

NOTIONAL SYLLABUSES: TWENTY ONE YEARS ON

Introduction

It is now twenty one years since the landmark work “Notional Syllabuses”¹ was published but still the ideas presented therein form the basis of lively discussion as to the best way to teach English as a Foreign Language (T.E.F.L.). Indeed at the recent 6th International House English Language Teaching Symposium, held at the University of Minho in Braga the renowned text book writer Robert O’Neil referred to the book as being the foundation of a teaching approach which he labelled “Naive Functionalism”. Perhaps therefore it is an appropriate time to return to the source and critically re-examine the ideas put forward originally in 1976 by David Wilkins.

The Outline

“Notional Syllabuses” contains three chapters which in broad terms deal with the theoretical background, the provision of a syllabus inventory and the implications of the operation of notionally based teaching programmes.

The basic theoretical starting point is a distinction between approaches to syllabus design which Wilkins characterises as being either “synthetic” or “analytic”, which are the two non-mutually exclusive ends of a continuum. Synthetic approaches, and in particular grammatical syllabuses, are seen as being made up of separate pre-selected and ordered

¹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Notional Syllabuses*, London, O.U.P., 1976.

units of grammatical structures which are mastered incrementally until re-synthesis of the global language occurs in the later stages of learning. Analytic approaches do not rely on such linguistic controls, allowing for great variety of structure. Learners progress through a series of increasingly accurate approximations to the global language until mastery is achieved. Wilkins claims notional syllabuses are analytic.

Wilkins identifies the main criteria for the staging and sequencing of structures in synthetic syllabuses as simplicity, regularity, frequency and contrastive difficulty. He also discusses the criteria of selection of lexical items and notes the pedagogic considerations of teachability, classroom management value, L1 transfer implications and "relations of recommended precedence".² These criteria may be in conflict and yet form the basis of the organisation of a grammatical syllabus. The nature of this selection and ordering of items is seen as invalid by Wilkins for a number of reasons including: there is no consideration of a structure's value to the learner; it assumes an equation between form and meaning and subsequent connection in terms of mastery, which is untrue; it is based on a system of paradigmatic contrasts which does not represent the range of distinct syntactic structures possible. But the strongest criticism is that grammatical syllabuses take no account of language use, only focusing on grammatical and lexical meaning. There is no recognition of the need to develop communicative competence, to view language in terms of utterance rather than sentence.

Wilkins observes a need for a planned approach to the explicit learning/teaching of communicative conventions, to include elements like situational relevance, interpersonal appropriacy and distributional information about structure in relation to use. He seeks to include such pragmatic elements in notional syllabuses where they have been absent in grammatical syllabuses. The desired communicative capacity of the learners is the starting point: the content of the language not the forms. So semantic demands determine the linguistic content of teaching units which are semantically labelled and are organised according to the value of the concepts and functions required. As a result a notional syllabus would contain "what the learners should most usefully be able to communicate"³

² WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

³ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

and there would be "no ordered exposure to the grammar of the language".⁴

Wilkins does not attempt to provide an entirely comprehensive inventory for notional syllabuses. He deals only with general aspects of meaning and use, recognising the impossibility of predicting all the possible utterances a learner may wish to produce. His distinction is three-fold. Ideational meaning is encompassed in "semantico-grammatical categories." The expression of attitude including such aspects as truth, certainty and contingency is catered for under "modal meaning categories". Functional meaning in context and language use in discourse is dealt with under "categories of communicative function". The categories are viewed as an inventory to be employed selectively without mutual exclusivity in the construction of an actual syllabus. (A fuller breakdown of the categories' composition is provided in an appendix.)

In terms of the form of notional syllabuses Wilkins stresses the priority of the semantic content being a direct reflection of identified learner needs to express particular types of communication. The central problem of operation is that there is "no one-to-one relation between grammatical forms and either grammatical meanings or language functions"⁵ and that "any function may take a variety of forms".⁶ But there are "recurrent associations between a given function and certain linguistic features"⁷ and "conventional interpretations"⁸ from which the learner can generalise, adapt and combine.

