

## **Clear Content and Language Objectives for CBI**

### ***Objetivos de Contenido e Idioma Claros para Clases de Instrucción Basada en Contenido***

### ***Objetivos claros de conteúdo e idioma para aulas de instrução baseadas em conteúdo***

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## Abstract

When planning a lesson for Content-based Instruction (CBI), scholars recommend to include both content and language objectives. Somehow, there is a tacit assumption that CBI teachers already know how to write clear and integrated objectives. Nevertheless, some well-known researchers have claimed that this is a fallacious assumption. Writing clear and integrated content and language objectives for CBI does not happen automatically. Therefore, teachers find themselves wondering: Where should I consult for finding the content and language objectives for my lessons? What language should my lesson focus on? What are the elements of my content and language objectives? Is there a formula for writing content and language objectives? To mention a few. Based on the available literature and without the intention of being exhaustive, this work aimed at providing the answers to these few of the many questions teachers commonly ask when writing their objectives for CBI lessons. To attain this goal, the researchers consulted the limited literature available in this respect. The literature review revealed that writing clear and integrated content and language objectives for CBI is an intricate process. Objectives written for content or language lessons as separated subjects are diametrically different from the ones written for CBI. It also evidenced the urgent necessity of a guide for CBI teachers to write their objectives. Based on these results, the authors proposed a guide for writing clear and integrated content and language objectives for CBI lesson plans. This proposal aims at helping those pre-service and in-service novice teachers who are initiating this journey in CBI.

**Keywords:** content-based, integrated, Content objectives, language objectives, teaching guides

## Resumen

Al planear una clase de Instrucción basada en el contenido (IBC), los académicos recomiendan incluir tanto objetivos de contenido como de idioma. De alguna manera, existe la suposición tácita de que los profesores de IBC ya saben cómo escribir objetivos claros e integrados para IBC. Sin embargo, algunos investigadores de renombre han afirmado que se trata de una suposición falaz. Escribir objetivos de contenido y de idioma claros e integrados no ocurre automáticamente. Por lo tanto, los profesores comúnmente se preguntan: ¿Dónde debo consultar para encontrar los objetivos de contenido y lingüísticos de mis lecciones? ¿En qué aspectos del idioma debería enfocarse mi lección? ¿Cuáles son los elementos de mis objetivos de contenido y lenguaje? ¿Existe una fórmula para redactar los objetivos de

contenido y del idioma? Por mencionar algunos. Basado en la literatura disponible y sin la intención de ser exhaustivo, este trabajo tuvo como objetivo proporcionar las respuestas a estas pocas de las muchas preguntas que los maestros comúnmente se hacen al escribir sus objetivos para sus clases de IBC. Para lograr este objetivo, los investigadores consultaron la limitada literatura disponible al respecto. La revisión de la literatura reveló que escribir objetivos de lenguaje y contenido claros e integrados para IBC es un proceso complejo. Los objetivos escritos para lecciones de contenido o de idiomas, como materias separadas, son diametralmente diferentes de los escritos para IBC. También evidenció la urgente necesidad de una guía para que los profesores de IBC escriban sus objetivos. Con base en estos resultados, los investigadores propusieron una guía para redactar los objetivos de contenido y objetivos de lenguaje claros e integrados para sus planeaciones docentes de IBC. Esta propuesta tiene como objetivo ayudar a los profesores novatos en formación y en servicio que están iniciando este viaje en IBC.

**Palabras claves:** basado en contenido, integrado, objetivos de contenido, objetivos del idioma, planeación docente.

## Resumo

Ao planejar uma aula de Instrução Baseada em Conteúdo (IBC), os acadêmicos recomendam incluir tanto o conteúdo quanto os objetivos do idioma. De alguma forma, existe uma suposição tácita de que os professores IBC já sabem como escrever objetivos claros e integrados para o IBC. No entanto, alguns pesquisadores de renome afirmam que essa é uma suposição falaciosa. Escrever uma linguagem clara e integrada e objetivos de conteúdo não acontece automaticamente. Portanto, os professores geralmente se perguntam: Onde devo consultar para encontrar o conteúdo e os objetivos linguísticos das minhas aulas? Em quais aspectos do idioma minha aula deve se concentrar? Quais são os elementos do meu conteúdo e objetivos de linguagem? Existe uma fórmula para escrever o conteúdo e os objetivos do idioma? Por mencionar alguns. Com base na literatura disponível e não pretendendo ser exhaustivo, este artigo teve como objetivo fornecer as respostas a algumas das muitas perguntas que os professores comumente se perguntam ao escrever seus objetivos para suas aulas IBC. Para atingir esse objetivo, os pesquisadores consultaram a limitada literatura disponível sobre o assunto. A revisão da literatura revelou que escrever uma linguagem clara e integrada e objetivos de conteúdo para IBC é um processo complexo. Os objetivos escritos para o conteúdo ou aulas de idioma, como disciplinas separadas, são diametralmente

