

stated at the top. Then, through a number of exercises the students are asked to use that certain point in a more or less deductive manner.

- This section occupies a large portion of each lesson with quite a few exercises aimed at helping the students to reach the level of automatic production.
- Having followed a PPP order, most of the exercises in this part are decontextualized and only focus on the structural point at hand.
- Meaningless repetition is also another characteristic of the grammar section.

Conclusion

All in all, English Book 3 is based on a strong version of structural syllabus. Though this syllabus type is not without critics, it has its own advantages as well. In terms of learners' needs in the short run, i.e. taking university entrance exams, such a syllabus satisfies learners' needs to some extent. This is due to the fact that the English section of the university entrance exams typically follows the same overall pattern followed in senior high school English course books including book3. In terms of feasibility, this seems to be an advantage of the present syllabus since each year around two million participants take part in the admission exams held simultaneously in two or three days in a nation-wide scale with English language as only one of the exam courses.

However, this approach won't be justified any more considering the long term goals of second/foreign language learning. Beyond university entrance examinations and passing some general English courses at high school and university level, this syllabus orientation finds little utility in the future lives of the students. In other words, since structural syllabuses are based on outmoded

models of language, i.e. structural linguistics, and language learning, i.e. behavioristic psychology, it seems very difficult to find any sound rationale for its implementation in an age in which English is used primarily for facilitating communication among people of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

To be more effective in light of the existing practical considerations, English Book 3 can be adapted through an eclectic supplementation with more communicative, meaning-focused activities with a proportionate balance of form and meaning. However, this is not merely a unidirectional enterprise and demands a reconsideration of our testing procedures which are also structurally oriented both at the high school and university level. The truth is, for many the exams are the strongest short-term motif for language learning.

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Speaking and Pronunciation

- The only section of the book devoted specifically to speaking is *Section F. Language Function*. However, this section is highly controlled and the pieces of the conversation it tries to engage the students in are mostly inauthentic with little potential for provoking learners' interest.
- The last section of each unit titled *Section G. Pronunciation Practice* attempts to highlight the important segmental and suprasegmental features of English language by stripping them off their context of use. This decontextualization may be useful since the point is explicitly explained to the learners. However, due to its discrete nature, it seems to be mechanical and to some extent unreal.

Reading and Vocabulary

- Each reading passage is preceded by a section titled *New Words* aimed at familiarizing the students with some of the new vocabulary items encountered in the text- the so-called linguistic warm-up.
- There are no graphics and illustrations for the reading section beginning each lesson.
- The reading passages are not accompanied by appropriate exercises. Most of the

comprehension questions following the reading section ask display questions which only require locating some pieces of information within the text.

- The list of new words arranged in alphabetical order at the end of each lesson is apparently intended to be used as reference material.

Writing

- Section E of each lesson, i.e. *Write it down*, is a section devoted specifically to writing. However, the writing practice provided in this section is at the sentence level and the students are never required to write a genuine piece of text above sentence level.
- In addition, none of the writing exercises given in this part are authentic and representative of the real life writing tasks the students may encounter in their daily lives.
- Above all, these writing exercises are uninteresting in that they do not have any particular non-pedagogic motif.

Grammar

- The new grammatical points of each lesson are presented in *Section D. Speak out*. In this part, first the intended grammatical rule is explicitly

lesson which is followed by a vocabulary list is *Section H. Vocabulary Drills*. In this part, students' word knowledge is assessed through a fill-in-the-gap exercise type for which students are required to change the form of the words to best fit the blanks.

The final part of the book is the *Review Exercise 2*, in about five pages recapitulating the major grammatical points and vocabulary items covered in the past six lessons. Then there are two pages of irregular verb forms listing all the irregular verbs used in the book and at last a *Word List* of about six pages indexing all the new words presented in the lessons.

