

Conducting Business in Japanese: Curriculum Development for Business Japanese Courses

Masahiko Minami
San Francisco State University

American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)
Annual Convention & World Languages Expo
November 20, 2011
Colorado Convention Center, Denver, CO

Business and International Education (BIE) Project
“Enhancing Business Japanese Pedagogy”

Description

This presentation is a report on a recently completed two-year curricular project, “Enhancing Business Japanese Pedagogy,” at San Francisco State University. This project has developed digital audio-visual teaching modules that are designed to broaden the learning experience of students studying Japanese as a second or foreign language.

Content

This presentation demonstrates course materials that have been developed for use in international business. The presentation specifically focuses on how digital audio-visual teaching modules are integrated into two business-related Japanese courses: “Business Japanese” and “Advanced Business Japanese: Business Writing.” These modules increase opportunities for students to improve listening and speaking skills and complement course textbooks and class lectures that focus on developing reading and writing skills. The modules enhance the student’s ability to: (1) effectively communicate in different sociolinguistic milieus such as formal business presentations, (2) build cultural and stylistic elements into their business communications, and (3) effectively recognize culture-specific modes of behavior, as well as socio-cultural patterns of Japanese-speaking society. These are important particularly because in a world where most economic transactions have been fully globalized, we consistently need to promote internationalism for the Nation’s not only current but also future interests.

Methods

This presentation focuses on the notion that, pedagogically, business Japanese is not a distinct and separate field of language study, but, instead, that it is a choice of teaching materials and techniques that are fully in line with communicative approach that is currently prevalent in language teaching. The pedagogical orientations of the aforementioned two courses are based on the three concepts that have become features of recent developments in language learning and teaching: (1) learner-centeredness in the context of material development, (2) task-based orientation, and (3) students’ learning independence. The approach discussed in this presentation is not just limited to oral skills but that literacy skills need to be developed to promote L2 learners’ confidence as well, as seen the demonstration of business writing skills.

Outcome

This presentation emphasizes the importance of: (1) providing students with numerous opportunities for listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the target language for use in the future, (2) improving the international business education of undergraduate and graduate business students, and (3) disseminating the need for increased cross-cultural understanding.

“Enhancing Business Japanese Pedagogy” Project’s Goals

In the two classrooms “Business Japanese” and “Business Writing,” students are offered numerous opportunities for listening and speaking as well as reading and writing in the target language (i.e., Japanese) for use either in the near or distant future. The presentation demonstrates course materials that have been developed for use in international business.

- ❖ 2009 U.S. Department of Education “Business and International Education” (BIE) grant award (Masahiko Minami as a co-writer).
- ❖ The project allows restructuring SF State University’s Japanese Program’s business related modules.
- ❖ The modules are integrated into two business-related Japanese courses:
 - *Business Japanese* (mainly focusing on oral communication)
 - *Advanced Business Japanese: Business Writing* (mainly focusing on written communication)

1. *Business Japanese*

- ❖ Organized based on several thematic units:
 - Designed for those who have completed some upper-division Japanese courses.
 - The course enables those students to master conversational expressions that are useful in business environments
 - The course specifically provides intensive training in business Japanese; the course mainly focuses on the forms of oral communication frequently encountered in the business world.
 - The goals include:
 - learning expressions and vocabularies that are essential to business.
 - acquiring verbal and nonverbal communication strategies for better interaction with Japanese business associates
 - learning how to deal with Japanese business people in both formal and informal settings
 - reading business-related articles.
- ❖ Course Organization
 - The course includes: lectures, discussions, reading and writing exercises, vocabulary quizzes, assignments, final examination.
 - The course basically follows the textbook ビジネスのための日本語（スリーエーネットワーク）, with supplementary materials; focuses on conversational expressions that are immediately useful in a business environment; the course provides a collection of useful conversations for business people.

❖ Progression of Stages

- *Stage 1* provides students with practical conversational expressions that include practical expressions (mainly through substitution drills).
- *Stage 2* is intended for students to grasp those expressions in particular scenes and situations (mainly through listening comprehension drills).
- *Stage 3* provides students with opportunities to practice the expressions that they have learned in the previous stages.
 - Students create role-plays, on their own, that simulate actual business situations, and they perform those self-created role-plays in class.
- *Stage 4* includes a section of business articles students have an opportunity to read.
 - Those articles further explain the topic's Japanese business practices.

❖ Class Evaluations

- This class was a lot of fun and will be very useful in the future.
- Super fun class. Learned lots of useful expressions.
- You're good enough.
- Very energetic and fun teacher, GTM!
- It was a great semester! You seem much more cheerful and happier compared to 309! That's great. Thanks very much! I enjoyed the class very much!
- I was very impressed with this class. I thought it would be hard to learn in this course, but the repetition of saying the learned material in class was extremely effective. Thank you.

