



## **The *Whats*, *Whys*, *Hows* and *Whos* of Content-Based Instruction in Second/Foreign Language Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

As an instructional practice in second and foreign language education, content-based instruction is not a fully revolutionary paradigm, but a spin-off approach which derives from the evolution of Communicative Language Teaching. Sharing with CLT the same fundamental principles, CBI bases its idiosyncrasy on promoting the use of subject matter for second/foreign language teaching purposes. This article aims at exploring the nature and scope of the content-based methodological framework —the whats—, the theoretical foundations that support it —the whys—, and the different prototype models for application in compliance with parameters such as institutional requirements, educational level, and the particular nature and object of instruction —the hows. Additionally, it will also undertake a review of a copious number of references selected from the existing literature, mostly contributed by researchers and experienced practitioners in the field —the whos.

**KEYWORDS:** language education, language teaching methodology, communicative language teaching, content-based instruction, content and language integrated learning.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The language pedagogy arena can by no means be conceived nowadays without "the very robust contribution of communicative methodology to the language teaching community" (Pica, 2000: 4). Although some other alternative approaches have emerged in recent years —such as the lexical approach (Lewis, 1993) and the context approach (Bax, 2003)—, it is commonly agreed

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that the fundamentals of communicative language teaching (hereafter CTL) have remained healthily operational for the past three decades. In line with this, Richards (2002: 5) states that CLT "has survived into the new millennium. Because it refers to a diverse set of rather general and uncontroversial principles, Communicative Language Teaching can be interpreted in many different ways and used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures".

According to communicative principles, attaining communicative competence that would allow learners to operate effectively in the new language was set as the main goal of instruction. At the same time, using the language to communicate was seen as the best way to learn it. Under this canon, meaningful communication became both the target to reach and the medium to do so: CLT therefore came to refer to both aims and processes in language teaching and learning. In highly broad terms, the major purpose of the communicative proposal has been "the elaboration and implementation of programs and methodologies that promote the development of functional language ability through learners' participation in communicative events" (Savignon, 2002: 10). This means that there has never existed any single 'set in stone' communicative method, any standardized system with a fixed arrangement of techniques and procedures, or —to use Brown's playful terminology—, any "prepacked elixir" (Brown, 2002: 11) that would naively guarantee immediate success in language education.

The present-day applicability of CLT is perceived with a two-fold projection. On the one hand, the basic CLT framework —with the natural adaptation to contemporary trends— still shapes curricular planning, syllabus design, methodological guidelines and material writing. On the other hand, as Rodgers points out,

**Communicative Language Teaching 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)*

Among this array of communicative-based methodological options currently at our disposal, Content-Based Teaching—or Content-Based Instruction (hereafter CBI), as it is more commonly known—is one of the options whose "popularity and wider applicability have increased dramatically since the early 1990s" (Stoller, 2002: 107). The next sections of this article will attempt to explore the conceptual descriptions of this paradigm (the *whats*), the theoretical underpinnings that support it (the *whys*), the different operative models available (the *hows*), and the multiplicity of scopes, issues and areas reported by an extensive number of authors as in the existing literature (the *whos*).

## II. THE WHATS: DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

Content-based approaches suggest that optimal conditions for learning a second/foreign language occur when both the target language and some meaningful content are integrated in the classroom, the language therefore being both an immediate object of study in itself, and a medium for learning a particular subject matter. In content-based language teaching, therefore, teachers use content topics rather than grammar rules, vocabulary spheres, operative functions or contextual situations as the framework for instruction. Many different yet compatible

definitions have been provided. According to Brinton *et al.*, CBI is "( . . . ) the integration of particular content with language teaching aims ( . . . ) the concurrent teaching of subject matter and second language skills" (Brinton *et al.*, 1989: 2). Leaver and Stryker (1989: 270) define CBI as an instructional approach in which "language proficiency is achieved by shifting the focus of the course from the learning of language *per se* to the learning of subject matter". Short (1993: 629), for her part, states that "In content-based instruction, language teachers use content topics, rather than grammar rules or vocabulary lists, as the scaffolding for instruction".

Like the principles of CLT from which it derives, CBI cannot be conceptualized as a fixed, immovable method; quite contrarily, it is commonly perceived as a flexible operational framework for language instruction, with a heterogeneity of prototype models and application options available for different contexts and pedagogical needs. Authors such as Stryker and Leaver (1997: 3) view the paradigm within an ample perspective and claim that CBI "is a truly and holistic approach to foreign language education . . . (which) can be at once a philosophical orientation, a methodological system, a syllabus design for a single course, or a framework for an entire program of instruction". In a previous work, these authors agree that CBI proposals are bound to meet four basic characteristics: (1) *subject matter core* —the fundamental organization of the curriculum should be derived from the subject matter, rather than from forms, functions or situations; (2) *use of authentic texts* —the core materials (texts, video tapes, audio recordings, visual aids. etc.) should be selected primarily (though not exclusively) from those produced for native speakers of the language; (3) *learning of new information* —students should use the second/foreign language to learn new information and to evaluate that information, based on knowledge of their own culture (C1) and their own emerging cultural literacy in the second culture (C2), and (4) *appropriate to the specific needs of students* —the topics, content, materials, and learning activities should correspond to the cognitive and affective needs of the students and should be appropriate to the proficiency level of the class — (Leaver & Stryker, 1989: 271).

