The Relevance of Sheltered and Immersion Second Language Approaches to EFL in Japanese Public Schools

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Background

It may seem that the circumstances and constraints out of which immersion programs and sheltered courses developed are too remote from the EFL mission in Japanese public schools to offer any helpful comparisons or adaptations. Immersions programs have been largely designed to promote bilingual/bicultural competence in places when two (or more) speech communities overlap or are in close contact while sheltered courses were designed as a bridge between studying the target language and studying subjects in the target language. Since the recent shift in policy away from public support of bilingual education, immersion programs are seldom designed as a remedy to the proliferation of students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in the United States. Currently sheltered courses, aimed at mainstreaming students are the most popular alternative to bilingual immersion courses. A common overall design for sheltered courses is placing beginning students in ESL courses and then teaching academic subjects in the native language. At intermediate proficiency in English all academic courses are English sheltered course and advanced students are mainstreamed (Evaluative Report, 1995).

Although the sociolinguistic contexts in which these two approaches evolved are very different from that of Japanese learners in their native schools, at the core the goals are the same: to improve English proficiency, especially communicative competence, and to inculcate mastery of academic subjects in both languages at the appropriate level of cognitive development. The relevance of the research stemming from these approaches becomes clear when considering the recognition of the need to integrate the English curriculum throughout primary and secondary school in Japan. If the goal is to prepare Japanese high school graduates to communicate effectively in English as well as have adequate academic proficiency to pass college level courses where English is the language of instruction, the curriculum must be designed to promote those competencies from a very early stage. The early reports of astounding success of some immersion and bilingual programs have been tempered with revisions on

the degree of balance between communicative competence in social setting and lack of mastery of academic language and discourse including critical and creative thinking (Hakuta, et al, 2000).

Hakuta and colleagues (2000) report the results of analyzing recent data from California school districts, which reveals that even in the two schools ranked highest for success with LEP students, oral proficiency required 3 to 5 years and academic proficiency took 4 to 7 years. Hakuta (2000) refers to research reported by Cummins (1981), and Mitchell, Destino and Karam (1997) which concluded that it can take up to 10 years for students to reach the academic competence of their native speaking peers.

Cummins said that there are three distinctive components to consider when designing programs which aim to improve the academic language skills of bilinguals in the second language:

Cognitive: the instruction should be cognitively demanding and require
students to use high-order thinking abilities rather than the low-level memorization and application skills that are tapped by typical worksheets or drill-and-practice computer programs;

Academic – academic content (science, math, social studies, art, etc.) should be integrated with language instruction as in content-based ESL programs (Chamot et al., 1977);

Language – the development of critical language awareness should be fostered throughout the program by encouraging students to compare and contrast their languages (e.g., phonics conventions, grammar, etc.) and by providing students with extensive opportunities to carry out projects investigating their own and their community's language use, practices, and assumptions (e.g., in relation to the status of different varieties).

In short, instruction within a strong bilingual program should provide a Focus on Message, a Focus on Language, and a Focus on Use in both languages (Cummins, 1999).

These are the same central components of sheltered and immersion ESL programs being promoted and initiated in many U. S. public schools. The strategies and techniques of sheltered instruction involve the use of tasks that consistently require cognitively challenging critical thinking at the appropriate level, academically foundational and motivating learning and a constant attention to language, not just in terms of vocabulary and grammar, but in discourse analysis, language function and communication strategy among other higher level competencies.

To make second language instruction cognitively demanding is an extremely challenging task for teachers. Of the three components it is arguably the most difficult one to successfully apply. Ideally, it is an essential component of any kind of education. Studies to clarify and distinguish just what constitute higher-order thinking skills or critical thinking skills and how to promote them have proliferated in the United States in recent years, largely in response to criticism of the education system. Through such studies, the central importance of engaging the higher-order thinking skills when learning any new material has been upheld. In many ESL teacher-training programs teachers are required to take course in critical thinking theory and practice. However, to result in teachers actually making critical thinking a central component of their courses may require more explicit training. Teachers need to be cognizant of their students' level of cognitive development and how to match cognitively demanding tasks to that level. In a study by Carrasquillo and Song all students in the TESOL teacher training program at Fordham University rated awareness of students cognitive development and the need to promote cognitive academic skill at the top of concerns for reflective teachers. However observations of their teaching made it evident that their understanding of language and cognitive development was simplistic. The observations did not "provide evidence that teachers consciously and deliberately push students beyond their current individual capabilities toward goals that focus on higher thinking cognitive processes (Carrasquillo and Song, 1994)." Perhaps the most urgent issue made clear by the study is the need for a systematic means of evaluating the critical thinking component of second language programs.

