Content-Based Persian Language Instruction at the University of Maryland: A Field-Report

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Abstract

Content-based language instruction (CBI) has been increasingly gaining prominence in foreign language education. There is, however, a paucity of reports on less commonly taught language programs in the USA that have adopted this approach. This paper reports on the introduction of CBI in a Persian language program at the University of Maryland. The paper begins with an overview of the most common CBI models in higher education settings. Next, a description of a particular CBI model developed in response to the program needs is presented, followed by a description of an offered course based on this model and a discussion of the views of the students, content faculty, and the language instructor. In conclusion, key considerations and the lessons learned in the process of implementing CBI are discussed.

Introduction

An approach to foreign language education that has been increasingly gaining prominence is content-based language instruction (Dalton-Puffer, 2007; Lyster, 2011; Tedick & Cammarata, 2012). Content-based language instruction (CBI) has been variously hailed as "an excellent way of making progress in a foreign language" (The European Commission report as cited in Dueñas, 2004) and "a truly and holistic instructional approach" (Stryker & Leaver, 1997) that can be an alternative to communicative and task-based language teaching methodologies (Wesche & Skehan, 2002). Despite such enthusiasm, however, reports of college-level foreign language programs that have actually adopted this methodology are indeed scarce compared with their ESL counterparts. Moreover, most of the programs that have in fact implemented CBI involve English as the foreign language (e.g., see

the edited volume by Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Within the USA, reports of programs involving less commonly taught languages are by comparison few and far between. A key consideration in planning a language curriculum is 'context', necessitating a consideration of such factors as the stakeholders' needs and goals, institutional expectations, teachers' availability and their relevant training, and expected outcomes. There is therefore a need for reports of CBI implementation in less commonly taught language programs in order to share experiences in developing this instructional approach. Collectively, these reports can help us learn what works best and what needs to be avoided. In this spirit, this paper offers an account of implementing a particular model of CBI in a Persian language program at the University of Maryland and shares the lessons learned.

An overview of CBI

Currently in its third decade of intellectual existence, CBI has been characterized as a "powerful innovation" (Grabe & Stoller, 1997) in language pedagogy across a diverse set of instructional contexts; an innovation that integrates subject matter learning with language acquisition outcomes. CBI which has been regarded all at once as "a philosophical orientation, a methodological system, a syllabus design for a single course, or a framework for an entire program of instruction" (Stryker & Leaver, 1997, p. 2) gained real impetus in second language education with Mohan's (1986) revolutionary observation in the 1980s that:

> What is needed is an integrative approach which relates language learning and content learning, considers language as a medium of learning, and acknowledges the role of context in communication (p. 1).

The concurrent teaching of content and language through CBI provides a meaningful context for language teaching and learning to occur and exposes students to a considerable amount of comprehensible language while learning content. It motivates them to engage in real communicative interactions in the target language which has a crucial role in second language development (Byrnes, 2005; Gass

& Mackey, 2006; Wesche & Skehan, 2002). Moreover, as a highly practical curricular methodology, CBI "lends itself quite naturally to the integrated teaching of the four traditional language skills" (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989, p. 2). In addition, as Byrnes (2005) observed, the CBI methodology can effectively fill the existing gap in most college foreign language education in the US where there is a curricular bifurcation between *content-indifferent* lower-division language courses and *language-indifferent* upper-division content courses.

Over the past couple of decades an array of instructional models has been proposed for the integration of content knowledge and language objectives. In an influential taxonomy, Met (1991, 2012) placed existing CBI models along a continuum, depending upon whether they prioritize content or language learning outcomes. At one end of this continuum are *content-driven* models in which content learning has priority. In these models, language learning is considered important but it is viewed as secondary or an incidental consequence of content teaching. In addition to the primacy of content, two other related features distinguish content-driven CBI models. One is that they are *content-accountable*; that is, both teachers and students are evaluated in reference to subject matter knowledge or skills outcomes (Met, 2012). Another feature is that in this model courses are typically taught by content specialists rather than language teachers. Examples of content-driven models are total or partial immersion programs in which subject matter courses are entirely taught in a second/foreign language by content specialists (Lyster & Ballinger, 2011). At the opposite end of the continuum are *language-driven* models in which language learning is the real course objective. Here content simply provides a vehicle for language study, introducing authentic topics that serve to motivate learners to engage in meaningful communication in class. Content is often drawn from general topics of interest to learners or occasionally from academic disciplines. In contrast to content-driven CBI approaches, in language-driven models students and instructors are only accountable to language outcomes and students are taught by language teachers rather than content specialists. In addition to these two rather diametrically opposing approaches, there are also hybrid models that fall somewhere in the middle of the continuum, placing equal emphasis on language and content outcomes. In these models, language and content is taught

