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ОБУЧЕНИЕ ИНОСТРАННОМУ ЯЗЫКУ, ОСНОВАННОЕ НА СОДЕРЖАНИИ УЧЕБНОГО МАТЕРИАЛА

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Рассмотрены основные характеристики и типы обучения на основе содержания учебного материала.

Ключевые слова: типы обучения; обучение на основе содержания; вспомогательная модель; мобильная модель; тематическая модель обучения.

A PRIMER OF CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

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In this article the main characteristics and types of content-based instruction for English language learners are examined. It is shown how teachers balance the dual focus on language and subject matter and learn about a helpful framework for designing content-based courses and lessons.

Keywords: content-based instruction; the adjunct model; sheltered content instruction; theme-based instruction.

Marking the 25th anniversary of TESOL H. Douglas Brown identified the emergence of content-based instruction as one of the four most significant developments in the first quarter-century. In content-based classrooms, he wrote, “language becomes the medium to convey informational content of interest and relevance to the learner” [1, с. 198]. He cited the increase in intrinsic learning and the empowerment of students as self-directed learners as two principal goals of content-based instruction. However, D.M. Brinton emphasized the acquisition of language skills as one of the most important – if not the most important – goal of CBI [2]. These two perceptions, while not altogether contradictory, still illustrate an ongoing tension, or shortcoming, in the CBI approach: how to effectively integrate language learning skills with content materials.

The thing is that CBI combines “focus-on-form” with “experiential techniques” by integrating particular content with language-teaching aims by concurrently teaching academic subject matter and second language skills. According to A.S. Snow [3], four theoretical rationales underlie CBI:

1. Language and content are connected naturally and form the path in which they learn about the world.
2. Language is learned more effectively when learned in “meaningful, purposeful social and academic contexts.
3. Content can, as H. D. Brown noted above, provide a motivational basis for language learning.

4. Content provides “real meaning” – via authentic texts with real language and relevant content – a principal feature of naturalistic language learning.

In fact, CBI offers a more real-life approach to learning. It is evident that people use language to talk about what they know and what they want to know more about, not to talk about language itself. The experiential-orientation of CBI classrooms can meet the language needs of L2 learners by offering real-life communicative activities, where learners need not “focus-on-form”, but rather on message meaning.

These researchers point us toward a central question: can a CBI approach help us create a classroom setting where learners receive meaningful input that addresses both *form* and *meaning*? Now days, three main types of content-based instruction are distinguished: the adjunct model, sheltered content instruction, and theme-based instruction. The researchers argue if CBI approach could help us to create a classroom setting where learners receive meaningful input that addresses both form and meaning?

Theme-based language instruction, shelter content instruction and adjunct language instruction form main types of content-based instruction. The first principal of theme-base language instruction is simply to always work with a theme. The second principle is that form-focused learning is generally inconspicuous. According to L.Q. Allen, theme-based language instruction is characterized by the use of short-term, varied themes where the content material provided by

language instructor “the basis for language analysis and practice” [4, p. 30]. L2 input is achieved through multiple media, such as different reading materials (i.e. periodicals, newspapers, book chapters, etc.), videos, listening activities like lectures and mini-lectures and writing. Generally, materials are teacher-generated or adapted from outside resources, and the topics are “often made to integrate into the teaching of all skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Theme-based language instruction is the most commonly used of the three approaches since it can be adapted to practically any institutional setting.

In order to increase student motivation, subject materials are often chosen to match students’ interests. Although teachers do not need to be specialists in the subject area, they are, at a minimum, chosen for their enthusiasm in the subject material. Teachers need to be able to “unlock” the interests of the students and maintain the balance between language and content.

Talking about shelter content instruction it is necessary to mention that the principal goal of sheltered content instruction is to help ESL students to study the same content material is native-speaker as students. In these types of classes, learners are “sheltered” from native speaking students and given special assistance in understanding regular content material. For example, in a sheltered content class, second language learners “may have the same professor, lecture content, reading assignments, and final multiple-choice exam as native speakers.” The learners, however, would be “sheltered” from native speakers and receive “team teaching” from both the content professor and a 2L instructor who emphasizes the development of listening and reading comprehension skills critical to understanding the lectures and readings. For example, the content specialist will give a short lecture and then the 2L teacher will check that the students have understood the important words by reviewing them later. This kind of team teaching requires teachers to work closely together to plan and evaluate classes.

One significant difference between shelter content and theme-based instruction is that the focus of the former model is “content”, while theme-based instruction focuses on “language”. Also, shelter content classes are provided in secondary schools, colleges and universities. Thus, they are taken for academic credit and materials are those which are formally required.

