Content-Based Language Teaching in International Liberal Arts Education

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Abstract
The growing international interdependence has increased the importance of knowledge about and proactive reaction to new global changes. Approaches to language teaching that focus on aspects besides the language itself, such as CBLT, are becoming an ever more valuable tool. In this research we define the important points that should be considered in the application of Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT) in International Liberal Arts (ILA) education. Based on our own experience of teaching and the analysing the arguments stated in the literature, we suggest how to conduct CBLT lectures effectively, how to make CBLT lectures active-learning style, and how to keep the students involved even outside of the class. In particular, we explain the important points related to the general context or environment where learning takes place, parts of the teaching under the full control of the teacher, parts that could be partially controlled or affected by the teacher, and parts that are less controlled by the teacher (learning out of class). Our research and shared experience contributes to the development of CBLT.

Keywords: Content-based Language Teaching, International Liberal Arts, Effective Teaching

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Introduction

In this research, the researchers attempt define the most important points that should be considered in the application of Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT) in International Liberal Arts (ILA) education. The research team members have long-term experience of teaching ILA courses in more than two countries in more than two languages. Based on our own experience of teaching and analysing the arguments stated in the literature, we suggest how to conduct CBLT lectures effectively, how to offer CBLT lectures in the active-learning style, and how to keep students involved even outside of class.

Growing international interdependence has increased the importance of knowledge about and proactive reaction to new global changes. When it comes to preparing students for an ever-evolving global future, approaches to language teaching that focus on aspects besides the language itself, such as CBLT, are becoming an ever more valuable tool. We hope our research and shared experience contributes to the development of teaching in ILA education.

In this paper, instruction is separated into three areas; areas of teaching under the full control of the teacher, areas that could be partially controlled or affected by the teacher, and areas that are least controlled by the teacher (i.e. learning out of class). Ideas for improving the effectiveness of instruction in each area will be proposed.

In the next section, we analyse the important arguments stated in the literature. After that, our suggestions for effective implementation of CBLT lectures are proposed. At the end, we conclude the important points of this research.

Literature Review

In the current international climate, bilingual communication is not just desirable, but critical (Cammarata et al., 2016). Since the 1970s, there has been more of an attempt at having students pick a target language up incidentally, rather than through classroom activities alone (Juan-Garau & Salazar-Noguera, 2015). Naturally, this places a huge demand on language education providers the world over, and as a result English-medium instruction (EMI) is becoming increasingly commonplace worldwide, including in Japan (Galloway & Rose, 2015).

Cammarata et al. (2016) rightly doubt whether the learning of foreign languages alone is enough. The authors question the underlying goals of foreign language teaching in general, and instead propose placing an emphasis on developing critical thinking and advanced literacy skills, stimulating development of high-order thinking skills, fostering intellectual sensitivity, and nurturing student motivation and active participation in their learning adventure (pp. 9-11). An example of this method of teaching that has seen some success is content-based language teaching (CBLT) that combines both language learning and the learning of content, in way that is designed to have each element complement the other (Creese, 2005).

As opposed to the traditional L2 classroom in which the focus is almost solely on students developing language skills in isolation, content-based approaches to language learning aim to develop language, academic, and cognitive skills together (Oba, 2019), 'to promote a dynamic interplay between language and content' (Lyster, 2018). This view sees language in less of a traditional foreign language learning sense, and 'toward a view of language as a

means with which to explore content, that is, the realization that both language and content are two equally important instructional foci' (Cammarata et al., 2016, p. 11).

In two of the researchers' context, Japan, the governmental policy for English teaching education has corresponded to the growing demand for cultivating globalized citizens, particularly the youth (Oba, 2019). These views are reflected in the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology revision of curriculum guidelines in 2017 where the three primary goals include: 1) developing oneself, envisioning lifelong learning; 2) increasing solid subject knowledge; and 3) acquiring cognitive, evaluative, and expressive skills (Yasunaga, 2018).

CBLT is seen as a good option for English educational reforms in Japan following the 2017 revision of curriculum guidelines (Yasunaga, 2018). Here, theme-based language programs can also be useful, centered on a theme that allows repeated opportunities for recycling language, expanding domain knowledge, and increasing critical and reflective thinking. Such programs could easily be integrated into ILA instruction.

Effort to teach students in the classroom is going to be exerted, so being able to teach both language and content at the same time, with the added benefit of developing advanced critical thinking skills, could be seen as a win-win for all. However, focusing on multiple aspects of learning at the same time risks diminishing the outcomes of all. Especially when, as Oba (2019) describes, CBLT and other content-based programs have not been fully tested in Japanese settings, and there has not been sufficient development of content and language integration, despite their apparent attractiveness.

