

17 Content-Based Instruction

Background

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) refers to an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is organized around the content or information that students will acquire, rather than around a linguistic or other type of syllabus. Krahnke offers the following definition:

It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content being taught. (Krahnke, 1987: 65)

The term *content* has become a popular one both within language teaching and in the popular media. *New York Times* columnist and linguistic pundit William Safire addressed it in one of his columns in 1998 and noted:

If any word in the English language is hot, buzzworthy and finger-snappingly with it, surpassing even millennium in both general discourse and insiderese, that word is content. Get used to it, because we won't soon get over it. (*New York Times*, August 19, 1998, 15)

Although *content* is used with a variety of different meanings in language teaching, it most frequently refers to the substance or subject matter that we learn or communicate through language rather than the language used to convey it. Attempts to give priority to meaning in language teaching are not new. Approaches encouraging demonstration, imitation, miming, those recommending the use of objects, pictures, and audiovisual presentations, and proposals supporting translation, explanation, and definition as aids to understanding meaning have appeared at different times in the history of language teaching. Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989) propose that Saint Augustine was an early proponent of Content-Based Language Teaching and quote his recommendations regarding focus on meaningful content in language teaching. Kelly's history of language teaching cites a number of such meaning-based proposals (Kelly 1969). Content-Based Instruction likewise draws on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching, as these emerged in the 1980s. If, as it was argued, classrooms should focus on real communication and the exchange of information, an ideal situation for second language learning would be one where the subject matter of language teaching was not

grammar or functions or some other language-based unit of organization, but content, that is, subject matter from outside the domain of language. The language that is being taught could be used to present subject matter, and the students would learn the language as a by-product of learning about real-world content. Widdowson commented (1978: 16):

I would argue, then, that a foreign language can be associated with those areas of use which are represented by the other subjects on the school curriculum and that this not only helps to ensure the link with reality and the pupil's own experience but also provides us with the most certain means we have of teaching the language as communication, as use, rather than simply as usage. The kind of language course that I envisage is one which deals with a selection of topics taken from the other subjects: simple experiments in physics and chemistry, biological processes in plants and animals, map-drawing, descriptions of historical events and so on. . . . It is easy to see that if such a procedure were adopted, the difficulties associated with the presentation of language use in the classroom would, to a considerable degree, disappear. The presentation would essentially be the same as the methodological techniques used for introducing the topics in the subjects from which they are drawn.

Other educational initiatives since the late 1970s that also emphasize the principle of acquiring content through language rather than the study of language for its own sake include Language across the Curriculum, Immersion Education, Immigrant On-Arrival Programs, Programs for Students with Limited English Proficiency, and Language for Specific Purposes. Content-Based Instruction draws some of its theory and practice from these curriculum approaches. We will briefly consider the role of content in these curriculum models before looking at the specific claims of Content-Based Instruction.

The role of content in other curriculum designs

Language across the Curriculum was a proposal for native-language education that grew out of recommendations of a British governmental commission in the mid-1970s. The report of the commission recommended a focus on reading and writing in all subject areas in the curriculum, and not merely in the subject called language arts. Language skills should also be taught in the content subjects and not left exclusively for the English teacher to deal with. This report influenced American education as well, and the slogan "Every teacher, an English teacher" became familiar to every teacher. Like other cross-disciplinary proposals, this one never had the classroom impact that its advocates had hoped for. Nevertheless, subject-matter texts appeared that included exercises dealing with language practice, and the need for collaboration between subject-matter teachers and language teachers was emphasized. In some cases,

Current communicative approaches

curricular material was produced that integrated subject matter and language teaching goals, such as the Singaporean Primary Pilot Project in the 1970s – classroom texts integrating science, math, and language study.

Immersion Education has also had a strong influence on the theory of Content-Based Instruction. Immersion Education is a type of foreign language instruction in which the regular school curriculum is taught through the medium of the foreign language. The foreign language is the vehicle for content instruction; it is not the subject of instruction. Thus, for example, an English-speaking child might enter a primary school in which the medium of instruction for all the content subjects is French. Student goals of an immersion program include: (1) developing a high level of proficiency in the foreign language; (2) developing positive attitudes toward those who speak the foreign language and toward their culture(s); (3) developing English language skills commensurate with expectations for a student's age and abilities; (4) gaining designated skills and knowledge in the content areas of the curriculum.

