

Designing an Afrikaans (third language) communicative syllabus¹

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When the new communicative syllabuses for Afrikaans as a third language were introduced in the primary schools in Transkei the problem arose: the teachers who had to implement the syllabuses were not trained in the communicative approach. A communicative syllabus had to be designed for teacher training colleges to train teachers in the methodology as well as improve their proficiency in Afrikaans.

This paper describes the needs analysis that was conducted as the basis for the syllabus and gives an outline of the syllabus that was designed.

Toe die nuwe kommunikatiewe sillabusse in Afrikaans as 'n derde taal in die primêre skole in Transkei ingevoer is, het dit tot die volgende ernstige probleme gelei: Die onderwysers wat die nuwe sillabusse moes gebruik was nie opgelei in die kommunikatiewe benadering nie. 'n Kommunikatiewe sillabus moes dus ontwerp word in die onderwyserskolleges om die onderwysers in die metodologie op te lei sowel as om hulle taalvaardigheid in Afrikaans te verbeter.

Hierdie artikel beskryf die behoefte-analise wat as 'n basis in die sillabus gedien het en beskryf in breë trekke die sillabus wat ontwerp is.

1 PROBLEM

The problem on which this investigation focused was created when new communicative syllabuses for Afrikaans L3 were implemented in several departments of Education (Transkei in 1985 and the Department of Education and Training in 1986/7) while the teachers of Afrikaans in these departments were not familiar with the communicative approach. The syllabuses for the colleges where teachers were trained were based on the structural approach accentuating grammatical structures. A communicative syllabus for teacher training colleges had therefore to be designed to train students to implement the new school syllabuses effectively. An additional complication was the teachers' poor command of Afrikaans which led to a breakdown in communication between them and their pupils and to high failure rates in the subject.

2 AIMS

The aims were as follows:

1. To design a syllabus which would equip future teachers of Afrikaans (as third language) with the ability to implement effectually the communicative syllabuses for primary and secondary schools in Transkei.
2. To design a syllabus that would optimally raise the teacher trainees' proficiency in Afrikaans.

Yalden says (1983:88) that the context of a syllabus is determined by the language needs of a target group which are established by means of a needs analysis. In addition, cognizance must be taken of the constraints which restrict the implementation of the syllabus.

Consequently, in order to design an effective communicative syllabus for an Afrikaans course at teachers' colleges in Transkei, thorough needs and constraints analyses of the target group had to be made.

¹Compiled from: *Afrikaans for Transkei* (Institute for Language Teaching, University of Stellenbosch).

The syllabus would contain

- a proficiency component;
- a method component to train teacher trainees in communicative approaches, and
- a component for testing communicative proficiency.

3 ASSIGNED TASKS

In the research proposal, the researcher was assigned the following tasks:

- to establish the language needs of senior primary and secondary teachers of Afrikaans L3 in Transkei;
- to consult literature on the design of syllabuses;
- to study the syllabuses for Afrikaans of other departments and the new communicative syllabus for primary and secondary schools in Transkei;
- to obtain (by means of questionnaires and observation), a detailed description of the target group: senior primary and secondary teachers of Afrikaans L3, and first-year students in teacher training colleges;
- to conduct interviews with lecturers at teacher training colleges;
- to assess the proficiency of teachers and first year students;
- to identify the constraints in teacher training colleges which might impair the effective development and eventual successful presentation of a course;
- to design a syllabus for Afrikaans L3 for teacher trainees; the syllabus would act as a basis for a three-year training programme of teachers who would become responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans L3 to senior primary as well as secondary school children.

Although this project was directed primarily at the Republic of Transkei, the syllabus for Afrikaans L3 would be available to any other teachers' college which might request it.

4 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The composition and size of a representative random sample was established scientifically and it was decided to direct the research project at teachers responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans in senior primary, junior and senior secondary schools, and at first-year students at teachers' training colleges.

Data were obtained through relevant literature, observation, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and a language proficiency test.

Twenty-six senior primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Transkei were visited from 12-24 May 1986 to observe Afrikaans lessons taught by teachers responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans. The 26 schools represented 4 of the 29 inspectorates in Transkei. These 4 inspectorates were selected on a random basis: one from each of 4 geographical areas in Transkei.

Considerations which influenced the selection of schools, standards and lessons were whether Afrikaans was compulsory from Std. 3 to 7, whether it was an elective subject in the senior school, whether the school was accessible, whether there was a sufficient number of teachers teaching Afrikaans in the higher standards, and whether the school could be visited during the nine days the researcher had at her disposal.

Six of the nine teacher training colleges in Transkei were visited for observation. They were also selected at random to accommodate language influences as well as rural-urban differences.

Structured in-depth interviews were conducted at training colleges with 9 lecturers responsible for Afrikaans. These interviews were valuable as a means of establishing proficiency, attitude and in identifying specific problems related to the teaching of Afrikaans in Transkei.

