

## BUSINESS SPANISH: A CROSS-CAMPUS COLLABORATIVE MODEL

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### ABSTRACT

This paper briefly reviews past research regarding interdisciplinary teaching efforts at the college level, especially those in which the business school has joined together with colleagues in modern languages. Additionally, a proposed interdisciplinary course is presented in which business Spanish is taught by a marketing professor working with a collaborative team of modern language and marketing faculty, all of which have extensive multicultural experience. Sample lists of resource materials are provided.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY PROGRAMS

Interdisciplinary courses can offer a relatively simple, low-cost way for universities to accommodate new material from different disciplines at the intersection of those disciplines (Miller & McCartan 1990). In business education, for example, courses taught with contributions from foreign language departments are a common way to promote the growing field of international business. Such courses can also expand the scope of content coverage for traditional modern language programs (Normand 1986, To-Dutka & Spencer 1990).

Language issues play a major role in marketing activities. Marketing lore is replete with instances of poor cross-cultural use of language. Translation errors are the cause of the greatest number of blunders in cross-cultural business (Ricks 1993). Budweiser's "King of Beers" becoming the "Queen of Beers" and Pepsi's "Come alive with Pepsi" being translated as "Come out of the grave" reveal just one aspect of the many diverse roles language can play in global marketing.

An example of deficiencies in traditional Spanish teachers' business culture knowledge, in important trade relations, was discovered by one of the collaborative team members. Under a Department of Education Title VIa grant, a marketing faculty member accompanied a group of language teachers to Ecuador. She attended the language and culture classes with these teachers. She also met with U.S. Embassy officials, Ecuadorian government ministers, top academics, and local entrepreneurs. The subject

of these meetings was U.S. and Ecuador trade relations and the state of development of marketing activities in the local economy. One of the major subjects of interest among the Ecuadorians was the potential impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on all U.S.-Latin America trade. When the embassy officials discussed Ecuadorian attitudes toward the possible success of NAFTA, it was evident that by far the majority of the U.S. foreign language teachers did not know what NAFTA was, nor did they understand the importance of NAFTA to Spanish speaking countries.

Different interdisciplinary efforts have different goals. There are some basic goals that are common to interdisciplinary work in business education. The relationship of business to culture and society is essential. Efforts combining business and foreign language education see the promotion of a "world view" and "cultural awareness" to be an inherent component of learning a foreign language for business communication (Normand 1986, p. 311; To-Dutka and Spencer 1990, p. 17). A well-planned business language course addresses many of these goals.

### LANGUAGE FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

#### Current Business Spanish Approaches

More departments are adding business Spanish courses to traditional literary and linguistic offerings at the post-secondary level (Uber Grosse 1985). In a typical scenario in teaching business Spanish, a foreign language department sends a language faculty member, usually a specialist in literature, to the Madrid Chamber of Commerce or to a U.S. workshop for international business training and teaching business Spanish. Training courses or workshops provide faculty with an introductory knowledge base which compels them to closely follow the contents of a business Spanish textbook. The textbook is usually very generic in its treatment of international business and generally includes chapters on management, marketing, finance, and accounting as well as a description of the economic status of countries in Latin America. At first, the converted business Spanish instructor may barely stay ahead of the class; after

teaching the course several times, the instructor should be able to speak more confidently on some issues in international business and present authentic documents such as business letters, spread sheets, and annual reports. At best, the language instructor's level of knowledge of international business and international business practices will be far less than that of a business school faculty member.

A second approach to teaching business Spanish is called "foreign languages across the curriculum" (Allen, et al. 1992). In this approach, a foreign language department and the business school typically present a revised business course by adding a one credit hour "trailer" course taught in Spanish by a business faculty member. In an international marketing course, for example, the marketing instructor teaches an existing international marketing class three or four days a week. An additional class session per week is taught in Spanish, and readings in Spanish are provided to interested students, who enroll for the additional credit.

