

THE IMPLEMENTABILITY OF WESTERN APPROACHES IN EASTERN SOCIETIES

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Abstract

The field of foreign language teaching has been dominated mostly by Western views. While some of these views can indeed be implemented, many others, especially with regards to the role of the teacher and that of the students, stumble on cultural barriers; the approaches are also constrained by the unavailability of educational facilities in most Eastern societies. This paper is to look into these two constraints: (a) in the case of learner autonomy and the new role of the teacher, the Western concepts cannot be conveniently implemented without changing the cultural values of the society, and (b) in the case of educational facilities, Western approaches such as Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, and Content-based Instruction, which are claimed to be student-centered, cannot easily be implemented in normal classrooms where educational aids are not generally available on the national scope.

Keywords: learner autonomy, Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, Content-based Instruction.

INTRODUCTION

If we look at the development of scientific endeavors, we will see that although science was born in the East, it grew up in the West. It was the people of Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China who first dealt with inquiries that led to scientific rigors. However, it was the Greeks in Asia Minor, Sicily, who then developed it. The Greeks set up the basic elements in mathematics, astronomy, mechanics, physics, geography, and medicine (*Encyclopedia Americana*, 1980, Vol. 24, p. 385). The flow of scientific thoughts from the West continues even until today. In the field of language teaching, we can even say that the contribution began from the West from the very beginning (Titone, 1968).

Although we must admit that science knows no hemispheric boundaries, there are cases where a particular scientific field developed in one region may not fit into that of another. This incongruity seems to have emerged in our field, language teaching, in which the Western approaches

have been implemented in Eastern societies. While I do not intend to be Easterly chauvinistic, I do feel that there are foreign language teaching approaches that may work well in Western societies but stumble over problems when implemented in the East. I would discuss in particular the concepts of (a) learner autonomy and (b) humanistic orientation as found in approaches such as Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, Total Physical Response, and Content-Based Instruction. I will look at the concept of learner autonomy from the cultural and philosophical points of view. For the humanistic orientation, I will add the virtual impossibility of implementation.

LEARNER AUTONOMY

The latest concept on foreign language learning can perhaps be attributed to the view now known as *learner autonomy*. As many other scientific concepts, learner autonomy was first thought out in the West but has now been “exported” to many other parts of the world including the East. This concept, however, creates a controversy not only among scholars in the West vs the East, but also among the Western scholars themselves. Those supporting the concept believe that learner autonomy is universal in nature and not just restricted to the West. Littlewood (1999), for instance, in his research on the Chinese students in Hong Kong came to the conclusion that Chinese students embrace learner autonomy as well. Other scholars share this view. Little, for instance, argues that “human beings in different cultures are more alike than it is often supposed” (1999, p. 12). Perhaps Chomskyan view on genetic process of acquisition and Universal Grammar has influenced Little when he says that “human cultural diversity, though great, cannot be infinite because it is always constrained by our common biological endowment” (1999, p. 13). Apparently Little considers the autonomy of the students in the process of learning a foreign language biologically and genetically programmed which does not then tolerate any deviation.

In another research conducted by Aoki and Smith among the Japanese students, it was found that “Japan has not always been a group-oriented, or collective society” (1999, p. 23) and that “autonomy can be seen as a valid educational goal in the Japanese context.” The conclusion is based on the belief that people have certain misconceptions about culture. People wrongly believe, according to Aoki and Smith, that (a) culture is coextensive with a political unit, i.e. a nation, (b) culture is static and given, and (c) the influence of one culture on another is necessarily unfavorable. They also believe that people have also misunderstood what is meant by *autonomy*: (1) autonomy is synonymous with self-instruction, (2)

autonomous learners make the teacher redundant, (3) autonomy is a new methodology, (4) autonomy is a single easily described behavior, and (5) autonomy is a steady state achieved by certain learners (1999, p. 21).