Interviews were also conducted with the rectors of 4 colleges. These interviews were especially valuable in obtaining information in administrative procedures which might influence the structure of the Afrikaans course.

The relevant literature that was consulted was drawn from sources referring to the language situation in Southern Africa, the teaching of Afrikaans in black communities in Southern Africa, especially in Transkei, comparable and related investigations, and second and third language syllabuses currently used in Southern Africa.

Questionnaires were sent to senior primary and secondary teachers and to first-year students at training colleges. In 1983 there were 17 779 school teachers in Transkei (Department of Education Annual Report 1983). The primary school system is the largest sub-system in Transkei's educational system, catering for 79% of the pupils. Current trends indicate that there has been a rapid increase in secondary enrolment during the past decade but that there is a shortage of teachers (Geber 1985:52).

The sample to whom the questionnaires were sent accommodated all inspectorates and all standards, with a random sample of schools in each inspectorate. Two hundred and one schools (8,58% of the universum) were considered as numerically sufficient to allow a statistical analysis. The number was proportionally divided between senior primary and senior secondary schools (173) and senior secondary schools (28). Nine hundred and fifty-three questionnaires were sent out, of which 173 were returned. This represents 74 of the 201 schools.

The colleges selected for observation were also selected for the completion of the questionnaires to first-year students. As the researchers were able to visit the six colleges, they could preside over the completion of the questionnaires, 819 in total.

Furthermore, 16 students from each of the 6 colleges were selected for oral testing. The selection was done by means of a statistical table of random numbers.

A GAD-1 Language Proficiency Test (copyright Pergamon), which assesses communicative accuracy, was used. It has two components – reading and writing – and assessment is made by means of a Band system.

5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SYLLABUS

From the data collected from these sources, there emerged a profile of:

- the position of Afrikaans in the SA situation;
- the target group;
- the college and school setting, and
- the language needs (Afrikaans) of college students.

Specific **needs and constraints** were identified which had direct **implications** for the design of an communicative syllabus for Afrikaans as third language for teachers' training colleges.

5.1 The position of Afrikaans in the SA situation

Regarding the teaching of Afrikaans in black communities it was established that according to an HSRC investigation (Schuring 1983:52) 75% of the black respondents indicated that they were in favour of Afrikaans taught as a second language at school level.

From the relevant literature the following problems were identified:

- In the “homelands”, national states and townships (e.g. Soweto) people are seldom exposed to Afrikaans (RAU Report Part 1 1985:166).
- Black people's attitude towards Afrikaans is influenced negatively by the political situation in the Republic of South Africa (RAU Report Part 1 1985:184 and Steyn 1980:292).
- The authorities responsible for the design of syllabuses and curriculums for black pupils often do not take into account the specific and changing needs of the black pupil (RAU Report Part 1 1985:10).

- Most teachers responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans L3 are not mother tongue speakers and do not have the necessary skills or communicative competence to teach the target language (HSRC Report No. 18 1981:131).
- Methods used by teachers are predominantly formal, with the emphasis on rote learning and theoretical knowledge (Kroes 1978:81).
- The pupil: teacher ratio underlines the urgent need for more qualified teachers (HSRC Report No. 18 1981:130).

From a study of the relevant literature, it appeared that these problems also apply to Transkei, but, in fact, the situation is probably more critical there than in any other part of South Africa. The RAU Report Part I made special reference to the weak Afrikaans competency of Transkei students and that teaching was often conducted through the medium of English and/or Xhosa. The present research found that there were only 3 mother tongue speakers responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans at college level, and confirmed what the RAU Report had established, namely that exposure to Afrikaans as target language was almost non-existent in Transkei. Although the researcher found that the responsible officials' attitude was very positive towards the subject, the departmental policy regarding Afrikaans has not always been explicit since Transkei became independent in 1975.

5.2 Profile of target group

- All students had passed Std 10.
- More than half of the students had obtained an aggregate of less than 50% in the matric examination.
- The students represented different school proficiency levels in Afrikaans.
- The band mean for the students' communicative proficiency in Afrikaans was 2,941 on Carroll's 9-band scale.
- Students enjoyed little, if any, exposure to the target language outside the college.
- Students were taught Afrikaans by non-mother tongue speakers at school level.
- Most of the students were trained in the TL by non-mother tongue speakers at college level.
- Afrikaans was often taught through the medium of either English or Xhosa at school level.
- Students experienced both primary (Xhosa) and secondary (English) interference in the acquisition and use of the target language.
- The majority of the students were younger than 30 years.
- The majority of the students realized the advantage of being able to communicate in Afrikaans and were in favour of having Afrikaans as a subject in Transkei schools.
- The students from colleges situated in urban areas were more negative in attitude towards Afrikaans than the students from colleges situated in rural areas.
- The majority of the students wanted to acquire Afrikaans for the sake of communication and career purposes.

5.3 Profile of college setting

- The teaching time available for Afrikaans was limited, namely 4 periods per week.
- Students had no knowledge or experience of the communicative approach. The teaching of Afrikaans had thus far been formal with the emphasis on grammar and literature, rather than the active use of the language.

