**Didactics LMD3 Prof. Semmoud.A**

**Lecture 6**

**The Syllabus**

There is a kind of disagreement over what a ‘syllabus’ is. According to Nunan (1988:5) syllabus design is approached in two different ways: a narrow traditional one and a broad more recent view .The first approach considers syllabus and methodology as two different things. Thus, syllabus is more a question of selecting and grading the content [the ‘what’], whereas methodology implies the selection of learning tasks and activities [the ‘how’].Richard and Rodgers (1986:21) came out with the conclusion that ‘traditionally the term syllabus has been used to refer to the form in which linguistic content is specified in a course or method.’ In parallel with this logic, a syllabus would serve the aim of selecting and grading items of language providing accurate data on what is to be taught and what is to be learned by a given group of learners in a given situation.

On the other hand, within the broad view, it seems quite difficult to cut a clear line between syllabus and methodology. Nunan (1988:5) claims that ‘those who adopt a broader view question this strict separation, arguing that with the advent of communicative language teaching the distinction between content and tasks is difficult to sustain.’

These two main stream thoughts gave birth to two different syllabus kinds: the product and the process syllabuses. According to Nunan “…‘process’ is a series of actions directed toward some end. While ‘product’ is the end itself. […]A list of grammatical structures is a product. Classroom drilling undertaken by learners in order to learn the structures is a process. The interaction of two speakers as they communicate with each other is a process. A tape recording of their conversation is a product”(ibid: 12).

Syllabuses such as the structural (or grammatical) syllabus, the situational syllabus and the notional (or functional-notional) syllabus are the result of traditional considerations to syllabus design. All of them are product-oriented syllabuses. These are syllabuses ‘in which the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of instruction’ (ibid: 27).

**Syllabus Design**

Syllabus design is mainly a matter of selecting items to be learnt and their gradation into an appropriate sequence. There are many kinds of language syllabuses, all of which can be used as a starting point in the planning of a language course-book. Whatever type it is, however, writers and course designers should bear in mind a number of elements while designing their material. When they have an appropriate view of how their theories and conceptions of learning might be translated into suitable activities, they will have to decide about what topics to include. This will turn around what the learners find engaging, what research has found in this area, and the capacity for a good exploitation of the topics they might choose. It will also be essential to think about the kind of culture that the material will reflect, and to consider a sort of balance in terms of the representation of different groups in society, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic. Once these decisions have been taken, course book writers may focus on the organization of their material, namely the syllabus.

As Nunan (1988:5) states it ‘Syllabus design is mainly concerned with the selection and grading of content’. And According to Harmer (2001:295), every type of syllabus needs to be developed on the basis of certain criteria, such as ‘learnability ’and ‘frequency’, which can inform decisions about selection and ordering.

**Syllabus Design Criteria**

Harmer (2001) came out with the belief that when syllabus designers put syllabuses together they have to think about each item for inclusion on the basis of a number of criteria. The criteria he came out with are described below.

**Learnability**

Some structural or lexical items are easier for students to learn than others. Consequently, simpler language items are to be taught at first place then increase the level of difficulty as the learners’ language level improves. Learnability implies that, at beginner levels, it is simpler to deal with the uses of was and were right after teaching is and are, rather than presenting the third conditional after is and are.

**Frequency**

The inclusion of items which are more frequent in language, than those which are occasionally used by native speakers seems to have more sense especially at beginning levels. The use of see to express vision is less used than that which is equivalent with understand (eg. Oh, I see).It is, therefore, more logic to teach that second meaning of see which is more frequent in use than the first one.

**Coverage**

Some words and structures have greater coverage (scope for use) than others. Thus it might be decided, on the basis of coverage, to introduce the going to future before the present continuous with future reference, if it could be shown that going to could be used in more situations than the present continuous.

**Usefulness**

The reason that words like book and pen figure so highly in classroom (in spite of the fact that they might not be used so frequently in real language use) is due to their usefulness in that situation. Similarly, words dealing with family members take place early on in a pupil’s learning life because they are useful in the context of what pupils are linguistically able to talk about.