

Using Content and Language Integrated Learning for Business Administration Students

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Abstract

This article introduces a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) course that has been successfully implemented at Toyo University. CLIL is an instructional practice in second or foreign language education that refers to the teaching of non-linguistic subjects (e.g. mathematics) in an additional (non-native) language, with attention given to both the language and the content, or as Coyle, Hood & Marsh, (2010: 24) express, “an amalgam of both”. CLIL is not new. It shares some elements of a range of educational practices such as, but not limited to, immersion teaching, content-based teaching (CBT), and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Grabe and Stoller, 1997). Because CLIL classes use language as a means to convey information on a topic or body of knowledge, it is important to keep in mind the language development of the students. This article illustrates how the author tries to strike a balance between students engaging in meaningful communication, in English, to learn content without neglecting more form based grammar and vocabulary instruction and activities.

1. Introduction

The creation of a specialized core English course for students in the Faculty of Business Administration at Toyo University contemplating study abroad was proposed towards the start of the 2011 academic year. The development of a course that would have as its aim not only the promotion of the study abroad programs offered at Toyo University, but also the improvement of students' English language skills and development of tools necessary for success in an English milieu, was initiated. This paper will first give a synopsis of some key terms to help elucidate some of the guiding principles of the course. Next, information on education in Japan along with government initiatives is presented followed by a brief introduction to CLIL. Lastly, a discussion of the course materials, basic design and student interaction is given to demonstrate how the key terms are operationalized in the classroom, followed by some general conclusions.

2. Key Terms

2.1 Motivation

Motivation is an essential element for successful language learning but is a very complex phenomenon, not easily defined or measured. “Unfortunately, research on how language learners might be brought to think positively and develop skills in motivational self-regulation is still

scarce” (Ushioda, 2008: 27). Learning is driven by personal goals, needs and interests and motivated learners exhibit skills and use techniques to keep themselves on track. They set short-term goals, engage in positive self-talk, organise their time efficiently, use problem solving strategies, and show autonomy in the learning process (Ushioda, 2008). Still, motivated learners encounter peaks and valleys on their learning journey but are usually able to maintain a steady pace throughout. Not all language learners however, are willing to hop on the trail for much more than a test ride. What can the teacher do to help unmotivated students?

Dornyei (2001) discusses a range of teacher behaviours that students pick up on. First, the teacher should strive for a positive relationship with the students, making attempts to foster a sense of mutual trust and respect. The author has found that taking a little time during lessons to deliver a funny story or personal anecdote can go a long way to instilling a relaxed atmosphere and sense of congeniality in the classroom. Next on the list is enthusiasm, thought to be one of the most important ingredients of motivationally successful teaching (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Urban, 2008; Baum, 2002; Metcalf & Game, 2006; Richards Hopkins, 2010). A teacher’s commitment and dedication towards a subject matter can prompt students to willingly pursue knowledge. Finally, by showing a commitment to and expectations for the students’ learning there is a good chance that they will do the same thing. Carefully planning challenging and interesting activities that enrich their learning experience is one way to show student that you care.

2.2 Zone of Proximal Development

The Russian psychologist L. S. Vygotsky’s work on social cognition led to the development of Sociocultural Theory (SCT). Within the SCT framework, the development of an individual relies on social interactions in cultural, linguistic, and historical and institutional settings. It is within this social interaction with one’s family, at school and at work that cultural meanings are shared within a group, and then internalized by the individual (Richardson, 1997). From his work on SCT, Vygotsky developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), one of its important concepts expressing that:

“...learning collaboratively with others, particularly in instructional settings, precedes and shapes development. The relationship between learning and development is not directly causal, but intentionally designed learning environments (e.g., instructed L2 settings) can stimulate qualitative development changes.”

(Lantolf & Thorne, 2007: 211)

2.3 Scaffolding

The American psychologist Jerome Bruner first proposed scaffolding Theory, a concept that parallels the work of Lev Vygotsky, in the late 1950s. Bruner (1978) believed that for learning to occur, interactions between adult and child that enable the child to do something beyond his or her independent efforts must take place. In the planning and

implementation of lessons, it is vital that a balance between the challenge level of the task and the skill of the performer be suitably matched.

Instructional scaffolding, the temporary support given during the learning process in an effort to help the learner reach their goal, can be used to bridge that gap. Examples of scaffolding are found in the use of templates, the modeling of activities and coaching by the teacher or more able peers. A final goal of scaffolding is that it be taken away as needed when the less experienced learner finds success with the completion of a task.