concurrently in various arrangements (see below) and students are expected to demonstrate not only mastery of subject matter but also language learning outcomes. In these hybrid approaches, instruction of content and language are typically provided by content and language specialists, either jointly in the form of team-teaching or separately.

The most widely adopted CBI models in North American post-secondary foreign language education contexts are the three instructional prototypes known as *theme-based*, *sheltered*, and *adjunct* (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989; Stryker & Leaver, 1997). Theme-based CBI courses are entirely language-driven, language-accountable, and taught by language teachers. This is the most prevalent CBI model at beginning and intermediate levels of language education (Dupuy, 2000; Weigle & Jensen, 1997). An example of such a course can be illustrated as follows:

> [A] 10-week theme-based language course might be organized around several unrelated topics, such as heart disease, noise pollution, solar energy and television news coverage. For example, the topic might be initially presented as a reading selection, the topic and vocabulary would then be recycled in guided discussions, related audio- and/or videotaped materials would provide the basis for listening activities, and, finally, a writing assignment synthesizing the various source materials would round out the topic unit. (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989, p. 15)

Alternatively theme-based courses might focus on one single overarching topic subdivided into more specific or specialized sub-topics in order to link the sub-topics and increase the possibility of recycling linguistics forms.

The sheltered CBI courses are primarily content-driven and are taught by subject matter specialists entirely in the target language. This model involves various content courses such as psychology, geography, or math, exclusively for second language learners in order to 'shelter' them from native-speaking students and create homogenous classes entirely made up of language learners. Typically, content specialists who teach such courses have either been trained in issues of language learning (Snow, 1997, 2005) or receive assistance

from language specialists in using linguistically sensitive instructional strategies in order to render the subject matter more accessible to students. Some of the pedagogical modifications used in sheltered courses, for example, include careful selection of texts in terms of their organization and clarity, gearing lectures more closely to the readings, making certain linguistic adjustments to accommodate students' still-developing listening proficiency and placing greater emphasis on receptive skills and less on speaking and writing as the overall course requirements (for an example of a sheltered course for students of journalism see Vines, 1997).

The adjunct CBI models, in contrast, have a *shared emphasis* on content as well as language (Met, 2012). In this approach, students are concurrently enrolled in two linked courses: a content course and a language course. Instructors of these two courses work collaboratively to ensure that students acquire the content base and the language skills necessary for successful learning of the content. Adjunct approaches are therefore both language- and content-driven and students are simultaneously accountable to language as well as content (Andrade & Makaafi, 2001). To illustrate, an adjunct psychology course in an ESL program reported in the literature has been described 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 [….]" (Adamson, 1993, p. 126)

Reports of programs that have actually implemented an adjunct CBI model are comparatively very few in number (e.g., Brinton & Holten, 2001; Goldstein, Campbell, & Cummings, 1997; Iancu, 1997). The reason for this paucity can be attributed to the fact that introducing adjunct courses within an existing curriculum requires a considerable amount of coordination of the curricula between the two linked courses as well as significant institutional commitment and adjustments. It is probably because of these requirements that

implementation of adjunct courses has been characterized as an "ambitious undertaking" (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 1989).

It is important to note here that regardless of the type, the central feature common to all CBI models is that the curriculum is organized around content. In other words, it is the content that drives the curriculum rather than an inventory of linguistic forms, functions, or tasks used in other approaches to second/foreign language education. Further, in all CBI models there is always a primary focus on meaning rather than form, and efforts are made to render the subject matter as comprehensible as possible to the students through various pedagogical modifications, both in terms of content and language in light of their language competence and knowledge of the subject matter.

