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## Infusing the National Standards into Business Language Curricula

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## INFUSING THE NATIONAL STANDARDS INTO BUSINESS LANGUAGE CURRICULA

### ABSTRACT

This article attempts to promote business language instruction at K–12 levels, particularly in high school settings, by discussing business language education in light of principles and guidelines of world language education addressed in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999; hereafter, National Standards). It highlights the correspondence between the National Standards, which provide a foundation for language class curricula especially in grades K–12, and business language instruction, examining how principles of language learning proposed in the National Standards can be applied to business language instruction. It further provides suggestions as to how business language instruction can be adapted in high school settings and introduces case studies of business Japanese lesson plans implemented by high school teachers. In conclusion, the article encourages more empirical studies of teaching business language in high school settings.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, interest in teaching business languages in grades K–12 has been increasing in the United States. Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERS),<sup>1</sup> supported by the US Department of Education, whose mission is to promote international understanding and competitiveness and to support international business education including language training, have undertaken rigorous outreach initiatives to enhance business language education in Grades K–12<sup>2</sup> (Centers for International Business Education). This article attempts to further promote business language instruction at

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on CIBERS, please visit <<http://ciberweb.msu.edu/about.asp>>.

<sup>2</sup> There are workshops on business language instruction targeting K–12 levels offered by CIBERS, such as the K–12 Language for Business Conference offered by Florida International University CIBER (<http://ciber.fiu.edu/k12language.php>) and Summer Institute in Teaching Language for Business Communication by PennLauder CIBER ([http://www.lauder.wharton.upenn.edu/ciber/academics/professional\\_development.asp](http://www.lauder.wharton.upenn.edu/ciber/academics/professional_development.asp)).

K–12 levels, particularly in high school settings, by discussing business language education in light of principles and guidelines for world language education addressed in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (1999; National Standards, hereafter). The article highlights the correspondence between the National Standards, a foundation for language class curricula especially in grades K–12, and business language instruction, examining how principles of language learning proposed in the National Standards can be applied to business language instruction. We further provide suggestions as to how business language instruction can be adapted in high school settings and introduce case studies of business Japanese lesson plans implemented by high school teachers. Arguments and pedagogical examples given in the discussions are mainly from business Japanese; however, they should be applicable to other business languages.

At present, business language instruction in high school settings has been a relatively unstudied area. Traditionally, Language for Specific Purposes, including business language education in the United States, has evolved mainly in higher education (Grosse and Voght 181). During the late 1980s and early 1990s, for instance, business Japanese courses started to be offered in several universities, coinciding with a strong Japanese economy and a Japanese language boom. However, in the late 1990s, as the Japanese economy stalled and the number of Japanese learners decreased, quite a few business Japanese courses were canceled (Tanihara and Kuriyama 11; Tsutsui 11–14). As of 2010, there are not many universities offering business Japanese courses (Tabuse, “Business Japanese Programs”). Under the title “Business Japanese,” typical courses offered at the undergraduate level are either a semester- or year-long intermediate high- or advanced low-level language class, which parallels third- or fourth-year Japanese courses taught to students of mixed majors and fields of interest. In graduate schools, business Japanese courses are often given exclusively to MBA students (Tabuse, “Business Japanese Programs”).

No case studies of business Japanese courses in high school settings have been found at this point in published literature on business language pedagogy including *Global Business Languages* and Japanese language pedagogy resources. The reason for not traditionally teaching business language courses in high school probably stems from the notion that such courses are meaningful only for learners in higher education or for business professionals who have more concrete and immediate professional needs. Many high school students, before entering college, are neither certain about what profession

they want to enter nor do they have immediate needs for using the language for professional purposes.

