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Art Center Kobe, Kobe, Japan | June 01–03, 2018

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The Asian Conference on Asian Studies 2018

Official Conference Proceedings

ISSN: 2187-4735

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Entropy in the Rise and Fall of a Japanese-American Dystopia - Karen Yamashita's "Through the Arc of the Rain Forest"

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The Asian Conference on Asian Studies 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Stephen Pepper first discussed the term "root metaphor" as the foundation of successful world hypotheses. The idea of a root metaphor as a metaphysical archetype can be expanded and used in literary analysis. For this paper we will rely mostly on Eric Zencey's theory of "Entropy as Root Metaphor," and will use the Second Law of Thermodynamics for a close reading and analysis of Karen Tei Yamashita's novel "*Through the Arc of the Rain Forest.*" The world view and perspectives for the future depicted by Yamashita are as relevant today, as they were when the novel was first published. Her inclusion of Japanese characters and constant hinting at Japan throughout the novel makes it easy to identify aspects of Japanese culture that highly influence the development of the plot. We will also show how Matacão plastic (a newly discovered matter that triggers the entire plot) acts as generating substance for entropy. Using entropy as root metaphor, we will uncover how it works in the novel, emphasizing the dystopian tones brought to the narrative by technological advancements within the plot. The paper aims to bridge literary analysis and physics, while underlining the Japanese cultural elements that shape the entropy in Yamashita's narrative.

Keywords: entropy, Japanese American, literature, dystopia

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Introduction

The reason we have chosen Karen Tei Yamashita's novel to exemplify the concept of entropy as root metaphor is that she is one of the Japanese American authors on whom we are currently doing research. We decided to use this particular novel because its magical realist traits make it easy to identify the entropy in the plot development and to understand how we believe it works.

Following, we will define a few terms used throughout the paper, then we will show you how the idea of a root metaphor can be expanded and used in literary analysis. We will use the Second Law of Thermodynamics for a close reading and analysis of Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest.* The world view and perspectives for the future depicted by Yamashita are as relevant today, as they were when the novel was first published in 1990. Her inclusion of Japanese characters and constant hinting at Japan throughout the novel help us identify aspects of Japanese culture that highly influence the development of the plot.

Plot summary

The full title of the novel is *Through the Arc of the Rainforest,* but we will call it *Through the Arc* from now on. The plot begins when a foreign object hits the coast of Japan, knocking down a little boy, named Kazumasa Ishimaru, who is playing outside. What seems like a piece of debris hits him in the head, but instead of falling to the ground, it remains hovering a few centimeters in front of his forehead. Despite his mother's attempts to remove this floating ball, it keeps being pulled back in front of Kazumasa's face. Eventually, they all become accustomed to this new addition, it also acting and reacting in certain ways, according to Kazumasa's circumstances, thus becoming a sort of extension of the boy's. As Yamashita explains,

Kazumasa and his parents began to accept the ball which continued to float before his forehead no matter where he went or what he did. They began to forget their early anxieties as Kazumasa seemed to draw confidence and security from the ball. (Yamashita 2017: 5)

We later learn that this ball is made of a fabric called Matacão plastic and that it is also the narrator of the novel. We fast forward some years and see Kasumasa as an adult, working as Superintendent of Track Maintenance and Repairs for Japan Railways. Although a good job in the beginning, he is soon replaced by a piece of technology that is able to do his work perfectly and much cheaper. After some thinking, Kazumasa eventually decides to follow a cousin of his (Hiroshi) to Brazil, where railroads were still imperfect and his prospects of finding a job were much higher. It is here where all the characters meet and the plot takes place. Among the characters, the most influential for the plot development are the following: Kazumasa Ishimaru (the main character and already discussed above), Batista and Tania Aparecida Djapan (Brazilian couple with a keen interest in raising carrier pigeons; she is mostly business oriented; he is consumed by jealousy whenever she isn't close), Jonathan B. Tweep (CEO of American corporation GGG, who comes to Brazil allured by the prospect of becoming involved in the development of new technology; also, he has three arms), Chico Paco (young man who goes on pilgrimages in order to

help others have their prayers answered), Mané Pena (an old man who lives with his family on the Matacão, where he performs healing acts, using magical feathers).

All these characters' destinies are connected with the Matacão, which is described as a thick plastic-like mass underlying the rain forest. We first get a slight idea about the special abilities of Matacão plastic when introduced to Mané Pena who, unknowingly, directs some of that energy with the use of bird feathers, in order to heal people. Later, Chico Paco decides to walk barefoot to the Matacão and build a shrine to St George there, in the hopes that his selfless act would grant him a miracle, enabling his boyfriend to walk again. He is successful, thanks to the mysterious powers of the Matacão. JB Tweep moves his company from New York to Brazil, so as to study the Matacão and discover ways to turn it into a marketable product. Batista and Tania Aparecida Djapan start a business of their own, training pigeons to carry messages across Brazil, eventually also being pulled towards Matacão. As for Kazumasa, the fact that he has a piece of Matacão plastic acting as an extension of himself makes him extremely lucky. He wins the lottery and despite giving away a lot of the money, he keeps getting richer, which attracts a lot of attention from the locals.