SIOP, (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) is a teacher-training guide for teaching and developing materials for sheltered English in the United States, but embraces principles of cognitive development and critical thinking that are relevant to any language learning program as well as any academic subject. SIOP is instantiated by documented observations of teachers implementing the sheltered strategies and techniques found to help make academic subjects comprehensible while promoting English language development, so it is a self-contained evaluation instrument. The SIOP model provides guidance on the most effective practices for sheltered course based on the compiled experiences of highly successful teachers, more than 20 years of classroom based research and reviews of the professional literature. The theory underlying the model is that language acquisition is promoted by meaningful use and interaction. The basic philosophy of SIOP model is that content methods and strategies can be smoothly combined with second language approaches.

Before students are able to articulate their thinking in English, e.g., make hypotheses and predictions, express analyses, draw conclusions, make comparisons and con-

trasts and so forth, they must first acquire those skills. As critical skills are predominantly acquired in school by doing academic tasks, incorporating such tasks into the sheltered classroom promotes the transfer of critical thinking skills from the native to the target language if they have already been acquired and promotes their acquisition and development otherwise.

The second component of an integrated content approach, the academic is addressed by the SIOP strategy of enrichment of ordinarily context-reduced subject course. To truly integrate the goals of both components, techniques and approaches from the second language classroom must be flexibly adapted and informed by the pedagogical techniques and traditions of the academic subjects. The academic component of sheltered instruction really provides the opportunity to weave Cummins' three components of bilingual education together into a tight mutual reciprocity through tasks that require processing or learning of all three aspects with support, scaffolding and evaluation.

Socialization in culturally appropriate classroom behaviors is necessarily an important aspect of sheltered instruction in the United states but what would be the case in the EFL classroom in the student's native country? I think, depending on the subject being taught, sheltered instruction in the student's own country could provide an excellent opportunity to make comparisons between culturally diverse ways of designing academic tasks and role taking in the learning process. In combining academic and second language strategies, the sheltered course will have to incorporate principles of communicative language learning which emphasize student centered learning and recognize individual difference in learning style and level of cognitive development.

"This fact is beneficial to English language learners because the more familiar they are with academic tasks and routine classroom activities, the easier it will be for them to focus on the new content." Through the study of content students interact in English with meaningful material that is relevant to their schooling. "Because language processes, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing develop interdependently, sheltered instruction incorporates activities that integrate those skills (Echevarria, J. & D. Short 2000)." To develop academic competence or CALP in Cummins terms, students need to master not only English vocabulary and grammar, but also the way English is used in core content classes. This "school English" or "academic English" includes semantic and syntactic knowledge along with functional language use. Using English, students for example, must be able to read and understand expository prose such as that found in textbooks; write persuasively; argue points of view and take notes form teachers' lectures.

A curriculum that integrates content and language and promotes sociocultural

awareness provides an excellent opportunity to scaffold instruction for students learning English. According to Vygotsky (1978) and others (Tharp & Gallimore.1988) students' language learning is promoted through social interaction and contextualized communication, which can be readily generated in all subjects areas. Teachers guide students to construct meaning from texts and classroom discourse and to understand complex content concepts by scaffolding instruction. Vygotsky believed that effective scaffolding is that which is used in the students' zone of proximal development. When scaffolding, teachers pay careful attention to students' capacity for working in English, beginning instruction at the current level of student understanding and moving students to higher levels of understanding through tailored support. One way they do this is by adjusting their speech (e.g., paraphrase, give examples, provide analogies, elaborate student responses) to facilitate student comprehension and participation in discussions where otherwise the discourse might be beyond their language proficiency level (Bruner. 1978). Another way is by adjusting instructional tasks so they are incrementally challenging (e.g., pre-teach vocabulary before a reading assignment, have students write an outline before drafting an essay) and students learn the skills necessary to complete tasks on their own (Applebee & Langer. 1983)."