Recent promotion of business language instruction at K–12 levels, however, is based on the view that a business language class does not necessarily have to be limited to students in higher education, and grades K–12 students would also benefit from learning language in a course with business content. Realistically, it may be extremely difficult to offer a new “business language” course in addition to regular language classes at the high school level because of factors such as insufficient budget, low student enrollment, and lack of other resources. However, business language education can be incorporated as part of a regular language class, as seen in Ayumi Nagatomi’s description of her method of integrating business Japanese into her regular Japanese classes. This approach is very likely to work well with a thematic-based approach currently incorporated in grades K–12 where integration of themes and topics and language learning is advanced. Teachers can lay the foundation in the early years for teaching about business Japanese. For instance, discussion about the concept of in-groups and out-groups in Japanese culture and different language use based on this concept, likely to surface when talking about family, could easily be revisited in greater depth in any Advanced Placement (AP) course. With regards to themes and topics, the College Board’s AP guidelines suggest themes related to “contemporary social, political, or educational issues” as well as customs and traditions in AP Japanese courses (6). Business, career, and the economy would be appropriate topics to be included as part of contemporary social issues. Indeed, according to Tabuse (“Japanese for Professional Purposes”), the College Board is in the process of revising its curriculum framework and focused themes of world languages, and their revision includes recommending topics such as economics, education, and careers. These changes, when realized, will surely stimulate interest in teaching business Japanese in high school and help widen the horizon of the field of business language instruction.

When business is chosen as the content for language classes in K–12 settings, apparently, business needs to be meaningful to the students. Material needs to be selected and adapted to suit students’ purposes, needs, interests, language proficiency, and cognitive level. For instance, high school teachers may adapt business context in a way that their students find relevant. Instead of job interview simulations that university and graduate students perform in their classes, a part-time job interview simulation may be suitable for high school students, many of whom have the experience of holding a part-time

job. Furthermore, teachers may adapt business content to be more meaningful and familiar in students' daily lives. High school teachers may be able to coordinate with a teacher who is teaching AP Economics and adapt topics from their Japanese classes (Carolyn). Elementary school students may talk about using a piggy bank and counting coins, while MBA students may discuss the stock market and monetary issues in the target language (Aquino-Sterling). The key issue for teachers would be, as with teaching business languages at any other levels, to create not only language, but also a content-based, spiral curriculum.

It will also be crucial for teachers in grades K–12 to develop curricula in accordance with the National Standards. The National Standards were issued in 1999, and they have become a foundation of language education, especially at the K–12 levels. They are embodied in many state frameworks as well as developed into each lesson and unit plan of numerous language classrooms (National Standards 28). Principles of the National Standards promote utilizing a thematic-based curriculum, a characteristic of Content-Based Instruction (CBI), an integrated approach to teaching language and content that encourages learners to actually use the target language through learning the content (Stryker and Leaver 3–11). For teachers at K–12, it would be more tangible to consider that teaching business language involves choosing a business-related theme, adapting its theme and content to be meaningful and approachable to their students, and then creating lesson plans that integrate content and language. The next section discusses the National Standards, with a focus on the 5 Cs, and pedagogical implications around this classification.

#### NATIONAL STANDARDS AND BUSINESS LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

The National Standards lay out the statement of the philosophy of language learning:

Language and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. (7)

Under this plan, the National Standards put forth the five goal areas for foreign language education referred to as the 5 Cs, namely, Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities.

*(1) Communications*

Being able to communicate in the target language is considered crucial for language learning. The Communications goal is put at the center of the 5 Cs and discussed in relation with other goal areas. The National Standards state:

In the twenty-first century, students must be able to speak, to read, and to comprehend both spoken and written language. They must be able to participate appropriately in face-to-face interaction with members of other societies, and they must also be able to interpret the concepts, ideas, and opinions expressed by members of those societies through their media and their literatures. (39)

The National Standards encourage students to learn a language by using the language in real contexts and through a broad range of content areas. They also emphasize the importance of fostering communicative competence, not only accurate but also appropriate language use (Hymes), needed for successful communications. Also, this concept of communicative competence includes the ability to use the language to “. . . obtain information from written texts and media and to interpret the style, context, and purpose of communication” (40). There are three standards in the Communications goal: Interpersonal Mode, which is centered on interpersonal communication; Interpretive Mode, centered on listening and reading skills; and Presentational Mode.

