

# Krahnke's Syllabus Continuum Revisited: Is It Still Relevant in 21st-Century Language Teaching?

**Sawaira Bahadur**

*Bahria University, Karachi Campus, Pakistan*

**Amna Attaria**

*Bahria University, Karachi Campus, Pakistan*

**Mahnoor Farhan Ali**

*Bahria University, Karachi Campus, Pakistan*

**Lubna Farhan Ali**

*Bahria University, Karachi Campus, Pakistan*

**ABSTRACT** – The paper provides a conceptual review of the syllabus continuum of Karl Krahnke (1987), the first theory that proposed a basic taxonomy of curriculum organization at the Structural (synthetic/form-oriented) and Content-Based (analytic/use-oriented) ends. Traditionally, this model has been the one that offered priceless insights into how to organize the contents and mirror the transition of grammar-oriented teaching into communication-oriented teaching. The given paper will assess the viability of the model as of now by providing answers to three fundamental questions: what the theoretical background of the continuum is, how it is related to other modern frameworks, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and how it applies to digital, multimodal, and AI-enhanced learning contexts. The conclusion of the analysis is that although the continuum by Krahnke is a key diagnostic axis in determining the theoretical orientation of a program (form vs. use); its inflexible, bipolar division of the contents is no longer a generative design model in the 21st century. This obsolescence is related to its inability to provide a sufficient consideration of the merging of instructional elements (Focus on Form), the need to negotiate curriculum and provide learner agency individually, and the multimodal and intricate needs of ecological (Complex Dynamic Systems) and multimodal communication models.

**Keywords** – *Karl Krahnke; syllabus continuum; synthetic/form-oriented; analytic/use-oriented; 21st century language teaching.*

## I. Introduction

Historically, language learning has always been affected by the way it is taught and the syllabus that is followed in the class. Syllabus functions as a guideline for both the teacher and the learner. Many scholars have contributed to this field over the years, one of the well-known scholars who is hugely known for his contribution is Karl Krahnke. His syllabus continuum is introduced in 1987 and offers a wide range of syllabus for language learning (Krahnke, 1987). In his approaches of syllabus design he proposed Structural Syllabus, Notional/Functional Syllabus, Situational Syllabus, Skill-Based Syllabus, Task-Based Syllabus, and Content-Based Syllabus. He proposed these syllabus types according to our need and which aspect we want to focus from structured syllabus to task- syllabus that solely focuses on the task. This wide range of syllabus has influenced language teaching and made lessons more effective by focusing on different areas. It also focuses on the specific needs of the learner and provides

them with multiple syllabus. Teachers and the syllabus planner can plan their lessons according to their students and their capabilities. With reference to the use/form language syllabi continuum, the syllabi of the beginning classes were more form-focused and functional-situational in nature and the advanced classes more meaning-focused and skill-based and content-based (Rode et al. 2020). In a class where the core focus is on the basics of the language, there we mostly use functional-notional syllabus, so the learner will get the understanding of how the language functions.

The aspect of language teaching method that is most closely related to syllabus is the theory of language that is assumed by the method (Krahnke, 1987). The syllabus is highly affected by the language that the students are learning. These theories of Krahnke directly shape syllabus content and how it is taught. Krahnke points to the fact that, in practice, these different types rarely occur independently of each other and that any actual syllabus represents a combination of two or more

syllabus types, more or less integrated, with one type as the organizing basis around which the others are arranged and related (Bucur, 2014). So according to Krahnke language syllabi are never a one-way approach. It is typically a mixed approach in which one syllabus acts as a main approach.

However, language teaching has evolved significantly in the 21st century. Teachers and Learners are more focused on utilizing technology to learn language rather than focusing on the traditional method of language learning. Learner's autonomy and use of technology in language learning have directly challenged Krahnke's syllabus continuum, and it raises a question that is Krahnke's syllabus continuum still effective in the 21st century.

## II. Research Questions

1. What are the theoretical foundations and key assumptions underpinning Krahnke's (1987) syllabus continuum?
2. How do contemporary language teaching frameworks such as analytic/synthetic distinctions, Type A/B Syllabi, TBLT, and CLIL relate or extend Krahnke's model?
3. To what extent does Krahnke's continuum remain relevant for understanding or designing language curricula in digital, multimodal, and AI-Enhanced learning environments?

