

## COURSE DESIGN: ESP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS?

*Maria Helena Cúrcio Célia*  
UFRGS

Broadly, English is likely to be taught in three types of situation at secondary level. The teacher may be dealing with a class of students who are learning English solely because the school system demands it, with anything between one and five periods a week to contend with, and very little strong motivation. Alternatively, students may be quite strongly motivated (...). Finally, there is the situation in which English is a medium for all or part of the instruction in the school (...). (...) the same principles apply to all three types of situation, but the appropriate goals for each course will vary according to its type. (Broughton, 1980: 174)

Looking at these three possible conditions pictured by Broughton, we may say that specifically in terms of the Brazilian secondary school, most of us are faced with the first situation. There seems to be general agreement concerning the state of English at secondary school level: the teaching-learning process is often inefficient, there is little motivation on the part of the learner, the teacher is frustrated.

Indeed, this situation can be seen all over the world. It is well-known that foreign language in general is not as successful or as effective as it should be. However, the ideal way of achieving satisfactory results has not been found yet.

There are many aspects that account for the deficiencies of the teaching of English in secondary schools. Besides socio-economic and administrative difficulties, which are found in the teaching of other disciplines as well, there are sound pedagogic, linguistic and methodological reasons. There has been a continuous shift in theories of language teaching: new methods have appeared always related to the current linguistic theory; new techniques have been adopted, due to recent approaches to language and to the teaching-learning process. Other difficulties arise, derived from the need to transfer and adapt theories: methods which could be successful in a given situation lose their effectiveness when they are adopted in a different context.

Harbich (1981: 9) gives insights into this topic: the Brazilian student (age: 12 to 18) does not feel a real need to learn the foreign language. In general, he has two classes per week, during 2 or 3 years (sometimes, only one). Language laboratories are seldom available and the classes are too big. Besides these conditions, many students dislike English because they have not been successful previously.

It is true that there is a lot of information and influence coming from the USA and from the UK — songs, films, advertisements, trade marks. There is also a desire to identify with these cultures. But it is also true that interests and needs in terms of jobs and further or later studies are very far from most of the students and cannot be considered. The essential aspect is that they learn English because it is a school subject: some may like it, others certainly hate it (Celani, 1977: 97-8).

In Brazil, further elements can be pointed out: the foreign language teacher often lacks a solid formation in linguistic theories and methods of teaching English that could enable him to make wise choices. He does not select a theory to

be followed. Aiming at being eclectic, he neglects the fact that he should know exactly what is meant by language. The outcome of the teaching-learning process reflects this situation in that various techniques and methods are employed simultaneously to develop objectives that are too vague and general.

Concerning materials, we can see that there is a general deficiency in terms of the existing textbooks. There are not adequate and suitable materials in ready-to-use form, for many courses. In addition, teachers are seldom aware that they should know more about the book than just the answers of the exercises. They should be able to identify the linguistic and pedagogic theories of the writer, the principles that have oriented the organization of the textbook. Otherwise, they are limited to follow the standard imposed by the textbook.

However, we can say that, depending on the educational system, there are some advantages in the secondary school situation. The students have only about 3 classes a week, in large classes, but they usually have a long period of contact with English in secondary school-although this may be a drawback because of previous failures in the instruction already mentioned. Besides this, they generally have a high sense of group cohesion and they are at an age when the teacher can be in close relationship with the class. In this non-intensive situation, success will have to be measured in terms of slow improvement rather than rapid results. In order to maintain motivation, effective communicative strategies can be used, providing apparent success (Brumfit, 1981: 47).

## 1. THE EXTENSION TEACHER TRAINING COURSE IN UFRGS

### 1.1. Rationale

Being aware of the situation described above, the ESP group in UFRGS decided to organize an Extension Teacher Training Course. Since we, ESP teachers have evidence enough that the General English instruction which is provided in secondary school has in most cases proved to be inadequate, we have tried to make the participant teachers realize that something should

change. The rationale of the course was the intention to provide theoretical grounding and practice in alternative ways of dealing with secondary school learners. The participants were English teachers of private and public schools, working with "1º e 2º graus".