This philosophy of the Communications goal aligns well with the implementation of business language instruction, which emphasizes interpersonal communication skills and communicative competence, since these are considered extremely important in business settings. Falsgraf, Fujii, and Kataoka researched the kind of Japanese language skills used and needed in the work place. The participants in their study, non-Japanese working in Japan, answered that they used Japanese for communicating with colleagues at work regardless of the type of jobs and Japanese-language proficiency. This indicates that in order to create good relationships, non-Japanese need to learn appropriate language use, such as the kind of speech styles they should use according to whom they are addressing and in what context. Language use in Japanese with this perspective is realized in such situations by distinctively different speech styles—formal, informal, polite, and casual, showing respect and/or solidarity to others using honorifics and humble expressions. Many business Japanese classrooms emphasize communications including using the language appropriately according to the business contexts (Kikuchi; Tanihara

and Kuriyama; Tabuse, “Toward a More Effective”; Takami, “Integrating Language and Content”)

Developing listening and reading skills is also considered important in business language instruction. Listening skills are as important as speaking skills in face-to-face communications (Falsgraf, Fujii, and Kataoka). Traditionally, reading in the business Japanese classroom tended to be de-emphasized, giving higher priority to speaking and listening. However, high proficiencies in reading and writing are considered to be more important in current business situations in Japan than before (Kamiyoshi). Reading authentic materials such as newspaper articles and books on business topics along with activities and tasks to improve reading skills are often incorporated into classroom activities (Kishimoto, “Developing Autonomous Learning”; Tsutsui, “Japanese for Technical and Business”).

The Presentation mode is also considered important in business settings, and as a result presentation projects are often utilized in business language classrooms. Students read and summarize the content of a short article, document, or something produced in their native language and write a summary in the target language (Kishimoto, “Business Japanese Program”; Tsutsui, “Japanese for Technical and Business”). Students can read news on the Internet about the current issues of the target culture and give presentations (Takami, “Integrating Language and Content”). In addition, students can make research presentations on any business topics of their interest (Kikuchi; Kishimoto, “Developing Autonomous Learning”). In a company meeting simulation, students can give a formal presentation taking certain roles in a business project using Power-Point (Ushida).

## *(2) Culture*

The importance of including culture in language education is encouraged more now than ever since it is articulated in the National Standards. There is a strong connection to business language instruction, since, as Grosse reports, one of the strongest pedagogical interests in the field of business language teaching was the incorporation of culture in the language classroom. The importance of understanding how misunderstanding and miscommunication occur due to lack of cultural knowledge and sensitivity has driven many business language teachers to develop cultural components. Kishimoto (“Business Japanese Program”), for instance, included Japanese work ethics, religion, history, and corporate organization along with business Japanese culture as content in her business Japanese course. In order to learn culture, the National Standards suggest the 3P approach, exploration of Products, Practices, and

Perspectives. Products, or social artifacts, can be something either tangible or intangible. Practices concern how the product is used. Perspectives involve values, beliefs, and attitudes emphasizing how the product and its practice are perceived. A business-related topic such as the Japanese employment system (intangible product), for instance, can be examined through an analysis of how it is realized, in consideration of the values and beliefs reflected through the system. Using the case studies of actual American companies with operations in Japan and Japanese companies with operations in the United States, for instance, Takami (“Building Connections”) uses the 3P approach in analyzing Japanese and American products such as soft drinks, Nintendo game software, and brand items such as Coach to explore culture.

### (3) *Comparison*

Students are able to see differences in languages and culture effectively and critically by comparison. In business language instruction, comparing language aspects can include comparison between different languages used in the business settings. Examples include questions that highlight differences on how certain functions of language and situational language are used, such as with introductions, making requests, negotiating, conducting meetings, business lunches, and decision-making procedures in the business setting in both the target and native cultures.

Also, learners can make comparisons between different speech styles within a language by highlighting the differences between language use in business settings and non-business settings. In Japanese, there are certain expressions preferred in business and more formal settings such as “watakushi” not “watashi” (both words mean *I* in English), “honjitsu” not “kyo” (both mean “today” in English).<sup>3</sup>

Learners can also increase their cross-cultural awareness by comparing culture explorations (Fantini). The 3P approach to analyzing culture can involve not only the target culture but also native cultures. In comparisons, though, students are encouraged to find not only differences but also similarities. Identifying similarities is important, especially for students who see the cultural differences in polarized perspectives, such as superior or inferior, good or bad (Bennett, Bennett, and Allen).