The Book's Underlying Syllabus

The overall review of the book presented above implies that, English Book 3 is written on the basis of a structural (grammatical) syllabus. This is quite apparent from:

1. The highly controlled and neatly sequenced grammatical points in each lesson on the basis of the simplicity/ complexity criteria;
2. The integration of a list of vocabulary items with the presented grammatical patterns;
3. The implicit assumption that language consists of a finite set of rules which can be combined in certain ways to make meaning and the chief responsibility of language learners in this regard is mastering these building blocks of the intended language;
4. An overall synthetic approach to language teaching and learning which focuses on presenting and practicing only one item at a time demanding full mastery of one point before moving to another; and
5. The structural view of the nature of language and the behavioristic assumption about language learning which have led to an overemphasis of structural points as the skeleton of language and repetition/memorization as the heart of a successful

language learning experience.

Overall Features of the Book

In this section, a general evaluation of the book's appearance, contents and the way the contents were organized will be made by first probing the impression which the book may have for its target users, i.e. the third graders. Then, an effort will be made to examine the book's features regarding the four language skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, and components, i.e. grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. What follows is a brief account of the book's qualities in each domain.

General Appearance/ Appeal

- The book's cover is quite simple without any illustrations. At the top is the ministry of education logo followed by the name of the book (English Book 3) printed largely in bold. In fact, this is the only section of the book for which colors other than black and blue are utilized.
- The whole book appears to be somewhat dull with the texts printed in black and white.
- As for the lessons, they all follow the same pattern. The few available pictures are also relatively inauthentic depicting people doing their routines for which the students are required to produce the necessary language.

Listening

- Quite interesting is the fact that the book is accompanied by no supplementary materials, be it audio/ video tapes, work books, teacher's guide, etc.
- The book has no separate section for listening comprehension. Indeed, as the evidence suggests the reading sections and the exercises to be done orally are taken to provide listening opportunities as well.

Section B. Reading immediately follows section A, the vocabulary warm-up. The reading part offers a one page reading comprehension passage with different topics dealing with the daily life affairs. For example, the title of Lesson One's reading section is 'TV or no TV' which mentions some of the pros and cons of watching TV and its impacts on peoples' lives. However, like the previous section no graphics are given to facilitate comprehension of the passage.

In *Section C. Comprehension* there are three different types of comprehension questions asking about the passage the students have covered in the previous part. In fact, they are the same for all the six lessons and include: *I. Answer the questions, II. True/ False* and *III. Complete the sentences*. A more meticulous examination reveals that these are mostly display questions asking for pieces of information explicitly stated in the passage. The overall length of section C varies from one page to a page and a half while the section's framework, the question types and the information asked for remain almost the same across all lessons.

Section D. Speak Out is the first part of each lesson for which pictures are provided. In this part, which is comprised of two sub-sections: Structure 1 and Structure 2, two structural points, sometimes related, are introduced. Each structural point follows the traditional sequence of *Presentation, Practice* and *Production*. As a matter of fact, all these three phases are strictly controlled and the learner seems to have little or no freedom for language production at each stage. This section also varies in length from one lesson to another and perhaps on the basis of such criteria as the significance of the grammatical point introduced, its difficulty level and the amount of graphics incorporated in the section. In general, this part

covers some four to seven pages of each lesson which, compared to the coverage of other sections, is quite noteworthy.

The next section in each lesson is *Section E. Write it down*. There are usually different subsections to this part ranging from *writing sentences by looking at pictures, answering some strictly controlled open-ended questions, sentence completion, unscrambling words to make correct sentences to sentence transformation*. This part is between one to three pages in length and despite the fact that it is labeled as writing section, it gives little opportunity for students' free writing practice.

Having trailed section E, *to the teacher* is a typical one page teacher guide intervening sections E and F. In fact, this part is a sort of teacher aid for the Speak out in Section D. That is, this section explains the point of grammar to teach.