2. *Advanced Business Japanese: Business Writing*

- ❖ While *Business Japanese* mainly handles oral communication, *Advanced Business Japanese*, as its subtitle indicates, mainly deals with written communication. These should not be interpreted as a dichotomy, however. Orality and literacy form a continuum, instead. These are mutually complementary.
 - Business letters are basically divided into two types:
 - External documents (e.g., external letters/e-mails) that are prepared for customers and others outside the company.
 - Internal documents (e.g., internal letters/e-mails) that are submitted to managers and colleagues in one's own company.
 - Business letters perform communication in order to ensure smooth operation not only internally but also with business partners outside the company.
 - Courtesy is essential in business, particularly in Japanese business.
 - This is not limited to business letters. Courtesy letters, such as greetings and invitations, play a vital role in running one's business smoothly.
 - Business letters serve as a communication tool that conforms to rules of courtesy.
 - Business letters are written for such purposes as: (1) inquiry, (2) apology, (3) notification or information, (4) reply, and (5) request for payment or collection notice. *Advanced Business Japanese: Business Writing* is designed to fully cover these different types of business letters.

- A letter of *inquiry* is a letter for asking something.
- A letter of *apology* is sent for the purpose of admitting one's mistake when a problem or miscommunication has arisen.
- A letter of *notification* or *information* is used for the purpose of informing the recipient of a shipment or remittance.
- A letter of *reply* is used when there is a necessity to respond to a recipient's request, negotiation, or inquiry.
- A letter of *request* is prepared when an invoice, in which the price and other details are written, needs to be sent out.
- The course amply covers these different types of business letters.
- E-mails are also adequately included in the course because they have recently been used more often than ever before although business letters still play a pivotal role.
 - While e-mails are convenient, recipients at times may feel that they are not being treated in a polite manner. This is because, unlike business letters, formal rules for business e-mails have not yet been established although there are some basic manners for writing e-mails.
 - Since mastery of how to write good business e-mails is equally important nowadays, the issue of how to write easy-to-understand and well-mannered e-mail messages was thoroughly discussed in the course.
- To support all of these activities, a great number of visual teaching modules (PowerPoint materials) have been created.

❖ Guest Speakers

- Guest Speaker Series I October 15, 2010: Ms. Dana Lewis, President, Japan Society of Northern California <http://www.usajapan.org/index.html>, has worked for the *Asahi Evening News*, *Kyodo News Service*, *Newsweek*, and most recently with *Newsweek Japan* magazine, writing on Japanese politics, society and culture, U.S.-Japan relations, and the rapidly evolving political landscape in East Asia.
- Students' comments on Guest Speaker I:
 - "Thank you for organizing the guest speaker today. Ms. Lewis was very interesting and it was good to hear from someone like her about her experiences working in Japan. I hope you have a chance to bring in more guest lecturers before the end of the semester."
 - "I very much enjoyed the guest speaker you planned for the class. I only wish that we had more time with Dana Lewis as I am sure she has many more stories to share with such an audience as your JAPN 395 class. Her presence and skill as a speaker was very inspirational for me."
- Guest Speaker Series II November 5, 2010: Mr. Naoyuki Hasegawa, Chief Executive Director, Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) San Francisco, <http://www.jetro.org/content/792/#Hasegawa>
- Students' comments on Guest Speaker II:

- “Thank you for arranging today’s speaker, Mr. Hasegawa. I thought he was very engaging and interesting. I very much appreciated his reinforcing the notion that the work we are doing in your class is important in the real world. It was great to have that reiterated by someone of Mr. Hasegawa's status. I found his clarity and humor to be valuable lessons not only in business but also for language learners in general. Thank you again for arranging another beneficial guest speaker. I hope we are able to have at least one more before the semester ends.”

❖ Class Evaluations

- This class exposed me to lots of customs in the Japanese business environment and allowed me to meet many people in the field. I enjoyed this class greatly.
- Everything I learned in this class is what I plan to take with me when I begin my career. Professor Minami was a very helpful teacher.
- Minami Sensei is a wonderful instructor. He does an excellent job at encouraging class participation and keeps class very interesting.
- Minami makes class really enjoyable. He is one of the best Japanese teachers I have ever had. I look forward to going to class because it is fun and I learn a lot.
- Miami 先生 is a great teacher. His enthusiasm rubs off on the students.

For further information, please visit:

<http://www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/business-japanese/>