For global course design Wilkins recommends a cyclic approach so that the range of expression available to the learner can increase in an orderly fashion, and where the relationship between cycles is more important than each cycle's internal sequence. "Semantic and behavioural prediction"⁹ is the source of limitation and ordering. Medium, settings and interpersonal relations are to be considered when setting up objectives and priorities. There is also recognition of the importance of grammatical criteria such as "relative productivity, simplicity and contrastive

⁴ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁶ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁷ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁸ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

difficulty”¹⁰ at exponent level. But the overriding priority must be “semantic value”¹¹ rather than the traditional simplicity of structure. Wilkins suggests some kind of thematic continuity to “overcome undue fragmentation”¹² of the grammatical sequence.

High surrender value, limited duration, specific purpose and remedial courses are also covered with regard to their more “individual” relation to a notional approach to syllabus design. The book concludes with a limited discussion of some more explicitly “classroom” implications such as teaching materials, especially the use of authentic materials, the potential of role playing techniques and finally with some general open-ended comments about the implications for language testing.

The Assessment

Wilkins’ distinction between synthetic and analytic approaches to syllabus design in general (and more specifically to structural /grammatical content) can only be seen as useful if his own notional approach is accepted as being analytic. The claim he makes of “basing our approach on the learner’s analytic capacities”¹³ does not seem to hold water by the end of the book. Learners would encounter language that has been pre-selected, isolated and subjected to the kind of analysis which can be viewed as causing interference in the process of teaching/learning. With a notional syllabus the analysis of components of terminal language behaviour is by no means decreased in comparison to a grammatical syllabus. Likewise, the pattern of instruction is derived from “expert analysis” and does not in any way diminish the role of the teacher. Organisational demands ensure heavy selection, isolation and ordering of functional chunks with the focus remaining fixed on language. This is much the same process as happens with a grammatical syllabus and it prevents a more accurate reflection of real language interaction, where meaning is negotiable, through truly communicative tasks. The word “language” could equally well be substituted by “structures” or “notions”

¹⁰ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹¹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

¹² WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

¹³ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

and the learners finish by re-synthesising in both cases. It has also been pointed out by Widdowson that inventories of functions and notions do not necessarily reflect the way languages are learned any more than do inventories of grammatical points and lexical items. He also claims that dividing language into discrete units of whatever type misrepresents the nature of language as communication.¹⁴

However, this line of argument does nothing to diminish the importance of Wilkins' decision to base his approach on a semantic rather than a structural starting point. The highlighting of a form of communicative competence, which goes beyond the grammatical competence previously catered for, brings to notice the inherent partiality of grammatical syllabuses and consequently language teaching and the need to view language learning as a good deal more complex and subtle than mastery of the grammatical system. The roots of the notional approach can be traced back to authors such as Hymes and his conception of "communicative competence"¹⁵ and Searle and his original thoughts on "speech acts"¹⁶, among others.

Wilkins states "the learner has to learn rules of communication as well as rules of grammar"¹⁷ and that "the learning of the communicative conventions... has to be planned for."¹⁸ He aims to create a syllabus where the focus is on what people say, not on how they say it: the utterance force and "meaning as use"¹⁹. Without doubt Wilkins is re-emphasising a highly valid distinction in the terms of language competence and is correct in placing such high value on "meaning as use". These ideas represent a much more insightful approach to the nature of communication than any structuralist approach does. However, the problem arises that there is no predictable, fixed, finite system of rules governing communicative knowledge and that only a limited sample of highly ritualised or routine acts can be said to have conventional performance and content. It could be

¹⁴ Cf. WIDDOWSON, H. G. — *Explorations in Applied Linguistics*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1979.

¹⁵ Cf. GUMPERZ, J.; HYMES, D. (eds.) — *Directions in Sociolinguistics, the Ethnography of Communication*, New York, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1972.

¹⁶ Cf. SEARLE, J. R. — *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1969.

¹⁷ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁸ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹⁹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

argued that there are no rules of communication and no conventions available as yet as a basis for teaching/learning, so that a notional approach will not be able to provide a framework which is both consistent and accessible.