The convergence of all these characters to the Matacão leads to a variety of conflicts:

1. Firstly, pilgrims flock to the site as the Matacão becomes the site of religious miracles. Chico Paco's initiative also gathers a lot of attention, which makes some people ask him to perform miracles as he had for his boyfriend, and others copy his actions and start pilgrimages to the Matacão themselves.
2. Batista continues to train pigeons, while Tania Aparecida sets business meetings and tries to promote their carrier pigeon activity collaborating with media outlets, and converging upon the area to use it as a site of advertising and media spectacle.
3. Mané Pena starts broadcasting his healing sessions, creating a sort of new religion in the process, and also becoming fascinated with his own image in TV, as a kind of central divine figure of this movement.
4. J.B. Tweep represents American consumerism, and arrives in Matacão looking to explore the commercial potential of the site and substance.
5. Kazumasa is invited to Matacão by J.B. Tweep. However, as Kazumasa's spinning ball shows a clear connection to the plastic mass in Matacão, JB imprisons Kazumasa until he can decide how the Japanese man can influence the Matacão plastic and what possible use he could have of it.

It becomes obvious that we already have a fairly large number of characters, all with different plans, all acting in different directions, but in the small, confined space of the Matacão. The general image this creates is that of chaos, doubled by the Brazilian masses who turn each of these characters' endeavours into religious-like beliefs. This chaos, confined to the world created by the author reflects closely how entropy works.

Entropy

Before moving forward, let's define entropy. Ludwig Boltzmann described it simply as "missing information," however, there are more aspects to this concept that we can apply to analyze Yamashita's novel. For example, entropy is also:

1. a thermodynamic quantity representing the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work, often interpreted as the degree of disorder or randomness in the system.
2. the second law of thermodynamics says that entropy always increases with time
3. lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder.

Applied to *Through the Arc*, we considered the world created by the novel as a closed system, which enabled us to identify entropy as the way in which characters use Matacão plastic, the plastic itself acting as *generating substance* of the root metaphor (to be explained later). Of course, the characters' intention is not to create chaos, to increase entropy. Quite the contrary: they aim to find a purpose to this raw material, if anything, they are trying to create order. They either want to cure the world, make money, or generally have some sort of benefit from the use of this newly discovered material. We could say that they are trying to use it in order to pave the way to a better world, a utopic one even. But because of lack of information, they achieve the opposite. Using this plastic without fully understanding its properties, makes them overly-rely on it, and causing total chaos when they are being stripped of it, because in the end, anything and everything that had been made of, or contained Matacão plastic, simply disintegrates, unexpectedly being eaten from the inside out by bacteria. To create a more vivid image, keep in mind that they had used it in making buldings, clothing, prosthetic limbs, facial rebuilds, even Matacão plastic hamburgers and French fries for consumption. So by the end of the novel, it quickly becomes apparent that unbeknownst to them, they had all contributed to the realization of a nightmare, a proper dystopia.

Matacão and the plastic it produces stand for lack of order. The fact that it is used without fully understanding it, shows the effects of missing information, the lack of predictability and it also leads to a gradual decline into disorder. We could say that Matacão plastic is the degree by which we can measure disorder in the system (in our case, in the novel): the more Matacão plastic, the bigger the chaos. So entropy here is the quantity of Matacão plastic used by the character, the level up to which it infiltrated their lives.

Root metaphor

As defined in Merriam-Webster dictionary, the root metaphor is "a fundamental perspective or viewpoint based on a supposition of similarity of form between mental concepts and external objects which though not factually supportable determines the manner in which an individual structures his knowledge."

So a root metaphor can be an image, a narrative, or a fact that shapes or changes one's perception of the world. According to Eric Zencey, who first discussed entropy as a root metaphor, *successful root metaphors generate world hypotheses with a high degree of structural corroboration. (Zencey 1990: 188)*

We are not going to stress too much the *structural corroboration*, as we are not applying the concept to a practical field, but to a piece of literature. However, we are going to look at how entropy generates world hypotheses in the closed system of the novel.

Entropy as root metaphor

In his book, *World Hypotheses,* Stephen Pepper first talks about root metaphors, defining and classifying them according to different archetypes (which we will not describe further, so as not to divagate). At one point, he finds that pre-Socratic philosophies are based on root metaphors of *generating substance* (i.e., a fundamental element that gives rise to all things). Eric Zencey builds on this theory and states that entropy can just as well be seen as a variant of this theory, with energy being its generating substance.

In our case, the generating substance of entropy as root metaphor is Matacão plastic, since it is the element that triggers and fuels the plot, it is the energy that literally depicts the second law of thermodinamics, degrading from useful to less useful, shifting work potential from free to bound, but never allowing entropy to decrease within the closed system, as explained by Zencey:

In one of its more accesible guises, the second law of thermodinamics holds that energy spontaneously degrades from more useful to less useful forms, even if it accomplishes no work in the process, and that in any transformation of energy [...] some part of the energy is irretrievably lost to us. [...] In an entropic process what is at first "free" energy ("free" in the sense of available to do work) becomes "bound" energy (energy that [...] cannot be used to accomplish work). (Zencey 1990: 188)

So entropy is a root metaphor, and the way it changes the world hypothesis of the novel is in the end of the novel, by facing the characters with the result of their actions. Their overindulgences, their readiness to worship, and their willingness to blindly trust a technology they don't understand lead to distruction. It changes their viewpoint from "anything goes," to a more cautious "what if it's wrong?" or "what else should I know about this?" Unfortunately, not all characters live to have this epiphany.

