

Perspectives

Global Issues in EFL: Why and How

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The idea that functional proficiency and communicative competence can be attained through focusing on meaning has become widely accepted in the foreign language teaching community. Since the learner's attention to meaning is highly dependent upon the effective presentation of subject matter, as opposed to language *per se*, a surge of interest in content-based language instruction has resulted. This paper examines the theoretical and social rationale for using the content theme of global issues in foreign language instruction. It also presents information on adaptable materials related to global issues, discusses techniques for presentation of this information, and provides brief suggestions for such adaptations and classroom activities.

意味に注目することによってコミュニケーション能力が身につくという考えは、外国語教育の世界では広く受け入れられている。学習者の注意を意味に向けさせることは、非言語的内容をいかに効果的に提示するかにかかっているために、内容中心の言語教育が注目を集めるようになった。この論文は、外国語教育においてグローバル問題という内容を使うことの理論的、社会的根拠を検討する。また、グローバル問題に関連した調節可能な教材を入手するための情報源も紹介し、この情報の提示のテクニックを論じ、調節と教室活動の短い例も含める。

Reflecting on the apparent failure of the Audio Lingual method, Krashen (1981) posited that conscious learning makes only a small contribution to communicative ability. This conception has been interpreted as meaning that "communicative competence is acquired through communication, not through conscious structure practice" (Savignon, 1983, p. 65). The popularization of the concept of communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Munby, 1978; Savignon, 1983) has resulted in a movement to give use at least as much consideration as language *usage* in the foreign language classroom. "The ability to use a language depends both on language knowledge and the capacity for implementing it" (Widdowson, 1983, p. 18). In addition to

having a high degree of linguistic competence, learners, if they are able to implement language knowledge, must be able to distinguish and utilize the functional purposes of linguistic forms. They must be able to apply cognitive skills and strategies to concrete situations and use feedback to judge their success and calculate remedies. They must also appreciate the social meaning and context of language forms (Littlewood, 1982, p. 6).

To facilitate the attainment of these goals, teachers should attempt to stimulate critical thinking by emphasizing interaction between the learners and the informational content of the course materials. Instruction should direct the learners' conscious cognitive efforts toward processing the information. Analysis of and focus on language form should take place, not for its own sake but as a supplementary activity to assist in the determination and transmission of meaning. In this way, attention to linguistic structure will contribute to the ultimate goal of actual communication.

The application of this pedagogical position has led to the development of content-based second language instruction. "Language learning cannot justifiably be isolated from other kinds of learning that humans do, and from the larger educational goals that we may espouse for students who are studying foreign languages in the context of schools" (Casanave, 1992, p. 83). In their overview of content-based second language instruction, Brinton, Snow, and Wesche emphasize that "both in its overall purpose and in its implementation, content-based instruction aims at eliminating the artificial separation between language instruction and subject matter classes which exists in most educational settings" (1989, p. 2).

If one accepts this perspective, one must ask what type of content material can successfully break down the traditional isolation of second language instruction from other kinds of learning and provide the necessary motivational interest, social context, and informational content. I propose that in many second and foreign language learning environments the content theme of "global issues" is appropriate. Defined as an interdisciplinary approach to contemporary sociopolitical problems of global concern, global issues can provide the informational content and meaning-focused interaction suggested to be necessary to attain functional proficiency in the TL (Ellis, 1994).

Necessary Conditions for a Content-Based Approach

Brinton et al. (1989, p. 3) list the five following rationales underlying approaches for integrating the teaching of language and content. These are:

1. The language syllabus must take into account the eventual uses the learner will make of the target language.
2. Informational content which is perceived as relevant by the learner and increases motivation must be present.
3. Teaching should build on the previous experience of the learner and take into account existing knowledge of the subject matter and the academic environment as well as knowledge of the second language.
4. Instruction should focus on contextualized language use rather than sentence-level grammatical usage to reveal discourse features and social interaction patterns.
5. Finally, the learner must be able to understand what is presented through the interaction of existing imperfect language knowledge with cues from the situational and verbal contexts. (Krashen, 1985a; 1985b)

The use of global issues as a content theme will now be discussed in relation to these five points.

