"Structural Syllabuses" are in use in many parts of the world as guides to the teaching of English at both primary and secondary levels. They all contain a list of structures and sentence patterns to be taught.

One danger inherent in such kinds of syllabuses is that each structure will tend to be presented and practised in isolation. For example, last week a class might have practised adjective phrases ("Where is that book by Enid Blyton?"). This week, they may be working on questions with final prepositions ("Who did you give it to?") Next week, they may be introduced to a pattern containing the to-infinitive ("I told him to return the book."). As individual patterns, these may be well-taught, but do pupils ever have practice in using all three patterns together? Do they ever have the opportunity to use a variety of patterns for a piece of communication? This is, after all, what language is. We all make a selection of the patterns of the language when we wish to communi-
cate. Rarely do we find that ten examples of the same pattern are adequate for our purpose.

If your answer to the questions above is “No”, then you would do well to consider using prepared dialogues as one of your teaching aids. Having taught the patterns mentioned above, for example, we could combine them in a simple dialogue like this:

Halim: Where is that book by Enid Blyton?
George: I don’t know. Who did you give it to?
Halim: Faridah. I told her to return it yesterday.
George: (searching among some papers on the table)
Faridah came in about half an hour ago. Perhaps she brought the book. Yes, here it is.
Halim: Thank you, George.

Notice the degree of control. All the sentence patterns and most of the vocabulary have already been introduced. (is such as “brought” (irregular past tense) and “ago” are also included because they are useful. These might have been taught the previous term, or the previous year, but they need revising and using again in new contexts if pupils are to attain competence in English.

Here are some other examples of dialogues. The Syllabus Items are taken from the post-1970 English Syllabus for National Primary Schools in Malaysia.

**Items 23, 17, 14, 13, 12 etc. (Standard 1)**

**Shopping**

Halim: Good morning, Che’ Radziah.
Radziah: Good Morning, Enche’ Halim. Please show me the bananas.
Halim: These are good bananas, Che’ Radziah.
Radziah: Please give me six bananas.
Halim: Certainly. One, two, three, four, five, six bananas.
Radziah: Thank you, Enche’ Halim.

(Many variations on the “shopping” situation are possible).

**Items 48 – 45 etc. (Standard 2)**

**Getting ready for a picnic.**

Mother: Asmah, put these boxes in the basket.
Asmah: What is in them?
Mother: There are sandwiches, nasi goreng, oranges and mangoes.
Ali: Have you got a bottle of lemonade?
Mother: Yes, I have. There are three bottles.
Get them from the kitchen cupboard.
Father: (from outside) Hurry up! Where is the basket?

Mother: Asmah, take the basket to the car.
Give it to your father.
Ali: I have the bottles of lemonade. Mother.
Mother: Good! Come on! Your father is waiting.

The following points may be noted:

(a) The dialogues are short enough to be done in one lesson or in part of a lesson.

(b) The language is controlled. No sentence patterns are used that have not already been presented and practised. A few new words may be introduced provided the situation and apparatus used make the meaning clear.

(c) The situations involve a few simple actions which help pupils’ understanding.

(d) By substituting other words, a dialogue may be used several times. For example, in the “Shopping” dialogue above, the names can be changed, the woman asks for other kinds of fruit, and she may buy three papayas.

(e) Pupils enjoy saying and acting the dialogues.

The second part of this article will deal mainly with how to present and use dialogues with primary classes.

**Using Prepared Dialogues in Primary Classes**

In the first part of this article, there were some remarks on the value of prepared dialogues, together with a few examples. Now we will consider effective procedures for presenting and practising a dialogue. This should be done orally so that pupils can concentrate on understanding and saying the sentences without at this stage having the additional task of recognizing print.

(a) Introduce the dialogue orally while pupils listen and watch. Use blackboard sketches, pictures or flannelboard figures of the characters (usually only two or three). Point to the appropriate character as you repeat his words. Do this twice. Use suitable gestures and actions. Do not vary the sentences. To avoid doing this, you may have a written copy of the dialogue in your hand to refer to, but you should, of course, already know the dialogue as a result of having practised your own pronunciation, intonation and rhythm beforehand.

(b) Ask a few simple questions about who the characters are, what happens, etc. If no one can answer, present the dialogue again.

(c) Divide the class into as many groups as there are characters. (No moving about is necessary.) Pupils
repeat the sentences after the teacher. Change
groups and repeat.

(d) By now, pupils have heard the dialogue several
times. Try to get them to repeat it again, this time
only prompting them as necessary. Generally one
or two key words, or the first word in a sentence,
are sufficient.

(e) Have pairs or small groups of pupils repeat the dia-
logue at the front of the class. Encourage them to
use simple actions. Prompt them when they need
it.

Pupils can usually master a dialogue in this way in
about 20 minutes, that is, more quickly than adults
can.

(f) Come back to the dialogue again in another lesson,
this time using a few substitutions. Make a point
also of using similar patterns and phrases in the
course of classroom routine. The object is to en-
able pupils to use the patterns in a variety of situa-
tions, not merely to memorize a few sentences.

Reading and writing work arise naturally out of a
dialogue. As desired, after the oral stage has been
mastered, pupils can read the dialogue from the black-
board or write out a part or the whole of it. For the
reading, a useful piece of equipment is a “roll-up black-
board” (cheap to make, like a wall map, but made of
plastic or other material suitable for writing on with
chalk). At the opportune moment, the blackboard, on
which you have already written the dialogue, can be un-
rolled. Children are most impressed by this, and if the
teacher can manage to sit down and say nothing at this
point, the pupils will often read the dialogue for them-
seves quite fluently.

This can be followed by getting individual pupils to
point out particular words and phrases, and to match
flashcards with words on the roll-up blackboard. The
blackboard should be hung low enough for them to be
able to do this easily.

For written work, pupils can be asked to copy any
number of sentences, perhaps after you have rubbed out
a few structure words first. Pupils then supply the
erased words as they write. For example:

— did you give it — ?

Most of the written work done in this way will be com-
pletely correct. Pupils’ own copies of dialogues can later
be used for revision. For example, ask pupils to read
their work silently as a prelude to acting a dialogue and
again for a few minutes at the end of a lesson.

If the reader is by now convinced that dialogues can
be an effective aid for teaching English, he may ask
where he can get a collection of suitable dialogues. Some
are included in “The Teachers’ Handbook for the post
1970 Primary School English Syllabus (Items 1 – 64)”
published in February 1971 by the Dewan Bahasa dan
Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, at a price of $1.50. This Han-
book covers the syllabus items for Standards 1 and 2.
Many more dialogues will be introduced in the Hand-
books for Standards 3 – 6 now being prepared by the
Ministry of Education.

Two titles which teachers may find useful for reference
are:

*Easy English Dialogues* Books 1 and 2 by Michael
West (Longman)

*Conversation Exercises in Everyday English* Books 1
and 2 by M. F. Jerrom and L. L. Szkutnik (Longman)

The first of these gives guidance on how to use sub-
estitions. The second is marked for stress and intona-
tion which will help a teacher wishing to improve his
own spoken English. However, the dialogues in these
books are not entirely suitable for primary classes,
though many could be adapted to suit your own school.
No collection of dialogues for primary schools in Malay-
sia has yet been produced. Perhaps members of SELTA
and readers of this journal can fill the gap?