

English Education and the Bible: Case study of CLIL-designed advanced English course

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英語教育と聖書：「内容言語統合型学習」を用いる上級英語コースの事例研究

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Abstract

The first step in presenting a course that utilizes the Bible in English education, especially in a Japanese academic institution, would be to clarify the necessity and importance of such a reference text. This course thus shows the Bible's significance as literature and the preeminent role it has played and continues to play in the development of Western culture. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is the vehicle which allows integration of a given subject, such as the Bible in this case, into language study. It has become the umbrella term describing both learning another subject through the medium of a foreign language and, at the same time, learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject in the given language. The advantages of such an approach (also known as "content-based instruction" and "bilingual education") include learning content as language skills improve, getting language learning integrated into the broader curriculum, and providing increased motivation among students who see language in their areas of interest and real-life situations. Obihiro University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (OUAVM) has been offering such courses for several years and has valuable experience to share with teachers considering the implementation of CLIL in their own courses. One course in particular, English V (Advanced English Topics), is looked at in detail in this paper to demonstrate the advantages of the CLIL approach to education and how it can be utilized to study the Bible. Relevance of the Bible in literature, music, art, science, history, government and education are explored and discussed.

Keywords: Bible in English education, bilingual education, CLIL, content-based education, language program, Western culture

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Rationale

The first step in presenting an English course on the Bible in a Japanese academic institution would be to explain its necessity and importance (relevance). Given that the Bible nowadays often conjures up images of religion and even fanaticism in the minds of the left-leaning xenophobic academia of Japan, one needs to approach the subject with caution and objectivity, weighing the evidence where it falls. One must not allow partisan scholars in the name of political correctness to suppress facts and historical accuracy.

Although there are religious zealots in the world fomenting hate, uprooting cultures, tearing families and nations apart, and seeking to undermine systems of governance in the name of religion, we cannot allow fear, usually stemming from a lack of knowledge, to push us into a corner, to cause us to suppress facts or information relevant to advancing appropriate knowledge and understanding, especially in the academic realm. Such disturbing images, indeed, paint a scenario that frightens the average person; and even in Japan, abuses of religion have peppered the news with ominous cults and scandalous Buddhist and Shinto practices over the years. The Bible has become synonymous with religion, and religion with evil, something taboo, not to be discussed but steered clear of.

On the other hand, rather than sticking our heads in a hole, like the proverbial ostrich, we must, as mentioned, seek to hold a dialogue and comprehend the real-life issues and fundamentals. The proverbial baby shouldn't be thrown out with the bath water. An article in *The Japan Times* implied that unless leftwing academics learn to value or at least tolerate diversity, the future for intellectual inquiry, especially in the humanities and social sciences in Japan, remains bleak.¹

Given these parameters on the one hand, it is a widely accepted fact that without an understanding of the Bible, today's youth cannot fully understand the Westernized world

and society.² In fact, based on research studies, regardless of a person's stance on matters of religion, an educated person needs to know about the Bible. Robert Polhemus, Stanford University's English Department Chair, asserted in a study to determine what Bible knowledge students need, that "The Bible is the cultural heritage of the nation we live in, and also the heritage of the creation of literature in English."³ His study focused on Bible literacy for participating fully and equally in Western cultural discourse—not a Bible scholar's knowledge, but a layman's literacy.

On a broader scale, the Bible has had a tremendous influence on people and cultures throughout the world and has greatly contributed to understanding global events. Its subject matter has permeated history and great works of literature, music, art, and scientific achievements, as well as provided a foundation for education, government, and law.

For these reasons, it is deemed essential that any academic program teaching English and seeking for any level of international recognition and achievement includes study of the Bible.

What is CLIL?

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has become the umbrella term describing both learning another subject, such as math or biology or Bible (in this case), through the medium of a foreign language and at the same time learning a foreign language by studying a content-based subject in the given language. The term CLIL was coined by David Marsh (1994): "*CLIL refers to situations where subjects, or parts of subjects, are taught through a foreign language with dual-focused aims, namely the learning of content and the simultaneous learning of a foreign language.*"⁵

Advantages of CLIL

Also known as “content-based instruction (CBI)”, “bilingual education”, and a host of other names (Fig. 1), the advantages of such an approach include learning content as language skills improve, getting language learning integrated into the broader curriculum, providing increased motivation and fostering thinking skills and application among students who see the importance of language in their areas of interest and real-life situations, and, overall, creating a natural learning environment.