Eventual target language use

Because of the burgeoning development of modern electronic information processing and communication systems, the overall number of people who have regular opportunities to engage in international contacts and exchanges of information has increased greatly. At the same time, sociopolitical events in recent world history, variously referred to as "the fall of socialism," "the spread of democracy," "a new world order," or "the end of history," have given a larger than ever proportion of the world's population a political voice in the formulation of public policy. Thus, proficiency in language items and forms related to topics such as military conflict and national security, environment and development, human rights, energy resources, can enhance the capacity of the individual to respond to make informed decisions. Presentation and practice of language functions related to soliciting information, discussion, and persuasion can for the same reason benefit society and the individual, while, at the same time, promoting the learner's development of TL ability.

Relevance and motivation

Focusing on contemporary problems and controversies acknowledged to have consequences at both the individual and social level answers the need for relevance in course design and is likely to arouse motivation and sustain interest in learners. Furthermore, introducing global issues as content in EFL programs at Japanese universities is timely.

Although the National Council on Educational reform has stressed the important role of undergraduate education in internationalization and educational reform, much remains to be done (National Council on Educational Reform, 1986). For example, in a recent cross-cultural study on knowledge and attitudes toward global issues of students in Japan and the United States, a sample of 418 Japanese university freshmen and 407 seniors were surveyed. On average, the Japanese senior answered only two more questions correctly than the Japanese freshman. This contrasted with a nine-item improvement for American seniors over freshmen similarly surveyed. The authors of the study state:

There is a widespread belief that students prove themselves by passing the university entrance examination and have earned the right not to work as hard for the next 4 years. This is a matter of growing concern to those in Japanese higher education and a central issue in the current debate surrounding needed reforms. (Cogan, Torney-Purta, and Anderson, 1988, p. 295)

One Japanese scholar notes, "social and intellectual internationalization would have to accompany economic achievement" (Kitamura, 1983, p. 1). In response, some recently established universities have demonstrated a greater awareness of the responsibility to fulfill this social role and several older universities have already formed new faculties to foster an interdisciplinary approach to contemporary problems (Coulmas, 1992). In the words of the report of the United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange:

The current reform interest differs from that of earlier periods in that it has not been precipitated by a major breakdown in the system or by a strong demand from the corporate sector for improvement. Rather, the current impetus stems from a growing sense in Japan that higher education is neither responding to new national needs in a changing world *nor to the changing concerns of Japanese youth.*" (Finn, 1987, p. 56, [italics added])

Previous experience and existing knowledge of the learner

How to exploit the existing imperfect target language knowledge of the learner is an important consideration in the selection and adaptation of materials and the design of classroom activities, regardless of the nature of the content theme. The use of authentic materials, generally defined as those not generated specifically for language teaching purposes (Johns, 1987), benefits the learner but also requires extensive adaptation. This adaptation is crucial since most materials must be simplified to the point where learners can employ their existing TL.

A further concern is how to activate the learner's previous knowledge of the subject matter, or schemata (Rumelhart, 1980), under consideration. The mass media is replete with information concerning disarmament and national security, human rights, energy resources, environmental protection and sustainable development, intercultural communication and international trade, controversies about the ethical use of modern technology, and similar reports. Governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been organized for the expressed purpose of affecting and executing policy on issues such as these. As a result, most language learners have been exposed to this information in their native language. They have formed opinions about the factors and processes which influence these issues and have ideas about what the proper state of affairs should be.

The presence of such background knowledge gives the learner the opportunity to engage in real communication—the imparting of ideas, knowledge and opinions—not just information exchange as in an information gap activity (Stapleton, 1992). The chance to express ideas and opinions provides the focus on content and meaning which Krashen (1982) posited as requisite for language acquisition.

Focus on contextualized language use

The recent emphasis on communicative competence has shifted the focus of inquiry about language and language learning from the sentence level to the discourse level. Hatch suggests that second language learners must first learn how to interact verbally, then, through interaction, syntactic structures are further developed (1978, p. 404). Expanding on the need for contextualized language, Brown says,

what are the rules that govern our conversation? How do we get someone's attention? How do we initiate topics? terminate topics? avoid topics? How does a person interrupt, correct, or seek clarification? These questions form an area of linguistic competence that every adult native speaker of a language possesses, yet few foreign language curricula traditionally deal with these important aspects of communicative competence. (1987, p. 206)

The mass media, governmental agencies, and non-governmental organizations offer abundant information on topics of global interest. This information may take the form of printed materials, informational or documentary videotapes, or live guest speakers. The fact that international exchange of technological and sociopolitical information occurs overwhelmingly in English holds special implications for the field of EFL and has a positive effect on access to pedagogical resources.