The last three sections of each lesson are: *Section F. Language Function, Section G. Pronunciation* and *Section H. Vocabulary Drill* respectively. The section Language Function is aimed at helping students to use language for real communicative purposes. This part, which covers about a single page of each lesson, presents a short piece of conversation. then, this single-page-section in each lesson requires the student to make similar conversations on the basis of the information provided in the exercise section. Despite all the efforts made by the authors, the language functions offered in this part have little authenticity and appear, in one way or another, artificial. As for *Section G. Pronunciation*, both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English phonology are explained and practiced. But, most of such practices are decontextualized and mechanical, as has been the case for almost all the other exercises in the book. The last part of each

of a one-to-one correspondence between forms and functions are amongst the most widely echoed criticisms against notional-functional syllabuses (Widdowson, 1983).

Content-Based Syllabuses

The offspring of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), content-based syllabuses view language learning as an unconscious process of developing an in-built linguistic system while attention is off the form and on the meaning (Nunan, 2001). As a result, within a content-based framework, language is mainly used for the presentation of other subject areas such as mathematics, biology and other sciences. Overall, the optimal learning situation is believed to be created while learners are using the language as a vehicle for communicating content without much attention to the language per se.

Task-Based Syllabuses

Task-based syllabuses introduced under the influence of communicative language movement of the 1980s highlight the potential role played by tasks, both real and pedagogic, in the language learning process Lang & Crookes (1992). As a whole, the core assumption of such syllabuses is that, tasks, due to their psychological reality, should be the cornerstone of any language learning effort (Long & Robinson, 1998). These tasks are, in turn, specified through certain *needs analysis* procedures which determine what learners require for their future academic/professional life. In addition, the non-linear and organic orientation of many task-based syllabuses towards language and language learning is claimed to be an improvement over the earlier syllabus types which treat language as a linear system developing according to a pre-planned map with one point at a time (Skehan, 2001).

with swing of pendulum from one syllabus type

to another as a result of changes in the linguistic and psycholinguistic assumptions of each era, new orientations towards syllabus design emerge which affects the subsequent materials development efforts. In such a situation, it seems imperative that language teachers, as the main agents of pedagogical settings, be thoroughly familiar with different syllabus types in order to be able to evaluate their own materials and make enlightened decisions for their classroom practices in interaction with the specific needs of their students. What follows is a brief analysis of the content of the English Book of senior high school in Iran in light of these major syllabus types.

An Overview

English Book 3 consists of six lessons each running through some 15 to 17 pages. The book starts with neither the authors' preface, neither any introduction to the book objectives. In fact, there are only 3 pages preceding the book's content page which is immediately followed by the Review Exercises 1. The main purpose behind this section seems to be making a quick revision of the major points, mostly structural, covered in the previous two volumes for the first and second graders, i.e. English Books 1 and 2. This initial review section, which runs through four pages, consists of different exercises including: fill-in-the-blanks, sentence completion, question/ answers and sentence formation.

Following the review section comes *Lesson One* which begins with '*Section A. New Words*'. In this part, as the name implies, some of the lesson's new vocabulary items are presented half-contextualized in either short pieces of conversation or detached sentences exemplifying a limited linguistic and situational context of use for them. This section, for which no pictures and graphics are provided, occupies the first page of each lesson in the book.

latter phase is to shed more light on the likely strengths and weaknesses of the book regarding its underlying syllabus and how it is realized. At the same time, the choice of such a syllabus in view of both short and long term needs of the students will be discussed.

Key words: content-based syllabus, curriculum, notional-functional syllabus, structural syllabus, task-based syllabus

Introduction

Any thorough definition of syllabus entails making a distinction between curriculum on the one hand and syllabus on the other. According to Nunan (2001) a curriculum is typically concerned with making general statements about the goals of language learning at a global level while a syllabus is a more detailed plan for the orderly selection and presentation of materials at the classroom level. According to this definition, curriculum development is a policy-making enterprise which is usually carried out at the governmental level. Conversely, syllabuses are more localized in nature and sensitive to contextual variations.

Influenced by the learning and teaching assumptions of each era, several syllabus types have emerged with each presenting their own peculiar frameworks for selection and grading and presentation of language. Structural, Notional-Functional, Content-Based and Task-Based syllabuses are some of the most well-known of these syllabus types. What follows is a brief introduction to each of these syllabuses highlighting some of their distinctive characteristics.

