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TYPE A, OR TYPE B, THAT IS THE QUESTION: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PRODUCT-ORIENTED AND PROCESS-ORIENTED SYLLABUSES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Abstract

The current paper aims at examining and comparing two major syllabus types, Type ‘A’ and Type ‘B’, by reviewing the literature on three product-oriented (type A) syllabus sub-types namely: structural, notional-functional and situational syllabuses and three process-oriented (type B) syllabus sub-types notably task-based, process and content-based syllabuses. The discussion focuses on the characteristics of both types, the different views of language and language learning that influenced the classification of the two syllabus types as well as the benefits and drawbacks of each type in foreign language learning and teaching. At the end of the paper, foreign language teachers are invited to adopt the eclectic approach by combining both syllabus types. This combination will, therefore, help in counteracting the weaknesses of both types and provide teachers with opportunities to address their learners’ diverse needs and meet their expectations.

Keywords: Foreign language learning and teaching, Process-oriented, Product-oriented, Syllabus, Type A, Type B.

1. Introduction

Before going to the classroom, a teacher needs to think about what should be done, why it should be done and in what way in order to achieve an effective learning process. These questions can be better answered by having what is called ‘syllabus’ which is defined by Ur (1996) as a comprehensive list of content and process items. This list is a public document which is ordered, has specific objectives, and may indicate a time schedule as well as a preferred methodology or approach. Moreover, the importance of syllabuses in the field of language teaching and learning can be demonstrated in a set of conceivable purposes provided by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). According to them, a syllabus, as plan of what is to be learnt and what can be achieved through teaching ‘linguistic performance’, aims at breaking the complex into manageable units and providing a practical basis for the division of textbooks and instructions. It also provides both teachers and learners with moral support as well as a clear idea about the progress of the course. Finally, a syllabus provides teachers with guidelines on how to select materials, texts and exercises.

In fact, different types of syllabuses have emerged and been categorized according to their objectives and the way language is presented to learners. Almost all researchers in the field of second language pedagogy, as we shall see in the next sections, agree on the fact that there are two major types of syllabuses. However, the names attributed to these two types differ from one researcher to another. For example, while the two types have been called by White (1988)

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as 'type A and type B syllabuses', Wilkins (1976) has classified them as 'synthetic and analytic syllabuses'. Also, the two types are known by other researchers, such as Nunan (1988), as product-oriented and process-oriented syllabuses.

The aim of the present paper, therefore, is to examine and evaluate these two major syllabus types (Type A and Type B) with regard to the development in the field of language and language learning theories that justify such a classification. Besides, this paper sheds light on the positive and negative aspects of each type and their influence on language learning.

2. What is a Syllabus?

Before discussing the two types of syllabuses, a few statements are important to define and understand the meaning of the term "syllabus". The fact that "syllabus" is a broad concept has made scholars define it differently depending on the context in which it is used. For instance, Yalden (1987) points out that a syllabus is "an instrument by which the teacher, with the help of the syllabus designer, can achieve a certain coincidence between the needs and aims of the learner, and the activities that will take place in the classroom»(p. 86). In other words, a syllabus is an instrument that is used in the classroom in order to facilitate teaching and learning processes (Widdowson, 1984 as cited in Nunan, 1988). A more specific definition is offered by Kara (2001) who states that "the syllabus is time bound, linked to particular objectives, and founded upon a grading that emerges following the theory of language to be assumed and the administrative needs. It is flexible in terms of negotiation and adjustment. It is concerned with the teaching content, and is an account of it" (p.68).

3. Type 'A' Syllabus (Synthetic/Product-oriented)

For Wilkins (1976), "a synthetic language teaching strategy is one in which the different parts of language are taught separately and step by step so that acquisition is a process of gradual accumulation of parts until the whole structure of language has been built up" (p. 2). To put it differently, according to the synthetic approach, the focus is on what is to be learnt and language blocks are taught to learners separately and progressively.

For a better understanding of type 'A' syllabuses and how they work, White (1988) provides a detailed description of its major features. According to him, these syllabuses are interventionist. That is, it is the teacher who preselects the linguistic elements to be taught, divides them into small chunks and defines the objectives of the course before coming to the class without taking into account the learners' needs, abilities and expectations. This is why type A syllabuses are external to the learner due to the fact that the latter is viewed as a passive recipient who is just supposed to re-synthesize the language blocks and swallow all what is designed by the teacher who is considered as the only source of knowledge, represents the highest authority in the classroom, makes decisions and sets the learning objectives (Cited in Long & Crookes, 1993).

3.1.Sub-syllabuses of Type 'A'

Being a generic term, type 'A'/synthetic syllabus includes various sub-syllabuses namely: the structural, the notional-functional (N-F), and the situational syllabuses.

