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RESEARCH PRIORITIES IN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents an overview of past and current research priorities in languages for specific purposes (LSP). The study examines the following questions: What research has been published in refereed professional journals in the U.S. in the past five years? What research topics recur in these publications? What research priorities did business language professionals identify in 1997 and 2002 conferences? How have research priorities shifted in the past five years? What are the research priorities today?

METHODOLOGY

The information for this study comes from four primary sources: 1) a review of 30 years of LSP literature from 1960–1990 (Grosse & Voght, 1991); 2) a review of published articles from 1997–2002; 3) research topics discussed at the 1997 SDSU CIBER business language seminar; and 4) research topics explored at the 2002 UCLA business language research priorities conference. Research trends emerge through a comparison of the topics covered in these four sources. It is possible to see which subjects have captured researchers' attention, and how research areas have changed over the past forty years. Past, present and future research priorities emerge in the analysis of topics covered in publications and at the CIBER seminars.

RESEARCH CATEGORIES OF LSP PUBLICATIONS FROM 1960–1990

Grosse and Voght (1991) reviewed the LSP literature of the early 1900s–1990, and found over 200 books and articles. Most of the material

was published in the 1980's, the last decade of the period they reviewed. This coincided with the national growth of interest in the field, and proliferation of new LSP courses and programs.

Grosse and Voght categorized the research base for LSP into seven areas described in Table I. They placed most (156), but not all articles, into categories. Complicating the process, research in some articles fell into more than one category. In these cases, the dominant topic of the article guided its placement. In their study, the authors focused on publications from 1960–1990.

The majority of articles (103) dealt with curriculum development issues, including the development and implementation of LSP courses, the place of LSP in the foreign language curriculum, model programs, needs assessment, and the interaction of FL programs with business programs and the community. The next most popular research topics were methods and materials, followed by career education, the integration of language and culture, the proficiency movement, discourse analysis, and vocabularies and glossaries.

Table I
Categories of LSP-Related Research Published from 1960–1990

Category	Number of Articles
Curriculum Development	103
<i>Development & Implementation of LSP Courses</i>	50
Place of LSP in the FL Curriculum	16
Model Programs	13
Needs Assessment	12
Interaction of FL Programs with Business & Community	6
Other Curricular Issues	6
Methods and Materials	15
Career Education	10
Integration of Language and Culture	8
Proficiency Movement	7
Discourse Analysis	7
Vocabularies & Glossaries	6
<i>TOTAL</i>	156

Source: Grosse & Voght, 1991.

RESEARCH IN PUBLICATIONS FROM 1997–2001

The number of LSP publications has surged in the past five years. The 172 articles that were published between 1997–2001 in six journals and two dedicated volumes almost equals the 200 publications from the thirty years between 1960–1990 (Grosse & Voght, 1991). The emergence of *Global Business Languages* and *The Journal of Language for International Business* gave writers greater access to academic journals that exclusively publish research in languages for business and the professions. In addition, two dedicated volumes for Spanish and Portuguese (T. Bruce Fryer & Gail Guntermann, Eds. 1997) and French (Steven Loughrin-Sacco & Janet Abrate, Eds. 1998) provided other important outlets for LSP-related research.

These publications help to promote and disseminate research in LSP. Christiane Keck and Allen Wood have edited *Global Business Languages* from its inception in 1996 to the present. Christine Uber Grosse, Eric Vogt, and Salvatore Federico served as editors of the *Journal of Language for International Business* from 1997 to the present.

In addition to these journals and dedicated volumes, the 172 articles in the Bibliography come from the following foreign language and business communication journals: *Foreign Language Annals*, *Business Communication Quarterly*, *The Journal of Business Communication*, and *The Modern Language Journal*.

The two specialized LSP journals *Global Business Languages* and *The Journal of Language for International Business* published the largest body of research, followed by *A Manual for Spanish and Portuguese for Business and the Professions* (Fryer & Guntermann, Eds., 1997), *Foreign Language Annals*, and *Making Business French Work* (Loughrin-Sacco & Abrate, 1998). See Table II for the number of LSP-related articles appearing in each publication from 1997–2002.

