

## Trying to balance behavioral and linguistic objectives in a specific needs task-based syllabus design

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### Abstract

The relation between specific needs and the notion of "task" as the unit of analysis in syllabus design is rightly a strong one because a task-based approach can identify the needs as coherent sets of behaviors. One question that a task-based syllabus designer must ask, however, is whether the necessary linguistic inputs can be graded and sequenced in such a way that they help to build the linguistic foundation without which the students cannot adequately produce the required behaviors. This paper will examine this question through a case study of the history of the syllabus design for the International University of Japan's (IUJ) annual intensive English program for prospective MBA students that began in 1988. The starting point will be a paper that IUJ's Mohammed Ahmed gave at the 1989 LULTAC Conference in which the questions of linguistic grading and sequencing were raised but not answered. The struggles of successive syllabus designers to reconcile behavioral and linguistic needs will then be analyzed. The paper will conclude by arguing that the present trend towards a multi-syllabus design in which a task-based syllabus exists side by side with satellite linguistic syllabi represents the best outcome for this and, perhaps, for other similar courses.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years task-based approaches to syllabus design have captured attention because they provide, among other things, a way of satisfying the stipulation made of communicative course designs that they relate more to the learning process than to the learning product (e.g. Breen, 1984; Brumfit, 1984). For English for Special Purposes (ESP) course designers another reason to give close consideration to task as the unit of syllabus design is that a task-based approach can identify the learners' needs as coherent sets of behaviors. When, in addition, the specific needs of the learners appear to constitute a single target situation or set of target situations, the ESP syllabus designer must consider the possibility of deriving classroom tasks, albeit with some modification, more or less directly from the target situation, without the need for the elaborate abstraction of task "types" which is necessary when target situations are more heterogeneous (Long, 1985). Content-based English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course designers, for example, are often endowed with this possibility, though they might not necessarily express it in quite the same terms (e.g. Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). Although motivational and other benefits may be obtained by deriving classroom tasks fairly directly from a target situation, one disadvantage is certain to be a

more restricted field of maneuver in which to balance behavioral and linguistic objectives in a syllabus.

As with all syllabus work, one of the major difficulties facing a task-based syllabus designer is the grading and sequencing of the syllabus elements. In the field of task-based syllabus design the principle, if not the practice, is simple enough. Both Long (1985) and Nunan (1989) recommend that the tasks be graded and sequenced according to non-linguistic criteria in order to preserve the communicative coherence of the task activities. Nunan goes further and specifies a "psycholinguistic processing approach" by which "activities can be graded according to the cognitive and performance demands made upon the learners" (Nunan, 1989, 118). In this approach discrete items such as grammar and vocabulary from a number of syllabus checklists can then be fed in to the task activities after the sequence of tasks has been mapped out. It is evident from the many examples that Nunan provides that the key factor in making sure that there are plenty of opportunities to feed in lower order linguistic inputs in this way is the ability not only to grade and sequence the tasks themselves but also to break them down into a number of component activities and then assemble them together in a cumulative "chain" that represents an ascending order of activity size and difficulty.

In principle, then, grading the cognitive and performance demands upon the learners is the key to the construction of a task-based syllabus. This obviously assumes that these demands are susceptible to such grading. This assumption is reasonable enough when the tasks are not being derived directly from a target situation, for then the syllabus designer can more easily construct or choose activities that fit a particular point on the grading and sequencing profile. But suppose that a content-based EAP syllabus designer has decided that the logic of a needs analysis indicates a syllabus based directly on the tasks the learners will face in the content course is appropriate, and also finds that it is difficult to grade the cognitive and performance demands made upon the learners in a nicely graduated way. And suppose that the linguistic level of the students is not really equal to these cognitive and performance demands. And, furthermore, suppose that because of lack of time it is not possible to use time to the extent desired to grade the tasks and task activities. In this highly constrained scenario what should the syllabus designer do? Should the syllabus designer abandon the attempt to construct a task-based syllabus? Should the syllabus designer forsake Long and Nunan and seek to compensate for the relative lack of gradability of the cognitive and performance demands by switching emphasis to the grading of the lower order linguistic inputs? Or should the syllabus designer deal with the higher order cognitive and performance demands separately from the lower order linguistic and skills demands and thus give up one of the major advantages of communicative and task-based approaches - their creation of coherence in terms of language and context which helps to ensure that language knowledge and language use skills work and increase together? These sorts of questions are ones that ESP

designers in general and content-based EAP designers in particular may have to face at some time in their professional life, but because they relate to "extreme" conditions existing syllabus design models provide no ready-made answers to them.