diferentes daqueles escritos para o IBC. Também evidenciou a necessidade urgente de um guia para os professores do IBC escreverem seus objetivos. Com base nesses resultados, os pesquisadores propuseram um guia para escrever objetivos de conteúdo e objetivos de linguagem claros e integrados para seu planejamento instrucional IBC. Esta proposta visa auxiliar professores iniciantes em formação e em serviço que estão iniciando essa jornada no IBC.

**Palavras-chave:** baseado em conteúdo, integrado, objetivos de conteúdo, objetivos de linguagem, planejamento de professores.

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## Introduction

As content-based instruction spreads to many countries and contexts (Thompson & McKinley, 2018; Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Lyster, 2007); the demand for a less exclusive focus on content also increases (Short, 2017; Nikula, Dalton-Puffer, Llinates, & Lorenzo, 2016; Spada, Jessop, Tomita, Suzuki, & Valeo, 2014; Lightbown, 2007; Bigelow, Ranney, & Dahlman, 2006). Even more, scholars have suggested that if content-based instruction is to reach its fullest potential, subjects immersed in the education process where CBI programmes are implemented have to foster both content and language as an integral part of it (Short, 2017; Schleppegrell, 2017; Valeo, 2013; Lyster, 2007).

CBI teachers who are at the very forefront of the learning process, most of the time, have to take responsibility of their professional development when in need of planning their lessons in which they integrate both content and language (Trojan, Cammarata, & Martel, 2017; Short, 2017; Savic, 2012). Seeking this integration might be a stab in the dark (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012) as there are many aspects that teachers need to take into account when integrating content and language in their lessons.

The planning stage of CBI lessons is one of the many aspects teachers need to consider. The inclusion of content and language objectives in a teacher's lesson plan might be a step of paramount importance if the integration of content and language has to be accomplished (Short, 2017; Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2010; Bigelow, Ranney & Dahlman, 2006). Thus, scholars have suggested that at the planning stage, CBI lessons require including both content and language objectives (Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2010; Short, 2017).

Nonetheless, filling in the content and language objectives sections of a lesson plan template does not necessarily mean that both types of objectives are clear (Baecher, Farnsworth &

Ediger, 2014) neither it means both types of objectives are integrated. Moreover, to write clear and integrated content and language objectives does not happen spontaneously. Thus, all programmes aiming at training pre-service and in-service CBI teachers need to instruct them in this essential aspect.

However, the literature on how to write clear and integrated content and language objectives for CBI lessons is far from being abundant. Thus, this paper aims at contributing to the body of research on how to write clear and integrated content and language objectives. It also aims at serving as a guide for pre-service and in-service novice teachers who need to write these objectives for their CBI lessons.

This essay examines some of the important issues related to the process of writing both content and language objectives for a CBI lesson. Issues such as the difference between goals and objectives; common sources of content and language objectives teachers can consult when crafting their objectives; the characteristics of content and language objectives that teachers need to take into account when writing each type of objectives. This essay also deals with the formulas to write both types of objectives. Finally, a proposal for writing content and language objectives for CBI lesson is put forward.

### **The subject matter addressed in this paper**

Writing clear content and language objectives is an important challenge that teachers face. It is “imperative we plan lessons that are not negatively biased for students acquiring English and that include age-appropriate content and materials” (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2010, p. 26).

In her study of 12 teachers from ten middle schools in Southern California; Short (2017) concludes that despite having trained teachers in including language objectives, among other features, in their content lessons, the results were not the ones she expected. She also points out the need for “practice opportunities to write language objectives for lessons” (p. 4254). Short (2017) also asserts that lesson planning assistance is needed for teachers to get used to including language objectives in their content lessons.

Additionally, in her research of the major patterns in content-based instruction lesson plans among practicum teachers at the final stage of a MA TESOL program, Baecher et al. (2014) found that around 50% of the content objectives and 62% of the language objectives analyzed were rated as not clear. These MA students had more problems with writing clear language objectives than with content objectives.

