5 Syllabus and materials

This chapter discusses some implications of task-based teaching for syllabuses and materials in second language pedagogy. It will be argued that task-based teaching calls not only for different syllabuses and materials from those used in other forms of teaching but for a modification of the concepts of syllabus and materials as well.

A syllabus is generally thought of as a statement of what is to be taught. But the expression 'what is to be taught' may refer either to what is to be done in the classroom or what is to be learnt as a result. This discussion will refer to what is to be done as an 'operational construct' and what is to be learnt as an 'illuminative construct'. There are also other roles which are often assigned to a syllabus and comment will be made on two of them; the syllabus as an instrument of organizational control, and the syllabus as a document of public consent.[1]

Syllabus as an operational construct

The syllabus is a form of support to the teaching activity that is to be carried out in the classroom and a form of guidance in the construction of appropriate lesson plans. It is concerned, from this point of view, with what is to be done in the classroom, not necessarily with what is perceived to be taught or learnt thereby; its role is essentially to make it possible for one teacher to draw on the experience of another – for many teachers to draw on the experience of some. A syllabus in this role was an immediate need for the teaching done on the project: those who taught early project classes made their experience available (in the form of a collection of tasks which they had found feasible and satisfying, in the sequence in which they had used them) to those who taught later classes at comparable levels of ability. This transmission of lesson plans from one teacher to another was in a very specific form, and the only step taken towards generalization was a descriptive or mnemonic labelling of different tasks and a listing of them in an order suggested both by experience and some reflection on it.[2] The list was called a 'procedural syllabus', with

the intention of indicating that it was only a specification of what might be done in the classroom – that is to say, only an operational construct. The tasks in the collection were set out in a 'pre-task and task' format with, in addition, an indication of the success achieved by the class which had first attempted the task: this indication in itself was a form of procedural guidance.[3] The teachers who drew on the collection in the teaching of later project classes altered the sequencing of tasks at various points, modified the content of some of the tasks in order to raise or lower the difficulty level as well as to 'localize' information where necessary, and omitted or added tasks within given task-sequences. This was done for the purpose of maintaining the more general principle of reasonable challenge for each class at each stage of teaching; so the principle of reasonable challenge itself can be regarded as a further, more general, form of procedural guidance.

The low level of generality represented by a list of actual tasks was adequate for the scale of teaching attempted on the project, but task-based teaching on a larger scale would naturally call for a more generalized construct capable of supporting activity in more varied classrooms. This could be attempted by stating task-types, instead of specific tasks, indicating the types of information to be used (rules, schedules, prices, distances); the forms of demand to be made on the learner (inference, calculation, collation of information, application of rules to particular cases), and the types of constraint to be observed (the shortest time or distance, the lowest cost, the most symmetrical pattern). The list given in Appendix V represents one possible level of generality in task specification.

It is also possible to indicate some criteria for grading tasks, as rough measures of cognitive complexity. Experience on the project suggests the following parameters:

1 *Information provided* The amount of information to be handled makes a task more or less difficult; so does variety in the types or sources of information. Tasks based on rules become more difficult when there is an increase in the number of rules; they also become more difficult when there are rules of different kinds, or when the personal circumstances of the rule-user have to be borne in mind as well.

2 *Reasoning needed* The 'distance' between the information provided and the information to be arrived at as outcome – i.e.

the number of steps involved in the deduction, inference, or calculation – is a measure of the relative difficulty of tasks. Working out a teacher's personal timetable from given class timetables is easier than working out, from the same information, the time when two teachers are both free.

3 *Precision needed* The same information may need to be interpreted more or less precisely for different tasks, and outcomes may need to be expressed in more or less precise terms as well. Difficulty-level increases with the degree of precision called for. Instructions to draw demand more and more precision in processing as they are aimed at more and more complex figures as outcomes. Precision is partly a matter of the number of plausible options: the larger the range of plausible options, the more difficult it is to decide on the one which represents the right outcome. It also has a dimension of linguistic accuracy: precise interpretation is often a matter of accurate comprehension of language, and precision in stating outcomes can depend on lexical or syntactic accuracy.

4 *Familiarity with constraints* Learners' knowledge of the world can make tasks more or less difficult for them, depending on whether they are more or less familiar with purposes and constraints of the kind involved in the tasks. Tasks based on money earned and money spent proved easier for project classes than those based on a bank account (though deposits and withdrawals from an account might be said to have the same role as income and expenditure). Students found tasks based on the baggage rules of air travel difficult because the distinction between check-in baggage and hand baggage was too unfamiliar a concept.