The strengths of this approach are two-fold. First, the trailer section of an international marketing course taught in Spanish is provided by a business faculty member instead of a language professor. Second, by offering trailer sections in actual business courses, students receive a more in-depth study of marketing than a typical business Spanish. The weaknesses of the "foreign languages across the curriculum" approach are also two-fold. First, a one-hour-per-week trailer course taught in Spanish provides limited language practice. And second, post-secondary institutions must be willing to compensate the business faculty member for teaching an additional hour or to modify his or her teaching load to reflect the teaching of an extra one-hour course.

#### Proposed Business Spanish Approach

The proposed approach to teaching business Spanish includes offering an introductory course taught by a language professor and a Spanish for Marketing (or Management, Finance, and others) course taught by a marketing or another appropriate professor. The addition of the second course utilizes the strengths of "foreign languages across the curriculum" and eliminates its weaknesses by exposing students to functionally qualified business faculty teaching professional materials in the target language. During the spring semester of 1994, a marketing professor will teach Spanish 497-Spanish for Marketing. To prepare for the course, a collaborative team was formed of two marketing faculty and two modern language faculty.

The instructor is an experienced professor of marketing with an undergraduate Spanish minor and two years' residence in Mexico. He also has maintained involvement with Hispanic segments of the community. The second team member is a marketing professor, fluent in Spanish and with a BA in Spanish Education. As a student, she participated in a junior studies abroad program in Madrid. Recently she participated in interdisciplinary and international programs as described earlier. A Spanish professor is contributing language resource knowledge, guidance to meet performance standards, and grading support through assignments given to advanced classes. The final member is chairman of the Modern Language Department, originator of the grant funding this course, and an expert in teaching business French courses.

#### Target Student Market

Several distinct student segments are anticipated to enroll in this course. Spanish majors will take the course to expand their business knowledge for potential applied career enhancement or future teaching knowledge. Business majors, in Marketing or International Business, can use the course to fulfill major requirements. Native Spanish speakers enrolled in other majors may be interested to upgrade their professional language skills and improve their employment options. Some Spanish teachers may enroll for graduate credit to upgrade their teaching credentials.

#### Primary Course Objective

The primary objective for the course is to prepare students to confidently and competently participate in commercial activities and professional marketing discussions conducted in Spanish. Special emphasis will be on Mexican-American business relationships to take advantage of the local Hispanic population's historic background and to build upon the present level of trade between this state and Mexico. The particular expertise of the instructor (in this first effort, marketing), will be emphasized each time the course is offered.

#### Operational Objectives

Operational objectives for the course will be to provide students with:

1. a working Spanish vocabulary of terms of commerce and marketing.
2. a knowledge of the concepts that are used in marketing management.

3. an exposure to the economic characteristics of Spanish-speaking nations.
4. a familiarity with the current business issues in the Spanish-speaking world, with specific reference to attitudes and anticipated outcomes of trade treaties such as NAFTA.
5. an understanding of the economic impact of trade between this state and the Hispanic world.
6. an introduction to Spanish-speaking business proprietors, managers, and professionals in government and industry who are influential in conducting business where the use of the Spanish language is important.
7. a review of cultural factors affecting marketing relationships in the Hispanic world.

### Pedagogical Tools and Resources

The variety of objectives expected for this course presents a need to use a mixed set of pedagogical tools and resources.