As for the question of what qualifies as *content* in CBI, it is very common for it to be some kind of subject matter related to the students' own academic curriculum in primary, secondary or tertiary education. The second or foreign language can be consequently used as the medium of instruction for literature, history, mathematics, science, social studies, or any other academic subject at any educational context or level. Nevertheless, this is not the only option available for, as some authors suggest, the content ". . . needs not be academic; it can include any topic, theme, or non-language issue of interest or importance to the learners" (Genesee, 1994: 3). In fact, any content material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learners, as well as appropriate to their linguistic level, can be used for instructional purposes. On the occasions when it does not convey any discipline-specific content, one common option for content selection is to choose materials which can provide background knowledge on cultural or socio-cultural issues. This version, which has been termed as Content-Enriched Instruction (Ballman, 1997), has also been proposed as a potential alternative to overcome the sometimes neglected treatment of meaningful socio-cultural or real-world information offered by some language textbooks (Dueñas, 2002a, b). Thematic spheres such as intercultural relations, immigration, multiculturalism or other global issues can easily accommodate the necessary input so as to provide students with the opportunity of learning about the world realities while advancing their language proficiency. In this way, as Stoller (2002: 107) points out, "Through content-based instruction, learners develop language skills while becoming more knowledgeable citizens of the world".

In broad terms, integrating language and content is not a new phenomenon in the general field of education, although it is a relatively contemporary trend in the particular area of second/foreign language teaching. The practice of combining language and content for both purposeful linguistic and subject-matter learning originated in Canada around 1965 within the first programs in language immersion education developed to provide the country's English-speaking young population with opportunities to learn French —Canada's other official language. However, as a specific approach to second and foreign language teaching, CBI "is a relative newcomer to the field" (Brinton & Master, 1997: v). It first appeared on the general language teaching scene in the mid to late 1980s, and it has gained increasing popularity throughout the 1990s and the initial years of the new millennium, expanding in many different areas for a variety of educational projects, and being widely used in many Canadian and US institutions. In Europe, where the approach is commonly known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), the methodology has been described by the European Commission as "an excellent way of making progress in a foreign language" (<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/language/home.html>). This institution has contributed to developing the network *Euroclil* ([www.euroclil.net](http://www.euroclil.net)), a forum for practitioners, projects and proposals in the area of language and content integrated learning.

### III. THE WHYS: TNEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

As one of the CLT spin-off approaches, CBI integrates the fundamental rationales and components of the methodological paradigm from which it derives. Additionally, a number of theoretical underpinnings for content-based teaching and learning are associated with a variety of sources which provide further empirical support to this pedagogy. According to Grabe and Stoller. "the research which supports CBI spans the range from studies in second language acquisition. to controlled training studies, to various strands of research in educational and cognitive psychology" (Grabe & Stoller, 1997: 5). Thus, the research reported to offer a theoretical backup of CBI is not always strictly limited to the scope of language teaching and learning, as some of the arguments exposed are typically used to inform learning theories and instructional practices more generally. However, these arguments are directly transferable to language teaching and learning at almost any level and, particularly, in academically-oriented settings. Furthermore, the evidence of some successful program outcomes can also provide irrefutable evidence of the benefits of CBI.

Regarding second language acquisition research, some authors (among others Krashen, 1984; Savignon, 1983; Snow, 1993; Wesche, 1993) have suggested that

(. . .) a second language is most successfully acquired when the conditions mirror those present in first language acquisition, that is, when the focus of instruction is on meaning rather than on form; when the language input is at or just above the competence of the student, and when there is sufficient opportunity for students to engage in meaningful use of that language in a relatively anxiety-free environment.

*Dupuy (2000: 206)*

A major source of support for CBI derives from the work of some researchers in the area of SLA, particularly from the postulates of Krashen and Swain. In extremely abridged terms, the theories of Krashen (1982, 1984, 1895) claim that second language acquisition occurs when the

learner receives comprehensible input, not when he or she is forced to memorize vocabulary or manipulate language by means of batteries of grammar exercises. According to these premises, those methodological practices which provide students with more comprehensible input are bound to be more successful in attaining the desired goals, since learners are more likely to progress in their command of the new language when they understand content in that new linguistic code. CBI principles are closely linked to these assumptions, as the focus of instruction is on the subject matter, and not on the form or, in Krashen's words, it is on "what is being said rather than how" (Krashen, 1984: 62). Thus, in general terms, as some other authors have pointed out (Genesee, 1991; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), high levels of competence can be reached in classrooms where the target language is a medium of communication rather than a object of analysis.