5 *Degree of abstractness* Working with concepts is more difficult than working with the names of objects or actions. With tasks based on information about books, students found it difficult to handle the category of publishing, as distinct from that of writing, printing, or selling, books. Categorization of kinship according to generation (for example an uncle represents an earlier generation than a brother, whether or not he is actually older than the brother) was a task-type that proved to be too difficult for a project class.

The fact that tasks which occurred early in a new sequence tended to use only information-gaps while subsequent tasks

were based on reasoning-gaps was mentioned in Chapter 3 and can be viewed as a special case of grading by the reasoning required. It was also mentioned (in Chapter 2) that a change from orally presented tasks to similar ones presented in writing proved to provide a distinct increase in difficulty for project classes – perhaps because writing, which represents language at one remove, adds to the 'distance' between language samples and meaning content. Similarly, there was a gradual increase in the amount and complexity of the language used in presenting tasks, with a consequent decrease in reliance on non-linguistic modes for presenting information. This can itself be regarded as a dimension of grading, although it was purely in response to learners' increasing abilities.

While generality in specification can be attempted in ways such as the above, it is important to bear in mind that the purpose of generalizing is to help 'translate' an operational construct from one teaching situation to another, not to arrive at some fixed specification which removes the need for teachers' choices and decisions. No syllabus of generalized tasks can identify or anticipate all the sources of challenge to particular learners, and what constitutes reasonable challenge for a given class depends, in any case, on such factors, as the learners' knowledge of the world and cognitive state, the teacher's ability to give help through simplification or negotiation, and his or her assessment of learners' success. A procedural syllabus cannot therefore be judged by its generality or specificity as such.[4] As an operational construct, it can only be assessed by its operability – i.e. whether it provides the degree of support which is thought, or found by trial and error, to be necessary for some of the teacher's decisions, without pre-empting other decisions which the teacher needs to make independently.

Syllabus as an illuminative construct

While the syllabus as an operational construct is concerned with procedures of teaching, the syllabus as an illuminative construct is concerned with the product of learning: it is a specification of what is to be learnt in terms of a conceptual model which aims to provide an understanding (hence the term 'illuminative') of the nature of the subject area concerned. Descriptive grammars are attempts to provide an understanding of the structure of language, the different 'schools' of grammar employing differ-

ent conceptual models for the purpose; and a grammatical syllabus is, from the point of view of task-based teaching, an illuminative construct. A 'content' syllabus may be said to be an illuminative construct which is also used as an operational construct, while a procedural syllabus is an operational construct which is deliberately different from illuminative constructs. A content syllabus is appropriate when the aim of teaching is an understanding by learners of the subject concerned, or when the development of an ability in learners is thought to be directly controllable in terms of the relevant illuminative construct. A procedural syllabus is justified when the ability to be developed is perceived as a matter of natural 'organic' growth and teaching is directed to creating; conditions which are most favourable to that process.[5] To take examples from other fields of activity, farming operations can be regarded as a procedural syllabus; so can procedures of physical training, and play-school activities meant to help infants' conceptual or perceptual development.

The use of a procedural syllabus for language teaching is not a denial of any role to illuminative constructs in language pedagogy, much less a questioning of the value or validity of illuminative constructs as conceptual models. The perception of language development as organic growth is itself a conceptual model, and pedagogic perceptions can be articulated and discussed only in terms of whatever illuminative constructs are relevant. The arguments stated in earlier chapters about the probable complexity of the internal system which represents grammatical competence, the development of that system as a holistic process, and the formation, deployment, and revision of abstract cognitive structures, have all drawn on illuminative constructs for their articulation. Similarly, any attempt to validate pedagogy by examining learning outcomes also needs to draw on some illuminative construct of the product of learning. If teaching aims to develop in learners an ability to conform subconsciously to grammatical norms while the conscious mind is occupied with meaning exchange, an illuminative construct of those grammatical norms (i.e. a descriptive grammar) needs to be drawn on in examining the degrees of conformity achieved by learners under conditions of preoccupation with meaning-exchange. The syllabus as an illuminative construct thus has roles in pedagogy which are different from that of an operational construct but are relevant in justifying the use of a particular operational construct. What seems unreasonable is any

assumption that a syllabus as an operational construct must necessarily be an illuminative construct – or that any operational construct used as a syllabus must meet the same criteria as are applicable to illuminative constructs.[6]