## III. Methodology

The given study uses the detailed conceptual analysis and literature review framework to examine the relevance of the syllabus continuum introduced by Krahnke (1987) over the course of time. The main strategy of the research is analytical and the central synthetic/analytic dichotomy is used in the discussion as the organization principle. The analysis will be designed in such a way that it will not be just another classification, but it will diagnose the pedagogical constraints of the model. Three main steps are performed to achieve this:

1. a descriptive dissection of the theoretical underpinnings and major assumptions of Krahnke's six types of syllabuses;
2. a critique of the conceptual inadequacies of the model by mapping the concept of bipolar content classification in the model onto the more nuanced Type A/Type B classification of pedagogical process, as postulated by White (1988) and;
3. an analysis of how modern, blended models, namely, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content and The approach to the matter is to diagnose the conflict between the fixed and pre-instructional

content approach, which is the Type A characteristic of Krahnke, and the adaptive and process-oriented demands, which is the Type B characteristic of modern Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

## IV. Identifying the Fundamental Difference between Curriculum vs. Syllabus

According to Krahnke's view, the syllabus is more specific and detailed than the entire curriculum. The syllabus shows the material needed to achieve the goals, while a curriculum may only outline the objectives, which describe what students will be able to do. Although actual teaching syllabi includes more aspects like behavioral targets and evaluation methods, the content, or what is taught, is the only part of syllabus design that is considered (Krahnke, 1987, "Content, or what is taught...").

### A. Krahnke's (1987) Continuum: Foundations and Assumptions

Krahnke (1987) proposed a continuum representing syllabus types from synthetic that is form oriented to analytic that is use-oriented. The spectrum includes:

#### 1. Structural Syllabus (Synthetic)

Structural Syllabus is also known as a grammatical or linguistic syllabus, this is the most traditional syllabus. In this syllabus, the content is organized around language rules and structure. The language is broken down into separate grammatical units (e.g., nouns, verbs, tenses) and it goes linearly from simplex to complex. It is "synthetic" because it assumes that once a learner learns all the rules of the language then they will be able to use it for communicative purposes.

**Example:** Week 1: The verb "to be." Week 2: Present Simple Tense. Week 3: Present Continuous Tense.

#### 2. Notional/Functional Syllabus

This syllabus focuses more on communication than grammar. The content is organized around notion and function (what people actually want to do with the language). It prefers communication over grammatical accuracy.

**Example:** A unit titled "Expressing Disagreement" (Function) or "Talking about Future Time" (Notion).

#### 3. Situational Syllabus

The situational syllabus revolves around different real-life situations. Language is taught by teaching students how to use a language in specific places and events and then students rehearse dialogue that is relevant to the specific place. The syllabus predicts what language (vocabulary and phrases) a learner will need in those specific settings.

**Example:** Unit 1: At the Bank. Unit 2: At the Doctor's Office. Unit 3: Ordering at a Restaurant.

#### 4. Skill-Based Syllabus

The content of this syllabus is organized around specific skills that learners need to acquire. These skills include; Listening (understanding what you hear), Speaking (talking clearly), Reading (understanding written texts), Writing (writing correctly and clearly). It focuses on developing competence in a specific mode of communication, often used in English for Specific Purposes (ESP).

**Example:** A course focused entirely on "Academic Writing for University Students".

#### 5. Task-Based Syllabus

It organizes syllabus around real-world tasks like planning an activity or solving a problem, and students must complete those tasks. This syllabus does not pay much attention to grammar and grammar is discussed, when necessary, for the completion of the task.

**Example:** The students are given a map and a train schedule and must plan the cheapest, fastest route from City A to City B.

#### 6. Content-Based Syllabus (Analytic)

This approach mixes both language learning and subject matter learning. Students learn the language *through* studying the material.

**Why it is "Analytic":** The learner is presented with whole, natural language (the subject matter). They must "analyze" this raw data to induce the rules of the language themselves, rather than being taught the rules explicitly upfront.

