Teaching language through literature: a Content-based Instruction model

Javid Elyasi

Department of Linguistic, Shahid Beheshti University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract
This paper deals with the identification of English literature roles in ESL/EFL classrooms and targets the benefits of collaborating content-based instruction and literature teaching across the curriculum. First, definitions of CBI model and its various programs are given; afterwards, it has been tried to touch the benefits of incorporating English literature into a CBI program. Following that, the objectives and the activities in this kind of CBI model are stated and finally the writer introduces some evaluation techniques and tools for assessing both the subject matter and language skills simultaneously. As a bottom line some concluding comments regarding this paper are placed at the end of the paper.
Keywords: Content-Based Instruction, Adjunct Model, Literature, CBI Activities

I. Introduction
The changing wind and shifting sands of the history of language pedagogy has witnessed a lot of controversy regarding the methodology of English language teaching and various methods based on different approaches have waxed and waned throughout the history. Each of these methods claimed to be complete and considered as the placebos of language learning problems. However, due to their inherent drawbacks and problems, none of these methods survived as the dominant method of language teaching and learning and finally language teaching profession entered a new era called Post method era in which certain underlying principles of language learning took the place of methods for having more fruitful and satisfying classes. Even though we are now in post method era and sticking to a particular method or approach is out of place, no one can deny that among these methods and approaches some had dramatic effects and important benefits for language teachers and provided the profession with invaluable insights and ideas.

Content-based instruction or CBI is one of these methods which undoubtedly has had undeniably significant effects on teaching language within content curriculum .Before going any further and getting to the heart of our paper which is about teaching language through literature based on a content-based instruction program, as a preliminary step to this essay it is better to explain about content-based instruction and its relation to this paper.

Generally Krahnke (1987) offers the following definition for CBI program:

It is the teaching of content or information in the language being learned with little or no direct or explicit effort to teach the language itself separately from the content taught. (p. 65)

As a clarification on this issue Richard and Rodgers (2001) add, Content-based instruction (CBI) refers to an approach to second language teaching in which teaching is organized around the content or information that students will   acquire , rather than around a linguistic or other type of syllabus. (p. 204).

To be more specific, there are various models in the content-based instruction which are going to be discussed here briefly to have a better understanding of this model. It should be mentioned that the current paper is somehow based on one of these models named "Adjunct Model". The first type of CBI is the theme-based model in which in which selected topics or themes provide the content for students to learn (Brinton et al, 1989). Based on these topics and themes, language teachers should extract language activities and engage students in language practice and content learning simultaneously. As an example under the supervision of language teacher students work on the topic shopping and through doing certain activities, they get familiar with the concept of shopping and its related register and jargon.

The second important model of CBI is immersion program which can be considered as the prototypical content based approach. Snow (2001) explains that "in the total immersion model, English–speaking elementary school students receive the majority of their schooling through the medium of their second language" (p. 305). The third model of CBI which is the major focus of this paper is adjunct model. Richard and Rodgers (2001) define adjunct model instruction as:

> In this model, students are enrolled in two linked courses, one a content course
> and one a language course, with both courses sharing the same content base and
> complementing each other in terms of mutually coordinated assignment. Such a
> program requires a large amount of coordination to ensure that the two curricula
> are interlocking and this may require modification of both courses. (pp. 216-27)

In this model teacher should try to engage students in various activities related to the four skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing) for boosting students' knowledge, literacy, oral development, cultural understanding and thinking skills. For achieving this aim, Krashan (1985) supports using extended text such as novel and short story for promoting literary development and getting students familiar with literary style. The fourth model of CBI called sheltered program which is based on the Canadian model of immersion education is defined by Larsen-freeman (2000) as a type of CBI model in which " both the native speaker and non-native speaker of a particular language follow a regular academic curriculum" (p. 142).

After explaining about CBI model in general and touching the four specific models of it, the second step to be taken before relating language and literature under the umbrella of

CBI is the rational behind CBI as a useful approach in language and subject matter teaching. Some important assumptions and learning theories exist based on which CBI came into existence Richard and Rodgers (2001) explain some of them as following:

  1. Students learn a second language in a better way when they make use of
   language as means of acquiring something else rather than an end itself.
  2. Some disciplines such as geography, psychology, and literature due to their
  unique features lend themselves better to content-based instruction.
  3. Students learn best when instruction is related to their specific needs and CBI
  using Larsen freeman (2000) terms as a part of the movement "Language across
  the curriculum" (p.137) does so.

Based on the principle number two which states that some subject matters are more suited to being incorporated into a CBI model for teaching content and language at the same time and since English literature is the discipline which is the major focus of the this paper, in the next section, a very important questions regarding literature is being addressed and the researcher tries to answer it thoroughly.