In planning a CBI curriculum two challenges stand out. The first one is the thorny issue of appropriately assessing content and language. The difficulty arises from the fact that it is not easy to isolate knowledge of the content from knowledge of the language in the assessment process. In sheltered CBI, one solution around this problem has been to increase the sources and types of assessments such as the inclusion of journal entries, oral responses to questions, and student projects in order to monitor and gauge conceptual understanding. In adjunct CBI, the solution has been to assign the assessment of language development to the language instructor and the conceptual understanding to the content teacher. However, as Crandall (1999, p. 608) notes, such separation is an "artificial one and only partially possible" as content and language are in fact intertwined. Indeed some scholars have even argued that learning disciplinary content is the same as learning the language of the discipline (Halliday, 2007; Kong & Hoare, 2011). Given the infused nature of content and language, it has been suggested that a practical strategy for proper assessment can best be derived from the collaborative analysis of content and language by both of the teachers involved (Short, 1997; Weigle & Jensen, 1997).

The second major issue is that of teacher education. Effective CBI requires that the content and language instructors gain some knowledge of the other's field of expertise. Language teachers need to become knowledgeable about the content the students are learning, and the content teachers need to learn some of the strategies that

language educators use to make the content more accessible to students (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013). In planning a successful CBI curriculum, then, proper attention needs to be paid to this issue.

The Persian CBI model at the University of Maryland

Curriculum and students

The University of Maryland offers a four-year Bachelor of Arts degree program in Persian Studies that has an interdisciplinary orientation, involving courses on the language, literature, history, and politics of the three Persian-speaking countries of Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. Persian Studies majors are required to initially complete a sequence of core language courses totaling twenty-six credit hours over three years. By the end of their third year of language study, students are expected to attain a proficiency level comparable to ACTFL Intermediate High (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012). With the successful completion of the language sequence, students will then proceed to content courses taught in Persian by disciplinary specialists. With the completion of their studies, students are expected to achieve ACTFL Advanced level.

The University of Maryland is also home to the Persian Flagship program that aims to graduate students with professional proficiency in the language at ACTFL Superior level (ILR level 3 and beyond). While the students enrolled in this program do not have to be Persian Studies majors, the majority elect to be. Flagship students in addition to completing the regular Persian BA curricular requirements participate in a range of extracurricular linguistic and cultural activities and complete one year of study abroad that among other components involves direct enrollment into content courses offered in the language at a partner overseas institution of higher education.

Rationale for CBI courses

The initial decision to introduce content-based courses in the Persian Studies undergraduate curriculum was in part motivated by the curricular demarcation between language and content courses. This

bifurcation meant that those Persian majors who wanted to take fourth-year content courses after three years of language study had to make a significant leap from a carefully structured language curriculum to content courses that typically "require mastery of Persian" and expect from students to perform such linguistically and cognitively sophisticated tasks as reading original texts in Persian, participating in class discussions, making oral presentations and writing term papers. It was clear that the linguistic demands of such tasks was well above the language proficiency level of students who had just finished their third-year courses and were ideally at ACTFL Intermediate High level. Students at this level clearly do not yet meet the prerequisite "mastery of Persian" to enable them to meaningfully and successfully participate in regular content courses and handle most of the academic literate tasks mentioned above. In order to address this gap, it was necessary to build into our BA curriculum a series of intermediary courses that could help students to make the transition from language courses to content courses. To this end, CBI was the obvious candidate for this transitional link, given that it would provide both curricular subject matter and the necessary language support to help students to perform the literate tasks associated with content courses. By participating in these courses, Flagship students would also begin to prepare for their future direct enrollment in content courses overseas.