Japanese cultural elements & their influence in the novel

The Japanese cultural elements and their role in the way this root metaphor shapes up are not obvious at first. The fact that it is written like a South American telenovela, and it abounds in lighthearted jokes make for a very entertaining reading, which in turn makes it easy for the reader to overlook certain details or nuances that the author did not include by chance. For example, once you get into the heart of things, it is easy to even forget that the whole action started in Japan. Only very little of the plot is set elsewhere than in Brazil: the beginning in Japan, containing the origins of the narrating ball and Kazumasa, and the episode where we are introduced to JB, that is set in New York. So Kazumasa and JB are the only two characters we meet outside of Brazil, and both of them have a key role, being not only individual characters, but representing typologies of their native lands.

As a result, JB Tweep is the head of a corporation. He has three arms, meaning that he can do a lot more than the average person, but he also has more hands with which to grab and hold. His goal is not necessarily to become rich for the sake of it, but rather to expand and conquer. While in the US, he is not described as a greedy type, but as a doer, as one who is eager to grow, try new things, and change the world. As soon as

he arrives in Brazil and is faced with the untapped business potential of Matacão, he immediately becomes obsessed with it, trying to use this fabric for absolutely anything. He is blinded by his need to possess and subjugate Matacão and its miraculous powers.

In turn, Kazumasa gives us a different kind of typology: your regular *salaryman*. Although he doesn't do a desk job, he is that particular stereotype: he just wants to go to work, do a good job, earn his living, go back home, and maybe sing some karaoke somewhere in between. Even when moving to Brazil and becoming extremely rich, he doesn't overindulge, overspend, or do anything reckless. He also represents the technologically developed country, which (at least at the time the novel was written) goes hand in hand with pollution. The more developed the country, the more consumerist, the greater the waste, especially in plastic. His employer in Japan fires Kazumasa and replaces him with a piece of machinery – that is also the sign of such a country. Also, the fact that the narrating ball, which is, as it turns out, made of Matacão plastic (meaning an accumulation of waste from all over the world), hits Kazumasa in the face and stays attached to him, is also revelatory. It is as if he stands for all the people from developed countries who produce(d) plastic waste in excess, but are oblivious to it. They become accustomed to, what ultimately is rubbish, right under their noses, to the point that they become emotionally attached to it. Moreover, this becomes a model to be emulated by technologically underdeveloped countries. We can see this in the novel with Kazumasa and the Brazilians. Kazumasa is an exotic appearance in Brazil, doubled by his tiny satellite. As soon as he becomes known to the locals, some start to imitate him by attaching small globes to their heads with string.

So Kazumasa and JB Tweep are the silent influencers. They each act in their own ways, but they are the doers. The Brazilian masses are the loud ones, and also the ones being influenced. The Japanese and American (technologically developed) are the doers, the Brazilians (technologically underdeveloped) react to the doers. Ultimately, Kazumasa and JB Tweep are the triggers to the fact that Matacão plastic starts being used.

All the Brazilian characters involved in promoting Matacão plastic fall under the influence of one, or the other. Chico Paco's pilgrimages are endorsed by Kazumasa, while JB Tweep hires Mane Pena, the healer, and sends him on tours to talk about the healing feathers.

The only ones that act on their own are Batista and Tania Aparecida Djapan. However, they represent something different altogether. The nature of their relationship and their last name leads us to believe that they represent the way in which the second generation Japanese-Americans relate to their motherland in Yamashita's conception.

Conclusion

In the end, we have shown that entropy is a root metapor, but also a valid literary tool. Morover, I believe that it is in literature where entropy appears much more clearly as a root metaphor. *Through the Arc* is a good example in this regard, especially due to its magical realist traits. However, it is our opinion that it being a magical realist novel only makes it easier to identify entropy within its system; that is not to say that

entropy cannot be applied when discussing other types of literature. But coming back to *Through the Arc*, we have seen that the novel is the closed system, the magical Matacão plastic is the generating substance, while the characters' frantic attraction to Matacão and the drive, the energy behind their actions is the entropy. Without the their intention to act the way they do, nothing would have happened. But their desire for more only grows in time (2nd law of thermodynamics), which in turn establishes the degree of the final distruction (the greater the desire, the greater the chaos, leading to entropy). Not knowing exactly what Matacão plastic is also implies the lack of predictability (which equals entropy), and it also leads to decline into disorder (entropy again). Needless to say, entropy shifts the way all characters view the world. Kazumasa alone is completely dephased by the loss of his beloved ball, and has to learn how to function without it, for example. But most importantly, we believe that the root metaphor in this novel has the power to shift the reader's viewpoint on technology, the way we use it and its effect on the environment.

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The Pedagogy of Japan Studies for Japanese University Students

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The Asian Conference on Asian Studies 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Content-focused language teaching approaches such as Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) continue to gain both recognition and credibility. This short article introduces both the theory and practice of such approaches. After looking at the various benefits and challenges of a content-focused approach, the author offers an example of a theme-based CLIL program that is currently being used in a tertiary-level English program for management course students in Japan. Specifically, we explore how a required Japan Studies course for second-year students has been designed and developed. The aim here is to highlight for readers the instructional design process as well as some of the various considerations at both the macro (curriculum) and micro (task) levels. Readers are then challenged to consider the motivational merits of implementing a content-focused approach in their own teaching contexts, and presented with a list of suggested readings for further exploration.

