A Bi-Modality Approach to Language Program Design

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Abstract

One of the functions of the Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI) besides offering Foundation English and English for Academic and Professional Purposes to university students is to offer a summer intensive course for university instructors and government officials. The writing program constitutes one-fourth of the whole course.

The writing program consists of ten units incorporating main functions and topics of English use found to be highly needed in the Thai government sector in a survey research conducted by CULI.

Viewing writing as a dynamic, interactive and integrative activity of skill-getting and skill-using processes, the designers of the writing program have been integrating listening texts and video input with the reading texts to maximize the output via the graphic modality. The tasks, therefore, require the course members to listen-write, observe-write, read-write, listen-read-write, observe-read-write within the specified domains of language functions, topics, channel, setting and other necessary parameters.

The writer describes the program, materials design and preparation, and evaluation of program outcome. Sample units are demonstrated.

One of the functions of Chulalongkorn University Language Institute (CULI), besides offering Foundation English, English for Academic and Professional Purposes, Advanced English and Graduate English Courses to university students is to conduct a Summer Intensive English Course for university instructors and government officials. The intensive course lasts from 5-6 weeks with approximately 25 contact hours for each of the four language skills. The skill level imparted could be regarded as advanced since all the participants are required to have at least a Bachelor's degree, and many, in fact, are Master's degree graduates or medical doctors. Their purposes in taking the course may be either to improve their English for working/social purposes or to prepare themselves for further advanced training abroad. The participants have to take a placement test consisting of listening, vocabulary and reading, and structure and writing.

This paper will focus on the writing program, and will consider the aspects of program design, implementation, evaluation, and program review.

I. Program Design

In designing the program, various considerations were made with regard to the approach, method and techniques to be adopted, as well as to the characteristics and needs of the participants.

This section of the paper will discuss these considerations:
1. the rationale for selecting the approach
2. method and technique considerations
3. input considerations

1. The rationale for selecting the approach

In line with Anthony (1965), Brown (1980) and Brumfit and Roberts (1983), the designers of the program viewed approach as axiomatic, theoretical and descriptively referring to a general view of how language teaching and learning should be carried out.

Within the context of communicative program design, the four popular approaches among material developers and syllabus designers are thematic-topical, functional-notional, discourse, and skills approaches.

The thematic-topical approach describes language as consisting of an episodic mosaic. Everyday life topics may include automobiles: buying a car, repairs; banking: applying for a loan, opening an account; department store: locating facilities, locating items, purchasing an item, returning an item; emergencies: reporting a home emergency, reporting an accident or incident; drug store: over-the-counter drugs, prescriptions, purchasing an item; and food: food items, recipes, etc. (Harris, 1988)

The functional-notional approach describes language as objective/functional based and the purpose of language communication as goal-oriented. The functions may include requests, regret, promising, permission, advice-suggestions, apologizing, asking for and reporting information, identifying, instructing and inviting (Van Ek, 1984).

The discourse approach has as its backdrop the view of language as a mosaic of registers which may be vertical: ecclesiastical, royal, high-class, middle-class, laborers etc., or horizontal: English used by people in various professions or walks of life. The approach, in other words, is based on the theory that language for specific purposes and for different groups of users are linguistically different. *The Nucleus: English for Science and Technology Series* (1972-1978) and Bachman's *Reading English Discourse in Business, Economics, Law and Political Science* (1986) exemplify this approach.

The skills approach dissects language into four unitary skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing or into groups of integrated skills, e.g., translation via the graphic modality (reading-writing), via the oral modality (listening-speaking) and via graphic/oral modality (listening-writing, reading-speaking). The following chart illustrates an integrated skills approach which incorporates language contents and functions into a program.

Skill	Content	Function	Weight in per cent
Oral Modes			40
L – S	– dialogues	– asking/giving information	10
L – R	– lectures	– explaining/clarifying	10
L – W	– radio-TV advertisements	– persuading/propagandizing	5
	– radio-TV announcements, e.g., weather forecast, news	– listening for ideas, information, etc.	7
		– summarizing a lecture in writing	4
		– reading for ideas, information, etc.	4

Skill	Content	Function	Weight in per cent
Graphic Modes			60
R – W	– newspapers	– reading for main ideas	30
R – S	– encyclopaedia	– reading for giving an oral	5
R – L	– announcements,	report	
	notices	– reading for writing a report	10
	– notes–memos	– reading for elaborating a	7
	– personal	message in writing	
	letters	– reading and listening to a	4
	– business	related message	
	letters	– reading for clarifying a	4
	– explanatory	message orally	
	statements in		
	200–300 words		

Note : L = Listening, S = Speaking, R = Reading, W = Writing

For the CULI Summer Intensive Course the skills approach is the rationale for materials development and the teaching/learning processes. Thus, the writing skills are the underpinning of the writing program in which integrated skills set the framework for input considerations together with functions and topics presented and practised via the oral and graphic modalities. Diagram I (page 41) illustrates the approach described here.