**Example:** An immersion program where students take a Geography course taught entirely in English.

**Figure 1: An Illustration of Krahnke's Continuum**

#### B. The Rise of the Form-Use Dichotomy (1970s-1980s)

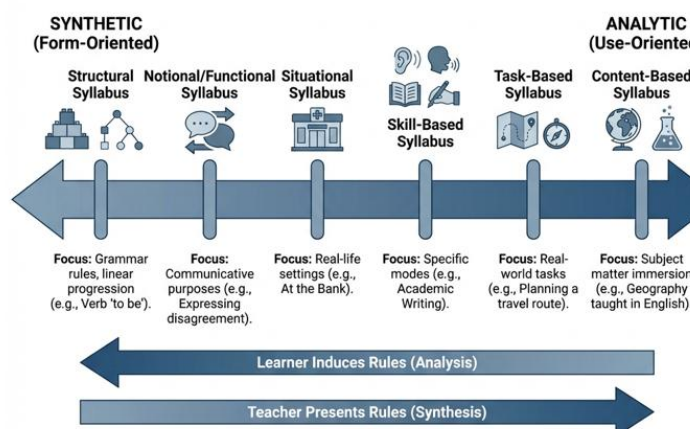
Krahnke's syllabus continuum illustrates how teaching language has shifted significantly from being centered on grammar and structure to being centered on actual communication (Communicative Language Teaching or CLT). This transition mixed up different elements of language teaching all together which are grammar, structure, and communication.

Wilkins (1976) first identified the distinction between synthetic and analytic types of syllabuses (Synthetic and Analytic Syllabuses, n.d.), and Krahnke further build up this distinction through a continuum that extends from lessons that are based on language form like grammar and structure, to lessons that demonstrate how language is used in communication (Krahnke, 1987).

The continuum provides helpful guidance for teachers to use when planning language lessons. However, it should be noted that Krahnke's continuum was not intended to address anything other than the organization of the content to be taught. Real syllabuses also present goals, methods of teaching, and an assessment plan, but for Krahnke's continuum, it is important to focus on content, because it provides specific criteria for evaluating and developing modern language approaches in the 21st century.

#### C. The Foundational Significance and Conceptual Shortcomings of Krahnke's Continuum

Krahnke's (1987) syllabus continuum still works as a useful tool for identifying the theoretical orientations of language with focusing mainly on the debate between the form- and use-based language teaching. However, when applied as a generative model for second language learning it lacks the potential to respond to the complex environment of 21st-century language education. Three distinct facets of contemporary language are overlooked by this bipolar classification of content: the delicate blending of instructional components (e. The g. Focus on Form), the need for individualized, negotiated curriculum development, and the complexity brought about by multimodal communicative competence and ecological models. Krahnke's continuum use has changed from being a design guide to being an essential axis in a multifaceted curriculum.



## **V. Krahnke's Anatomy (1987): Analytical vs. Synthetic Logic**

### **A. The Core Ideas of Content Organization**

Krahnke's classification provides a very clear description of how linguistic content is broken down and presented, drawing a distinctive line between two major philosophies of learning: the additive (which build up the language step by step) versus the holistic approach (which focuses purely on real communication). These six approaches to syllabus design that are presented by him are clearly showing a shift from focus on language rules and grammatical authenticity to focus on real life communication.

### **B. Structuralism and the Reductionist Philosophy**

The structural syllabus is the most well-known syllabus type defined by Krahnke. The synthetic syllabus is the traditional way of language teaching which focuses on teaching language step by step and its sole focus is on the accuracy of the text. It is characterized by the teaching of language parts such as grammatical rules, vocabulary items, or functional phrases separately. The core idea of this approach is that if the learner knows all the elements of the language so they can easily combine all these elements and communicate effectively in real situations. This process relies heavily on the learner's ability to later integrate what has been taught linearly.

This approach is called reductionist because it concludes that complex behaviors, like language use, are best acquired by breaking it down and teaching one step at a time and linearly. Sequencing in synthetic syllabi is typically based on linguistic grading or principles such as the frequency, coverage (wider scope of use), and perceived difficulty (learnability) of the material. While the structural syllabus remains familiar and forms the basis of many programs, Krahnke himself warned that excessive synthetic instruction is often not very suitable for general purposes or for beginners. Synthetic syllabi are considered 'Type A' syllabi (Long & Crookes, 1992), because it focused primarily on *what* should be learned, often determining objectives in advance and evaluating outcomes in terms of mastery.