After broadening the definition of learner autonomy to include thirteen aspects, Sinclair (2000) also came up with support for the implementation of this concept to any culture. These thirteen aspects, however, can be considered as “modifications” as they include statements such as “There are degrees of autonomy,” “The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable,” “Autonomy is interpreted differently by different cultures.” She even warns that “practitioners and researchers in the field of learner autonomy need to exercise great care, particularly if working within cultural contexts which are not their own” (Sinclair 2000, p. 13). Sinclair emphasized her stand by citing Pennycook (1997):

To encourage ‘learner autonomy’ universally, without first becoming acutely aware of the social, cultural and political context in which one is working, may lead at best to inappropriate pedagogies and at worst cultural impositions.

The concern about cultural impositions was also expressed by other Western scholars such as Kirkpatrick. He believes that learner autonomy has been “transplanted to other parts of the world with little respect for local customs or conditions” (1995, p. 76) and that “the method takes for granted a certain ‘equality’ between teacher and students. It takes for granted the notion that the teacher is not a transmitter of knowledge but merely, in the phrase of the day, a facilitator” (1995, p. 76). His view is based on his belief that in many Asian societies “knowledge is traditionally seen as something to be transmitted down through generations ... and that knowledge is passed down from teachers to students” (1995, p. 75).

In an attempt to look into the matter further, Dardjowidjojo (2001) scrutinized the Javanese society and came to the conclusion that learner autonomy is not a concept that can be readily implemented in societies such as the Javanese. Although there have been changes in outlook, the majority of Javanese still adhere to certain philosophical and cultural views such as *manut-lan-miturut*, *éwuh-pekéwuh*, and *sabda-pendita-ratu*. In Javanese society, the interrelation among its members is determined by social factors such as rank, social status, and age. The higher the rank, the higher the social status; or the older the age, the more respect is given. A person with lower status (such as a student, a son, or a village head) is expected to *manut* (‘obey’) and *miturut* (‘follow’) the elders (teacher, father, or mayor respectively). Conversely, an elder expects a lower status person to show his/her respect by following the *manut-lan-miturut* concept.

A lower status person is also expected to feel *éwuh* ('uncomfortable') and *pekéwuh* ('uneasy') if he/she has a view or an opinion different from the elders, let alone disagreeing with them. This particular concept is not only applicable in social groups such as families, but also in administrative and educational circles. A village chief, for instance, would feel uncomfortable and uneasy to express his/her view which is different from the view of his superior. In the educational circle, a student would also feel the same toward his/her teacher.

The *sabda-pendita-ratu* philosophy teaches people to believe that the words (*sabda*) of a priestly king (*pendita-ratu*) are not to be questioned – a king can do no wrong. Although this philosophy was originally intended for a leader to be very cautious in what he/she is going to say, in practice it has taken a different meaning. People are not to question what the higher ups say. The classroom implication is that students, being lower in (academic) status, are not to question the words of the teacher!

Although another scholar from Java, Wachidah, believes that her findings “showed a strong indication that the Javanese learners are quite capable of taking responsibility for their own EFL learning” at the Senior High School (Wachidah 2001, p. iii), she strongly supports the view that among the Javanese

... it is not easy to encourage autonomous behaviour (*i.e.* to incite them to perform independently, creatively, critically, and with initiative, and so on), particularly in teacher-fronted classroom activities for the reason that it may not be easy to change a pattern of classroom discourse that is laden with important cultural implications for both the teacher and the student. In other words, an interactive discourse that is based on the principles of learning autonomy may, for the time being, not be feasible in typical Javanese classrooms. (Wachidah 2001, p. 127)

Cultural and philosophical views as I outlined above constitute an obstacle for the implementation of learner autonomy – as originally proposed. Let us see how this can happen by looking at the concept of learner autonomy as originally proposed and how it has developed.

The Original Concept of Learner Autonomy

The view that it is the student who should take the responsibility for his/her own learning is manifested in Holec's five famous, what we may call, doctrines (Holec 1981, p. 3):

- a. Students determine the objectives;

- b. Students define the content and progressions;
- c. Students select the methods and techniques to be used;
- d. The students monitor the procedure of acquisition;
- e. The students evaluate what has been acquired.