This paper will examine these questions through a case study of the evolution since 1988 of a "content-related" EAP course at the International University of Japan (IUJ). The course is defined as "content-related" in order to distinguish it from the "content-based" paradigm identified by Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) which assumes some sort of active participation by a content instructor. The course at IUJ is designed to help prepare an almost exclusively Japanese group of adults for the academic and linguistic demands of an English medium graduate level program in business administration. After explaining the rationale for a case study approach, the paper will provide a brief overview of the sorts of choices regarding syllabus integration and the language-behavior continuum that are available to a syllabus designer within the existing communicative and task-based syllabus design tradition. The evolution of the content-related preparation course through a task-based syllabus design will then be interpreted as a succession of responses, sometimes unconscious, to these sorts of choices. The paper will conclude by pointing out that the current stage in the course's evolution indicates that it may be necessary in certain highly constrained task-based syllabus design conditions to deal in separate syllabuses with higher order cognitive and performance demands on the one hand and with lower order linguistic and skills demands on the other hand.

## **2. REASONS FOR A CASE STUDY APPROACH**

This enquiry adopts a case study approach for two main reasons. First, this is a purely empirical examination in one particular setting of how a general model of task-based syllabus design derived from Nunan (1989) has to be adapted to serve specific needs and to fit specific constraints. Like all ESP design work, it is the servant, not the master, of its circumstances (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Despite this limitation, however, it is expected that the very severity of the design constraints that the enquiry identifies may serve as a useful reference point for others engaged in similar design work or for those who are interested in the language-behavior relationship within a pragmatic course design framework. Second, and perhaps more importantly, a case study approach permits as much, or even more, emphasis to be laid on failure as on success. This is important in the field of syllabus design in which no solution is ideal, no solution is "final", and every solution should be evaluated in some sort of comparative framework.

### 3. SYLLABUS INTEGRATION AND THE LANGUAGE-BEHAVIOR RELATIONSHIP

In the absence of any clear vindication of the rival Second Language Acquisition (SLA) claims made by those who propose a "bottom-up" type of SLA theory (e.g. Pienemann, 1985) and by those who propose a "top-down" type of SLA theory (e.g. Krashen, 1982; Long, 1985), the agnostic task-based syllabus designer will have to fall back on less controversial syllabus design positions for guidance on syllabus integration and on the language-behavior relationship within the syllabus. Brumfit (1984) presents the most comprehensive analysis of general communicative syllabus design and Nunan (1989) provides the most detailed account to date of what a task-based syllabus looks like and how it can be developed.

In regard to syllabus integration, while neither Brumfit nor Nunan categorically rule out the possibility that it might be necessary to deal separately with different orders of syllabus elements, it is also true that neither of them actually mention the possibility. In practice, the weight of their ideas and examples pushes in the direction of integration of all the elements within a single syllabus. Thus, Brumfit (1984, 122) makes clear that a holistic approach is vital for effective language learning:

"Only from goals which have some educational and content value will we achieve language courses which reflect current theories of the nature of language because only when there are messages being carried which are significant to users will there be full engagement with the linguistic code."

The syllabus examples that he gives are all of single integrated syllabuses, usually with time frames of five years. Nunan (1989) goes further than Brumfit in this direction by positing the dual principles of task as the unit of analysis and syllabus construction and of a single grading and selection system based on non-linguistic criteria. These principles make a non-integrated syllabus design difficult to imagine. As already indicated above, Nunan suggests a task-based syllabus should comprise a number of modules each of which consists of a "chain" of tasks and their activity components which both follow a developmental and cumulative sequence from easier to more difficult operations. Each task, moreover, contains within itself a microcosm of all the elements of communicative design, such as inputs, roles, activities and activity goals. The integrity of the chain and its task constituents is, therefore, important.