Syllabus as an instrument of organizational control

The syllabus is also a means by which supervisory control is exercised in institutionalized education and a basis on which common examinations are set for learners in different classrooms. Supervisory control can consist of some form of monitoring of classrooms to ensure that the activities that take place are those that are meant to, and a comparison of progress in different classrooms. I will be commenting in the next chapter on the expectation of uniformity in teaching which supervision often implies, but I do not see any serious conflict between the use of a procedural syllabus and the need for supervisory control as such: it is as easy or difficult to monitor task-based activity in classrooms as it is to monitor language-practice activity. The complexity of the tasks which learners in different classrooms are able to perform at any given time, and with a given degree of success, seems to me a usable basis of comparison – less objective, perhaps, than a comparison based on an itemized linguistic syllabus but, I would argue, likely to be more valid as an indication of true learning. Common examinations, too, can be set in the form of tasks and, since tasks have an essential similarity to real-life language use in their preoccupation with meaning-content, success in such examinations can be expected to correlate acceptably with success in real-life language use.

Syllabus as a document of public consent

Yet another role attributed to syllabuses is that of making educational intentions available for public criticism and of thereby acting as documents of public consent. One can readily agree that the overall aims of teaching should be open to scrutiny and consent by the society in which that teaching (and learning) takes place, but this does not mean that a syllabus for public discussion should necessarily be either an illuminative construct or an operational one. The aim of task-based teaching – to enable the learner to acquire an ability to employ language for meaning exchange and, in the process, to achieve conformity to linguistic

norms – does not seem to me to be at variance with the general view of what language ability is. What pedagogic means are best employed to realize an agreed aim, for example whether the operational construct should be a content syllabus or a procedural one, is an educational decision rather than a social one. There is, of course, a form of conditioning of the public mind which results from past practice in education (for example the view that teaching a language 'properly' is teaching its grammar) but that is something which any pedagogic innovation has to come to terms with. There have, after all, been changes in the mode of syllabus specification in the past and it is difficult to see how the role of a syllabus as a public document in itself constitutes a strong argument against a procedural syllabus.

Simple and sophisticated syllabuses

Since a procedural syllabus aims only to support classroom activity, it needs only to be as general or specific (and as structured or unstructured) as is necessary for that purpose. A content syllabus, by contrast, lends itself to much greater internal structuring, drawing for the purpose on one or more illuminative constructs, and can look much more 'impressive' than a procedural syllabus. There is also, I think, a general notion that highly-structured syllabuses, being 'rich' in detail, are indicators of superior forms of pedagogy. One result of the communicative teaching movement in recent years, for instance, has been the construction of multi-dimensional syllabuses, making simultaneous use of two or more illuminative constructs of language or language use which include those in terms of notions, functions, settings, topics, register and discourse, as well as grammar and lexis. Specific attention to a variety of dimensions tends to be viewed as an expression of educational responsibility, while simultaneous systematicity in terms of different dimensions makes the syllabus look 'rich' – or systematically complex – suggesting that the resulting teaching and learning are correspondingly effective or efficient. In reality, however, such complexity in syllabus design can have the general effect of reducing the range of language that can be used in teaching materials or the classroom. Each dimension to a syllabus is a criterion for the choice of language samples to be used – that is to say, for the delimitation of language. If a sample of language has to meet two criteria simultaneously, it has fewer alternatives available than if it

has to meet only one criterion. Samples of language which can fit five or six predetermined categories simultaneously (for example expound a function, be appropriate to a setting, be relevant to a topic, exemplify a point of grammar, and be natural to a given form of discourse or a given participant-relationship) can be so specific that teaching is reduced to focusing on a fixed list of language forms. Much teaching based on such syllabuses no doubt stops short of this level of restriction, but it is important to bear in mind that the process of enriching syllabus-design can also be one of impoverishing classroom language and that the more 'content' a syllabus has in the sense of 'detail', the less exposure to language the learner is likely to get.