There is an extensive problem of selection operating at each level of a notional analysis: which body of language provides the source of the notions and functions; which notions and functions are to be considered as having value to the learners: and which linguistic forms should be selected to expound those functions? Wilkins recognises such problems: "Even if one could identify a simple need, it is unlikely that there would be a simple form that met it"²⁰. The answer to problems of this kind is said to be found in a needs analysis which identifies the required language specifics and guides syllabus content. But this perhaps only by-passes a more fundamental weakness in that a notional syllabus does not directly accommodate the development of communicative abilities like interpretation, expression and negotiation which act as a kind of bridge between knowledge and performance, preferring to concentrate on the limitation of the ultimate product and, by nature of its organisation, to reduce real negotiation of meaning in the context of authentic communicative events. This conforms to the opinion expressed by Allwright that "communication has become fully accepted as an essential and major component of the product of language teaching, but has not yet been given more than a token place as an essential and major component of the process."²¹

Wilkins pinpoints the central failings of grammatical syllabuses: "The assumption seems to be that form and meaning are in a one-to one relation"²² and that "the fundamental facts of syntax are almost inevitably taught, but there remains a good deal that is not"²³. A notional syllabus combats these failings by a re-organisation of ideational meaning into "semantico-grammatical categories" and the inclusion of functional meaning in "categories of communicative function". Despite the usefulness of this more embracing analysis of language in relation to communication

²⁰ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

²¹ ALLWRIGHT, R. — *Language learning through communication practice*, in BRUMFIT, C. J.; JOHNSON, K. (eds.) — *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1979.

²² WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

²³ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

Wilkins provides little assistance as to how a notional syllabus can deal with structural input in an adequate manner. He states "much greater variety of linguistic structure is permitted"²⁴ and there is no attempt to achieve "careful linguistic control"²⁵. So within a functional unit there will be structural diversity and varied complexity. This makes it very difficult to achieve a principled structural progression while still maintaining functional criteria in any strong sense: "it is difficult to focus attention on structural concerns in a principled or comprehensive way".²⁶ The lack of any fully developed pragmatic analysis precludes the necessary information on discourse conventions, such as range of functional applicability and exponent distribution from being available: "No attempt is made at a full linguistic description of the categories listed. Indeed they cannot be specified because often the facts are not adequately known..."²⁷. This lack of structural focus could be ignored if acquisition was seen as being dependent solely on the provision of "comprehensible input" as has been suggested by theorists such as Krashen²⁸.

Problems in the classroom would inevitably arise. For example, at low levels a clear structural progression provides a solid psychological and pedagogic prop for learners: something "concrete" with a name and a beginning and an end is being learned; a structure can be "done" and then it is time to move on, there is a clear sense of progress being made. Indeed many teachers would have similar feelings given a traditional view of language learning and instruction. Many students would also face problems when dealing with such a completely different learning experience. We would be well advised to recall that "Learning takes place within the context of teaching, but not as a direct result of it. We should still endeavour to plan relevant lessons with clear, valid aims and execute these plans as thoroughly as possible with the maximum student

²⁴ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

²⁵ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁶ JOHNSON, K. — *Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology*, London, Pergamon, 1982. p. 43.

²⁷ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

²⁸ Cf. KRASHEN, S. — *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford, Pergamon, 1982.

participation.”²⁹ Functional materials would need to be non-overtly introduced, initially at an activity level rather than from above, at syllabus level.

Functional units are difficult to delimit in terms of content and there is a degree of category overlap: “The categories do therefore to some extent overlap one another and some functions could be placed equally well within more than one category”³⁰. Hence selection and exponent inclusion has an arbitrary and subjective nature. As such the units would be more difficult to teach with decisions about quantity, type and quality of presentation and practice being based largely on the teacher’s intuitions. Many teachers would be unsettled by this: teachers who were non-native or part-trained or part-time. Wilkins notes that “structural diversity in any analytic syllabus or teaching materials is inevitable”³¹ and “significant linguistic forms can be isolated... so that learning can be focused on important aspects of the language structure”³² but does not provide any methodological guidelines as to how both the diversity and focusing can be accommodated: it is outside the bounds of a syllabus designer’s remit. However I think this is rather a dangerous type of distinction to use as defence. White reports: “Various models have been created with a view to providing a satisfactory mix of form and function, though there is an absence of any evaluation of the models proposed. Similarly, syllabus designers lack any empirical evidence upon which to base their selection of structures and exponents when working within a functional framework, and to date there has been an unhealthy reliance on intuition.”³³ A syllabus designer may work separately from a linguist or a materials writer or a teacher, but there is surely an element of interdependence: a syllabus which cannot be taught is equally as useless as materials which do not fit a syllabus.