Keywords: Content-Based Instruction (CBI), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Japan Studies, Affective Learning Domain, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Instructional Design (ID)

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Introduction

This paper provides a brief overview of the design, development and delivery of a content-focused English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program for university students in Japan, with a specific focus on a Japan Studies course for non-English majors in a business faculty. Content-focused language teaching approaches such as Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) continue to gain both recognition and credibility (Coyle, 2007; Jones & Palmer, 2017), though a number of challenges in implementation still exist (Jones & Palmer, 2016). The main purpose of this article is to outline the rationale for and pedagogical considerations involved in CBI/CLIL approaches to EFL teaching and inclusion of this specific course in the required curriculum at a private university in western Japan. Aiming at a balance of theory and practice, we offer some of the early design decisions for the program (now in its tenth year), curriculum development strategies and considerations, and support structures for both learners and teachers.

Historical Context

Work on the overall curriculum for these learners began in mid 2007 when official approval was handed down on the creation of a new faculty conceptualized as a hybrid between business administration and economics. Key features of the new department were project-based learning, healthy doses of liberal arts study and communicative approaches to language learning. One underlying aim of the program was to draw on innovative teaching methodologies that provide students with more opportunities to apply and experiment with the knowledge and skills they are learning in all of their courses.

In preparation for inauguration of the new faculty, a content-focused curriculum was outlined based on the principle of "the integration of general education with content-based English education," delivered via an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program and integrated communicative approaches. The primary goals were to (1) develop English communication skills for global communication, (2) foster cultural, cross-cultural and global literacy needed to contribute to local and global communities, and (3) nurture critical and analytical thinking for effective self-expression in English. One key concept that emerged from the early curriculum design sessions was a shift from studying English (*eigo wo benkyo suru*) to studying "in" English (*eigo de benkyo suru*). The analogy we like to use is that we do not learn to ride a bicycle by reading and studying about bicycles (history, physics, engineering) but by actually getting on, peddling, steering, and even falling down sometimes.

The required English curriculum that emerged and was included in the proposal to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEXT) included two twice-a-week courses and one once-a-week course in both (Spring & Fall) 15-week semesters of the first year, and four once-a-week courses in the Spring semester of the second year as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Required English Courses

Semester One	Semester Two	Semester Three
American Studies (2)	Global Challenges (2)	Japan Studies (1)
Speech & Discussion (2)	Discussion & Debate (2)	European Studies (1)
Active Listening I (1)	Active Listening II (1)	TOEIC/TOEFL (1)
		Business Communication (1)

* Numbers in parentheses indicate how many times these classes meet per week.

Although the aim has been to help learners develop all four language skills in all of their English courses, both Global Challenges and American Studies (since swapped in the curriculum) were conceptualized as reading-writing focused, while the Speech & Discussion and Discussion and Debate courses would emphasize development of speaking confidence and proficiency. The Active Listening course was subsequently renamed and the listening focus was balanced with study skills.

Elective English courses (all meeting once a week) were offered in the fourth semester and beyond under the headings of (a) Regional Studies, (b) Media Studies, (c) Liberal Arts, (d) Communication, and (e) Business Skills. Aiming at increased flexibility and choice for learners, two additional categories were subsequently added (Studies in Literacy, Cross Disciplinary).

Early on, we adopted the following vision and mission statements for the English language program at CUBE:

Vision Statement: We aim to create and maintain a program that inspires students to reach for and achieve their language-learning potential. At the same time, we hope to foster a sense of wonder and develop critical thinking skills that will help students in their academic pursuits and beyond.

Mission Statement: Toward this vision, we will utilize the combined knowledge and skills of the faculty in offering a learner-centered, communicative approach to instruction in all classes. Courses will generally center on problem-based, project-based and task-based activities aimed at helping learners develop themselves as both individuals and as contributing members of various communities of practice.

With the above pieces in place, we began designing and developing the courses in a way we felt best addressed and integrated the tenets of the overall program as well as the above vision and mission statements. Much of the groundwork for each course was done from early 2008 until the doors opened in April, 2009. Our main inspirations in designing the curriculum were Brown (1995), Van Leir (1996) and Brinton, Snow & Wesche (2003). The guiding principles and design decisions are outlined in Appendix 1 to provide readers with a more intimate understanding of our aims.

Curriculum Development Strategies and Considerations

A number of instructional design models were consulted when setting out to design the overall curriculum and specific courses (see, for example, Branch & Kopcha, 2014), but we eventually settled on significant learning experiences (Fink, 2003) as the framework of choice.