Sheltered instruction has a long history and contributes in a major way to a wide variety of educational curricula. It is incorporated in many bilingual programs, both two-way and late-exit; it is at the core of many ESL programs and foreign language programs and immersion programs. It is part of many newcomer programs and at the heart of many adult language and literacy programs. In foreign language settings it can provide the most important arena of authentic communication and promote a critical level of acculturation to the different values and interests of the target speech community.

Overview of Principles of Integrating Language and Content

Language immersion programs, may have roots in timeless approaches of naturalistic language learning, but can be viewed as a relatively recent innovation in the context of the development of second language pedagogy and theory. In this method of language instruction, the regular school curriculum is taught through the medium of a second language. Some of the first immersion programs were developed in Canada to enable English-speaking students to learn French, Canada's other official language. Since that time, immersion programs have been adopted in many parts of North America, and alternative forms of immersion have been devised. In the United States, immersion programs can be found in a number of languages,   including French, Ger-

man, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese. Principles, policies and outcomes are generalized below.

Language integration is more effective than separation

The first lesson to be learned from immersion is that when second language instruction is integrated with instruction in academic content, it is more effective than teaching the language in isolation. Proficiency in the target language is not a prerequisite to academic development; rather, language learning results from using language to perform authentic communicative functions. There has been a recent shift away from teaching language in isolation to integrating language and content instruction. There are at least four reasons for this shift. First, language is acquired most effectively when it is learned for communication in meaningful and significant social situations. The academic content of the school curriculum can provide a meaningful basis for second language learning, given that the content is of interest or value to the learners.

Second, the integration of language and content instruction provides a substantive basis for language learning. Important and interesting content, academic or otherwise, gives students a meaningful basis for understanding and acquiring new language structures and patterns. In addition, authentic classroom communication provides a purposeful and motivating context for learning the communicative functions of the new language. In the absence of content and authentic communication, language can be learned only as an abstraction devoid of conceptual or communicative substance.

A third reason for the shift toward language and content integration is the relationship between language and other aspects of human development. Language, cognition, and social awareness develop concurrently in young children. Integrated second language instruction seeks to keep these components of development together so that second language learning is an integral part of social and cognitive development in school settings.

Finally, knowing how to use language in one social context or academic domain does not necessarily mean knowing how to use it in others. The integration of second language instruction with subject content respects the specificity of language use. For example, evidence indicates that the way language is used in particular academic domains, such as mathematics (Spanos, Rhodes, Dale, & Crandall, 1988), is not the same in other academic domains, such as social studies (Short, 1994).

A variety of integrated approaches to second language teaching have been developed. Immersion is a specific type of integrated instruction. The primary focus of immersion is not language learning but academic instruction. Immersion programs have

proved to be successful; the academic achievement of immersion students is comparable to that of students educated through their native language. This indicates that the students in immersion programs acquire the second language skills they need to master the academic skills and information appropriate for their grade level.

Opportunities to use the language promote acquisition

The second lesson to emerge from research on immersion is that approaches that provide opportunities for extended student discourse, especially discourse associated with activities selected by individual students, a principle of the communicative approach that recognizes student-centered teaching and individually task as much as feasible, can be particularly beneficial for second language learning.

Research on French immersion programs in Canada has shown that immersion students often perform as well as native French-speaking students on tests of French reading and listening comprehension. However, they seldom achieve the same high levels of competence in speaking and writing. Although functionally effective, the oral and written skills of immersion students indicate a number of shortcomings. Immersion students' grammar is less complex and less redundant than that of native speakers and is influenced by English grammar. The available studies suggest that this results, in part, from learning environments in which there is a lack of opportunity to engage in extended discourse.

