

The Media English Course: Making space for content in the language classroom

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1. Introduction

These days the objective in English language teaching in Japan is to raise scores in TOEIC or other standard language tests, on the one hand, and help students master a core of oral communication skills on the other. English remains a valued benchmark, whether for entering university or the job market. High standard test scores immensely improve students' chances of getting the best jobs and a faster promotion track, along with a higher salary. The mastery of general communication skills in English offers them an additional window on the world, for example making interaction with native-speakers of English or overseas travel more comfortable.

In order to help language educators get students to these goals, a plethora of textbooks is available: split, full-year and intensive among many other configurations. The choice is overwhelming. Yet, within these many texts, a look at four of the most popular in Japan and widely sold worldwide and including the leading ELT textbook, Liz and John Soars' Headway series, indicates that the same themes are returned to repeatedly within an obviously grammar-based agenda. Five books we evaluated were found to offer almost the exact same functional and thematic grammatical development. I refer to American Headway 1 (Soars and Soars 2015), Communication Spotlight High Beginner (Graham-Marr 2013), Four Corners 1 (Richards & Bohlke 2012) and Smart Choice 1 (Wilson, 2011). In the first six units of these texts, the development, with little variation, progresses thus: personal information (verb to be), likes and dislikes (yes/no questions), daily routines and hobbies (simple present/frequency adverbs), jobs (wh-questions), yesterday or last weekend (simple past), describing people and/or places (looks like/ prepositions of place).

Besides the grammatical and functional focus, the principal goal these language classes target is personalization. Personalization is important, for people love to talk about themselves, but language classes lack an extra element, which is content – 'meaningful input' in the Krashen sense, as illustrated in the following two quotations:

"... 'comprehensible input' is the crucial and necessary ingredient for the acquisition of language."
(Krashen,1987)

"Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill." (Krashen,1987)

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2. Aim

The aim of this paper series is to describe a content-based language course and evaluate data gathered about the course from former students. This first part will detail the course outline and rationale, and give examples of work produced. In the subsequent part, findings of questionnaire results and follow-up interviews with students will gauge how far the working hypothesis that students find content classes in English challenging but intrinsically motivating is accurate. Students' perceptions of their language improvement will also be evaluated in the interview-questionnaire study.

3. Course Content

For a number of years, I have taught a media English course which seeks to remedy the 'input' problem referred to above, by allowing students access to authentic English texts - in this case newspaper articles, - to have the chance to work with these and above all to think about and respond to them. The course is a hybrid reading-writing-discussion class which helps students develop some critical thinking skills, expand their horizons and produce some writing themselves. Explicit language learning is in no way the focus of the course, but students learn by doing; the language increment to be won by concentrating on content is not negligible.

The stated goals of this course are threefold:

- (1) for students to gain confidence in reading (English)
- (2) to raise students' awareness of current affairs, and
- (3) to stimulate students' interest in discussing news in English.

4. Methodology

During class, members begin by brainstorming and sharing the week's news stories. Students then tackle articles chosen by the teacher, as a class or in small groups, doing jigsaw readings and comprehension activities, summarizing and paraphrasing, and working with, giving opinions about and discussing at a basic level a variety of news stories. Some Japanese use is allowed during short periods in lesson time, but following group-work, students are systematically required to give feedback from their work and this is obligatorily in English. Worksheets also help students to use as much English as possible in class. (See sample worksheet Appendix Ai)

Cornerstones of the course are its press book, news journal and unique article writing component: Press books are compiled individually and added to weekly. This is a core requirement in the Media English course. It should be noted that newspaper subscriptions are taken out and students are given their own newspapers regularly throughout the course. These are chosen from the Asahi Weekly, the Shukan Times and the Mainichi Weekly, which present abridged and simplified versions of articles in the parent newspaper, and also offer English-Japanese glossaries. These newspapers target Japanese students. Students take home their personal copy to read and a period of silent English newspaper reading is scheduled every week during the class.

For the press book assignment, students choose articles they are interested in (2 per week), and add these to their press book, select and record keywords (1-5) that they wish to memorize, and comment on the articles chosen in 2016. Students chose a large variety of topics, some more trivial but many

serious topics, ranging from dog Olympics, the death of a popular panda, through the Arctic ice situation, the Paris climate pact, the recent Japanese paid overtime survey, children living in poverty, WHO guidelines on sugary drinks, an Australian asthma crisis, and many more thought-provoking news items lending themselves to awareness-building discussions (See sample press book entry Appendix B).