Baecher et al. (2014) and Short's (2017) results evidence the complexity of the integration of content and language objectives in CBI lesson planning. Paraphrasing Mutton, Hagger, and Burn, (2011), it is clearly unreasonable to assume that any beginning CBI teachers will be able to plan appropriately for the kind of lessons to which they aspire.

In what follows, some common problems CBI teachers face when planning their content and language objectives will be discussed and possible solutions will be offered.

### **Difference between goals and objectives**

For novice teachers, it is easy to get confused between goals and objectives. Although, in some disciplines, both terms have been used interchangeably (Harden, 2002) and some instructors consider them to be synonymous (Dooley, Linder, & Dooley, 2005). In CBI, scholars agree these terms are different. The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (2020) defines a goal as “the long-range intents or purposes for a unit of study” (introduction to objectives, para. 3). It states that at higher than secondary levels, goals relate to a whole syllabus or a unit within that syllabus. Thus, “goals are much broader and general than objectives” (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2020, introduction to objectives, para. 3).

Moreover, CBI teachers need to consider both content and language objectives.

Objectives are precisely defined statements that describe what a learner can do upon the successful completion of a learning experience (Veronin & Patry, 2002; Dooley et al., 2005).

In the field of CBI,

Objectives are written for the lesson level; they help transform unit-level goals into do-able stages or steps; so, each goal embeds multiple objectives. Objectives reflect the what and why that underlie the how. This is what distinguishes them from activities (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2020, introduction to objectives, para. 7).

Thus, it is clear that in CBI, the terms goal and objective are not synonymous; and cannot be used interchangeably. CBI teachers need to focus on different levels when crafting each of them.



### **Where content objectives come from in CBI**

From kindergarten to secondary levels, Echevarría, Vogt & Short (2010) state that content objectives come from state content standards and/or learning outcomes. Once the content standards have been identified, teachers need to focus on the unit and goals of the subject area of interest. Regarding post-secondary levels, teachers need to focus on the syllabus of a given school subject and again select the unit, goals and topic of interest.

### **Where language objectives come from in CBI**

There is a variety of sources of language objectives such as the state English language proficiency standards, the English as a second language standard, the national standards for English language proficiency, The Pre-K-12 English Language Proficiency Standards. Other sources include the state English language arts standards, the local district curricula, instructional materials, and course textbooks (Echevarría, Vogt & Short, 2010)

It is plausible that teachers need to invest some time in finding out the language objectives for a lesson as most of the content syllabi do not explicitly state the language objective (s) to cover during a lesson (Unterberger, 2012)

Moreover, teachers struggle to identify what language to focus on and how and when to integrate that language in their lessons (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012). As can be seen, this is not a straight-forward process in CBI. First, teachers need to identify the type of language (Short, 2017); and analyze the text structures in the material they are using. “Text structures are the language representations of knowledge structures” (Kong, 2015, p. 304). Kong (2015) also states that the text structures provide a means for identifying the language teachers need to focus on. Text structures reveal the content-obligatory and content-compatible language.

### **Content-obligatory language**

Content-obligatory language is the language closely associated with the content. Students find it difficult to master the content without learning the language as well (Met, 1994). Met (1997) provides an example, “it would be difficult to discuss the causes of pollution in the environment without knowing certain vocabulary (e.g., pollution, environment)” (p. 37). She claims that a few teachers have problems with identifying this type of language, as it is very necessary for the learning of content.

Fortune and Tedick (n.d.) provide some useful characteristics of Content-obligatory language objectives:

- Are necessary to learn the key content concepts for the lesson/unit
- Are primary – usually generated first
- Are more readily identifiable
- Are directly supportive of the “big idea” or “essential understanding” you are teaching
- Are essential to complete the lesson’s content objectives
- Act as the “Meat and potatoes” or “bare bones” language of the lesson
- Are required to learn for success with the assessment(s)
- May be derived from national, state, and local content standards
- Are content- or discipline-specific, more academic in nature
- Are “what-oriented”—the “what” being the content

### **Content-compatible language**

“Content-compatible language objectives are those language skills that might be taught within the context of a given content lesson but are not required for content mastery” ( Met, 1997, p. 37). She states that these objectives are less straightforward to identify. Teachers might find it challenging to recognize them in the content material.

Fortune and Tedick (n.d.) point out some important characteristics that might help teachers in the identification of these types of objectives.