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<sup>3</sup> The use of “watakushi” vs. “watashi” and “honjitsu” vs. “kyo” depends on context, and the words “watakushi” and “honjitsu” also can be used in non-business settings. Therefore, these words cannot be defined as business words. These words, however, are often used in very formal business settings, and thus are taught in business Japanese classrooms.



#### (4) *Connections*

The National Standards suggest connecting foreign language education with other disciplines and subjects, stating that “(t)he conscious effort to connect the foreign language curriculum with other parts of students’ academic lives opens doors to information and experiences which enrich the students’ entire school and life experience” (53). This is well suited to business language education because it connects business content and language by nature. Yet connecting the two areas is a challenging task. Language classes are usually offered according to learners’ language proficiency and proceed so that students can develop language proficiency; they are presented with a language spiral curriculum. However, in CBI, the content learning also needs to be carefully delivered in meaningful ways, which means the content spiral curriculum is also invoked. One of the essential features for successful CBI, according to Leaver and Stryker (5–11), is positioning the content at the core of the curriculum, the subject-matter core:

The fundamental organization of the curriculum is derived from the subject matter, rather than forms, functions, situations, or skills. Communicative competence is acquired during the process of learning about specific topics such as math, science, art, social studies, culture, business, history, political systems, international affairs, or economics. (6)

The challenge for teachers starts with curricular development, which needs to integrate language and content and support effective language and content learning.

#### (5) *Communities*

The Communities goal concerns students’ language use not only at school but also beyond the school setting, helping students become “life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment” (66). The business language classroom strongly matches these goals since the class itself offers students the chance to focus on language use beyond the classroom and school settings. Business language teachers actively seek opportunities to incorporate the real business world into the classroom. Some invite guest speakers from the business field (Kikuchi; Tabuse, “Toward a More Effective”), have the students interview business persons in the target language (Muto), or arrange corporate visits (Kishimoto, “Business Japanese Program”; Tabuse, “Toward a More Effective”).

Business language classrooms also help students see themselves using the language after graduation. It would be helpful for them to see how they

use the target language in real situations, including professional settings, and the class helps them to prepare for such encounters. Business language education can be a language learning place that bridges classroom learning and real-world learning situations.

#### APPLICATION OF BUSINESS LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION IN HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

As discussed in the previous section, business language instruction is compatible with language learning principles expressed in the National Standards. Most of the pedagogical examples of business instruction given in the discussions above are conducted at the undergraduate level, around intermediate-mid to high in the ACTFL OPI scale (ACTFL). Since the upper level of language classes in high schools, such as AP courses, are equivalent to intermediate-mid in the ACTFL, these pedagogical approaches would be adaptable, in light of language proficiency, to high school settings and would have ample possibilities to provide effective teaching for such classes.

The key issue concerns teaching content; that is, how to adapt the business content so it will be meaningful and appealing to high school students. One of the challenges of teaching business language is the emphasis on business language use, which many high school students may not find relevant to their current lives. Many business Japanese textbooks on the market, for instance, are made up of situational and functional syllabi and center on model dialogues employing frequently used vocabulary and expressions in business situations. It would be difficult for high school students, and even college students who have no work experience, to imagine these situations (Kamiyoshi), and too great an emphasis on appropriate language use in business situations would not be effective at the high school level. Communicative tasks such as role play would not be as meaningful if students are to be engaged in role play between a manager A and section chief B in Company C. These types of role plays are very likely to be ineffective, since students do not find them realistic (Kawaguchi). Needless to say, it would be helpful in high school to learn that there are different language vocabularies and uses according to place, such as home, school, and work place. If interpersonal communication in the business setting is incorporated in the language classroom in high school settings, the situation presenting the communication should be adapted so that it can be more concrete and realistic to students.