Significant Learning Experiences (SLEs)

Instructional consultant L. Dee Fink (2003) starts from the fundamental question of how we can create courses that provide significant learning experiences for our learners. His book offers several key ideas and suggestions for instructional design, including his concepts of backward design, forward assessment and the twelve steps of integrated course design (Appendix 2). Another contribution was his attempt at updating and broadening Benjamin Bloom's (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956) taxonomy of learning to accommodate a broader range of learning. In constructing this new taxonomy (Fig. 1), Fink (2003) defines learning in terms of change (i.e. for learning to occur, there has to be some kind of change in the learner). Fink stresses that each kind of learning is related to the others, and that when a teacher finds a way to help students achieve one kind of learning, this can enhance student achievement in other kinds of learning.
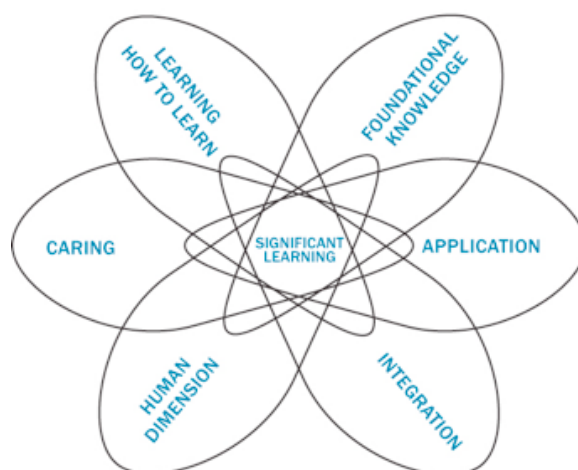
Figure 1. Significant learning experiences (Fink, 2003)

Appendix 3 includes key concepts related to each of the six categories in this taxonomy of learning. Fink (2003) also stresses that the intersection of all of these kinds of learning is the sweet spot, what he calls significant learning experiences. These ideas seemed especially applicable to our curriculum development endeavors, especially as related to content-focused language instruction.

Content-Focused Language Instruction

Our decision to adopt a content-focused curriculum was greatly influenced by findings and developments in the fields of language teaching and second-language acquisition related to Content-Based Instruction (CBI) and more recently Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). Although the practice of learning (and teaching) a new language via authentic subject matter has a long history, it is only the

past thirty years or so that empirical studies have been seriously undertaken and that clear examples and viable templates have been published (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 2003; Coyle, 2007). The rationale outlined by Brinton, Snow and Wesche (2003) is that a CBI curriculum:

- offers learners the necessary conditions for second language learning by exposing them to meaningful language;
- builds on the learner's previous learning experiences in the subject matter, the target language, and in formal educational settings;
- takes into account the interests and needs of the learners through their engagement with the academic subject matter and discourse patterns that they need to master;
- allows a focus on (communicative language) use as well as on (accurate) usage; and
- incorporates the eventual uses the learner will make of the language through engagement with relevant content and L2 discourse with a purpose other than language teaching.

The dominant models of CBI that have appeared are (1) Theme-Based Language Instruction, (2) Sheltered Content Instruction, and (3) Adjunct Language Instruction. These and other CBI models differ from one another in terms of being content or language driven. Table 2 highlights some of the characteristics of each.

Table 2. Characteristics of Content and Language Driven CBI Curriculums

Content-Driven	Language-Driven
Content is taught in L2. Content learning takes priority. Language learning is secondary. Content objectives determined by course goals or curriculum. Teachers must select language objectives. Students evaluated on content mastery.	Content is used to learn L2. Language learning takes priority. Content learning is incidental. Language objectives determined by L2 course goals or curriculum. Students evaluated on content to be integrated. Students evaluated on language skills/proficiency.

Theme or topic-based language courses are used to bring subject matter into the language classroom. The materials chosen provide a springboard for analyzing and studying language. In comparison, sheltered courses are content courses that include help with target language meaning and subtleties. Finally, the adjunct model involves separate but coordinated classes, one with a focus on the content and the other with language support related to that content. In terms of instructional format, the three models differ in the degree of explicit integration of language and content (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 2003). Figure 2 shows how each of these models fall on a CBI continuum.

```
                    Theme-Based        Sheltered          Adjunct
                      Model             Model              Model
   Language        < - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - >      Mainstream
    Class                                                                     Class
```
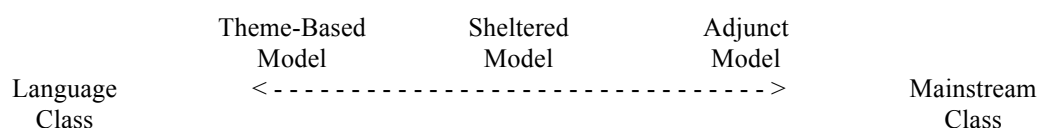
Figure 2. A Content-Based Continuum.

The CBI approach is somewhat related to (1) English for Specific Purposes (ESP), which usually is for vocational or occupational needs, and (2) English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The goal of CBI is to help students acquire a new language using the context of specific subject matter. The assumption is that students learn the language by using it within the specific context. Rather than learning a language out of context, it is learned within the context of a specific academic subject. The following section includes some of our other assumptions.

Assumptions

Some of our underlying assumptions are that (1) supporting teachers in their classroom endeavors is potentially the most effective path to supporting learners in our program, (2) teachers come to our program from a variety of educational backgrounds, have a range of pedagogic experiences, and possess diverse skills, knowledge and beliefs related to teaching and learning language, and (3) learning a new language is a complex, social endeavor that is hindered rather than helped by mechanical, technocratic processes or approaches. Second Language (L2) teaching assumptions are that (4) learning vocabulary is fundamental to language learning and high frequency vocabulary provides the strongest foundation, (5) extensive reading will help learners improve reading competence and confidence, and (6) a genre-based approach to literacy based on sound systemic functional grammar (SFG) perspectives will facilitate a better understanding of the reading-writing connection and increased overall proficiency.

Japan Studies

In this section, I outline key components of the Japan Studies course to illustrate some of the major considerations at the macro (curriculum) and micro (task) levels. The course description and course goals are offered here to give readers some context. This is followed by brief introductions to each of the modules.