2. Method and technique considerations

Methods and techniques are closely related as methods are procedural and techniques strategic and implementational (Anthony, 1965). Both operate on the continuum of learning strategies-LS-and communication strategies-CS- (Brown, 1980). Method considerations may be described as interactive operating on the LS-CS continuum and between learner-teacher, learner-learner, learner-material, and teacher-learner-material. Running along the LS-CS continuum are the intermeshes of types of practice and feedback/evaluation procedures and strategies developed within various frames of situation in order to fulfill the learning goals and objectives. Both productive and receptive modes of discourse are employed in the synthetic study of language use in various situations based on the principles derived from Searle's first aspect of language philosophy (Searle, 1974).

The interactive method requires dynamic and bi/multi-directional teaching/learning strategies. Therefore, the program designers pre-planned the activities for frequent use of English which the participants need and in accordance with their level of language performance and expected domains and standard of language attainment.

3. Input considerations

The term "input" as used here refers to the learners, the teachers, the materials developed within the framework of skills approach, interactive method, dynamic-bi/multi directional and bi-modality teaching/learning techniques. The "input" components described here are learners and materials.

The "learner" input consists of learners' characteristics and needs. The characteristics have been mentioned before so only needs will be discussed here. In order to obtain information about the participants' needs for English, two research projects were conducted. The first one was "Survey of Societal Needs for Using English" by Wangsotorn, et al., completed in 1981. To update the data, Pongpaew, et al., conducted further research of a similar nature in 1988. Preliminary findings of the needs for English writing of government officials, prospective participants of the course, have confirmed the previous findings for the most part. Ranked in order of priority, the writing skills needed are for : (1) business letters, (2) projects, (3) reports, (4) articles, (5) memos, (6) notes, (7) personal letters and social invitations, (8) essays, and (9) instructions. The purposes of writing, also ranked in order of priority are (1) giving information, (2) reporting results, (3) proposing a project, (4) giving opinions, (5) describing people/events/places, (7) performing business contacts, (8) taking notes, (9) inviting, (10) carrying out personal contacts, (11) persuading readers, (12) instructing and (13) ordering goods. We can conclude that the writing skills most needed are writing business letters, projects and reports in order to give information, report results and propose a project.

The "material" input for the program consists of various streams since the teachers are allowed to develop or adjust the units to suit the level of the group each of them is responsible for. Participants are grouped according to their skill levels. Group A have the highest skills while Group F have the lowest level of English skills. Materials for the mainstream have been prepared to suit the middle ability groups which are the majority. The units prepared are within the framework of the approach adopted and the needs for English use of the participants which consist of writing skills by functions specified above. The channel of "material" input for the writing program is bi-modality as described earlier. The activities are dynamic and bi-multi directional and will be described in the following section on implementation.

II. Program Implementation

To encourage the joy of learning to write, and the authenticity of language transactions to be practised in order to achieve the desired writing output, the instructors are encouraged to integrate the reading tasks with other visual modality like video and the oral modality of speaking and listening.

The LS parameters consist of some explanations of the topic or function, language focuses with necessary expressions, video or audio scripts, reading texts and integrated input tasks.

The CS parameters consist of input channels, settings, functions, role relationships of the receivers and the transmitters (newspaper readers and newspaper reporters, employers and employees, research fund granters and prospective grantees, etc.), bi-directional strategies for writing (business correspondence, exchange of information between two parties etc.), multi-directional strategies for writing or chain transmission of information through writing (1st transmitter to 2nd transmitter to 1st receiver to 2nd receiver-transmitter or a group of prospective receivers to prospective transmitters to actual transmitters and actual receivers, such as in business negotiations among various parties, competitions in writing proposals for a grant and preparing a yearly report for submission to the company board of directors, channeled through heads of units, divisions or vice-presidents and presidents).

