International Higher Education in Japan: How does our program at Sophia meet the objectives?

Jim McKinley

The January 2013 Faculty Development workshop entitled Teaching Content in Multilingual Classrooms, conducted by Dr. Heath Rose of Trinity College, University of Dublin, raised some significant considerations regarding Sophia University’s objectives in providing an “international” education for an increasingly international student body. Especially as more and more “international” undergraduate programs (i.e. all undergraduate coursework in English) sprout up across Japan, it is of most importance now that we—academic faculty of Sophia University—clarify the objectives and goals of our programs. Our programs, while they do all have an academic English skills component, are made up of “content” courses, rather than “language” courses, meaning students access English and develop language skills through the study of subjects other than language. With the high percentage of bi- and multi-linguals at Sophia, it is easy to overlook the language ability of our students and to target the course as one would in a “native” English program, but Dr. Rose warns of the dangers of this.

The workshop required participants to explain and justify their teaching approaches, with sound reasoning behind the focus on sensitivity to language ability, and strong emphasis on the importance of making changes where they need to be made in order to reach objectives.

Dr. Rose’s workshop was organized as follows:

- The global context of English medium instruction
- The bilingual and multilingual student
- The curriculum of content-driven programs
- Understanding your students’ future English usage

The workshop began with a list of opening questions that were designed to get us to consider the relationship between the content we teach in our courses and the reality that students are learning in English, which, although our students (in the Faculty of Liberal Arts) include native speakers of English in addition to Japanese-English bilinguals, other English bilinguals, returnees, and Japanese speakers with varying degrees of English proficiency, the language of academic English is a foreign language for all our students.

In order to assess our attitudes toward our teaching contexts, Dr. Rose asked us to
complete the following table that focuses on opinions of our students and opinions regarding bilingual education. We used the scale:

(Strongly agree 4 ≤ 1 Strongly disagree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinions regarding your students and the program you teach or study in</th>
<th>Opinions regarding bilingual education in general</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students often don’t meet my expectations in terms of language ability in classes and/or in their assignments.</td>
<td>Ideally teachers of content courses in English should be Native English Speakers, or have lived in a Native English Speaking country.</td>
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<td>I often compare student performance with the level I’d expect to find in an English-speaking university.</td>
<td>Students need to have high proficiency to study content in English. (e.g. TOEIC 800+)</td>
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<tr>
<td>I spend a lot of time correcting or highlighting grammar and vocabulary mistakes in my students’ written assignments.</td>
<td>Content-based courses at Sophia University are inferior in quality to those offered overseas in English speaking countries.</td>
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Dr. Rose then explained that for any participants with a number 4 entered into the table, course objectives should be revised; as such a position is not taking into sufficient consideration the global context of our teaching.

The global context of English medium instruction

Dr. Rose provided an examination of the global context of English medium instruction.

Key terms include:

- Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
- Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT)
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- English Medium Instruction (EMI)

All four of these terms have significance in the programs offered in the English language at Sophia, but it is particularly Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that has recently received more attention, as it is particularly appropriate for our teaching context. Although English is a foreign language in Japan, it is less and less a “foreign” language for our students, and more another or second language. Dr. Rose pointed to Clegg (2003) for a comparison of foreign language teaching and
The significant differences are all related to the focus on the subject rather than on the language; however, the methodology still calls for language-supportive teaching.

Sophia’s position is no longer unique in the global context. Dr. Rose pointed out that “English medium instruction has become commonplace in many institutes of higher education where English is not the native language” (Wilkinson, 2013, p.3). While Sophia’s international program (now the FLA) was first developed based on a need for an English language undergraduate program for native English speakers living in Japan after the end of World War II, Dr. Rose explained that since that time, there are now, more than ever, economic, social, political and educational drivers behind the initiatives of English medium instruction causing the insurgence.

As of 2013, half of the world’s international students are learning through English (Ball & Lindsay, 2013), and Internationalization and English Medium Instruction are intertwined. Dr. Rose took us through an examination of the situation in the European and Japanese contexts.

In the European context, as of 2007, there were 2400 programs taught in English
at 400 mainland European universities and colleges. This is a 340% increase in just five years. In 2002 there were only 700 such programs (Wächter & Maiworm, 2008). Experts in 2013 say this trend is happening worldwide (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013).

In the Japanese context, economic and political drivers have been playing a vital role in recent years, and will continue to have a huge impact on English content programs in the future in Japanese higher education. However, the initial movement toward content was more driven by educational needs, rather than political or economic drivers. The needs have become very clear:

- Need for education of an international population
- Need for further development of high-proficiency students in universities known for language specialization.

Dr. Rose explained that the changing approaches to education are gradually phasing out grammar-centered instruction, once well established at the high school level, and are now expanding English Medium Instruction (EMI) and CLIL at the specialist university level, and that this change will continue until grammar-centered instruction is phased out completely.

