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Module 3

Syllabus and Materials

Lexis

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**Tasks for task-accustomed learners?**

**The suitability of task-based syllabi  
in different learning contexts**

Assignment SM/09/01

Select one type of syllabus from the list below, and comment on its strengths and weaknesses.

Lexical syllabus  
Notional/functional syllabus  
Grammatical syllabus  
Task-based syllabus  
Integrated syllabus

Show how the syllabus has been influenced by particular theories (and models) of both language and learning. Describe the teaching situation (or situations) which you believe is best suited to this type of syllabus. Outline the arguments for choosing this type of syllabus.

Word count: 4,373

excluding footnotes and references

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## 1 Introduction

Despite decades of research into language learning, teachers to this day are often frustrated by a discrepancy between certain learners' efforts to learn a language and their lack of communicative ability (Skehan, 1996). As Willis (2009, p.5) puts it more succinctly, "Why can't learners apply what they have learned?" Focusing on this problem and stimulated by extensive research, 'task-based learning' (TBL) has become a buzzword in language teaching, with publishers struggling worldwide to meet demands for TBL materials (Nunan, 2004)<sup>1</sup>. However, as few empirical data support TBL (Ellis, 2003) and because it often conflicts with learners' and teachers' beliefs, TBL remains controversial, and Nunan (2004, p.13f) doubts whether it is actually implemented in the classroom or simply seized upon as a "new orthodoxy".

Task-based syllabi, built on a concept of 'organic' language growth, aim at real-world communication for learners of all ages and proficiency levels, in general learning contexts, e.g. state schools or second language courses, as well as in professional environments. However, because of their controversy among educationalists, course-designers should judiciously assess the advantages and disadvantages of task-based syllabi in different learning contexts, their compatibility with existing curricula and formal evaluation methods, and their flexibility regarding acceptance by learners and teachers.

In my essay I will, therefore, outline the development of TBL from different theories and models of second language acquisition, offer definitions of the terms 'syllabus' and 'task' and compare task-based syllabi with linguistic ones. I will discuss the merits of task-based syllabi in general learning contexts with English as a global language, including potential conflicts with prevailing beliefs and prescribed assessment and illustrated by a brief description of the teaching situation at public schools in Germany. Demands for TBL being particularly strong in adult education, I will analyse to what extent task-based syllabi and authentic materials are particularly suitable to learning situations in L2-speaking environments and in professional contexts. Lastly, I will point out how a focus on form may be incorporated in task-based syllabi to reconcile them with traditional beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> Although Nunan (2004) uses the term 'task-based language teaching' (TBLT) and other authors refer to 'task-based teaching' (TBT), I will use 'TBL' as a more generic term in this wider context.

## 2 What is a 'task-based syllabus'?

### 2.1 The development of 'task-based learning'

Language learning, from medieval Latin schools until far into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, meant grammar-translation, assuming that language is learned additively by moving from one language form to another (Willis and Willis, 2007). The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, saw a surge of new theories and models in linguistics and psychology. Focusing on forms did not guarantee their appropriate production, and further research, revealing language learning processes to be more complex (Skehan, 1996, and Ellis, 2003), led to the now widely accepted model of 'communicative language teaching' (CLT), based on linguistics, anthropology, psychology and sociology and aiming at communicative competence (Nunan, 2004). Krashen (1982, 1985, cited in Nunan, 1999) offers a 'strong' interpretation of CLT with his controversial 'comprehensible input hypothesis', according to which new structures are acquired by understanding messages containing these structures.