The effectiveness of CBLT is seen as dependent upon program setting and the curriculum, the characteristics of teachers involved, the characteristics of learners, and the availability of resources (Butler, 2005; Andrade, 2014).

In the case of content-based courses, teachers and curriculum developers are in charge of deciding how much of an emphasis to put on language, and how much to put on content. This can be thought of on a continuum from content-driven to language-driven approaches. Approaches to language teaching at each end of the continuum have different titles in the literature. For clarity, CBLT is when there is a more of a focus on learner acquisition of language, whereas Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) places more of a focus on content.

Careful consideration of the context and student aims must be taken during the needs analysis when it comes to deciding to take an approach focusing on content, one focusing on language, or one somewhere in the middle. In this paper, we leverage years of experience in teaching International Liberal Arts courses in Japanese and Russian universities in both foreign and second languages to students from broad international contexts to propose a model for effective implementation of CBLT.

Suggested Model

General Idea

We separate learning into three areas determined by the amount of control the teacher has in the situation, namely, during the lecture when the teacher has full control over what goes on,

when the teacher has partial control as the students partake in their own activities during class time, and out of the class where the teacher has the least control (Fig. 1).
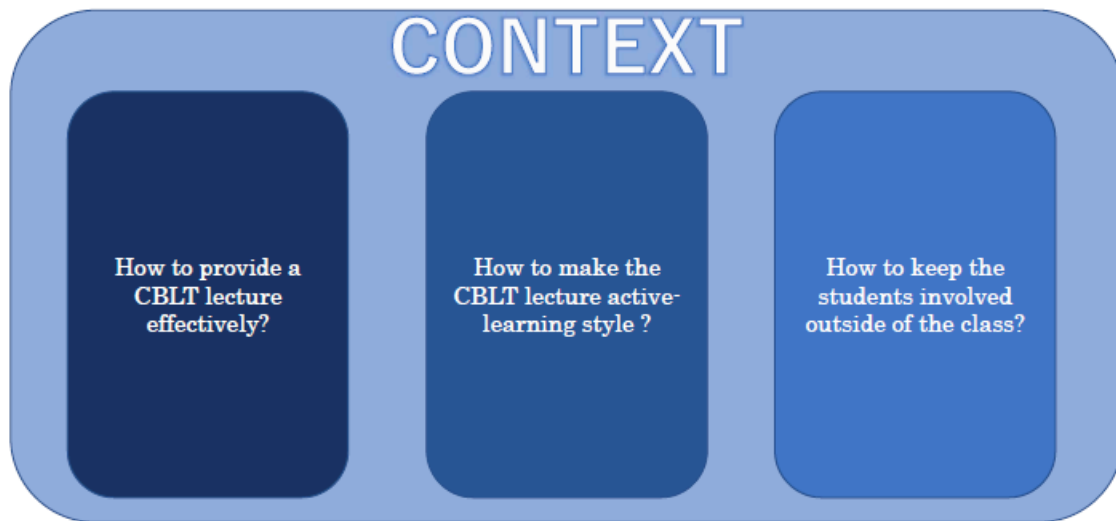
Figure 1: Important Points to Be Considered in CBLT.

Context

As with all instruction, context dictates approach. To gather a good understanding of the context, the first port of call should be a thorough needs analysis. When it comes to CBLT, the needs analysis needs to consider the amount of emphasis to place on language and content outcomes respectively, in addition to other important factors such as the medium of teaching and the type of assessment that best fits the learners' needs. To ensure the safety of the students due to COVID-19 or other such factors, the curriculum designer may be limited in their options for the medium of teaching, but any medium, online, offline, or a hybrid, can be used for CBLT.

CBLT can be used in certain courses and in certain classes to increase the effect of learning, not just in terms of language, but in terms of content acquisition as well. The focus of CBLT on cognitive development of the students is an attractive proposition when it comes to ILA, however students come with different backgrounds, and different abilities in the target language, as well as with different levels of knowledge and interest in the topic or content to be taught.

The teacher could be a native speaker of the students' native language, a native speaker of the target language with or without language capability in the students' native language, or a non-native speaker of the target language with or without language capability in the students' native language. Depending on this make-up, the teachers may adjust their instruction to take advantage of their relative strengths in a certain context. At a minimum, to be able to learn the content well enough some ability of the language of instruction is necessary. A CBLT approach should be used at late A2 and higher levels of language capability, or additional language lessons should be provided to allow for this.

How Can We Provide CBLT Lectures Effectively?

If the teacher has sufficient knowledge of both the students' first language and the target language, transitional classes that incorporate both languages may be more effective for the

students. If the students' language capability is not so high, or if the students lack confidence, it is often better to discuss the topic in the target language, summarize in the native language and then again address the topic in the target language.

