

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **Business Chinese for Advanced Learners**

**Jia Yu**

**The Pennsylvania State University**

#### **1 Introduction**

English is still the lingua franca of the world in fields of work such as business, computer programming, air traffic communication, and academics; however, specific contexts may still call for the use of a language other than English. According to the latest data available on the website for the Office of the United States Trade Representative (n.d.), the U.S. had a surplus of \$17 billion with China in services trade in 2012. In its published trade agenda report online, the U.S.-China Business Council believes that this trend translates into high-quality jobs in China and the U.S. in service industries such as finance, logistics, legal services, and more (2013).

It is necessary, then, that the U.S. service providers achieve a sound understanding of the business practices, trends, and culture in China, in addition to a high level of foreign language proficiency. As noted by both politicians and researchers (see Simon, 1980; Victor, 1992; Galloway, 1987), in the absence of insight into the culture, history, politics, and economics of the

country or region where the target language is used, foreign language skills just give students “the illusion that they are communicating” (Victor, 1992, p. 69). If the U.S. employees in these services are equipped with a desirable proficiency level in the Chinese language and a profound knowledge of Chinese business culture, they will be essential in helping their company fit into the local Chinese market. Findings of the Language Flagship survey (2008) show that among more than 100 U.S. international business leaders there is support for the need of both language and culture studies in the new or established market both home and abroad. Furthermore, the surveyed professionals put a great emphasis on higher language proficiency, which results in greater personal ties and thus reduced time needed for new business establishment abroad. They also preferred to have a fluent foreign language-speaking employee, rather than an outside interpreter, to handle sensitive business matters, based on their belief that the employee could better communicate the mission, products, and services of the company.

The status quo of Chinese language education at secondary and postsecondary levels in the U.S. still focuses on general language learning, although there is a growing interest in developing new courses or new tracks of Chinese for business purposes. The Center for International Business and Education reports the number of American postsecondary schools interested in starting a business Chinese program rose from six to 26 in 2013. In the case of the Penn State Chinese program, students pursuing Chinese majors or minors are given options as to which courses to take in the third and fourth year, while courses in the first two years are prescribed. Nevertheless, the optional advanced courses are mostly literacy-focused. Meanwhile, the growing number of business major students and students interested in using Chinese for business purpose calls for business Chinese course(s).

## 1.1 Institutional Background

The Chinese program at the Pennsylvania State University offers a major and minor in Chinese. Course offerings in the program include four years of Chinese language courses, introductory courses to Chinese culture (100 level), content courses taught in English (42X level), and content courses taught in Chinese (45X level). Students pursuing a Chinese major are also recommended to take courses pertaining to China in departments such as art history, Asian studies, comparative literature, history, philosophy, political science, and religious studies. Student enrollment in the language courses has been steady in the past two years, with 300-350 students in fall semester and 260-300 students in spring semester. The Pennsylvania State University is a comprehensive research university offering undergraduate, graduate, and professional degrees. The Smeal college of business offers an undergraduate minor in international business in which foreign language proficiency is an optional component.

The Chinese program is planning to offer a one-semester business Chinese course at the University Park campus, and this is the focus of the current proposal. This course will focus on building thematic vocabulary, enhancing business communication skills, and developing cross-cultural awareness and critical thinking skills. In this course, students will read, analyze, discuss and synthesize successful multinational business cases in the local context of China. In addition to language-focused case studies, students will be expected to critically examine TV commercials, business-related media reports, the unique structure of the Chinese financial market (e.g., banks, bonds, and stock markets), and evolving Chinese business laws and regulations. Highlighted career-oriented activities cover translations of common business terms,