2.4 Flow Theory

Renown for his theory on “Flow”, Csikszentmihalyi (1997), tells us that people are happiest in a state of flow. Figure 1. illustrates the flow zone where Csikszentmihalyi (2004) explains maximum learning occurs; when one feels completely absorbed with the activity at hand and the passing of time seems to speed up with an optimal state of intrinsic motivation reached. If tasks are either too easy or difficult for us, then flow cannot occur.

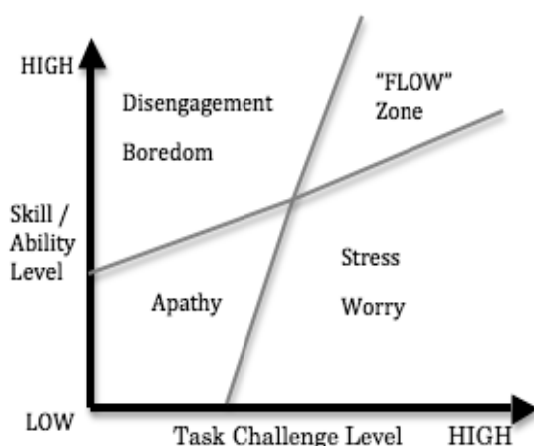


Figure 1. Flow Theory. Adapted from *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life*, by M. Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, Basic Books: New York.

2.5 Process Based Approach to Writing

In a traditional product based approach to writing, students are typically presented with a text that is read with key features highlighted by the teacher. Students then practice those features in isolation and ideas are organized in a, usually, rigid form. Finally, students are expected to mimic the model to produce the final product. A process-based approach to writing differs from a traditional approach in that students move more freely through a sequence of stages from the start to the end. The Process Approach can be broken down into three stages:

pre-writing; gathering ideas; and the final stage evaluating, which includes structuring and editing. The following section outlines how White and Arndt (1991) describe those stages.

The beginning stage of pre-writing includes co-operative group-work like brainstorming and group discussion where students gather ideas for the task and take notes. From there, students organize their ideas into lists, mind-maps, or flow charts to help give the ideas structure. Next, students begin to write a first draft. This stage can be done alone, in pairs or even in small groups. Collaborative writing can be especially valuable in that more able peers can provide scaffolding to those lesser able utilizing the four language skills. While students are involved in the writing process, they listen to and read what their peers have written, and make comments of their own. First drafts are shared and readers are encouraged to ask questions, make comments and give advice. Next, improvements are made based on peer and teacher feedback. New drafts can be written until the writer, or teacher, is satisfied with the finished piece of work. This approach requires more time to set up before students become comfortable with it, but once familiar they are on their way to becoming more co-operative and autonomous, more willing to ask for and give help to peers, thus relying less on the teacher to always tell them what to do and how to do it.

2.6 Dictogloss

Dictogloss is a quick-paced classroom dictation activity where learners listen to a text and reconstruct it (Wajnryb, 1990). An example of progression through the activity can be: student listen once to a short text, the length or complexity adaptable to suit the learners' level. They then listen again and write down what they hear, usually key words or phrases at this point. In pairs or small groups, students reconstruct the text. The author metaphorically refers to this part of the activity as the "puzzle-building" phase. Students therefore comprehend that each one of them holds different pieces to the puzzle, all of which are invaluable to the re-creation of the final image. Students listen a third and final time prior to composing their final answer, which must be the same for every student in the group. Dictogloss is an activity that incorporates the four skills. Learners listen to a text, write what they hear then share what they have heard and written with partners by speaking and listening. Students are able to ask questions about spelling and unknown vocabulary. They are encouraged to think grammatically to fill in listening gaps and focus on form.

3. Education in Japan

3.1 The Past

The 1989 Japanese Government Policies in Education, Science and Culture White Paper proposed that improved communication ability in foreign languages would be made a curricular target. It was considered to

be an important contributing factor in deepening mutual understanding. An emphasis was placed upon communicative competency and international understanding in the junior and senior high school system.

In 2003 the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science & Technology in Japan (MEXT) produced a five-year educational reform plan, which encouraged junior and senior high school teachers to implement a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology within their classrooms, with the purpose of improving English communication abilities in students. All junior and senior high school teachers were required to undergo training in CLT at workshops within the five-year period between 2003 and 2007. The author participated as a teacher trainer from 2003 to 2005 for the Chiba Board of Education. The vast majority of participating junior and senior high school teachers showed enthusiasm for the five day “Workshop on Communicative Language Teaching: Teaching English in English” There was doubt expressed by some of the participants as to how CLT techniques could be best utilized in their classrooms while still covering the required curriculum. Large class sizes and the rigid seating arrangements of most schools were voiced as being the most common limiting factors along with teachers’ self-perceived lack of experience using CLT methods.