Table II
LSP-Related Articles Published in Journals and Specialized Volumes,
1997–2002

Journal	Number of Articles
<i>Global Business Languages</i>	55
<i>Journal of Language for International Business</i>	51
<i>A Manual for Spanish and Portuguese for Business and the Professions</i>	24
<i>Foreign Language Annals</i>	14
<i>Making Business French Work: Models, Materials, Methodologies</i>	13
<i>Business Communication Quarterly</i>	7
The Journal of Business Communication	4
<i>Modern Language Journal</i>	4
TOTAL	172

The topics found in these articles fell into seven categories. Some overlapped into more than one area. In those cases, the dominant topic was used for categorization. As in the 1991 study (Grosse & Voght), most of the articles dealt with curricular issues (42 articles), or the methods and materials of teaching languages for specific purposes (33 articles). However, culture (37 articles) took second place as a popular research topic. This focus on culture and cross-cultural communication represents a major new trend in the LSP literature. Other topics receiving attention in the research were communication and language use (21), technology (16), need/demand for LSP (10), and proficiency/assessment issues (8). Faculty development and other topics was the subject of the remaining four articles.

Table III
Major Research Topics in LSP Publications, 1997–2001

Topics	Number of articles
Curriculum and program models	42
Culture	37
Methods and materials	33
Communication and language use	21
Technology	16
Need/Demand for LSP	10
Proficiency and assessment	8
Faculty development & other topics	4
TOTAL	171

Examples of articles in each category are listed below. These appear in the Bibliography.

Curriculum: Wright and Borst’s “Globalizing Articulation: Rethinking the Business German Curriculum”

Culture: Bailey’s “The German Job Application: A Mirror of Culture”

Methods and materials: Loughrin-Sacco and Fronmueller’s “Developing Case Studies of Quebec Companies for Use in Business French Classes”

Communication and language use: Adachi’s “Business Negotiations between the Americans and the Japanese”

Technology: Kelm’s “The Potential of Multimedia in Language for Business and the Professions”

Need/demand for LSP: Vandeberg’s “Corporate vs. Academic Perceptions of the Need Language Fluency”

Proficiency and assessment: Campbell’s “Proficiency Testing for Business and Professions”

CIBER CONFERENCES’ ROLE IN PROMOTING RESEARCH

Title VI of the U.S. Department of Education funds Centers for Business Education Research (CIBERs) at 28 universities in the United States. One of the missions of the CIBERs is to promote foreign language study for business and the professions. To carry out this

mission, Susanna Easton, Project Director for the CIBERs at the U.S. Department of Education has encouraged the support of the annual CIBER conference on global languages, communication and culture for business and the professions. As a result of her initiative, many CIBERs participate in financial support of the annual conference. At CIBER 2002 conference co-hosted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University, 18 CIBERs supported the annual conference.

The 1999–2002 CIBER global business language conferences carry on the tradition established by the 1982–1997 Eastern Michigan University (EMU) conferences for languages for business and professions. The 1999–2002 conferences were jointly sponsored by CIBER institutions and hosted by the following universities: CIBER 1999 and 2001 by San Diego State University, CIBER 2000 by Thunderbird, The American Graduate School of International Management, and CIBER 2002 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Duke University. The earlier EMU conferences were organized by Geoffrey Voght and Ray Schaub of Eastern Michigan University. The CIBER business language conference, now sponsored by CIBER funding from Title VI of the U.S. Department of Education, continues to provide an annual venue for academics and professionals to meet, exchange ideas, and present their research.

CIBER institutions also sponsored a smaller seminar for foreign language faculty at San Diego State University in 1997 and a research priorities seminar in 2002. Both conferences sought to identify a research agenda that could guide faculty in their research on languages for specific purposes. To gain further insight into past and present research priorities, we will compare the research topics discussed at these two seminars with those covered in the published research from 1997–2001.

SETTING A RESEARCH AGENDA AT THE 1997 SDSU CIBER SEMINAR

Alvord Branan and David Earwicker organized the San Diego State University CIBER language conference that was held on Feb. 14, 1997. For the conference, I developed a list of topics for potential inclusion in a CIBER Research Agenda. 23 business language professionals from CIBER institutions attended the conference. These participants rated the research topics from 0–3 (3=very important).

David Earwicker compiled the results of the 1997 CIBER Research Agenda Survey and distributed them to participants later that day. His

handout stated that the raw numbers were “collected from an informal survey of participant opinions regarding potential inclusion of items in a possible CIBER Research Agenda.” The information below derives from Earwicker’s handout and was the source of the rankings presented.

The research needs identified at SDSU 1997 are summarized below:

- Need for FL & cultural knowledge
- Faculty development needs
- FL study’s impact on CIBER alumni
- Business and language class & community interaction
- Educational technology in business language classes
- Business & cultural content in FL classes

Of these topics, business and cultural content was covered most extensively in publications from 1997–2001, followed by technology, and need for FL and cultural knowledge. Topics that received less coverage in the literature are faculty development needs, FL study’s impact on CIBER alumni, and interaction between academic classes and the business community.