II. The rationale behind using literature

In this part it has been tried to discuss the role of English literature in ESL classrooms and to enlighten the readers about unique features of literature which makes it compatible with being implemented in a content-based instruction program. The role of English literature in the ESL classroom has always been hotly debated in different books and by a lot of well known applied linguists and literary figures. McKay (1986) states some of the undeniable benefits of using literature in language classroom. She believes that literature in language classroom makes L_2 learners motivated enough to read extensively in English and this amount of reading leads to cultural knowledge and sensitivity and boosts learners' reading skills. Moreover, writing about the use of literature in language classroom, Langer (1997) states," because it taps what the learners know and who they are, literature is a particularly inviting context for learning both a second/foreign language and literacy" (p. 607). According to Langer, literature allows students to reflect on their lives, learning, and language. Literature can open" horizons of possibility, allowing students to question, interpret, connect, and explore" (p. 607).

Littlewood (1986) specifies four perspectives for literature and discusses these perspectives' use in language teaching context. According to him, "at the simplest level literature is not qualitatively different from any other linguistic performance" he adds that "literature provides instances of language structure in use, which can form the basis for instruction and practice in language skills, especially accompanied by a varying amount of grammatical analysis and explanation" (pp. 178-179). Littlewood (1986) explains the second perspective in this way that the perspective comes into play when students who have passed the initial stages of learning and are at later stages in which they become capable of sensitivity to stylistic variations. Therefore, literature can be very beneficial in the sense that it becomes a vehicle for teaching the differences between the varieties and it

can be claimed that through the use of literature students become familiar with different styles of writing and features of different genres. Littlewood (1986) continues with the explaining of the third perspective and its benefits in ESL classes. He states that " at the third level literature is the expression of the superficial subject matter as it relates events or describes scenes: the plot of a drama or the story of a novel" (p.178).

A major problem in language teaching classes is the lack of authentic situation for language teaching. Littlewood (1986) mentions three ways of compensating for the absence of real events and authentic material in language classroom and literature is one of them whose benefits here is related to this third perspective. Littlewood (1986) adds and explains the forth perspective "as a level at which literature is a symbolization of the author's vision of these events and his or her worldview" (p.178).
It is at this level in which transition from receptive skills to productive skills intensifies (i.e.) at this level literature might provide a basis for generalizing and theorizing in language classroom.

Other people as well mentioned the benefits of literature in general and in language classroom. According to Fitzgerald (1993), literature can be a vehicle for improving students' overall language skills. It can "expose students to a wide variety of styles and genres" (p. 643). It is in literature that "the resources of the language are most fully and skillfully used" (Sage, 1987, p.6). We all know that literature's language is a sophisticated one, and the most superior form of language is employed in different literary works and nobody is capable of versifying a piece of poetry in a second language unless s/he has acquired a language fully. Therefore, it is sensible to attempt to make students become familiar with this sophisticated form of language at later stages of language learning. In teaching language components such as vocabulary, idioms and proverbs, literature surprisingly has a role. An example clarifies such a claim fully. Many idioms and proverbs which exist in a language originate in the literature of that language, and in teaching those idioms etymology we'd better go through and have a glance at the literary work based on which the idioms came into existence. For instance, we have the idiom "Achilles heel" in English which is based on an old literary work. Based on all these comments and quotations concerning the benefits and uses of literature in ESL/EFL classrooms, literature's significant roles in language classroom become undoubtedly obvious. However, before making use of literature in language classroom, one important thing needs to be taken into consideration.

Selecting a suitable and interesting literary text for language classroom is of significant value. Most texts are obsolete and useless for language teaching context unless we have certain goals in mind such as teaching archaic words and structures. Some literary texts don't arouse students' interest and motivation and even are in complete contrast with students' values and culture. Use of such texts should be prohibited because it leads to nothing and sometimes become counterproductive. Based on all the above-mentioned information regarding content-based instruction and the benefits of literature, it is time to discuss the benefits of collaborating content-based instruction and literature teaching.

III. Content-based Instruction through Literature

Brinton et al. (1989) made a list of several benefits of collaborating CBI and literature. For example, knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, paragraph, structure, interactive communication skills, and types and styles of writing can be acquired through the collaboration of CBI and literature. To repeat the same benefits again, Abulhaija (1987) further supports that language and literature are inseparable, for each has something important to offer in the development of a well-rounded students. Literature teaches idiomatic language and cultural contexts; it betters correctness in speech and writing, encourages extensive reading, boosts reading and comprehension skills. Erkaya (2005) states that by integrating literature in the curricula, students can acquire and learn the four skills more easily and effectively because of the literary, cultural, higher order thinking, and motivational benefits.