Syllabuses organized in terms of 'communicative' content (for example functions and topics) can also claim to have the additional advantage of being divisible into stages such that each stage represents a distinct level of learner achievement, and has an immediate surrender value.[7] In contrast, a procedural syllabus of tasks only envisages constant effort by learners to deploy their language resources in the classroom, and does not attempt either to demarcate areas of real-life use for different stages of teaching or to bring about a 'thorough' learning of use in some functions at each stage. While this can be regarded as a reflection of the fact that the teaching that was done on the project was free from social demands for immediate usefulness there is, I think, a more general point to make about immediate usefulness and the quality of learning. Syllabuses can be set up either as a sequence of fixed levels of expected achievement or as a general direction for learners' progress. A fixed-level syllabus implies a demand that all learners reach a common level of achievement at a certain stage and therefore the assumption that learning depends relatively directly on teaching. A syllabus seen as a general direction of progress, on the other hand, implies the recognition that learning depends necessarily on the learner (i.e. on what he or she brings to bear on the process) and that progress will necessarily vary between different learners. Although it would be simplistic to suggest that learners' actual progress is influenced by whether the syllabus is perceived one way or the other by the teacher, it is, I think, possible to suggest that the teacher's perception of the syllabus has an influence on the form of teaching employed and on the quality of learning achieved. When a syllabus is seen in fixed-level terms, there is likely to be a preference for forms of teaching which can bring about rela-

tively uniform levels of learning.[8] Since forms of learning which depend directly on teaching – and can be seen to be both thorough and uniform – are set patterns of behaviour, teaching is likely to take the form of training in fixed patterns of verbal behaviour, at some cost to the longer-term development of capacity for adaptable behaviour and potential for further learning.[9] The more frequent the fixed stages are in a syllabus (thus increasing the immediacy of surrender values), the more behaviour-oriented the teaching and learning are likely to be. This can only result in a gradual reduction of the notion of language to a matter of meeting short-term needs, and the activity of language teaching to a matter of equipping learners quickly with linguistic table-manners.

Materials

Any collection of tasks acting as materials for task-based teaching can only have the status of source books for teachers, not of course books. Although it is possible to organize the collection in some order of increasing task-complexity (with tasks of the same type appearing in short sequences, at various points, and with later task-types exploiting the kinds of reasoning, content-familiarity, or format-familiarity likely to result from earlier ones), the ordering has necessarily to be partial and suggestive rather than definitive, because what constitutes reasonable challenge for any class at any time is unpredictable and depends, as noted already, both on the learners' ability and on the degree of help given by the teacher.[10] Teachers should therefore be free to modify the information-content or reasoning-gap of some tasks, omit some tasks or alter their sequence and, when possible, devise their own tasks and add them to the collection.

The language in which tasks are presented in a collection is similarly subject to teachers' simplification in the classroom, including, when necessary, a complete reformulation. Although the same task can, within limits, be presented and attempted in more or less complex language, there is, in general, a minimal level of linguistic ability which a given task demands of the learner, and different teachers may assess that minimal level differently, depending on the degree of simplification they consider feasible and on their earlier experience of trial and error. Teachers' decisions about what task to use at what time thus involve an assessment of both cognitive complexity and linguistic feasibility, the aim being to

ensure that the tasks used are, in both respects, difficult but manageable for learners.

The fact that materials need to be used as sources rather than as pre-constructed courses should not be regarded as a weakness of task-based teaching; it can in fact be a strength for any form of teaching. When what is done in the classroom involves a decision made by the teacher, he or she has an 'investment' in that activity and consequently a reason to feel personally satisfied or dissatisfied with the way in which it takes place. There is also a likelihood that the outcome of each of the teacher's decisions will influence the next one, and decision-making as such will improve from an accumulation of experience. Teaching is thus unlikely to become a matter of mere routine (see the discussion in the next chapter) and likely, instead, to contribute to the teacher's professional growth.[11] From this point of view, 'loosely constructed' teaching materials have the advantage not only of being more easily adaptable to particular classrooms but of promoting teachers' professional development over time. It is common to regard materials which are 'tightly constructed' (or fully specified) as being commendable on the grounds that they make teachers' work easy and ensure a uniformity to the work that takes place in different classrooms, in spite of differences between teachers. Indeed, it is often thought that materials are where pedagogic intentions are carried out in action, and where theory and practice are ingeniously fused: this is especially the case if the theory involves conflicting principles such as linguistic systematicity and natural samples of language, or planned language practice and learners' attention on meaning-content. The result is that pedagogic proposals tend to be assessed by how impressive and interesting to the observer – or interesting to the learner in the opinion of the observer – the associated materials look. While there is certainly a case for providing support to the teacher in the form of materials, there is also a need to be aware that materials which are, or are made out to be, superior to what teachers can hope to do on their own, restrict the teacher to the role of a transmitter of given materials to the learner, and a carrier out of instructions given to him by the materials. This means that the teacher's responsibility is to the materials rather than to learners, and the general effect of such non-negotiable materials is to reduce the degree of teachers' identification with what takes place in the classroom and therefore to reduce the likelihood of teachers' growth from the experience of teaching.