Even though implementation is based on the same LS and CS strategies, each unit is not implemented uniformly. For example, the unit on "Letter of Enquiry" does not come with a video or audio script, whereas the unit on "Proposal" has a video script and "Memoranda" has a tape script. In several units input through the graphic modality contains pictures and tables in addition to the reading texts. Program implementation is illustrated in Diagram II (page 41). Section V of the paper contains sample units of the CULI Summer Intensive Course writing program.

III. Program Evaluation

Continuous formative evaluation through questionnaires, pre-post test of English proficiency and achievement tests are regularly employed together with observations and interviews. From open-ended questionnaires, the program designers have obtained qualitative feedback for improving the course. The pre-post tests of English proficiency yield quantitative data of gains in English after the 5-6 weeks of the course. The achievement data yielded both quantitative and qualitative information of each participant. Letter grades are given together with teachers' comments.

The parameters for program evaluation include input considerations, administrative aspects of the course and outcome of the program. Concerning the suitability of the program to the needs of the participant, information about the background and profession of every participant is available in order that the teachers can enhance their observations; they can also obtain feedback from an informal interview with the participant.

IV. Review of the Writing Program

To maximize the quality of the program, program review is conducted yearly. Classroom-centered research will be an ongoing activity. How to use OHP in a writing class, how to give feedback on writing to the participants or how to sequence the input in order to maximize the output are possible topics for such research projects.

After a five-year period of program implementation and continuous minor revisions, another major research on a large scale should be conducted for program review because the characteristics and needs of prospective participants tend to change over the years as the social contexts keep changing. The backdrop on the schema for the writing program has to be realistic as the program evolves. The designers of the program need to have a new outlook and to be ready for implementing new approaches, methods and techniques as the input and the expected outcome of the program keep changing.

V. Sample Units

To illustrate the ideas and information presented in the first four sections of this paper, a sample unit is provided complete with the teacher's notes and students' sheets.

Diagram I

Input Parameter of a skill approach.

Functions

Graphic Modality

Oral Modality

L-R-W
R-S-W

Writing

L-W
S-W
L-S-W

R-W

Topics/Themes
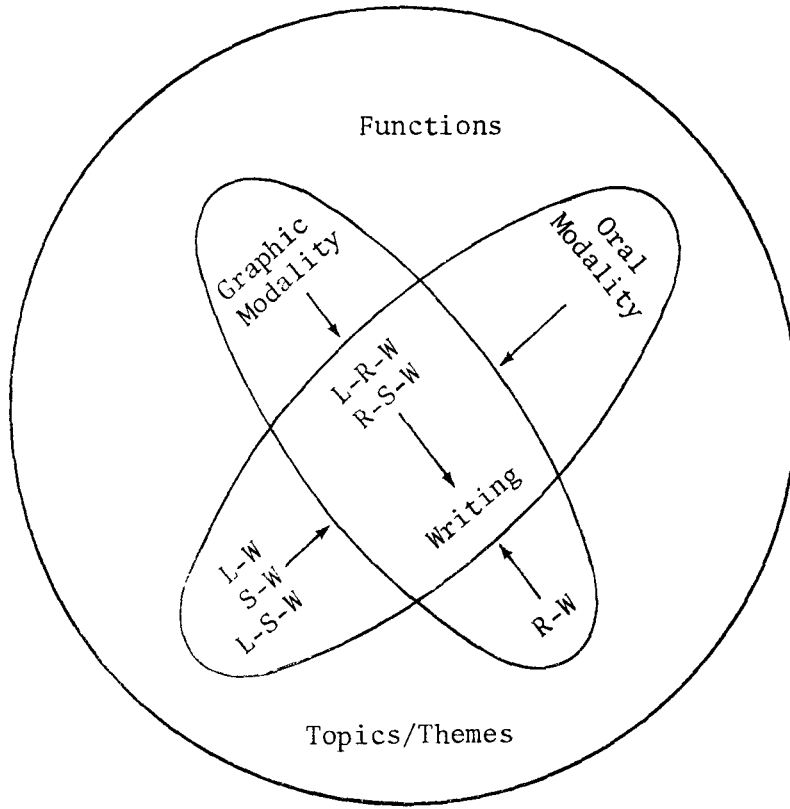
Diagram II

Dimensions of Program implementation.