Taken at face value, these five doctrines encompass all there is in a learning process. It begins with the objective of the study and, through a learning process, ends up with the students evaluating themselves on how much they have accomplished.

What has this left the teacher with? Obviously, the learner autonomy concept is also based on the belief that the teaching process is learners-focused, thus making the teacher a facilitator. The change of the status from a master to a facilitator for the teacher is not as easy as many people might think since the change is culturally bound. As Kirkpatrick (1995) stated, teachers in the East are supposed to be the transmitters of knowledge. It would take a cultural transformation to act otherwise. In Thavenius words “it is not just a matter of changing teaching techniques, it is a matter of changing teacher personality” (1999, p. 159).

Another problem with the implementation of the original concept of learner autonomy in the East is that the five requirements above cannot normally be done by regular students in formal academic institutions. It would be too much, for instance, for us to expect junior, or even senior high school, students to know what they want, define the contents to be studied, determine the methods and techniques used, monitor how the acquisition progresses, and eventually evaluate the result. In formal institutions like high schools, many, if not most, students learn English (or other foreign languages) not because they want to, but because they have to.

Even in special classes like Indonesian, Thai, or Burmese offered in American (or other Western) universities where the students enrolled have a clear instrumental motivation – that is, they know what their objectives are – they, in virtually all cases, would not know how to go about it. As far as I know, regular foreign language classrooms have not followed the five principles above.

A research questionnaire by Hood to find out the students’ attitude toward learner autonomy clearly shows that the students themselves do not find the concept appealing. Out of the 22 students surveyed in a Russian class, no one chose “we have a responsibility to learn everything we need to know in Russian”; five chose “the teacher has a responsibility to teach us everything we need to know in Russian”; and 17 students were middle-line respondents. Of these 17 students, “five clearly put the teacher as the leading element in learning, while a further five stress the equality of the responsibility” (Hood 2001, p. 41). The other seven mention their own

responsibility first, “which *may* (italic by Hood) mean they see more autonomous learning partly positively” (Hood 2001, p. 41).

Recent Development of Learner Autonomy

Although never stated, the problems above apparently have become a prompt to redefine, or clarify, what is actually meant by *learner autonomy*. Latest definitions such as that given by Dam (2001, p. 49).

“Autonomous learning can be described as *what takes place* (italic mine) in situations in which the teacher is expected to provide a learning environment where the learners are given the possibility consciously to be involved in their own learning thus become autonomous learners“

clearly show that learner autonomy is considered a process. This is what may have led people to think that the concept refers to a classroom activity. Meanwhile, further development seems to indicate that the concept has shifted now into the product. Aoki and Smith cited above, for instance, stated that “autonomy can be seen as a valid *goal* (italic mine) ...” (1999, p. 19). The same shift has also been indicated by Little, who can be considered one of the strong proponents of learner autonomy. He said that

If the potential for autonomy is a human universal and the purpose of education is to help learners to develop tools for critical reflection, it follows as a matter of principle that learner autonomy is an appropriate pedagogical *goal* (italic mine) in all cultural setting (Little, 1999, p. 15).

The shift from process to goal is enlightening since the two indeed deal with completely different aspects. No one would deny that the goal of education, be it language or any other subject, is to create individuals who would be independent in their future life but interdependent in their way to reach the goal. I have no quarrel with learner autonomy as a goal, although it would sound awkward for a decision such as “determining the objectives, defining the content ...evaluating the result” and “what takes place in a classroom” to be considered a goal, rather than a process.

Another concept of learner autonomy which has been “redefined” or reemphasized pertains to the type of students involved. In many literatures on learner autonomy, it is virtually never stated that the concept is not for regular classrooms. People have experimented the concept in learner autonomy is for adult education. This means, of course, that the class suitable for this type of learning is an ESP class. At least in an ESP class where the students are adults having definite motivations, the students know what they want. Some may also know how to reach the goal.