The solution to the shortcomings in immersion students' productive skills seems to lie in the use of methodologies that apply techniques to practice language forms with a communicative approach. "Such tasks and activities will meet the same criteria as is demanded of the communicative teaching of grammar: purposefulness, interactivity, creativity, and unpredictability" (Clipperton, 1994, p. 746).

Activity-centered immersion programs, particularly those that focus on individual choice of learning activity, achieve high levels of second language proficiency even in the productive skills. Stevens (1976) compared students who worked on self-selected activities in collaboration or consultation with other students and who were expected to make oral and written reports in the target language on their work with students who all worked on the same teacher-directed activities at the same time and in the same way. Although students in the activity-centered program used the target language for only 40% of the school day, they attained the same levels of target language speaking and reading proficiency and almost the same levels of reading and writing proficiency as the students in the teacher-centered program, which provided all instruction in the target language. The success of the activity-centered classes can be at-

tributed to two main factors: 1) students had regular opportunities for extended discourse; and 2) students were highly motivated because they used the target language in situations of personal choice. In sum, the use of instructional strategies and academic tasks that encourage increased interaction among learners and between learners and teachers is likely to be beneficial for second language learning.

Integration of language and content require thoughtful planning

The third lesson to be learned from immersion is that the integration of language and academic objectives should be carefully planned, providing for the presentation, practice, and application of specific language forms that are necessary for discussing different academic content. If integrated instruction is not planned systematically, teachers may use strategies that are not optimal for promoting full second language development. Swain (1988) examined how immersion teachers used French to teach a variety of academic subjects. The study found that teachers used a functionally restricted set of language patterns, corrected content more often than linguistic form, and were inconsistent in their corrections of linguistic form. These results suggest that in an effort to make academic material as comprehensible as possible, immersion teachers might be adopting communication strategies that rely on linguistic skills which their students have already acquired instead of challenging students to learn new language skills. In order to develop the students' language skills fully, immersion teachers must progressively model more complex language and use instructional activities that demand more complex language skills from students.

Instructional strategies and tasks must be carefully selected so that students use and learn targeted aspects of the language. Without such systematic plans, teachers may provide inconsistent or even random information about language forms. A systematic focus on the structural aspects of the language greatly enhances learning of targeted grammatical features.

Increased attention to language forms does not mean less focus on communication and meaning. Salomone (1992) reports on an immersion program in the United States that "exemplifies the current trend of all second language instruction: using the second language rather than knowing about the language, with bilingualism as the ultimate instructional goal" (p. 9). However, having verified a lack of accuracy and a continued "fossilization" in the students' speech, teachers in the program studied by Salomone incorporated systematic planning and explicit teaching of the grammar and vocabulary component of the syllabus. This strategy greatly improved the results. Other studies describe the specifics of direct language instruction in an immersion

context (e.g., Clipperton, 1994; Laplante, 1993) or show the benefits of identifying the semantic and syntactic features and language functions and tasks that are part of the academic language for a content area and incorporating them in the design of lesson plans (Short, 1994).

Conclusion

Evaluations of immersion classes illustrate the practice of second language teaching and demonstrate effective ways of attaining high levels of academic content mastery and target language proficiency. Evaluations of a number of immersion programs reveal at least three elements for successful second language instruction: 1) approaches that integrate content and language are likely to be more effective than approaches in which language is taught in isolation; 2) an task-based, activity-centered approach that creates opportunities for extended student discourse is likely to be promote second language learning; and 3) language objectives should be systematically pursued along with academic objectives in order to maximize language learning and facilitate critical thinking.

Studying immersion and sheltered courses as inspiration or a model for EFL programs in Japanese public education can reward the language educator with many valuable principles and practices. Perhaps more importantly, it can raise our consciousness of the complex social, linguistic, cultural and political issues involved in language education and cultural interaction. One point is clear from any review of existing programs: there is no right way to balance all these factors. Educators must seek to find the way that works best in the unique cultural, historical, political and economic situation by which they are constrained

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