Adoption of appropriate CBI model

The first step in the adoption of an appropriate model for our CBI courses entailed selecting an appropriate model from among the prevalent CBI instructional approaches. As the review of literature above suggests, we were faced with choosing from among the three common prototypes of theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct models. In reviewing these approaches for our purposes, we concluded that none of them in their prototypical format would be quite appropriate for our context for different reasons. Starting with the theme-based model, we felt it was not appropriate, primarily because we wanted to maximally expose our students to the kind of academic tasks that they would encounter in their regular content courses. This meant that our CBI courses need to be taught by content specialists rather than language instructors and carry a discipline-specific subject matter

relevant to Persian Studies rather than general interest themes or topics as is common in this model. The other two models, that is, the *sheltered* and *adjunct* models in their prototypical format were not appropriate either. With respect to the sheltered model, the challenge derived from the fact that sometimes content courses in our program were taught by faculty members from other academic disciplines who expressed reluctance to teach their subject matter to a cohort of language learners, reasoning that they did not have much experience teaching language learners. Given such practical difficulties, the sheltered model was deemed to be inappropriate for our context. Similarly, the adjunct model was not feasible mainly because of conflicting class scheduling that prevented many students, some of whom were completing two majors, to simultaneously enroll in both linked courses in one major. In light of these challenges, there was a need to come up with a feasible hybrid model that would have all the positive features of a sheltered and an adjunct model minus the downsides described above. To this end, we devised a model that could be at once 'sheltered' and 'adjunct'. Figure 1 schematizes this model for a three-credit-hour undergraduate course.
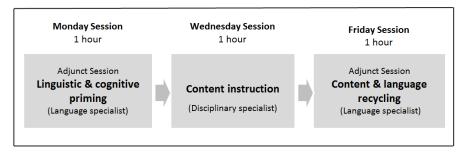
Monday Session 1 hour	Wednesday Session 1 hour	Friday Session 1 hour
Adjunct Session **Linguistic & cognitive priming** (Language specialist)	**Content instruction** (Disciplinary specialist)	Adjunct Session **Content & language recycling** (Language specialist)

Figure 1. Schematic representation of the model

As Figure 1 demonstrates, in this CBI model a typical three credit-hour undergraduate course is broken down into three linked one-hour sessions taught separately by a language specialist and a content expert. Based on this model, we shelter instruction in the following ways. First, since the Persian studies student population very often includes many native-speaking or highly proficient heritage students, the CBI courses are closed to this group of students. This helps create a more linguistically homogenous class and protect our

second language students from the negative consequences of placing them in the same course with native/near-native students. Very often when non-native language learners are placed in the same course with these students, the latter group tends to dominate the class and, as a result, the instructor inadvertently tends to adjust his or her speech to the level of these students to the detriment of the second language students in class. The model further shelters the course by reducing the number of class lectures to one lecture per week, thereby reducing the reading load compared with what is the case in a regular content course. A further sheltering feature built into the model has to do with teacher training in that the content instructor is coached in advance on strategies to make his or her lectures and discussions more accessible to the students. This can be done by giving them tips such as linking their class lectures to the assigned readings with as little digression as possible so that students can follow the ideas and argument.

The adjunct component of the model includes the pre- and post-language sessions linked to one core weekly content session. Prior to each content session, the language instructor reviews the associated readings selected by the content instructor, identifying the themes, major ideas, and arguments to be covered in the week. Having done so, the language instructor proceeds with making an inventory of the *content-obligatory* and *content-compatible* (Snow, Met, & Genesee, 1989; Stoller, 2004) linguistic forms and functions associated with these ideas and arguments. The instructor next develops pedagogical tasks seeded with these ideas as well as relevant language forms and functions which are to be taught in the pre-lecture session on Monday. This pre-language session serves to provide the students with the background knowledge as well as the language forms for the Wednesday content session taught by the disciplinary instructor.

The language instructor also attends the Wednesday session but only as an observer. This allows the teacher to maintain full awareness of the content discussed and take notes of any problem areas that might arise in the session. At the same time, this session is entirely video-recorded. The video recordings and notes serve as the basis of developing instructional materials for the following language session on Friday. The function of adjunct session is to recycle the themes and ideas and the related language forms and function in order to reinforce them.