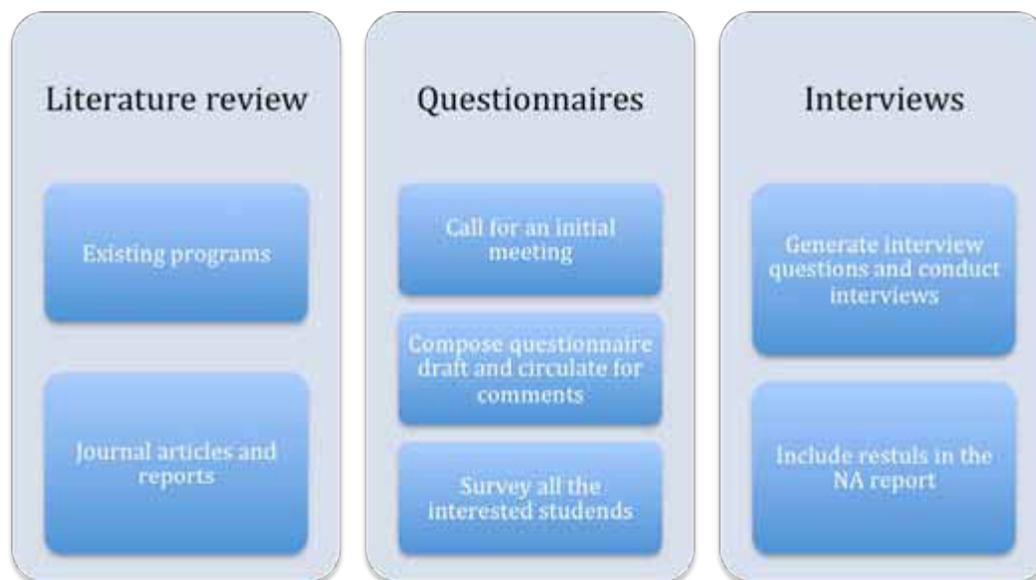
business writing and presentations, and business research. Guest speakers will be invited to deliver a report on various topics such as business market research, business trends, business culture comparisons, or prior business experience in China. All classes will be conducted in Chinese.

## **2 Needs Analysis**

Needs analysis (NA) is an integral part of course development of language for specific purposes (LSP) courses. Adequate NA involves information about the context, students, and other stakeholders. In the tripartite pedagogical model for business language studies (Doyle, 2012), business content, cultural context, and geographical setting are the three main constituents, which are imbedded into the communicative activities. Business language courses usually have different focuses depending on student needs, and therefore the proposed needs analysis will help to determine the varying degree of coverage of these three components for this course. Since this course is still in the planning stage, I will explain my design for the needs analysis, including but not limited to delimiting the student population, defining the purpose of the needs analysis, and selecting appropriate data collection procedures.

Students will need to be placed at the center of the needs analysis and all curriculum planning for this LSP course. The potential students for this proposed course mostly include undergraduate students (e.g., business majors, Chinese majors, Asian Studies majors, and Chinese heritage students) and possibly students pursuing a professional degree (e.g., law, MBA, teaching English as a foreign language). By identifying student needs and resources available to both the students and the instructors, I will be able to articulate the skills to be learned and how

the skills are best taught, with considerations of where the skills are to be learned and used. In this sense, NA also improves accountability and enhances learning assessment and program evaluation. The planned needs analysis is summarized in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Needs analysis steps.

In addition to the students interested in taking this course, it is of great importance to conduct a rigorous needs analysis among all stakeholders, such as business content experts and the coordinator of the Chinese program in the current study. Cowles (1998) considered not only student profiles and teacher profiles, but also educational setting resources when establishing the Lauder Institute programs at the University of Pennsylvania. By virtue of involving all stakeholders in the educational institution, I will be able to pool together information about program or departmental support for curriculum innovation, convey the importance of this course to the program and department, encourage faculty or content-expert commitment, and provide further access to professional development. For new courses or program development,

Cowles (1998) suggested interviews and focus groups, questionnaires, and audio and video recordings, in addition to a review of relevant research and a study of existing programs.

## **2.1 Data Gathering**

In the current needs analysis, I intend to determine students' performance and proficiency standards, student's perceptions of their needs in this course and future career, and the varying degree of importance of business content, cultural context, and geographical setting in this course. Due to time and resource constraints, I will rely on existing literature and reports to formulate notions of language performance and linguistic and cultural proficiency standards. Moreover, I will rely on the analysis of the existing programs, student questionnaires, and interviews to shape the syllabus and curriculum.

I have been and will continue to examine journal articles on programs of business language and LSP in prominent evidence-based journals such as *Global Business Languages* (e.g. Wang, 2011; Wang, 2013; Zhang, 2011) and *The Modern Language Journal* (e.g. 2012 focus issue), among others. At the same time, I will review related literature on intercultural communication, conduct a genre analysis of common business communications, comparative rhetoric, and the available business Chinese textbooks on the market.