The first immersion programs were developed in Canada in the 1970s to provide English-speaking students with the opportunity to learn French. Since that time, immersion programs have been adopted in many parts of North America, and alternative forms of immersion have been devised. In the United States, immersion programs can be found in a number of languages, including French, German, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese.

Immigrant On-Arrival Programs typically focus on the language newly arrived immigrants in a country need for survival. Such learners typically need to learn how to deal with differing kinds of real-world content as a basis for social survival. Design of such courses in Australia was among the first attempts to integrate notional, functional, grammatical, and lexical specifications built around particular themes and situations. A typical course would cover language needed to deal with immigration bureaucracies, finding accommodations, shopping, finding a job, and so forth. The methodology of the Australian on-arrival courses was based on the Direct Method (Ozolins 1993) but included role play and simulations based on the language needed to function in specific situations. In current on-arrival programs, a competency-based approach is often used in which a teaching syllabus is developed around the competencies learners are presumed to need in different survival situations (see Chapter 13).

Programs for Students with Limited English Proficiency (SLEP) are governmentally mandated programs to serve especially those children whose parents might be served by the on-arrival programs, but more generally designed to provide in-class or pullout instruction for any school-age children whose language competence is insufficient to participate fully in normal school instruction. Early versions of such programs

were largely grammar-based. More recent SLEP programs focus on giving students the language and other skills needed to enter the regular school curriculum. Such skills often involve learning how to carry out academic tasks and understand academic content through a second language.

Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) is a movement that seeks to serve the language needs of learners who need language in order to carry out specific roles (e.g., student, engineer, technician, nurse) and who thus need to acquire content and real-world skills through the medium of a second language rather than master the language for its own sake. LSP has focused particularly on English for Science and Technology (EST). An institution offering English for Science and Technology courses would have specialized courses to support its clients in learning to read technical articles in computer science or to write academic papers in chemical engineering. LSP/EST have given rise to a number of subfields, such as ESP (English for Specific Purposes), EOP (English for Occupational Purposes), and EAP (English for Academic Purposes).

Content-based courses are now common in many different settings and content is often used as the organizing principle in ESL/EFL courses of many different kinds. In this chapter we will examine the principles underlying Content-Based Instruction and how these are applied in language teaching programs and teaching materials.

Approach

Content-Based Instruction is grounded on the following two central principles: (as we examine how these principles are applied in CBI, a number of other issues will also be considered):

1. *People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself.* This principle reflects one of the motivations for CBI noted earlier – that it leads to more effective language learning.

2. *Content-Based Instruction better reflects learners' needs for learning a second language.* This principle reflects the fact that many content-based programs serve to prepare ESL students for academic studies or for mainstreaming; therefore, the need to be able to access the content of academic learning and teaching as quickly as possible, as well as the processes through which such learning and teaching are realized, are a central priority.

Theory of language

A number of assumptions about the nature of language underlie Content-Based Instruction.

Current communicative approaches

LANGUAGE IS TEXT- AND DISCOURSE-BASED

CBI addresses the role of language as a vehicle for learning content. This implies the centrality of linguistic entities longer than single sentences, because the focus of teaching is how meaning and information are communicated and constructed through texts and discourse. The linguistic units that are central are not limited to the level of sentences and sub-sentential units (clauses and phrases) but are those that account for how longer stretches of language are used and the linguistic features that create coherence and cohesion within speech events and text types. This involves study of the textual and discourse structure of written texts such as letters, reports, essays, descriptions, or book chapters, or of speech events such as meetings, lectures, and discussions.

LANGUAGE USE DRAWS ON INTEGRATED SKILLS

CBI views language use as involving several skills together. In a content-based class, students are often involved in activities that link the skills, because this is how the skills are generally involved in the real world. Hence students might read and take notes, listen and write a summary, or respond orally to things they have read or written. And rather than viewing grammar as a separate dimension of language, in CBI grammar is seen as a component of other skills. Topic- or theme-based courses provide a good basis for an integrated skills approach because the topics selected provide coherence and continuity across skill areas and focus on the use of language in connected discourse rather than isolated fragments. They seek to bring together knowledge, language, and thinking skills. Grammar can also be presented through a content-based approach. The teacher or course developer has the responsibility to identify relevant grammatical and other linguistic focuses to complement the topic or theme of the activities.