3.1.1. Structural/Grammatical syllabuses

According to Long and Crookes (1993), this is the most prevalent type. The structural syllabus is based on the belief that the language teaching content is a set of grammatical structures of the target language and that the sentence is the largest unit of analysis (Krahnke, 1987). That is to say, the main focus in the structural syllabus is on accuracy and mastery of grammatical forms where the "learners' task is one of synthesis, combining the 'pieces of information' provided by teaching to form an overall knowledge of how the language

operates” (Knapp, Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2009, p.3). Similarly, Nunan (1988) assumes that language in grammatical syllabuses is made up of a finite set of rules that are combined differently to produce meaning. He adds that linguistic rules are acquired one by one and that “each item being mastered on its own before being incorporated into the learner’s pre-existing stock of knowledge»(p.29).

3.1.2. Notional-functional syllabuses (NFS)

Wilkins (1976) categorized the N-F as an analytic syllabus as it aims at teaching learners how to use language for communication in different situations. However, other researchers such as Widdowson (1979) and Markee (1997) rejected the idea of classifying it as an analytic syllabus and claim that the notional-functional syllabus is considered as a synthetic syllabus. In this regard, Widdowson (1979) points out that learners are unable to use language for communication and apply certain semantic and pragmatic rules in different situations (cited in Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Likewise, Markee (1997) notes that although the notional-functional syllabus adopts some of the principles of Type B syllabuses, as we shall see in the next sections, and allows learners to interact and, to some extent, do things with language; it is rather considered as a synthetic syllabus because notions and functions are still linguistic units of analysis.

The notional-functional syllabus focuses on notions and functions of language instead of the grammatical structure. Hence, in order to clear up any ambiguities, it is important to highlight the difference between the terms ‘notions and functions’ before we discuss the principles and advantages of this syllabus. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), functions refer to the intention of the speaker behind language use such as: advising, warning, threatening and praising. On the other hand, notions are meaning elements which reflect the way in which reality is divided by the mind and language such as: time, frequency, gender, location etc. In Nunan’s words (1988), “functions refer to the communicative purposes for which we use language, while notions are the concept meanings (objects, entities, states of affairs, logical relationships, and so on) expressed through language” (p. 35). The notional-functional syllabus, therefore, stresses the communicative purposes and conceptual meaning of language. In this regard, Wilkins (1976) notes: “It takes the desired communicative capacity as the starting-point” (p.18) as its main concern is the meaning which emerges from the context in which language is used not from a set of isolated words.

3.1.3. Situational syllabuses

The main organizing principle of the situational syllabus is that the teaching content should be presented in form of real-life situations which reflect the way language is used in daily life. Examples of such situations may include: at the hotel, at school, at the post office, at the restaurant and the like. Quite often, these situations include participants who perform specific activities in particular settings (Krahnke, 1987).

Furthermore, in the situational syllabus, language should be used in its social context because without this context, learners will not fully understand the intended meaning (Wilkins, 1976). That is to say, in a situational syllabus, linguistic items are closely related to situations that learners may be faced with. These situations are the bases for language content and presentation (Richards, 2001; Knapp et al., 2009). This is in line with Krahnke (1987) who notes that:

the situational syllabus relies exclusively on realistic situations rather than contrived or artificial situations devised simply to exemplify linguistic

structures...it is closely associated with a broadly communicative view of language and an experiential theory of learning (p.47).

3.2.Type 'A' Syllabuses' Underlying Theories of Language and Language Learning

According to Stern (1983), “a theory of language and language learning is implicit in the practice of language teaching, and it reveals itself in, amongst other things, the syllabus. A syllabus will therefore reflect a particular view of language and language learning.»(cited in Van der Walt, 1990, p.72). In the light of their theoretical underpinnings, the aim of the following sub-sections (i.e. 3.2.1 & 3.2.2) is to explain why type A syllabuses have been classified as such.

3.2.1. Influential theories of language on type 'A' syllabuses

The structural syllabus is influenced by the structural view of language. According to this view, structure is the heart of speech (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) and the aim of language learning is seen to be “the mastery of elements of this system, which are generally defined in terms of phonological units, grammatical units, grammatical operations, and lexical items»(Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p.17).

Moreover, the notional-functional syllabus is said to be based on the functional view of language which came as a reaction to the traditional (structural) view of language learning. This view went beyond the sentential level and called for the importance of learning language in relation to the context in which it is used. Additionally, the functional view is closely related to Hymes' view of language which describes what learner's communication needs. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), Hymes sees that linguistic theory needs to be viewed as part of a more general theory including communication and culture. In this regard, they write:

The functional view of language emphasizes the semantic and communicative dimension rather than merely the grammatical characteristics of language and leads to a specification and organization of language teaching content by categories of meaning and function rather than by elements of structure and grammar (p. 17).

In addition, language syllabuses are not only influenced by theories of language but also theories of language learning because, as Richards and Rodgers (1986) note, “structural, functional or interactional models of language provide the theoretical framework that may motivate a particular teaching method. But in themselves they are incomplete and need to be completed by theories of language learning” (p. 17).