**Figure 1: Changing approaches to education**

This movement, he explained, is just beginning in Japan. Currently, an increasing number of domestic firms are requiring English proficiency, using the Test of English for International Communication, or TOEIC. This is in response to globalization
causing greater use of English as Lingua Franca in business and society. For example, more and more international firms require use of English in some capacity (e.g. Maersk). Domestic firms are now pushing to use English as a Lingua Franca. Famous examples include Uniqlo and Rakuten. Japanese Universities are now attempting to tap into the international student market by offering EMI undergraduate programs.

The bilingual and multilingual student

Dr. Rose then moved to a discussion of how students engage in EMI in the global context. He began by defining bilingualism using the figure below:

Figure 2: Defining bilingualism

Dr. Rose explained the five cases:

- Monolinguals are predominantly single-language users. They have only marginal ability in an additional language.
- Balanced bilinguals have full capability and proficiency in two languages. One language is not stronger than the other, and they can function without difficulty in either language.
- Dominant bilinguals have partial ability and proficiency in a language other than their first language. They can communicate with a certain level of
confidence but their ability to use the language is limited in comparison with their first language.

• Subtractive bilinguals are those who have taken on the additional language in such a way that it has caused their ability and proficiency in their first language to diminish. While they can fully function without difficulty in the additional language, what was once their first language has become secondary.

• Semilinguals are those who are not fully capable or proficient in either of their languages. They have limitations in both, and these levels can change depending on their context situations.

When workshop participants were then directed to respond to the question: “What is the background of the students in your typical classroom?” it was noted that the student body at Sophia University covers all five of these cases, sometimes in the same classroom.

Dr. Rose emphasized that dominant bilinguals are not equal to balanced bilinguals and monolingual NESs. He urged us not to use native English as a yardstick for which to measure up all our students, as less proficient bilinguals (of which we have many in the FLA), and even highly proficient bilinguals cannot be expected to produce language skills at the native level.

Dr. Rose then explained the issues this presents for us in our classrooms: that many of us see the multilingual mixed-language-ability classroom as a balancing act between higher & lower proficiency students; and if we focus on language, higher proficiency students gets bored. If we teach at a high level, the lower proficiency students are at a disadvantage.

With a specific focus on the content classroom, Dr. Rose provided five ways to minimize language differences in a content classroom. He elaborated on the five ways by drawing on his own experiences with university content teachers who failed to minimize the language differences.

1. Do not use Native English as a yardstick. This first approach is a priority. While teachers may believe students just need to keep up the best they can and their language proficiency will follow, Dr. Rose explained that this approach is not grounded in any sound theory, is truly antiquated, and needs to be abandoned.
2. *Teach with language sensitivity*. This approach relates to concerns teachers have about the idea of “dumbing down” the content of their courses in order to meet the level of understanding the students are limited to due to lower language proficiency. Dr. Rose emphasized the importance of not changing the content of the course, but rather the language and vocabulary used to deliver and discuss it.
At this point, Dr. Rose then raised concern about the fact that there are language limitations that we have to acknowledge. In her doctoral research, Airey (2011a) explored student and teacher attitudes in a Swedish university where students learned through English. She discovered that students believed there was no difference in their ability to learn content in their L1 and L2. However, her study discovered important differences in learning and understanding of key concepts in the L2. So although the discrepancy was unnoticed by the students, it did not go unnoticed by the teachers, causing negative attitudes in the students.

3. **Shift the focus on assessment of knowledge of content rather than language use.** Dr. Rose explained that we should use a grading rubric rather than assigning an arbitrary score to written assignments and presentations. This way we minimize our evaluation of language as part of the final score. Also, we should not grade content papers for grammar (or at least we should not make this the focus of our feedback). Content, support for ideas, and successful communication of this content should be the focus of assessment, rather than grammar.

He then provided some sample rubrics:

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<th>PRESENTATION MARKING SHEET</th>
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<td><strong>CONTENT:</strong></td>
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<td>ORGANISATION:</td>
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<td>LANGUAGE:</td>
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<td>PRESENTATION SKILLS:</td>
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**TOTAL SCORE**

**Adjusted score:**
The grammar debate is a significant one. As teachers, it is difficult to justify giving a high score on a paper that is filled with grammatical errors.
As Professor Paul Kei Matsuda pointed out in his Faculty Development workshop at Sophia in June 2012, we should not be marking papers for aspects we cannot reliably teach ourselves. If we are not teaching grammar in the course, we should not penalize students for grammar mistakes in their writing.

This raises the question, Should students be treated differently? In mixed ability classroom, assessment is a point of contention for many engaged in CLIL. Ball and Linsay (2013) note that many teachers are torn between the unfairness to lower-proficiency students when students are treated the same, and the unfairness to higher proficiency students if a distinction in assessment is made. Ultimately, this decision is a matter of classroom policy (BUT lower proficiency students CAN outperform even the NES).