It could further be argued that any effort to match exponents to functional units is misplaced. Creating fixed correlations between forms and functions does not capture the full meaning potential of the gram-

²⁹ SOARS, J.; SOARS, L. — *Whatever you do don't use the T. word*, in «ELT News and Views», Year 3, Vol. 2, June, 1996, p. 60.

³⁰ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

³¹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

³² WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

³³ WHITE, R.V. — *The ELT Curriculum*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 82-83.

matical system. Wilkins relies on "recurrent associations between a given function and certain linguistic features"³⁴ and that "conventions of use do exist"³⁵ to outweigh the fact that "An individual sentence can be used to perform virtually any function in the language and consequently any function may take a variety of forms"³⁶. But there is little evidence to suggest any generalisations that can usefully be drawn from mapping forms onto functions through such a highly selective process. The relationship is not fixed: the participants in communicative interaction choose their exponents and create the value of their utterances. Following the same line of thought Criper and Widdowson point out that "one basic communicative act can be fulfilled by a variety of linguistic forms and... one linguistic form can be used to fulfil a variety of communicative acts. There is no simple one-to-one correspondence between messages and the forms in the language code which reflect the functions which messages fulfil."³⁷ Perhaps it would be more productive to involve learners in such events through communicative tasks using language which is not pre-selected under functional headings and analysed into exponents for easy classroom digestion: "to acquire the mutually negotiated and dynamic conventions which give value to formal signs" as Candlin puts it³⁸.

How to select "significant linguistic forms" is a problem which Wilkins leaves largely unresolved despite a lengthy discussion of criteria worthy of influence. Degrees of formality and politeness, elements of interpersonal relations and questions of markedness are discussed. However the linguistically interesting analytical focus on discourse throws up more questions than answers for the language teacher. The role of intonation is noted as being crucial but this is generally recognised as being very difficult to teach, even in fragments, let alone in a systematic manner. There exists an attitude among some that it is impossible to teach. Brown comments that "It is important that the language teacher should know in which areas he is treading confidently and in which areas there

³⁴ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

³⁵ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

³⁶ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 56.

³⁷ Cf. CRIPER, C.; WIDDOWSON, H. G. — *Sociolinguistics and Language Teaching*, in ALLEN, J. P. B.; PIT CORDER, S. — *Papers in Applied Linguistics Vol. 2*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1978, pp. 205-206.

³⁸ CANDLIN, C. — *The Communicative Teaching of English*, London, Longman, 1978, p. 12.

is no adequate theoretical backing. Too many intonation courses are on the market making claims about areas we do not begin to control.”³⁹ The potential for teacher uncertainty and resistance does not bode well for the use of criteria such as these. Perhaps the criticised criteria of grammatical simplicity and regularity of form would be replaced by social simplicity and typicality of exponent when employing notional rather than grammatical criteria of selection. However this would lead to a fragmentation of the global language which ultimately requires a process of re-synthesis in just the same way as occurs with grammatically based selection criteria.

A cyclic approach within notional syllabuses is recommended by Wilkins in contrast to the linear accumulative approach of grammatical syllabuses. The earliest cycles should deal only with the “simplest and least differentiated” elements of the “semantic repertoire”⁴⁰ and the learner “can work through all the themes at one level before returning to the same themes at the next, higher level.”⁴¹

I would anticipate this procedure as being likely to induce a lack of motivation among some students, in that a feeling of being stuck at one level might develop. There would be little obvious element of progress within a cycle, which could be a lengthy period of time in an Institute offering only 3 hours class per week. There might also be little obvious connection between cycles. Wilkins speaks of the need to avoid such “undue fragmentation”⁴² and suggests a story line as a solution. My own experience of story lines in course books leads me to be ill-disposed to accept this solution as strong enough to be plausible and motivating. The fact that “respective grammatical categories are not covered exhaustively when they have made any appearance in one semantically defined unit”⁴³ creates a sense of fragmentation and non-system which a materials-centred solution like a storyline would be unlikely to overcome, and leave a sense of incompleteness which some students would find frustrating and demotivating. It is also true that grammatical units are just as incomplete and questions of wider organisation have to be faced, by both notional and grammatical syllabuses.