TBL represents CLT philosophy in the classroom (Nunan, 2004). Prabhu (1987) states that focusing on meaning during task-solving activities promotes communicative competence. Encouraged by Prabhu's 'Communicational Teaching Project'<sup>2</sup>, J. Willis (1996, p.52) maintains that through "a holistic experience of language in use", processing language for meanings, learners acquire the forms carrying those meanings. Mapping forms and functions during a task, learners formulate hypotheses about the L2 that are later revised and reformulated (Skehan, 1996, Ellis, 2003, and Willis and Willis, 2007). Ellis (2003) also mentions psycholinguistic aspects, with learner motivation as key issue in using communication strategies. 'Experiential learning' describes a philosophical view of learners' personal experience as basis for intellectual growth occurring during their active involvement in tasks and leading towards learner autonomy and responsibility (Nunan, 2004).

However, many curricula still prescribe form-focused approaches easily implemented in the classroom, linking learning and theory and enabling

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<sup>2</sup> The 'Communicational Teaching Project' (also known as the 'Bangalore Project'), a five-year classroom experiment carried out at primary and secondary schools in India during the 1980s, implemented a task-based 'procedural' syllabus to demonstrate that acquisition of language form occurs through a focus on meaning rather than on form itself (Prabhu, 1987).

straightforward evaluation (Skehan, 1996). Examining strengths and weaknesses of TBL more closely in different contexts would, therefore, seem crucial.

## **2.2 Defining the term 'syllabus'**

There are different meanings of the term 'syllabus' in relationship to 'curriculum': in North America the terms are often synonymous, both referring to the content of a subject, whereas 'syllabus' in the British sense is subordinate to 'curriculum', which specifies the overall content and goals of what is taught within an institution (White, 1988). To Brumfit (1984a, cited in White, 1988), syllabi are organised workplans, based on language learning theory and accountable to the public; they can specify what is taught but not what is learned and should be adjustable to changes in theory.

I will follow an even less restrictive definition accommodating all types of syllabi, according to which 'syllabus' describes the elements serving as basis for the instructional focus and content of a language course. The syllabus should be placed within the broader context of a course rationale establishing the target group, the course goals, the kind of teaching and learning taking place in it, teachers' and learners' roles, and underlying beliefs and principles (Richards, 2001).

## **2.3 What is a 'task'?**

J. Willis (1996) defines 'tasks' as activities in which learners focus on meaning, using the L2 purposefully and regardless of form, to achieve an identifiable outcome. Completion of tasks includes a) a pre-task phase introducing a topic; b) the task itself, encouraging spontaneous talk and promoting learners' confidence; c) a teacher-guided planning phase preparing a class report; d) a class report with listening purpose for other learners; and e) a focus on language forms occurring in the task. However, tasks do not simply reverse the 'presentation, practice, production' (PPP) concept but are more soundly based on theoretical principle and offer more flexibility and variegated learning opportunities (J. Willis, 1996).

Nunan (2004) distinguishes between 'real-world or target tasks' and 'pedagogical tasks': target tasks focus on real-world meanings, with non-linguistic outcome, while pedagogical tasks are activities for processing language purposefully, with non-linguistic outcome specified by the teacher. Ellis (2003) also distinguishes between tasks in terms of scope, perspective, authenticity, language skills, cognitive processes and outcomes.

For the purposes of this paper, I define 'task' as a cycle of meaningful activities with real-world relevance to learners, in which meaning and form are interrelated as learners deploy grammatical knowledge to express meaning, and which may be assessed according to outcome (Nunan, 2004), thus implying particular suitability of tasks to learning situations with more advanced and goal-orientated learners (cf. section 4).

## **2.4 Structural versus task-based syllabi**

Structural syllabi (also called 'synthetic' or 'Type A' syllabi), whether 'linguistic' (i.e., introducing language structures hierarchically) or 'notional/functional' (i.e., specifying learners' needs in terms of notions and functions but also specifying linguistic content) are all "interventionist", meaning learners do not control their learning process (Ellis, 2003, p.207). Structural syllabi consist of 'focused tasks' – usually in form of coursebooks using PPP methodology –, assuming that learners acquire particular structures through analysis, presentation and completion (Nunan, 2004). Success is measured by learners' accuracy in producing these language forms (Willis, 2009).