### 1.2. Objective

The objective of the course was to provide English teachers at secondary school level with the opportunity of getting acquainted with new approaches through which the teaching-learning process can be appropriate to the learner's actual situation.

### 1.3. Subjects developed

The curriculum of the course included theoretical as well as practical issues. The former was supplied through pedagogical, linguistic, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic background, together with the corresponding methods and approaches to language teaching. Emphasis was given to the real situation of the average student at public schools. The curriculum of Secretaria de Educação was discussed twice in the course: first at the beginning, the participants approached it from scratch; then, later in the course, in the light of the new approaches to the teaching-learning process and with a theoretical background to course design, lectured by Prof. Celani, who greatly contributed for the success of our course. The course lasted sixty hours and included the following items:

- a) English teaching methods;
- b) teaching techniques;
- c) psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic principles of the language teaching process;
- d) the communicative approach;
- e) background to course design;
- f) analysis and discussion of Secretaria de Educação document on foreign language learning in "1º e 2º graus" in Rio Grande do Sul;
- g) how to adapt syllabuses according to the learner's needs;
- h) materials production: theoretical background, analysis of the materials used, possible adaptations;

i) evaluation: how, what and why we test.

#### 1.4. Procedures and techniques adapted

Besides lectures, workshops, micro-teaching sections and seminars were organized so that participants could at once apply what was presented in theory in terms of teaching, testing and adapting programs and materials.

## 2. THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING: ANALYSIS OF LEARNERS' NEEDS

There has always been a swinging of the pendulum as far as language teaching methods and approaches are concerned. In an effort to surmount difficulties which, as stated before, are inherent to the language teaching-learning process over the world, new methods and approaches are created to replace the existing ones.

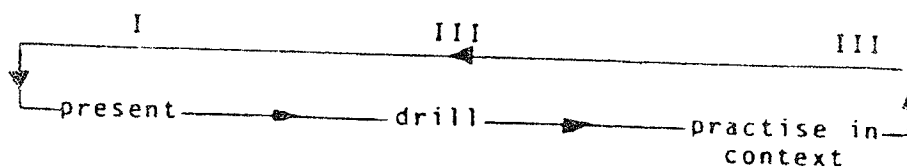
Together with insights into language use as communication, present researches in the areas of sociolinguistics and philosophy of language have given rise to the communicative approach to language teaching, in which communicative competence is in vogue. The grammatical competence comes to be one sector of communicative competence which, according to Hymes has four sectors. Whether or not something is formally possible, feasible, appropriate to the context and whether or not something is in fact done (Brumfit, 1979: 14).

Widdowson (1979: 163) calls attention to the problems derived from this new trend: "(...) although this pedagogic concern for communication derives partly from the influence of a prevailing linguistic fashion, it has been given a particular urgency by changing trends in the English language learning market and the emergence of a new kind of consumer". By this is meant that the new approach assumes a change in the way the teaching programme is implemented: the student should face authentic situations and materials in the foreign language in order to develop communicative competence. As Widdowson (1979: 165) points out, "authenticity has to do with appropriate response". Thus, it is up to the teacher to know what his

