

## CHAPTER 5: Communicative methodology and syllabus specification

### Communicative methodology, a definition

There is a good deal of confusion as to what is involved in a communicative approach to language teaching. I argued in Chapter 1 that part of this confusion stems from the fact that an approach involves both syllabus specification and methodology. Sometimes the term 'communicative' is used to describe an approach incorporating a notional-functional syllabus on the grounds that such a syllabus is expressed not in terms of language items, but in terms of what is communicated through language. But the methodology which realises a notional-functional syllabus may be a presentation methodology which involves virtually nothing in the way of genuine communication in the classroom.

Sometimes the term 'communicative' is taken as referring to the methodology involved in a particular approach. In terms of the distinction made earlier between a focus on form and a focus on meaning, activities which focus on meaning would be seen as communicative, because learners are expected to acquire language by using it to communicate with one another, not simply to display a knowledge of linguistic form.

I would like to distinguish between three kinds of classroom activity (see J D Willis 1983). The first two, *citation* and *simulation*, focus on language form. The purpose of citation activities is to model target utterances for the learners. This is usually achieved through the kind of presentation methodology described in Chapter 1. Teachers have a range of devices for this. The important thing, as we have seen, is that students are required to respond to a teacher elicitation with an utterance which is appropriate in form. So Socoop's perfectly acceptable sentence:

Yes, I am, er, father of four children.

was rejected by the teacher because it did not display the form the teacher wanted, a verb with a gerund as object. Any of the following would have been acceptable:

I	love like enjoy. hate can't stand	being a father
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irrespective of whether it happened to be true or not.

Nowadays teachers often go to great lengths to create the impression that

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language is being used rather than simply manipulated. There is even talk of 'communicative drills'. But such a concept is contradictory, since the essence of communication is choice and a basic requirement of drilling is the restriction of choice. The advocates of 'communicative drills' argue that provided the learner is required to produce a true statement, then whatever they say is meaningful. They would argue, for example, that in the sequence quoted in Chapter 1, Socoop's utterance of the form:

I like being a father.

would be meaningful because it would be a true statement. In a narrow sense so it would. In the same way an example given in a dictionary definition is meaningful. It is a sentence of English for which we can conceive a meaningful context. When I read in the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary*:

I shouldn't write these down if I were you.

I do not take it that the lexicographer is advising me not to waste my time by copying down definitions. I know that the sentence is being used simply to illustrate the meaning of **should**. In the same way, were Socoop to say:

I like being a father.

he would be uttering a 'true' sentence. But he would not be using it to *inform* the teacher about his attitude to parenthood. He would be doing it to demonstrate his control of the target pattern. The intention behind his utterance would be to show control of language form, not to convey information.

Some classroom activities have a more elaborate similarity with acts of communication. When, for example, students are asked to write an essay on 'The Happiest Day of My Life' most of them know very well that the purpose of this activity is not to inform, amuse or entertain the teacher. It is to display control over the forms of the language. Sophisticated students will aim quite specifically to avoid errors or to display particular language forms in the guise of informing the teacher what happened on a particularly happy day. I call activities of this kind *simulation* activities, because although there is an appearance of communication, the real purpose is to display control of language form. The same is true of role play activities in which the learner is expected to display forms of the language which have just been presented and practised. The role play is simply a device to enable the learner to display particular forms. Students adopt, for example, the roles of doctor and patient simply in order to show that they have 'learned' expressions like:

What's the problem?

and:

I've got a pain in my back.

Simulation activities, therefore, are constrained in the same way as citation activities. Learners know that they are expected not necessarily to tell the truth or play a convincing role, but to display control of language form.

Classroom activities of the third type, which focus on outcome, are called *replication* activities because they replicate within the classroom aspects of

communication in the real world. There is a wealth of activities already accessible to teachers involving games, problem solving, information gathering and so on in which learners use language for real communication. In these activities they ask questions because they need to know the answers in order to solve a problem or win a game, not simply to show that they can produce question forms in English. The forms of the language they use are in no way predetermined. They can use whatever language they wish in order to achieve the desired outcome quickly and efficiently. I would define a communicative methodology as a methodology based on this kind of language use, in which learners are required to use language to achieve real outcomes. What we have done in *CCEC* is match a lexical syllabus with a communicative methodology of this kind.