Fig. 1 The various methodologies and programs employing CLIL principles.⁶

- Bilingual Integration of Languages and Disciplines (BILD)
- Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)
- Content and Language Integration in Primary CLIP
- Content-based Language Instruction (CBLI)
- Content-based Language Teaching (CBLT)
- English Across the Curriculum (EAC)
- English as an Academic Language (EAL)
- English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)
- Foreign Language Immersion Program (FLIP)
- Foreign Languages as a Medium of Education (FLAME)
- Languages Across the Curriculum (LAC)
- Teaching Content Through English
- Teaching English Through Content

Experiences of CLIL at OUAVM

OUAVM has been utilizing the CLIL concept in many of its courses to date, mainly with the language courses, but also in other subject areas as well. However, for the purposes of this presentation, I would like to focus on one particular course, English V (Advanced English Topics) and show how this approach to learning demonstrates the advantages of

CLIL.

English V (Advanced English Topics) course

Outline

English V (Advanced English Topics) is an English language course that is thematically centered on the Biblical roots and foundation of Western history and culture. In other words, while the course is taught in English, the content of the course focuses on the influence and role the Bible has had, and continues to have, in all spheres of Western history and culture, the cradle of the English language.⁷

Textbooks

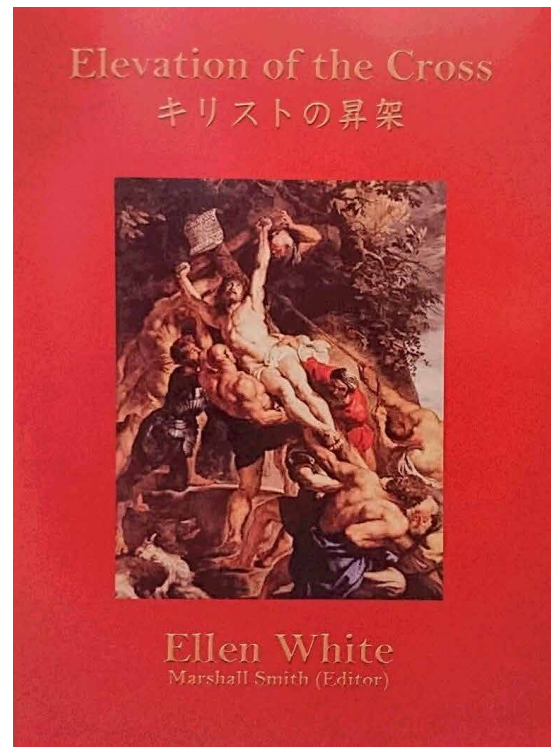
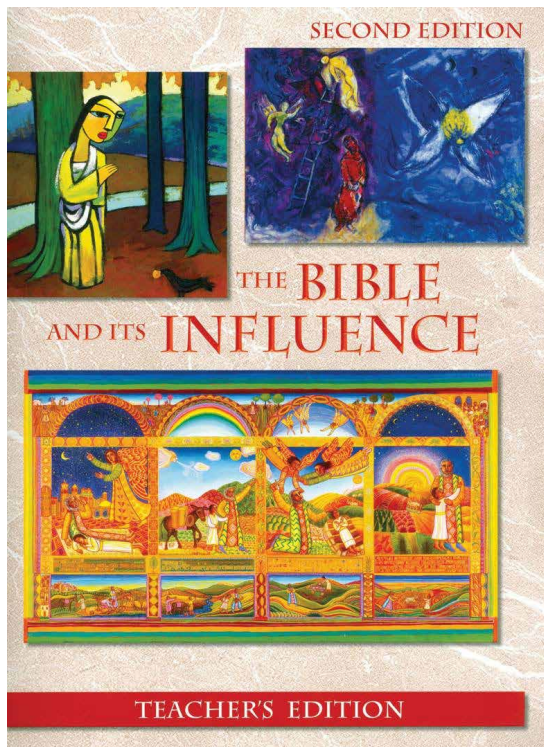
Accordingly, the textbooks currently utilized in the course include the Bible (reference book), *Elevation of the Cross*, and *The Bible and Its Influence* (Fig. 2).

Elevation of the Cross, written and first published by E.G. White in 1892 and edited by M.T.S. Smith in 2013, remains a best-selling classic volume on Bible philosophy printed in more than 150 languages and selling millions of copies.

The Bible and Its Influence, by Cullen Schippe and Chuck Stetson, was produced by the Bible Literacy Project in the U.S. According to the Bible Literacy Project website, it was initially launched in September 2005 as the only First-Amendment-safe textbook, compliant with the Constitution and Supreme Court rulings, that supports objective academic study of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It is used by thousands of students in public high schools throughout the United States. Because of its broad acceptance in the educational community and its widespread use nationally, it has become the standard for academic Bible study in the USA. It is also fast becoming the academic standard in the global community.