3.2.2. Influential theories of language learning on type 'A' syllabuses

Richards and Rodgers (1986) point out that there are two main language learning theories: process-oriented theories and condition-oriented theories. While the former (i.e., process-oriented theories) are concerned with “learning processes such as habit formation, induction, inferencing, hypothesis testing, and generalization” (p. 18), the latter (i.e., condition-oriented theories) focus on “the nature of the human and physical context in which language learning takes place” (ibid.).

For example, the structural syllabus is based on the process-oriented theories where language learning is viewed as a process of mechanical habit formation and stimulus/response whereby learners are required to repeat discrete items of language until they fully master them (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Therefore, “the learning of language was perceived as the progressive accumulation of structures of the language until the language was complete” (Wilkins, 1994, p. 46).

Furthermore, since it falls under the umbrella of type 'A' syllabuses and though it is assumed to be based purely on the functional view of language, in reality, the notional-functional syllabus (NFS) is also based on the process-oriented theories. More specifically, the NFS is based on the behaviorist view of language as it requires learners to repeat linguistic rules such as functions and notions (Richards, 2001).

3.3. Strengths of Type 'A' Sub-syllabuses: (Structural, Notional Functional and Situational)

The features of type 'A' sub-syllabuses attracted the attention of many researchers in the field of language teaching and learning. For instance, Brumfit (1980) notes that among the advantages of the structural syllabus is that it consists of units that can be broken down into small separate elements which can be ordered in a systematic way. Therefore, learners can master the grammatical structures of the target language easily (Cited in Chandee, 1991). Likewise, Higgs and Clifford (1982) argue that high proficiency in new language can be best obtained when these learners are exposed to formal structures of the language they are studying (Cited in Krahnke, 1987). Additionally, Krahnke (1987) lists a set of advantages that can be drawn from the structural syllabuses:

- Grammatical structure is the most general component of communicative competence. Every utterance, if it is reasonably well-formed, involves a given structure, which can be used for a variety of functions, situations, and meanings (p. 21).
- The content of these syllabuses is relatively easy to describe. Noun, verb, imperative, plural, and gerund are terms that are generally shared within the language profession, and there is general agreement about what they mean (p. 22).
- Structural knowledge is the most measurable of the components of communicative competence. Because of the relative finiteness of structural knowledge and its relatively clear definition, measurement tasks are easily prepared to determine how much students have or have not learnt (ibid.).

Further, the benefits of notional-functional syllabuses (NFS) have been highlighted by many researchers such as Wilkins (1976) who points out that NFS have been developed in order to encourage meaningful communication in the target language. In this type of syllabuses, great attention is paid to meaning without ignoring the importance of grammatical structures in the teaching process (Wilkins, 1976). Further advantages that are worth mentioning include: a) Providing real-world language, b) increasing learners' intrinsic motivation through involving them in interactions which express basic communicative functions, c) enabling teachers to exploit sound psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, linguistic and educational principles (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983 as cited in Nunan, 1988).

Finally, situational syllabuses have been praised by Krahnke (1987) that they develop learners' ability to communicate in specific socio-cultural situations. Besides, these syllabuses encourage learners to use language forms within the social context in which they are used as well as use students' needs and personal experiences as a basis to create meaningful situations. Therefore, this contextualized approach increases learners' motivation to learn (Christison & Murray, 2014) as they will be eager to know more about the use of the socio-cultural features of the language being taught (Krahnke, 1987). In other words, "such a syllabus focuses teaching upon what is most relevant to a particular group of learners and these learners, able to see the relevance of what they are doing, become more highly motivated»(Wilkins, 1972, p.256).

3.4. Weaknesses of Type 'A' Syllabuses

According to Long and Crookes (1993), one of the negative aspects of Type A syllabuses is that they are 'static' and ineffective in terms of instructional content, course objectives and meeting the learners' needs and expectations. In their words: "synthetic syllabuses consistently leave the learner out of the equation" (Long & Crookes, 1993, p.27). Likewise, Spector-Cohen, Kirschner and Wexler (2001) believe that type A syllabuses "may not take sufficient account of the learner's specific language needs in that many courses are not restricted to specific disciplines»(p.373). In addition, Tyler (1949) criticizes product-oriented syllabuses because the lists of content items used in such syllabuses are ineffective as they do not clearly specify how to meet the objectives and how to teach learners the linguistic structures (Cited in Nunan, 1988). Moreover, Long and Crookes point out that the results of second language acquisition research regarding the nature of language learning processes are not reflected in the principles of type A syllabuses as the latter focus on the acquisition of linguistic units separately and in a linear fashion. However, they do not acknowledge the importance of psychological processes in language learning such as learners' intrinsic motivation, emotional well-being, memory (short and long term) and prior knowledge. These processes should have "priority over arguments concerning alternative ways of analyzing the ideal, but rarely attained, product»(Long & Crookes, 1993, p.27). In this regard, Widdowson (1979) concurs that "dividing language into discrete units of whatever type misinterprets the nature of language as communication." (Cited in Nunan, 1988, p.37). Last but not least, learners' major aim behind learning a target language is to communicate effectively using that language. Nevertheless, the principles of type A syllabuses might not help learners reach this goal because most of the grammatical structures to be taught do not fit learners' needs and interests. This would therefore have negative impact on their motivation to learn (Wilkins, 1972 as cited in Long & Crookes, 1993).