As regards the roles of language and behavior within a syllabus, both Brumfit and Nunan stress the need first to create a syllabus structure which is organized around language use situations and second to provide a set of syllabus checklists from which the teacher can select and feed in appropriate lower order elements such as grammar and lexis. Where they appear to disagree is on the preconditions for efficient learning within a syllabus. Brumfit (1984, 99-101) identifies three

types of system which he believes can, in principle, facilitate efficient learning: language, content, and problem solving. He differentiates these systems from other systems on the basis of their cumulative and generative properties. In practice, however, after examining the problems inherent in Prabhu's problem solving syllabus, he advocates only language and content as viable systems for maximizing learning efficiency. Thus, he proposes that in the early stages of a syllabus when learners are at a relatively low linguistic level they should be given more opportunities to spend time on "accuracy related" activities than on "fluency related" ones - i.e. spend more time dealing with the language as a system - , but as the learners progress to higher linguistic levels this proportion should be reversed and learners should be engaged in more cognitively demanding and meaning focused content work (Brumfit, 1984, 118-125). Nunan, by contrast, has no apparent interest in emphasizing either accuracy or fluency at any particular stage of the learners' development. For him the task is the all-encompassing unit of analysis and within it the language-task activity relationship is held to be very flexible. When talking about reading tasks he states quite simply (Nunan, 1989, 19):

".....one might find or create an interesting/relevant task at the appropriate level of difficulty and then identify which language items on the syllabus checklist can be introduced or taught through the text/task."

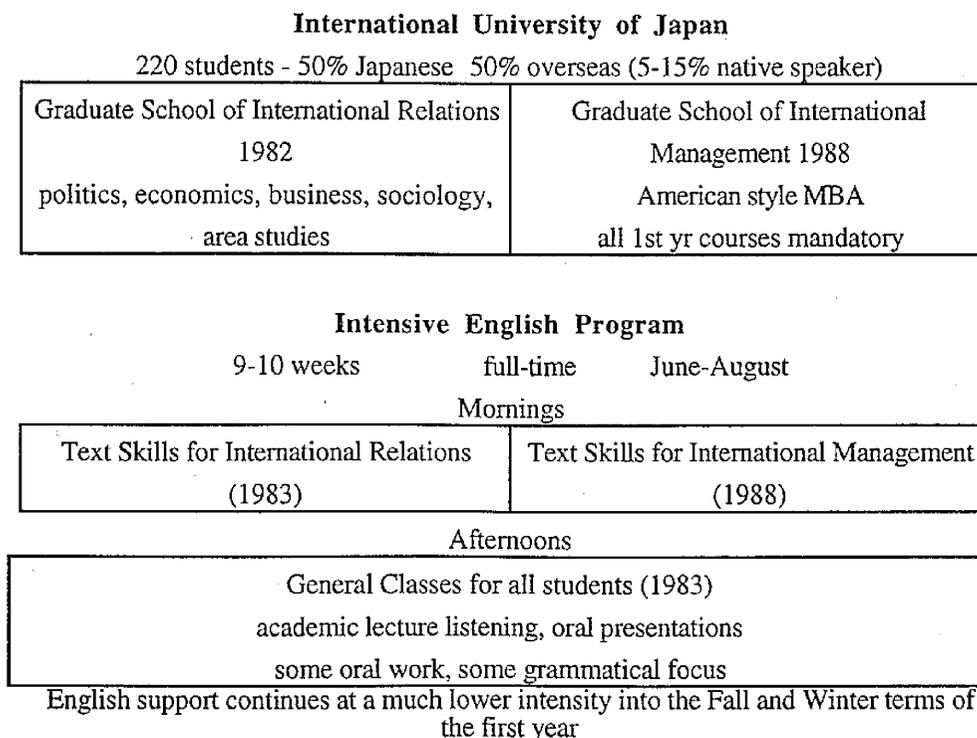
This leads to the conclusion that, although the task-based approach was born directly from the communicative approach's concern with the need to deal with language learning as a process which creates a "capacity for communication rather than a repertoire of communication" (Breen, 1984, 53), the two do not necessarily go about this in the same way.

Assuming that controversial "top-down" and "bottom-up" SLA theories have been set aside and that the syllabus design choices are to be found within the framework of communicative syllabus design, the designers of the graduate level business administration preparation course at IUJ have had two basic choices. The first is to adopt Brumfit's accuracy to fluency model and make sure that the learners acquire a sufficiently developed linguistic competence before becoming fully engaged in more cognitively demanding activities. The second choice is to adopt Nunan's task-based model and focus only on identifying a chain of tasks which need be graded only according to cognitive and performance criteria. In most syllabus design situations, of course, the choice between the two is one of emphasis rather than substance as Nunan's insistence on the careful cognitive and performance grading of tasks will usually ensure that learners are not exposed to demanding content-focused work until a relatively late stage in a course. The choice between the two models, however, becomes much more significant when this careful grading of tasks proves difficult to perform. As will be seen, these two choices correspond roughly to the first two stages of the evolution of the graduate level preparation course at IUJ, with the third and current stage representing a modified combination of the two.