3.2 The Present

Despite the efforts for educational reform that took place in 2003, the use of the traditional grammar-translation method, or *yakudoku*, remains widely in use throughout the secondary education system. It could be due, in part, to teachers lacking the experience or confidence to conduct classes in English using CLT (Sato, 2006), or as a by-product of washback, resulting from the dominance of translation and grammar-focused type questions on university entrance exams (Gorsuch, 2001). Nevertheless, as it stands, the six years spent studying English does not do nearly enough to develop the communicative ability of the majority of Japanese high school graduates. Most struggle to understand even basic conversation or to make themselves adequately understood in English.

“...globalization and the emergence of new technologies have moved us into a new era, the Knowledge Age. This has resulted in sweeping changes in how societies, and the educational systems that serve them, operate...Integration, convergence and participative learning are the three characteristics of Knowledge Age organizations which are influencing decisions on what, and how, we teach young people.”

(Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2010).

Crystal (1997) notes that English, with its status as a global language in this new knowledge age has made it critical for university students to acquire English communication skills sufficient to engage in exchanges if they hope to be able to succeed on an international scale. Japanese graduates continue to trail behind, consistently scoring lower than other English learning nations (TOEIC Newsletter No. 89, Special Feature, 2005).

3.3 The Future

The Daily Yomiuri (2012) reported in March that the number of Japanese college students going abroad to study has shown a steady decline since 2004 when the number stood at 82,945 (See Figure 2). In an attempt to reverse this trend, MEXT is encouraging universities to increase the number of students studying abroad. They will begin funding 40 universities with special five-year grants of ¥100 million to ¥200 million that will be distributed from autumn of 2012.

Universities hoping to cash in must adhere to certain standards with regard to the ratio of foreign teaching staff, the percentage of students studying abroad in relation to total enrollment as well as provide job-seeking assistance to students returning from overseas. While financial assistance does seem to be a good incentive to promoting study abroad, there are still many difficulties to overcome before it becomes an easy option for the majority of university students.

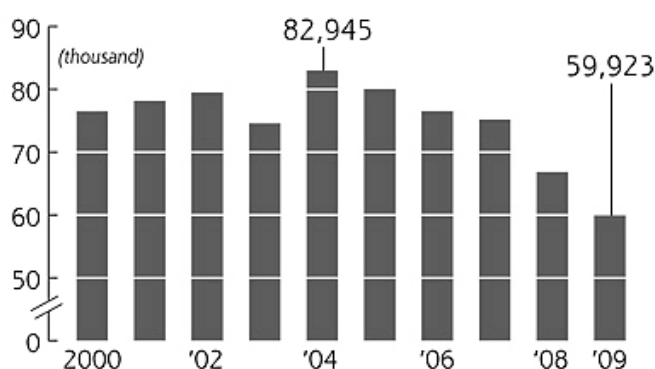


Figure 2. Number of Japanese college students studying abroad. From *Daily Yomiuri Online*: March 26, 2012. (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T120325003181.html>).

3.4 Immersion Language Teaching: Why Not an Option in Japan?

“The type of approach may differ, but any language burden on children or students can be alleviated if CLIL methodologies are imbedded in teaching and learning.”

(Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010).

By implementing workable solutions, communities can turn language problems into language potential. This is just what was done in the province of Quebec, Canada in the mid-1960s. French was then, and remains now, the main language for communication throughout the province. A small group of English-speaking parents from Montreal were dissatisfied with the level of French-language instruction within the Anglophone school system. They felt that an enhanced ability to communicate in the French language along with a greater appreciation of French culture would be of benefit to their children in the future. They lobbied administrators and politicians to set up experimental French language kindergarten classes for their children. “Thus immersion in

schools served as a pragmatic response to a linguistic and cultural problem.” (Coyle, et al. 2010). Perhaps more Japanese university students would want to study abroad if they had more exposure from a younger age, giving them a better background to the varied cultures where English is spoken and more confidence using the language.

4. Content and Language Integrated Learning

4.1 Roots in CLT

Brandl (2008) outlines that the CLT classroom focuses on real communication, using real-life situations that require the exchange of information and problem solving. It provides us with an approach to language teaching “that aims to *(a)* make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and *(b)* to develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication.” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 155).