1. Chapters on general business, goods and services, marketing, and import/export from the book, Exitto Commercial: Prácticas Administrativas y Contextos Culturales by Doyle, Fryer, and Cere 1991, will be used to provide the foundation vocabulary and reading structure for the course. Chapters include assignments on vocabulary, role playing situations, translation, and content review.
  2. The text also contains a discussion of recent economic conditions, geography, demographics, governmental form, basic economic information, and a brief look at the culture and major political issues of 21 countries with Spanish-speaking populations, including the United States.
  3. For current business, cultural, and political issues, assignments will be made requiring reading of newspapers in Spanish.
  4. Video materials will be used to challenge listening skills, present visual images of culture, and expose students to business situations. Examples of materials which are available include:
    - a. London International Advertising Awards "Advertising by Country" videotapes.
    - b. Quality Video, Inc. produces "The World's Funniest Commercials."
    - c. Insight Media's collection includes relevant films such as the "Unfinished Business" episode of The Buried Mirror series (about Hispanics in the U.S.) and two volumes of Spanish television commercials.
  - d. Educational Video Network's videos include El Mercado, Foods of Latin America, and Mexican Popular Customs.
  - e. Films for the Humanities and Sciences in Princeton, New Jersey, has a series about Latino issues in the United States.
  - f. Video travel guides, such as those sold in The Whole World Language Catalog, usually have sections which deal with that country's economy and business enterprises. The recent PBS series, Americas, serves as a similar resource, as would The Image of Modern Spain, sold through Films for the Humanities & Sciences.
  - g. Television commercials taped from Univisión (U.S.) and Galavisión (Mexico City), which broadcasts mostly news, can be obtained by satellite downlink.
  - h. Destinos contains several segments about business operations in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, Argentina, and Miami.
  - i. Managing the Overseas Assignment, part of the Going International series, depicts a U.S. salesman calling on his potential Mexican customer. Lack of knowledge of the differences in business etiquette is discussed.
  - j. Although we have found very few Spanish-language movies which contain scenes which appear to be relevant to a business Spanish course, the film La Historia Oficial depicts the negative attitude that many Latin American societies have toward multinational corporations. Exploring attitudes toward business would be an important cultural component for our proposed course.
  - k. Demonstrations of translation software such as GLOBALINK add to any discussion of translation issues. The PBS show "Computer Chronicles" broadcast an entire show devoted to foreign language software. Some Spanish-language translation software is demonstrated in this episode. Additionally, the discussion of the advantages and problems associated with machine translation is very valuable to any course dealing with foreign language study.
  - l. Audio cassette business Spanish courses exist, such as the one sold by The Whole World Language Catalog, which provides dialogues, exercises, vocabulary, and culture capsules.
- Not all these resources are on campus now. Funds from the grant will be used to purchase those that the collaborative team identifies as having the greatest contribution to the course.
5. Spanish speakers will be invited to discuss their experiences and areas of expertise with the class.

## Assignments and Evaluation

This initial version of the course will be introduced as a "special topics" class in Spanish. The course will fulfill departmental major electives for Marketing, International Business, and Spanish majors. Since this is an elective special topics, experimental course, there will be a presumption of interest, motivation, and self discipline in the accomplishment of class assignments.

The interdisciplinary nature of the objectives, students, and faculty in this course presents an interesting challenge in determining criteria for evaluating students. Language students will be challenged by unfamiliar business concepts. Business students will have little familiarity with upper division level language study. Native Spanish-speakers from other disciplines may struggle with both formal language study and business concepts. The individual student's objectives desired from this course will vary.

While the teacher has proficiency in speaking and reading Spanish, there is no proven ability to evaluate professional level writing. Any graders provided by the language department would be unable to evaluate business content. The collaborative approach provides evaluation by those most qualified to grade each component.

A menu form of assignments and grading will be used to allow students to customize their learning experience. Students will be able to select assignments from a set of options. Points will be allotted to each proportionate to the time and difficulty required to complete the assignment. The total available points will substantially exceed the number required for any desired grade level. Students may be able to avoid some forms of evaluation entirely by concentrating on other options. Anticipated types of assignments anticipated include:

1. Textbook activities of vocabulary exercises, review questions, role playing, translation exercises, and microcase evaluation.
2. Reviews of guest speakers' presentations.
3. Newspapers and magazine article reviews.
4. Concept analysis from movies and videos.
5. Reports on selected nations' economic activities.
6. Examination of larger case problems.
7. Summaries of broadcast media reports.
8. Exams over text, speaker presentations, and in-class discussions.

Cooperative grading support will be used to fairly evaluate assignments by individuals who are qualified to review each type of assignment. Senior-level Spanish education students will grade grammar and lexicon as part of course work in advanced language education. Students taking the course for graduate credit will be required to include in their menu additional components of teaching unit preparations and verbal reports to the class.

## CONCLUSION

Increasing interdependence among nations makes international relationships inevitable in business today. The ability to interact with others whose language and culture are different is essential to success in these relationships. Language students need to understand business culture and business students need to be able to use foreign languages to effectively communicate with businesses from different nations.

Using business professors to teach language classes, emphasizing their business expertise, is an innovative but necessary approach to providing quality education for the business needs of the next generation of international professionals.

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