#### 4. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM (ELP) AT THE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF JAPAN (IUJ)

IUJ is an experimental English medium graduate university which was founded in 1982 and now comprises two schools, the Graduate School of International Relations (GSIR), which was founded in 1982, and the Graduate School of International Management (GSIM), which was founded in 1988. **Figure 1** shows in outline form the relation between the two schools and the ELP. The key point to note is that the 9-10 week Intensive English Program (IEP), which precedes the matriculation of the students into the two schools, bears most of the burden for the preparation of mostly Japanese students for the academic and linguistic challenges they will face. It should also be pointed out that the division of the courses into specific needs courses in the mornings and into general courses in the afternoons has, until recently at least, been determined by social and pragmatic factors, rather than by pedagogical ones. The focus of the case study that follows is on the preparation of the students who intend to enter GSIM and pursue an MBA style track of graduate study.

**Figure 1: Overview of IUJ and the ELP**



Through Stages #1 and #2 of the evolution of the preparation course for the students who intend to enter GSIM, the focus was very much on the syllabus design of the morning Text Skills for International Management classes which deal with the needs that are specific to Japanese students entering an American style business administration program. Stage #3, the current stage, also pays attention to a broader complementary role that the general afternoon classes may be able to play.

## **5. THE CHALLENGES FACING PROSPECTIVE JAPANESE GSIM STUDENTS**

Although it was not clear in 1988 what all the challenges facing the Japanese GSIM students were, it was clear by 1989 that these challenges were quite formidable, and by 1992 there was a growing appreciation that these challenges were even greater than previously thought. For the sake of order and convenience, these challenges are identified with the benefit of hindsight and according to Nunan's three criteria for grading tasks: activity factors, input factors, and learner factors.

Activity factors. In addition to having to deal with the normal EAP activities of written examinations, lecture listening, note-taking, and textbook reading, the GSIM program's American MBA orientation means that the learners have to be able to participate in frequent case discussions and to write occasional analyses of cases. These case discussions, which proceed at a rapid pace and typically last about 90 minutes, are probably the most difficult challenge facing the Japanese learners.

Input factors. Although MBA textbooks present no unusual challenges for Japanese learners, the lengthy case texts and the listening input from case discussions represent unusually severe difficulties for non-native speakers of English who are not already advanced in all areas of English competence. The case texts are usually between 15 and 25 pages in length, and, though their propositional density is not particularly high, they are crammed with an overwhelming amount of detail in a text structure that deliberately eschews a clear interpretive form of organization. Making sense of these case texts requires interpretive reading skills that lie at the outermost point on the range of reading macroskills. The listening input from case discussions is just as challenging because of the presence in the GSIM classes of a significant number of native speakers and a larger number of very high proficiency non-native speakers from countries outside Japan. Exchanges tend to be spoken rapidly with a lot of idiomatic content. It is necessary for the Japanese students to be able to decode these messages quickly and formulate their own responses quickly if they are to maintain the capacity to participate in a case discussion.

Learner factors. The most striking learner factor is the relatively low general English proficiency of the Japanese learners at the start of the IEP. An average TOEFL score of 540-550 in a range of 500-600 is typical. The learners' productive English skills are generally weaker still. Most Japanese learners have been exposed to little or no writing instruction or writing practice within Japanese educational institutions *in their own LI*, let alone in English L2 (Mok, 1993). Furthermore, the Japanese learners' good passive knowledge of English morphology and grammar is not usually complemented by an equally good grasp of the situational use and function of elements from the language system. In the area of cognitive capabilities Japanese learners are handicapped by the tendency of the Japanese educational and cultural systems to ignore or actively discourage critical and heuristic modes of thought (Mok, 1993) that are essential for good case analysis.

Perhaps the biggest constraint of all, however, is the limited amount of time - 9-10 weeks - in which to steer the Japanese learners towards a position from which they can start to tackle, and not feel overwhelmed by, these challenges.