In task-based teaching, lessons in the classroom are not acts of text, or language presentation, but rather contexts for discourse creation.[12] The tasks, provided in a collection are essentially plans for discourse, and the discourse which actually results in the classroom is shaped as much by learners' reactions as by teachers' intentions, and also by a number of *ad hoc* coping strategies employed on both sides. 'Materials', in the sense of the language that becomes available to learners, are the actual discourse events that constitute lessons.[13] Further, since those discourse events are likely to be perceived and processed differently by different learners, depending on the degree of their engagement and what they bring to bear on the tasks, materials as learning resources can vary from one learner to another within the same class.

Coverage

This perception of 'materials' makes it virtually impossible to monitor the occurrence of different items of language (structural or lexical units) in the classroom for the purpose of checking that specific areas of language structure have been covered. To ascertain the extent of linguistic coverage, it would be necessary to record and scan all the discourse that took place in a classroom over a period of time and, even then, the outcome of such scanning in one classroom would not be valid for another. Since no part of language structure can be learnt unless at least one instance of it becomes available to learners – since, that is to say, there can be no acquisition without exposure – the difficulty in ensuring coverage may appear to be a serious disadvantage. There may, in particular, appear to be a possibility that task-based teaching leads to the recurrence of the same, small set of language items over a long stretch of time and that learners, as a result, end up with highly restricted internal systems. It is therefore necessary to examine the notion of coverage and the risk in task-based teaching of leaving learners deprived of language data.

Even if we ignore, for the moment, the assumption of a correspondence between units of teaching and units of learning – an assumption commonly made in discussions of coverage – we still have to recognize that no form of teaching can possibly aim to teach 'all' of the units of language structure. A structural syllabus is necessarily a selection of linguistic units, made with the

aim of enabling learners to learn *enough* of language structure in the classroom to be able to learn more, later and elsewhere, when more is encountered or needed. The notion of coverage is thus dependent on what is judged to form an adequate base for further learning. But it is difficult to identify a criterion for what constitutes this adequate base. Besides, any perception of the learner developing such a base has to take into account learning quality (what learning needs to be like in order to support further learning) and learning capacity (how much can be learnt, in a given time, without a sacrifice of quality). In the context of these latter notions, the question to ask is not what is likely to constitute adequate coverage in teaching, but rather (1) whether there is likely to be enough new language available, at every point, to cater for learning capacity, (2) whether what is learnt is likely to be the maximum possible for each learner, and (3) whether what is learnt is likely to be maximally supportive of further learning. The principle of reasonable challenge in task-based teaching aims to ensure that tasks in the classroom become steadily more complex at a pace determined by the learners' ability to cope, and there is, as noted earlier, a general increase in linguistic complexity as task complexity increases. Further, the fact that language-control by the teacher is not predetermined by any syllabus but responsive to actual need in the classroom, ensures that the limitation and simplification of language are at a level close to the minimum needed for learners to be able to manage. Since learners can manage with only a partial processing of the language being used in the classroom, there is likely to be more language available, on any occasion, than any learner is actually making use of. There is also the fact that the phenomenon referred to in Chapter 3 as 'task fatigue' creates a need for a regular change of task-types in the classroom. Finally, any language learnt in the classroom is learnt not as a result of any specific teaching of it, but as an incidental result of coping with meaning-exchange. This ensures that the learner has experience of coping with new language, and in the process learning it, in response to the needs of meaning-exchange – and is likely to be able to do the same outside the classroom. If, alternatively, what needs to be covered in teaching is thought of as being in some sense the 'core' of language structure, it might be asked how different the language represented by this 'core' is likely to be from that which occurs in the context of varied tasks in the classroom over a comparable period of time.