- There was little or no suitable support material available in Afrikaans L3 for college students.
- Facilities in the college were not always adequate; and aids were not readily available.

5.4 Profile of school setting

- Many students would eventually teach at levels for which they were not qualified, e.g. at Senior Secondary level.
- Newly qualified teachers would not be able to rely on help (in the teaching of communicative Afrikaans) from their older colleagues. However, if teachers should receive in-service training, the situation could change drastically.
- Newly qualified teachers would probably not teach under ideal circumstances.

5.5 Language needs profile

The following were identified:

5.5.1 Communicative events

- Teaching lessons
- Giving instructions to pupils
- Discussion of subject requirements with colleagues
- Preparation of work schemes
- Preparation of lessons
- Marking of homework

5.5.2 Communicative Activities

- Preparing notes
- Writing comments
- Reading syllabus
- Reading teachers' manual
- Reading pupils' textbooks
- Narrating stories
- Explaining difficult words

5.5.3 Language functions

Only 19,9% of the teacher respondents indicated that they used only Afrikaans as medium of instruction. It is especially in this category of macro functions that mother tongue and English were used extensively, e.g. for simplification, to define, to explain and to conclude. Whenever macro functions were expressed in the TL, the incidence of error was high. This had profound implications for the teaching of setwork, where the macro functions were of great importance. Macro functions with a high frequency were identified e.g. sequencing, using indicators, explanation by translation, indicating coherence, transaction, and defining by translation.

Micro functions of high frequency were identified, e.g. addressing, describing, giving information, asking questions, instructing and acknowledging.

However, the identification of macro and micro functions used in the third language classroom cannot be regarded as the only diagnostic method to select the content of a syllabus, as functions were often not used because the teachers' own proficiency failed him/her.

Many errors occurred in the teachers' oral output, even though they tried to adhere closely to instructions and questions where the same structure could be used repeatedly. An error analysis was made as part of the needs analysis.

6 CONTENTS AND FORMAT OF THE SYLLABUS

The above features of the target population and of the college and school setting, and the language constraints identified determined the contents and format of the syllabus.

6.1 Proficiency component

The language needs which were identified in the needs analysis viz what the student teachers needed to say in Afrikaans, formed the content of the syllabus. In other words, the functions, and language utterances that were selected for the syllabus were those that students and teachers used or needed to use in classrooms and lecture rooms in Transkei.

The first year course would raise the proficiency level of the students to survival level – viz. sufficient language skills for students to cope adequately in general contact situations with Afrikaans speakers. The second and third year course would advance students' proficiency in Afrikaans so that they would be able to cope in a wide variety of language situations.

The emphasis would fall on acquiring communicative skills. Therefore acquisition of listening-speaking skills would be of primary importance.

6.2 Methodology Component

The methodology of the primary and junior secondary phases would also be applicable to senior secondary communicative language teaching.

The method component would be taught through the medium of English because it was important that the students master the methodology completely. It would enable them to comprehend and apply the fundamental principles of the communicative approach and implement a syllabus for Afrikaans as third language.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Because the new syllabuses which had been introduced in schools and colleges were based on the communicative approach, certain adjustments were imperative:

- Afrikaans should be a compulsory subject at college level since it was compulsory in schools from Stds. 3 to 7. Teachers often had to teach subjects for which they had not been trained and there was a considerable shortage of qualified Afrikaans teachers in Transkei.
- It would be advisable for the non-mother-tongue speakers responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans L3 at college level to follow an intensive pre-instructional course to improve their communicative competence in the target language and to master the theory of the communicative approach.
- An adviser, well versed in the communicative approach, should visit Afrikaans teachers and lecturers regularly to provide advice and guidance. This person should liaise with the in-service training centre, the Department of Education and UNITRA.
- In-service teachers should be trained as soon as possible to implement the new syllabus.
- All departments of education which offer Afrikaans as a third language should consider a uniform communicative course for teachers' colleges.
- Prospective senior secondary school teacher trainees ought to have Afrikaans as a major.
- Instruction in the language proficiency component of the college syllabus should be given through

medium of Afrikaans; the method component should be presented in English to ensure optimum understanding.

- The number of Afrikaans periods (per week) should be determined by the Department.
- Teaching aids like overhead projectors, tape recorders, cassettes and video equipment would lend interest to teaching and should be available in every college.
- College libraries ought to contain a wide range of Afrikaans books, magazines and news papers.
- Lecturers should be well informed about teaching conditions in schools so that they will be able to prepare their students to cope with them.
- Second and third year students should be given enough opportunity to teach Afrikaans as L3 during practice teaching sessions.
- Prospective teacher trainees should be encouraged to take Afrikaans as subject in order to acquire an acceptable level of language proficiency.
- Pass requirements: it was recommended that a sub-minimum of 50% be maintained for listening and speaking skills.
- Lecturers responsible for the teaching of Afrikaans L3 should hold a departmental meeting once a week.

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