Assessment

With respect to assessment, the model incorporates accountability to both content and language outcomes through having two separate assessments for content and language outcomes. Taking note of the observation that "considerations of authenticity and interactiveness are paramount in content-based assessment" (Weigle & Jensen, 1997, p. 211), it is up to the particular content professor collaborating in CBI to come up with modified versions of a set of measures typically used in content courses to assess students' knowledge of the subject matter. These modified content assessment measures at a minimum involve evidence of *concept comprehension* (e.g., an evidence of the ability to identify and explain the notions and concepts discussed) as well as *problem-solving* (e.g., an evidence of the ability to pose and solve a problem appropriate to their level of language proficiency). While each content professor might choose different assessment activities, our experience over the past couple of years suggests that both of the above requirements can easily be met through modified versions of three commonly used assessment measures. One can be a weekly journal writing activity wherein students are asked to identify and explain main points and ideas discussed in the lectures and readings as well as provide an outline of the weekly topics and subtopics. A second activity can be weekly short source-based writing pieces (*circa* 250 words). A third measure can be a final paper (*circa* 1000-1500 words) wherein students are given the freedom to either sort and classify themes and ideas, agree/disagree with alternative viewpoints on particular course topics, or briefly explain their own views on the course topics or issues. All of these can engage students' thinking skills and get them to problem-solve.

With respect to language assessment, three broad outcome categories are identified. Students are assessed for their ability to understand and use appropriately the inventoried content-obligatory and content-compatible language forms. In a political science CBI course, for instance, this means that students should be to understand and appropriately use such content specific terms as 'pluralism', 'constructivism', 'national sovereignty', 'rentier state' as well as such general forms common to many academic texts as passive voice,

causatives, sequence words, metadiscourse makers, and the like. Second, students must be able to demonstrate communication skills. That is, they must show the ability to perform a range of language functions such as explaining, describing, comparing, rephrasing, clarifying and asking for clarification, and giving examples in relation to the subject area being studied. And third, they should demonstrate the ability to perform such language tasks as read level-appropriate texts, find main idea and supporting details, take notes of lectures, present short oral reports, etc.

The model: An example

In this section, I provide a brief description of one CBI course based on the model described above. I next consider the views of the stakeholders involved in this course, namely, the language teacher, the students, and the content faculty. This discussion is based on extensive class observations and field notes by the author who acted in the dual role of course designer and language teacher, and conducted interviews with the students and content professor after the course.

The course

In spring 2010, we began to offer the first CBI course in our undergraduate program. The course was on the sociopolitical context of Iranian Media and was co-taught by a political science professor together with the author as the language instructor of the course. It involved one content session per week for a total of fifteen sessions, taught by the content professor; and two weekly pre- and post-content adjunct language sessions for a total of thirty sessions, taught by the author. The focus as stated in the course syllabus was:

> "In this course, we will examine social and political issues against the background of media developments in Iran. After a brief review of Iran's media and political structure, we will discuss the changing role of the old and new media, the media's interactions with factional politics, the emergence of a new generation of religious intellectuals, the rise and the decline of

the reform movement, and the ascendance of the ultra-conservative politicians (p. 1)."

There were nine Persian Studies undergraduates, including five Flagship students, enrolled in the course. All of the students were in the second semester of their third year and some had also completed an intensive summer program.

Content faculty recruitment and orientation

The content faculty recruited for teaching content was interested in working with language learners. However, the challenge was that he had little experience teaching a course entirely designed for, and made up of, Persian language learners. As a result, prior to the start of the course, he was provided with a crash course on some strategies to make his lectures more accessible to the students (for a detailed discussion of strategies see Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013).

Materials

The content professor, in consultation with the author, pre-selected a total of fifteen authentic articles on the course subject of relatively manageable length and complexity in view of the students' language proficiency levels. The materials for the adjunct language sessions were developed on a weekly basis by the author based on pre-readings of the weekly articles and video-recordings of the lecture sessions as well as the author's notes taken during lecture sessions that he attended as well. The development of these materials was generally guided in reference to the categories identified in Table 1 below. It is worth noting that the table represents the most salient categories and that it is not exhaustive.