In addition to the disadvantages stated above, some type 'A' syllabuses have been proved to have some negative impacts on the teaching and learning processes. For example, Hasan (2007) claims that the structural syllabus is ineffective owing to the fact that it does not consider meanings and ideas conveyed through the language as its main concern is to teach learners isolated grammatical structures. He further adds, this syllabus does not provide learners with opportunities to use authentic language for meaningful communication. As a result, learners' motivation and their performance in writing can be negatively affected (Chandee, 1991). Furthermore, Nunan (1988) believes that the structural syllabus fails to present the complex nature of language because it is mainly interested in studying only the formal aspect of language ignoring other aspects and the context in which it is used.

The second syllabus that has been subject to criticism is the notional-functional syllabus. According to Christison and Murray (2014), this syllabus follows, to a great extent, the principles of the structural syllabus that instead of being identified through a needs analysis, notions and functions are identified in advance and need to be broken down into small components that are taught out of context. Besides, Long and Crookes (1993) point out that notional-functional syllabuses may cause some problems in terms of practicality as "many individual notions and functions are difficult to define and distinguish»(p.16). In the same vein, Krahnke (1987) writes:

A problem arises if notional/functional syllabi are limited to short utterances or exchanges involving the functions in question. Like structural syllabi, functional content can be presented entirely in short utterances and units of discourse. If this mistake is made, and larger structures of discourse are ignored, the students may be unable to handle the new language in longer, connected discourse (p.37).

The situational syllabus also has many drawbacks due to the fact that situations in which language is likely to be used are difficult to predict (Hasan, 2007). Hasan sees that though this syllabus is supposed to encourage learners to use language for meaningful communication in different real-life situations, in reality, it follows the principles of the structural syllabus. In his words, “it combines the structuralist view of the nature of language and a behaviorist orientation to language learning which emphasizes participation of the learners through the use of dialogues and role-play»(p.50). Moreover, this syllabus is thought to be ineffective because it aims at teaching the target language in only some specific contexts and situations. Therefore, language that can be used in one situation cannot be necessarily appropriate in another one (Richards, 2001) and learners will not really develop their communicative competence (Saraswathi, 2004). Similarly, Wilkins (1972) argues that “the diversity of linguistic forms in any one situational unit makes the task of generalizing grammatical learning a difficult one and without it the learner may acquire no more than a set of responses appropriate to that one situation»(Cited in Johnson, 2009, p.317).

4. Type B Syllabus (Analytic/ Process-oriented Syllabus)

The failure of the courses based on type ‘A’ syllabuses in promoting learners’ communicative skills in the target language has led to the appearance of type B syllabuses in which the focus has shifted from what should be learnt (content) to how it should be learnt (process). This view can be better explained in Wilkins’ description (1976) of analytic syllabuses. He writes:

In analytic syllabuses, there is no attempt at this careful linguistic control of the learning environment. Components of language are not seen as building blocks which have to be progressively accumulated. Much greater variety of linguistic structure is permitted from the beginning and the learner’s task is to approximate his own linguistic behavior more and more closely to the global language (p.2).

In other words, in courses based on type B syllabuses, great importance is attributed to meaning and developing learners’ communicative competence instead of just acquiring isolated structural forms. Besides, the rules of language are not explicitly presented to the learners, but rather learners are required to use their analytical skills and capabilities to synthesize the rules and convert the input they receive into intake (Saraswathi, 2004; Long and Crookes, 1991). Furthermore, a set of characteristics have been attributed to type B syllabuses by White (1988). He points out that unlike type A syllabuses, these syllabuses focus on how language should be learnt. They are non-interventionist in that the learning objectives are not set before doing the course and language content and course materials are not pre-constructed by the teacher alone, but it is a matter of negotiation with students. Hence, they are internal to the learner since s/he is seen as an active agent in the classroom who has her/his own voice and contribution to the learning process. Also, in type B syllabuses, teachers are no longer the highest authority in the classroom, but rather learning becomes, to a great extent, the responsibility of the learner while the teacher is just a facilitator and a co-participant. In addition, language learning within these syllabuses is viewed as a communicative interaction where teachers and learners share responsibility in decision-making and selecting the instructional content. The latter is based on what learners need and bring to the classroom (Cited in Long & Crookes, 1993).

4.1.Syllabuses of Type B

A number of syllabuses fall under the umbrella of a type B syllabus. Three main types are discussed in this section namely: task-based, content-based and process syllabuses. The main concern of the three types is to use language as means for communication not to acquire isolated linguistic forms. This can be supported by Yalden's (1987) view about these process-oriented syllabuses. In this regard, Yalden declares:

all come via different paths to similar conclusions about language teaching: that the teacher's concern should be primarily with the route, not the goal-with what Richterich has called the "learner's trajectory" (Richterich et al. 1981). Along the way, procedures of linguistic syllabus design are considered marginally important if not irrelevant (p.74).