With appropriate adaptation such authentic materials provide the learner with examples of the conversational language functions cited by Brown. Moreover, activities derived from these examples can serve to give the learner an opportunity to practice these functions. This is especially true of intermediate and advanced learners who are eager to participate in an exchange and discussion, using informed opinions.

The presentation of the informational content through a variety of media makes the material more vivid and compelling. These media may include a combination of printed materials, videotapes, live speakers, field trips to relevant sites, and simulation activities. However, as noted, the teacher must adapt these activities from the authentic materials to the level of the learners' capabilities.

Comprehension through interaction of language knowledge with cues

This item acknowledges the findings of recent research in second language acquisition and addresses the issue of "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1981), the idea that input containing elements new to the learner can be understood through the interaction of cues from the situational and verbal contexts with the learner's existing linguistic knowledge, world knowledge, and expectations. There is evidence that comprehensible input may be a sufficient condition for attaining high proficiency in listening and reading yet may not develop accurate productive skills (Swain, 1985; Sheen, 1994). To improve production, it has been suggested that learners must produce "pushed" output (Swain, 1985), that is, output which, through negotiated interaction, has become increasingly like the TL.

These controversies imply that in all aspects of curriculum design, opportunities for meaning-focused output, as well as input, should be maximized by careful choice of the method of instruction, the nature of the content, and the selection and adaptation of materials. The content theme of global issues can promote both input and output through stimulating discussion of opinions.

Implementing a Global Issues Content-Based Curriculum

I will now discuss the implementation of a global issues-oriented approach to content-based EFL instruction within a Japanese context. Some aspects of implementation, including the degree and techniques of materials adaptation and also administrative issues, vary according to the specific educational setting. Others, such as the availability of authentic resources, restrictions on their use, and measures intended to

ensure objectivity, show less variation from classroom to classroom.

Availability of resources

Although the various mass media are sources of adaptable material, a word of caution should be offered concerning their use. In general, newspapers and magazines are very generous about the reproduction and adaptation of their products for classroom use. This is looked upon as a means of cultivation of future readership. Teachers need not have reservations about the use of such materials in individual classrooms or programs, but if one intends to publish a collection of teaching materials, naturally permission must be requested and compensation may be required.

In an EFL environment such as Japan, use of videotaped teaching materials can be a worthy substitute for being in an environment where the TL is spoken (Jeppsen, 1986). Even in an ESL environment, videotapes can serve to introduce useful cultural content. However, off-the-air recording of broadcast programming is complicated. In the United States, an off-the-air recording may be presented publicly only within the first ten school days following the original broadcast. Without special authorization, a teacher is allowed to show a segment only twice during those ten school days; and after 45 calendar days the tape must be erased (*Guidelines for off-air recording*, 1979). These restrictions make it difficult to prepare and use materials effectively.

Fortunately, teachers in Japan are not so constrained in the use of recordings. In response to inquiries by concerned educators, the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications has advised that when a foreign produced program has been broadcast on-the-air by a Japanese broadcasting organization, such as the government sponsored and private commercial networks and the broadcast satellite channels, it is considered that the foreign producer has been already been compensated for copyright by the Japanese broadcasting organization. Therefore, these materials are available for classroom use in Japan.

Teachers are also advised to be cautious about the use of commercial theatrical release feature films in either video or CD ROM format. In addition to the fact that most movies are too long, are scripted as opposed to unscripted, and lack adequate informational content for classroom use in higher education, some movie production companies and broadcast news organizations are entering the EFL materials market and becoming more assertive about copyright protection. Therefore, it is best to err on the side of caution. Computer software is another area of concern for issues of intellectual property rights. A patent on an algorithm is currently under consideration in the U.S.

There are three sources of abundant materials which teachers can use without reservations regarding copyright infringement. These are governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and corporations. Such entities all produce and distribute materials in English meant to impart information and advance their policies. These include printed materials, informational and documentary videotapes. Furthermore, many governmental agencies and private corporations in Japan maintain museums or exhibits to disseminate information regarding sociopolitical issues. Examples include: the Museum of Posts and Telecommunications, the IBM Information-Science Museum, and the Tokyo Electric Power Company Electric Energy Museum which features a one-third scale nuclear reactor model. Usually, guest speakers from such organizations are compensated by their employers. Although non-governmental organizations rarely have exhibits and public relations departments, they are another source of printed and videotaped information. They also often provide guest speakers who serve as excellent non-native speaker models for the students and who are willing to speak from a sense of commitment to their convictions without requiring remuneration. A directory of non-governmental organizations in Japan is available upon request (see Appendix 1).

