



Donna M. Brinton

**Donna M. Brinton recently retired as Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and Associate Director of UCLA's Center for World Languages to pursue her interest in international teacher development. She has taught a variety of graduate level classes and also trained and supervised teaching assistants. She is the co-author and co-editor of several professional texts including *Content-Based Second Language Instruction* (University of Michigan), *The Content-Based Classroom* (Longman), *Teaching Pronunciation* (Cambridge), *New Ways in Content-Based Instruction* (TESOL), *New Ways in ESP* (TESOL), and *Heritage Language: A New Field Emerging* (Routledge, forthcoming). She has also co-authored several commercial English language textbooks and numerous journal and book articles. Ms. Brinton has done short-term international teacher training in China, Thailand, Vietnam, Korea, Taiwan, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Morocco, Tunisia, South Africa, Mozambique, Madagascar, Mauritius, Senegal, Mali, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Syria, Lebanon, and Curaçao.**

# Abstract

**Content-based instruction (CBI) has emerged over the past several decades as one of the primary approaches used in the teaching of second/foreign languages. In this session, I begin by explicating the basic principles of CBI, focusing on several of its common “prototype” applications. I next examine the degree to which the principles of CBI align with those of communicative language teaching. The presentation concludes with a critical examination of the principles of CBI along with an examination of its various applications for college-level foreign language teaching, particularly with respect to the teaching of culture, literature, and history. Participants are invited to participate in the follow-up question and answer period and reflect on how CBI can help make foreign language teaching a more integral part of higher education.**

**12th Annual Conference  
American Association of Teachers of Korean  
Chicago, Illinois  
June 14th-16th, 2007**

**Content-Based Instruction:  
Reflecting on its Applicability  
to the Teaching of Korean**

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## Is it CBI?

Scenario 1: In the university classroom, a Japanese teacher centers her instruction around themes such as food, music, and the family. The topic-based course supplements a course based on the study of grammar. According to the course developer: “Postponing content instruction while students develop more advanced academic language is impractical and ignores students’ complex educational needs.” (Morioka, n.d.)

Is it CBI?

Answer: *Yes! This is theme-based instruction--a form of CBI.*

## Is it CBI, cont'd.?

Scenario #2: In the university classroom, American college students studied Japanese business and current affairs through instruction in Japanese. A follow-up questionnaire revealed that learners felt the experience “increased their motivation to study Japanese and broadened their understanding of the Japanese business community, while also providing solid training in language skills.” (Wei, 2005)

Is it CBI, cont'd.?

Answer: *Yes! This is sheltered instruction--  
a form of CBI.*

## Is it CBI, cont'd. ?

Scenario #3: In the LAUSD middle school curriculum, native-speaking Korean and English children study their elementary school subjects in *both* languages. Literacy instruction in both Korean and English begins in kindergarten. The school curriculum advocates the simultaneous learning of language and content with “sheltering” of the instructional delivery to allow learners to access challenging content. The program’s goal is for all students to become bilingual and biliterate in Korean and English. (Sohn & Merrill, in press)

## Is it CBI, cont'd. ?

Answer: *Strictly speaking, this is dual language instruction. However, it shares many things in common with CBI, especially the underlying philosophy of learning language and content simultaneously.*

## So then, what *is* CBI?

Discipline-based language instruction, and the broader "content-based" approach to which it belongs, are part of a trend at all educational levels aiming at the development of use-oriented second and foreign language skills. Content-based language teaching is distinguished first of all by the concurrent learning of a specific content and related language use skills in a "content driven" curriculum, i.e., with the selection and sequence of language elements determined by the content...

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## Definition, cont'd.

Essential to all content-based language teaching is a view of language acquisition which emphasizes the incidental internalization of new knowledge by the learner from rich target language data, while focusing on the meaning being communicated... In content-based language teaching, the claim in a sense is that students get “two for one”--both content knowledge and increased language proficiency.

(Wesche, 1993, pp. 57-58 )

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## CBI principles

1. The content-based curriculum removes the *arbitrary distinction* between language and content.
2. It reflects the *interests* and *needs* of the learners, taking into account the eventual *uses* the learners will make of the second or foreign language..
3. It offers *optimal conditions* for second language acquisition by exposing learners to *meaningful, cognitively demanding* language in the form of *authentic materials and tasks*.

## CBI principles, cont'd.

4. It provides pedagogical *accommodation* to learner proficiency levels and skills.
5. It views language as learned within a larger *framework of communication*.
6. It holds *sustained content* as necessary for providing an authentic, meaningful context for students to acquire language.
7. It views *rich, comprehensible input* as necessary but *not sufficient* for the development of high-level academic language proficiency.