### **C. The Analytic Turn: Holism and the Focus on Language Use**

In contrast, the analytic syllabus approaches see language learning holistically. It mainly focuses on using language for communicative purposes, provides learners with larger, meaningful pieces of language or content, requiring the learners to analyze the language input as needed to fulfill their communicative objectives. Instead of focusing on grammatical rules and linguistics features, analytic approaches such as notional-functional, procedural, task-based, and content-based

syllabi start with the goals of language performance, i.e. what the learners need to be able to *do*.

Analytic approaches are closely connected with the development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which focuses on the complex cognitive activities required to understand, evaluate, and synthesize information in the target language. This represents a major theoretical transition in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) that is from viewing language as fixed knowledge made up of separate parts, to seeing it as active, purposeful behavior used to achieve real communication goals.

### **D. Aligning Content with Process: White's A/B Classification**

The fundamental limitations of the synthetic/analytic dichotomy of content were recognized shortly after Krahnke's contributions. White (1988) provided further clarification of the distinction by introducing Type A and Type B syllabi (White, 1988), in which he explains how learning happens and how evaluation is done.

In the Type A syllabi, akin to the synthetic approach, the focus is on the final-learning result, setting the objectives, and then pre-packaging the language into small, manageable units. Importantly, these syllabi reflect process, and are controlled by external authorities, indicating an interventionist approach by authority.

Type B syllabi, aligned with the analytic approach, is process-oriented, focuses on how the language is learned and how it interplays with learner experience. Often in Type B models, objectives are described after-the-fact, and content is defined and determined as "what the learner brings and wants" (Widdowson, 1984) and is a result of negotiation between the teacher and the learner. This mapping of the synthetic content to its Type A product-orientation, and analytic content to its Type B process-orientation, is critical for producing a framework for identifying the underlying pedagogical mechanism of the syllabus.

## **VI. Critical Evaluation: The Limitations of a Bipolar Model**

While the bipolar division of teaching methods provides clarity, it is ultimately too rigid to handle the complexity of modern teaching which calls for flexibility and responsiveness and focus on learner agency.

### **A. Focus on Forms vs. Focus on Form**

In modern times, language teaching is rarely focused on one pole. Teachers mix and match methods according to contexts and learners' autonomy. These teaching methods often

combine grammar focus with communication. While the traditional synthetic approach also called Focus on Forms (FOFs) teaches grammar rules one by one, the modern teaching method Focus on Form (FOF) focuses mainly on communications and briefly emphasize on grammar rules when needed (Long, 1997). For Example, an oral communication course might combine both the theoretical and task-based teaching. Through such practical mixing, the clear divisions of linear continuum are obscured.

### **B. Curriculum Negotiation and Learner Agency**

The main drawback of the Krashen model, especially from a Type A/Type B perspective, is that it does not take into account learner selection and curriculum adjustments. A process-oriented curriculum (Type B) emphasizes that the content should include what students bring to the table and what they want. This means that the program should not act as a fixed plan, but as an open and adaptable interactive guide.

In today's classrooms, many students come from different backgrounds and have different needs and abilities. In these cases, a consistent program is often needed, especially when time is of the essence, needs are complex, or common ground needs to be found. Continuum Krashen, which modifies content before instruction begins, cannot capture the flexible and continuous changes needed to personalize learning and support learner autonomy. A rigid division of form use ignores the feedback loops that make learning adaptive. Modern approaches, often supported by technology, aim to match students' needs with resources and help them develop autonomy.

### **C. Simplifying postmodern curriculum development**

Linear dichotomies are insufficient to capture the complex and multidimensional nature of language use in the 21st century. By privileging only, the code (form) of language rather than the communicative use of language, this continuum ignores essential nonverbal aspects of competence. These include developing a space to express one's identity and acquiring the necessary skills on different media platforms. When pedagogical choices are reduced to simple binary axes of form use, designers risk losing sight of the social, cultural, and technological complexities that deeply shape contemporary language learning. Although this dichotomy is still useful for diagnosing the underlying theoretical intent (i.e., whether a program views language primarily as a structure or as a communication tool), it does not serve as a viable overall model for the detailed design of a program.