The third change or development can be seen in Sinclair (2001), who broadened the concept by elaborating thirteen aspects of learner autonomy:

1. Autonomy is a construct of capacity;
2. Autonomy involves a willingness on the part of the learner to take responsibility for their own learning;
3. The capacity and willingness of learners to take such a responsibility is not necessarily innate;
4. Complete autonomy is an idealistic goal;
5. There are degrees of autonomy;
6. The degrees of autonomy are unstable and variable;
7. Autonomy is not simply placing learners in situations where they have to be independent;
8. Developing autonomy requires conscious awareness of the learning process, i.e., conscious reflection and decision making;
9. Promoting autonomy is not simply a matter of teaching strategies;
10. Autonomy can take place both inside and outside the classroom;
11. Autonomy has a social as well as individual dimension;
12. The promotion of learner autonomy has political as well as psychological dimensions;
13. Autonomy is interpreted differently in different cultures.

The changes and refinements of the original concept on learner autonomy as described above have certainly been able to accommodate many of the problems of implementation in an Eastern society. One thing that is still questionable is the very basic tenet of the concept, that is, the students must take responsibility for their own learning. It must be admitted that teachers can only provide conditions for the acquisition of knowledge and that in the final analysis whether learning is going to take place or not is totally dependent on the students themselves. However, is this idealistic approach not too much for us to expect for public schools not just in Eastern but Western societies as well? Most public school students, be they on the junior or senior high school level, take language courses because the subject is there in the curriculum. While there may be students genuinely interested in learning a foreign language, it can be suspected that most take the subject because they have to, not because they want to. High school students normally would not yet know what they want with the foreign language. Field experience teaches us that these young students, as young people are anywhere, spend more time on many things other than the school subjects.

Even among the more mature students, the responsibility to do one's own learning is questionable. Voller et al. (1999) reported that university students in Hong Kong did not make the best use of the availability of self-

access learning centers set up by the University of Science and Technology and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Expecting them, especially the young high school students, to be responsible for their own learning is, to say the least, sort of wishing for the moon.

Without trying to question the validity of the research findings, we would wonder why the success of the implementation of learner autonomy reported has almost always been in experimental classes, conducted, and evaluated by the researchers themselves (Wachidah, 2001; Dam, 2001; Nunan et al., 1999) and the number of students is extremely small (Hoffman, 1999 [three students]; Campbell and Kryszewska, 2002, p. 6 [twelve to fifteen students]).

HUMANISTIC APPROACHES

Other approaches that are presumably applicable to all societies include Curran's Community Language Learning, Lozanov's Suggestopedia, and Krashen's Natural Approach. Lately, a classroom instructional method of teaching known as Content-based Instruction is also suggested. I would like to look at these means of teaching not so much from cultural and philosophical points of view as from the practical classroom implementation.

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE LEARNING

This approach, known as Community Language Learning (CLL), was developed by Charles A. Curran at Loyola University in 1957. The result of the experiment began to be made public in 1960 and responded to by other scholars. Taylor (1979), for instance, experimented with Japanese, La Forge (1971) with Chinese and Indonesian, and Stevick (1980) with Swahili. Let's look at how this approach is implemented.

Basic Principles and Practices

Being a psychotherapist, Curran (1976) looks at the interaction between the giver of knowledge and the "givee" not as that of a teacher and a student but as a counselor and a client. Based on his assumption that anyone coming to a language classroom must bring with him a psychological handicap, he proposed four concepts that he believed would help students with their learning: (1) Security, (2) Attention-aggression, (3) Retention-reflection, and (4) Discrimination – abbreviated as SARD. These concepts are intended to lead the students from feeling secure (Security) in the class to eventually be able to use the language not only correctly but also properly (Discrimination).

He postulated five stages of learning: (a) embryonic, (b) self-assertion, (c) birth, (d) reversal, and (e) independent. These stages describe how a student moves from the anxiety stage (embryonic), where psychological obstacles are prevalent, to complete independence from the teacher. One very interesting point to note here is how these stages are gained. Curran has several ways of classroom setting. One type consists of six clients (preferably three males and three females), each with a counselor. Having no textbook to use, if a client wants to initiate a conversation in the foreign language, he would ask his/her counselor behind him/her how to say the words or expressions in the foreign language. Another student who would like to respond would also ask his/her own counselor how to say what he/she wants to say.