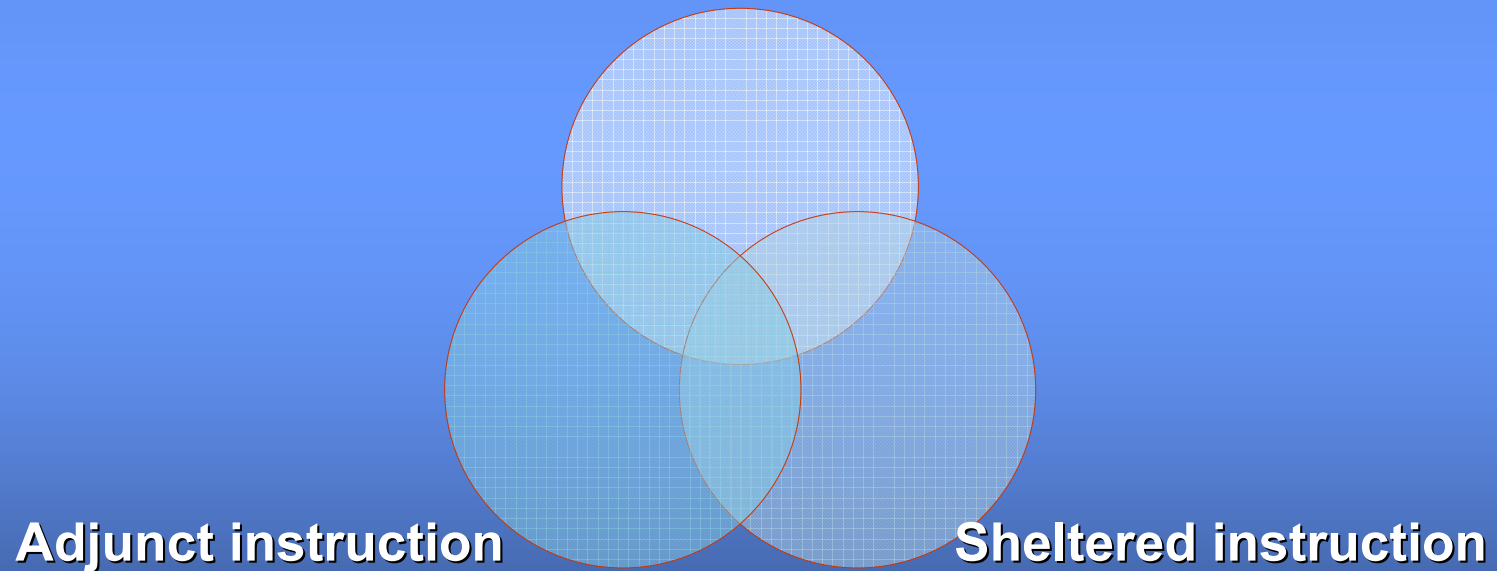
## CBI principles, cont'd.

8. It places a high value on *feedback on accuracy* to help students develop target-like output.
9. Instead, it supplements exposure to input through language-enhanced instruction (e.g., *skill-based instruction* and *consciousness raising* about issues of grammar, lexis, style, and register).
10. Finally, it aims for a balanced focus on *fluency* and *accuracy*.

# Three prototype CBI models

Brinton, Snow, & Wesche (2003)

**Theme-based instruction**



# Theme-based instruction

Brinton (2003)

- Topics in theme-based instruction are chosen to be of high interest to students.
- The units incorporate all skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar).
- The teacher present topics as a vehicle for language development--i.e., teaching language (not content) is the main goal.
- Courses may cover a variety of topics or treat one topic more in depth.

# Theme-based instruction

Brinton (2003)

Example: A theme-based unit entitled “What is a Friend” in which students explore the answers to the question posed while expanding their vocabulary and practicing the four skills.

## Sheltered instruction

- The class is taught by a content instructor, not a language instructor.
- The content instructor is sensitized to the L2 acquisition process and to students' language needs and abilities.
- There is accommodation to the students' level of language proficiency.
- Content is not watered down.
- L2 acquisition occurs through content mastery; the focus is on content rather than language.

## Sheltered instruction

Example: Second language learners are enrolled in a special section of “Biology for Non-Native Speakers.” All instruction is in the target language but linguistic accommodations are made to the learners by the teacher, who is trained in sheltering techniques.

## Adjunct instruction

- The linked classes are taught by content and language instructors respectively.
- The purpose of the content class is content mastery; the purpose of the language class is for students to master the language necessary for success in the content area.
- The curricula of the two classes are negotiated with respect to each other, with the content course providing the point of departure for the language class and dictating its sequence.

## Adjunct instruction, cont'd.

Brinton, Snow, & Wesche (2003)

- Coordination between content and language teachers is essential.
- Language teachers need to be familiar with the content material (i.e., read the content textbook and attend content lectures whenever possible).
- The materials development load on the language teacher is heavy; this should be planned into the course assignment and teachers should be compensated or otherwise rewarded for the work load.

## Adjunct instruction, cont'd.

Brinton, Snow, & Wesche (2003)

Example: Second language learners enroll in a Psychology course and a linked language course. The curricula of these classes are negotiated with respect to each other. Joint papers or projects may be assigned.