- Expand students’ language learning beyond more academic forms and functions
- Provide an opportunity to sequence language instruction by reviewing previously introduced language and previewing language yet to come [introduce (I), repeat (Rep), refine (Ref), Master (M)]
- Provide “extra language” or “filler” to round out students’ language development
- Complement and supplement the content-obligatory language
- Are supportive of teacher-selected lesson activities and learning tasks
- May be derived from national, state, and local language standards (e.g., ACTFL, TESOL, etc.)
- Are inclusive of more communicative forms and functions
- Act as “language enhancements”; “above and beyond”
- Are “how-oriented,” not as much about the “what” of the content



At a more practical level, Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, (2010) propose six categories as starting point for generating a language objectives.

- Key vocabulary refers to the technical vocabulary and/or concept words that students need to read, write and/or discuss about the topic of a given lesson.
- Language functions have to do with reasons or purposes students use language in a given lesson (e.g., describe, summarise, apologise, hypothesise, etc.).
- language skills relate to the receptive and productive language skills of a language: reading and listening and speaking and writing.
- grammar or language structures involve verb tenses, affirmative negative and interrogative pattern, sentence formation, prefixes and affixes, etc.
- lesson tasks refer to the language that is embedded in a lesson assignment that a teacher can extract from the task and teach it explicitly in a lesson. “Will students have to take notes or explain a procedure to another student?” (Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, 2010, p. 32)
- And language leaning strategies may include pre-reading strategies (e.g., relate to personal experience), corrective strategies (reread confusing information), self-monitoring strategies (e.g., make and confirm predictions) or language practice strategies (rehearse phrase, visualize).

### **Characteristics of clear content and language objectives**

Echevarría, Vogt, & Short, (2010) advise to evaluate how clear content and language objectives are using the following criteria.

- The objectives are observable
- Objectives are written and presented in language that students can understand.
- The content objective is related to the key concept of the lesson.
- The language objective promotes student academic growth. It is not something most students already do well.
- The language objective connects clearly with the lesson topic or lesson activities.
- The teacher of a given course has a plan for assessing student progress on meeting these objectives during the lesson.

These criteria have proved to be very helpful and need to be at the disposal of teachers before, during, and after the process of writing both content and language objectives for a CBI lesson. Moreover, it might serve as a checklist for teachers once the objectives have been written.

## **A shortcoming found in Content and language Objectives**

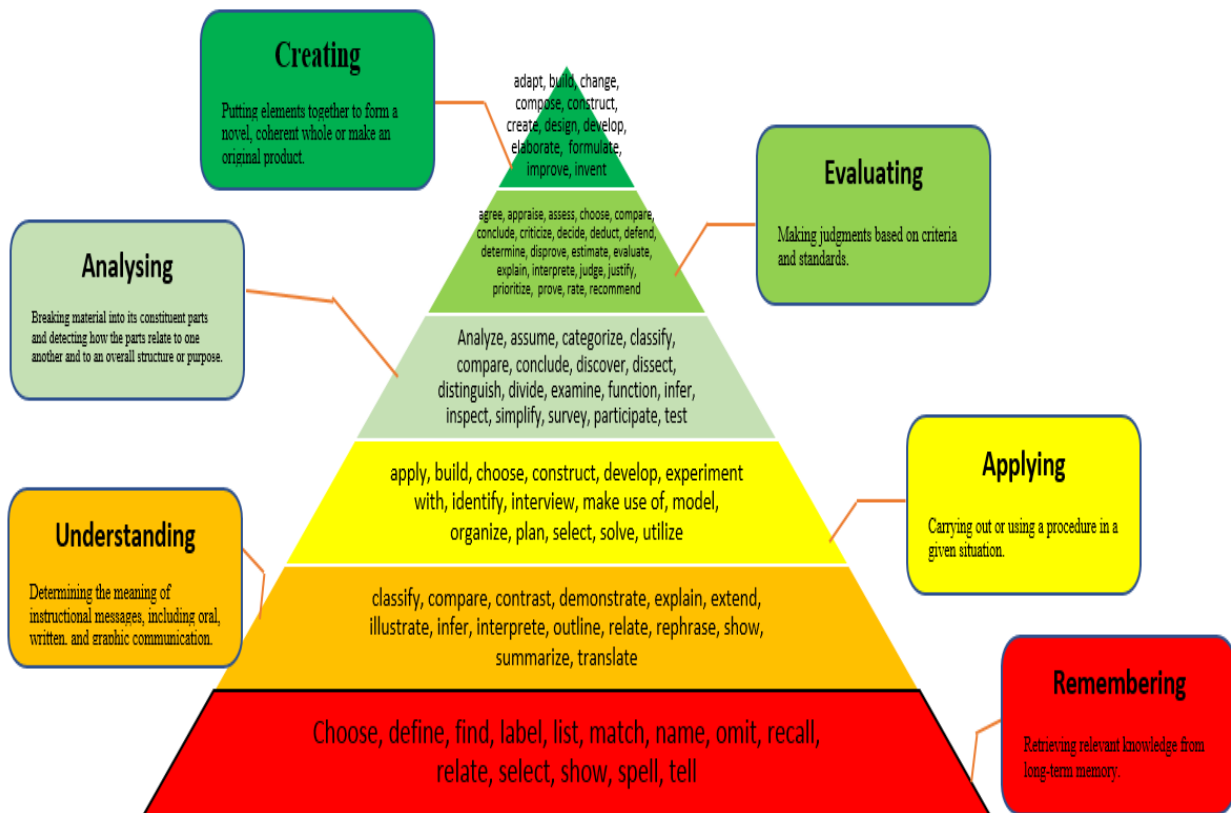
A common shortcoming found in the few studies that have analysed content and language objectives for CBI lesson plans is that teachers tend to write objectives demanding low-order thinking skills from students (Banegas, 2015). Therefore, it is suggested that teachers know their students and consider writing objectives demanding both low-order and high-order thinking skills from the students. To overcome this problem, scholars have put forward the necessity of writing objectives using Bloom's taxonomy (e.g., Dooley et al., 2005).