LANGUAGE IS PURPOSEFUL

Language is used for specific purposes. The purpose may be academic, vocational, social, or recreational but it gives direction, shape, and ultimately meaning to discourse and texts. When learners focus on the purpose of the language samples they are exposed to, they become engaged in following through and seeing if the purpose is attained and how their own interests relate to this purpose (or purposes). For learners to receive maximum benefit from CBI they need to be clearly in tune with its purposes and the language codes that signal and link these expressions of purpose.

Language contains great potential for communicating meaning. In order to make content comprehensible to learners, teachers need to make

the same kinds of adjustments and simplifications that native speakers make in communicating with second language learners. The discourse that results from these simplifications is often referred to as “foreigner talk.” Teachers and lecturers operating within CBI consciously and unconsciously make such “foreigner talk” modifications in the language they use in teaching, in order to make the content they are focusing on more comprehensible to their students. These modifications include simplification (e.g., use of shorter T units and clauses), well-formedness (e.g., using few deviations from standard usage), explicitness (e.g., speaking with nonreduced pronunciation), regularization (e.g., use of canonical word order), and redundancy (e.g., highlighting important material through simultaneous use of several linguistic mechanisms) (Stryker and Leaver, 1993).

Theory of learning

We earlier described one of the core principles of CBI as follows: *People learn a second language more successfully when they use the language as a means of acquiring information, rather than as an end in itself.* Regardless of the type of CBI model that is used, they all “share the fact that content is the point of departure or organizing principle of the course – a feature that grows out of the common underlying assumption that successful language learning occurs when students are presented with target language material in a meaningful, contextualized form with the primary focus on acquiring information” (Brinton et al., Wesche, 1989: 17). This assumption is backed by a number of studies (e.g., Scott 1974; Collier 1989; Grandin 1993; Wesche 1993) that support the position that in formal educational settings, second languages are best learned when the focus is on mastery of content rather than on mastery of language per se. CBI thus stands in contrast to traditional approaches to language teaching in which language form is the primary focus of the syllabus and of classroom teaching.

A number of additional assumptions that derive from the core principles of CBI just discussed will now be described. One important corollary can be stated as follows:

People learn a second language most successfully when the information they are acquiring is perceived as interesting, useful, and leading to a desired goal.

To justify this claim, CBI advocates refer to ESP studies that “note that for successful learning to occur, the language syllabus must take into account the eventual uses the learner will make of the target language” and further that “the use of informational content which is perceived as relevant by the learner is assumed by many to increase motivation in the

Current communicative approaches

language course, and thus to promote more effective learning” (Brinton et al. 1989: 3).

Language learning is also believed to be more motivating when students are focusing on something other than language, such as ideas, issues, and opinions. “The student can most effectively acquire a second language when the task of language learning becomes incidental to the task of communicating with someone . . . about some topic . . . which is inherently interesting to the student” (D’Anglejan and Tucker 1975: 284). If content with a high level of interest is chosen, learners may acquire the language more willingly. This can be expressed as:

Some content areas are more useful as a basis for language learning than others.

Certain areas of content are thought to be more effective as a basis for CBI than others. For example, geography is often the “first choice” of subject matter. Geography is “highly visual, spatial and contextual; it lends itself to the use of maps, charts, and realia, and the language tends to be descriptive in nature with use of the ‘to be,’ cognates and proper names” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 288). For somewhat different reasons, “Introduction to Psychology offered an ideal situation in which to introduce CBI at the bilingual University of Ottawa, since it has the largest enrollment of any introductory course in the university” and thus was likely to “attract a large enough number of second language speakers to justify special lecture or discussion sections” (Brinton et al., 1989: 46). This course was further recommended because of student interest in the course topics and because of “the highly structured nature of the content, the emphasis on receptive learning of factual information, the availability of appropriate textbooks and video study material” (Brinton et al., 1989: 46).

On the other hand, CBI courses have been created around a rich variety of alternative kinds of content. Case studies of CBI in foreign language education report content selection as wide-ranging as “Themes of Soviet Life and Worldview” (Russian), “Aphorisms, Proverbs, and Popular Sayings” (Italian), “Religion and Change in Twentieth-Century Latin America” (Spanish), and “French Media” (French). Eleven such case studies using a variety of course content in a variety of foreign language teaching situations are reported in Stryker and Leaver (1993).

Students learn best when instruction addresses students’ needs.