Course Description

Japan Studies is a content-based English course, with an integrated skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) focus. This course will be taught in three-week modules, and will cover four broad themes as they relate to Japan: (1) society/culture, (2) business/economy, (3) the environment, and (4) politics/government. Students will be challenged to build on their existing background knowledge, and reflect more deeply on what it means to be Japanese and Japan's role on the world stage. Weekly reading and/or listening assignments will be used as a basis for in-class discussions and activities. Students will write short multi-paragraph texts (narrative, recount, report, hortatory) on Japan-related themes.

Course Goals

The overall aim of the course is to develop English language and critical thinking skills through engagement in the course content. Upon completion of the course, students will demonstrate the ability to do the following for Japan-related topics: (1) read and comprehend extended texts, (2) listen and comprehend short lectures or

videos, (3) write narratives, recounts, reports and persuasive texts, (4) discuss confidently, and (5) think critically.

Module One – Society/Culture

Using the SLEs framework described above, we developed a course handbook, teaching/learning materials and detailed lesson plans for each of the fifteen ninety-minute lessons (https://tinyurl.com/js-lessonplans), including both content and language learning outcomes, summary of tasks (including time estimates), materials/equipment, supplemental resources, and out-of-class assignments. Time is spent during the first meeting eliciting student-generated course goals, including discussion of how these relate to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) "can do" statements that are a cornerstone of the English program.

There are three main components in this first module. First, the class generates a list of common expressions or sayings in Japanese such as *ito bata kaigi* (literally "around the water well), which is used to describe the tendency for housewives to gather and chat about daily events. This is an ongoing task for the whole semester, and groups of students are assigned the task of coming up with literal meanings in English as well as short descriptions of how the expressions/sayings are commonly used.

The main listening components for this module are a twenty-minute documentary about Japanese education aired on NHK World (www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/) and short videos on social phenomena in Japan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs - mofachannel on Youtube) such as *kawaii* (liking of things cute), *mirai* (high tech industries), *oishi* (local delicacies), *takumi* (craftsmenship) and *omotenashi* (hospitality). The rationale was that learners would be familiar with the topics and could thus be pushed harder on the language. The education video is split over three meetings, with worksheets that include language focus (e.g., fill in missing information, find the changes, paraphrasing) and discussion prompts, while the MOFA videos are assigned as out-of-class assignments.

The new writing assignment for the society and culture module is a narrative based on a school-related *anime* (animation), *manga* or television drama. This change was introduced so that students would have further practice with this genre and also because the topic is more closely linked with the listening material. We also believe that learners will be more invested in the assignment if they can choose a story of their liking. We also upload final versions of the narratives written by higher proficiency students as examples for future cohorts.

Supplemental topics and tasks for this module are related to the dark side of *manga* and *anime* (such as child pornography) and the social phenomena of *hikkikomori* (or social withdrawal).

Module Two – Business/Economy

The transition to the second module includes a return to the Japanese expressions/sayings task, and students are guided to business related concepts such as *amakudari* (literally "decent from heaven"), which is the practice of high-ranking bureaucrats taking golden-parachute positions at major corporations. The main

listening materials are (1) a short Youtube video in which a Dutch student introduces his internship experiences at a stevedoring company in Japan, and (2) news stories related to the company Rakuten, its founder Hiroshi Mikitani, and their English-only policy.

The writing genre targeted in this module is the recount, especially biographies of Japanese business leaders. The teaching cycle starts with a discussion of the genre (including what students remember of earlier attempts), and this is followed by an in-class deconstruction of a sample biography (the subject being Mikitani). Small groups of students are then assigned biographies of other business leaders to analyze in terms of structure and content, after which individual group members need to present overviews to students from other groups. Students are assessed on their own writing as well as how much they learned from the other student presentations, with the help of Cornell style notes (taught in the first year and reinforced throughout the program).

The final component of this module is a transition to the topic of the environment, with readings, audio/video segments and discussion of general corporate social responsibility and specific environmental policies of select companies.

Module Three – The Environment

Earlier in the program we developed lesson plans for this module around the topic of Japan's eco-model cities, which provided a nice segue into the government/politics module. Eventually, the focus shifted to Japan's nuclear power program and endeavors to switch to renewable energy sources. Again, lesson plans and materials center on incrementally longer reading assignments and audio/video listening clips.

A small group research project is also assigned in this module where students choose an environmental issue, research causes and effects, and report their findings to other groups. Past topics include quite broad issues such as noise pollution or the over-reliance on vending machines to specific problems such as environmental threats to local coral reefs or individual animal species.

Module Four – Politics/Government

Intuitively, this is the least popular topic or theme for these learners. However, we are convinced that inclusion of the module can help prepare these learners for active civic engagement and meet the goal of developing critical thinking skills. The main components of this module are (1) short introductions to the branches of government, (2) group research on one of the political parties, and (3) peer interviews as the final assessment for this module and the overall course.

As with other group tasks in this course, the group research project includes convergent and divergent activities. Normally, groups of three or four students are assigned a unique topic/subject of inquiry, individual members work on their own, the group comes together to confirm their findings/understandings, and finally individuals present these findings/understandings to learners from other groups.