### Language varieties in the classroom

Ellis (1984) proposes what he calls a 'variable competence model' of second language acquisition. He points out that native speakers do not have just one single language system, but a number of overlapping language systems. This is a notion that all language users are familiar with. The style of writing I am using here, for example, would probably be inappropriate in an informal letter. The kind of spoken language I use in delivering a public lecture would be most inappropriate in style if I were to use it at the family breakfast table. We all move easily from one style to another depending on where we are, who we are talking to, what we are talking about and so on.

To make this point, Ellis draws on the work of Labov (1972). Labov's work shows that there is a predictable relationship between the circumstances of communication and the variety of language produced. Where communication is personal and casual, users adopt a 'vernacular' or natural variety. Where the circumstances of communication are more formal, users move towards a more prestigious variety. In the case of the New Yorkers whom Labov studied, the natural style showed a much higher incidence of /dis/ and /daet/, as opposed to the /bis/ and /baet/ of the more prestigious variety. By analysing the relative frequency of 'speech markers' like /dis/ and /daet/ as opposed to /bis/ and /baet/ Labov was able to show that his subjects operated a range of styles according to how much they were concerned with the form of their utterance.

Applying this to language learning, Ellis goes on to argue that:

SLD (Second Language Development) is accounted for by demonstrating that structures which are initially stylistically restricted to formal contexts of use are gradually available for use in more informal contexts. (Ellis 1984)

In other words learners, like native speakers, have a number of different language systems. There are times when they are careful about how they express themselves and times when they are not so careful. This is a process that the teacher can usefully exploit in the classroom. Before looking at the pedagogical implications, however, there are three ways in which I would like to reformulate Ellis's position.

First of all the learner's switch from one variety to another is developmental in a way that the native speaker's is not. New Yorkers vary their style according

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to social context. But all the styles they use have a real value. Unless they have some social motivation for doing so, they are not going to eliminate /dis/ and /daet/ from their repertoire. Learners, on the other hand, do want to eliminate features of their repertoire and replace them with a different variety. They know that their 'vernacular' style, an unstable interlanguage, has a limited value outside the classroom and they want (assuming of course that they are reasonably motivated) to transcend this style and replace it with another.

Secondly, learners are operating within a restricted environment. The classroom does not immediately create the variety of social contexts to which the native speaker responds in the outside world. At an early stage the learners' first concern is with some kind of propositional/functional adequacy. Provided they can get the basic content of their message across they are not concerned with much beyond that - and even that limited objective may be achieved only with some effort. If learners have been set purely pragmatic goals there is no reason for them to go beyond that limited propositional/functional adequacy. Unfortunately, many teachers have a similarly restricted view of what is meant by communication. They cast doubt on the value of pair and group work in which learners communicate with one another unsupervised by the teacher on the grounds that 'My students can communicate all right, but they keep on making a lot of mistakes'. And unless teachers work to create an environment in which learners will be moved to look for more than propositional/functional adequacy, that is exactly what will happen. Unless teachers manipulate the social context within the classroom, there is no reason why learners should look to a prestige variety of the language - one which in their case is as far as possible formally accurate.

Finally, we need to question the nature of the structures that are restricted and need to be made more widely available. Ellis's formulation may suggest that a 'structure' is a linguistic unit. It might be better conceived of as a mental construct relating to the way the learner's internalised grammar conceptualises the language, rather than as a form of words or even the kind of abstract patterning described in formal grammars. Certainly if we understand the word 'structure' to refer almost exclusively to clause or sentence structure in the way it seems to be understood by proponents of a presentation methodology, we shall have a very restricted view of the learning process.

Considering the position of the learner in the classroom, let us say for the time being that all learners have a variety of English which they regard as adequate for certain restricted communicative purposes in the classroom. They also have knowledge about the forms of the language which they may be able to deploy to move towards a more universally acceptable variety. They also have the motivation to develop this restricted variety towards something which has a wider currency outside the classroom. Most important of all, they will be subject to the same kind of social pressures in using the target language as in using the native language. Given the right classroom environment they will attempt to refine the language which is immediately available to them. The teacher's task, then, is to create an environment in which the learners will respond to familiar social pressures and adjust their language accordingly.

This can be done by manipulating the communicative context. When students are working in pairs or small groups to solve a problem or to exchange

information, they will tend to use what to them is a natural variety, the language that comes easily to them, in the way that /dis/ and /daet/ come easily to many New Yorkers. The circumstances of their communication are:

*Private:* Students are working in a small group, all the members of which are working as a unit towards the achievement of a common goal.