## **VII. Modern Analytical Pedagogies: TBLT & CLIL as Related Models**

Modern analytic pedagogies, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), are modern teaching frameworks that offer excellent analytical designs that mix up synthetic components

with analytic plans to conceptually shrink the continuum of the traditional continuum into a systems-based methodological approach.

### **A. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT): Task as the Organizing Construct**

TBLT is a highly developed form of an analytic syllabus that focuses mainly on 'task' as the center of curricular planning. The TBLT process follows a top-down approach, a functional approach to specify the content. According to Long (1985), The TBLT syllabus design process begins with the need to conduct a needs analysis to identify target tasks and then classify these tasks for pedagogical use and then lastly sequencing the tasks to create a coherent syllabus. This sequence is in accordance with analytic theory and is aligned strictly to define what the learner will be able to do in the end.

The main difference between TBLT and previous structural approaches lies in how the linguistic rules, and its features are handled. The research is persistent in showing that, if educators do not focus on the language form, then the emphasis on meaning in instruction will often not lead to full, native-like competence and fluency, and that learners should also focus on language form. In TBLT, this is done through Focus on Form (FoF). FoF is used to divert the learner's attention to language features during tasks, based on the learner's own processing capacity. This engagement with language form supports the TBLT model of learning, while still allowing for some structural practice. Krashen's (1981, 1982) work also supports the strong position of acquisition, especially through FoF perspective, as it notes that form-focused instruction which is conscious learning does not lead directly into subconscious acquisition.

### **B. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL): The Dual-Focused Syllabus**

CLIL is another system or framework, where students learn the subject (like science, history, philosophy, etc.) through the target language, so the learners learn the subject matter and the language simultaneously. CLIL is highly analytical because the overall syllabus revolves around the specific subject and its linguistic features. CLIL focuses on how language is used in the academic context and examples are given to students through relevant sources like newspapers and research articles etc. CLIL is very cognitive demanding because students need to understand, evaluate and process both the subject matter and target language at the same time, this helps them develop academic language skills (CALP). When students are successful in CLIL, they develop a good understanding of the complete topic or topic while learning the language.

While CLIL is analytical, it also focuses on synthetic rules so the student will learn all the features of the language perfectly. For example, in Content-Based Instruction (CBI) or other subject-focused programs, teachers might use technology tools

like Moodle to give students structured language practice that would be difficult to manage in class alone.

Therefore, this combination of analytical and synthetic approach shows that language learning is not about one approach or method, but it is the combination of both, and we can't learn a language perfectly by focusing on one approach only because it requires gradually increasing the use of analytic strategies, guided by good teaching principles and careful planning. This helps design courses that balance understanding the content with improving language skills effectively

## **VIII. The 21st-Century Multi-Dimensional Syllabus: Beyond the Linearity:**

The inherent inadequacy of a linear content continuum in modern SLA necessitates the incorporation of new dimensions, specifically those relating to complex systems, multimodal communication, and technology.

### **A. The Ecology of Learning: Complex Dynamic Systems and Interrelatedness**

Modern language learning and teaching are very complicated, and it is best modeled through an ecological perspective. It views the language program as a Complex Dynamic System (CDS). This approach moves decisively beyond binary categorization, sees language learning as long term process. The shift is conceptual: language learning is not seen as linguistic memorization (synthetic), but as a long-term, ubiquitous process aimed at strengthening functional and discursive ability (analytical/ ecological).

In this view, learners and teachers interact like parts of a system. The learner's own learning plan (internal syllabus) grows and changes on its own, while the teacher provides guidance and materials (external syllabus). Good teaching focuses on helping students be aware of their learning, make choices independently, and practice real-life language use. The syllabus isn't just a list of topics it's a tool to help learners develop and interact successfully within the learning system.