4.1.1. Task-based syllabuses

The view of language learning and teaching changed after to the emergence of the communicative approach which is based on the belief that learners learn best when they use language in its social context to interact. This has led second language acquisition researchers to shift their attention towards a new type of syllabuses and propose the task-based syllabus (TBS) where tasks are used as basic units of instruction.

Task-based syllabus emerges from Prabhu's hypothesis that "structure can be best learnt when attention is focused on meaning" (Yalden, 1987, p. 65). It derives its principles from the task-based language learning which is based on using real-life tasks that involve learners in authentic and meaningful communication and, therefore, develop their communicative competence. Taking tasks as the point of departure in the design process (Baleghizadeh, 2015), TBS focuses not so much on "particular words or grammar rules the learners will need to acquire, but rather on the purposes for which people are learning a language i.e. the tasks that learners will need to be able to perform" (Van den Branden, 2006, p.3).

In the literature, there has been a debate and different views on the very meaning of the term 'task'. However, although a variety of definitions exist, they all agree on the fact that "tasks are activities that are goal-directed...necessitate language use for its performance»(ibid). For instance, Nunan (1989) defines task as "a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing, or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form" (Cited in Markee, 2015, p.165). To put it differently, a task is an activity that encourages learners to use the target language while interacting with each other and aims at reaching a specific objective in a given situation (Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Bygate et al, 2001 as cited in Van den Branden, 2006).

The features of good tasks are best described by Candlin (1987). According to him, a good task promotes attention to meaning rather than linguistic forms and negotiation between the teacher and learners about the instructional content. It also takes learners' needs and expectations as bases to draw learning objectives. Moreover, a good task considers learners' beliefs and interests and encourages their contribution to the learning process. Further, it provides learners with opportunities of self and peer assessments and allows them to share responsibility with their teacher in evaluating the language tasks. Last but not least, a good task develops learners' critical skills and their awareness about the process of language learning (Cited in Nunan, 1988).

4.1.2. Process syllabuses

A simple definition of the process syllabus is ‘how learning takes place in the classroom’. Long and Crookes (1993) describe it as “a social and a problem-solving orientation, with explicit provision for the expression of individual learning styles and preferences»(p. 33). This syllabus, also called ‘negotiated syllabus’, is mainly based on the idea of Breen (1984) and Candlin (1987) who emphasize the importance of shifting attention to the learner and learning processes and needs instead of focusing on language and language learning processes. According to Breen (1984), “learners need plans in order to have a sense of direction and continuity in their work” (Cited in Johnson, 2009, p.322). This is why Breen and Candlin see that, in classes using process syllabuses, tasks and instructional materials should be chosen through a constant negotiation process between the teacher and the learners which, in turn, leads to effective learning (Cited in Long and Crookes, 1993). In addition, through this syllabus, learners are introduced to the way communication and learning to communicate can be undertaken in relation to particular situations of the language classroom. To put it differently, “a process syllabus addresses the overall question: “who does what with whom, on what subject-matter, with what resources, when, how, and for what learning purpose(s)?” (Breen, 1984 as cited in Long & Crookes, 1993, p.34).

4.1.3. Content-based/topical syllabuses

Instruction based on content-based syllabus (CBS) emphasizes learning about something or a specific topic that learners will acquire rather than learning about grammatical structures and language itself. That is, “the subject matter is primary and language learning occurs incidentally to the content learning... An example of content-based language teaching is a science class taught in the language the students need or want to learn” (Krahnke, 1987, p.12). In other words, in content-based instruction, learners acquire the language they are studying through introducing them to a set of topics where each topic is tackled differently and in a systematic way using what Mohan (1986) calls ‘a knowledge framework’ which is used to organize knowledge and learning activities. Each topic is treated in terms of the specific side (description, sequence, choice) and the general side (classification, principles and evaluation) (cited in Nunan, 1988).

In fact, CBS derives its principles from the communicative language teaching approach which encourages learners to use authentic language for meaningful communication and exchanging information. There are many characteristics, stated by Brinton et al. (1989), which demonstrate the importance to teach language in relation to specific content and make CBS effective in developing learners’ proficiency in the language they are studying. Quoting these features, Stoller (2002) writes:

In a content-based approach, the activities of the language class are specific to the subject matter being taught, and are geared to stimulate students to think and learn through the use of the target language. Such an approach lends itself quite naturally to the integrated teaching of the four traditional language skills. For example, it employs authentic reading materials which require students not only to understand information but to interpret and evaluate it as well. It provides a forum in which students can respond orally to reading and lecture materials. It recognizes that academic writing follows from listening and reading, and thus requires students to synthesize facts and ideas from multiple sources as preparation for writing. In this approach, students are exposed to study skills and learn a variety of language skills which prepare them for the range of academic tasks they will encounter (p.108).