News Journals are written once during the semester. Students choose a news story of interest to them, summarize it in 6 sentences and write three comprehension questions about the story. In small groups, students read their summary and ask the prepared questions so that they can judge if their classmates have understood the story. With practice, students learn that they must :

- a. not lift sentences verbatim from articles and
- b. simplify language so that their peers can understand their summary. In a follow-up activity, they give opinions about the topics that the news articles were about and carry out simple discussions about these before sharing with the whole class. (See news journal Appendix Aii)

Unique Article Writing The course culminates in the production of a newsletter, which forms a retrospective of the previous years news combined with original articles by the students. The newsletter, published 7 times to date) has a modest 50-100 copy print run. (See cover sheet sample and unique article, Appendix C)

5. Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation is based on the following work:

1. The collection of at least 2 articles per week to put in a 'press book'; the selection and learning of 3-5 words relevant to articles gathered.
2. The creation of a formal news journal once in the semester, requiring students to share a summary of a piece of news found interesting and the generation of suitable comprehension questions about it.
- 3a. The researching, drafting and final submission of a unique article for publication in the class newspaper EEST (English East Sea Times).
- 3b. Co-operation with class on compiling the newspaper.

Breakdown of marks: class effort (volunteering of opinions, work as chair of a group, assiduity) 20% ; press book: 30% ; news journal writing and presenting 20% ; final article writing 30%

6. Discussion & Conclusion

This Media English course falls into the category of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), which can loosely be described as a language-content hybrid. The principles of CLIL are that the classes are not language lessons, neither are they subject lessons in the true sense. Rather they combine several facets. A work widely referred to for an understanding of the CLIL lesson is Coyle 2008, which lists the following four elements as important: Content (growth of knowledge and understanding without explicit focus on structure), Communication (learning by doing or improving language communication by using it), Cognition (developing abstract and concrete thinking skills), and Culture¹ (exploring new to you perspectives which deepen awareness). It is rightly expected that the four language skills be used by students in a CLIL lesson.

It should be stressed, in order to understand the CLIL classroom, that language focus is not structural and language is functional and dependent on the context of the subject. Language will

therefore be approached lexically and not grammatically. This content class and others of its type can not of course replace the regular language class, but is complementary to it. It may be considered as a forum in which to practice, consolidate or showcase language skills being learned concurrently in other courses.

In a Keynote Panel on National Trends in Language Education at the JALT (Japan Association for Language Teachers) PanSIG Conference 2017, Associate Professor Annette Bradford of Meiji University, Tokyo, reported that the rate of the introduction of CLIL lessons is gaining momentum in Japan at this time and it is estimated that of 781 universities 274 are teaching content classes. Fellow panelist Meiji University Professor Naoko Ozeki said that a fundamental change is being observed in education in Japan and that existing, traditional, reading/translation classes will satisfy students less and less, particularly as students' general English language levels rise. She said that Meiji University is now hiring content teachers with no ELT background to teach in English, so in preparation for a future situation where CLIL would be the norm, ELT educators should begin to hone their own skills for teaching content classes. The kind of class that this paper describes may become more common in the future.

Footnotes

- 1 Community sometimes replaces Culture (Mehisto, Marsh, & Frigols, 2008).

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APPENDICES

HOW TO COMMENT ON A NEWS ARTICLE (MODEL)

For ONE of your newspaper articles every week, please be sure to write a comment of 1, 2 or 3 sentences. You can use these models:

I was surprised / shocked / happy / excited / sad to hear this news

This news made me surprised / shocked / happy / excited / sad

I chose this sentence because.....

I think

This story is important because

This will affect me/my family/Nagoya/Japan/the world because...

COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR PARTNER IN ENGLISH

Ask your partner: 1. Did you watch the news this week? AND

Ask your partner: 2. What did you learn about?

Tell your partner: 1. I found out about.. OR

Tell your partner: 2. I chose an article about ...

Ask your partner: 3. What happened?

Ask your partner: 4. What new words have you found / underlined?

RECENT NEWS ITEMS Group News Roundup

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5

News Journal

Name _____

News Story

Questions and Answers About Your News Story

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

News Source

Date of News Report

No. 13

11/12

Japanese working more unpaid overtime: survey

Some 38.2 percent of employees who worked overtime in September were not paid for their extra hours on the job, a biannual survey by the Research Institute for the Advancement of Living Standards has shown.

The figure is the highest rate since the current survey method was adopted in 2011.