This principle emphasizes that in CBI the content that students study is selected according to their needs. Hence, if the program is at a secondary school, the academic needs of students across the curriculum form the basis for the content curriculum. Authentic texts, both written and spoken, that students will encounter in the real world (e.g., at school or at

work) provide the starting point for developing a syllabus, so relevance to learners' needs is assured. In the case of an academically focused program, "the language curriculum is based directly on the academic needs of the students and generally follows the sequence determined by a particular subject matter in dealing with the language problems which students encounter" (Brinton et al., 1989: 2).

Teaching builds on the previous experience of the learners.

Another assumption of CBI is that it seeks to build on students' knowledge and previous experience. Students do not start out as blank slates but are treated as bringing important knowledge and understanding to the classroom. The starting point in presenting a theme-based lesson is therefore what the students already know about the content.

Design

Objectives

In CBI, language learning is typically considered incidental to the learning of content. Thus the objectives in a typical CBI course are stated as objectives of the content course. Achievement of content course objectives is considered as necessary and sufficient evidence that language learning objectives have been achieved as well. An exception to this generalization is with the theme-based instructional model of CBI. In theme-based CBI, language learning objectives drive the selection of theme topics; that is, "there are often set linguistic objectives in the curriculum, and thematic modules are selected for the degree to which they provide compatible contexts for working towards these objectives." It is possible for theme-based courses to be directed toward single-skill objectives; however, most often theme-based instruction "lends itself well to four-skills courses, since the topic selected provides coherence and continuity across skill areas and allows work on higher-level language skills (e.g., integrating reading and writing skills)" (Brinton et al., 1989: 26).

An example of objectives in CBI comes from the theme-based Intensive Language Course (ILC) at the Free University of Berlin. Four objectives were identified for its yearlong, multitheme program. These objectives were linguistic, strategic, and cultural. Objectives were:

1. to activate and develop existing English language skills
2. to acquire learning skills and strategies that could be applied in future language development opportunities
3. to develop general academic skills applicable to university studies in all subject areas
4. to broaden students' understanding of English-speaking peoples

(Brinton et al., 1989: 32)

Syllabus

In most CBI courses, the syllabus is derived from the content area, and these obviously vary widely in detail and format. It is typically only CBI following the theme-based model in which content and instructional sequence is chosen according to language learning goals. The theme-based model uses the syllabus type referred to as a topical syllabus, the organization of which is built around specific topics and subtopics, as the name implies.

The organization of the Intensive Language Course at the Free University of Berlin consists of a sequence of modules spread over the academic year. The topical themes of the modules are:

1. Drugs
2. Religious Persuasion
3. Advertising
4. Drugs
5. Britain and the Race Question
6. Native Americans
7. Modern Architecture
8. Microchip Technology
9. Ecology
10. Alternative Energy
11. Nuclear Energy
12. Dracula in Myth, Novel, and Films
13. Professional Ethics

There is both macro- and micro-structuring of the yearlong syllabus for this course. At the macro-level, the syllabus consists of a sequence of modules selected to reflect student interests and a multidisciplinary perspective. The modules are designed and sequenced so that they “relate to one another so as to create a cohesive transition of certain skills, vocabulary, structures, and concepts.” The first six modules are ordered so that early modules have easily accessible, high-interest themes. “Later modules deal with more technical processes and assume mastery of certain skills, vocabulary, structures, and concepts” (Brinton et al., 1989: 35). The internal design of the modules (the micro-structure) is such that:

All modules move from an initial exercise intended to stimulate student interest in the theme through a variety of exercises aimed at developing comprehension and the students’ ability to manipulate the language appropriate to the situation and use the language of the texts. The final activities of each module require the students themselves to choose the language appropriate for the situation and use it in communicative interaction. (Brinton et al., 1989: 34)

Types of learning and teaching activities

There are a number of descriptions of activity types in CBI. Stoller (1997) provides a list of activities classified according to their instructional focus. The classification categories she proposes are:

- language skills improvement

- vocabulary building
- discourse organization
- communicative interaction
- study skills
- synthesis of content materials and grammar.

Mohan (1986) describes an approach to content-based ESL instruction at the secondary level that is built around the notion of knowledge structures. This refers to the structures of knowledge across the curriculum in terms of frameworks and schemas that apply to a wide range of topics. The framework consists of six universal knowledge structures, half of which represent specific, practical elements (Description, Sequence, and Choice) and the other half of which represent general, theoretical elements (Concepts/Classification, Principles, and Evaluation). A variety of CBI courses have been developed based on Mohan's knowledge framework.