In addition to receiving comprehensible input, researchers such as Swain (1985, 1993) support that, in order for learners to develop communicative competence, they must also have the opportunity of using the new language productively, both orally and in writing. In line with this, scope to produce comprehensible and coherent output is constantly offered in CBI, as students are systematically pushed to produce language that is appropriate in terms of both content and language. This 'output hypothesis' —which complements Krashen's input hypothesis—has recently been extended, arguing for "explicit focus on relevant and contextually appropriate language forms to support content-learning activities in the classroom" (Grabe & Stoller, 1997: 6). The issue of 'form-content integration', as distinct from the 'form versus content' dichotomy, has been discussed by Garrett (1991), Lightbrown and Spada (1994), Swain (1995a), and Tarone and Swain (1995). The appropriateness of grammar exploitation in CBI is reviewed in detail by Brinton and Holten (2001) by examining the different arguments and counter-arguments regarding its pertinence within the approach. The conclusion reached is that grammar instruction is optimally compatible with CBI methodology; furthermore, these authors suggest a number of pedagogical guidelines for integrating grammar into the CBI syllabus in a systematic way.

Outside research in second language acquisition, classroom training research also supports the effectiveness of some instructional approaches commonly incorporated into CBI. Among these, research on cooperative learning, research on learning strategy instruction, and research in extensive reading are strongly attached to CBI and have provided outstanding results.

Cooperative learning is readily incorporated into CBI as it is consistent with the goals of this paradigm (Crandall, 1993; Fathman & Kessler, 1993). Cooperative learning requires that small groups of students (four to six) work together to learn information and perform different tasks, thus promoting peer group support and peer instruction. Among the different approaches to cooperative learning (Fathman & Kessler, 1993; Stahl, 1994; Slavin, 1995; Shaw, 1997), the documentation provided by Slavin (1995) seems to be particularly relevant, as it claims that significant advancement in student learning exists when students work in groups which incorporate structured objectives, have common group goals, offer potential rewards, promote individualized responsibility, and provide each individual in the group with equal opportunities for success. Cooperative learning leads to greater student collaboration, increases motivation for learning, develops more positive student attributions for learning success and better attitudes toward school and learning, and promotes greater self-esteem (Slavin, 1995). Outcomes in the fields of research in cooperative learning suggest that, by integrating language and subject matter learning, students are offered opportunities for participating more and using the target language

with less pressure; moreover, a cooperative learning context provides students with self-confidence and with a starting point for higher work and cognitive demands. In CBI classrooms, practices that allow learners to work together sharing responsibilities in order to perform tasks are widely used. As Dupuy points out, "Small group work, team learning, jigsaw reading, and peer editing are among the many techniques CBI calls on to provide students with ample opportunities to interact, share ideas, test hypotheses, and construct knowledge in a low-risk forum" (Dupuy, 2000: 207).

Learning strategy instruction is also contemplated as highly effective when incorporated into CBI. In the words of Grabe and Stoller.

**CBI approaches provide one of the few realistic options for promoting the development of strategic learners within a language-learning curriculum. The content component of a content-based classroom provides the extended coherent material into which strategy instruction can be integrated and recycled on a daily basis. Thus, CBI approaches, which promote the importance of strategy learning, provide the curricular resources for development of the strategic language (and content) learner.**

*Grabe and Stoller (1997: Y)*

According to these authors, research in the field has verified that strategy learning works optimally when it is incorporated within the regular curriculum as a consistent feature of content and language instruction. Support for the benefits of learner strategy training can be found, among others, in the works of Brown, Pressley, Van Meter and Schuder (1996), and Pressley and Woloshyn (1995).

As extensive reading is an integral part of CBI, some findings in extensive reading research have also claimed the benefits of this methodological approach. Studies in the area provide evidence that reading of coherent extended materials promotes language development and content learning. Elley (1991) has supplied sound evidence that second and foreign language learners who practice extensive reading across a variety of topics increase their language abilities in the four basic skills, expand their vocabulary, and acquire greater content knowledge and higher motivation. In CBI classes, students engage in reading copious amounts of material related to the content selected; moreover, on most occasions the materials offered are not limited to conventional textbook content, but make use of a wide variety of viable texts from different sources, thus promoting student autonomy and empowerment.

Persuasive support for content-based approaches is also found in the fields of cognitive and educational psychology. According to Grabe and Stoller (1997), five potentially interacting research areas within these fields contribute to provide endorsement for CBI: cognitive learning theory; depth-of-processing research; discourse comprehension processing research; motivation, attribution and interest research; and expertise research.

Cognitive psychology reveals that when students are exposed to coherent and meaningful information, and when they have opportunities to elaborate the information, their linkages are more complex and recall is better (Anderson, 1990). Moreover, research in learning theory (Anderson, 1993) reinforces teaching approaches which combine the development of language and content knowledge, and practice in using that knowledge. In accordance with these theories, CBI promotes extended practice with meaningful content conjoined with relevant language learning activities (Mohan, 1986; Tang, 1997).

Research in depth-of-processing (Anderson, 1990; Barsalou, 1992; Stilling *et al.*, 1987)

suggests that the presentation of coherent and meaningful information contributes to deeper processing, and that deeper informational processing promotes better learning. As Grabe and Stoller point out, "depth-of-processing research findings are consistent with CBI, an approach that, by definition, promotes extended study of coherent content and relevant language learning activities. Thus, depth-of-processing research provides support for the integration of language and content instruction" (Grabe & Stoller. 1997: 11).