Ideally, teachers can bring their classes together for the peer interviews. Normally, two students from one class will interview one student from the other class. With this

arrangement, each student will take the role of interviewer twice (once as the lead interviewer and once as an assistant) and be interviewed once. These interviews are audio recorded (using digital voice recorders or smart phones), and evaluation is based on both teacher (70%) and peer (30%) assessments.

Perceived Challenges

One challenge we anticipated when designing this course was gaining student buy-in with regard to the value of studying about Japan. Also, as this and other third-semester courses meet only once a week, teachers are limited in how deeply they can go into each of the topics/issues. We designed this as a survey course, but there are times when it feels like there are missed opportunities where students would benefit from delving deeper into the content and/or exploring the language more. There is also a danger with this type of course that materials will become outdated. As one example, the video clips and short readings focused on Hiroshi Mikitani and the English policy at Rakuten has lost some of its freshness. Another challenge in the past has been finding good biographies of famous Japanese women in business. We are finally seeing more female business leaders like Tomoko Namba, Founder and Chairman of the Board for DeNA, and hope to gain a better gender balance. Finally, as with other courses with a genre reading-writing focus, gaining teachers' understanding and acceptance of this approach has been a challenge. At the same time, we are not sure whether or not individual teachers are using the intended teaching-cycles (or other best practices) for each of the target reading and writing assignments.

Current & Planned Support

We continue to make extensive use of Moodle to support students in the JS class. There are links to practice tests, videos and other online resources, as well as PDF or Word versions of worksheets, transcripts and writing frameworks. One further plan we have for JS and other courses where genre writing is taught is to prepare short, focused instructional videos for students, with an understanding that these videos will also help teachers better understand the instructional cycles we expect in the program. We see these types of videos as also being an important support structure for other parts of our program.

In terms of program-level teacher support, course handbooks and other resources are reviewed and updated year by year, and both print and digital versions are maintained. Furthermore, semester-end meetings are organized for July and January. The July meetings are course-specific and chaired by the course leader with the aim of sharing ideas and opinions regarding course improvement. The January meeting is a gathering of all full- and part-time instructors with the aim of (1) reviewing each Fall-semester course, (2) preparing for all Spring-semester courses, and (3) providing focused faculty-development workshops. Course leaders again coordinate these reviews and previews of specific courses, while the faculty development workshops are designed and delivered by one or more of the full-time teachers or by an invited guest speaker.

Discussion & Conclusion

In this short article, I have attempted to describe the design and development of a content-focused English language program at a private university in Japan, the challenges we are experiencing in the delivery of a specific course (Japan Studies), and how we are addressing these challenges. Earlier studies (Jones & Palmer, 2017) identified three main areas that we identified where support is being provided for teachers and learners. Our current understanding is that these three areas (Fig. 3), namely, faculty development, organizational tools and instructional resources, will continue as the pillars of our support structure.
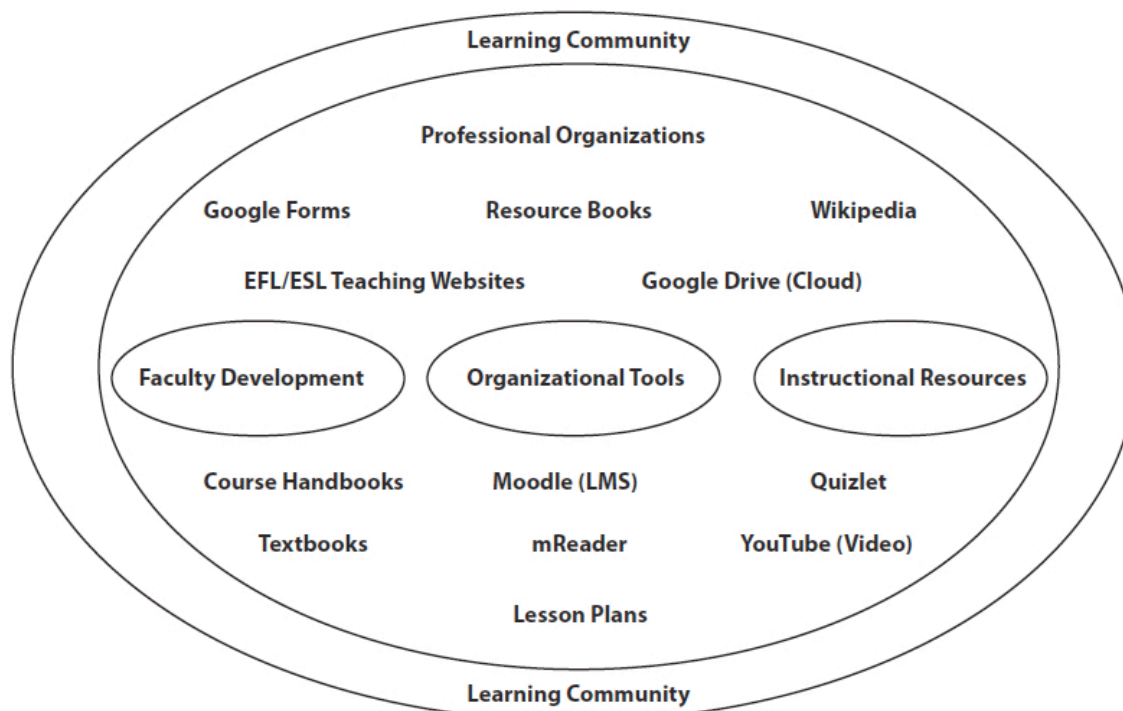

Fig. 3 Tentative Conceptualization of Teaching/Learning Support
Structures/Frameworks (Jones & Palmer, 2017)

We see faculty development as being all-important in that teachers need to continue struggling toward best practices, especially for a content-focused language program. At the same time, we view that support for teachers in their classroom endeavors is potentially the most effective path to supporting learners in our program. Another core element is organizational tools, by which we mean a place like Moodle or Google Drive where teachers and students can access and share materials, links and other resources where and when they need them (just-in-time). Instructional resources, such as handbooks, lesson plans, and worksheets form the final pillar of support.