Learner roles

One goal of CBI is for learners to become autonomous so that they come to “understand their own learning process and . . . take charge of their own learning from the very start” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 286). In addition, most CBI courses anticipate that students will support each other in collaborative modes of learning. This may be a challenge to those students who are accustomed to more whole-class or independent learning and teaching modes. CBI is in the “learning by doing” school of pedagogy. This assumes an active role by learners in several dimensions. Learners are expected to be active interpreters of input, willing to tolerate uncertainty along the path of learning, willing to explore alternative learning strategies, and willing to seek multiple interpretations of oral and written texts.

Learners themselves may be sources of content and joint participants in the selection of topics and activities. Such participation “has been found to be highly motivating and has resulted in a course changing its direction in order to better meet the needs of students” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 11). Learners need commitment to this new kind of approach to language learning, and CBI advocates warn that some students may not find this new set of learner roles to their liking and may be less than ready and willing participants in CBI courses. Some students are overwhelmed by the quantity of new information in their CBI courses and may flounder. Some students are reported to have experienced frustration and have asked to be returned to more structured, traditional classrooms. Students need to be prepared both psychologically and cognitively for CBI and, if they are not adequately primed, then “missing schemata needs to be

Current communicative approaches

provided or students need to be kept from enrolling until they are 'ready'” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 292).

The role of teachers

CBI anticipates a change in the typical roles of language teachers. “Instructors must be more than just good language teachers. They must be knowledgeable in the subject matter and able to elicit that knowledge from their students” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 292). At a more detailed level, teachers have to keep context and comprehensibility foremost in their planning and presentations, they are responsible for selecting and adapting authentic materials for use in class, they become student needs analysts, and they have to create truly learner-centered classrooms. As Brinton et al. (1989: 3) note:

They are asked to view their teaching in a new way, from the perspective of truly contextualizing their lessons by using content as the point of departure. They are almost certainly committing themselves to materials adaptation and development. Finally, with the investment of time and energy to create a content-based language course comes even greater responsibility for the learner, since learner needs become the hub around which the second language curriculum and materials, and therefore teaching practices, revolve.

Stryker and Leaver suggest the following essential skills for any CBI instructor:

1. Varying the format of classroom instruction
2. Using group work and team-building techniques
3. Organizing jigsaw reading arrangements
4. Defining the background knowledge and language skills required for student success
5. Helping students develop coping strategies
6. Using process approaches to writing
7. Using appropriate error correction techniques
8. Developing and maintaining high levels of student esteem

(Stryker and Leaver 1993: 293)

Content-Based Instruction places different demands on teachers from regular ESL teaching. Brinton et al. (1989) identify the following issues:

- Are adequately trained instructors available to teach the selected courses?
- Will there be any incentives offered to instructors who volunteer to teach in the proposed program (e.g., salary increases, release time, smaller class sizes)?
- How will faculty not willing or qualified to participate in the new program be reassigned?

- How will teachers and other support staff be oriented to the model (e.g., pre-service, in-service)?
- What is the balance of language and content teaching (i.e., focus on content teaching, focus on language teaching, equal attention to both)?
- What are the roles of the teacher (e.g., facilitator, content-area expert, language expert)? What is the anticipated workload (e.g., contact hours, curriculum duties)?
- Who is responsible for selecting the teaching materials?
- Are teachers expected to develop content-specific language-teaching materials? If yes, will materials development training and guidelines be provided?
- Will alternate staffing configurations (e.g., curriculum and materials specialists, team teaching) be used?

Almost all participating instructors comment on the large amounts of time and energy involved in Content-Based Instruction and many describe it as “a major challenge. Taking up this challenge requires a highly motivated and dedicated individual – or group of individuals” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 311).

The role of materials

As with other elements in CBI, the materials that facilitate language learning are the materials that are used typically with the subject matter of the content course. It is recommended that a rich variety of materials types be identified and used with the central concern being the notion that the materials are “authentic.” In one sense, authenticity implies that the materials are like the kinds of materials used in native-language instruction. In another sense, authenticity refers to introduction of, say, newspaper and magazine articles and any other media materials “that were not originally produced for language teaching purposes” (Brinton et al., 1989: 17). Many CBI practitioners recommend the use of realia such as tourist guidebooks, technical journals, railway timetables, newspaper ads, radio and TV broadcasts, and so on, and at least one cautions that “textbooks are contrary to the very concept of CBI – and good language teaching in general” (Stryker and Leaver 1993: 295).