*Spontaneous:* They are producing language in real time in response to their changing perceptions of the problem they are tackling and of the way a solution is best achieved.

*Exploratory:* The responsibility for a successful outcome is shared. There is some tolerance of imprecision. Meanings can be overtly negotiated by continuous feedback. Useful meanings are built up by trial and error, by hint and counterhint.

If, on the other hand, a student is asked to stand up in front of the class as a whole and offer a considered report of the results of his or her group's deliberations, the circumstances of the communication are quite different. They are:

*Public:* The student is speaking to a wider group. This group does not have the solidarity of a common purpose. The setting is different. It is a classroom rather than a secluded corner of a classroom. This means that delivery must be more deliberate.

*Rehearsed:* The student is offering a considered report. He or she is not producing language in real time but is delivering a performance which has been, at least to some extent, rehearsed.

*Final:* It is no longer a question of a group of participants working together to reach a conclusion. What we have now is a monologue in which the speaker carries a disproportionate responsibility for the success or otherwise of the enterprise. He or she must be precise or explicit, since the circumstances do not allow for the same kind of negotiation of meaning as does the group situation.

One would predict, and this is borne out by informal observation, that in the first set of circumstances students produce the kind of language that comes naturally. In the second set of circumstances they aim at what they believe to be a prestige form of the target language. They want to speak well and clearly and above all accurately.

### **A variable competence methodology**

One way of achieving this shift of communicative context is to set up a series of activities which vary the demands on the learner in a principled way. The components of such a methodology could be labelled *Task, Planning and Report* (Willis and Willis 1987).

The *Task* phase consists of a task-based activity focusing on outcome - a replication activity. In an early unit in *CCEC*, for example, students are asked to interview one another and then to draw up a family tree for their partner on the basis of the information gleaned from the interview. The circumstances of the task are private, spontaneous, and exploratory. Students aim at task-orientated efficiency rather than formal accuracy. They are seeking to achieve propositional/functional adequacy. During this phase the teachers are asked to restrict themselves to functional correction. That is to say, they are to restrict their correction to the resolution of communicative problems - they are not to

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correct students simply for the sake of formal accuracy. In working on functional correction they are working with the students, helping them to achieve the outcome that the students themselves are working towards.

In the *Report* phase of the cycle, students will report to the rest of the class the results of their work during the task phase. Here the circumstances of communication are public, rehearsed, and final. In these circumstances the form of the message assumes great importance. Students will move towards what they believe to be a prestige form of the target language that prescribes a high level of formal accuracy. The report phase is still an activity which focuses on outcome, provided of course that some outcome is built into the report. (In the example we have given, the results of a family tree exercise are incorporated by the class into a class survey.) But the activity also sets a premium on formal accuracy. It is, if you like, a fluency activity with a focus on accuracy.

There are a number of ways that a teacher can make the circumstances of communication more 'formal', so as to move the learner towards a desire for accuracy. In general the written form of the language demands a higher level of accuracy than the spoken form. This is because it is more permanent and therefore more public, more open to inspection. The same effect can be achieved by making a recording of students' reports on audio or video cassette. Similarly if learners prepare notes on an OHP transparency and then come out to the front of the class to make a report, there is greater formality and greater pressure for accuracy. It is important to identify techniques which work within a given teaching situation.

If students are to do themselves justice in the report phase of the cycle, they are going to need help. That is the purpose of the *Planning* phase. As students work together to prepare their report, the teacher works with them, helping them to rephrase and polish until an acceptable version is realised. This involves correction based on formal accuracy. But this focus on formal accuracy is not dictated by the teacher's whim or by the nature of a citation activity. It is the product of the communicative circumstances which will pertain during the report phase. Once again the teacher is working *with* the students, helping them to realise a form of language which they themselves want to achieve. Of course most students will still make mistakes even in the most formal contexts. The important thing, however, is that they are trying to shape their vernacular style towards something more universally acceptable.

### Extending the methodology

What we have established so far is a three stage methodology:

*Task:* In which learners carry out a replication activity. The focus is on the outcome of language use rather than the display of language form.

*Planning:* In which learners prepare to present the findings of the previous phase to the class as a whole. At this stage the teacher helps with correction, rephrasing and so on.