4. *Follow a standard text, or compilation of readings.* Following a standard text allows students to take advantage of their different strengths and weaknesses. If a student has had difficulty following a lecture, they can find the information in the text. Following a standard text can give our courses structure, which can improve understanding of course content. An important recommendation is to require students to read before the lecture (Airey, 2011b), and even assign papers for students to complete and peer read before the lecture.

5. *Adapt approaches to teaching.* Dr. Rose recommended that we try to employ more student-centered approaches to our classes. Studies in education show that students learn more through discussion and discovery than through lectures alone. In non-native English speaking (NNES) environments, different approaches can elicit more participation from students (e.g. engage in group discussions, before class discussion or student Q & A). Airey (2011b) found EMI courses to have less interaction in lectures and students were more hesitant to ask and answer questions.

Dr. Rose then drew on the literature for support for these five approaches. He drew on Wilkinson (2013) who stated, “Students may find that listening to lectures does not enhance their own productive competencies (writing and speaking) in the subjects of study. For this reason a student-centered approach has been argued as important for helping both academic staff and students” (p.15). Ball and Lindsay (2013) further emphasize the importance of a student-centered approach when they stated, “A learner is unconvinced that he/she has assimilated a concept until he/she has 'expressed it’” (p.54). It is necessary for us to bridge the gap in attitudes toward level of English proficiency.
The curriculum of content-driven programs in EFL settings

Dr. Rose then moved to a discussion of content-based curricula in English as a Foreign language (EFL) settings. He showed three different typical course structures. The first shows one similar to that of a number of programs at Sophia University, in which the language support component happens as a small part of the early stages of the student’s coursework. The second shows a much more intensive language support program, in which students may spend as much as their first two years on skills-based language studies in academic English before completely shifting to content-based courses in their final two years. The third is an idealized course structure that Dr. Rose explained may happen in other parts of the world; and he added the skills-based component at the beginning of the course structure to emphasize the importance of training students in academic English.

Dr. Rose elaborated on the importance of skill training in a content-driven curriculum. He explained that CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) is MORE vital than general language ability when undertaking content classes in a foreign language (Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2013). Thus, academic skills...
courses are essential for NNES [and NES for that matter] before engaging in the learning of content in a foreign language.

He stressed the point that academic English is NOT the same as native English. He drew on Klitgård (2011) to emphasize that “Academic language is no one’s mother tongue, and especially not so to international students if it is the alien version called academic English” (186).

Dr. Rose then took us through the curriculum he developed for the College of Business at Rikkyo University with a particular focus on the first two years when students are required to learn Core academic English skills in order to function in higher level business courses conducted in English.

Figure 3: Rikkyo College of Business Curriculum

Participants were then asked, “How is the program organized in the department where you teach?” We attempted to draw diagrams of our programs with some difficulty, coming to the realization that we are creating more challenges for ourselves in meeting curriculum objectives by not understanding the bigger picture.
Dr. Rose emphasized the importance that outcomes should be created from student needs. He explained that curriculum design is a backward process; it starts at analyzing students’ FUTURE needs.

Participants were then asked to write out two lists of outcomes including the outcomes that we expect students should know or be able to do at the start of the course, and then the outcomes that we expect our students to have achieved by the end of the course.

In terms of improving coordination between courses within a program, Dr. Rose emphasized that outcomes need to be 1) established for each course, 2) consistent for all courses sharing the same subject name, and 3) matched up with outcomes for previous courses and expectations of later courses; if not, the curriculum is failing to meet student needs.

**Understanding students’ future English usage**

The sociolinguistic landscape of English is changing. There are now more than one billion English language learners worldwide (McKay, 2012, p.28), of which 750 million are EFL speakers and 375 million are ESL (English as a Second Language) speakers (British Council, 2012). The population of the world using English on a regular basis has gone from one-fifth to one-third (Crystal, 2008, p.5). The majority of English language users are therefore non-native English speakers. The movement now is toward English as an International Language (not a native language).

What is needed in the future of content-based courses in international English in Japan is:

- Respect for multilingualism. Students’ first language is a resource, not a hindrance. We need to allow them to take advantage of this resource.
- Value of “non-standard” varieties of English. We need to eradicate stereotypes about “standard” English and encourage hiring of non-native English speaking content teachers
- End the dominance of grammar in assessment. We need to put emphasis on communication and intelligibility of ideas over adherence to grammatical accuracy.

Participants engaged in a lively discussion of striking the balance for their course objectives in consideration of the variety of language proficiencies and backgrounds in our students. We were all very appreciative of Dr. Rose’s highly informative workshop and his generosity in sharing his experience and materials with us. The
slides and materials from the workshop can be downloaded from his website at www.heathrose.net.

References