As the course developer, I will call for an initial meeting with stakeholders so they can weigh in on the purpose and pertinent questions to be used in the above-mentioned survey. A draft of the questionnaire will first be handed out to all stakeholders within the institution, such

as the coordinator of the Chinese program, content experts and students. After integrating their feedback into the final version, I will survey all the interested students before the semester starts.

Scrutiny of the quantitative and qualitative survey results will help to generate interview questions to provide a more in-depth qualitative analysis for this pedagogical inquiry. Ideally, both the questionnaires and interviews will be concluded by the end of the semester prior to the semester this course will be offered, thus leaving the course developer sufficient time to search for and compose applicable teaching materials. If time doesn't permit, however, I will consider interviewing the students at the start of the course and maybe make the student conference part of the course requirements. Results from both the questionnaires and the interviews will be included in the NA report and circulated among all stakeholders for comments.

Although subject to change, the student questionnaire will consist of four sections: (a) language learning background; (b) business content background; (c) the relevance and importance of business domains such as marketing, finance, trade, E-commerce, and management (as listed in Doyle, 2012); and (d) the relevance and importance of the learning objectives (see below) with varying focus on general language, business language, culture, and content. The first two sections will include multiple-choice and short answer questions, while the last two sections will include five-point Likert-scale questions and open-ended questions. In the Likert-scale questions, participants will be asked to rate the relevance and importance of each item on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being *not at all important*, 3 being *neutral* and 5 being *very important*. In the open-ended questions, participants can write a short response to additional questions.

### 3 Student Learning Outcomes

In accordance with the Modern Language Association's report (2007) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency standards, Doyle (2012) outlined a tripartite pedagogical model for business language studies, where business content and geographical and cultural contexts are anchored in communicative activities. Due to the needs-based nature of the LSP courses, it is critical to teach the right amount of language, content, and culture. Although there is disagreement when it comes to if we should teach general language or specific purposes, LSP courses solely teaching specialized language may be too functional as a result and cannot prepare students to become a fully effective communicators in the target community of practice. Teaching general language only, on the other hand, deprives LSP students of their privilege to specialized instruction. Therefore, conducting a rigorous needs analysis and ensuring the instruction meets student's general and specialized language needs are essential for the success of an LSP course.

The goal of this course is to provide language-focused, culture-enlightened, and content-valued Chinese instruction for business purposes. The following student learning outcomes (SLOs) are articulated with this in mind. Note that students will be asked to rate the helpfulness and importance of the individual SLOs in the needs analysis, and therefore they are subject to change. Students, after successful completion of the course, will be able to:

- Understand and apply in case-studies the unique structure of the Chinese financial market, the evolving Chinese business laws and regulations related to foreign companies doing businesses in China, and the distinctive features of Chinese consumers and markets

- Understand and create business-themed vocabulary networks
- Follow the general idea of business phone calls and meetings and actively engage in business meetings and networking
- Write business emails and reports and give business presentations with a high level of formality, accuracy, and appropriateness
- Perform daily functions in a Chinese-speaking business setting such as introducing, complaining, complimenting, proposing an idea, responding to criticism, and disagreeing, with consideration of the Chinese business culture
- Gather, summarize, and synthesize business information from reliable Chinese media and online sources
- Understand and display certain etiquette in business settings such as addressing others and seating arrangement.

#### **4 Materials and Curriculum**

A variety of class activities will be integrated in order to achieve such instructional objectives as general and business language proficiency, cross-cultural business communication skills, cultural competence, and business research skills (see Table 1). The instructional activities reflect my pedagogical belief that optimal language learning occurs when students are “learning by doing” and “learning through modeling”.

Table 1

*Course Objectives and Corresponding Instructional Activities*

<b>Course Objectives</b>	<b>Instructional activities</b>
General and business language proficiency	Business case studies, TV commercials, and news reports
Cross-cultural business communication skills and cultural competence	Business phone calls, business presentations, mock business meetings, and negotiations
Business research skills	Business research paper, group project

Needs analysis results will provide insight into students' interest and wants, which can also be used to determine appropriate materials and tasks for the course. In addition, I will meet with content specialists to pick out the most relevant topics in the current Chinese business world and identify the best sources of authentic materials. Under each proposed topic, students will read one successful or unsuccessful case about a real international business in China and the instructor will lead a discussion of each business case to pool their knowledge together and foster critical thinking.