Receiver(s)

Role Relationship

Bi/Muti-Directional

Input
Channels

Output
Channel

LS

CS

Settings
Functions

Transmitter(s)
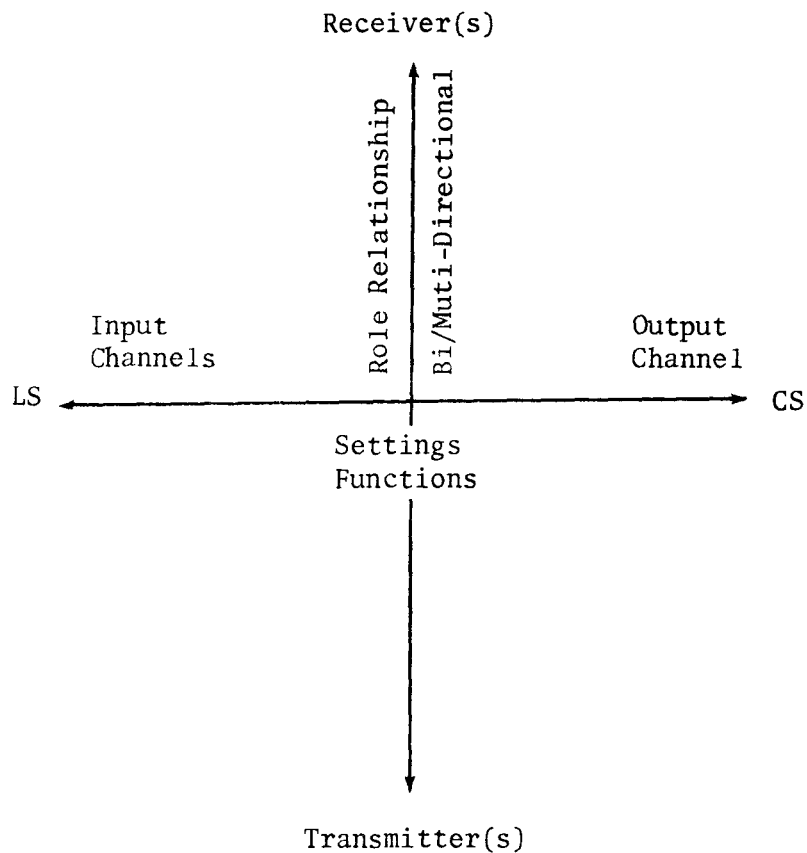
Appendix

Memoranda

Teachers' Notes

1. Set the scene by briefly describing the situation.
2. Distribute the observation sheet.
3. Tell the students to study the observation sheet in order to get a general idea of the content of the video.
4. Play the video once or twice.
5. Let the students work on the observation sheet.
6. Play the video once again to enable the students to check their responses.
7. Discussion.
8. Distribute the Student Exercise Sheets and let the students do the exercises.
9. Let the students check the answers in pairs.
10. Discussion
11. Distribute the video script and replay the tape.
12. Stop the tape at some crucial points.
13. Explain the language and culture points.
14. Discuss cultural differences.
15. Collect the students' work sheets.

Memoranda

Teachers' sheets

I. Elicit memo is internal form of written communication. Elicit need to record/have record of communication.

     N.B. pronunciation : to re'cord and a 'record

Missing items :

i) To ii) From iii) Date iv) Subject

Teacher should mention that there is no fixed order but To and From follow each other.

II. Suggested subject for 1 (b) :   Sales Staff Meeting
   1) (Staff) Punctuality
   2) (Annual) Staff Party
   3) (Department Heads) Meeting

III. If students have difficulty in writing memos from tape then hand out tapescript.
   Completed Memos :
   To : All Clerical Staff   Date :
   From : Managing Director   Subject : Punctuality
   Clerical staff are reminded that they must be at work by 8:00 a.m.
   To : All Staff   Date :
   From : Mr. Evans   Subject : Punctuality
   This year's staff party will be held soon. Please indicate your preferred date for the party.

Memoranda

Teachers' sheet 2

Completed memos (contd.)

To : All Department Heads

From : Managing Director

Date :

Subject : Meeting

The meeting of department heads scheduled for Wednesday 6th June has been postponed until Wednesday 13th June at 2:00 p.m. in room ——————————.

N.B. The protocol of some companies dictates that where individuals' names or initials are used in the "To" part, they should be listed in order of seniority.

Video Script

In an Office : Between an Employee and His Boss

B : Come in, Mike.

E : G'morning Mr. Coffin, I was wondering if ....

B : Call me Jim please. You've been here long enough.

E : Fine, all right. Jim.

B : What have you got on your mind?

E : Well, it's a bit of a problem. Well, I see it as a problem anyway. We need to have some painting done around here. Err ... some offices but particularly hallways, lobby, reception areas.

B : I noticed that.