Table 1. Sample categories guiding language-based materials development

Language Functions	Language Tasks	Text Structure	Syntax	Lexis
Argue	Find main idea and supporting details	Compare and contrast	*Content compatible forms*	*Content obligatory terms*
Categorize	Listen and take notes to write a piece	Enumeration	Active/passive voice	
Clarify	Read and take notes to summarize	Generalization - Example	Causatives	
Compare	Read short texts	Problem-solution	Hedging devices	
Contrast	Recount an event /present an oral report		Modals	
Define	Transate short texts (oral and written)		Sequence words	
Describe			Tenses	
Evaluate			Transition markers	
Explain				
Express				
Justify				
Organize				
Restate				

Assessment

With the course being accountable to both content and language outcomes, each of these was separately assessed by the relevant instructor. With respect to content, three assessment activities were used, including a weekly journal listing and defining new concepts/ideas, a short piece synthesizing ideas from class discussions and readings (about 250 words), and a final paper on a relevant topic approved by the content professor (about 800 words). As for language outcomes, they were assessed in reference with the categories identified in Table 1 through a variety of performance tasks in separate quizzes, a mid-term, and a final exam. Students would then receive one composite grade incorporating content and language grades.

Participants' views about the course and lessons learned

In what follows, the views of the three stakeholders in the course, that is, the language instructor, the students, and the content faculty are presented. These are based on the author's observations notes and reflections as well as interviews conducted with the students and the content professor after the course.

The language teacher's views

In my dual role as the person who planned the CBI course and acted as the language teacher, I had certain expectations from the course. As a language educator, I was especially interested in making sure whether the course created optimal conditions for student language development. Observations of the students' engagement in all the components of the course were reassuring in that students would frequently remark that the course was relevant, interesting, and fully meaningful to them. More crucially, the course was saturated with the all-important comprehensible input. For instance, during lecture sessions by the content specialist, he would modify his speech to make sure that the students were following the lecture through various strategies such as using a more deliberate style of speech, avoiding the use of marked linguistic forms in favor of unmarked ones, and providing a lot of paraphrasing or rephrasing to convey his meanings.

The adjunct support sessions provided ample opportunity to ensure that not only was the content comprehensible to the students, but that they also actually *comprehended* the content through various language-sensitive pedagogical tasks. Given that comprehensible input in the context of meaningful communication is widely regarded as a prerequisite for language acquisition (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Swain, 1995), it was satisfying to see that the course did meet this important requirement.

However, while the course overall did provide a significant amount of comprehensible input, one major observation was that, contrary to my expectations, the lecture sessions were not equally rich in interactive episodes between the content professor and the students. The anticipation was that the content sessions would give rise to many instances of 'negotiation of meaning' between the professor and the students as new ideas and concepts would be introduced, discussed, and clarified in class. From the Interaction Hypothesis perspective (Gass & Mackey, 2006), I was expecting to see students *pushed* to use Persian during these episodes, thereby enhancing their communicative competence. However, not only were these episodes infrequent, the content professor would occasionally code-switch to English when such interactive episodes did happen, thereby also prompting the students to do likewise. This appears to be something not unique to this CBI course (for similar observations, see Musumeci, 1996; Pica, 2002). From a language development perspective, negotiation of meaning in the language is particularly important because, in their attempts to communicate their meanings real-time, learners are more likely to "notice a gap between what they *want* to say and what they *can* say, leading them to recognize what they do not know, or know only partially" (Swain, 1995, pp. 125–126, italics original)." In the wake of this perceived shortcoming during lecture sessions, I felt it imperative to make up for this shortcoming in adjunct language sessions. To this end, I would make sure to include various language tasks such as information-gap, reasoning, and opinion tasks (see Nunan, 1989) in order to trigger episodes of interaction and negotiation of meaning in the adjunct sessions.

