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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

American business needs every advantage it can get, now more than ever. The post-recession economic recovery in the United States continues to be slow, fragile, and insular, lacking vigorous and general growth in all sectors, regions, and demographic levels. International competition is intense, production costs continue to rise, and profit margins are narrow. We are reminded almost daily of the porous nature of America's borders, with immigration issues and the threat of geopolitical violence. Yet as a country we continue to live and conduct business in near linguistic isolation, an understandable consequence of our vast (mostly monolingual) geographic size and the predominance of English as an international language. American businesses have been slow in responding to the advantages held by their foreign competitors, whose linguistic and cultural competencies have placed them in a stronger position for closing deals and increasing sales because of a better knowledge of a trade partner's customs.

The past year has seen a decline in US imports and exports, with a marked trade imbalance resulting in greater imports than exports. With regard to specific trade partners, the US saw a sharp decline in exports to China, a major decline to Mexico, and a moderate decline to India and Canada. These declines may be due to a variety of factors, among which may figure linguistic deficiencies that hinder US companies. In the online site *The Language Flagship*, a recent article entitled "What Business Wants: Language Needs in the 21st Century" indicates the crucial role that intercultural and linguistic competence plays in the world today. Among a number of pertinent observations, the article states "Developing new business, especially negotiating complex arrangements, increasingly requires a full knowledge of the language and culture of the region." Without such knowledge, one faces many challenges, as Elizabeth Lord Stuart of the US-Algeria Business Council is quoted as explaining, "The lack of language skills among U.S. businessmen [*sic*] is an enormous barrier to increasing U.S. participation in overseas markets."

The theme of this year's issue of *Global Business Languages* is "Reaching In, Reaching Out," which places an emphasis on companies and educational institutions examining their own internal personnel, programs, and strategies that provide for international cultural competence before they reach out to global companies or institutions. It calls for an assessment of one's own strengths before reaching out to partners around the world. The following articles present a number of different aspects that relate to this need.

The first two articles address the intersecting issues of ecological sustainability, business, and language learning. In Margaret Gonglewski and Anna H. Helm's study, "Sustainability Pedagogies for the Business Language Classroom," the authors present methods for educators to integrate concepts of sustainability through experiential learning and case studies of companies that have been working to solve ecological concerns related to their practices. In their article "Incorporating Global Sustainability in the Business Language Curriculum," Steven J. Sacco, Altina M. Jones, and Richard L. Sacco examine the use of their own case studies that focus on Africa. Students are actively engaged as they are required to complete the information about a given challenge, and provide possible solutions that are sustainable and effective.

An evaluation of current Spanish textbooks and their intercultural components is provided in Maida Watson's article "Teaching Culture in Textbooks for Spanish for Business Published in Spain." The comparative study should be useful for those wishing to adopt a text, and for those studying pedagogical approaches and trends.

Diana M. Ruggiero's study, entitled "Graduate Courses in Languages for Specific Purposes: Needs, Challenges, and Models," analyzes the need for foreign language curricula to expand their offerings and incorporate business language courses not only at the university undergraduate level, but especially at the graduate level, so that "students [can] adapt and apply their education to the ever-changing demands of today's global society."

In response to changing technologies that relate to students' interests and abilities, the article by Annie Abbott, "Incorporating New Areas of Business into Business Language Studies: Social Media Marketing," provides some innovative means for using podcasts and social media in Business Spanish courses. Companies are increasingly using social media for advertising and promotion, and students need to be familiar with this marketing tool. In the article "The Six-Tier Communication Gap for Multinational Corporations after Mergers and Acquisitions," May Hongmei Gao examines issues that arose after the acquisition of the Chinese battery company Nanfu by Duracell. Various communication problems are identified, which can provide important materials for the classroom and corporate world.

In the article "Action-Based Learning for Language Proficiency and Cross-Cultural Competence," Yi Zhou applies a learning method to real problems in a business language context in order for students to determine an action to be taken. As a result, "students gained a new appreciation for the true value of being open to questions, misunderstandings, and conflict caused by cross-cultural communications." Finally, Judith Ainsworth's study "The

‘Why’ and ‘How’ of Task-Based Language Learning for Advanced Business French” provides a detailed explanation of task-based learning that emphasizes language and culture learning in a utilitarian context, “with reference to social, psycholinguistic, and cognitive approaches to language processing.” It is an effective approach for advanced learners, who use their linguistic and cultural knowledge in real-world professional situations. As with many of the other pedagogical models, we see that this is one more way in which young professionals are learning to reach out to the current business environment.

This year we at *Global Business Languages* are proud to announce that Associate Professor Ahmed Idrissi Alami, a Purdue expert in Arabic language and culture, is joining the journal as co-editor. He brings much experience to the field, and has already proven his editorial skills.

We can be reached at our email addresses: wooda@purdue.edu and aidrissi@purdue.edu. For more information you can visit us also at our website <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/>. We hope that this will help facilitate your access to our journal.

We would like to express our deep gratitude to Madeleine M. Henry, Head of the School of Languages and Cultures at Purdue University. Without the School’s financial support that she provided, this publication would not have been possible.

We hope you find the following studies useful.

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