Developed over a five-year period with input from

Fig. 2 Textbooks for English V (Advanced English Topics) course.



40 leading scholars, religious leaders, and academic practitioners, this textbook provides an opportunity to share the contents of the Bible—narratives, characters, plots, poetry, letters, events, parables, prophecies, and proverbs—in an appropriate and scholarly way.

Bible and Literature

According to an article in *The Washington Times*, the first reason to read the Bible as literature is that it is a work of literature.⁸ Since the Bible has often been read through the ages in a religious sphere, many have been misled into thinking that the Bible is a piece of doctrinal exposition. This is a misconception. The form in which the Bible comes to us is primarily a literary anthology; a collection of varied literary genres (narrative, poetry, letters, and visionary writing) written by multiple authors over the span of many centuries.

What are the implications of this? The literary nature of the Bible opens the way to its being studied as part of the literature curriculum of any school. This is not the only

place in which to locate the academic study of the Bible, but it is the most natural place. Among other considerations, it is useful to note that there is something prototypical about the Bible. In the Bible we see the essential principles of literature highlighted. This makes the Bible the best possible introduction to literature and its techniques.

But is the Bible important literature? Yes, it is the world's most famous literary work. In fact, it has been and continues to be the central book of English-speaking cultures throughout the ages. It has provided the cohesive frame of reference for Europe and America. Compared to the Bible, even the collected works of Shakespeare are demonstrably in the second tier of literature.⁹ And so many of famous literary works, ranging from William Shakespeare to Jane Austen to Robert Frost, cannot be properly understood without a background knowledge of the Bible.

Bible and Music

In the realm of music, and the role the Bible has

played, we see that the majority of the great composers and musicians of all time, including Handel, Haydn, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and others, were inspired by the Bible above any other book and read it studiously. Their most popular compositions are based on Bible passages and stories, including Handel's massively popular *Messiah* and Haydn's *The Creation*. "Johann Sebastian Bach appreciated his heavily-annotated Bible so much that, when he was satisfied with a piece of music, he wrote the letters SDG at the bottom of the page - Soli Deo Gloria - For the Glory of God Alone. He hoped that when the music was played, it would point toward God."¹⁰ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart set many passages of the Bible to music, as did Ludwig van Beethoven in his universally recognized *Ninth Symphony*.¹¹

In early America, popular Bible-based hymns flourished, such as *Amazing Grace*; and African-American folk songs portraying deliverance from slavery, like *Go Down, Moses* and *Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?*, inspired social reform.

But the Bible's influence hasn't been confined to "religious" music per se. Popular songs by mainstream artists in every conceivable style have included references to biblical stories, such as country legend Dolly Parton's *Coat of Many Colors*, Lauryn Hill's *Forgive Them Father, Turn! Turn! Turn!* by The Byrds, *40* (Psalms 40) by U2, and *A Light in the Darkened World* by metal/hardcore band Killswitch Engage, just to name a few. Artists have always been drawn to the Bible's more colorful stories in hit songs like Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah*, *Bloody Mary* and *Judas* by Lady Gaga, and even Disney animation theme songs.¹²

These songs and their videos—like much of music in American life, whether classical or popular—depend upon a widespread cultural awareness of biblical stories, themes, and iconography for their very power. Those who don't know the biblical references can't fully understand what these artists are trying to communicate.

Bible and Arts

Throughout the history of art, many great artists have been inspired by the Bible. The most well-known masterpieces by Michelangelo (the Creation of Adam, David, Moses, etc.), Leonardo da Vinci (The Last Supper), Vincent van Gogh (The Good Samaritan, The Raising of Lazarus, Pieta, etc.), Raphael (Christ Blessing) and Rembrandt (The Blinding of Samson, The Descent from the Cross) represent only a few of a broad field of museum pieces portraying Bible themes.¹³ Without a knowledge of the Bible, a trip to the Louvre or British Museum would leave a person scratching his head and feeling functionally illiterate.

And in modern visual arts (movies and Broadway plays) there seems to be no end to the creativity the Bible engenders. Blockbuster films such as *Gone with the Wind* with Clark Gable, *Ben Hur* and *The Ten Commandments* starring Charlton Heston, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, C.S. Lewis's children's epic fantasy series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lucasfilm's *Star Wars* series, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, James Cameron's *Titanic* and *Avatar*, and most of the Disney animation classics, just to name a few, fuse Biblical themes into their stories.

Bible and Science

One of the most serious fallacies of modern thought is the widespread notion that Bible philosophy is in conflict with true science and, therefore, that genuine scientists cannot believe the Bible. As a result, many turn to alternative theories and explanations of history and the origin of our living systems such as evolution. However, thousands of scientists of the past and present still hold the Bible as the authority on life and its beginnings.