However, comprehensibility is as critical as authenticity and it has been pointed out that CBI courses are often “characterized by a heavy use of instructional media (e.g., videotapes and/or audiotapes) to further enrich the context provided by authentic readings selected to form the core of the thematic unit” (Brinton et al. 1989: 31). Although authenticity is considered critical, CBI proponents do note that materials (as well as lecturer presentations) may need modification in order to ensure maximum comprehensibility. This may mean linguistic simplification or adding redundancy to text materials. It will certainly mean “providing

guides and strategies to assist them [students] in comprehending the materials” (Brinton et al., 1989: 17).

Contemporary models of content-based instruction

The principles of CBI can be applied to the design of courses for learners at any level of language learning. The following are examples of different applications of CBI.

Courses at the university level

Several different approaches to Content-Based Instruction have been developed at the university level.

Theme-based language instruction. This refers to a language course in which the syllabus is organized around themes or topics such as “pollution” or “women’s rights.” The language syllabus is subordinated to the more general theme. A general theme such as “business and marketing” or “immigrants in a new city” might provide organizing topics for 2 weeks of integrated classroom work. Language analysis and practice evolve out of the topics that form the framework for the course. A topic might be introduced through a reading, vocabulary developed through guided discussion, audio or video material on the same topic used for listening comprehension, followed by written assignments integrating information from several different sources. Most of the materials used will typically be teacher-generated and the topic treated will cross all skills (Brinton et al., 1989).

Sheltered content instruction. This refers to content courses taught in the second language by a content area specialist, to a group of ESL learners who have been grouped together for this purpose. Since the ESL students are not in a class together with native speakers, the instructor will be required to present the content in a way which is comprehensible to second language learners and in the process use language and tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty. Typically, the instructor will choose texts of a suitable difficulty level for the learners and adjust course requirements to accommodate the learners’ language capacities (e.g., by making fewer demands for written assignments). Shih cites examples of such an approach in sheltered psychology courses for English and French immersion students at the University of Ottawa, courses in English for business and economics offered at Oregon State University, and ESP courses in English for business, economics, and computer science at Western Illinois University (Shih 1986: 638).

Adjunct language instruction. In this model, students are enrolled in two linked courses, one a content course and one a language course, with both courses sharing the same content base and complementing each

other in terms of mutually coordinated assignments. Such a program requires a large amount of coordination to ensure that the two curricula are interlocking and this may require modifications to both courses.

Team-teach approach. This is a variation on the adjunct approach. Shih (1986) describes two examples of this approach. One (developed at the University of Birmingham) focuses on lecture comprehension and the writing of examination questions in fields such as transportation and plant biology. The work of recording lectures and preparing comprehension checks (including exam questions) is shared between the subject teacher and the language teacher, and during class time, both help students with problems that arise. A second example is from a polytechnic program in Singapore. An English-for-occupational-purposes writing course was designed to prepare students for writing tasks they might have to carry out in future jobs in building maintenance and management (e.g., writing of specifications, memos, accident reports, progress reports, and meeting reports). The subject teacher finds authentic or realistic situations that are the basis for report assignments. As students work on these assignments, both teachers acts as consultants. Models written by the subject teacher or based on the best student work are later presented and discussed (Shih 1986: 638).

Skills-based approach. This is characterized by a focus on a specific academic skill area (e.g., academic writing) that

is linked to concurrent study of specific subject matter in one or more academic disciplines. This may mean that students write about material they are currently studying in an academic course or that the language or composition course itself simulates the academic process (e.g. mini-lectures, readings, and discussion on a topic lead into writing assignments). Students write in a variety of forms (e.g. short-essay tests, summaries, critiques, research reports) to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter and to extend their knowledge to new areas. Writing is integrated with reading, listening, and discussion about the core content and about collaborative and independent research growing from the core material. (Shih, 1986: 617–618)

Courses at the elementary and secondary level

Variations of the approaches discussed in the preceding section are also found at the secondary and elementary level.

Theme-based approach. A common model at this level is one in which students complete theme-based modules that are designed to facilitate their entry into the regular subject-areas classroom. These models do not provide a substitute for mainstream content classes but focus on learning strategies, concepts, tasks, and skills that are needed in subject areas in the mainstream curriculum, grouped around topics and themes such as consumer education, map skills, foods, and nutrition.