According to Veronin and Patry (2002), selecting the appropriate verb to write an objective is a way to ensure that an objective communicates its intent effectively. Although it might seem trivial, "Often the most difficult task in writing instructional objectives is selecting suitable verbs" (Veronin & Patry, 2002, p. 211).

Bloom's taxonomy has proved to be an extremely useful resource for teachers when writing their objectives (e.g., Dooley et al., 2005; Echevarría et al., 2010). It has six categories going from low-order to high-order thinking skills: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating, and creating.

The figure 1 below shows the six categories and some verbs that might be helpful for teachers when writing both content and language objectives of their CBI lesson plans. For a complete version of the categories refer to Anderson and Krathwohl (2001).

**Figure 1:** pyramid showing low-order to high-order thinking skills



Source: Based on Anderson & Krathwohl (2001)

In what follows, the formulas for writing both content and language objectives are presented.

### Formula to write content objectives

According to some scholars (e.g., Wandberg & Rohwer, 2010; Dooley et al., 2005), content objectives usually have four major component. In writing these objectives, teachers simply follow the ABCD method, where

- 1) A stands for Audience: who are the students a CBI teacher is writing an/the objective(s) for? (Dooley et al., 2005)
- 2) B stands for Behaviour: it refers to what the students or group is expected to know or is going to be able to do at the end of a given lesson. (Wandberg & Rohwer, 2010)
- 3) C for Conditions: “It describes under what circumstance, timeline, or situation the learning is expected. It answers the question: When in the instructional or learning process is the student expected to demonstrate his or her learning?” (Wandberg & Rohwer, 2010, p. 77)

4) D for Degree: it describes the level of learning, criteria or standards of performance expected or acceptable from students. “In measurable terms, this section answers the students’ question: What specific learning level am I expected to achieve?” (Wandberg & Rohwer, 2010, p. 78).

In short, the formula, as shown in figure 2 below, is as follows:

**Figure 2.** Formula to write content objectives



Source: Based on Wandberg & Rohwer (2010) and Dooley et al. (2005)

It is suggested that teachers start writing content objectives using the stem: *students will*.

Wandberg and Rohwer (2010) provide an example of a content objective that illustrates these four criteria:

Each student (= *the audience*) will be able to name the two types of carbohydrates (= *behaviour*) after completing the nutrient worksheet (= *condition*) with 100% accuracy (= *Degree*).

If we take another example from a British culture content subject:

Learners from the British Culture course (= *the audience*) will be able to name (*remembering=low-order thinking skill*) the four countries belonging to the United Kingdom (= *the behaviour*) after locating these countries in a given map (= *the condition*) with 75% of accuracy (= *the degree*).

Teachers should try to respect the order of the ABCD method’s criteria as they get acquainted with it. Progressively, they may vary the order of criteria as they automatize it and judge it convenient and appropriate.