Structural Syllabuses

Deeply rooted in structural linguistics of the 1960s, structural, also known as grammatical, syllabuses are based on the premise that language is composed of a finite set of rules generating an infinite number of well-formed sentences (Ellis,

1997). According to this perspective, learning a second language is a process of memorizing the building blocks of the language, i.e. grammatical rules, along with the necessary vocabulary items to be embedded within the context of the available structures. As a result of paying exclusive attention to language rules, the notion of grading structures according to their relative simplicity/complexity is a distinguishing characteristic of the structural orientation towards syllabus design. In fact, this overreliance on grading of structure on the basis of the simplicity/complexity criteria and presenting one item at a time has turned into one of the most frequently cited criticisms posed against structural syllabuses which according to the critics, presents a mechanical notion of what language and language learning entails (Krashen, 1982).

Notional-Functional Syllabuses

At the heart of notional-functional syllabuses are the concepts of *notions*, i.e. the meanings conveyed through the use of language such as time and place, and *functions*, i.e. the communicative purposes for which language is used such as explaining and apologizing. In brief, what different versions of notional-functional syllabuses have in common is the assumption that language is a vehicle for transmission of meaning and it is through this real communicative use of language that it can be best acquired (Wilkins (1976). Yet, like other syllabuses, notional-functional syllabuses are not without their critics. Paucity of clear criteria for grading of content as well as lack

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A Critical Look at English Book 3 of Senior High School in Iran

چکیده

به دنبال ارائه‌ی نظریه‌های جدید زبانی و تغییر نگرش به ماهیت فرایند یادگیری، شیوه‌های آموزش زبان نیز دچار تغییر و تحول می‌شوند. چنین تغییراتی به نوبه‌ی خود به تحولاتی در سطوح متفاوت، از جمله تهیه و تدوین مطالب آموزشی می‌انجامند. به طور خلاصه، با نگاهی اجمالی به تاریخ تحولات تهیه و تدوین مطالب آموزش زبان انگلیسی می‌توان چهار مدل عمده‌ی «ساختاری»، «ادراکی-کارکردی»، «محتوایی» و «عمل-محور» را شناسایی کرد. آگاهی از این مدل‌ها که پایه‌ی بیشتر کتاب‌های آموزش زبان را تشکیل می‌دهند، این امکان را برای معلمان فراهم می‌آورد که به طور مستقل کتب آموزشی موردنظر خود را ارزیابی کنند و تغییرات لازم را به منظور بهینه‌سازی مطالب برای دانش‌آموزان هدف به وجود آورند.

در همین راستا، این مقاله پس از ارائه‌ی خلاصه‌ای از مدل‌های فوق‌الذکر و برخی معایب و مزایای آن‌ها، با نگاهی به کتاب آموزش زبان انگلیسی پایه‌ی سوم دبیرستان سعی بر آن دارد که محتوای کتاب را در سایه‌ی این مدل‌ها بررسی کند و نقاط قوت و ضعف آن را با توجه به امکانات و شرایط موجود آموزش زبان در سطح دبیرستان‌های کشور مشخص نماید. امید است این بررسی، معلمان زبان را در تدوین مؤثرتر کتاب مذکور یاری رساند و موجبات بهبود کیفیت آموزشی را فراهم آورد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: ساختاری، ادراکی-کارکردی، محتوایی، عمل-محور.

Abstract

Syllabus is defined as an orderly plan for the selection and presentation of materials at the classroom level (Nunan, 2001). According to this definition, a syllabus can be roughly compared to a map of a journey setting the objectives in view and showing the easiest route for their realization. Among the most salient syllabus types, one can refer to *Structural*, *Notional-Functional*, *Content-Based* and *Task-Based* syllabuses each characterized by its own peculiar accounts of nature of language and language learning.

In the first part of this paper, an effort will be made to present a brief overview of these four major types of syllabuses along with their distinguishing features. This, then, will be followed by an evaluation of the English Book 3 of senior high school in the Iranian educational system. The purpose of this