Studies in discourse comprehension processes offer powerful support for CBI as well, since one of the paradigm major goals is to make information available through multiple opportunities to work with varied yet coherently developed sets of content resources, and to recycle that information with different procedures and techniques. Discourse comprehension processing research has demonstrated that information which is more coherently presented in terms of thematic organization is easier to remember and promotes improved learning (Singer, 1990). Furthermore, text information that directly describes and endorses the topic of the text, and information that connects to related topics or areas, are more easily learned and recalled by students. The different ways in which that information is interconnected can also assist learners to use the information in new contexts and situations (Spiro *et al.*, 1987). Finally, research on discourse comprehension evidences the relevance of both verbal and visual representations of information in order to improve the memory and recall of students (Sadoski, Paivio & Goetz, 1991).

Motivation and interest research has found out that "motivation and interest come, in part, from the recognition that (1) one is actually learning and that (2) one is learning something valuable and challenging that justifies the effort" (Dupuy, 2000: 207). In line with this, CBI attempts to respond to the needs and interests of learners by focusing either on subject matter that is related to their own pedagogical or academic needs, or on content spheres which are associated with the students' cognitive and affective preferences. Research claims as well that those students who are more motivated, who develop an interest in learning aims and practices, and who see themselves as capable and successful students, learn more and obtain better results (Alexander *et al.*, 1994; Tobias. 1994; Krapp *et al.*, 1992). Furthermore, according to these authors, students with high levels of motivation make more sophisticated elaborations with learning material, increase connections among content information, and are able to recall information more easily and better.

Finally, research in the area of expertise has also contributed to support CBI paradigms. Bereiter and Scardamalia (1993) argue that expertise is a process in which students reinvest their knowledge in a sequence of problem-solving tasks which become progressively more complex. As learners are exposed to growing complexity in activities, their learning advances and they develop intrinsic motivation. Thus, they seek connections between sets of information, acquire relevant skills to accomplish tasks, and gain familiarity with problem solving. Both motivation and expertise are found to be widely addressed in CBI.

A synthesized yet comprehensive revision of the perceived benefits of CBI is found in Grabe and Stoller (1997); the conclusions derived from these findings lead these authors to suggest seven rationales for CBI that can be recapitulated as follows:

1. **In content-based classrooms, students are exposed to a considerable amount of language while learning content. This incidental language should be comprehensible, linked to their immediate prior learning and relevant to their needs. ( . . . ) In content-based classrooms, teachers and students explore interesting content while students are engaged in appropriate language-dependent**

- activities (. . .). The resultant language learning activities, therefore, are not artificial or meaningless exercises.
2. CBI supports contextualized learning; students are taught **useful** language that is embedded **within** relevant discourse contexts rather than as isolated language fragments. (. . .) Thus, CBI allows for explicit language instruction, integrated with content instruction, in a relevant and **purposeful** context.
  3. (. . .) The use of coherently developed content sources allows students to **call** on their own prior **knowledge** to learn additional language and content material.
  4. (. . .) In content-based classrooms, students are exposed to complex information and are involved in demanding activities which can lead to intrinsic motivation.
  5. CBI (. . .) lends **itself well to strategy** instruction and practice, as theme units **naturally** require and recycle important strategies across varying content and learning tasks.
  6. CBI allows greater flexibility and **adaptability** to be built into the **curriculum** and activity sequences.
  7. CBI lends itself to student-centered classroom activities.

*Grabe and Stoller (1997: 19-20)*

**IV. THE HOWS: MODELS OF CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION**

Prototype models of content-based instruction differ in design and implementation depending on a multiplicity of factors among which educational setting, level, and the nature of instruction are of primary **relevance**. Some models are commonly implemented in foreign language settings whereas others are more typical in second language contexts. There are **also** well-developed paradigms which **have proved** to be **highly** successful at the elementary school level, while others **have demonstrated** their optimal effectiveness at the secondary or post-secondary levels. Equally, the variable degree of emphasis put on either language or content that underlines each particular program affects the nature of the model in substantial terms, generating a continuum which places "content-driven" models at one end and "language-driven models" at the other extremity. This continuum is envisioned by Met (1999:7) as follows:

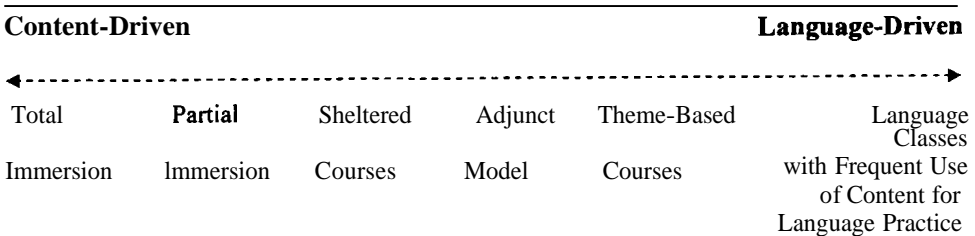


Figure 1: **Content-Based** Language Teaching. **A Continuum** of Content **and** Language Integration. Met (1999: 7)

Although the amount of and emphasis on language and content varies in the models showed above, **all** paradigms incorporate both components in a systematic and integral manner, with existing individual peculiarities depending on the objectives of the course or program, the target student population, and the particular idiosyncrasy of the instructional context.