*Report:* In which learners present their findings. The focus is on outcome, on actually presenting their findings, but also on achieving the level of accuracy demanded by the circumstances of communication.

If learners are to gain experience of language in use it is not enough for them simply to work with tasks for themselves. Ideally they must also be given exposure to language relevant to the task they have performed or are about to perform, and in particular they must be given the opportunity to see how competent speakers and writers use the target language to achieve similar outcomes.

Let us look at a task from *CCEC* Level 1:

<p><b>78 Ways of saying numbers</b></p> <p><b>78a a</b> How do you say telephone numbers in your language?</p> <p><b>b</b> Look at the numbers on the right. What are they? What about 1989 for example? Could it be a telephone number, or a date, or car V number? How would you say it if it was a date? One thousand nine hundred and eighty-nine? . . . One nine eight nine. . . ?</p> <p>Discuss with your partner how you could say the numbers. How many different ways can you find and what do they each mean ?</p> <p>Tell the class</p> <p><b>78c c</b> Bridget and David talked about the same numbers. Did they think of the same things as you? Write down the things David and Bridget thought of.</p>	<p><b>22</b></p> <p><b>0</b></p> <p><b>1989</b></p> <p><b>3.14</b></p> <p><b>748</b></p> <p><b>22756</b></p> <p><b>10.12</b></p> <p><b>021 337 0452</b></p>
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Before students do the task for themselves the teacher will probably introduce the task, focusing attention on the problem and on possible solutions. There will be a teacher-student exchange of this kind:

- T: What about this one? (writes 3.14 on the board)  
 S: Time is three fourteen.  
 T: Good. If we were talking about the time we would say three fourteen . . . or?  
 S: Fourteen past three.  
 T: Yes fourteen minutes past three. What else could it be?

This preliminary stage provides learners with an introduction to the task they are about to do. It provides them with some ideas on how to approach the task. It also provides valuable exposure to language, in particular to the forms **could**

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and **would** and to the hypothetical or 'unreal' use of the past tense. But the important thing is the preparation for the task. Language input is inevitable, but it should be incidental.

Further exposure is provided in the form of native speakers working towards a similar outcome. We recorded two native speakers doing the task. Here is an excerpt from the recording we made:

A: Er, ten twelve. That could be the time. You'd just say ten twelve. The date you'd say B: Mm Or twelve minutes past ten.  
A: . . . either the tenth of December or the twelfth of October . . .  
B: Mm . . .  
A: . . . depending on whether it was English or American. Erm . . . If this was a telephone number you'd say o two one three three seven o four five two, wouldn't you?

This recording provides us with a listening stage, which gives further exposure to the forms **could** and **would**, and to the hypothetical use of the past tense.

In addition to this, the recording provides us with an opportunity to study language use. It provides us with a text for detailed study and analysis. An appropriate analysis task here would be:

Read through the transcript and find three occurrences of 'd. What does 'd mean? Why is the past tense used in the transcript? Are they talking about the past?

This *analysis* is clearly a language focused activity and one which focuses on accuracy and the relationship between form and meaning. In this case it highlights the way English handles the notions of hypothesis and possibility.

We now have a six stage methodology:

*Introduction:* In which the teacher prepares the learners for the task they are about to perform.

*Task - planning - report:* The basic task-based cycle.

*Listening:* In which learners listen to native speakers carrying out a parallel task.

*Analysis:* In which learners look critically at aspects of the native speaker language use in the listening phase.

It is the task stage which is central to the methodology. It is by working at the task that students grapple with meaning and create a meaningful context for the language they have heard and are about to hear. In the task we have been looking at they consider possibilities:

That *could* be the time.

and set up hypotheses:

If this was a telephone number . . .

and talk about the consequences:

. . . you'd say o two one . . .

Of course many learners may not have the right English. They may say:

Maybe time. If is time is ten twelve.



This does not matter at first. The important thing is that they are looking for ways of expressing possibility and hypothesis. They are searching the English they have and making it do the work. This is a creative and useful process. One of the most valuable skills learners can acquire is that of making a little go a long way, of doing a lot with the limited language they have at their disposal. Often this involves them in extending their language in a way which is not strictly acceptable. They make mistakes. But if they make mistakes by manipulating language to achieve the meanings they want to achieve teachers should learn to recognise this as a sign of useful creativity and ingenuity.