This process goes on for every class hour and each session is recorded. At the end of each session the recording is played back so each student would reflect on what has been going on. Since no textbooks or notes are used, each class session begins with a student deciding on what topic to discuss. The way to do it is again by asking the counselor behind him/her how to say what in the foreign language.

Another possible classroom arrangement is that one counselor counsels three clients. If this is also not feasible, the number of counselor is reduced further but they are placed in a separate room. The communication between clients and counselor is done electronically. To assist the students, Curran invented what he called Chormacord – a visual aid with color coded keys, a screen, a tape recorder, and a box with also eight colors. Three students practice together – one as speed controller, one an error corrector, and the third as the regular client learning the foreign language. When a word is projected, the client would push a color button, say, red, to indicate that the word is feminine. Blue color would mean past tense, etc.

Curran claimed that the experiment that he conducted for over fifteen years resulted in a solid method of foreign language teaching. Other experimenters such as Stevick (1972) claimed that after 120 hours of learning a foreign language, the clients mastered the language materials 100%. La Forge (1971) and Taylor (1979) also came up with glowing results.

Implementation in Eastern Societies

In addition to the cultural constraints that CLL may have when implemented in the East, this approach brings about a tremendous amount of practical problems. First of all, the ratio between the students and the teachers is unrealistic. Where in the world could any country, even in the West, afford to have the luxury of one-teacher to one-student ratio? In many

countries of the East, it would be a luxury to have a class in public schools with thirty students in it – and one teacher. Suggesting a one-student-one-teacher approach completely disregards world realities.

Reducing the number of counselors and requiring an electronic device placed in a different classroom is another out of the question solution to our language learning problem. Many countries in the East, even in developed countries like Singapore or Japan, could not afford to add a special space for each language classroom when the language learning process is being undertaken. If a high school with 300 students has six language classes, each attended by 45 students (as is the case in Indonesia), we need an extra six classrooms every time the language classes are conducted. Even if the rooms could be spared, what are we going to do after the language class hours are over?

With regards to no-textbook in class practice, one certainly wonders if this type of approach should be the one we select. Any normal language teacher knows that he/she must have something “to hang on to.” It is beyond my imagination to have a class where students come every time with their own topics to discuss. Even for adult classes, I doubt it very much if this is implementable, let alone in junior and senior high schools nationwide. The unavailability of textbooks and relying only on memories are also unimaginable. Humans select only certain events to be saved in long-term memory. They are certainly not expected to store all and every lessons in their long-term memory. Even with notes and efforts to memorize vocabulary items and to practice structural patterns for effective communication, learners still have problems.

SUGGESTOPEDY

Sometimes referred to as Suggestopedia or Suggestopedagogy, Suggestopedy was initiated by Georgi Lozanov from Bulgaria in 1975. It became popular first in Eastern Europe and then spread to other countries including the United States of America.

Basic Principles and Practices

Humans can only learn when their minds are peaceful and relaxed. Before every lesson, therefore, students are to perform yoga to develop what he calls hypermnesic abilities – extraordinary super memory. This state of mind can be achieved only if the physical surrounding is also conducive. For this reason, the classroom cannot be conventional. The regular chairs are replaced by comfortably arranged sofas with the room dimly lit. For each lesson baroque music is played. No lab is needed and no drills are

given as Suggestopedia emphasizes on mental absorption for all the lessons. Lessons are given in the form of very long dialogues emphasizing vocabulary, real life topics, emotional relevance, and practical use.

For an intensive class, maximally twelve students meet four hours a day, six days a week for one month, amounting to ninety-six classroom hours. They are given new roles and new names based on the sound system of the language being learned. For each lesson, students are to control their breathing: the first two seconds are for the students to inhale, hold the breath for the next four seconds, and relax for two seconds afterward. While inhaling, the students listen to the teacher presenting the material in L-1 so that the students would understand what the topic is. The next four seconds are used by the teacher to read the dialogue. The students are to mentally repeat the dialogue, then they rest for two seconds before they go back to the breathing cycle. At the end of each session, called the *séance*, students are to sit around, do the Savana yoga. This is a reinforcement period where students are expected to subconsciously absorb the materials.