## 6. STAGE #1 1988-1989

The first stage of the syllabus design for Text Skills for International Management (TSIM) was marked by a lack of information about the sort of academic and linguistic challenges the students would face on completion of the IEP. In this informational vacuum the syllabus designer decided to employ a traditional EAP approach based on the three skills of reading, writing, and speaking, with the afternoon classes covering lecture listening and note-taking skills. It was expected that the learners would be able to apply their improved competences in these skill areas to meet the particular and largely unknown challenges they would face in the graduate program. As is made clear in the preceding section of this paper, there was also some justification for thinking that the Japanese learners had yet to reach the level of linguistic proficiency that, in a general communicative methodology, would be regarded as a necessary condition for full exposure to even the initial cognitive and behavioral demands of a graduate level content course.

In this first TSIM syllabus the language and skills were always introduced and practiced in a contextualized and meaning-focused way, but, unlike in a task-based syllabus, the task activities that were performed were never drawn together into the fully integrated and cumulative chain of tasks that Nunan would recognize as "tasks". Neither was there any attempt to use any authentic GSIM materials. Furthermore, there was a conscious plan to start with an emphasis on accuracy related activities and then shift to fluency related ones. **Figure 2** provides an overview of this initial syllabus design. The solution to the problem of how to balance cognitive/behavioral and

linguistic objectives was simple: priority was given to instruction that would provide meaningful contexts for the realization of the linguistic objectives regardless of whether these would also contribute to the realization of the cognitive/behavioral objectives. It was implicitly accepted that these latter objectives could be accommodated at a later stage in the language curriculum or could be achieved by the learners themselves through immersion in the GSIM program.

Figure 2: The TSIM Syllabus Design in 1989

Skill	Start & Middle	End
	→	→
<b>Expository writing</b>	•paragraph level notions & short essays functions e.g. exemplification e.g. causality	
<b>Reading</b>	•newspaper articles •ESL adapted short cases	ESL adapted short cases
<b>Discussion</b>	•newspaper articles •ESL adapted short cases	ESL adapted short cases
<b>Sentence level</b>	<i>You're in business</i>	<i>You're in business</i>

## 7. STAGE #2 1990-1991

The Stage #1 syllabus had reasonable credentials, but it failed to satisfy either the learners, whose evaluations were not enthusiastic, or the GSIM professors, who were upset by the seeming inability or unwillingness of the Japanese students to participate in the case discussions during their first year of study. It appeared that even the more proficient Japanese learners who had performed well in the IEP tended not to participate in the case discussions.

The obvious response was to engage in a needs analysis of the GSIM "target situation". Although this needs analysis was never conducted in a formal way, there was soon collected a large body of evidence in favor of a task-based approach. A majority of the GSIM courses, and the most challenging for the Japanese students, were organized around the American MBA case method pioneered at Harvard Business School (Christensen, 1987). One outstanding characteristic of this case method is that it constitutes in an unusually concentrated form a paradigm example of the "pedagogical task" defined by Long as a task derived indirectly from the real world by

abstracting real world tasks into a number of "task types" (Long, 1985). The MBA case method takes this abstractive process one stage further by identifying just a single task type - the case method - that can process the vast complexity of business administration data into a pedagogically manageable form. The case method task-type and the case task are identical: the case method, therefore, proceeds through a continual repetition of the case task. Five of the six task components identified by Nunan (Nunan, 1989) - goals, activities, teacher role, learner role, and settings - remain more or less fixed: only the sixth component, the inputs, changes with each subsequent case. Analyzing the MBA case method in terms of "task" was thus both logical and easy (Ahmed, 1990).

In principle, then, a task-based approach seemed appropriate. It seemed feasible to incorporate the case method task directly into the TSIM syllabus since each case task required a cumulative progression through a number of sub-task activities, notably reading an analytical text(s), reading a case text, writing an analysis of the case, and discussing the case in class. Such a direct incorporation also accorded with the expressed desires of the learners.

In actually implementing such a syllabus, however, the grading and sequencing of the tasks was immediately recognized as the major difficulty. How could it be possible to grade and sequence an essentially repetitive set of tasks in which most of the task components were fixed? Clearly, the range of available solutions would be much narrower than usual: in fact, the range narrowed to just two solutions.