As mentioned earlier, we are making efforts to address the various challenges, and some of these are listed around the core elements of faculty development, organizational tools and instructional resources. Many of these are not neatly categorized under any one banner, which is why we arranged them around the core elements. Appendix 4 is a short list of useful online resources and I earnestly hope the

discussion in this paper will stimulate dialog among the wider community of teachers in similar teaching contexts.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the many colleagues (past and present) that have helped us develop ideas and contributed to the program. At the same time, I appreciate the efforts and enthusiasm of past and present students who have suffered my zany antics and kept their good humor.

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Appendix 1 – Guiding Principles and Design Decisions

Guiding Principles

- Effective and efficient use of existing resources,
- Balance between face-to-face meetings and self-access materials,
- Balance between concept learning and procedural learning,
- Activities and materials that appeal to various learning styles,
- Activities and materials that are intrinsically motivating,
- Teaching methodology based on accepted and emerging theories of learning,
- Activities and materials that promote success and boost confidence,
- Get students active within the first five minutes of any encounter,
- Include non-native varieties of English

Design Decisions

1. Clear performance objectives will be established at both the macro (curriculum) and micro (task/activity) levels (see, for example, Mager, 1997).
2. The curriculum will include work on all four language-skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) but will concentrate more effort on improving the receptive skills of reading and listening at earlier stages and productive skills later in the program.
3. Criterion-referenced test items will be developed to clearly measure progress and performance (see, for example, Shrock & Coscarelli, 1989).
4. All components will have the underlying goal of increasing familiarity with the most frequent words in the English language. (Nation, 2002)
5. Attention will be focused on improving both language competencies (including communication strategies) and social skills.
6. Attention will also be directed at raising cross-cultural awareness and nurturing positive language learning attitudes and beliefs.
7. Individualized instruction will be implemented whenever possible.
8. Emphasis will be placed on transfer of knowledge/skills to outside pursuits.

Appendix 2 – Twelve Steps of Integrated Course Design (Fink, 2003)

Initial Phase

Building Strong Primary Components

1. *Where are you?* Size up the situational factors, including specific context, general context, nature of the subject, student characteristics, teacher characteristics and special pedagogical challenges.
2. *Where do you want to go?* What are your learning goals for the course? Ideally, what would you like students to get out of this course in terms of different kinds of learning: *Foundational knowledge, Application, Integration, Human Dimension, Caring, and Learning how to learn:*
3. *How will the students and you know if they get there?* How will you know if the students have achieved these goals? What kinds of feedback and assessment would be appropriate?

4. *How are you going to get there?* Select or develop learning activities that reflect the principles of active learning.

5. *Who and what can help?* Find resources.

Intermediate Phase

Assembling the Components into a Dynamic, Coherent Whole

6. *What are the major topics in the this course?* Create a thematic structure for the course.

7. *What will the students need to do?* Identify the specific learning activities necessary for the desired kinds of learning and put them into an effective instructional strategy.

8. *What is the overall scheme of learning activities?* It can be helpful to create a diagram of the course structure and the instructional strategy, and then find ways to enhance the way these two components work together.

Final Phase

Taking Care of Important Details

9. *How are you going to grade?* Develop your grading system.

10. *What could go wrong?* Debug the design by analyzing and assessing this "first draft" of the course.

11. *Let students know what you are planning.* Now write the syllabus.

12. *How will you know how the course is going?* How it went? Plan an evaluation of the course itself and of your teaching performance.

Appendix 3 – Six Categories of Significant Learning (Fink, 2003)

Foundational Knowledge
        Basic understanding
        Necessary for other kinds of learning
Application
        Knowledge and how it's applied
        Skills
Integration
        Making connections (other courses, work, life)
        Power: the whole - more than the sum of the parts
Human Dimension
        Human significance of topic
        Learning about self, others
Caring
        Caring engenders energy for learning
        Nothing significant happens without caring
Learning How to Learn
        Learning more effectively
        Life-long learning

Appendix 4 – Online Resources

Dr. L. Dee Fink - http://finkconsulting.info
Significant Learning - http://www.significantlearning.org
ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines - http://actflproficiencyguidelines2012.org/
Compleat Lexical Tutor - http://www.lextutor.ca
EIKEN Comparison Table - http://stepeiken.org/comparison-table
Lextutor Vocabulary Profiler - http://www.lextutor.ca/vp/
Spreader - http://www.spreeder.com
Readability - http://www.online-utility.org/english/readability_test_and_improve.jsp
Fink, L. D. (N/A). A Self-Directed Guide to Designing Courses for Significant Learning.
https://www.deefinkandassociates.com/GuidetoCourseDesignAug05.pdf

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