E : Well, it's the first place people see when they come in the building and I'm sure that it influences their feeling about the business and I was sure that you want to get it taken care of right away.

B : I wish you had brought it to my attention two weeks ago.
     The Budget Committee met, decided on the budget. It's very tight.
     There's no room for painting.

E : Oh, I'm sure there's a way we can work some money.
     I... I got the crews .... the time right now.

B : I wish there were. I was just going over the figures and there was no way I can do it this year. Absolutely no way. Tell, what I might be able to do for you. If you could write me a memo. Detail what's wrong--how much money you need--the size of the crew--all the details. Get it to me within the next couple of weeks. I'll put it in next year's budget.

E : All right, Mr. Coffin, Er...Jim. I'll, I'll have the memo to you as soon as I can. All right, it'll have all the details and I'm hoping that....well, maybe with the memo you could even work something out right now, I....

B : Not now. But maybe for next year.

E : All right, well, all right, fine. I'll get the memo to you as soon as I can. Thank you very much for your time.

B : Sure, anytime you've got any problems. Fine.

E : Jim.

B : Right.

        * B = Boss, Jim
          E = Employee, Mike

Memoranda

Students' sheet

I. What is the difference between a memo and a letter?

Look at the following:

1 (a)

1 (b)


```
There will be a meating of
sales staff on  Friday June
2nd. at 3:00 p.m. in  room 104.
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Why would we use a memo format for 1 (b) but not 1 (a)?

What items are missing from 1 (b)?

i) _____ ii) _____ iii) _____ iv) _____

II. Subject line

The subject line is important because it gives the receiver an immediate and clear idea of what the memo is about. It should bé as brief and concise as possible.

Can you suggest a subject for 1 (b)?

Now listen to three dialogues and suggest a subject for each of the memos mentioned.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Memoranda

Students' sheet 2

III. We can use informal language in a memo sent to a colleague we know well but very often memos are written to people we do not know well, or perhaps not at all, If this is the case the language should be formal.

Listen to the dialogues again and write appropriate, *formal* memos. Make up information where necessary, e.g., who the memo is from.

Memo 1

To :   Subject :
From :   Date :

_____

_____

_____

Memo 2

To :   Subject :
From :   Date :

_____

_____

_____

Memo 3

To :   Subject :

From :   Date :

_____

_____

_____

Tapescript

1) Manager : I've noticed that quite a few of the clerical staff have been arriving for work after 8 o'clock. Could you send a memo to them reminding them about arriving on time, Jenny.

 Jenny : Yes, certainly.

2) Secretary : Mr. Evans, it's time to start thinking about the annual staff party.

 Evans : Oh yes, I'd completely forgotten. Could you send a memo round to find out what day suits everyone best.

 Secretary : I'll do it immediately.

3) Manager : When's the meeting of department heads scheduled for ?

 Secretary : This Wednesday at 2 o'clock.

 Manager : Mmm, well I'm not going to be able to make it then ; we'll have to put it off till the following Wednesday.

 Secretary : Do you mean the 13th?

 Manager : Yes, but keep it at the same time. Could you tell them?

 Secretary : Right away.

Student Observation Sheet

Notice the patterns of interaction between the Boss and the Employee.

Formal ..... Informal?

Superior ..... Inferior?

Unequal ..... Equal?

The atmosphere of the office.

Tense ..... Relaxing

Cold ..... Warm

Unfriendly ..... Friendly

The tone of the conversation.

Sincere ..... Insincere

Earnest ..... Playful

Rude ..... Polite

Aggressive ..... Yielding

The topic of interaction.

Personal .... Professional/Occupational

The purposes of interaction.

Request	_____
Suggestion	_____
Asking for information	_____
Giving information	_____
Order	_____
Hint	_____

The metalanguage aspect.

The gestures	_____
Facial expression	_____
Distance between the Boss and the Employee	_____

This interaction is

a success	_____
a partial success	_____
a failure	_____

Student Exercise Sheet

Exercise I

1. Identify the nationality of the Boss and the Employee.

_____

2. What was the Employee trying to do?

_____

_____

3. How many facts did the Employee use to support his points?

_____

_____

4. What were the reasons the Boss gave to support his point?

_____

Exercise II

Put the actions that took place into proper sequence by writing 1, 2, 3

order	_____
greet	_____
reject	_____
propose	_____
take leave	_____
explain	_____
plead	_____
promise	_____

Exercise III

From the video, what is a memo used for ? What would be in Mike's memo?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

The Author

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