The average ranking of topics by the 23 participants appears below. However, the difference in numerical rankings between items 1 and 12 is probably too small to be of statistical significance. Therefore, we cannot say that any of these topics was significantly more important than the others. Instead, we can say that on the average, participants considered items 1–12 all to be important. Table IV presents the rankings of the 23 faculty present at the SDSU conference.

Table IV
Topics in the 1997 CIBER Research Agenda Survey

Topic	Average Rating
1. Assessment of employers’ FL and cultural knowledge needs in different business areas. What types of courses and course content would they like to see?	2.67
2. Assessment of business language faculty development needs. What training do we want and need?	2.61

3. How has FL study helped prepare the CIBER alumni for work in a global economy? What can we do to better prepare our students for the global marketplace?	2.60
4. Integration of business and cultural content in business FL courses	2.57
Interaction between business language classes and business community	2.57
Role of educational technology in business language courses	2.57
5. Comprehensive list of instructional materials used by CIBER FL professors for all languages taught: texts, case studies, CD-ROMs, videos, Internet resources, etc.	2.52
6. Perceived effectiveness of business language courses to current CIBER students and alumni	2.48
7. E-mail directory of FL faculty at CIBERs	2.45
Distance learning and instructional technology: new ways to reach the business community. Pilot projects to teach FLs to executives	2.45
Using case studies in the business language class	2.45
Business language curriculum: business/language/and cultural content	2.45
8. Ways to bring the business world into the classroom, and the classroom into the business world: site visits, guest speakers, volunteer service, videoconferences, Internet, e-mail, study-abroad programs, and internships	2.43
9. Collaboration between business language and international business faculty	2.38
Videotape series of effective business language teaching for faculty development: exemplary CIBER business language teachers, their beliefs and practices, syllabi and teaching materials	2.38
10. Faculty rewards for teaching business language	2.33
11. Analysis of syllabi of business FL courses: course goals, content, instructional materials,	2.32

assessment procedures, and learning tasks	
Business language training in US corporations	2.32
12. Compare and contrast professors', students', and alumni's views on what should be taught and how in business language courses	2.30
Funding sources for business language research	2.30
13. New survey of business languages in the FL curriculum	2.26
14. How does business language training in other countries compare to CIBER FL training?	2.25
15. Interviews with CEOs on FL and cultural knowledge demands of their jobs	2.23
16. Pilot study of 2-way faculty development: intensive FL courses for business and intensive business courses for FL faculty	2.13
17. Marketing strategy to promote study of less commonly taught languages	1.81

RESEARCH PRIORITIES FROM THE 2002 UCLA CIBER SEMINAR

With CIBER sponsorship, Russ Campbell, Professor Emeritus of Applied Linguistics and TESL at UCLA organized a small seminar on research priorities in business language education in February 2002. At the meeting, ten researchers primarily from CIBER institutions discussed current research needs in business languages. This meeting was conducted without access or reference to the research priorities ranked at the 1997 SDSU meeting. Starting fresh, each researcher identified pressing needs in languages for specific purposes, and brought a one-page description of the topic to share with colleagues at the meeting.

Participants included Toni Cowles from Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania, T. Bruce Fryer from the University of South Carolina, Christine Uber Grosse from Thunderbird, the American Graduate School of International Management, Orlando Kelm from the University of Texas at Austin, Roberta Lavine from the University of Maryland, College Park, Steven Loughrin-Sacco from San Diego State University, Patricia Paulsell from Michigan State University, Yihua Wang from UCLA, and Allen Wood from Purdue University.

A sample description of a research project submitted by the author follows.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES IN BUSINESS LANGUAGE EDUCATION

UCLA Conference Feb. 8–9,2002

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“The competitive advantage of foreign language and cultural
competence”

Research Question

What competitive advantage do foreign language skills and cultural competence give U.S. executives working in international business at home and abroad? How do executives use their foreign language skills at work? How do they use knowledge of other cultures to conduct international business? How do they value their skills, and how are they valued by superiors? What is the general level of foreign language and cultural competence of U.S. executives working in the international divisions of Fortune 500 companies?

This research project addresses these questions to gain insight into the competitive advantage that foreign language skills and cultural competence give U.S. executives who conduct international business at home and abroad.