Lozanov claimed that vocabulary retention in German, French, and English was 93.16% (1982, p. 209). Even after a three-year time lapse, the retention was still perfect. Other proponents of this method also gave encouraging results. For Spanish, Bordon and Schuster found that Suggestopedia was 2.5 better than conventional methods (in Bancroft 1978). Meanwhile, Iowa teachers found the method to be two-thirds faster. Ostrander and Schruder even claimed that Suggestopedia is 150 times better than any other method (in Bancroft 1978, p. 168).

Implementation in Eastern Societies

There is no doubt indeed that a troubled mind cannot do anything. However, the suggestion by Lozanov to do what he did with his experimental classes to achieve the peace of mind is a bit beyond reason, to say the least. The requirement to do yoga, for instance, requires that not only the students but also the teachers be able to do it. One wonders whether this condition is feasible.

Physical requirements such as the use of sofas instead of regular chairs are indeed nice, but are they realistic? Where in Eastern countries (as well as Western ones, I suppose) could we afford to have luxurious classes like this? For an experimental class, or what we can call an *executive* class, this arrangement may be possible, but we are here dealing with regular classes in public schools! Not only are they unaffordable financially, but they also take up a tremendous amount of space.

Judging from the fact that it was the vocabulary retention that was shown as supportive evidence, we can conclude that language learning for

Lozanov is vocabulary learning. This assumption is, to say the least, questionable. Going deeper into the evidence provided, we are not told what vocabulary items were used in the experiment. One would remember the items close to 100% for years if the Indonesian words to be learned by an American learning Indonesian are, for instance, *demokrasi*, *bambu*, and *amuk*.

With regards to the claim for success, I have no evidence to comment one way or the other, but the claim for a method to be 150 times better than any other method is belittling our intelligence.

TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

Another approach that was once popular was the Total Physical Response, TPR. Pioneered by a San Jose State College professor, James T. Asher, TPR began in the 1960s when Asher conducted an experiment on foreign language teaching by making use of body movements (Asher, 1979). TPR has been applied to the teaching of Russian, German, Spanish, and English.

Basic Principles and Practices

Underlying the TPR are the assumptions that (a) skills can be improved by the use of kinesthetic sensory system, (b) humans, especially children, acquire their language through physical activities, and (c) comprehension precedes production. These three principles are manifested in the classroom practices. Students are allowed to spend as much time as they want to comprehend before they are to produce any sentence. To achieve this goal, physical movements are mandatory.

Classes begin with short sentences, like “Walk!”, with the teacher demonstrating the meaning by doing the action. Students are then to perform the action. The sentences are gradually expanded, each followed by an action representing the sentence meaning. Since meanings are obtained from the actions performed, all sentences in TPR are in the imperative form. Asher claimed that abstract meanings could also be conveniently handled. To convey the meaning of, say, *democracy*, one student would be asked to pass the card on which the word is written to his/her classmate – “John, please pass *democracy* to Mary.” Tenses can also be easily presented: Asher would use directions as follows: “John, go to the blackboard and *write* the word *eat*. Mary, after John *wrote* the word, shake his hand”.

Asher and de Langen conducted an experiment in 1972 with five children about eleven years old. They were learning German twice a week, each time lasting twenty minutes. The class lasted for two months. It was

found that what TPR accomplished in five hours and twenty minutes (320 minutes) was the same as what the Army School did in 240 class hours. Another experiment by Asher for university students also produced similar results: 32 hours of TPR equals 75 up to 150 hours of conventional methods.

Implementation in Eastern Societies

One big practical problem with the implementation of TPR in an Eastern society is that class setups in public schools cannot be modified very easily to accommodate just for language classes. Preparing a room for physical actions after, say, a biology class and before a history class, is more easily said than done. Schools teach many other subjects, not just language. Demanding a language class to be set up differently would create envies among other teachers.