³⁹ BROWN, G. — *Phonological Theory and Language Teaching*, in ALLEN, J. P. B.; PIT CORDER, S. — *Op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁴⁰ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴¹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴² WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁴³ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 67.

A major concern in assessing the contribution notional syllabuses could make is their applicability to general language courses. Wilkins says: "They (notional syllabuses) are organised in terms of the purposes for which people are learning language and the kinds of language performance that are necessary to meet those purposes"⁴⁴. This advantage only remains valid when some purpose for learning is assumed and it is further assumed that there are "kinds of language performance" that fit with those purposes: needs "will be expressed in particular types of communication"⁴⁵. Within a single class of students a very wide range of needs, purposes and intentions will be present: a class of perhaps 25 students varying in age with a huge variety of reasons for being there. It would be impossible to include all their needs and purposes comprehensively in planning a course. Strevens identifies a series of factors directly associated with the variability individual learners may exhibit related to the learner's identity or "static qualities" and to "the manageability of his learning" or "dynamic qualities", the former being completely beyond the control of the teacher.⁴⁶ Many students may have no immediate use for the language, it is just supplementing part of their general education programme, some may have an immediate need for the language for educational or business reasons. Wilkins provides no guidance as to what should be considered "core" material (in this book) and it is doubtful that the principles of the notional approach as outlined here could be maintained in their strongest form in any attempt to produce a needs related syllabus, with functional-notional material to cover the whole range of abilities for students on a general language course. Indeed Wilkins recognises this weakness: "it is doubtful whether global courses provide the most effective field of application of the notional approach"⁴⁷.

Conclusion

The question of where the most effective application of Wilkins' proposals lies remains open to debate. I see it as being in the sphere of Intermediate remedial classes and non-exam higher level classes. The

⁴⁴ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁴⁵ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ Cf. STREVEN, P. — *New Orientations in the Teaching of English*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1977, p. 43.

⁴⁷ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 69.

former presupposes a large amount of traditional if individualised watered-down grammatical syllabus associated input has been covered, albeit not without some success. A notional approach would avoid unnecessary repetition of a failed strategy and provide an alternative, better focused attempt at activating communication. Above F.C.E. level there are few non-exam classes available and many students give up following the "F.C.E. experience" as their needs are no longer being addressed. As Ellis mentions: "If the goal is to participate in natural conversation, the learner will need to develop his vernacular style by acquiring L2 knowledge that is automatic but unanalysed"⁴⁸. A notional approach would offer a change in style of learning and materials that would be well-placed to exploit existing grammatical competence in a challenging, fresh and involving manner, developing "ways of using language that are appropriate to the situation in which and for which it is required"⁴⁹ over a wide rhetorical range.

Wilkins presents a convincing and wide-ranging condemnation of structural/grammatical syllabuses. His comments would be worthy of the attention of many current teachers. There remains a desire and a conviction to instil grammatical competence at the expense of all other considerations. It is not difficult to see how hard it would be to change. The students are used to this kind of approach and the delicate re-training of the classroom and learning habits of the students entailed by a notional approach would be problematic for many teachers, who may be sceptical and themselves need re-training. There would have to be some way of avoiding a negative reaction from teachers who considered themselves "good teachers". Assuming a move to adopt a fully-fledged notional syllabus the problems would be considerable. However such a move would be unwise. Rather an increased awareness of the drawbacks of grammatical syllabuses and further exploration of the implications for classroom practices and materials provided by Wilkins would be the goal. Indeed he, in 1979, later concluded: "I would therefore be content if, for the present, notional and functional considerations were to be regarded as simply providing another dimension to the existing grammatical and situational parameters — a way of ensuring that general courses do not lose sight of

⁴⁸ ELLIS, R. — *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1986, pp. 244-245.