Finally, the most technologically advanced information resources, for those fortunate enough to have access, are telecommunications networks, particularly the Internet. This has been characterized as "a global, high-speed computer network dedicated to research and education, used daily by more than one million people" (Sheppard, 1992, p. 182). Material from the Internet can expose the learner to authentic written discourse of TL native speakers, can provide direct access to cultural information, can focus the learner's attention on informational content, and can provide an opportunity for learners to participate in a collaborative project regarding a social or political issue of international importance or related to the learner's major field of study. An example of a global issues Internet project would be to have groups of Japanese EFL learners and other learners in a TL-speaking country who are studying Japanese politics do research and prepare a joint report or presentation comparing the conditions of foreign workers in both countries.

The issue of objectivity

To ask students to analyze information in a foreign language concerning a controversial issue and then use this information as the medium of their learning is a delicate matter. If the learners are not provided with a rationale for selecting a particular issue and given a means of viewing the issue within in a broader framework, the instructor may be

perceived as whimsical or biased. To preclude this, it is useful to solicit suggestions of what topics they would like to work with from the learners themselves.

It is also important for the teacher to accept diverse views, to allow the learners to take the position that there is no problem with the status quo. Regardless of the teacher's personal viewpoint, the purpose of content-based exercises is to develop the learners' language proficiency through logical analysis and communicative language use. The learners should be told that evaluation will be based exclusively on effective use of the TL and the ability to express well-supported opinions, whatever they might be.

For teachers who are involved in a cooperative language program, it is advantageous to compile an outline of topics and related resource organizations and materials. Besides serving as a source of organized information for instructors, a topic outline would allow the students to view the issues in a broader context and even function as a kind of menu (Appendix 2). If there is sufficient interest and cooperation among the teaching staff, adaptations of authentic materials concerning specific topics could be assembled into packets and shared.

For almost every social or political controversy, there is usually at least one NGO, one governmental agency, and one corporate entity active in the field. For example, the Citizens' Nuclear Information Center, the Atomic Energy Commission of Japan, and the Tokyo Electric Power Company, Inc. all have their own policy positions and are potential sources of information about the future of the Japanese nuclear industry. To be fair, and to promote development of critical thinking skills, the instructor should try to present the learners with information from as many sources as possible and direct them to resources they can use on their own.

Presentation of informational content

As mentioned, background knowledge is crucial to overall comprehension. The new information that a learner receives must be processed in connection with previous knowledge in order for the new material to be successfully understood (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988). For this reason, it is best to begin a teaching module with a general introduction and informal discussion to activate the learner's background knowledge of the particular issue. After the issue has been introduced, it is interesting to do a survey or poll of the students' initial opinions. Then, the learners should be assigned readings of differing points of view from the mass media. This allows the learners to question or justify their

initial opinions, introduces them to unfamiliar lexical items and expressions necessary to talk about the topic, and gives the instructor a chance to explain and give contextualized examples of grammatical structures. The reading assignments may be exploited by jigsaw activities, cloze passages, true/false and multiple choice quizzes, comprehension questions, paraphrasing activities, sequencing exercises, comprehension questions, etc. Currently, the number of articles being published in the professional EFL literature which detail specific instructional activities related particular global topics is increasing rapidly (Cates, 1992; Fujioka, 1992; Stempleski, 1992).

After the reading activity, the class can be divided into groups of four to six for the culminating activity of the module. This might be a persuasive speech advocating a proposed public policy, a debate, a panel discussion, a simulation, etc. The instructor should be ready to assist the groups by providing information resources for their research, for example videotaped information from one of the resource organizations previously mentioned. In most classroom situations, it is desirable for videotapes to be 40 minutes or less in length. The brevity promotes better understanding of the nonlinguistic content as well as allowing greater explanation and exploitation of linguistic items. Henderson and Setliff make some suggestions for effective use of videotapes of television news which can be generally applied to other varieties of video:

It is advisable to break the piece down into short sections according to the developmental organization of the report. Each short piece should be introduced before viewing and briefly discussed after viewing; students should be encouraged to ask questions about anything they may have difficulty understanding so they will be better prepared to process the following parts. Once the entire segment has been presented, a series of practice activities can provide learners with opportunities to use the new vocabulary and structures that have been selected as target patterns. This would also be an appropriate time to give concentrated practice in the pronunciation of sounds or sound combinations that the students may find especially troublesome. All of these activities will make it possible for the learners to increase their level of comprehension as they proceed to the next step, which is to view the news segment in its entirety, concentrating on meaning and on the developmental structure of the report. Finally, as a follow-up activity, the class can use the information they have heard as a basis for questions and answers or for more extended discussion. This may consist primarily of comprehension questions to check on the students' grasp of the overall message of the report, and their understanding of specific important details. For more advanced learners, a more open-ended discussion of their own opinions and reactions would be valuable.