4.2. Influential Theories of Language on Type ‘B’ Syllabuses

In fact, the three types (i.e., task-based, process-based and content-based syllabuses) derive their principles from the learner-centered views of language, including Hallidayan view of meaning-potential, Hymesian’s communicative competence and Austin’s work, in addition to the principles of the communicative approach. According to Hymes, in addition to his knowledge of grammatical structures, a person needs to have the ability to use language appropriately in order to be an effective communicator within a speech community (Cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Also, the speech act theory by Austin assumes that language is a vehicle of communication and a tool employed by speakers to express their needs, feelings, intentions and thoughts (ibid.).

Furthermore, learner-centered pedagogists list some principles that should be followed in language classrooms. These principles, as stated by Richards and Rodgers (1986, p.71), are as follows:

- Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
- The primary function of language is for interaction and communication.
- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
- The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

4.3. Influential Theories of Language Learning on Type ‘B’ Syllabuses

According to Richards and Rodgers’ classification of language learning theories, the three type ‘B’ syllabuses fall under the umbrella of the condition-oriented theories. Their main concern is to teach language in relation to its socio-cultural context. Kumaravadivelu (2006) claims that these syllabuses were mainly influenced by cognitive psychologists who criticized the value given to habit formation and mechanical processes by behaviorists and called for ‘insight formation’. Furthermore, learner-centered pedagogists suggest that “language learning is most appropriately seen as communicative interaction involving all the participants (learners, teachers) in the learning and including the various material resources (texts and activities) on which the learning is exercised»(ibid., p.118). Other influential theories of language learning include Krashen’s input hypothesis, Swain’s output hypothesis and Long’s interaction hypothesis. Krashen’s hypothesis assumes that “opportunities for second language acquisition are maximized when learners are exposed to language which is just a little beyond their current level of competence” (Krashen, 1981, 1982 as cited in Nunan, 2012, p. 41). Swain’s output hypothesis, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of output in facilitating second language acquisition. That is, it is through producing language that learners will be able to assess their language proficiency and see the gap between ‘what they want to say and what they can say’. Consequently, learners become aware of their weaknesses and work on improving their proficiency (Robinson, 2011).

Van den Branden (2006) praises the important role played by both input and output in task-based instruction in particular. According to him, tasks that are based on input and output hypotheses’ principles are vehicles that facilitate interaction and provide learners with opportunities to act as language users “who process meaningful input and produce meaningful output in to reach relevant and obtainable goals»(p. 8). Last but not least, interaction hypothesis also played a vital role in second language acquisition (SLA). In this respect, Long (1983, 1989) stresses the necessity of interaction between learners while doing their tasks as “it provides one way in which input can be made comprehensible and serves as a context for attending the problematic forms in the input and output during task-work»(Cited in Robinson, 2011, p.11). This was referred to as “negotiation of meaning” which “concerns the way

learners encounter communicational difficulties while completing tasks, and how they do something about those difficulties” (Skehan, 2003, p.3).

4.4. Strengths of Type ‘B’ Syllabuses

Type ‘B’ syllabuses can be useful in various ways. According to Spector-Cohen et al., type B syllabuses’ main concern is to develop learners’ communicative skills in the language they are studying. Therefore, learners are exposed to authentic language and real-life situations which would help them master all what is needed for successful meaningful communication (Spector-Cohen et al., 2001).

Regarding the task-based syllabus, the fact that learners are given the opportunity to be active participants in the learning process, in terms of selecting the course content and setting the learning objectives, as well as share their personal experiences with others through using active and real tasks increases their motivation and involvement (Krahnke, 1987). Krahnke further adds that “Task-based learning can be especially useful for learners who are not accustomed to more traditional types of classroom learning or who need to learn cognitive, cultural, and life skills along with the language” (ibid, p.61). In addition, task-based instruction calls for the use of authentic materials in the classroom which expose learners to real-life situations and, hence, develop their communicative skills in the target language. The importance of using authentic materials in the language classroom is clearly shown in some of the advantages stated by Phillips and Shettlesworth (1978); Clarke (1989); and Peacock (1997) as follow:

- They have a positive effect on learner motivation as they are intrinsically more interesting and motivating than created materials.
- They provide authentic cultural information about the target culture including culturally based practices and beliefs.
- They provide exposure to real language rather than the artificial texts found in created materials. Simply put, learners are exposed to language in its social context.
- They relate more closely to learners’ needs and provide a link between the classroom and students’ needs in the real world.

(Cited in Richards, 2001, pp.252 - 253).

Besides, various advantages are claimed for process/negotiated syllabuses by Nation and Macalister (2009). According to them, the negotiated syllabus is responsive to the wants of learners and involves them in decision-making about the instructional content and the learning process. Consequently, this involvement in making decisions increases learners’ motivation to learn. Moreover, being a key concept, “negotiation develops learners’ awareness of the goals of language-learning activities and how these goals can be achieved. This understanding may then make them better learners” (ibid., p.156).