In the following paragraphs, four well-documented prototypes of paradigms will be described, starting with an account of the nature of immersion education so as to envision the



most radical model of CBI, and then moving progressively toward more flexible language-driven frameworks.

#### **IV. 1. Immersion education**

Teaching and learning concepts and ideas in a language that is not one's own is hardly a new phenomenon; in fact, as Cummins points out, "throughout the history of formal education the use of an L2 as a medium of instruction has been the rule rather than the exception" (Cummins, 2000). However, the first well-documented programs subjected to intensive long-term scrutiny were the innovative experiences developed in Montreal, Canada from 1965 onwards, in which French language was used as the medium for the instruction of monolingual English-speaking children. These programs expanded successfully throughout the rest of Canada and the US in the subsequent decades. The immersion paradigm is one of the most carefully researched language teaching models in primary —and sometimes secondary— education (Cummins, 1987; Genesee, 1987; Johnson & Swain, 1997). Referring to ESL programs in the US, for instance, it has been reported that immersion children at early educational stages "consistently perform at or above grade level scholastically, are on par with their monolingual peers in English language development, and by the end of the elementary school, become functional bilinguals" (Snow, 2001: 305). Variations of immersion programs developed over the years differ with respect to the amount of time the second/foreign language is used for instruction and the grade in which the program commences: additionally to early immersion cases, there are numerous programs labeled as 'middle' or 'delayed' immersion, and 'late' immersion —starting at the end of elementary education or the beginning of the secondary level. Although the amount of teaching in the target language may vary, it is common that at least 50% of curricular instruction is provided in the new target language. Many of the experiences reported in the existing literature in the field refer to immersion programs developed in Canada and the US; the model, however, is widely operational all over the world (Johnson & Swain, 1997).

#### **IV. 2. Sheltered courses**

Sheltered courses are very common in a variety of contexts, mostly at secondary and post-secondary levels. A basic definition of the model states that "A sheltered content-based course is taught in a second language by a content specialist to a group of learners who have been segregated or 'sheltered' from native speakers" (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989: 15). The term 'sheltered' derives from the intended separation of second language students from native speakers of the target language for content instruction purposes. In sheltered instruction, lectures are commonly taught by content instructors, not language teachers. Content instructors, nevertheless, are required to be aware of the language needs and abilities of the learners, and need to be familiarized with the idiosyncrasy of the language learning process. Some authors (Gaffield-Vile, 1996), however, claim the likelihood that the instructors may be language teachers with subject-matter knowledge, or instructors working collaboratively with language specialists and content specialists. In order to meet the desired selected teaching goals, there has to be an evident accommodation of the instruction to the students' level of proficiency in the language; content, however, is not usually watered down, thus containing the same components as a regular subject course. Although a primary goal of the model is accelerating the development of language abilities for students to reach the course aims; it has to be kept in mind that the overall purpose of sheltered courses is facilitating content learning rather than language learning,

so this model constitutes one of the most content-driven paradigms within the general framework of CBI.

Sheltered courses are typical of second language situations rather than of foreign language instruction. The early sheltered courses in post-secondary education were originally developed at the University of Ottawa in Canada, as an alternative to the traditional university foreign language classes for non-native speakers (Edwards *et al.*, 1984). Ensuing experiences in many different contexts have been reported in the existing literature; Gaffield-Vile (1996), for instance, offers an account of a more updated experience in a sheltered Sociology course developed in order to bridge the perceived gap between the standard EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course and the normal first-year undergraduate courses at universities in Britain:

Through the subject of sociology, the model suggested here is designed to develop language and study skills, especially academic writing. The course begins by looking at the social sciences in general, and examines the methods of research used by social scientists, particularly sociologists. After that it examines major theoretical perspectives which shed light on issues such as social stratification and social class in Britain, and concepts of wealth and poverty, crime and deviance. The major institutions are also examined, including the political system, the mass media, agencies of social control, the family, education and religion. Because the course marries subject content with EAP content, an EAP syllabus is written alongside the content syllabus, highlighting skills such as:

*Reading:* Reading sociology texts to identify main and supporting ideas, examples and details; differentiating between relevant and irrelevant information; skimming and scanning for key ideas; reading, summarizing, and reinterpreting information in diagrammatic form: identifying bias in written text; following the main line of an argument.

*Writing:* Writing summaries; understanding essay titles; planning essays; writing essays to 1,500-word length; examinations; using sources appropriately and correctly, using exposition and argumentation.

*Listening:* Listening to one-hour academic lectures and grasping the gist of an aural text with complex language; differentiating between fact and opinion; presenting aural text in a different form.

*Speaking and oral interaction:* Answering questions and giving information following a lecture; giving opinions; using conversational discourse strategies for interrupting, holding the floor, disagreeing or agreeing, and qualifying; requesting clarification; giving a short oral summary of main points; giving a 15-minute prepared seminar presentation using visual aids on a sociological topic.

*Gaffield-Vile (1996: 108)*

This course differs from a regular 'Introduction to Sociology' course not in the content, which is parallel for both the ordinary and the sheltered versions, but in the provision made to cope with language aspects not only in order to facilitate non-native students' performance in the subject area, but also to help them progress in their language skills, particularly in those academic abilities essential for successful higher-level study. The course would therefore serve as a most helpful bridge between skill-based EAP courses for non-native students and regular university subject-matter courses.