The important thing is that learners be given an opportunity to use the target language items as well as the new knowledge they have gained from the news segment. (Henderson and Setliff, 1992, pp. 262-263)

During the final activity, a field trip to a relevant site can drive home the reality of the topic under discussion and further motivate the learners. Inviting a guest speaker from one of the resource organizations can also increase motivation. If there are no objections, it is recommended to videotape guest lectures and the students' final activity for later examination and analysis. A follow-up survey to track change in learner opinions compared to the initial survey can also be instructive.

Some Disadvantages

The disadvantages of using global issues as the content theme for EFL instruction seem to be twofold and they are the same for any content-based language program, regardless of the informational content. Firstly, the instructor must take responsibility for materials adaptation and development. Substantially more preparation for class may be required. However, it should be noted that support from program administrators and cooperation among teachers can lighten this burden considerably. The other disadvantage is that teachers must manage information from areas outside their professional training. Some may be uncomfortable with this, but they should be assured that it is unnecessary to become a technical expert in these fields to conduct a language class which addresses general issues.

Conclusions

The benefits of content-based instruction are manifold and outweigh the few disadvantages. Relating the curriculum to aspects of the real world activates background knowledge and enhances the motivation of the learners. Skills of organizing content information which can generalize across disciplines are refined. The TL is not simply treated as an object of study, but is used as a means of communication. Adaptations of materials can be tailored to the proficiency level of the learners and modules can be condensed or expanded, simplified or made more difficult, as appropriate.

Content-based second/foreign language instruction itself is a relatively new field and much empirical research and work in design and implementation remains to be done. The efforts of classroom teachers

to cooperate in the establishment of integrated curricula and coordinate elements of classroom practice with theory of second language acquisition will expedite this process.

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Appendix 1: Directory of Non-Governmental Organizations in Japan and NGOs Active in International Cooperation

Compiled and published by: Japanese NGO Center for International Cooperation (JANIC)

Address: #3 Daini-shibata Building, 3-21 Kanda-nishiki-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan 101

Cost: ¥2,500 plus postage.

This directory lists 186 Japanese organizations involved in a wide variety of cooperative, non-profit activities in developing countries throughout the world. These groups are categorized according to purpose, size, and funding. They are indexed according to field of interest, geographical area of activity, and alphabetically in English and Japanese. Information is provided on contact persons, staff and support, objectives, activities, field of assistance, regions of activity, financial status, membership, and affiliated organizations overseas.

Appendix 2: Sample Outline

The following is a sample outline for the topic of human rights, with potential resources which could be revised and expanded.

- Legend: T = major topic
 S = subtopics
 N = adaptable non-ESL materials
 C = related computer software
 E = ESL materials to serve as procedural models
 V = adaptable videos
 R = relevant resource organizations

T: Human Rights.

S: Political Prisoners and Nonviolent Dissent.

Forced Labor.

Refugees.

Prejudice and Discrimination: Race, Ethnicity, Religion, Social Background, Age, Gender, Physical and Mental Disabilities.

Examples and examination of social pressure, cultural relativism, and universal values.

E: Refugees, Unit 14, *Our World*, Eichosha Longman (intermediate).

Women's Liberation: The Search for Equality, Unit 7, *Advanced Listening Comprehension*, Newbury House (advanced)

Writing a Short Constitution and Bill of Rights, Unit 20, *The Non-Stop Discussion Workbook*, Newbury House (intermediate/advanced).

N: Teaching About Human Rights: Issues of Justice in a Global Age, Center for Teaching International Relations, University of Denver.

V: United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, State of Siege, Missing, The Chocolate War, 60 Minutes Documentary: Chinese Prison Industry, M.L.K.: I Have a Dream Speech, Cry Freedom, Gandhi, The Hooded Men.

R: United Nations Information Center, Amnesty International, Japan Anti-Apartheid Committee.

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