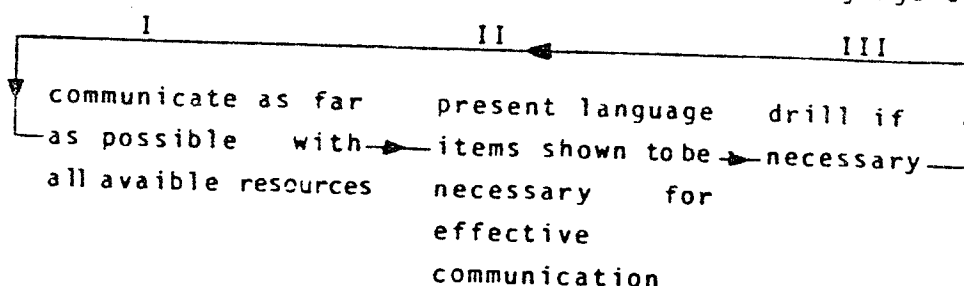
students' needs and/or wants are in order to devise materials and create situations that provide data allowing for authentic competence to communicate. Care has to be taken not to exaggerate such a view: "the learner will have to be able to cope authentically with genuine language use at the end of his course" (Widdowson, 1979: 251-2). This does not mean that he will be uncritically exposed to such language right from the beginning.

Besides the issue of authenticity, there is a general belief that the notional-functional syllabus - though it is not a synonym of communicative approach, as it will be seen later - is more suitable to develop communicative competence because it is more likely to focus on language in use. Its proponents argue that appropriate behaviour has to be developed during the course and this cannot be done only through linguistic knowledge. Aiming at the ability to communicate, "(...) communicative competence needs to be expressly taught: the learner cannot be left to his own devices in developing an ability to communicate". (Widdowson, 1979; 248) This holds true as for strategies, since the teacher presents various alternatives for the learner to choose which procedures are more suitable and effective in his own situation.

What has to be emphasized in our own situation is the problem that students who have received several years of formal English teaching still remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language and to understand its use. We do not mean that we should give up structural practice. Indeed, the ideal approach would combine both models. Brumfit (1979: 183) illustrates the difference between traditional and communicative courses: traditional pattern of procedure of language courses



Communicative model of procedure of language courses



We have to keep in mind that since secondary school learners tend to systematize and experiment with the rules they have created, the grammatical systems of language must be considered in any syllabus as a means to structure language learning in a systematic way. The aim is the ability to cope with discourse, but as "the field of discourse study is rather a confused one" (Widdowson, 1979: 112) and a relatively new domain, descriptions in this area still lack the systematization that grammar can provide. Furthermore, usage is part of use (Widdowson, 1978, 1979).

A communicative methodology will start from communication with challenging activities. As the learners attempt the exercises, they will have to stretch their linguistic capabilities with a purpose related to the task. Communication practice can be viewed as a way to develop linguistic skills.

The importance of the communicative approach lies in linking language learning to the everyday life and interests of learners and their future communication needs, rather than rejecting the structural syllabus. For instance, activities using authentic texts are perfectly feasible in our secondary school, even considering the low level of knowledge that our students present. Widdowson (1978, 1979) suggests that the areas of use that appear to be most relevant for secondary level learners are those of the other subjects on the school curricu-

lum. We may talk to the Geography, History, Biology teachers and ask them the subjects that have been covered until then or that are being covered by the time; then, we xerox simple texts from juvenile books and encyclopaedias for children, all related to these areas that the students have been studying. The exercises are created according to the level of each class, either demanding a strong command of all the text or just general comprehension.

A distinction has to be made between notional syllabuses and communicative methodology. The mere adoption of a notional-functional syllabus does not guarantee that we are going to teach our students to communicate. A functional course is ultimately concerned with language forms - just as a grammatically based course is. The difference may lie simply in the way the forms are organized. But communication involves much more than simply a knowledge of forms; it depends crucially on the ability to use forms in appropriate ways. The key word for a communicative approach is "strategy": the search for communicative competence lies in the development of "a set of strategies or creative procedures for realizing the value of linguistic elements in contexts of use, an ability to make sense as a participant in discourse, whether spoken or written" (Widdowson, 1979: 248).

Another aspect that is related to the choice of a course and of procedures to be followed is that any syllabus is a generalization. It is up to the teacher to establish the specific items to be worked. An adequate syllabus would list steps in terms of the grammatical, lexical and communicative generalisations required to reach the specified objectives of the program (Mackay, 1981: 16-8).