IV. Design and objectives of such a program

Objectives of CBI courses based on English literature are widely varied, the objectives such as, helping our students to comprehend the meaning that the author tries to express, enhancing students critical thinking, bettering study skills and language abilities are some of the important ones. Shang (2006) included the following objectives for a content-based instruction program in the EFL literature curriculum.

- Build on students' educational background and personal experiences based on the topic of the literature
- Help students comprehend the meaning that the author tries to convey in order to enhance their reading ability
- Provide the opportunities for peer cooperative learning
- Enhance students' critical thinking and judgmental abilities
- Develop students' aural/oral fluency by asking questions and sharing their feedback
- Develop students' writing ability by writing an essay or comments related to the topic of the literature (pp. 4-5).

Having a glance at the list provided by Shang (2006) shows that in the specified objectives for the course, attending simultaneously to both literature and language learning is of great importance. For example, the second objective deals with the study of meaning of a literary work and at the same time is related to the development of students' reading ability. As another example, in the last objective it is shown that that students work to develop their writing ability based on the topic or major theme of a literary work.

V. Classroom Activities

In a CBI model based on English literature, the classroom activities primarily revolve around English literature content and secondarily deal with developing language skills. These multifunctional activities are related to eliciting knowledge of content, acquisition of thinking skills, and development of English language abilities. A novel or short stories can be a suitable source based on which these multifunctional activities can be designed.

Before mentioning some of these activities it should be born in mind that the novel or short story selected as the source of activities should be an interesting modern type of literary work and students should be familiar with it culturally. What comes next is an excerpt from "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho and a set of activities consistent with CBI model for upper-intermediate students.

"They crossed the desert for another two days in silence. The alchemist had become much more cautious, because they were approaching the area where the most violent battles were being waged. As they moved along, the boy tried to listen to his heart.

It was not easy to do; in earlier times, his heart had always been ready to tell its story, but lately that wasn't true. There had been times when his heart spent hours telling of his sadness, and at other times it became so emotional over the desert sunrise that the boy had to hide his tears. His heart beat faster when it spoke to the boy of treasure and more slowly when the boy stared entranced at the endless horizons of the desert. But his heart was never quiet, even when the boy and the alchemist had fallen into silence.

"Why do we have to listen to our hearts?" the boy asked, when they had made camp that day.

"Because, wherever your heart is, that is where you'll find your treasure."

"But my heart is agitated," the boy said. "It has its dreams, it gets emotional, and it's become passionate over a woman of the desert. It asks things of me, and it keeps me from sleeping many nights, when I'm thinking about her."

"Well, that's good. Your heart is alive. Keep listening to what it has to say."

During the next three days, the two travelers passed by a number of armed tribesmen, and saw others on the horizon. The boy's heart began to speak of fear. It told him stories it had heard from the Soul of the World, stories of men who sought to find their treasure and never succeeded. Sometimes it frightened the boy with the idea that he might not find his treasure, or that he might die there in the desert. At other times, it told the boy that it was satisfied: it had found love and riches."

VI. Activities & Guidelines for their Use
    1. Content questions :
       Before reading the novel, ask such questions
       Have you ever heard of alchemy?

Do you think it exists?
Have you ever taken a trip abroad for fulfilling your dreams?
What are the Pyramids in Egypt?

2. **Motivating activities:**
   Before reading the novel, have the students watch a short movie or video clip concerning the Pyramids in Egypt , its secrets and treasures

3. **Teaching vocabularies**
   Based on an excerpt like the one presented above, engage students in thinking about the new vocabularies.
   Look at the words *agitated*, *emotional*, and *passionate*. Is there some kind of association among these words? What state do these words refer to? What is the part of speech of these words? What is the role of *ed* in agitated *al* in emotional and *ate* in passionate? Based on the context can the students guess the meaning?

4. **Post reading activities targeting students' critical thinking**
   After reading the novel, students should be engaged in discussing the meanings conveyed by the author; they should extract the themes, motif, and symbols of the novel and relate them to their own life. Through the interactive group discussion, students can develop their language fluency and critical thinking abilities. For example, based on the above-mentioned excerpt, they could talk about the word "treasure" and what it represents for the main protagonist of the novel. The danger of fear and centrality of personal legends and the two major themes of the novel could also be discussed upon. The students could also be given some writing activities in the form of compositions concerning these themes.