Teaching aids

The teaching aids used on the project were those which are used in most schools in India – namely, blackboard and chalk, and paper and pencil. Task-based teaching in other situations might draw upon such teaching aids as are easily available. The classroom in India is admittedly an austere one, but it is misleading to think of the quality of language pedagogy as being dependent on either the range of the teaching aids used or the technological sophistication of those aids. If, as has been argued, the essential condition for language learning is effort at meaning-exchange between language knowers and language learners, it is not of much importance what the meaning-exchange is about or what particular non-linguistic resources it is supported by. The possibilities of meaning-exchange cannot be said to be fewer in one society than in another and classrooms draw on those possibilities guided by practical considerations. Having to use only a blackboard and chalk is not, therefore, an 'impoverishment' of pedagogy in the sense of its being a sacrifice in effective learning. It is, further, important to avoid any assumption of a relationship between superior technology and superior pedagogy. There is no reason to expect any correlation between economic or technological development and either the quality of language use or success in language acquisition. Technology in the classroom can no doubt save labour for the teacher and perhaps also for the learner, but the labour so saved cannot be the labour of learning, and labour-saving does not necessarily create additional 'space' for learning. Technology in the classroom can also be a means of avoiding human error or limitation. However human error and inefficiency are among the causes of interaction and can therefore contribute to learning opportunity. There is also the risk that the use in the classroom of forms of technology which are unrelated to those in the society outside will give rise to pedagogic superstitions about the role of technological devices, and will leave teachers and learners trying to 'live up' to the machines being used.

Teachers' competence

The fact that English is taught in India – as in several other parts of the world – by non-native speakers of the language may seem to be a disadvantage for task-based teaching, since the teachers'

own linguistic competence is, in general, limited or deficient in relation to native speaker's competence, and learners' acquisition will consequently be based on samples of language which are deviant in some respects. Some of the issues involved here have to do with the recruitment and training of teachers, but I will confine comment to two questions: (1) whether, in cases where the teacher's competence is limited, learners are likely to learn less from task-based teaching than from some other approach, and (2) whether the concept of deficiency in relation to native speakers' competence is a reasonable one to operate with anyway, given that English is an international language.

If a form of language pedagogy is to prevent learning from being influenced by the teacher's linguistic competence, it must of necessity chiefly comprise presenting predetermined samples of language to the learner. Any interaction or negotiation, involving spontaneous use of the language by the teacher, must be regarded as a hazard rather than a help in promoting the desired learning. Since, however, no lesson can be conducted without some verbal exchange between the teacher and the learner, this form of pedagogy must attempt to predict and prescript classroom exchange in some way, giving priority to the more predeterminable forms of classroom exchange such as repetition by learners. It must also predict the learner's readiness to benefit from particular samples of language at particular times and attempt to ensure comprehensibility to the samples in advance of actual evidence from the learner. To the extent that such 'remote control' of classroom activity is feasible and successful, the learner is provided with desirable language samples but, at the same time, deprived of the condition in which he or she can benefit from them – the condition of deployment. To the extent the remote control does not, in fact, operate and the teacher is using language responsively and therefore spontaneously, better conditions are being provided for learning, albeit with samples of a lower quality. Since the quality of language samples is of consequence only insofar as the learner learns from them, it is reasonable – given the perception that learning takes place through deployment – to regard the benefit resulting from the teacher's spontaneous use of language as being greater than the loss resulting from the lower quality of samples. Given comparable learning conditions, however, it is equally reasonable to regard the *quality* of samples as being more important

than their *quantity* – hence the avoidance of groupwork, as discussed in the previous chapter.

There is a further fact to bear in mind as well: trying to 'protect' the learner from any limitations or deficiencies in the teacher's language is also a process of undermining the teacher's professional self-confidence, and there is a danger of this causing a further loss both in the quality of what language the teacher uses spontaneously and the probability of responsive interaction with learners. Pedagogy has more to gain by seeking to benefit from what competence teachers have than by trying to safeguard against teachers' incompetence.

Turning now to the question of native-speaker standards, the fact that English is taught by large numbers of non-native speakers of the language in many parts of the world reflects its status as a world language, and it is necessary at some point to recognize that standards of adequacy for a world language are those which arise from its operation as such, not those which arise from its operation in exclusively native-speaking contexts. Besides, given the fact that most learners of English as a second language can only be taught by non-native speakers, a continuing assumption that native-speaker standards constitute measures of adequacy can only result in a sense of inadequacy in all the classrooms concerned. This assumption can also lead to a preference for forms of pedagogy which attempt a 'remote control' of second language classrooms and fail to accommodate developing perceptions of the nature of language learning.