One major issue that soon emerged as the course was unfolding was the need to reconsider our earlier decision to use authentic readings. As mentioned earlier, we had initially decided to

assign short and manageable, but *authentic,* reading assignments in the interest of making the course resemble a regular content course as much as possible. However, very soon we noticed the students were finding the readings too difficult to access. As a result, we both felt that there was a need to abandon strict adherence to authenticity and actually provide the students with 'tailored' readings to make them more accessible. This tailoring involved shortening the articles as much as possible, adding marginal glosses for difficult or low frequency lexis, occasionally rewriting sections of the articles, adding transition markers to make the links between text sections more clear, and occasionally making linguistic changes to the readings by, for example, replacing low frequency lexical items with high frequency ones.

Students' views

Overwhelmingly the students welcomed the course such that they asked for more similar courses in their end of term anonymous course evaluations. In fact, one of the reasons that we have since continued to offer such courses was this enthusiasm on the part of the students. Given that one academic semester is too short a time frame to result in significant proficiency gains, especially in language for cognitive and academic purposes (Cummins, 1984), I avoid making any claims about students' language gains. Instead, I focus on their affective response to the course. It is uncontroversial to say that learners' affect in any context of learning does play a crucial role in the learning process.

Perhaps the most prominent feature that most of the students commented on in their interviews was the face validity of the course as a *content* course rather than a *language* course. For the majority of them, the very fact that a political science professor was the leading instructor in the course was itself a novel experience. When asked how they would introduce the course to a prospective fellow student, one student, for example, stated that:

> I'd say in this course you'd read about Iranian contemporary history and politics, and you'd read some political theories in order to understand the political formation in Iran, and you'd talk about them in class. In addition, you'd read Iranian

> newspapers. In the course, you'd work with a real political science professor and also with a language professor. [Translated from Persian]

It is important to note that, without exception, all of the students in answering the above question began their response with a description of the content of the course, suggesting that they perceived it primarily as a content course. Frequently, the students stated that, thanks to its particular organization, the course had boosted their confidence as it enabled them to follow and understand class lectures, engage in discussions in the content session and complete the assignments. One student, for example, expressed his sense of accomplishment when he said:

> I felt very accomplished to have been able to understand the professor's lectures and also to have written a six-page paper. [Translated from Persian]

Another student described a similar feeling by stating that:

> I think the course was well planned and it helped me to understand the lectures better. For example, the fact that we could listen to the lectures several times helped me understand the lectures more and more. I think this was really helpful because from the middle of the semester I felt I could understand the lectures easily. [Translated from Persian]

For some of the students, the course put them in a position to engage in tasks in the language that they had never done before. One student, for instance, stated that:

> I'd never taken notes in Persian like in English and in this course it was the first time I did it, especially on Fridays when we watched lectures and practiced note-taking. [Translated from Persian]

In particular, the adjunct sessions appeared to have been very helpful in boosting the confidence of the less proficient students because they provided these students with the opportunity to listen to

video-recordings of segments of the lectures multiple times and involved explicit focus on the language of the lectures. Some of the students also remarked with satisfaction that the particular organization of the course enabled them to understand the entire fifty-minute long content class in Persian, noting this was something they had not been as confident about prior to the course. As one student put it:

> Before signing up for the course, I wasn't quite sure if I was ready for this course or not. But the course was quite manageable. I mean, the things that we'd do on Mondays and Fridays were useful to me and they helped me succeed. [Translated from Persian]

These statements that clearly speak to the students' increasing confidence level were reassuring to us as they suggested the course was indeed achieving one the primary goals we had hoped for in introducing transitional CBI courses in our undergraduate program.

While the students invariably made many positive comments about the way this CBI course had been organized, some also pointed to their challenge in comprehending the weekly readings, particularly early on in the semester. In this connection, one student stated that:

> In the first few weeks some of the articles were really difficult; sometime I couldn't understand them at all. Don't get me wrong, I mean, I liked the challenge but sometimes they were way too difficult.

Some students expressed a sense of frustration at having had to spend a lot of time struggling with understanding just one single article. However, when asked whether they found the assigned readings less challenging as the course progressed, the students' responses were nearly unanimously positive. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that many stated that the vocabulary glosses that were provided in the margins greatly helped them in comprehending the readings. This corroborates research findings on the importance of second language readers' knowledge of specialized and low-frequency lexis in their text comprehension (Nation, 2001; O'Keefe, McCarthy, & Carter, 2007).