To name a few, Galileo Galilei, the father of modern science, was a firm believer in Biblical creation and the Bible as truth.¹⁴ Johann Kepler, famous for developing the field of astronomy and discovering the mathematical laws of planetary motion (known as Kepler's Laws), had a deep

appreciation for the Bible and its authority, and for the God of the Bible who founded the universe.¹⁵ Robert Boyle, the father of modern chemistry, who transformed the study of science into an experimental discipline, remained a devoted student of the Bible throughout his life.¹⁶

Then we have Sir Isaac Newton, perhaps the most influential scientist of all time, who was also a serious student of the Bible and published several theological works. Even in his famed *Principia*, Newton exhibited his belief in biblical creation by writing that “this most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being...”¹⁷

Even modern scientists have admitted the weaknesses and alleged fallacies of evolutionary theory.^{18 19} Due to the limitations of this article, I’ll briefly mention quotes from three of them. Darwin wrote in a letter to another well-known scientist, “The impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God.”²⁰ Sir Fred Hoyle, a commemorated English astronomer, stated, “Random and impersonal chance does not create complexity and design.” and “We must now admit to ourselves that the probability of life arising by chance by evolution is the same probability of throwing six in dice five million consecutive times.”²¹ Finally, Stephen Hawking said, “It would be very difficult to explain why the universe should have begun in just this way, except as the act of a God who intended to create beings like us.”²²

Bible and Government

Every year two million visitors file past the famed Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, USA. As they look at the cracked bell, they read these words: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” The inscription comes from the Bible (Leviticus 25:10).²³ Most English law is ultimately derived from the codes of law within the Bible, of which the Ten Commandments is pre-

eminent.²⁴ Thus, in the United States government, we can find the Bible playing a historical and central role. From the swearing in of Presidents to the Supreme Court, the Bible continues to be employed as a guiding light towards honesty and truth. Its emblems appear on the currency, engraved on powerful government buildings, and sung in national anthems.

The Bible provides the moral cohesion of society. Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th President of the United States, said, “The teachings of the Bible are so interwoven and entwined with our whole civic and social life that it would be impossible for us to figure out to ourselves what that life would be if these teachings were removed. We would lose almost all the standards toward which we strive to raise ourselves.”²⁵ Abraham Lincoln, arguably the greatest United States President, is quoted to have said, “I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man.”²⁶

Bible and Educational Institutions

One last evidence for the Bible and its importance in education is the role it has played in the evolution of education. Many of the greatest universities that exist today—Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Princeton, Yale, and so on—were founded as Bible schools, places to study the Bible. Among these schools is Oxford, whose motto (guiding principle) remains “The Lord is my light” (Psalm 27:1).²⁷ Cambridge University’s motto is “From Here, Light and Sacred Draughts”.²⁸ For Harvard, the original motto “For Christ and Church” was later changed to “Truth”. And Yale’s motto is “Light and Truth”. Finally, Princeton’s motto displays the Bible and translates as “Under the Protection of God She Flourishes.”²⁹

George Lindbeck, former professor of theology at Yale University, once described the cultural position of the Bible in American culture this way: “Its stories, images, conceptual patterns, and turns of phrase permeated the culture from top to bottom. This was true even for illiterates and those who did

not go to church, for knowledge of the Bible was transmitted not only directly by its reading, hearing, and ritual enactment, but also indirectly by an interwoven net of intellectual, literary, artistic, folkloric, and proverbial traditions.”³⁰

Summary

This paper begins by providing a rationale for incorporating the Bible into a CLIL language course. Following this is a description of CLIL and its dual-focused advantages. However, the bulk of the paper focuses on a case study, a course that has sought to incorporate these advantages into the classroom by combining English language with academic study of the Bible and its influence on culture. Classroom instruction and experience have provided positive feedback. The advantages of CLIL have become obvious in increased motivation for learning and fostering thinking skills. Students have also expressed an increased awareness of the importance of English. The justifications for combining a study of the Bible in this approach are reiterated as follows.

- The content of the Bible has had a sweeping impact on people and cultures throughout the world.
- The Bible helps us understand current events.
- Its subject matter permeates great works of literature, music, and art.
- It provides the foundation for science, history, law, politics, and education.
- Based on research studies, regardless of a person’s stance on matters of religion, an educated person needs to know about the Bible.
- It is hoped that, through this course, Japanese students are able to gain a broader understanding of the culture of the English language and other cultures, and be empowered to function more effectively as global citizens.

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