Task-based syllabi (also called 'procedural' or 'Type B' syllabi), following an 'organic' view of language development, aim at the process of learning instead of the product (Nunan, 2004). Learners constantly review their understanding of structures and functions in different contexts, applying their knowledge in 'unfocused tasks'. Materials are not prescribed but chosen for appropriate language content, authenticity and intrinsic interest to learners (Nunan, 2004). While Skehan (1996) proposes assessment of task achievement and Willis and Willis (2007) consider the possibility of form-focused testing in TBL contexts (cf. section 3.4), Willis (2009) observes that autonomous learners should judge their communicative competence themselves.

From the contrasts between the two types of syllabus it is quite understandable that task-based syllabi, despite their generally accepted aim of communicative competence, arouse scepticism at institutions accountable to the public and following traditional principles, and they should be introduced with care, allowing for adjustment (cf. section 5).

### **3 Task-based syllabi in general learning contexts**

#### **3.1 English as 'lingua franca'**

Traditional curricula and syllabi of state schools and in adult education need to adjust to the fact that English no longer 'belongs' only to native speakers (Willis, 2009) – it has become a 'lingua franca' shared for global communicative purposes and consisting of innumerable variations of 'world Englishes' (Kachru and Nelson, 2001).

Interestingly, German school syllabi still attach English predominantly to British, North American and Australian culture<sup>3</sup>, although even young learners are likely to encounter the language in completely different, international contexts – the Internet, travelling, educational exchange, etc. Recent course-books for adults, whose main reasons for learning English are having fun, socialising, business contexts and language use (v.d. Handt, 2002), are usually more independent of specific cultures.

Some classroom implications of English being an international language would be that, in contrast to structural syllabi predominantly concerned with reading and writing, spoken language becomes the focus of attention (White, 1988), while Brown (2007) and Willis (2009) propose a more relaxed attitude towards accuracy in certain phonological, grammatical and lexical items and the acceptance of some language variability. Task-based syllabi, offering communicative activities concerned with real-world language and leaving room for learners' own subjective language interpretation and production, would lend themselves well to meeting these implications.

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<sup>3</sup> All coursebooks that I have come across while teaching at German secondary schools show, without exception, a map of either London or Britain on the inside covers of years 1-3; in year 4 it is either Britain or the United States, in year 5 the United States or Australia, and only in year 6 a map of Europe and, in one (!) case, of the world. (I am referring to the most recent editions of *Portobello Road*, *Bayswater* and *Camden Town*, all published by Diesterweg, Frankfurt/Main; *Let's Go* and *Red Line* by Klett, Stuttgart; *Highlight*, *Go for it!* and *English G21* by Cornelsen, Berlin.)

## **3.2 Age and proficiency levels**

While the main levels of proficiency in English courses for general purposes are probably lower to intermediate, the two predominant age groups are young learners (in primary and secondary education) and from middle age upwards (in adult education) (v.d. Handt, 2002). English being a compulsory school subject almost worldwide, younger adults are usually more advanced, attending special courses (cf. section 4.3).

To design task-based syllabi built on content, knowledge about learners' needs is paramount; however, in general learning contexts these are widespread and rather difficult to establish (Willis and Willis, 2007). Finding materials to meet adult learners' varying needs and interests – from writing Christmas cards to sailing around the world – and schoolchildren's future needs, which seldom correspond to their current, peer-orientated interests, might constitute a challenge. Also, as Ellis (2003) points out, tasks often require cognitive processing, of which very young learners are usually incapable (Lightbown and Spada, 2006).

On the other hand, children's ability to learn implicitly, discovering functions before structures and creating new language forms (Lightbown and Spada, 2006), would enable them to process a limited range of language items slightly beyond their current level of understanding (Nunan, 2004). Moreover, being spared 'boring grammar' and working with interesting materials might motivate young learners as well as adults familiar with traditional instruction (cf. section 3.3.1). Therefore, despite some drawbacks, carefully planned task-based syllabi may be suitable in general learning contexts if learners are to some extent capable of cognitive processes and materials aim at specific target groups.