Last but not least, content-based syllabus can be useful in language classrooms in many ways. First, it motivates learners as they learn content instead of learning isolated linguistic items only (O’Mally & Chamot, 1994 as cited in Elaggoune, 2015). That is, when learners find that the content is interesting and addresses their needs, they will be highly motivated to acquire the target language. Also, Mohan (1986) agrees on the fact that content-based syllabuses facilitate learning not merely through language but with language. In this regard, he writes: “we cannot achieve this goal if we assume that language learning and subject-matter learning are totally separate and unrelated operations” (Cited in Nunan, 1988, p.49). In addition, Anderson (1990) sees that content-based syllabuses make linguistics forms more meaningful. Hence, they facilitate comprehension and lead to better learning (Cited in Stoller, 2002). To put it differently, “content-based instruction provides students with the ability to

master the language function and skills needed to understand, discuss, read, and write about the concepts acquired” (O’Malley & Chamot, 1994 as cited in Elaggoune, 2015, p.63).

4.5. Weaknesses of Type ‘B’ Syllabuses

Despite their effectiveness and significant role in developing learners’ communicative skills, type ‘B’ syllabuses have some drawbacks. One of the negative aspects is shown in the inability of teachers to find appropriate ready-made materials that match with learners’ needs and expectations. Hence, a lot of work is to be done by the teacher in order to produce his/her own materials (Spector-Cohen et al., 2001). Besides, these types of syllabuses might not be appropriate for learners with low proficiency level in the target language (ibid).

For instance, in the task-based syllabus, many problems become apparent. They are better presented by Bucur (2014) as:

the limits with second language acquisition and classroom research because of inconsistent methodology; little empirical support available for parameters of task classification and grading; the difficulty of defining the concept ‘task’; decreased learner autonomy due to preplanning and guidance; no complete implementation and evaluation of this type of syllabus (p. 914).

Another issue is related to the nature of task-based instruction which is not teacher-centered. Learners are required to be active participants, responsible and have some control over their learning. Hence, if learners do not have these qualities, implementing task-based instruction will be challenging for teachers (Krahnke, 1987). In addition, in terms of language assessment, “the field of task-based testing is still very young” (Van den Branden, 2006, p.12). The challenges of task-based testing include the following: a) difficulties in selecting concrete parameters on the rating scale, b) difficulties in selecting test tasks that allow for valid and reliable test scores, c), problems with extrapolating from test performance to real-world performance and across tasks in addition to increased cost and logistical problems (Bachman, 2002; McNamara, 1995; Messick, 1994; Norris et al., 1998 as cited in Van den Branden, 2006, p. 12).

Further criticism of type ‘B’ syllabuses concerns the negotiated/process-based syllabus. According to Nation and Macalister (2009), there are two major disadvantages. First, learners may not accept the idea of negotiation with each other as they believe that it is the teacher’s job to guide the course. Teachers are also against the negotiated syllabus as they think that giving learners chances to negotiate with each other and make decisions regarding the learning process would make them lose their power and authority in the classroom. Second, process-based syllabuses require time and huge efforts from the part of the teacher in order to produce appropriate resources.

Additionally, content-based syllabus is also claimed to be challenging and difficult to implement. For instance, Krahnke (1987) states that CBS may not be appropriate for beginners or adult learners with low proficiency level. This is why they need to be exposed to some amount of analytic grammatical structures in order to learn effectively. Besides, the fact that learners are not carefully guided by their teacher and given feedback on their language proficiency might result in “premature fossilization or overreliance on compensatory communication strategies” (ibid, p.70). Finally, in terms of language assessment, there are no specific criteria for assessing learners’ performance in content-based syllabus; instead “grading tasks are left partly to real-time impressionistic judgments by the teacher” (Long & Crookes, 1992, p. 37).

5. Which Type Is More Appropriate: Type A or Type B?

In the light of the discussion above, we believe that teachers had better adopt the eclectic approach to language teaching where they are compelled to combine type A and type B syllabuses as this combination would, hopefully, help in counteracting the weaknesses of both types (already discussed in sections: 3.4. & 4.5.). This is in line with Hutchinson and Waters' claim (1987) that "any teaching materials must, in reality, operate several syllabuses at the same time. One of them will probably be used as the principal organizing feature, but the others are still there, even if they are not taken into account in the organization of the material" (p. 89). This, of course, does not mean that teachers mix up different types randomly, but rather there should be some systematic relation among different types of syllabuses the teacher intends to use.

The integration of syllabus types results in what Yalden (1987) called 'proportional or balanced syllabus' which in turn leads to a more flexible, productive, and dynamic teaching that focuses on various syllabus specifications at once. In this regard, Yalden states that a proportional syllabus is beneficial as:

It allows the course designer freedom to respond to changing or newly perceived needs in the learners; and at the same time, it produces a framework for the teacher to start out with a plan. A proportional syllabus type can give rise to many kinds of frameworks; and a framework can be designed for most second language teaching (p. 93).