In this model, second language learners are enrolled in “two linked courses” – both a language course and a content course, thus with two different instructors. The concept here is that “the two courses share the content base and complement each other in terms of mutually coordinated assignments” [5, p. 16]. The underlying theory of adjunct instruction is that the two courses will help students in “developing

academic coping strategies and cognitive skills which will transfer from one discipline to another”, thus giving students both language and study skills that will transfer to other “mainstream” course work [5, p. 17].

Comparing theme-based, sheltered, and adjunct language Instruction we could conclude that all three approaches focus on content. Then, all three approaches use authentic materials, meaning the use of materials that were not created for purpose of teaching language. Third, in assisting students with the acquisition of content, a measure of accommodation to second language learning needs to occur.

On the other hand, the three models differ in significant ways. Perhaps, the most important of these differences is how each approach connects content to language. In theme-based instruction, the primary aim is to help students develop second language competence; in the sheltered model, the primary aim is to help students acquire content material; and, the adjunct model aims to acquire both content and language skills. If the goal of CBI is to provide learners with both content and language, it appears on the surface that only the adjunct model accomplishes this purpose. Remember, though, that the adjunct model requires two professors - one for language and another for content - or, at a minimum, one professor who is trained in both language skills and content material. The costs of two professors and/or the lack of instructors trained in both language and content pose financial and logistical problems.

While theme-based instruction, sheltered instruction, and adjunct instruction are the three principle forms of CBI, a number of other related models have also been developed. Immersion models, English for Academic Purposes, and the Modified-input model are just a few content-based approaches. Two other approaches, sustained content study and the 6 T’s approach, are discussed below. The first model, called *sustained content study*, has been termed as a “cyclical, synergistic process between content and critical thinking skills” where learners acquire content by developing critical thinking skills and, at the same time, acquire critical thinking skills by delving into content [6, p. 121]. According to this approach, native speakers learn critical thinking skills in content classes, and that in order to acquire content area expertise, they then develop analytical abilities that can be applied to future content areas. Thus, by studying a subject in a sustained way (i.e. listening to lectures, extensive reading, writing, and listening about a single topic), aspects of language become more familiar that enables students to “compare, synthesize, and judge” what they are learning. Recycling both content and form-focused materials, activating and re-activating schema, and going in-depth in a partial subject are chief

characteristics of sustained content study. What distinguishes sustained content study from other approaches is the commitment to an exploration of one content area, or carrier topic that simulates the demands of mainstream university-level courses, with the addition of explicit instruction in language and academic skills.

Another approach, called the “6 T’s Approach” to CBI was created by F. L. Stoller. CBI is essentially theme-based and consists of a sequence of topics tied together by a coherent overall theme [7, p.72]. Their 6 T’s – themes, texts, topics, threads, tasks, and transitions - offer some guidance on the effective use of CBI, but the most challenging component of this model, at least for CBI instructors, is the “threads” section where the student reviews, recycles and revisits content, language and learning strategies. In the “threads” segment of the “6 T’s Approach”, the connection between language and content is explicitly reinforced, and underscore an ongoing challenge to CBI instructors: how to maintain, or thread together, the language component and the content component.

A.S. Snow identified four classroom settings that closely approximate the four basic models described above: theme-based, sheltered, adjunct and sustained content instruction models. In three of the models, there is close collaboration between an ESL instructor and a content instructor, and close teamwork between the two is strongly emphasized. In another model, we see an ESL instructor in a CBI setting and some of the strategies that are used. In a “pullout program” (similar to both sheltered and adjunct instruction), the ESL instructor asked the students to review the lessons from the previous “content class”. When there was confusion, the teacher and students reached resolution by working together. Then, the class worked with the content in different ways, such as composing short summaries or piecing together a timeline (in order to establish chronology). Whenever there was disagreement, the instructor would facilitate a “Q&A” time to “discover” the answer. When “Q&A” didn’t provide an answer, the questions would be presented to the content instructor in the next content class.

It is necessary to be mentioned that content-based instruction is not an easy approach to implement. As

F.L. Stoller wrote in 2002, “CBI is founded on important principles, but really its success depends on the details of its implementation.” [7, p. 2]. In order to assist students meet their goals, many of which involve the high-level use of English language skills, as well as useful academic skills, CBI instructors have to provide meaning, purposeful input in a way that continually *links* language and content. This paper attempts to identify some of the strategies that CBI instructors can use in their classroom. Just as language acquisition takes time and practice, so it is with these teaching skills and strategies. Each takes time, but if done diligently and properly, both learner and teacher will reach their goals.

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