The first solution was to manipulate the five fixed task components so that they could be graded according to cognitive and performance criteria. Thus, the initial goals would not necessarily be to master the case, the initial learner's role would not be to behave aggressively or to analyze the case in a critical way, the time allowed for the early set of task activities would be generous, and so on. Useful though these gradations would be, it was not expected that they would in themselves provide sufficient opportunities for the extensive feeding in of the controlled linguistic use and function practice opportunities that the Japanese learners very much needed. Their linguistic level was simply too low for them to "acquire" in an unsystematic way in a 9 week period all the language they would need to perform, even at a minimal level, in GSIM case discussions. Some way had to be found to force the pace. Here the inputs offered the only solution.

It was soon discovered that neither the case texts nor the case discussion listening input could be graded cognitively in any systematic way since the former are designed to yield an open-ended number of interconnected insights and the latter is an unpredictable product of this openness of the case texts. For good measure, the case texts also appeared resistant to linguistic grading. The learners had, furthermore, warned that the adapted ESL short case texts typified by *Case Studies in International Management* (Grosse & Grosse, 1988) provided a misleading and oversimplified introduction to the cognitive demands of the MBA case method. This left only the inputs from

analytical texts, usually textbook chapters or journal articles, whose reading usually precedes the reading of the case text. These could be graded cognitively according to various criteria, such as the degree of familiarity the learners were likely to have with the topic and the extent to which text content was concrete or abstract; they could also be selected on the basis that they would provide suitable opportunities for the identification and controlled practice of the function and use of key language elements, including basic written exponents and lexis frequently encountered in the MBA area, that would help the learners to build the linguistic foundation without which they would not be able to participate effectively in the unpredictable flux of an MBA case discussion or to write effectively. But it was not found that these texts could be systematically selected and sequenced by applying simultaneously *both* sets of criteria. Either the focus on the linguistic elements would have to be dealt with outside the main task-based framework or some sort of compromise solution would have to be adopted that would maintain the integrity of the task-based approach.

A compromise solution was adopted by which these texts would be chosen, as far as possible, according to both sets of criteria, but, where this proved impossible, the emphasis would be placed on selection according to opportunities for more controlled linguistic and written work. Selected modules from this syllabus solution are presented in **Figure 3**. Within this integrated task-based syllabus it was, in principle at least, easy to accommodate both the linguistic objectives and the surface behavioral objectives related to the learners' roles and to the case discussion activity. Whether this syllabus solution would also help the learners to develop an understanding of the cognitive processes required by the case method remained an open question.

Figure 3: Two modules from the 1991 TSIM Syllabus

Analytical Text	Opportunities for Linguistic Inputs	Discussion practice based on analytical text	Case Work
→	→	→	→
<b>Case Cycle No. 1</b>			
<b>"Country Analysis"</b>  <b>Reading skills</b> e.g. skimming & scanning	<b>Lexis related to ec. policy</b>  <b>General exponents</b> classification, gradable adjectives, future/probability  <b>Expository writing forms &amp; exponents</b> classification & simple definition	<b>Aim</b> apply the framework to Japan  <b>Functional exponents</b> e.g. asking for repetition & clarification	<b>"North American Telecom International"</b>  •case reading •case discussion
<b>Case Cycle No. 3</b>			
<b>Chaps. from "Operations Management"</b>	<b>Lexis related to operations management</b>  <b>General exponents</b> e.g. purpose and method  <b>Expository writing exponents</b> classificat'n, process, exemplificat'n	<b>Aim</b> apply the framework to your own industry  <b>Functional exponents</b> e.g. polite/real concessions	<b>"McDonalds Corp." &amp; "Burger King Corp."</b>  •case reading •case discussion

### 8. STAGE #3 1992-

The Stage #2 syllabus was highly evaluated by the learners because of its "rehearsal" value (Widdowson, 1987), but it was apparent to the syllabus designer/instructor that the case discussion rehearsals generally failed in their mission of generating self-sustaining and extended discourse. The most fundamental reason for this was that the Japanese learners were still working in a cognitive mode that was at odds with the MBA case method. Whereas the MBA case method represents an exercise in critical and creative thinking which yields sets of options rather than firm answers and can even turn on itself and become intensely reflective (Christensen, 1987), the Japanese learners tended to approach each case with a positivist search for a "correct" answer waiting to be revealed by a master formula. Answers were valued more than the reasoning process that should have led to them. The case discussions languished.