## **3.3 The roles of learners and teachers**

### ***3.3.1 Learners' attitudes and learner autonomy***

The rationale behind a new approach plays an important role for learners (Nunan, 2004). Willis and Willis (2007) mention learners convinced of needing grammar instruction and of success being linked to repetition. In my own experience many learners, aware of their lack of communicative competence and

that form-focusing does not improve it, still accept both as inevitable; and I have encountered students who deemed working without a coursebook inefficient but quickly welcomed the challenge of working independently and contributing materials.

Although learning a language form seldom leads to learners' immediate ability to use it, they may incorporate it in their interlanguage system (Skehan, 1996). Task-based syllabi promote the 'organic' growth of this system by new demands and input, while learners constantly revise it to use the internalised language (Willis, 2009). Learners need to develop learning strategies to become aware of their progress (Willis and Willis, 2007); by actively involving them in their learning process and carefully guiding them towards autonomy, TBL might motivate learners to achieve their goals of communicative competence.

### **3.3.2 Teachers' beliefs and teacher independence**

As described in section 1, institutions may not implement a task-based approach because many teachers cling to the century-old dogma that language-learning occurs through focusing on form. Having themselves learned languages in this way, teachers may influence learners' attitude towards classroom activities, learning processes and outcomes (Nunan, 2004). Richards (1998, cited in McGrath, 2002) also mentions teachers following coursebooks indiscriminately, rejecting tasks as 'too complex' and lacking confidence in their abilities to prepare materials more suitable to learners' needs (McGrath, 2002).

The main problem in implementing task-based syllabi is probably a fear of abandoning familiar but evidently ineffective methods (Skehan, 1996) for new ones without guarantee of success. To overcome prejudice, teachers might regard the decision-making involved in task-based teaching as an escape from routine and an investment in personal satisfaction and professional growth (Prabhu, 1987). A potential disadvantage of implementing task-based syllabi might be teachers' need of intuition concerning the appropriateness of materials and language content (Willis and Willis, 2007). While Skehan (1998, cited in Willis and Willis, 2007) offers a checklist for task grading, Willis and Willis (2007) suggest teachers rely on their knowledge about and experience with learner groups.

Teachers' roles in TBL are to provide appropriate input to learners, to guide learners towards insight about language, to provide activities for learners' analysis of language and to stimulate learners to become language users (Willis and Willis, 2007) – and "to stand back, have faith and let learners get on with their learning" (J. Willis, 1996, p.61).

### **3.4 Control and accountability**

Syllabi at educational institutions are instruments of control and accountable to the public (Prabhu, 1987, and Skehan, 1996). While structural syllabi allow progress comparison through uniformity of teaching (Prabhu, 1987) and enable control of classroom behaviour (Skehan, 1996), learner-centred, task-based syllabi cannot guarantee that classroom activities will occur as planned (Prabhu, 1987). However, evidence shows that prescribed instruction cannot determine natural learning development with its intrinsic syllabus (Skehan, 1996). If 'progress' means true learning, task complexity and independence may serve as basis for comparison, and since focusing on meaning also develops accuracy in form, there need not be any conflict between the public view of language ability and TBL theory (Prabhu, 1987).

Linguistic syllabi enable straightforward assessment and thus 'quality assurance' (Skehan, 1996). However, examination activities reducing language to samples of language forms are unrelated to real-life language use (Willis and Willis, 2007), whereas the outcome of task-solving activities may be assessed in terms of real-life language competence (Skehan, 1996), and TBL-accustomed learners made familiar with conventional, form-focused activities may also succeed in standard examinations (Willis and Willis, 2007).