With CLT, there is no single model or textbook that is accepted as the authority; it is open to a wide variety of methods and techniques (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Littlewood (1981) asserts that the CLT movement has influenced foreign language teaching since the early 1970s. It is perhaps due in part to both its flexibility as well as its longevity that it lends itself well to a variety of approaches that are learner centered, and considers the learners’ needs and goals. CLT has “spawned a number of off-shoots that share the same basic set of principles, but which spell out philosophical details or envision instructional practices in somewhat diverse ways. These CLT spin-off approaches include The Natural Approach, Cooperative Language Learning, Content-Based Teaching, and Task-Based Teaching.” (Rodgers, 2001: 2).

4.2 Beyond Language Learning

Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989: 2) describe CLIL as ...the integration of particular content with language-teaching aims...the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter and second language (L2) skills. Thus, CLIL provides us with an educational approach in which both content and language are interwoven. Learners are able to benefit from “...education which goes beyond language learning.” (Coyle, et al., 2010). CLIL leads to an ideal situation for learning. When students engage in language use through natural and lively exchanges, and focus on the content, they will learn more about the language as a by-product than when the driving force for language learning is based on direct instruction (Naves, 2009). Learners obtain concrete subject knowledge and skills and see English language as a tool to gather relevant and meaningful information. They can acquire language naturally, especially if careful attention is paid to lesson design. The teacher or peers provide linguistic scaffolding, allowing students to focus on the content.

5. Course Description

5.1 Students and Placement

The courses described here are part of the core-requisite English education curriculum for first and second year Toyo University students in the Department of Business Administration. First year students take English IB-21 during the second semester while English IIA-21 is completed in the first semester of the students' second year. Both courses are composed of 40 students who self-select into the courses. In general, the students are highly motivated and actively want to improve their English abilities. Many of them are highly interested in studying abroad.

The TOEIC-Bridge is used as a placement tool for first year core English classes. The test takes place, typically during the first week of April, prior to the start of the semester. Students also complete a questionnaire with items that examine their attitudes towards English. They are surveyed on their willingness to complete homework, their interest in studying abroad and their desire to participate actively in class. Both the TOEIC-Bridge and the survey results are used to select 40 of the most motivated and capable students who are then streamed into the first semester IA-21 and second semester IB-21 "Study Abroad" class. This past year, over 120 students showed interest, illustrating a definite need for this type of course. As for selection into the second year IIA/IIB-21 Active English Course, students complete an online questionnaire towards the end of their first year of studies. Similar to the process for first year students, 40 of the most able and motivated students are admitted to the course.

5.2 Materials

A wide variety of materials are used. The all-English textbook series *Quest Intro* (Hartmann & Blass, 2007) is used during both semesters. The series features complementary strands. The Reading and Writing focused text is used in the IB-21 class since there is a somewhat greater emphasis on these two language skills during that semester. Likewise, the Listening and Speaking focused text is used in the IIA-21 class. In addition to the textbook series, a wide variety of authentic and complementary material is utilized. Excerpts from videos, listening activities and information retrieved from the Internet, authentic texts drawn from books, newspapers, and magazines, and comic books and pamphlets, are included in many of the lessons.

The Reading and Writing text contains units on education, business and sociology, each unit composed of two chapters. The text is designed to provide scaffolding to students as they progress through the five parts of the chapter beginning with an easier general interest reading, next a more difficult one, and finally an academic reading. The chapter ends with some very useful form focused writing activities that serve to both assist students as they compose their drafts and provide review

materials students can use as a reference tool. The final section presents students with a personally engaging academic writing assignment.

The Listening and Speaking text contains the same three unit topics with new, but thematically connected, chapters. This text too, provides students with valuable scaffolding. A preview section sets the theme for an easier listening section followed by pronunciation and grammatical form focused practice. The final two sections include a more difficult broadcast style recording and an academic listening passage to help students both improve their overall listening and prepare for authentic academic lectures. Both texts feature a teacher's edition text and audio CD. In addition, a DVD featuring recurring characters from the listening section of the Listening and Speaking text is available.

Results of an anonymous survey distributed early in June 2012 are shown in Table 1. Questions were geared towards the Listening and Speaking text, which seems well matched to the current class level as 69% of the respondents found the level to be "just right". One of the guiding principles of scaffolding is that students engage in meaningful interactions with their peers. This text seems to strike a good balance between providing interesting discussion content that still provides challenge to the great majority of students.

Table 1
Perceived Level of Difficulty of Course Textbook

Difficulty level	Sample N=32	%
Much too easy	0	0
A little easy	3	9
Just right	22	69
A little hard	7	22
Much too hard	0	0

Students were also encouraged to provide comments on the textbook:

- I think that text is good one. But my English level is low, I want to use dictionary in class often.
- Quest is all English, so I think too hard.
- This textbook isn't too difficult, and isn't too easy, so it's suitable for me.
- Ally or classmates gave me some hints, so I could understand. But vocabulary is difficult for me.
- I could learn lots of vocabularies and grammar from this textbook.
- I like this text!!
- Grammar questions are just right.
- I like the [illustrations].