The emphasis placed on the analytical texts as inputs by the Stage #2 syllabus was undoubtedly helping the learners to develop their linguistic competences and yet, at the same time, this emphasis

on these cognitively one-dimensional texts had the effect of discouraging the learners from using these linguistic competences for their ultimate intended purpose. A way had to be found to do two things at the same time: (1) help the learners to break through the cognitive barrier and appreciate that in the MBA case method the *process* rather than the *outcome* of critical reasoning is important; (2) attend to the learners' considerable linguistic and writing skills needs.

It has been decided the only feasible way to do this is to reduce the need for syllabus design compromises by removing much of the controlled linguistic and written work out of the task-based "core" and housing these areas of work in their own syllabuses where they can be related to, but not determined by, their task-based parent. The task-based syllabus is then freed to focus on the development of the unusually large and sophisticated cognitive and behavioral capacities the learners need to deal with the case inputs and with the case discussion activities and roles. As a result, the emphasis can be switched from regarding the analytical texts as the key input to regarding the analytical text-case text *relationship* as the key input. The change of emphasis is vital if the learners are to grasp that the analytical texts are a necessary rather than a sufficient condition for understanding the case text. Such an abstract and complex form of input could not formerly have been considered when there was a linguistic agenda making demands for systematic opportunities for more concrete linguistic work. Linguistic work continues within the task-based core, but it is now primarily diagnostic and remedial in function. The reduction in the load on the task-based core has the added benefit of increasing the priority given to case discussion listening work. **Figure 4** illustrates the practical effects of this change of emphasis.

Figure 4: Two modules from the 1992-3 TSIM Syllabus

Analytical Text	Case Text	Relating the analytical text and case text	Full case discussion
→	→	→	→
<b>Case Cycle No. 1</b>			
<b>"Creating and managing joint ventures in China"</b>  Reading skills e.g. skimming & scanning	<b>"Nike in China"</b>  A guide to reading a case text  Some lexical work	Macro reading & interpretive skills  Some discussion work & feedback functional exponents e.g. asking for repetition & clarification	<b>"Nike in China"</b> Feed-back at all levels  Listening to a real MBA case discussion
<b>Case Cycle No. 3</b>			
<b>Chaps. from "Operations Management"</b>  Reading skills e.g. more intensive reading	<b>"McDonalds Corp." &amp; "Burger King Corp."</b>  A guide to reading a case text  Some lexical work	Macro reading & interpretive skills  Some discussion work & feedback functional exponents e.g. real/polite concessions	<b>"McDonalds " &amp; "B. K."</b> Feed-back....  Listening to a real MBA case discussion

## 9. CONCLUSION

The pressure of all the syllabus design constraints has had the effect of peeling away all the broader surface layers of the course components from an irreducible task-based core. In this situation, the core capacity of the task-based approach is revealed to be its capacity to deal with specific cognitive and behavioral objectives in a coherent way. The lack of time and the overwhelming nature of the challenges make it necessary that the focus on these objectives be as clear and uncluttered as possible, with linguistic work performed mainly for the purpose of solving local comprehension and production problems. The challenges facing the learners in the areas of relatively basic language usage and fundamentally basic writing skills make it equally necessary that the syllabus structures housing them should be clear and uncluttered. Such structures are readily available in the general communicative tradition that gave birth to "tasks". The linguistic and writing skills work remains highly contextualized in content related to the students' later degree

work, but at a much lower level of complexity and sophistication than in the task-based core. The conversion to this syllabus structure is not yet complete, but the initial evaluations from both students and teachers are highly encouraging.

A major concern for any syllabus designer must be that this Stage #3 syllabus structure clearly does not correspond to any models of syllabus design which are currently in widespread use. Its division of labor contradicts the implicit, sometimes explicit, stipulation within both the communicative and the emerging "task" traditions that syllabuses be coherent and integrated.

The concern is understandable, but it should also be remembered that syllabus models are designed with a range of "normal" circumstances in mind. Prime among these is the rather idealized assumption that learners will be in the care of that syllabus model from the time they embark on the language learning trail to the time they leave it. Reality is messier, but syllabus designers and language teachers can usually make the necessary adjustments within a single syllabus framework. This case study is a reminder that in certain unusual circumstances the adjustments may be so great as to break the framework itself.

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