It may be that learners will pick up some of the language they want at the *introduction* stage. If not, they will have another opportunity at the *planning* stage when the teacher offers help and correction. There will be a further opportunity at the *report* stage, either because they hear their classmates use the appropriate forms or because the teacher follows up and reformulates using those forms. Next, during the *listening* stage, they will hear fluent speakers of English using the forms. Finally, the *analysis* stage will focus in detail on some target forms (in the example given above on 'd meaning **would** and on the hypothetical past tense). The most important thing is that by using their own language in the attempt to get these meanings across, the learners have created a precise context. They are already looking for the language to express these notions, they know that they need the language, and they are likely to accept it readily when it is offered. The paramount function of the task, then, is to provide a context and a need for target language forms.

### **Working with written language**

The same methodology can be used for exposure to and analysis of the written language. (see p.66-67)

In this sequence learners begin with an introduction in the form of a teacher-led discussion about the kind of arrangements that need to be made in setting up an overseas tour. They go on from this to do a task in groups or pairs. Having done this, they are given time to prepare a report to the class of their findings. Finally there is an analysis exercise based on some authentic written correspondence which focuses on ways of referring to the future in English. Again we have focus shifting to and from outcome and form.

### **The learner's corpus**

We now have a methodological cycle which gives plenty of opportunity for focus on language form within the context of a task-based methodology. But we still have no way of specifying syllabus content. The spoken and written texts, however, do provide us with raw material. They provide a corpus of language which learners will have processed for meaning and which therefore consists of, to adapt Krashen's terminology, not only comprehensible input but comprehended input. These texts therefore represent an important part of the learner's experience of English.

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### **133 The Yetties to South East Asia - April/May 1982 .**

Quickly read the extracts from letters and interns correspondence and say which order they were written in. Which dates fit which extracts?

20 November 1981

16 December 1981

26 Feb '82

9 March '82

5 May '82

6 May '82

(NOTE: Pages 66 and 67 comprise extracts from the Cobuild English coursebook relating to this exercise, not reproduced here.. The material consists of facsimiles of six letters. or partially visible letters, including addresses, company logos etc, on the subject of a forthcoming tour of South East Asia by a pop group called 'The Yetties'. There are also further exercises and a Language Study box containing common phrases used in letters.)

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In Chapter 3 we looked at the ways in which lexicographers move from a corpus of language to an analysis of that corpus, and therefore to generalisations about the language as a whole. We have suggested that as part of our methodology we should include an *analysis* component in which students look critically at samples of language to see what they can learn from it. I suggest that this process is analogous to that carried out by the lexicographer. I would argue that just as lexicographers and grammarians clarify and systematise their knowledge about the language by analysis of text, so learners can make use of similar techniques to formulate and test hypotheses about the way language items are used.

In the examples of analysis activities given above, learners look at specific texts and discover from those texts some of the ways in which English encodes possibility and hypothesis, and some of the ways in which English refers to future time. We need not, however, confine analysis activities to a single text. Look, for example at these two exercises on the word **by**, the first taken from *CCEC* Level 1 and the second from Level 2:

### 111 Grammar words

#### **by**

1 who/what did it

*Do you think this would be said by a teacher?*

2 how

*She begins by asking what time they start.*

*I do my shopping by car.*

*I come to work by bus.*

3 when

*I've got to finish this by tomorrow.*

*It opens at eight, so I'm there by eight.*

4 where

*There's a phone box by the school. It's over there by the post office.*

Find examples for each category.

a *She starts by asking what time they begin work.*

b *She usually gets back home by 9 a.m.*

c . . . *handicrafts made by people in the Third World*

d *Come and sit here by me.*

e *Guess what your partner's number is by asking 'Is it under 50. . .'*

f *I think I left it by the telephone.*

g *I have to finish this by tomorrow.*

Compare the examples in each category with the examples in the Grammar Book.