Authors claim that, when properly developed and conducted, sheltered courses can offer a very effective approach for integrating language development and content learning for students whose language abilities may not yet be advanced enough for them to progress successfully in demanding higher-level content courses originally designed for native speakers. A potential handicap for the implementation of sheltered classes, however, could be the lack of availability of either content specialists familiarized with the needs and demands of students with limited operational capability in the language of instruction, or language instructors with the adequate background for teaching real content disciplines at secondary or university level.

### IV. 3. Adjunct courses

The adjunct model constitutes a more sophisticated pattern for the integration of language and content, because adjunct classes are not implemented on their own but aim at assisting an existing regular subject-matter class. This model has mainly been implemented at the university level, although some experiences of its effectiveness at secondary school level have been reported as well (Wegrzecka-Kowaleski, 1997). Although the adjunct model intends to connect a purposefully designed language course with a regular academic course, the target audience being those students who are enrolled in the regular content course but who lack the necessary language competence to progress successfully in the subject-matter proficiency unless some additional aid is provided. Both the regular discipline and the adjunct classes share a common content basis, although they vary in the particular focus of instruction: whereas the content instructor focuses on academic concepts, the language teacher emphasizes language skills using the academic content as the background in which the language learning process is contextualized. Thus, the adjunct courses work as support classes for regular subject matter courses and, according to different authors (Snow & Kamhi-Stein, 1997) offer excellent opportunities to develop the academic strategies necessary to cope with real academic content. First of all, the language component of the course is directly linked to immediate academic needs of students, equipping learners with assistance in tasks such as revising notes, writing assignments, preparing for tests, etc., as well as aiding them to advance in the conceptual background necessary to understand the content material. Additionally, the fact that, besides the adjunct course, students are enrolled in a parallel academic subject-matter course in which they must obtain a passing grade, helps to increase motivation for learning both language and content.

Adjunct classes are more commonly offered in second language settings rather than in foreign language contexts, although they are also quite often implemented at international institutions or national institutions using a foreign language as the medium of instruction. Some successful experiences have been detailed: a biology course at a university in the Middle East (Flowerdew, 1993), and a history and sociology course at the George Fox University in Oregon, US (Iancu, 1997). Another experience of effective adjunct courses was developed in the Freshman Summer Program at the University of California Los Angeles; among the different courses offered, one of the most successful ones was Introduction to Psychology, which Adamson (1993) describes as follows,

**The ESL component of this course emphasizes five areas of study: reading, writing, study skills, grammar, and discussion of the content material. During the first week of the course when the psychology instructor is covering the history and methods of psychology, the ESL reading component concentrates on previewing and predicting. The writing component covers topic sentences, paragraph unity, and writing paragraphs for definition. The study skills component covers verb tenses, determiners, and relative clauses. These activities are not much different from those taught in a study skills course in an intensive ESL program, but the adjunct format is much more effective because the activities are not done for their own sake but rather to help students understand material in a course that they must pass in order to graduate.**

*Adamson (1993: 126)*

The implementation of the adjunct model, however, demands some organizational requirements and coordination efforts that on occasions may go beyond the actual possibilities of many educational institutions. As Lonon-Blanton (1992: 287) states: "As it is obvious, this model requires a willing interaction and co-ordination among teachers in different disciplines and

across academic units and, for that reason, may be administratively difficult to arrange". Synchronization between instructors is therefore essential: the syllabi of the two classes must be negotiated with respect to each other, although it is common that the discipline course provides the point of departure for the language class, setting down the content and governing its progression.

#### IV. 4. Theme-based models

Theme-based courses probably constitute the most popular and widely used prototype of CBI at all levels of instructions and in both second and foreign language settings. In the theme-based model, courses are autonomous —i.e. they are not parallel to other discipline courses as in the adjunct model—, offer a strong language-oriented projection, and allow a high degree of flexibility in terms of content selection, curricular organization and procedural application. This leads to a lack of complexity for implementation that is viewed as highly positive, since teachers — who are language teaching specialists rather than subject lecturers — operate independently, and no organizational or institutional adjustments are required.

The syllabus in theme-based courses is organized either around different topics within a particular discipline, or including a number of individual issues associated with a relevant general theme or content area. In both cases, as Snow points out, "Themes are the central ideas that organize major curricular units selected for their appropriateness to student needs and interests, institutional expectations, program resources, and teachers abilities and interests" (Snow, 2001: 307). Typically, a course deals with several topics as it progresses. Thus a standard theme-based course would consist of a number of subunits focused on different topics which explore more specific aspects or different perspectives of the general theme. In general terms, topics should be arranged to provide maximum coherence for theme unit, and to generate a range of opportunities to explore both content and language. Each course is, in short, a sequence of topics linked together by the assumption of a coherent overall theme.

