any scientific definition of which structures are more complex and more difficult to learn.

One limitation of the structural syllabus is the scant regard paid to meaning and especially to the communicative potential of what is taught. The essential objective of the structural syllabus seems to be the skill of manipulating language forms, with little concern for the functional meaning that the forms can be used to express.

The strength of the structural syllabus is that it can account for all the forms of



language and relate them to each other in a coherent and finite system. The functional syllabus on the other hand lists various functions and gives examples of how those functions can be expressed in English.

Functions do not form an interrelated finite system, nor have they been fully described and delimited. Most lists of functions so far provided have been based upon introspection and intuition. Language forms are, after all, observable, whereas functions have to be inferred from their linguistic form and as such are more difficult to handle in a full, explicit and objective description.

Where a structural syllabus is adopted by a coursebook, we should check that sufficient attention has been paid to the meaning of the structures taught. One structure may have two or more meanings and it may be used differently according to the meaning which it expresses. The article (*the/a*) is a good example of this. With specific reference, definite and indefinite articles have a different meaning and play a different role in English syntax. So:

a book was lost yesterday

means something different from:

the book was lost yesterday.

The use of the definite article *the* in the second example indicates that the book is known to the speaker and listener and it is identifiable, whereas in the first example it is not. However, with general reference, the definite and indefinite articles, *the* and *a*, are virtually interchangeable. Compare:

the lion is a fine animal

with:

a lion is a fine animal.

There may be a fine shade of meaning which differentiates the two, but practically speaking either article can be used without a major change of meaning.

It is important that a coursebook should specify not only the structure that is being taught but also the particular meaning of that structure. Most coursebooks do make this distinction with major items of structure, such as the present continuous form of the verb, indicating for instance whether it is being taught with its future meaning or its present meaning. But in other areas of grammar, such as the article, many coursebooks are less careful.

Widdowson (1979 p. 248) points out that a functional syllabus is still only an inventory of units, functional rather than structural, and that there is no demonstration of the crucial relationship between form and function. The functional syllabus does not account for communicative competence because it does not contain the strategies for using linguistic elements for communicative purposes. Such strategies amount to more than just combining functional units learned in isolation and include 'an ability to *make* (create) sense as a participant in discourse... by the skilful deployment of shared knowledge of... language resources and rules of language use'.

Structural and functional syllabuses do not seem to be opposed to each other, as they have sometimes come to be seen, but are better considered as complementary. The functional perspective of a functional syllabus develops the structural syllabus by incorporating into it a component which is sensitive to



the learner's communicative needs and provides him with units of communication as well as with units of linguistic forms.

## 2 Subject-centred approach and student-centred approach

Is the selection and sequence of the language to be taught based on an attempt to identify probable student need (*student-centred approach*) or the internal structure of the language (*subject-centred approach*)?

Here we are concerned in a general manner with the extent to which student need is taken into account, and more specifically with the suitability of the material being evaluated to the needs of a particular group of students.

Most course material is designed with a fairly general readership in mind. This applies particularly to general courses which aim to give learners a basic competence in most aspects of English at elementary and intermediate levels but it also applies, perhaps surprisingly, in ESP materials. Here one might expect a title such as 'English in Engineering' or 'English in Agriculture' to be very specific and to meet fairly exactly the needs of all engaged in those particular occupations. Clearly such courses are aimed at a much more narrowly defined market than are general courses, but nevertheless the specific needs of students using these materials will vary considerably, and the materials will display, within their field, a considerable degree of generalisation. Good examples of the degree of generalisation possible in ESP materials include courses which teach basic scientific concepts in English and courses which deal with various kinds of academic study skills, where the skills taught and practised include note-taking from lectures and from written texts, reading for information, and writing academic papers. Here we are really concerned with the student's ability to use English to perform certain tasks. The skills or abilities learned can then be applied in any of a wide range of situations.

When considering how far a piece of material meets the needs of a particular student or group of students, it is just as important to ask oneself what the material teaches the student to do in English as to ask oneself what sort of English is being taught.

Perhaps the kind of material most directly aimed at a specific sort of student is course material for examinations. Here the students, although they may be disparate in background and past history, share a common and clearly defined, if rather artificial, goal: to pass a particular examination. It is interesting to observe how examinations influence teaching and course content. This is the so-called *backwash effect* of examinations: passing the examination becomes the over-riding objective of the course, whether or not that really involves learning English as an authentic communicative system. The backwash effect puts a very heavy responsibility on examiners to ensure that what their examinations require candidates to do is truly and fully representative of genuine language use. The point is that where a formal examination is the goal, both teachers and coursebooks will prepare students for the examination whether or not what is examined is representative of language as a communicative process.

## 3 Grading and recycling

Is the *grading* of the language content steep, average or shallow? Is the *progression* linear or cyclical? Is there *adequate recycling* of grammar and vocabulary?