Current communicative approaches

Two critical elements are necessary in developing an approach in which language proficiency and academic content are developed in parallel: integration of second language development into regular content-area instruction and creation of appropriate conditions for providing input. Success for this model rests on cooperative learning in heterogeneous small-group settings. This entails:

- grouping strategies
- alternative ways for providing input
- techniques for making subject matter comprehensible
- opportunities to develop language proficiency for academic purposes
(Kessler and Quinn 1989: 75)

This approach acknowledges that preparing ESL students for mainstreaming is a responsibility not only for ESL teachers but also for content teachers. The latter have to increasingly acknowledge the crucial role language plays in content learning.

An example of this approach is described by Wu (1996) in a program prepared for ESL students in an Australian high school. Topics from a range of mainstream subjects were chosen as the basis for the course and to provide a transition to mainstream classes. Topics were chosen primarily to cater to the widest variety of students' needs and interests. Linguistic appropriateness was another factor taken into account when choosing topics as some involved more technical terms and complex grammatical constructions. The topics were also chosen for relevance to the Australian sociopolitical and cultural climate. Topics that fulfilled these criteria included multiculturalism, the nuclear age, sports, the Green movement, street kids, and teenage smoking (Wu 1996: 23).

Adjunct approach. Parallel to the theme-based component described by Wu was an adjunct course focusing on science. Both ESL teachers and science teachers were involved in this aspect of the course, which focused on preparing students to make the transition to learning science through English. The adjunct course focused on the following:

1. Understanding specialized science terminologies and concepts
2. Report writing skills
3. Grammar for science
4. Note-taking skills

(Wu 1996: 24)

Courses in private language institutes

Theme-based courses also provide a framework for courses and materials in many programs outside the public school and university sector, such as the private language-school market. With theme-based courses, a set of themes might be selected as the basis for a semester's work, and each

theme used as the basis for 6 or more hours of work in which the four skills and grammar are taught drawing on the central theme. Such an approach also provides the basis for many published ESL texts (e.g., Richards and Sandy 1998).

Procedure

Since Content-Based Instruction refers to an approach rather than a method, no specific techniques or activities are associated with it. At the level of procedure, teaching materials and activities are selected according to the extent to which they match the type of program it is. Stryker and Leaver (1997: 198–199) describe a typical sequence of classroom procedures in a content-based lesson. The lesson is a Spanish lesson built around the viewing of the film *El Norte*.

Preliminary preparation: Students read reference materials regarding U.S. immigration laws as well as an extract from Octavio Paz's *El Laberinto de la Soledad*.

1. Linguistic analysis: discussion of grammar and vocabulary based on students' analysis of oral presentations done the day before.
2. Preparation for film: activities previewing vocabulary in the film, including a vocabulary worksheet.
3. Viewing a segment of the movie.
4. Discussion of the film: The teacher leads a discussion of the film.
5. Discussion of the reading.
6. Videotaped interview: Students see a short interview in which immigration matters are discussed.
7. Discussion: a discussion of immigration reform.
8. Preparation of articles: Students are given time to read related articles and prepare a class presentation.
9. Presentation of articles: Students make presentations, which may be taped so that they can later listen for self-correction.
10. Wrap-up discussion.

Conclusion

Content-based approaches in language teaching have been widely used in a variety of different settings since the 1980s. From its earliest applications in ESP, EOP, and immersion programs, it is now widely used in K–12 programs for ESL students, in university foreign language programs, and in business and vocational courses in EFL settings. Its advocates claim that it leads to more successful program outcomes than alternative language teaching approaches. Because it offers unlimited opportunities

Current communicative approaches

for teachers to match students' interests and needs with interesting and meaningful content, it offers many practical advantages for teachers and course designers. Brinton et al., (1989: 2) observe:

In a content-based approach, the activities of the language class are specific to the subject being taught, and are geared to stimulate students to think and learn through the target language. Such an approach lends itself quite naturally to the integrated teaching of the four traditional language skills. For example, it employs authentic reading materials which require students not only to understand information but to interpret and evaluate it as well. It provides a forum in which students can respond orally to reading and lecture materials. It recognizes that academic writing follows from listening, and reading, and thus requires students to synthesize facts and ideas from multiple sources as preparation for writing. In this approach, students are exposed to study skills and learn a variety of language skills which prepare them for a range of academic tasks they will encounter.

Critics have noted that most language teachers have been trained to teach language as a skill rather than to teach a content subject. Thus, language teachers may be insufficiently grounded to teach subject matter in which they have not been trained. Team-teaching proposals involving language teachers and subject-matter teachers are often considered unwieldy and likely to reduce the efficiency of both. However, because CBI is based on a set of broad principles that can be applied in many different ways and is widely used as the basis for many different kinds of successful language programs, we can expect to see CBI continue as one of the leading curricular approaches in language teaching.