Theme-based courses do have explicit language aims and objectives which are typically more important than the content learning objectives. In the continuum that Met (1999, Figure 1) establishes for the depiction of the degree of emphasis given to language and content in the different CBI prototypes, she places the theme-based approach at the language-driven models extreme, immediately before the category of "language classes with frequent use of content for language practice", which is not technically considered as a CBI prototype in itself, but just as a common procedure in language instruction. According to Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989) — who distinguish between what they call "weak" and "strong" forms of CBI— these courses would constitute the weakest representation of content-based models. As stated by this pattern, weaker forms would include language courses whose main aim is to develop learners' communicative proficiency, whereas stronger versions would integrate content courses for L2 speakers in non-language disciplines, in which the primary goal is mastery of the subject matter.

Courses designed according to the theme-based model parameters tend to integrate a variety of text types and discourse samples, combining oral input — teacher presentations, video sequences, recorded passages, guest lecture talks, etc— with written materials —newspapers articles, essays, informative texts, literary passages, etc. Another key feature is the interest in the concept of integrated skills: although the topics presented are commonly grounded on listening or reading, the oral passage or written text always serves as the basis for further exploration of other areas—grammar, vocabulary, language awareness, etc.— as well as acting as a springboard

for the practice of productive skills —making presentations and oral reports, engaging in discussions and debates, giving oral or written response to questions or issues associated to the topics, writing summaries, commentaries, etc. In this way, skills and language analysis are integrated around the selected topics in a meaningful, coherent and **interlinked** way.

Guidelines for the design of theme-based syllabuses and units are provided in Gianelli (1997) and Stoller and Grabe (1997). **References** to the successful implementation of theme-based courses are numerous. An interesting case is reported in Klahn (1997), with the description of an advanced Spanish course developed around the theme of 'Contemporary Mexican Topics' at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) of Columbia University (New York, US). The course was interdisciplinary in nature and scope because so was the target audience, which included, among others, students from degree courses in history, political science, anthropology, education, law, and journalism. The syllabus was organized around a selection of topics sequenced "by carefully controlling the quantity and quality of the content of the material so that each lesson guided the student to a higher level of competence (...). The different topics lent themselves to the performance of certain linguistic tasks that, when studied in a specific order, facilitated students' progress" (Klahn 1997: 206). The topics included were (1) The History of Mexico, (2) The Political System, (3) Means of Communication, (4) The Mexican Economy, (5) Geography and Demography, (6) The Arts, (7) Popular Culture, and (8) US-Mexican Relations. All the materials used for the course were samples of authentic Mexican discourse: historical, biographical and autobiographical texts, newspapers and magazine articles, editorials, film reviews, economic predictions and graphs, political speeches, poems, short stories, popular traditions, interviews, business letters, recipes, and tourist brochures, as well as excerpts of films, television programs, soap operas, TV interviews, commercials, and documentaries. Materials were purposefully selected —and occasionally edited— so that they would progressively increase their degree of difficulty, complexity, and challenging nature. According to the author, in terms of **outcomes** the course had "very positive results in the cognitive, linguistic, and affective domains. (. . .) Student evaluations demonstrate the potential for a course of this kind to achieve the goal of greater socio-cultural understanding through increased foreign language fluency" (Klahn, 1997: 209).

It is commonly agreed that theme-based courses constitute an excellent tool for the integration of language and content providing that curriculum planners, course designers and teachers manage to keep language and content exploration in balance, not to lose sight of content and language learning objectives, and not to overwhelm students with excessive amounts of content that may lead to overlooking the language teaching and learning dimension of instruction.

All the content-based prototypes described in the previous sections present well-documented models of content-based instruction. **Besides** these standardized models, **some** other proposals for paradigm combination or new experiences **have also been** offered for, as Snow states, "In recent years the models have evolved into new formats and different features have been borrowed, blurring many of the key distinctions" (Snow, 2001: 309). Hybrid proposals have emerged as well, and flexible alternatives anticipated by Lonon-Blanton (1992) and Leaver and Stryker (1989) — who advocated for a holistic approach and eclectic organizational frameworks for CBI respectively — **have demonstrated** their potential. Another important **feature** among current issues in CBI is the innovative trend to incorporate other teaching practices into content-based instruction: interesting experiences are reported, among others, for integrating project work (Stoller, 1997), making use of graphic devices (Short, 1997), and incorporating technology and,

very particularly, the Internet into the content-based classroom (Kasper, 2000; Crane 2000; Luzón 2002).

## V. THE WHOS: AUTHORS, EXPERIENCES AND SCOPES IN THE EXISTING LITERATURE

Evidence of the increasing relevance of CBI in contemporary second and foreign language education is contributed by numerous authors in the copious publications on the issue, a fact which demonstrates that, as Wesche and Skehan (2002: 224) point out, "an abundant and continually evolving literature on content-based instruction now exists". Although this section does not aim to provide a fully definitive corpus of references, it will attempt to offer an extensive body of authors and works that reflect the amplitude of the lines of work, trends and interest in the area.