### Formula to write language objectives

In CBI, “Most language objectives are best written with a “formula” in mind to link the grammatical structures that are necessary for carrying out a specific communicative or academic function along with the words or phrases necessary for doing so” (Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition, 2020, writing objectives).

Fortune (n.d.) developed a formula to help immersion teachers to write more specific language objectives. Figure 3 below is a slightly modified version of Fortune’s (n.d.) formula to write language objectives.

**Figure 3.** Formula to write language objectives

Source: Fortune (n.d.)

Here is an example that follows this formula:

Students participating in the British Culture course (= *audience*) will use prepositional phrases (= *grammatical structure*) to describe (*the remembering category*) the relative location of the countries that belong to the United Kingdom (= *communicative function*) with phrases such as to the south of, to the west of, to the north of, besides, between (= *words/ word groups*).

### A proposal for writing Content and Language Objectives

In an attempt to bring together both content and language objectives formulas, this section will show some objectives derived from a content subject syllabus from a BA in modern languages at a Southeastern Mexican university.

The name of the course is British Culture. At the syllabus level, the main goal of the course is to analyse the main historical, artistic, literary, and social moments that help students to understand the culture of the British people.

At the unit level, the goal of unit one is a historic and geographic overview of British Culture. This goal of the unit can be broken into several content and language objectives. As a point in the case, readers will find a content objective, a content-obligatory and a content-compatible language objective below.

#### First the content objective

The learners of the British culture course (*audience*) will tell the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (*behaviour*) after reading pages 8 and 9 of the coursebook (*condition*) with a 100% of accuracy (*degree*).

As for the language objective, the course instructor can decide upon two possibilities: content-obligatory or content-compatible language. For the purpose of this example, a content-obligatory and content-compatible objective will be created for the content objective above.

### **The content-obligatory language objective**

The students from the British Culture group (= *audience*) will use the simple present tense (= *grammatical structure*) to identify the different states that are part of Great Britain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (= *the communicative function*) with the verb *to be* using words such as is part of/ belongs to, islands, the British isles, the Republic of Ireland, Eire, Great Britain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (= *words/word groups*).

### **The content-compatible language objective**

The participants of the British culture group (= *audience*) will use the comparative of adjectives (= *grammatical structure*) to tell the difference between Great Britain and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (= *the communicative function*) with phrases such as bigger, smaller, more popular, less popular, more well-known, less well-known, lies on, because (= *words/word groups*).

Should we want to assure that both content and language objectives are clear and also integrated, we can use Echevarría, Vogt & Short's (2010) criteria as a checklist to evaluate our objectives.

#### *Criteria*

- The objectives are observable
- Objectives are written and presented in language that students can understand.
- The content objective is related to the key concept of the lesson.
- The language objective promotes student academic growth. It is not something most students already do well.
- The language objective connects clearly with the lesson topic or lesson activities.

### **Conclusion**

Up to this point, it should be clear that writing clear and integrated objectives for CBI lessons differ totally from writing objectives for a content or a language lesson as separated subjects. Thus, any assumptions that any CBI teacher will be able to write clear and integrated content and language objectives is clearly unreasonable. Moreover, many CBI teacher trainers assume that student teachers already know how to craft these objectives. This might be true for some but not for all.

At least in the CBI contexts, many teachers are appointed to teach CBI lessons without being licensed or trained to do so. Thus, these teachers, most of the time, have to train themselves



to teach these CBI subjects. They do their best to plan their lessons, although it does not necessarily comply with the methodological changes that CBI lessons require. Therefore, any effort made to help these teachers is without a doubt a step ahead in overcoming the lack of integration of both content and language at the planning stage of a CBI lesson. This paper aimed at contributing to this respect.

## **Future Directions**

Given that the aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical model for writing content and language objectives for CBI lessons; and that any attempts for examining this proposal in the field were out of the scope of this work. Thus, it is necessary to take these formulas to the empirical level. Future research must test and validate the proposal provided in this work. This test and validation need to come from teacher training programmes aiming at preparing students to teach English, both at a BA and MA levels.

The ideal context for this testing and validation is any English-speaking contexts in which training programmes are being implemented to prepare trainee-teachers to teach any language as a subject matter content.

Moreover, due to its long CBI tradition and the experience of researchers and teachers in this area, CBI training programmes in Canada come to be the best context to test and validate this proposal.

The second most ideal place is those BAs and MAs programmes taking place in non-English speaking countries aiming to train students to teach English as a foreign language. There is a long way to go before claiming any usefulness of this proposal; only empirical test and validation will determine it.

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