Notes

1 See, for instance, Brumfit (1984c).

2 The 'procedural syllabus' included in the RIE Newsletter 1: 4 (April, 1980) represents such an attempt, made at the end of the first year of the project.

3 Notice that the term 'procedural syllabus' is used in at least two senses: (1) a specification of classroom activities (including their meaning-content) which are, according to the theory behind task-based teaching, the procedures which bring about language learning, and (2) a specification of the patterns (or procedures) of classroom activity, but without any implications with respect to either language-content or meaning-content. A list of tasks or task-types is procedural

in the first sense, while a specification of the 'pre-task and task' pattern is procedural in the second. Allwright (1976) uses the term 'procedural syllabus' in the second sense. Brumfit's (1984a: 60–68) proposal for accuracy and fluency activities in the classroom can be said to be 'procedural' in the second sense, as can the listening-speaking reading-writing cycle of S-O-S pedagogy.

4 Syllabuses in terms of language structure also vary between specificity (represented by 'citation' forms) and generality (represented by a metalinguistic specification of items). It is perhaps true to say, in general, that early structural syllabuses were marked by specificity (aiming to serve an operational purpose) while later ones attempted generality (drawing on the abstractions of structural linguistics and aiming to be illuminative).

5 The distinction commonly made between 'syllabus' and 'methodology' is generally the distinction between learning content and learning conditions. Thus, the methodological principles in S-O-S pedagogy of contextualization and controlled practice indicate the conditions in which the items of a structural syllabus are thought to be learnt. Further, these conditions derive from perceived features of natural language use, for example automaticity, just as the condition aimed at in task-based teaching (a preoccupation with meaning) does.

6 See Brumfit (1984b: 240): 'If the programme [i.e. the project in India] is shown to be successful and if a consistent pattern of cognitive procedures is reflected in the final ordering of materials, we may have the beginnings of an analysis of cognitive strategies in the acquisition of language.' What Brumfit envisages is the development of an illuminative construct from an operational one. I am unable to assess the feasibility of such a development but feel concerned about the effect on pedagogy of a 'final ordering of materials'. The fact that applied linguistics is an exploration of illuminative constructs does not imply that pedagogy invariably benefits from using illuminative constructs as operational ones.

I am equally unable to see the force of Brumfit's argument for grammatical systematicity in the syllabus as an operational construct (1984a: 98): 'The arguments in favour of

systematicity are compelling. Whatever else we may not know about learning, we do know that what can be made systematic by the learner is more likely to be learnt than random elements, so – even if the system arrived at in describing language is not in fact the system that learners operate with – we should not discard, without strong reason, what can be made systematic for what cannot.' When 'the system that learners operate with' is seen to be different from 'the system arrived at in describing language', there seems to me to be no greater reason to use grammar to prevent randomness than to use the semantic structuring of tasks.

7 See Wilkins (1976: 69–70). Michael West used the concept, as well as the term 'surrender value', in 1927, as Howatt (1984: 245) points out.

8 It is, from this point of view, a 'hazard' of content syllabuses that they tend to be interpreted in fixed-level terms; and this points to a possible disadvantage of attempting to teach a second language by teaching one or more school subjects in it (as in 'immersion programmes'; see Swain and Lapkin 1982). Although such teaching will have the advantage of content-systematicity, it will also have a commitment to a fixed body of content over a fixed time, which will reduce the adaptability of both content and pace to suit particular classes.

9 See Widdowson's (1983: 6) distinction between 'training' and 'education'.

10 Allen and Widdowson (1974) represents an attempt to anticipate learners' need for help in reasoning and to provide for it in advance in the materials (see the sections entitled 'Solution' in different units). I think it illustrates both the advantage and the disadvantage of providing tasks in the form of a 'coursebook'.

11 It is interesting to speculate about the difference, in this respect, between those professions (for example medical and legal practice) in which each instance of professional work involves a fresh exercise of discretion and decision, and occupations (for example accounting, typing) in which routinization is much higher. Experience can lead either to improved judgement or firmly-formed routines and the

balance between the two can be different in different fields of activity.

12 This is not, of course, to say that texts (i.e. pieces of writing) have no place in task-based teaching. Not only is the information relevant to a task regularly presented to learners on paper but the interpretation of reading texts can itself be designed as a problem-solving activity with questions involving inferencing or pattern-perception. The task cited in Brumfit (1984b) represents an early attempt (1981) to do this on the project.

13 See Allwright (1981) for a more forcefully stated case against the notion of 'coursebooks'.