By *grading* we mean the speed with which the student progresses, how much new material is introduced in a given number of hours, how close together or how far apart new grammatical structures are in relation to each other, how much new vocabulary is introduced in each unit and so on. What is very important here is the amount of practice material provided, in the form of exercises and other activities such as open dialogues and role-plays, *after* one new language item has been presented and *before* the next one is introduced.

If, for example, the present continuous is introduced in unit 4 of a course, the *shall/will* future in unit 5, the simple past in unit 6 and the present perfect in unit 7 and each new grammar item has four or five practice exercises attached to it, then the course would be considered to be steeply graded. (I am taking a unit to be equivalent to about six hours' work in class.) Such a course would most probably not be intended for students learning these items for the first time but rather for false beginners, those who have previously learned English, perhaps at school, but, having either forgotten what they learned or failed to learn effectively the first time, are re-learning the language and, with the advantage of some previous if imperfect knowledge of English, can make faster progress than true beginners.

To take another example, a course which devoted six units to the present tense of the verb *to be* and then a further seven or eight units to the present continuous tense of lexical verbs would be considered to have a very shallow grading because each new item is very thoroughly presented and then practised in a variety of contexts before the next item is introduced. Such a course would be suitable for beginners who had had no previous contact with English and were experiencing difficulty in making fast progress, perhaps because their native language (L 1) was very different from English, with consequent problems of transfer or interference.

Functional courses often appear to be very steeply graded so far as grammatical items are concerned. This of course is because one function will have several exponents in terms of structure and, in grading their material functionally, material writers will probably select more than one structure for each function. A good example of this is found in *Strategies* (Abbs *et al.*, 1975: a) where in the second half of unit 10 the following structures are presented to express the related functions of expressing obligation and necessity in the present and future: *must, have to, don't have to, will have to, have got to, needn't*. Each language item is presented and practised once in a contextualised drill and then practised further in a variety of communicative activities. Students meeting the structures for the first time would probably have difficulty in coping with the variety within such a limited time-scale and would therefore need supplementary exercises to help them learn the language forms. On the other hand, students who had already met the forms *must, have to*, etc. in other contexts and had partly learned them, would benefit greatly from meeting the various ways of expressing obligation and necessity again, consolidating their knowledge of the language form, and, just as importantly, gaining insight into the meanings of these forms which cannot, of course, be used interchangeably in every situation.

This consolidation of knowledge is also referred to as *recycling*. Let us take as an example the teaching of new vocabulary items, or lexis. It is rarely sufficient to introduce a new vocabulary item once only and then forget about it. A word may need to be recycled three, four, five or six times before it is learned adequately. A principle of recycling is that words are best recycled in different contexts. In this way the students learn the form of the word, its sound and its



spelling; through progressive exposure to it, and by meeting it in a number of different contexts they develop a fuller understanding of its meaning.

The concept of recycling brings us to our final point here: the difference between *linear progression* and *cyclical progression*. A course with a linear progression, having adopted an order of presentation for each language item, then deals with each item exhaustively before passing on to the next item. The advantage of such an approach is obvious: each new item is thoroughly learned and then forms a sure platform from which the learner can move to the next unfamiliar item. The disadvantage is perhaps less obvious: there is so much to learn in a language that the learner progressing in this fashion may need to spend a considerable amount of time, perhaps even one or two years, before achieving any sort of communicative competence even in relatively uncomplicated situations.

A cyclical course moves fairly quickly from one language item to another and then progressively returns to each item, once, twice or more times, later in the course. The effect of this is that the learner acquires a wider range of expressive possibility in the language at an earlier stage but has not learnt each item as thoroughly as in a linear course. So, although the learner may be less accurate, he has a better-developed ability to communicate.

Provided that students follow their courses to the end, the final result may not be very different whichever kind of progression is used, linear or cyclical. But if a significant number of students leave a course at mid-point for any reason, then a cyclical course may be more suitable as the students who leave will leave with something potentially useful to them.

The two different approaches may also affect learner motivation, particularly at mid-point in the course. One cannot however generalise about this as some learners prefer a slow but thorough and methodical approach whereas others are happier flitting from one item to another and then returning later for a second look. The differences here are both individual and cultural.

When deciding between a linear or a cyclical course we should bear in mind the individual and cultural make-up of our group of learners, the length of the course, its objectives, and whether the students will follow the course to its end. There is a world of difference between a secondary school class for whom education is compulsory and a group of adult learners attending classes in the evenings. The drop-out rate in part-time evening classes can be high, particularly where students feel that they are not getting an immediate return for the very real investment of time and energy that they are making. Such students would most probably benefit from a cyclical approach whereas a class of secondary school pupils following a three, four or even five year course in English leading to a formal examination which stresses accuracy are likely to be taught more effectively following a linear progression.