In order to detect what specific objectives have to be established, it is necessary to determine learners' language needs. Care has to be taken to distinguish real, current needs from future hypothetical needs; both of these should be distinguished from students' desires and teacher-created needs (Mackay, 1981: 6).

The basic question to ask is what, in the light of our present knowledge, is the best way of presenting material



which summarizes what needs to be known by students of a specific type. Although it is particularly difficult to fulfil a needs analysis in secondary schools, a syllabus must have, explicitly or implicitly, some idea of what the language is being learnt for: the target objective and language that the learner will be expected to master has to be broken down into an optimally sequenced series of teaching and learning points, including the communicative ends to which those points are utilized. It is also important to determine the extent to which they generate the kind of language and behaviour that has been identified as the objective.

A crucial point in all these procedures is that teachers should receive training sessions and should be familiarized with the principles according to which they are going to work. This makes them aware of their task. So the first principle of a sound approach to language teaching is to know what the objectives of teaching are, i.e., it is necessary to predict what kinds of language skills will be of greatest value to the learner.

Obviously individual needs are not going to be specified in detail, but a general profile of the group can be achieved. The important problem for a teacher is to avoid stereotyping students on the basis of a superficial analysis. Once the profile has been obtained, it is the detailed syllabus specification, the target communicative competence, which constitutes the essence of what should be embodied in the course materials.

Munby's model focuses on the learner (1978: 32). One starts with the person (an individual or a category) and investigates his particular communicative needs according to the sociocultural and stylistic variables which interact to determine a profile of such needs. This model is particularly suitable to ESP courses, because ESP is the best example of a course that must have very precise objectives.

This is the reason why the course designer must have a model to follow. Each course is going to have unique

characteristics due to the specific objectives of that group. This principle has to be adapted to the situation of secondary school, because, first of all, there is a need to establish a basic curriculum; second, the profile of needs is bound to be of a category rather than of an individual because of the characteristics already mentioned. But it is possible to prepare syllabuses that are based on the given curriculum, while attending specific needs of the group. This can be done after establishing the profile of communicative needs of a particular category of participant (see table below).

#### PROFILE OF COMMUNICATIVE NEEDS

(according to Munby)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1. personal                                    | culturally significant information about the individual such as language background |
| 2. purpose                                     | occupational or educational objective for which the target language is required     |
| 3. setting                                     | physical and psychosocial setting in which the target language is required          |
| 4. interaction variables                       | such as the role relationships to be involved in the target language use            |
| 5. medium, mode, and channel (instrumentality) | communicative means   |
| 6. dialects                                    | information on dialects to be utilized  |
| 7. target level                                | level of competence required in the target language                                 |
| 8. anticipated communicative events            | micro- and macro-activities   |
| 9. key   | the specific manner in which communication is actually carried out                  |

(Mackay, 1981: 32)

Once the profile is ready, it must be interpreted in terms of language skills, functions and forms. From the taxonomy of language skills, the micro-skills required are selected and specified (Munby, 1978: 175). Munby does not intend to plan a course: his objective is to provide material to be used when planning. It is up to the teacher to choose those skills that are appropriate to each specific situation.

### 3. THE POSITION OF ESP IN SECONDARY SCHOOL: ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF IMPROVING THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

We have already talked about the inefficient and frustrating state of affairs of the teaching of English in Brazilian schools. However, ESP does not seem to be the solution either, for various reasons: the adolescent does not know what he is going to need English for, he has not decided upon his future career yet and still lacks a mature cognitive structure. He studies English because it is a school subject. Even concerning time, the secondary school learner commonly does not expect neither to be able nor to need to use the language communicatively soon and it does not matter if the development of communicative ability is postponed. It is not the case for the ESP learner because a general grammatical competence is taken for granted as a starting point in ESP courses (Wilkins, 1979: 93).