Bibliography and further reading

- Brinton, D. M., M. A. Snow, and M. B. Wesche. 1989. *Content-Based Second Language Instruction*. New York: Newbury House.
- Brinton, D. M., and P. Master (eds.). 1997. *New Ways in Content-Based Instruction*. Alexandria, Va.: TESOL Inc.
- Burger, S. 1989. Content-based ESL in a sheltered psychology course: Input, output and outcomes. *TESL Canada Journal* 6: 45–49.
- Cantoni-Harvey, G. 1987. *Content-Area Language Instruction*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Collier, V. 1989. How long? A synthesis of research on academic achievement in a second language. *TESOL Quarterly* 23: 509–531.
- Crandall, J. (ed.). 1987. *ESL through Content-Area Instruction: Mathematics, Science, Social Studies*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall.
- D'Anglejan, A., and R. Tucker. 1975. The acquisition of complex English structures by adult learners. *Language Learning* 25(2): 281–296.
- Dudley-Evans, T., and M. J. St John (eds.). 1998. *Developments in English for Specific Purposes: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Gass, S., and C. Madden (eds.). 1985. *Input in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Newbury House.
- Grabe, W., and F. Stoller. 1997. Content-Based Instruction: Research foundations. In M. Snow and D. M. Brinton (eds.), *The Content-Based Classroom*. New York: Longman.
- Grandin, J. 1993. The University of Rhode Island's International Engineering Program. In M. Krueger and F. Ryan (eds.), *Language and Content*. Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath. 57-79.
- Hutchison, T., and A. Waters. 1987. *English for Specific Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jordan, R. R. 1997. *English for Academic Purposes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kelly, L. G. 1969. *25 Centuries of Language Teaching*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Kessler, C., and M. Quinn. 1987. ESL and science learning. In J. Crandall (ed.), *ESL through Content Area Instruction: Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies*. Englewood Cliffs, N.Y. Prentice Hall. 55-88.
- Krahnke, K. 1987. *Approaches to Syllabus Design for Foreign Language Teaching*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Mohan, B. 1986. *Language and Content*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley.
- Mohan, B. 1993. A common agenda for language and content integration. In N. Bird, J. Harris, and M. Ingram (eds.), *Language and Content*. Hong Kong: Institute of Language in Education. 4-19.
- Ozolins, U. 1993. *The Politics of Language in Australia*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., and C. Sandy. 1998. *Passages*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. C., and D. Hurley. 1990. Language and content: Approaches to curriculum alignment. In J. C. Richards, *The Language Teaching Matrix*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 144-162.
- Robinson, P. 1980. *ESP (English for Specific Purposes)*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Safire, W. 1998. On language: The summer of this content. *New York Times*, August 19, 1998, 15.
- Scott, M. S. 1974. A note on the relationship between English proficiency, years of language study and the medium of instruction. *Language Learning* 24: 99-104.
- Shih, M. 1986. Content-based approaches to teaching academic writing. *TESOL Quarterly* 20(4) (December): 617-648.
- Snow, M., and D. M. Brinton (eds.). 1998. *The Content-Based Classroom*. New York: Longman.
- Snow, M., M. Met, and F. Genesee. 1989. A conceptual framework for the integration of language and content in second/foreign language instruction. *TESOL Quarterly* 23: 201-217.
- Stoller, F. 1997. Project work: a means to promote language and content. *English Teaching Forum*. 35(4): 2-9, 37.
- Stoller, F., and W. Grabe. 1997. A Six-T's Approach to Content-Based Instruction. In M. Snow and D. Brinton (eds.), *The Content-Based Classroom: Perspectives on Integrating Language and Content*. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman. 78-94.

Current communicative approaches

- Stryker, S., and B. Leaver. 1993. *Content-Based Instruction in Foreign Language Education*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.
- Wesche, M. 1993. Discipline-based approaches to language study: Research issues and outcomes. In M. Krueger and F. Ryan (eds.), *Language and Content*. Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath. 80-95.
- Widdowson, H. 1978. *Teaching Language as Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Widdowson, H. 1983. *Learning Purpose and Learning Use*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wu, S.-M. 1996. Content-based ESL at high school level: A case study. *Prospect* 11(1): 18-36.