#### 4 Implications for the evaluation of language teaching materials

I have suggested that the coursebook writer is in effect designing a syllabus as well as producing teaching material, except in the relatively rare instances where a writer organises the course around an existing syllabus. (It should be noted here that most examination 'syllabuses' are not full syllabuses in the sense that I have been using, but are comparable rather with a statement of objectives, whether expressed in functional or structural terms.)

Implicit in coursebooks for language teaching there must be a view of, or an



approach to, syllabus design. It is manifested in the language items that the writer selects to teach and in the grading of them. Any coursebook will be permeated with the writer's assumptions about syllabus design, whether they have been explicitly formulated and theoretically justified or simply operate on an intuitive level in the writer's thinking. It is therefore very important that, when setting out to analyse and evaluate teaching material, we should know what options are open to a writer in designing his syllabus.

#### 4.1 Functional and structural syllabuses in practice

If we look at the introductions to some general courses we shall see that, where reference is made to selection and grading, there is some mention of the usefulness of the language being taught. The authors of *Streamline English* (Hartley and Viney, 1978, p. 7) give the following criteria for selection and grading:

1. complexity
2. frequency
3. general usefulness
4. immediate usefulness.

These criteria appear to be primarily structural with a secondary level of selection in terms of functions. What seems to happen is that a structural progression is decided upon and the exponents of these structures are made to be as useful, communicatively speaking, as possible. Additionally a number of useful expressions, realisations of particularly useful functions, are taught at various points in the syllabus as formulae, i.e. on a one-off basis as in a phrase book.

So, in *Departures*, the first book of the series, there is a structural progression based essentially on grammatical complexity (although what is meant by complexity is not discussed) with the verb tenses, for example, taught in a conventional sequence: initially the verb *to be* in the present simple form, followed by the present continuous, present simple, past simple, present perfect, and *shall/will* future forms of regular and irregular verbs. Interspersed in this progression are items such as *I'd like ...*, *would you like ...*, and *could you ...*

*Kernel One* (O'Neill, 1979) also appears to have a structural base with allowance made for usefulness:

Kernel One is not a rigidly structural course. It does not try to present grammatical forms simply because they are part of the system, for their own sake. It presents things because they can be seen generally to be useful.

*Starting Strategies* (Abbs and Freebairn, 1977) takes more of a functional approach, stating in its introduction that:

this course...takes as its main starting point for language development what a learner wants to do through language.

But the authors add that they

still think it right to grade learning material by taking simple structures before more difficult ones, introducing the present simple before the past tense, simple clauses before complex ones.



The authors of both *Kernel One* and *Starting Strategies* are aware of the danger inherent in the functional approach, of teaching merely phrases or formulae without teaching the structure of the language which alone allows the speaker to use the language creatively, to produce novel utterances and to express his own ideas or feelings. The authors of *Starting Strategies* write that:

a purely functional course can ... run the risk of looking rather like a tourist phrase book; the learner may see the immediate application of the language, but will not be given any insight into the way the language works. The result is that he cannot readily create language to suit his needs in different situations.

O'Neill writes in the same vein that:

*Kernel One* is based on the concept that learners have to learn things in such a way that they can make *independent, creative* use of them. This means that they have to learn a lot more than a collection of useful phrases. They have to acquire things also in a structured, grammatical way.

If we compare the language items introduced in the first ten or fifteen units of a number of modern general English language courses we will see a remarkable similarity in both selection and sequencing. Whether the course is primarily functional or structural seems to make little difference because a structurally-based course today must take account of the insights provided into language use by the functional approach, whilst a functionally-based course cannot ignore the structural complexity of language if it is to be more than a phrase book.

What is perhaps more relevant to our interest than a supposed structural/functional dichotomy is that modern language-teaching materials show an awareness of the fact that there is in language a correspondence of some kind between form and function and that such correspondence is context-dependent. In other words, an appropriate form used to realise a language function in one situation may well be inappropriate in another situation. A language user 'perceives and categorises the social situations of his world and differentiates his ways of speaking accordingly'. (Cazden, 1970).

We have no real description as yet of how the form/function relationship operates in English, but clearly it is central to effective language use and therefore to effective language learning. The native speaker proceeds intuitively and usually successfully, the foreign learner depends on his teacher and coursebook. Coursebooks deal with the problem in an intuitive rather than a systematic way, as each coursebook writer draws on his intuition as a native speaker, but, as I have mentioned above, there is a remarkable similarity between coursebooks, and this suggests that the intuition of the various writers is fairly standard.

There is little empirical information, beyond the collective experience of generations of language teachers, to guide the materials writer in grading grammatical structures in terms of supposed difficulty of learning. Equally there is no objective standard for deciding to teach students how to perform certain kinds of communicative acts rather than others; beyond the writer's own judgement of what the learner is most likely to want to do through language.