References on the foundations of the paradigm trace back to the late 1980s with, among others, the pioneering works by Mohan (1986), Cantoni-Harvey (1987), Crandall (1987), Benesch (1988), and Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989). In the succeeding years, the number of publications on the field has continuously expanded in the form of books, with works such as the ones by Short (1991), Krueger and Ryan (1993), Fruhauf, Coyle *et al.* (1996), Snow and Brinton (1997), Stryker and Leaver (1997), Marsh and Langé (1999, 2000). Kasper *et al.* (2000), McLaughlin and Vogt (2000), Haley (2002), and Brinton, Snow and Wesche (2003). Similarly, a profusion of articles has also been published throughout the years in prestigious periodical publications in the language teaching field, such as *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (Spanos, 1987; Crandall, 1993; Snow, 1998), *Foreign Language Annals* (Leaver & Stryker, 1989; Ballman, 1997; Dupuy, 2000), *ELT Journal* (Lonon-Blanton, 1992; Gaffield-Vile, 1996), *The Modern Language Journal* (Campbell *et al.*, 1985; Pica, 2002), *System* (Chapple & Curtis, 2000), and *Applied Linguistics* (Musumeci, 1996), among others.

CBI is also referred to as one of the most representative contributions to contemporary foreign language pedagogy both in the updated editions of seminal books in the field of methodology —*Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* (Celce-Murcia, 2000), *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), and *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)—, and in newly published volumes in language methodology such as *Methodology in Language Teaching. An Anthology of Current Practice* (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Interest in CBI is perceived as well in relevant reference works in applied Linguistics, as it is the case of the recently published *Oxford Handbook of Applied Linguistics* (Kaplan, 2002), which titles one of the only three chapters in the part of 'The study of second language teaching' as "Communicative, task-based and content-based instruction" (Wesche & Skehan, 2002).

As it has already been mentioned, CBI has been extensively used in the United States and Canada in recent decades; the geographical scope of the methodology, however, goes beyond the North American boundaries, and numerous authors have also reported their experiences in other settings such as Asia (Sagliano & Greenfield, 1998; Murphey, 1997; Chapple & Curtis, 2000; Chadran & Esarey, 1997), South America (Snow, Cortés & Pron, 1998), and Australia (Chapell & DeCourcy, 1993). In Europe abundant work has been done on what has been termed as 'Content and Language Integrated Learning' (CLIL) (Fruhauf, Coyle *et al.*, 1996; Masih, 1999; Marsh & Langé, 1999, 2000, among others), and in the particular case of Spain there are some

experiences reported of CBI implementation at primary and secondary schools and universities (Scott-Tennent, 1995; Navés & Muñoz, 1999; Lorenzo, 2001).

In terms of content fields, a considerable number of courses and programs in an ample variety of disciplines and areas of interest have been reported, and thorough descriptions have been supplied by practitioners in the specific fields of literature (Holten, 1997), history (Stoller, 1997), art history (Raphan & Moser, 1994), film (Chapple & Curtis, 2000), biology (Dong, 2002), mathematics (Cantoni-Harvey, 1987), journalism (Vines, 1997), sociology (Gaffield-Vile, 1996), culture (Ballman, 1997), and national or regional features and issues (Klee & Teddick, 1997; Stryker, 1997; Klahn, 1997). Other references to courses in areas such as psychology, economy, geography, political science, etc. can also be found (Dupuy, 2000).

Information for improved practice is also contemplated by different authors in the existing literature on CBI: techniques and strategies for classroom application are explored by Short (1991), and Brinton and Masters (1997); guidance for the development of syllabus design and curricular materials is provided by Eskey (1997), and Brinton and Holten (1997), and the crucial issue of assessment is addressed by Turner (1992). Short (1993), and Cushing Weigle and Jensen (1997). Other matters of pedagogical concern, such as teacher training, are also conveniently tackled by Peterson (1997), Crandall (1998), and Brinton (2000). Research perspectives on CBI are also contemplated by Swain (1996), and Zuengler and Brinton (1997).

## CONCLUSION

Content-Based Instruction has been put into practice throughout the last decades in a variety of language learning educational contexts and levels, although its popularity and actual applicability has expanded substantially since the early 1990s. As has been stated in the previous sections, CBI is not so much a revolutionary proposal for language teaching as a new orientation within the CLT paradigm. Equally, as has been reported, the benefits of the approach are supported by both extensive research on theoretical foundations and the outcomes reported by numerous designers and implementers of successful experiences in a multiplicity of settings, institutions and levels of instruction. There also exists a set of well-documented standard models specifically developed to fulfill the particular needs and demands of different groups, settings and educational purposes. Moreover, as has been detailed, CBI crosses over disciplines and thematic spheres, providing a flexible teaching framework with optimal scope for the accommodation of the most diverse content areas.

The production and execution of a CBI course or program potentially constitutes a most stimulating challenge for language teachers, as the materialization of the real academic, cognitive and even personal interests and demands of both lecturers and learners can be accomplished by means of this methodological framework. Some issues, however, may contribute to dissuade practitioners from engaging in the development and implementation of a CBI course. Institutional restraints may be one of the most recalcitrant barriers. Personal qualms may also discourage teachers as, on most occasions, they will have to plan the appropriate curricula, design the syllabus, and fully develop new classroom materials which encompass the assumptions of the approach. This endeavor may involve strenuous hours of laborious effort and may spark mixed feelings of enthusiasm, anxiety, and fear of failure, since effectiveness and success can never be entirely guaranteed, and recipes of how exactly to proceed are hard to find. Most experienced

authors, however, encourage teachers to experiment by creating innovative content-based proposals that better suit the particular needs, concerns and preferences of their learner population. The effort, they agree, is utterly worthwhile.

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