A second practical problem is whether this method can be applied to people of all ages—although Asher did claim that it worked for any age. Students under ten might enjoy this “fun” method, but I doubt very much if seventeen-year old senior high school students would also consider it fun. I can imagine how adults (in extracurricular classes, for instance) would react if they are to jump up and down, to throw books to the classmates, or to hit another fellow student sitting next to him – as exemplified by Asher’s sentences.

From the suggestions given to handle cases like abstract words and tenses, it is quite obvious that Asher tried to find all means to justify the end. Passing a card with the word *democracy* written on it as a way of teaching abstract words is just absurd. The same is true with the tenses: one would not be able to develop the use of English tenses the way that Asher suggested. Finally, the use of only imperative sentences for the whole course is also too far fetched.

CONTENT-BASED INSTRUCTION

The curriculum of a Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is “one that (a) is based on a subject matter core, (b) uses authentic language and texts, and (c) is appropriate to the needs of the students” (Stryker & Leaver, 1997, p. 5). The first criterion ensures that the materials to be used are the subject matters that the students will or are actually taking in the regular mainstream classes. Thus, students would learn a language by using textbooks dealing with topics such as math, art, history, or economics. In order to accomplish the goal better, the textbooks used must also be authentic. For a university or a school, these materials are the content

textbooks that native speakers of the language actually use. The third criterion requires that the “content and learning activities correspond to the linguistic, cognitive, and affective needs of the students and appropriate to their professional needs and personal interests” (Stryker & Leaver, 1997, p. 9).

Current literature indicates that CBI has been increasingly influential in the area of foreign language teaching. A great number of evidence has been provided. People have used this type of instruction for languages such as Russian (Leaver, 1997), Italian (Sternfeld, 1997), French (Vines, 1997), Arabic (Ryding & Stowasser, 1997), and Indonesian (Chadran & Esarey, 1997).

If we look at the evidence more closely, however, we will see that the success has been due to factors which are not usually found in normal educational settings. To begin with, we must say that many of the claims are based on experimental classes. The teaching of English in the former Soviet Union was an experimentation at a large number of schools. The same is true with the teaching of French in Canada that was conducted by St. Lambert Experiment in Montreal. The teaching of English to Spanish speaking people in California was a Culver City Experiment (Stryker & Leaver, 1997, p. 5). Since the nature of an experimental class is quite different from that of an actual and regular class, we wonder if the application of a CBI would bring about the same successful result in the regular class.

Secondly, we must also say that most CBI classes have been conducted in special schools. The teaching of English in Russia mentioned above was done at a large number of “*special secondary foreign language schools* [italics mine]” (Stryker & Leaver 1997, p. 15). It can be presumed, then, that these are not regular public schools in the country. In the US, the claim of success has been based primarily on results from special institutions such as the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in Washington, D.C., or the Defense Language Institute (DLI) in Monterey. If we look at these courses more closely, we will see that the success is contingent upon certain conditions which cannot easily be set up for regular schools, especially in developing countries like Indonesia and perhaps some countries as well. The teaching of Russian at the FSI, for instance, meet for 30 hours a week, lasting for six to 47 weeks (Leaver, 1997, p. 32). If only six weeks, the students would have met for 180 contact hours in contrast with 60 contact hours in a regular intensive course at a university meeting ten hours a week for six weeks. Programs at the DLI are also highly intensive with students meeting up to seven hours per week for six to 16 months (Corin, 1997, p. 79).

The students at institutions such as FSI and DLI are either diplomats or military personnel that would be sent abroad. They have the strongest instrumental motivation to succeed since the foreign assignment is contingent upon their language abilities. With the number of hours provided and the motivation available, we would not wonder the institutions produce good results. The question is whether they would not produce good results using other types of instructions.