Students should be encouraged to try discussing the content in their second language, with additional support in their first language if required to increase their confidence. In cases where the students' command of the target language is not strong, excessive use of the target language is best avoided to maintain student motivation. This is a balance that is best decided by the teacher. In either situation, teachers should always respond to students in a positive way while they are sharing their own opinions on the content to further stimulate use of the language.

Even students with a good background in the target language may not be familiar with the keywords for different topics. Furthermore, different teachers use different words. One good way to address this is to ask students in advance to let the teacher explain the words they cannot understand during the lecture, or teachers can try many strategies such as repeatedly using paraphrasing, examples, synonyms, visualization, expressions or gestures.

Likewise, changing the speed of speech and repeating the points that are not easy for students to understand increases uptake. Using similar content or content that repeats a lot of the same type of phrasing further increases the chance for incidental learning of vocabulary. This is where theme-based learning can be an effective tool. In addition, providing a list of keywords to be used in discussions in advance is very effective.

How to Make the CBLT Lecture Active-Learning Style?

No matter what the teacher does inside or outside class, whether the learner learns is entirely up to them. Therefore, rather than teaching, the role of the teacher should be thought of as facilitating learning through the establishment of a conducive environment. In CBLT-type classes, the teacher has a number of levers they can pull to ensure the proper environment is provided. This is where active learning, where students are engaged and in control of their learning, comes into play.

The main levers the teacher can pull to provide a conducive environment for learning are in the assessments and tasks used in class. Assessments should be decided in accordance with the needs analysis, and in the case of CBLT, this could be based on language outcomes and content knowledge obtained during the class. At the same time the student interests, goals, and motivation should be kept in mind when deciding what to assess and how to go about assessing it.

Students could have better communication skills in the target foreign language, but less accuracy in grammar. In order to keep up student use of the target language, teachers have to be careful to keep students attentive in class and not bore students with too much of a focus on accuracy. This means when designing assessments and tasks to use in class, less of an emphasis should be placed on grammatical accuracy, and tasks and assessments should provide ample opportunity for a focus on production in the target language, as well as chances for fluency development.

Goal setting is an important area the teacher can employ to increase student motivation. By providing students the opportunity to set clear goals for the class, both in terms of language

and content acquisition, the teacher can encourage a positive attitude towards learning, and utilize the students own stated goals to motivate them further down the line if necessary.

In regards to tasks, teachers can increase student motivation by giving students agency in their learning by giving them a choice on what to learn and in what way. The teacher can curate a number of different resources for students to source content, or make the content choice completely open for students. Likewise, the teacher can suggest a number of tasks for students to do to choose from, or leave it up to the students to do the learning as they wish, given that the students are motivated, provided with proper support when necessary, and have some understanding of how they learn well.

The tasks students perform in class should be decided according to these assessments as a form of external motivation. Tasks based on student interests, and tasks that involve an active research element further incentivize students to be engaged even out of the class. To make the class more interactive, frequent use of presentations, discussions, and questions are very effective.

Teachers can choose tasks that force students to think deeply about their subject, such as writing an essay on their opinion of a point, or tasks that focus entirely on reproduction of target language, such as shadowing. In the case of ILA, tasks that involve critical thinking skills and expression of opinion should be encouraged. To increase student motivation, teachers can propose multiple tasks for students to choose from that have clear objectives and language development incentives. In addition, teachers should be flexible to respond to how the students themselves respond to the activities at hand.

For the success of the CBLT approach, we should choose themes that evoke broad public discussion. This ensures a variety of content related to the topic is available, and means students can get information in different forms from different sources. In public discussions, many socially significant questions are raised, which help to formulate questions for discussion in the class.

How to Keep the Students Involved Outside of the Class?

In the university setting, basically everything the students do throughout the course needs to contribute towards their grade. In terms of keeping students involved outside of class, besides setting tasks and assessments that provide external motivation, developing learner autonomy that encourages internal motivation is essential. In order to do so, the teacher needs to provide activities that students are able to do on their own, or with their peers, without the direct supervision of the teacher. If done successfully in class, it is then a natural progression for students to take this work outside the classroom. This can be as normal homework, or as part of the students' grade.

This does require a level of responsibility from the teacher, however. Such tasks require the teacher to give clear expectations of what is expected of students, ample opportunity for practice during class time, and they also require the teacher to be constantly available for support when necessary.

Conclusion

Based on the recent literature findings and our own experience of teaching at the university level, we stated some important features of effective ways of CBLT in ILA education. We split the control of the teacher into three areas; where the teacher has full control, where they have partial control, and where they have a minimal amount of control, to propose ideas of effective teaching in each area. We hope our research contributes to the development of teaching CBLT.

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