Conclusively it may be stated that although introducing a task-based syllabus at educational institutions may require some convincing and staff training (cf. section 3.3), it would nevertheless be appropriate in terms of comparison, evaluation and accountability to the public, with positive long-term effects likely to compensate for the effort.

### 3.5 Teaching at public schools in Lower Saxony, Germany

The following description, although an entirely subjective impression without empirical basis, may illustrate Nunan's (2004) theory about a 'new orthodoxy'.

A few years ago the obvious lack of young learners' communicative competence in English led to demands of CLT curricula in Germany - already long-standing practice in adult teaching -, on the basis of the Common European Framework (CEF). However, language learning in Lower Saxony<sup>4</sup> is still predominantly teacher-centred and form-focused; ostensibly communicative coursebooks specify mainly linguistic content, and grammatical accuracy is a central element in assessment.

This discrepancy may have various causes. Firstly, several unpopular reform measures in Lower Saxony's educational system - repeated financial cuts, suspended development of comprehensive schools<sup>5</sup> and radical transformation of teacher training courses - have aroused general scepticism towards reform. Secondly, decades of restrictive employment policy have led to an average age of over fifty for schoolteachers, who are mostly disinclined to give up teaching habits. Lastly, following the 'PISA Shock'<sup>6</sup>, uniform school-leaving examinations were introduced at years 9 and 10 (ages 14-16), with a largely form-focused English test and gratuitous training materials that made selecting and adapting materials according to learners' needs (cf. section 4.4) seemingly unnecessary.

I have taught and examined students under these circumstances, and while teachers' workload is reduced - lessons are quickly prepared and performance comparison is straightforward -, I find it extremely difficult to motivate students, develop their communicative competence and ensure long-term effectiveness. Again emphasising the subjectivity of this description, I would maintain that whenever my students work on task-solving projects using authentic materials selected for interest, they still may not use language accurately but are considerably more motivated and communicatively more

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<sup>4</sup> Lower Saxony is one of sixteen 'Länder' (≈ federal states); the German educational system is to a great extent subject to 'Länder' legislation

<sup>5</sup> Germany has a controversially discussed three-tier school system: separate secondary schools for basic and middle education, and grammar schools; comprehensive schools are a minority

<sup>6</sup> Expression coined by German media for the collective reaction to the first results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) carried out by the OECD every three years since 2000, which placed Germany at an unexpectedly low rank

competent, and their long-term acquisition of lexical forms is amazing. Introducing task-based syllabi, supplemented with structural elements (cf. section 5), to ensure development of communicative abilities at public schools would therefore seem entirely plausible.

## **4 TBL addressing special needs in adult learning**

### **4.1 General considerations**

Adult learners, accustomed to intellectual challenges demanding outcomes in personal and professional contexts, possess learning capacities different from those of young learners. There are indications that adults, due to their fully developed cognitive abilities and lateralisation of the brain hemispheres, are more capable of processing complex language and focusing on meaning, as well as of analysing, deducting and abstracting (Brown, 2007). Adults are also able to formulate their own concrete goals, which are often more result-orientated and directed at real-life language use.

Although TBL, requiring cognitive abilities and complex language processing at different levels, thus addresses adult learners' abilities, a strictly task-based syllabus rejecting language structure analysis and explanation might neglect adult learners' left-brain capacities of logical-analytical thinking. It would therefore seem appropriate to supplement task-based syllabi for adults with elements concerned with the presentation, analysis and explanation of form (Ellis, 2003) (cf. section 5).

### **4.2 English as a Second Language**

With global migration increasing for various reasons, English as a Second Language (ESL) for adults requires special attention. Learning a language in an L2 environment differs considerably from classroom learning; it must be regarded from sociological and psychological viewpoints and comes under the term of 'second language socialisation' (SLS) (Roberts, 2001).