# FSP Adjunct Model

Brinton, Snow, & Wesche (2003)

**Psychology 10**

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graph TD; A[Psychology 10] --- B[ESL Section 1]; A --- C[ESL Section 2]; A --- D[English A]
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**ESL Section 1**

**ESL Section 2**

**English A**

## CBI – A critical view

. . . any courses built around a content-based syllabus . . . have their limitations and generate certain specific problems. . . . The first is the problem of relating language form to language function and content in this kind of syllabus. This is the old accuracy/fluency problem, and content-based courses tend to come down hard on the side of fluency. Content and function flow rather smoothly together, being complementary aspects of language as a system for communication.

## CBI – a critical view, cont'd.

But attending to grammar in any systematic way is difficult within communicative paradigms. One major reason may be the absence of insightful theoretical work on the relationship between grammatical form and discourse function. . . . It seems to me that on the issue of how to teach linguistic forms, or how to insure that they will be learned, we don't really even know the right questions to ask. (Eskey, 1997, p. 139)

## The counterargument

Content-based instruction is an ideal means of assuring the integration of [form-focused instruction]. By dealing with grammar within the context of understanding content, many of the original criticisms of the grammatical syllabus are satisfied: students no longer deal with decontextualized sentences or spend years learning isolated rules that inhibit their spoken fluency. (Master, 2000, p. 94)



**CBI's applicability  
to the teaching of Korean**

# Introductory FL course

Morioka (n.d.)

CBI model: Theme-based instruction

Course: *Intermediate-level Japanese* (UC Irvine)

Description: Theme-based modules on Japanese food, music, and the family

- Teacher-developed thematic curriculum
- Integration of theme-based authentic materials into curriculum
- Students co-enrolled in Japanese grammar course

# FL literature course

Dietrich (2005)

CBI model: Sustained content (theme-based)

Course: *Readings in Modern Chinese Literature* (University of Pennsylvania)

Description: “What it means to be Chinese”

- 4<sup>th</sup> year Chinese course which fulfills the university’s general FL requirement
- Mix of heritage/ non heritage learners; not majoring in Chinese or Asian Language
- 8 subthemes (e.g., inter-personal relations and the rule of law, Love, sexuality and marriage in Chinese culture), each consisting of 2-7 stories and a film
- Assignments: Writing portfolio, literary analysis, student-led discussion

# FL history course

Georgetown University (n.d.)

CBI model: Theme-based

Course: *Contemporary German history--1945-present*  
(Georgetown University)

Description: Intensive advanced course for German majors

- Themes: Germany after 1945 (End of the War, Germany's Division, Postwar Reconstruction), Two German States, Fall of the Wall and its Consequences, Enroute to a Multicultural Society
- Goal: promote language accuracy, fluency, and complexity
  - Improve students' ability to narrate, compare and contrast and establish causal relationships in speaking and writing
  - Develop advanced reading and writing skills

# FL culture course

Beeman et al. (1993)

CBI model: Sheltered content course

Course: *Japanese Culture and Society* (Brown University)

Course description: Sheltered Anthropology section

- Taught in Japanese to 3<sup>rd</sup> year Japanese learners (offered in tandem with non-sheltered version of course taught by Anthropology faculty member)
- Sheltered section taught by advanced doctoral student in Anthropology (NS of Japanese)
- Core readings in English for all students; additional (glossed) readings in Japanese for L2 Japanese learners (sheltered) section and in English for L1 English learners (non-sheltered) section

# LSP course

Ushida (n.d.)

CBI model: Sheltered content

Course: *Japanese Language Proficiency B* (UC San Diego, School of International Relations)

Description: Japanese content course for IR majors focusing on Japan's security issues and international relations in the postwar era (prerequisite = Japanese 20C + Japanese Language Proficiency A)

- Subthemes: e.g., Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, Japan-U.S. alliance, self-defense force
- Linguistic goals: to enhance students' Japanese proficiency for social and professional interactions
- Sociolinguistic goals: to enable students to understand nonlinguistic meaning embedded in language to facilitate socially and situationally appropriate use of Japanese

# Advanced FL course

Burger & Chrétien (2001)

CBI model: Adjunct instruction

Course: *Introduction to Psychology* (University of Ottawa)

Description: French content course linked to language support course for advanced students of French

- Enrollment in the adjunct represents an alternative way for U. of Ottawa students to fulfill their FL requirement
- Lecture delivered in French; readings are bilingual, as is the final examination
- Results indicate that Anglophone students enrolled in the Psychology adjunct test at equal or higher levels of French proficiency than those enrolled in the university's "traditional" advanced French course (see also Brinton, Snow, & Wesche, 2003)

## The CBI curricular challenge

1. Base instructional decisions on content rather than language criteria.
2. Integrate skills.
3. Involve students actively in all phases of the learning process.
4. Choose content for its relevance to students' lives, interests, and/or academic goals.
5. Select authentic texts and tasks.
6. Draw overt attention to language features.

**Questions or  
Comments?**

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