5.3 Overview of Class Activities

From the very start of the semester, students are required to actively engage in exchanges with their peers. During the first week of the semester, students are given a class list, in English, in grid form. Thirty empty boxes, matching the number of lessons per semester, appear next to each name. Before commencing a task, students introduce themselves to their partners and check off names on the sheet prior to beginning group discussion each lesson. This strategy was instigated with the goal of having students interact with greatest number of peers possible through the semester; it has proven to be a hit with students.

While students take part in the Reading and Writing focused component of the course (IB-21), they are responsible for both completing a number of tasks from the text as well as undertaking independent and group research on the topic of “Study Abroad”. Students are given a sample of how their research is expected to take shape, and a list of topics to consider. Then, every student must produce a written report mid-semester, from his or her ongoing research. The research culminates in a short, oral group presentation worth 30% of the final grade. Tasks from the text include a variety of reading passages and academic writing. The academic writing sections from the text are expanded and enriched, both in and outside the classroom, and students are exposed to and become comfortable using the Process Approach to Writing. Towards the end of the semester, all students have completed a seven to eight paragraph essay on the topic: *All About Me*.

Students in the Listening and Speaking focused component of the course (IIA-21) also progress through a series of textbook activities and engage in pair and group discussion to share ideas and opinions. They have opportunities to work independently but spend the vast majority of class time collaborating on tasks and sharing ideas, brainstorming, creating mind maps and providing valuable feedback to each other. This provides ample opportunity for scaffolding where they can both assist and be assisted. Students truly become engaged in the learning process.

Halfway through the term, all students are required to submit a detailed typed report of their individual research. They are able to choose from a list of approximately 200 universities affiliated in some manner with Toyo University’s exchange program. They are encouraged to choose a place of interest to them, perhaps a place they would like to study. This research, done in small groups, forms the basis of the final class presentation. Students are given some class time to consult and practice with their group, but the onus to co-ordinate and practice rests on their shoulders, outside class time. In addition to the textbook and group project, a series of dictogloss style activities are used in class in an effort to develop students’ business English vocabularies. An overview of work completed through the semester is shown in Table 3.

5.4 Content

The content of the themes studied in both IB-21 and IIA-21 focus on education, business, and study abroad, all three being interesting and relevant to the students needs. Students explore these themes via a number of paths such as lively discussion, independent and group research, collaborative project work, and writing activities. They revisit content throughout the semester in an attempt to help students synthesize the knowledge they have accessed, make connections and build upon them in order to develop some level of expertise.

Theme 1 Education:

Topic: Personality and Learning (spans 5~6 lessons)

Topic: Learning and Memory (spans 4~5 lessons)

Theme 2 Business:

Topic: Career Choices (spans 5~6 lessons)

Topic: Marketing for the Ages (spans 4~5 lessons)

Research Report:

Individual one-page typed report. Give clear details of what you will discuss during the final presentation. (Due: Mid-semester)

Collaborative in-class dictogloss activities with a focus on form:

Business English Vocabulary - 60 items (spans 6~7 lessons)

Final Group Research Project / Presentation:

Research a university affiliated with Toyo's Student Exchange and Study Abroad Program. Prepare an 8 - 10 group minute presentation.

Figure 3. Basic Outline for the IIA-21 Course: 30 lessons

6. Conclusion

There is a clear need for change in the way foreign languages are taught in Japan. CLIL has the power to not only enhance language abilities but also lead to more developed critical thinking skills via enhanced content knowledge. Students are better able to apply the knowledge to real world problems, which can in turn lead to improved self-confidence and motivation.

The teacher's responsibility lies in finding a proper balance of task challenge and cognitive skills development to move students forward. When highly skilled students are presented with low challenge they quickly become bored. The opposite is also the case, when we present high challenge to those who are lowly skilled, frustration results. We want to avoid boredom and anxiety in the classroom and do our best to create opportunities for "Flow" where the passage of time is forgotten. As an educator, one comment that gives me great satisfaction is hearing at the end of the lesson "Class is over already?"

At the same time, it's very important to provide students with the know-how to attack the tasks we set. We need to supply them with carefully designed teacher modeling, coaching, and scaffolding to guide them to their problem solving when negotiating new information and encountering new challenges. We need to help them to succeed until they no longer need us. After all, isn't it the teacher's ultimate task to become unnecessary? (Grow, 1991).

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