Firstly, ESL learners simultaneously learn and use the language in real-life contexts – a permanently task-solving situation. Secondly, ESL learners have to

adjust to the culture of L2 environment – an intellectual and psychological challenge influencing the language learning process. Thirdly, ethnic and social issues, as e.g. group dominance over minority learners or notions of superiority and inferiority, may also affect the learning process (Roberts, 2001).

With interactive learning as essential characteristic of TBL (Willis and Willis, 2007), task-based syllabi enable ESL learners to recycle knowledge from the classroom in everyday language use and vice versa. Group work, another important element in TBL (J. Willis, 1996, and Willis and Willis, 2007), may strengthen learners' confidence and reduce intercultural conflicts. Dealing with real-life topics, using authentic materials and focusing on intercultural communication, task-based syllabi would be particularly well suited to ESL learners' needs.

### **4.3 English for Specific Purposes**

As the target groups of ESL learners (cf. section 4.2) and learners needing English for Specific Purposes (ESP) may overlap, I will restrict this section to adults learning English as a Foreign Language for professional reasons.

Although public and private institutions often generalise ESP under the term of 'Business English', learning English to perform a role (Richards, 2001) involves specific needs and specific learner characteristics. Since ESP is not only strongly demanded in business but also a compulsory subject in many disciplines of tertiary education in most non-English-speaking countries, it seems useful to determine the particular needs and characteristics of this target group (Richards, 2001).

ESP learners in training courses are mainly required to read and write complex, subject-related texts containing special terminology, with a high degree of accuracy (Willis and Willis, 2007), while learners in business contexts often need oral fluency or concise writing skills for predominantly business-related functions (negotiating, telephoning, emailing, presenting, instructing, etc.). Whether tertiary level students or business managers, most ESP learners will have some experience in learning as well as in language learning (if not necessarily English) and acquiring general learning strategies. Some learners' social skills may need developing, especially in environments with infrequent

social contacts; however, being accustomed to solving highly complex tasks, many ESP learners are intelligent, goal-orientated and creative and often possess strong abilities of abstraction and logical-analytical thinking.

These attributes point directly to a task-based approach – based on a detailed needs analysis (Richards, 2001), covering the necessary lexical topics, using authentic materials (cf. section 4.4) and offering opportunities to learn a language through familiar activities (Willis and Willis, 2007). Learners would exploit personal strengths and experience, regarding tasks as challenges (Ellis, 2003) and measuring success by outcome, i.e. the ability to perform the respective role, while developing social abilities in interactive situations. For left-brained ESP learners or those with previous experience of form-focused learning, structural analysis and explanation might be included (Ellis, 2003) (cf. section 5); open-minded and innovative learners, however, might welcome opportunities to experiment with new learning strategies.

#### **4.4 Authentic materials**

The relationship between syllabus and materials plays an important role. Syllabi may prescribe materials – e.g., in the form of coursebooks – (McGrath, 2002), or a specific linguistic syllabus may on the contrary be determined by materials selected for and creatively adapted to learners' needs (McGrath, 2002, and Richards, 2001), to promote holistic language experience, learner hypotheses, learner motivation and learner autonomy, the key aspects in TBL.

Task-based syllabi are not pre-constructed, and "lessons in the classroom are not acts of text, or language presentation, but rather contexts for discourse creation", requiring materials adaptable to learners' individual progress (Prabhu, 1987, p.97). For ESP courses McGrath (2002) suggests authentic materials taken from the media, companies, live recordings, etc., acknowledging, however, that their storage might be logistically and financially challenging. Richards (2001) argues that although authentic materials may contain difficult and distracting language and entail time-consuming preparation, they motivate learners by exposure to authentic language and cultural information and inspire teachers' creativity.

Carefully considering linguistic appropriateness and cognitive demands, teachers may well use authentic materials in the contexts of ESL and ESP, as they are particularly relevant and intrinsically interesting to learners, and contributing their own materials may further motivate learners (McGrath, 2002).