Rather than an ESP course, what is needed is a course of general English with precise and specified objectives. Munby (1978: 2-3) says that ESP should focus on the learner and the purpose for which he requires the target language, and the whole language programme follows from that. This does not apply to secondary schools. On the other hand, other principles seem appropriate and should be applied: a) a much more rigorous approach to the whole subject of course design; b) using insights and findings from sociolinguistics; c) the communicative approach to language learning; d) turning English learning into a meaningful experience by linking English classes to the student's everyday life and also linking those classes to the other classes in the curriculum (Munby, 1978: 7). In addition to Munby's sociolinguistic model, insights and findings from

psychology and pedagogy lead to principles of ELT that are stressed in ESP and that are appropriate for secondary schools, concerning cognitive processes, study skills, pragmatic procedures and tasks.

In our Extension Course, we tried to show the participants alternative ways to improve their classes for secondary school learners, applying and adapting such principles according to a communicative approach to language teaching.

#### CONCLUSION

In this paper an attempt has been made to picture the present situation of ELT in our secondary schools and to show that ESP cannot provide the solutions for the difficulties we meet. ESP is the most typical case of a course that takes the learner's needs as its basic principle and the secondary school learner does not have precise needs or wants, because his target situation is not known. In face of time, conditions and resources constraints of the secondary school system, some tentative procedures can be adopted in order to minimize its drawbacks: the use of authentic materials, the relationship with other subjects in the curriculum, the insistence on understanding and conveying information content, the use of language as true communication, developing communicative competence, the use of what the student already knows and of his own experiences. Teachers must be aware that the language teaching process will be successful only if students realize that learning a foreign language may be something close to their everyday life. But this cannot be achieved unless they see language as a system to communicate meaning.

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## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED DURING THE COURSE

### SAMPLE ITEMS:

#### PRE-TEST:

2. What do you know about "notional syllabus"? Do not hesitate to say that you have never heard the expression.
4. Which aspects do you think are important when you choose a textbook?

#### TAKE HOME EXAMINATION:

1. Discuss the following statement: "to ask whether a structural or semantic (notional x functional) syllabus is better is like asking: 'shall I practice scales or play Mendelssohn concerts?' the two things are not in competition". (Swan, 1982: 40).
3. Choose any unit of your textbook and having as a frame of reference the articles read and topics discussed in class turn it into a 'communicative' unit. Define objectives, specify methods and techniques. Design the exercises you think are relevant to be used for further practice in communicative activities. Hand in a xerox of the unit as it is presented in your book together with your own communicative version of it.
4. Read the "Secretaria da Educação" Document and relate it to your own teaching experience and to the topics discussed in our "Curso de Atualização".

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE ACTIVITY PREPARED BY A PARTICIPANT IN THE  
COURSE

SAMPLE ACTIVITY:

Colégio Protásio Alves - Escola de 2º Grau

Tarefa de Adaptação - Língua Inglesa

Profa. Carmen G. Ruaro

NOME DO ALUNO:

DATA: Junho.82.

IMPORTÂNCIA DA LÍNGUA INGLESA NOS DIAS DE HOJE

a) Pesquisa de campo:

Visitar lojas, supermercados e "trailers", com o objetivo de observar e anotar palavras, inscrições e pequenos parágrafos escritos em inglês.

Verifique se você tem em casa algum objeto que o ajude nesta tarefa. Fale também com amigos e colegas de aula.

Aqui está um roteiro que pode ajudá-lo a realizar este trabalho.

Dê três exemplos de cada item:

- a) inscrições em camisetas;
- b) rótulos em enlatados;
- c) aparelhos de som;
- d) aparelhos eletrodomésticos;
- e) alimentos;
- f) livros, revistas, discos, posters;
- g) nomes de lojas;
- h) produtos de higiene, de limpeza.

Obs: Se você tiver outra idéia, acrescente a esta lista.

b) Conclusão:

Escrever um parágrafo sobre os motivos da inclusão do inglês nos currículos dos colégios, isto é, por que estudar inglês.

c) Data de entrega:

12 de julho.