Significance of the Question

This study assesses the utility of foreign language and cultural knowledge for 200 U.S. managers working in the international division of Fortune 500 companies. The results of the research yield valuable information about 1) the workplace value of foreign language and cultural competence for U.S. businesspeople; 2) how executives use these skills on the job; 3) the competitive advantage that these skills give managers; 4) executives’ background in foreign language and cultural study; and 5) their need for additional training in foreign languages and cultural knowledge. The final results provide insight into how U.S. executives use foreign language and cultural skills to compete in the global marketplace. This information will help universities enhance

current course offerings to help U.S. business compete better in the international market.

Research Methods

To conduct the research for this project, I will administer a questionnaire to 200 U.S. executives who work for international divisions of Fortune 500 firms. Half of the sample will live and work in the United States, while the other half will live overseas. I will prepare a questionnaire for executives concerning their foreign language and cultural knowledge, the value of their skills, and how they apply them at work. I will ask if their present knowledge of foreign language and culture is sufficient for their work, or if they need additional skills.

The research questions presented by each participant at the UCLA 2002 seminar are summarized below. The principal topics appear in capital letters beside the author's name.

Research Questions and Topics

Maria A. Cowles, Wharton PLACE OF LSP IN FL CURRICULUM

- “Is there a field of business language?”

Bruce Fryer, South Carolina VALUE OF FL STUDY, LANG. USE, PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

- What do the career patterns of our graduates five years after graduation reflect about the use of, and importance of, language skills and their language learning experience?

Christine Uber Grosse, Thunderbird VALUE OF FL STUDY, LANG. USE

- What competitive advantage do FL skills & cultural competence give US executives working in international business?
- How do executives use FL skills at work?
- How do they use cultural knowledge?
- How do they and their superiors value FL skills?

Orlando Kelm, Texas at Austin PROFICIENCY, PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS, METHODS, FACULTY DEVELOPMENT

- Are students acquiring adequate proficiency in real-world skills in business language and culture?
- How do we identify, teach and assess these real-world skills?
- How do we prepare language professionals to assist learners in obtaining these skills?

Roberta Lavine, Maryland-College Park CULTURE, PROFICIENCY

- What are students' cultural perceptions before and after instruction in cross-cultural communication in business language courses?
- What understanding do students have of their own culture?
- What notions do students have about other cultures?

Steven Loughrin-Sacco, San Diego State University PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS, PROFICIENCY, CURRICULUM

- What is the impact of second-language specific, discipline-oriented, long-term study abroad on language acquisition of business and international business majors?

Patricia Paulsell, Michigan State University NEED FOR LSP, CULTURE, PROFICIENCY

- What cultural competence do our graduates need to perform successfully on the job?
- How and to what extent do students develop cultural competencies in business settings?

Yihua Wang, UCLA CULTURE

Define "business culture."

Allen Wood, Purdue University FACULTY REWARDS, NETWORK, TECHNOLOGY, RESEARCH

- How are faculty recognized and rewarded for their research in LSP?
- Directory of LSP researchers, teachers, and academic affiliations

- Annual bibliography of LSP articles, books and research projects
- What is the relationship of Internet and business languages in the business world and classroom?
- Standards for business language proficiency involving levels of knowledge of language and culture to be effective in business environment
- Online discussion group (listserv) for LSP
- CIBER Web site for working papers in LSP

Emerging Trends in LSP Research Priorities

From the UCLA CIBER Research Priorities conference, the following questions emerged as research needs:

- What is the value of foreign language and cultural knowledge to our students and business executives?
- How do executives use foreign languages and cultural knowledge on the job?
- How effective are our programs? How well do we teach what our students need to know now, and five to ten years from now?
- What proficiency levels are needed by our students and business executives, in terms of foreign language and cultural knowledge?
- How do we prepare teachers to teach LSP?
- How do we define business culture and what to teach?
- What is the place of LSP in the FL curriculum?
- How do academic institutions and department chairs reward faculty for research and teaching in LSP?
- How can we improve networking among faculty and sharing of research?

CONCLUSIONS

Opportunities for research abound in LSP, as this study shows. Trends show a need for research into areas such as educational program effectiveness, cultural and FL needs of business people, actual language and cultural knowledge use by professionals, and defining business culture. Major outlets for publication include *Global Business Languages* and *The Journal of Language for International Business*. However,

researchers should consider publishing more of their articles in journals such as the *Modern Language Journal* and *Foreign Language Annals* to ensure wider professional awareness by colleagues with a limited understanding of LSP.

The spread of CIBER institutions and their mission to promote foreign languages for business ensures funding for LSP-related research projects. The findings of this study may help colleagues to convince administrators of the need for their specific research project.

A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the CIBER 2002 conference on March 12, 2002 at the Duke/UNC Chapel Hill business language conference. This research was supported by the Thunderbird CIBER.

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