The number of students in special classes like this is always small. The Russian classes at FSI typically have three to six students per class while the Serbian-Croatian classes at the DLI take only maximally ten students per class. The advanced class for Indonesian at the FSI takes an average of six students per class (Chadran & Esarey, 1997). These students are prospective diplomats or military personnel that would be assigned to the countries of which the languages are being learned. The teachers who handle these courses are also “special teachers” – almost all are native speakers with different professions. Those who are not native speakers must possess at least “superior” level of proficiency (ILR-3).

Outside these two institutions—the FSI and the DLI—CBI so far has also been carried out in special classes. The CBI in French at the Ohio University (Vines, 1997), in Spanish, French, and German at the University of Minnesota (Klee & Tedick, 1997), in Spanish at Columbia University (Klahn, 1997), in English as an FL at Kingsborough Community College (Kasper, 1995) are classes designed apart from the regular language classes. These courses have certain factors in common: (a) usually the teachers are well trained in the CBI, (b) the teachers spend extra efforts to prepare the materials, (c) the course is not the regular language course at the institution, and (d) some have outside funding.

Factors such as these give the teacher an extra leeway to handle the course differently from the regular classes. We have not been informed of classes in public schools that have applied the CBI on the national level. Even if there is, the percentage is very low. Snow, for instance, reported that of the 2,992 programs surveyed at US public schools, only 15% have been identified as “having *some kind* (italics mine) of content-ESL program” (1998, p. 244). In a geographically and populously small countries like Singapore, perhaps CBI can be conveniently introduced. In other countries in Southeast Asia, it would be hard to imagine how we are able to adopt this concept.

Brinton, Snow, and Wesche (1989 in Styker & Leaver 1997, p. 16) proposed three models for CBI at multiple levels: (1) theme-based courses, (2) sheltered instruction, and (3) adjunct instruction. In the first model the teacher teaches both subject matter and language. In the second model, the teacher is the content specialist, and in the third model the students are

enrolled concurrently in a language course and a content course linked through the cooperation between the two teachers. Let us now see if any of these three models can be realistically adopted in our educational system.

The first model, the theme-based course model, neglects an important educational reality. For a teacher to act as a language teacher and content teacher in countries where the foreign language is not the language of the community is unrealistic. I do not know what the situation is like in other Southeast Asian countries, but in countries where English is, to use Kachru's term, in the expanding circle, where can we find such teachers for all the schools in the nation? In countries like Indonesia, for instance, virtually all language teachers are not content teachers. Even if they are able and willing to use content materials, where would they get the materials from? No subject in junior and senior high schools in the country is written in English! Do we expect all these teachers in the whole nation to prepare the materials themselves? Even in countries like the US, those who do it usually either receive a grant or they teach special classes.

The second model, the sheltered instruction, is more unrealistic. In countries where English belongs to the Expanding Circle, it can be easily predicted that teachers teaching content courses such as history, anatomy, economics, mechanical engineering and other subjects do not master English at all. Some may be able to say a few English words, but certainly not capable enough to use the language to teach their courses.

The third model, the adjunct instruction, is not applicable either. In countries such as Thailand, Japan, Korea, and Indonesia, content courses in public schools are taught in the national languages. Students cannot possibly be enrolled in a foreign language course, say, English, and at the same time enrolled in content courses using English. There are just no such courses!

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing exposition and comments, we can note several important points. First of all, while we must admit that many ideas in foreign language teaching come from the West, not all and every one of them can be readily adopted in Eastern societies. Philosophical outlooks may prohibit, or at least hinder, the adoption. Secondly, even if theoretically the approach is adoptable, in practice it is virtually impossible. Practical considerations prevent us from applying the theories in public schools. I even dare venture to say that even the US or England can afford to have textbooks for content courses such as math, history, or economics written in the foreign languages to be used as authentic materials. Thirdly, the claim of success for the CBI has been proven only in special classes or specific institutions dealing primarily with language teaching.

As a concluding remark, I must say that I am not against the West per se—after all, I lived in the West for over twenty years. I just want us to be cautious with new findings. I am a great follower of the American philosopher, William James, who says that a scholar must be tender-minded in listening to what other people have to say, but tough-minded in ever accepting what they say.

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