<p><b>96 Preposition spot</b></p> <p>by</p> <p>1 showing who or what does something <i>The microwaves are absorbed by the food. ( 91 )</i> <i>B &amp; B -in most cases it will be run by the owner. (39)</i></p> <p>2 answering the question 'How?' <i>Microwaves work by using a device called a magnetron... (91)</i> <i>They only deal with enquiries by letter.</i></p> <p>3 answering the question 'When?'  (Note: cartoon picture omitted)</p> <p><i>By the time we got downstairs they were already halfway down the street. (178)</i></p> <p>4 meaning 'near' or 'next to' <i>I would probably wait by the car. (150)</i></p>	<p>Find <u>two</u> examples for category 1, <u>three</u> for category 2 and <u>one</u> example for categories 3 and 4. Write down the other four phrases with <b>by</b>. What do they mean?</p> <p>a <i>I can get by in French . . . ( 12)</i></p> <p>b <i>I'm fairly interested in sport, but by no means football. (20)</i></p> <p>c <i>We went up by car. (29)</i></p> <p>d <i>She answers the door, looking a bit angry, as it's one in the morning by then (78)</i></p> <p>e <i>He sees this girl standing by the road side hitching. (78)</i></p> <p>f <i>They produce heat by friction,(91)</i></p> <p>g <i>Ensure your safety by getting microwave ovens serviced regularly. (91)</i></p> <p>h <i>I was driving up to London by myself (97)</i></p> <p>i <i>There'll be a left turn followed by an immediate night.</i></p> <p>j <i>I was approached by an American mother . . . (144)</i></p> <p>k <i>'By the way,' I said, 'why did you lie to him?' (161)</i></p>
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All of the examples in these exercises are taken from the learner corpus. They are all utterances taken from the course materials, which learners have processed or will process for meaning during the course of their study. We looked at similar examples in Chapter 3 to show how the uses of the word **way** were extended and recycled over three levels of CCEC. Just as the computer enables lexicographers to retrieve concordances from a large corpus of language under study, so the same computer techniques enable course writers to retrieve concordances for learners to study from the corpus of language contained in a language course. The effect of this procedure is to enable learners to examine their experience of English and to learn from it. In a presentation methodology, the teacher and course writer in effect say to the learner 'I am an experienced user of English and as such am able to present you with these acceptable samples of the language organised in such a way that from them you will be able to make useful generalisations for the future.' In enabling learners to examine their own experience of the language, teachers and course writers are saying 'You, the learner, have valuable experience of English. We will help you draw that experience together and see how it fits with a description of the way words are used and patterned to create meanings.' They no longer simply present language to the learner for the purpose of illustrating language form. Instead they encourage learners to examine their own experience of the language and make generalisations from it.

There is no way of knowing for sure what language items will be assimilated by the learner at a given stage of his or her language development. We are therefore obliged to recycle the typical patterns of the language so that learners will be exposed to them time and time again. At the same time we help learners develop a curiosity about language and an analytical capacity so that they will gain maximum benefit from exposure. Finally we recycle language items not only by offering them to learners in new contexts, but also by retrieving earlier

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occurrences so that we can exploit the learner's corpus, their experience of the the language in use.

### Syllabus specification

Once we think in terms of the learner's corpus, we no longer need to illustrate the language for the learner piece by piece. We can begin by specifying what it is that learners need to know about the language. We then go on to assemble a corpus which incorporates these 'items'. If we are committed to a task-based methodology, we will begin with an inventory of tasks and will go on to collect a set of texts arising from these tasks. If we are committed to a lexical syllabus we analyse our texts taking lexis as a starting point and check to see that we have the coverage we want. As we shall see in the next chapter, ensuring that we have the right coverage is by no means a straightforward process. Once this is done, however, we know that we have a corpus with which the learner will become familiar, and from which we can retrieve all the language we want to cover. We can realistically specify 700 of the most frequent words together with their main meanings and patterns as syllabus content. This is because we now know that we have a corpus of language which includes these words, meanings and patterns. The learner will be exposed to a carefully constructed sample of the language which contains the most common important features of the language as a whole, and all of these features can be highlighted for the learner.

The syllabus from which we as course designers for *CCEC* worked is hundreds of pages long. It consists of data sheets for around 700 words of the kind shown for way on page 32 and for **any** and **would** on pages 53 and 55. In the *Collins COBUILD English Course* the syllabus from which the teacher works is contained in the teaching materials and is specified in teachers' notes. Unit 3, for example, lists learning objectives under the headings of *Grammar and Discourse*, *Tasks* and *Social Language*:

OBJECTIVES	Tasks
<p><b>Lexical objectives</b> are in TB48</p> <p><b>Grammar and discourse</b></p> <p>a The meaning and use of common prepositional phrases of place (34,39)</p> <p>b The use of the quantifiers <b>both, all, some, neither, more</b> (35,46 4Bc)</p> <p>c The use of <b>one/ones</b> as in <i>the blue one</i> (34.35,4&amp;)</p> <p>d The tendency to run a check list of information received. marked by <b>one, another, second, third</b> etc (36,37)</p> <p>e The use of <b>mine</b> (36,38)</p> <p>f The use of <b>so</b> to mean the same as in such phrases as <i>so is mine</i> (33)</p> <p>g The description of people by the use of <b>has/have got</b> and with or by the verb <b>be</b> followed by an adjective or the <b>-ing</b> form of the verb. (38,39)</p> <p>h <b>There is/are/was/were</b> to express location or to identify number (35,42,44,45)</p> <p>i The structure of affirmative and interrogative sentences with <b>there</b>(45)</p> <p>j Stress (focusing on the important words) (41,47)</p> <p>k Contrastive stress (40)</p> <p>l Weak forms of <b>of, the, there, is</b> and <b>are</b> (35,45)</p> <p>m Question words <b>how, what, where, who, why.</b> (48a)</p> <p>n Three English sounds: /k/ as in <b>colour</b>, /t/ as in <b>grey</b>./l/ as in <b>yellow</b>. Silent <b>r</b> as in <b>are</b> (40)</p> <p>o The use of <b>okay, so, ah</b> to mark an item in a list. (37)</p>	<p>a Understanding descriptions of people and identifying them in terms of their clothes and surroundings (36, 38)</p> <p>b Asking and responding to questions to elicit specific information (38)</p> <p>c Checking on information received (36, 38)</p> <p>d Listing stems from memory and identifying them in terms of position (42)</p> <p>e Gtving precise reasons for a conclusion (46)</p> <p>f Explaining the process of logical deduction (46)</p> <p><b>Social language</b></p> <p>a Offering things to people (47)</p> <p>b Asking for and giving explanations about language (41 )</p> <p><i>Remind students tro look out for the title in the Unit It comes in recording 36b</i></p>

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It also lists under *Lexical Objectives* over 80 words which are introduced in the unit, for example:

<p><b>him</b> 1 object pronoun <i>The woman next to him. Do you know him?</i> See also <b>them, us, you.</b> <b>hold</b> 1 <i>holding his arm/hand</i> <b>lady</b> 1 <i>a very polite word for woman</i> <b>language</b> 1 <b>large</b> 1 <i>a large blue book</i> <b>left</b> 1 <i>on the left, to the left of</i> light 1 <i>Shall we have the lights on? Switch the lights off. Traffic lights Headlights</i> 1.2 <i>It's getting light/dark</i> 2 <i>Shall I light the gas? A lighted cigarette</i> 3 <i>not heavy. Her bag was very light</i> 4 <i>not dark She had light brown hair</i> <b>middle</b> 1 <i>in the middle (of)</i></p>	<p><b>mine</b> 1 <i>Mine has got three people in it So has mine.</i> <b>neither</b> 2 <i>Neither of his daughters goes to school.</i> <b>next</b> 3 indicating position <i>next to him</i> <b>no</b> 1 <i>not any. no blue ones. no lights on. no children</i> 3.2 used to refuse an offer. <i>No thanks</i> <b>none</b> 1 not one. <i>None of the yellow shapes are squares.</i> <b>nothing</b> 2 emphatic - in phrases like <i>nothing else, nothing but .</i> <b>one</b> 1.1 <i>this one, the red one</i> <b>ones</b> 1 <i>the blue ones</i> <b>part</b> 1 <i>parts of the body</i> <b>pink</b> 1 <b>red</b> 1</p>
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It further lists the items as they occur with each section. A task involving identifying differences, for example, covers this language:

**38 Find the differences**

**Aims:** 1 To describe and identify people using new language from this unit and any other English students know.

2 To listen for relevant information in a more extended stretch of conversation.

**Lexis:** **arms, carry, group, hat, holding, lady, mine, second, show. so, with. yours**  
**Understanding only:** **Don't show..., each, Get into pairs - , someone, so has mine, stand**  
**Revision:** **but, talk to**

The syllabus is, then, enormously detailed. It needs to be so if we are to provide good coverage of 700 words and their meanings and patterns.

We have, then, in Level 1 of *CCEC* a corpus of language which illustrates the meanings and uses of almost all of the 700 most frequent words in English. Learners are exposed to this corpus as language in use in that they listen to it or read it and understand and process the language. They are given the opportunity to focus on usage through a series of exercises, most of them involving language they have already processed for meaning. In terms of language production they are asked to encode meanings similar to those encoded by native speakers in using language to perform a series of tasks.