According to Yalden (1987), as shown in figures 1 and 2, by adopting the mixed-focus approach (i.e. focus on both form (accuracy) and meaning (fluency)), the teaching and learning processes go through different stages where the shift from one phase to another can occur at any time depending on learners' needs, abilities and interests. That is, at the beginning of the learning process, the teacher's emphasis should be more on merely developing the basic linguistic and phonetic structures. Next, after s/he makes sure that learners learnt the structural forms, s/he moves to the next stage which focuses on teaching the linguistic forms and their communicative and rhetorical functions. Last but not least, in the third phase, there is a shift from form to interaction and language use. That is, the teacher starts focusing much more on developing learners' communicative fluency through using tasks and topics that open the doors for learners' creativity and provide them with opportunities to apply the target language to real life situations.

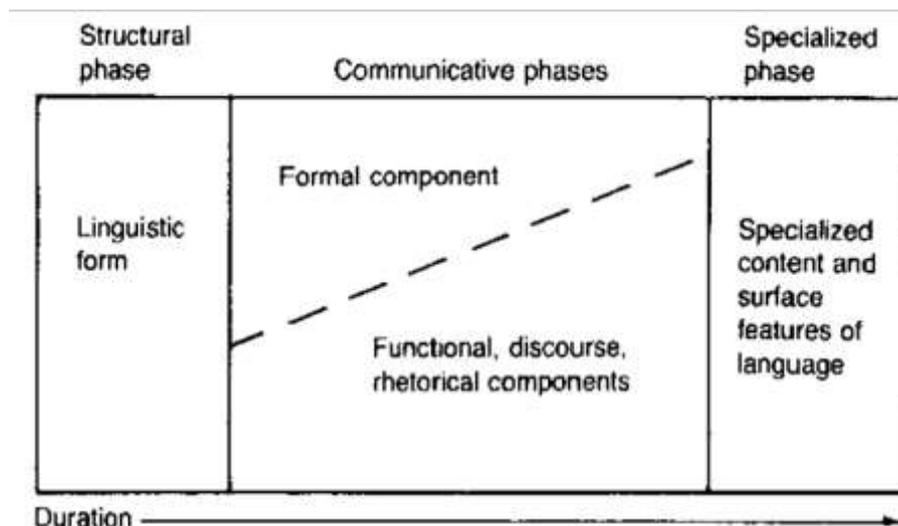


Figure 1

Fully developed proportional model based on Yalden (1983) (Yalden, 1987, p. 96).

Structure/Function	Function/Skills	Task/Theme
Greater emphasis on structure and functions	Targeting specific functions	Remedial structural work
Introduction of learning strategies & techniques	Application through task-based and problem-solving activities	Task-based syllabus, focus on learning processes and strategies to encourage creative language use
Elementary levels	Pre-Intermediate levels	Intermediate and above

Figure 2

The proportional syllabus' stages (Finney, 2002, p. 76)

All in all, applying the three stages in EFL classrooms will, hopefully, result in a better and more flexible instructional method that effectively considers learners' individual differences and teachers "who may not be able or willing to go fully communicative" (Yalden, 1987 as cited in Finney, 2002, p. 76) and allows more space for negotiation and interaction between students and teachers which in turn leads to an effective learning process.

6. Conclusion

The aim of the present paper was to briefly describe and compare two major syllabus types (type A and Type B). It discussed critically the two types in terms of developments in the field of language and language learning theories. Besides, this paper aimed at evaluating the two syllabus types in terms of positive and negative aspects and their influence on language learning. As it has been shown in the literature, while type A syllabuses (structural, notional-functional and situational) are mainly concerned with what is to be learnt and helping learners master the linguistic items with a little consideration of the context in which they are used, Type B syllabuses (Task-based, process-based and content-based), on the other hand, focus on how it should be learnt where great importance is given to meaning and developing learners' communicative competence instead of just acquiring isolated structural forms. Afterwards, the main influential theories of language and language learning underpinning

each type have been discussed. As it is aforementioned, type A syllabuses are mainly influenced by the structuralist view of language and the process-oriented theories of language learning (behaviorist view). Type B syllabuses, however, derive their principles from the communicative view of language which aims at teaching language for meaningful communication in social contexts. In addition, these syllabuses are highly influenced by various condition-oriented theories mainly: Krashen's input hypothesis, Swain's output hypothesis and Long's interaction hypothesis. Regarding the advantages and disadvantages of each syllabus type, it was shown that type 'A' syllabuses can be useful as they provide learners with clear objectives of what to do and how they do it. However, these syllabus types totally ignore learners' needs and expectations. Type 'B' syllabuses have also proved to be beneficial in language classrooms as they are based on tasks as the major unit of analysis. Through these tasks, learners are exposed to authentic materials and meaningful communication. Nevertheless, these syllabus types were subject to criticism as they are thought to be inappropriate for beginners and learners with low level of proficiency. Also, preparing the language tasks and looking for resources require too much time and huge efforts from the part of the teacher. Thus, for an effective teaching process, it is recommended that teachers should combine the aspects of both types and adopt the mixed-integrated syllabus to better engage learners in the learning process.

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