In order to choose content effectively and efficiently in business language instruction, needs analysis examining learner variables, such as age, work experience, specialty, interests, and purpose of learning business language is

extremely important for business language courses. In high school settings, however, it may be more difficult to focus on certain areas of business; it might be more plausible to cover a broad range of business topics and have specific business areas pursued as an individual project in which each student can choose his or her own field of interest. This approach is also often taken in business language classrooms at the undergraduate level where students of mixed majors and schools take business language classes (Takami, “Learner-Centered Approach”).

While many Japanese teachers in high school seem to use a textbook, it also seems that they are trained and encouraged to develop thematic units for their own classrooms. Although there are no business Japanese textbooks on the market specifically targeted to high school students, there are ample authentic business-related materials, such as articles, advertisements, commercials, products, corporate websites, and books, which teachers can utilize in their classes. Business, after all, is ingrained as a part of our daily lives, and it can provide familiar and interesting topics for high school students to learn as well.

#### CASE STUDIES OF BUSINESS JAPANESE LESSON PLANS IN HIGH SCHOOL SETTINGS

At present, almost no case studies of business Japanese lesson plans in high school settings are found. However, there are a few teachers who have created and implemented lesson plans in their classrooms, and this section describes their initiatives. The business Japanese lessons are created and implemented by Mieko Avello, a Japanese teacher at Miami Palmetto Senior High School in Miami, Florida, and Mina Mori, a Japanese teacher at Athens High School in Troy, Michigan.

Both Mori and Avello consider job interviews as adaptable to be relevant to high school students. Mori developed and implemented a lesson plan on job interviews. Students created job interview scenarios and performed them in class. Mori saw this context as an opportunity to learn and use not only formal speech style but also “proper leave-taking and back-channeling in Japanese language in a formal setting.” This also would help her senior students prepare for their future interviews, including job interviews and the Japanese placement test in college. She added a task of writing resumes, which she thought would help students learn vocabulary and Chinese characters in formal and business settings.

Avello points out that most of the students in her high school have held a part-time job, so she links the experience with business Japanese lessons.

The course textbook she used in her regular Japanese course, *Adventures in Japanese*, by Hitomi Peterson and Naomi-Hirano-Omizo, has a chapter in which one of the model dialogues presented is between a high school student working part-time as a shop clerk and his customer. Avello connected the chapter with topics around part-time jobs and conducted a part-time job interview simulation in 2009. This provided an appropriate context for her students to use most formal speech styles using honorifics.

Avello noted that business could be connected to students' daily lives outside the school environment. She used case study material developed by Takami<sup>4</sup> ("Employing International Business," "Building Connections") in her AP Japanese and Culture course in the fall of 2010. Using the case of Coca-Cola Japan, students enjoyed learning about a real-world story involving a familiar product to explore their lives and culture through the product. Since this material was originally created for fourth-year Japanese at college, she adapted the material so that it would suit her students. Vocabulary, Chinese characters, and grammar presented in the business case story were difficult for her students, so she encouraged students to understand the core part of the story, rather than emphasizing the close, accurate understanding of each word and sentence. She supplemented with authentic materials such as commercials for Coca-Cola products. For decision-making tasks, she developed a way her students could create advertisements of Coca-Cola Japan products for the market of American teenagers. After reflecting on using the case material in her high school setting, she concluded that the case material was useful for high school students.

## CONCLUSION

We see that the National Standards and business language instruction are compatible with each other. We have used business Japanese to examine how each of the five goals, Communications, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities, can be made relevant and implemented in business language classrooms. It is certainly possible to create a business language curriculum in accordance with the National Standards. Pedagogical materials, topics, and approaches in light of the five goals are given for business Japanese classrooms in higher education. In addition, recent case studies of high school teachers who developed and implemented business Japanese lessons in regular Japanese classrooms were introduced. These are all drawn from

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<sup>4</sup> The material is pending publication with the *Japan Times*, and the trial version is available upon request. Please contact [ttakami@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:ttakami@sas.upenn.edu).

business Japanese; however, it is hoped that they are applicable and adaptable to business language instruction in other languages in high school settings.

In conclusion, we encourage more empirical studies of teaching business language in high school settings. Such studies will provide more insights and allow us to explore more effective business language instruction in different settings.

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