⁴⁹ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

the fact that linguistic forms provide a means to an end and that end is communication.”⁵⁰

A concentration on communicative activities only loosely linked through notional or functional labels and with a far from detailed definition of linguistic exponents is a possible alternative. The focus would be on task and not linguistic content with some element of gradation of conceptual complexity and some influence allowed for grouping according to task similarity. This would go some way to overcoming the objections centred on the unpredictability of use and inconsistency of grammatical realisation associated with the notional approach’s selective analysis without having to abandon the insights gained from the categories established by Wilkins. For example, the meaning categories could maintain a role as prompts for form production and practice. A move away from the demands of “terminal behaviour” and “product” would be of value in the sphere of general courses so that a learner who does not progress to a high level of proficiency has nonetheless gained a defined body of usable language rather than being left with a partial grasp of the grammatical system or a limited range of functionally determined phrases: a kind of small bank of contextualised fixed patterns of functions. A change in viewpoint, then, focusing on the “process” aspect would be appropriate: “Process objectives differ from product objectives in that they describe, not what learners will do as a result of instruction, but the experiences that the learner will undergo in the classroom. These experiences will not necessarily involve the in-class rehearsal of final performance, although that may do so.”⁵¹

Wilkins acknowledges a lack of real methodological back-up for notional syllabuses at the time of writing, providing no “coherent and adequate account of the methods and techniques to be used”⁵² while mentioning the likely crucial importance of authentic materials and role playing. But assuming the existence of functional materials, their great advantage would be to provide language practice of a semantically homogeneous variety operating under “real” constraints of time, informa-

⁵⁰ WILKINS, D. A. — *Grammatical, Situational and Notional Syllabuses*, in BRUMFIT, C. J.; JOHNSON, J. (eds.) — *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

⁵¹ NUNAN, D. — *Syllabus Design*, Oxford, O.U.P., 1988, p. 88.

⁵² WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, p. 78.

tion discrimination, linguistic selection and so on. (This was never possible with materials derived from a grammatical syllabus.) Such materials would be likely to sustain students' interest and motivation as there can be language use and performance regardless of not having the full linguistic resources available. This moves closer to the view that language is learned as a whole act rather than learned through the forging together of the various constituent skills. The fulcrum of any communicative act is meaning and it is this element the notional approach is based on while attempting to maintain systematic intrinsic cohesion in a syllabus.

Wilkins speaks of the "interim nature of the proposals"⁵³ and how there is an interpretative and subjective element aimed at practical utility. Indeed there is no attempt to relate notional syllabuses to a learning theory or empirical research. Furthermore, problems of defining the exact nature of notions, the main basis for the organisational principles, and difficulties involve in measuring the claimed heightened motivational responses of learners leads me to the conclusion that instigating a full-blown notional syllabus for a general course would be a highly fraught and unpredictable project to undertake, in terms of both implementation and results. I would prefer to accept the negative analysis of grammatical syllabuses as a starting point and reappraise, adapt and reconstruct the existing syllabuses and materials bearing in mind the insights of the notional approach. At the same time we should not lose sight of "communicative competence" as the principal objective, as Johnson and Morrow state in their discussion of the communicative approach: "It is at the level of *aim* that such a language teaching distinguishes itself from more traditional approaches... We may thus see the revision of aims as an *enrichment* — an acceptance that there are further dimensions of language that need teaching."⁵⁴

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⁵³ WILKINS, D. A. — *Op. cit.*, preface.

⁵⁴ JOHNSON, K.; MORROW, K. (eds.) — *Communication in the Classroom*, London, Longmans, 1981, p. 10.

APPENDIX

Semantico-Grammatical Categories

1. **Time**
 - a) point of time
 - b) duration
 - c) time relations
 - d) frequency
 - e) sequence

2. **Quantity**
 - a) divided and undivided reference
 - b) numerals
 - c) operations

3. **Space**
 - a) dimensions
 - b) locations
 - c) motion

4. **Relational Meaning**
 - a) sentential relations
 - b) prediction and attribution

5. **Deixis**
 - a) time
 - b) place
 - c) person

Categories of Modal Meaning

1. **Scale of Certainty**
 - a) impersonalised
 - b) personalised

2. **Scale of Commitment**

- a) intention
- b) obligation

Categories of Communicative Function

1. **Judgement and Evaluation**

- a) valuation
- b) verdiction
 - committal
 - release
- c) approval
- d) disapproval

2. **Suasion**

- a) inducement
- b) compulsion
- c) prediction
- d) tolerance

3. **Argument**

- a) information: asserted
 - sought
 - denied
- b) agreement
- c) disagreement
- d) concession

4. **Rational Enquiry and Exposition**

5. **Personal Emotions**

- a) positive
- b) negative

6. **Emotional Relations**

- a) greetings
- b) sympathy
- c) gratitude
- d) flattery
- e) hostility