### **B. Technology Integration and Blended Curricular Architectures:**

Technology has forced teachers to rethink the idea of teaching, moving teaching away from just one classroom setting. Modern program often mix classroom lessons, online learning and other activities like internships, so teachers need to plan syllabi according to all different settings. To design the syllabus for this mixed program well, teachers use strategies like backward design, which means starting with the learning goals and making sure lessons, activities, and tests match

those goals in both class and online. Crucially, technology helps learners to take more control over their own learning. Technology helps learners to create more personalized lesson plans for themselves, helping them focus on the language skills they really need and making it easier to find useful materials. Teachers can use online tools to watch how students are doing and give help when needed, making the syllabus flexible and interactive instead of just a fixed list.

## **IX. Discussion: Is Syllabus Continuum by Krahnke Still Relevant?**

### **A. The Continuum as a Must-have Diagnostic and Historical Axis**

The syllabus continuum created by Krahnke is still useful nowadays, but the role it previously served has been reinvented. This remains true, however, at the cost of its conceptual inflexibility, which is based upon a simple bipolar division of content, as an instrument of historical reference as well as a diagnostic instrument. The bipolar classification has not been able to make the transition to a more nuanced and flexible approach to the modern context, in which language teaching must include a more subtle compromise of teaching elements (FoF), the necessity of a negotiated, individualized curriculum development, and the multifaceted nature of multimodal communicative competence.

### **B. The Shift of Linear Content Organization to Complex Dynamic Systems (CDS)**

The most drastic threat to the continuum of linear organization is the paradigmatic one of ecological modeling in SLA. A Complex Dynamic System (CDS) is the most appropriate perspective in the modern language teaching, and the curriculum is not an external, solid list but an outcome of the dynamics of interaction. The difference between Krahnke and CDS concept of syllabus is the dimensionality. The content continuum as presented by Krahnke is one-dimensional, but in a static manner, and is grounded on the pre-instructional planning (a Type A characteristic). On the other hand, CDS requires a multi-variate, interactive, adaptive and process (Type B) framework that cannot be mathematically represented in a linear continuum because technological affordances simultaneously, reciprocally, and mutually influence learner identity, cultural context and the balance that must exist between linguistic form and communicative practice. The types of syllabus classified by Krahnke have not disappeared, still, the continuum as such is structurally insufficient to explain the kind of adaptive process that the modern learner needs to go through.

### C. Multimodal and AI-Enhanced Learning Users

It is now clear that the continuum as systematic design resource cannot properly serve to explain the requirements of the modern learner, who requires the acquisition of nonverbal, media, and identity-expressive competencies. To meet this need, the designers are likely to resort to backward design, beginning with the learning goals and ensuring Examples. Bipolar Syllabus Linear Model is not the only model, but Krahnke thinks that the key element of the transitional system is synthesis the ability to synthesize knowledge across multiple media platforms (digital composing, nonverbal aspects). The Krahnke model has changed in a critical way. No longer is it the major conceptual point of reference in syllabus design, but it is rather an essential theoretical axis (or set of axes) within a multi-dimensional curricular space, which is to decide on the best proportion and order of incorporating the synthetic elements (to achieve structural accuracy) into an overall analytic framework (to achieve fluency, negotiation and real-world performance).

### X. Conclusion

The current syllabus continuum according to Krahnke offers an invaluable service to applied linguistics in that it offered a decisive influential taxonomy that effectively systematized the basic debate between form-centric and use-centric language teaching. Nonetheless, the analysis concludes that the syllabus continuum offered by Krahnke can no longer be used as a prescriptive, generative design tool in the 21st century. Its inabilities, its fixity, linear classification, the pre-instructional definition of content, and omission of process, learner agency and of technological context make it structurally inapplicable to the adaptive, dynamic relationship between SLA in the present day, which is ecologically modeled as a Complex Dynamic System. Its diagnostic usefulness is its enduring legacy. The continuum offers the fundamental philosophical paradigms (Synthetic/Analytic) that contemporary, advanced, and integrated curricula (as TBLT and CLIL) have to consistently and incessantly incorporate and harmonize to have learners achieve structural competence and communicative mastery. The continuum employed by Krahnke is therefore historically vital, but functionally replaced by multi-dimensional, adaptive models.

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