5. **Cooperative learning activities**
   Students can form some groups with each member taking a role in an activity related to the novel. For example; students can come up with a different ending for the novel in their groups and work together and write a different ending paragraph for the story. Having finished the writing assignment, they try to persuade the other groups that their choice for the end of the story is the best choice.

6. **Speaking activities**
   Students should do an internet search about the author of the story and the next session they should give a presentation about his or her biography and style of writing

VII. The Post-lesson Evaluation and Assessment
In CBI model section, four models of content-based instruction program have been described. Regarding adjunct model it was mentioned that the students attend two classes simultaneously. In content class they are taught different issues regarding the subject matter and in language class they become familiar with content related language. In this model the language instructor helps students do content instructors' assignments.

Both of these classes have prespecified outcomes which are expressed from the students at the end of the courses. Therefore, a variety of instruments to evaluate students' content and language learning are required. For instance, whereas written multiple choices, True

or False, or essay questions could be employed to gauge students' reading comprehension ability, open-ended questions format like writing an essay about the content taught during the term can be used to assess both writing skills and subject matter learning. Shang (2006) proposes different kinds of games such as "Jeopardy" through which students' aural/oral ability as well as vocabulary and reading comprehension can be assessed. All these question types should be designed in a way that address students' understanding of the content of the novel or other literary works which were taught.

VIII. A Practical Example

The above-mentioned activities in a form of a 30-minute lesson were tried out in an English class with a major focus on English literature and the feedback obtained from the students was quite promising. The participants were a group of prospective English literature university students who were preparing themselves for university entrance. These students had registered in an English class for improving both their English level and literature; however, during the first 3 weeks of the class, they always expressed concerns and dissatisfaction about the textbook they were studying since they believed the content had nothing to do with literature and the only thing which was being targeted in the class was general English.

The class consisted of 11 young adult with the age range of 16 to 20. Their English proficiency was at an intermediate level and the book they were studying: *Interchange: Third Edition* (book 3). The teacher was a friend of the author and let the author observe the class. The class time was divided into two sections like two classes of adjunct model. The first 30 minute section was devoted to the above-mentioned activities related to literature. During the first half an hour, students seemed really motivated and engaged in the classroom activities since they believed that they were learning English related to their future field of study. The second one-hour section was devoted to *Interchange* book and the teacher also tried to relate the activities in the book to English literature.

At the end of the class, the author asked the learners to spend a few minutes of their time answering some questions in an interview. The students unanimously believed that the integrated lesson was a useful one and they had positive opinions about it. They even asked to continue the class in this way since they thought during the class they were doing something meaningful with a clear purpose for their future needs. They also believed that through such lessons they could improve their skills in a literature class. For example, they learn how to give a lecture about a dominant literary figure; moreover, they added that in such classes they also learn many things related to English literature itself.

The part that the majority of students were really interested in was cooperative learning activity in which they had to write a different ending to the story. One of the students named Arash said, "through this activity we think we are in writer's shoes and have an ability to write the ending of a story; besides, we improve our writing skills in a cooperative atmosphere of the class". The second task the learner expressed satisfaction was the speaking activity in which they had to prepare and rehearse a lecture about the

writer of the story and present it the next session. Regarding the second section of the session, the students showed satisfaction and said that in such a format they enjoy learning English through Interchange book much more specially when the teacher tries to relate the activities to English literature.

In sum, the overall evaluation of the lesson was a successful one and the learners insisted on being exposed to such material and activities for fulfilling their future needs about both English and other subject matters.

IX. Conclusion

Ellis (2003) believes that," content-based courses are premised on the assumption that learners will best learn language which engages them in learning subject content" (p.74). Based on this quotation we know that a CBI model makes use of a language and a subject matter component. Regarding the subject matter component it has been mentioned throughout the paper that some disciplines such as literature lend themselves better to content-based instruction. Moreover, literature roles in ESL/EFL classrooms are undeniably important in language pedagogy. According to Sagliano and Greenfield (1998), the use of collaborative content-based literature teaching can improve EFL students' motivation and comprehension.

Making use of literature in ESL classrooms is consistent with a focus on the development of English fluency. By discussing the issues in a novel or short story, students can convey thoughts through language, use language sophisticatedly and develop their critical thinking skills; furthermore, literature is a door to western life and helps student become aware of the west cultural issues. Through reading and deeper processing of a literary text, students could imagine living in a western society with all its customs and traditions; therefore, teaching literature undeniably leads to teaching culture which is considered nowadays as a language skill besides reading, writing, speaking and listening. All in all it could be claimed that a collaborative CBI program with a literature teaching component can boost simultaneous learning of academic subject matter, English language skills and critical thinking abilities.

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