## **5 Reconciling TBL with traditional beliefs**

### **5.1 A focus on form in task-based syllabi**

The description of learners' needs in the previous sections shows one weakness of TBL being that a 'strong' interpretation, purely meaning-focused and rejecting structural analysis, may not address all learner types. According to Ellis (2003), there is evidence that focusing on forms may positively affect learners' language use, even if the latter occurs spontaneously, and that task-based syllabi should attend to form. Ellis (2003) proposes two approaches for incorporating a focus on form: an integrated approach, derived from content-based instruction and particularly suitable for ESL learners, and a generally applicable modular approach.

### **5.2 Integrated syllabi**

Integrated approaches prioritise content but do not only draw from a content-based syllabus consisting of learner-relevant, motivating activities presenting new language, but also from a linguistic syllabus specifying forms. Course-designers link content and form by including 'content-obligatory' language (meeting content-related goals) and 'content-compatible' language (useful but not essential to the specific context) (Snow, Met and Genesee, 1989, cited in Ellis, 2003).

However, Ellis (2003) observes that integrated syllabi meeting widespread demands of attention to both meaning and form are difficult to design and do not solve the problem of learnability, i.e. that learners' occupation with subject content does not necessarily lead to linguistic accuracy any more than focusing on forms, whereas the following approach evades the problem.

### **5.3 Modular syllabi**

Modular syllabi, easier to design, build on Prabhu's (1987) TBL theory while attending to form when learners are capable to do so (Ellis, 2003). They consist of two separate parts: the main part is the communicative module, consisting of unfocused tasks relevant and interesting to learners, through which learners develop fluency, accuracy and complexity while focusing on meaning and at the same time naturally attending to forms not predetermined by the task (Ellis, 2003).

The secondary part of the syllabus is a completely unrelated code-based module, a checklist of difficult linguistic items taught by PPP methodology or focused tasks to support learners' natural acquisition. Teachers decide independently if and when to use the code-based module; however, Ellis (2003) suggests a largely lexical syllabus for beginners and introduction of the code-based module at intermediate levels, destabilising learners' interlanguage to avoid fossilisation.

In most teaching situations where learners or teachers consider a focus on form indispensable, as described in sections 3 and 4, modular syllabi as a 'weak' interpretation of TBL may thus be adapted to satisfy individual needs for a more deductive approach; a pragmatic solution reconciling TBL with traditional beliefs and guiding learners and teachers towards a communicative way of language learning and teaching.

## **6 Conclusion**

Despite many teachers' and learners' reservations about TBL, it is obvious that task-based syllabi offer an abundance of opportunities for communicative language learning. There are certainly numerous aspects to be considered carefully before introducing task-based syllabi at institutions, habit-formation and general fears of innovation being not the least.

As task-based syllabi require cognitive processes to process complex language, their suitability to young learners' needs may be limited, and their variegated needs and goals, like those of adult learners in general learning contexts, may make course-design difficult; designed by an experienced teacher,

task-based syllabi might nevertheless motivate these learners through interesting topics and interactive learning.

With their focus on topic and lexical forms as well as their real-life character, task-based syllabi are particularly well suited to learners in L2 environments and learners in professional contexts, more so as these learners often possess characteristics that can be specifically addressed by a task-based syllabus.

Since purely task-based syllabi do not address the needs of learners who are convinced of needing grammar-focusing or those who have actual experience of successful learning with it, it would be necessary in these cases to incorporate a focus on form to provide analysis and explanation; as has been shown, modular approaches are well suitable to answer these needs.

Research has shown that focusing on form does not generally lead to language production and that structural syllabi are not appropriate to the concept of CLT; however, if communicative competence is the aim of language teaching, then the conundrum formulated by Willis (2009) (cf. section 1) should alone suffice to justify a change of method. In my opinion a task-based syllabus, despite its limitations, and because of its versatility, is a good way to communicative competence.

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<sup>7</sup> German titles translated by the author of this essay

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