The institute gave online questionnaires to 2,000 workers across Japan from Oct. 1 to 6, of whom 38.5 percent said they

had worked overtime in September, averaging 40.3 hours for the month.

Of those, 38.2 percent replied that they had done unpaid overtime. About 6.5 percent of men and 1.8 percent of women had surpassed the so-called "death from overwork danger line" of 80 overtime hours in September.

Among all workers who did unpaid overtime, 30.1 percent said they didn't report the extra hours because "the workplace



Protesters raise their voices against the government relaxing labor time regulation, in Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo, in May 2015. (Mainichi)

atmosphere makes it difficult," while some 25.6 percent replied that their employers "impose overtime pay limits."

1. Source

MAINICHI WEEKLY No.2296

2. Date

NOVEMBER 12th 2016

3. words

unpaid overtime サービス残業 ✓ biannual 年2回の

adopt 導入する surpass ~を超える

atmosphere 雰囲気

No. _____

Date _____

4. Comments

- I was said to hear news. ✓
 - I chose this sentence because ^{at} Pentsu ~~happened~~ prolonged work problem occurred.
 - I think the government should review the Labor Standards Act. ✓
- Perfect

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2016 SELECTIONS 2016

23 June 2016

UK Leavers boot out Remainers

What does Brexit mean?

It is a word that has become used as a shorthand way of saying the UK leaving the EU - merging the words Britain and exit to get Brexit.

Why is Britain leaving the European Union?

A referendum - a vote in which everyone of voting age can take part - was held on Thursday 23 June, 2016, to decide whether the UK should leave the European Union. Leave won by 51.9% to 48.1%. 71.8% voted (30 million people)

Trump Triumph



Against all expectations and proving that you do not have to be a politician to woo a majority, Donald Trump was elected the 45th president of the United States of America on 8 November 2016, preventing Hillary Clinton from becoming the first female US president.

5 of his pledges follow:

1. 'build a wall' and make Mexico pay
2. ban Muslims from entering the United States
3. 'Bring manufacturing (jobs) back'
4. Impose tariffs on goods made in China and Mexico
5. Renegotiate or withdraw from the North American Free Trade Agreement and Trans-Pacific Partnership
6. 'Full repeal of Obamacare' and replace it with a market-based alternative



金 'KIN', 2016 Kanji of the year. *Kyomitsu*

Temple Kyoto Chief priest Mori Seihan handwrites the giant character. Gold was considered the best character symbolizing the year's social mood.

Japan won 12 gold medals at the Rio Olympics and Tokyo Governor Yoichi Masuzoe resigned over a political money scandal. Some also cited the « golden » hair belonging to President Trump. There were some 153,500 entries and gold ranked first with 6655 entries.

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A Review of 'Your Name'
(Reviewer: Takumi Kinoshita)



"Your name" became the second in successive box office chart. This movie is a story about a boy who lives in the city and a girl who lives in the country and how they changed each other's minds. Why is this movie so popular

Firstly, the scenery is very beautiful and looks real. Secondly, the impressions posted on SNS, showed how popular it is. People who saw the comments wanted to go to watch this movie. Thanks to this good circulation this movie became very popular. Thirdly, the music is very suitable for this movie. All this movie's music was made by "RADWIMPS" (a Japanese rock band). Their music is certainly one of the most important elements that made this movie attractive.

The final reason for the movie's popularity is that the story's construction is very clever. You can't completely understand the contents if you only watch it once. That's why there are a lot of people who watch it many times.

The people who go to Hida which is a model of this movie are also increasing. If you have not watched this movie yet, why don't you go soon. You will surely be satisfied.

Fantastic Beasts
(Reviewer: Yousuke Osako Danilo)



Rowling offers us another fantasy movie. The movie Fantastic Beasts (starring Eddie Redmayne and released in 2016) is full of magic animals playing tricks who join him on his journey from England to Arizona. The battle scene was exciting. So was the love scene - and the duck. Take a look at these pictures. Then you will want to go to see the movie

Universal Studios, Japan

Universal Studios Japan in Osaka opened in 2001. The park operator said that they could draw 150 million visitors due partly to new rides and attractions. Tokyo Disneyland movie amusement recorded 100 million visitors on October 29th 2012, and four years later, increased to 50 million. USJ's Harry Potter area is based on Harry Potter series movie. It opened in 2014, that is popular with Japanese and foreign people. 13.9 million visitors went to USJ in fiscal 2015. It is a very popular theme park Shukan Times 18