Content professor's views

One major issue pointed out by the content professor was that he found it a challenge to teach a class of students that was entirely made of language learners. He stated that in this new experience, unlike his regular teaching in English where students' struggle is with unfamiliar disciplinary concepts and notions, in this course he constantly found himself wondering whether the students were following what he was saying. For this reason, he felt he had to rather simplify things and occasionally switch to English to make sure he has been correctly understood.

The professor, however, added that when reading students' weekly written responses to the articles, he would often be pleasantly surprised to see that they had in fact comprehended the lectures and the arguments presented in class, especially after we both had decided to make certain modifications to weekly readings. He also attributed students' comprehension in large part to the support the students received in the adjunct sessions. As he put it:

> When I read the students' pieces I really liked seeing that nearly all of them had gotten it quite well, especially after we'd decided to 'treat' the articles a little bit. I guess the fact that you worked with them on the side really helped. Some of the student's pieces were unbelievably good. So I guess in my class they'd comprehend something like 40-50% of the discussions but with the things they did in your class they ended up with something like 80 to 90% of it all.

A second issue raised by the professor was the time-consuming challenge of finding suitable articles written in Persian to be used in the course. However, noting that students did read a relatively truncated number of articles compared to his regular classes, he felt the students did show a good grasp of the key ideas and arguments discussed in the course. To add more depth to the students' knowledge of the subject matter, he suggested assigning articles in English as well. In his view, this could have increased the 'rigor' of the course, making it possible to "delve deeper" into ideas and arguments.

Related to the issue of academic 'rigor', the professor further stated that in the course he had to modify his expectations given the nature of the course and its students. As he put it:

> One other thing I've got to say is that in this course my expectations from the students were lower than my other courses. For instance, in the courses that I teach in English, 50% of the time I expect the students to regurgitate the sources and the rest I expect them to give me their own analysis. But here something like 80 to 90% of the time I expected them to understand and only 10% of the time I was interested in knowing what they *themselves* thought and I think this was because I felt there was not that much linguistic capacity. That is, my priority here was to make sure that they had in fact understood the lectures. So for this reason my expectations were different, that is, comprehension was more important than analysis of the arguments.

For this reason, he found the course qualitatively different from the courses that he normally taught. Understandably, increasing the disciplinary rigor of the course was a major issue for him.

Conclusion

Having introduced CBI courses in our curriculum, there are a number of lessons that may be worth sharing. To begin with, it is important to remember that the adoption of content-accountable CBI courses in a curriculum is a rather costly endeavor. At the very least, funding is needed to retain a doctoral student from a relevant disciplinary domain to act as the content professor alongside the language instructor. It is also important to bear in mind that CBI courses are labor-intensive and require close coordination and alignment between the content and language specialists. The language specialist in particular needs to be fully aware of what goes on in content sessions so that adjunct sessions can be closely aligned with them. Video recording content sessions would be particularly useful. However, it can add to the labor and costs.

The issue of costs and labor aside, perhaps one of the most important issues to consider in implementing CBI is that of 'authenticity' of sources that students need to read. While there are arguments in favor of using authentic materials (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Rogers & Medley, 1988), our experience suggests that careful selection of readings is critical. This can be more difficult than it may seem as in many less commonly taught languages there are fewer sources available. It is also important to carefully tailor course readings to the level of students. Overly inaccessible reading assignments can discourage students and negatively impact course outcomes.

Lastly, it is also critical to be realistic in setting appropriate subject matter learning outcomes in a typical CBI instruction in college-level foreign language education. Carefully calibrating academic 'rigor' with students' language proficiency levels, setting realistic outcomes and using level-appropriate assessment measures are essential in implementing the model. Typical college-level foreign language students, especially those learning a less commonly taught language, are obviously not at a language proficiency level to fully access authentic sources and engage in highly advanced literate tasks such as evaluating arguments and writing extended argumentative texts. College-level foreign language CBI courses, therefore, cannot be expected to have the same disciplinary rigor as regular content courses. On the other hand, however, they can be the most rigorous foreign language learning courses possible.

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