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The methodology which exploits this corpus now has six components:

*Introduction:* This gives students initial exposure to target forms within a communicative context.

*Task:* This provides an opportunity to focus on and realise target meanings. Students may begin to approximate to the target language form or they may use quite different, even ungrammatical forms.

*Planning:* The teacher helps students to move towards accurate production, often by modelling the target forms for them.

*Report:* Students have another opportunity to use target forms. Again, however, there is a focus on fluency as well as accuracy.

*Listening/Reading:* Students have a chance to hear or read the target forms used in a context which has become familiar to them through their own attempts to perform and report the task. (This stage may come immediately after Introduction, but normally comes just before Analysis.)

*Analysis:* This is an awareness raising exercise which gives the learners a chance to formulate generalisations about the language they have heard.

### Controlled practice

Finally, what about controlled practice? Does it have a place? In order to answer this question we should first consider the aim of controlled practice activities. I think the first thing here is to dispel the notion that practice of this kind teaches grammar. It highlights acceptable patterns in English, but it does little more than that. You can repeat passive sentences as long as you like, and that may help you to see how they are formed. But it will not help you with the important and difficult thing about the passive which is not 'How is it formed?' but 'How is it used?' This question can only be answered by exposure and by analysis. The passive is learned by seeing and hearing passive forms in use, not once but many many times, by focusing attention on how they are used and by providing learners with opportunities to use the same forms for themselves. The same applies to any other pattern. The important and difficult things are to do with use rather than form.

The role of pattern practice, then, should be to enhance the learner's familiarity and fluency with holophrastic units whose meaning and grammar have already been highlighted and exemplified in use. At first sight this takes us back to Wilkins' analytic strategy, by which the learners' attention was focused on functional realisations in the hope that these would become part of the learners' repertoire. CCEC focuses on the common patterns of English as identified by the COBUILD research in the hope that an analysis of these patterns will help learners benefit from exposure to the corpus of which they are a part. The difference is that instead of *presenting* items to the learner and drilling them in the hope that they become part of the learner's repertoire, we are identifying those items which are already part of the learner's corpus and building on the learner's familiarity to promote fluent production. We might therefore usefully drill such 'chunks' as:  
easiest

... the	easiest best simplest	way solution	is to ...
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But this will not be an attempt to teach grammar. It will be an attempt to consolidate such units so that they are easily retrievable. It is an attempt to consolidate the familiar rather than to present the unfamiliar. The rationale for this type of pattern practice rests first on the belief that learners do accumulate language form, often phrases. Secondly it rests on the belief that an important part of the native speaker's repertoire is in the form of prefabricated chunks of language which are retrieved and deployed in use. We are, of course, far from sure what these chunks are. What we are sure of, however, is that we are more likely to find them by looking empirically at the patterns which occur with great frequency in the speech and writing of native speakers than by starting from an abstract grammatical description.

It certainly seems to be the case that learners (particularly in the early stages) want controlled practice, but I do not believe that it should be central to a methodology. First of all I suggest that this kind of practice should be little and often. A short sharp burst of practice can be a useful confidence builder, but if you spend too long at it students soon begin to parrot the repetition without thinking about what they are doing. This may be useful if the aim is to consolidate a holophrase. It does not, however, help to teach grammatical form. That can only be done by looking at language in use so that learners can become aware not only of the phrases but also of their meaning and use.

Secondly I think this kind of practice should come when learners have some familiarity with the item to be drilled, and that it should come at the end of the methodological cycle, not at the beginning. The danger with focusing mechanically on form too early in the cycle is that students see what follows not as an opportunity to use language for communication, but rather as an opportunity to produce the prescribed form as often as possible. The focus on form gets in the way of fluency practice and all we have are a series of activities designed to elicit a particular language form.

We should first create a context and demonstrate language in use. We do this during the *Listening/reading*, *Planning* and *Analysis* stages. Students may begin to approximate to the target during the Task and will certainly be aware of it during Planning. This awareness becomes explicit during the *Analysis* when it is set alongside similar occurrences from the learner's corpus. When students are aware of the form and have seen and heard how it is used, when they have a context and a meaning for the target form, that is the time to do a quick burst of controlled practice. Controlled practice should be the final stage which helps build confidence and reinforces familiarity with form.