Business case studies will be supplemented by genuine language materials and authentic communicative tasks, such as business news reports or TV commercials, from which thematic vocabulary and idiomatic expressions will be practiced. Additionally, students will engage in activities to interpret and describe graphs, tables, and charts in Chinese business news or reports. I will consult the HSK leveled vocabulary list developed by experts from Beijing Language and Culture University and funded by the Confucius Institute Headquarter, based on frequency, word

productivity, and select key vocabulary in each case study. Students will also be encouraged to look for cases or news relevant to the topic and bring them for discussion in class.

In addition to the above, students will read or watch lectures or interviews on cross-cultural communication skills grounded in theory, such as the difference between high and low context cultures (Hall, 1976), high and low power distance, and individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1983). The goal will be to have students apply them in their group projects and class discussions of such cultural artifacts. Materials will also cover nonverbal communication, styles of persuasion, use of titles, and networking tips. Table 2 displays a sample of topics and material format for the first two lessons.

Table 2

*Sample Lesson Topics and Materials*

	Topic	Business case	TV report	News article
Lesson 1	Localizing products in the Chinese market	How KFC adapted its menu and services to the local needs	Why Chinese consumers love KFC food	
Lesson 2	Chinese government control on companies doing business in China	Why Google closed its business in China		Debate on the good and evil side of government control.

My plan is to follow a cyclical model of material development (Figure 2). I will pilot a lesson among a small group of students, and they will be asked to give feedback on the materials and teaching approach. For materials evaluation, I will consult with the language coordinator and business specialist to make sure that students are appropriately challenged both linguistically and content-wise.



*Figure 2.* Process of material development.

## **5 Assessment and Evaluation**

Students will complete a self-evaluation of various skills in the first class and the results will be used to provide a baseline and diagnostic information. Students will then complete a second end-of-the-semester self-evaluation and provide specific examples or evidence for their self-perceived progress.

In addition to these self-assessment methods, a mix of other achievement and performance-based assessments for linguistic and cultural competence methods will be applied, including vocabulary quizzes, simulated business performance tasks, and simulated business

research tasks. Vocabulary quizzes will consist of cloze-type passages and items, as well as matching items. The simulated performance tasks will be designed to suit real-life needs. For example, students will give presentations, play different roles at a business setting, and network with business professionals. Performance rubrics will be developed, with a special focus on language proficiency and cultural competence. Lastly, the simulated research tasks will require students to use credible sources of information to identify potential problems and solutions for American companies interested in expanding their business to Chinese markets, or new business opportunities in China. Writing rubrics will cover both content creativity and writing proficiency. The language instructor and business specialist will grade writing samples together. Students will receive individualized feedback in several forms: (a) performance and writing rubrics-based feedback; (b) individual student conferences; and (c) native speaker tutors.

The evaluation process will involve students and the coordinator of the language program via course evaluations, post-course questionnaires, and interviews. To make sure the evaluation process remains an ongoing process, I will create an evaluation timeframe and incorporate the results into next year's needs analysis.

## **6 Conclusion**

Careful planning in the implementation of this course offering will ideally serve the purpose of fostering further development of the Chinese program curriculum, as well as increasing overall enrollment in the program. The course offerings in the Chinese program curriculum have up to now not been able to address the growing interest in business Chinese. This course can serve as a preparatory course before students intern at a company in China or

participate in an internship included in study abroad requirement. Therefore this course will be a great addition to the current curriculum bridging the gap between language instruction and real-life needs.

In addition, this course will hopefully attract students interested in doing business in China to continue taking Chinese language courses in the department. There is the potential to offer additional business Chinese courses, or even to create a separate business Chinese track, based on the success and interest generated through the development of this course.

Despite the obvious benefits, there remain several limitations to take into consideration in the creation and planning of this course. Due to limited resources and time, I will not be able to conduct research on the language used in the target business setting to the extent that I would have liked. This information could have served as a great resource and model for this course. Moreover, since Penn State is located in a small town in Pennsylvania and the local Chinese business community is small, bringing in experience beyond the classroom is difficult. I hope that by using technology, this course can still provide students with a rich experience into the Chinese business world.

In developing this course, the most useful insight that I gained was in relation to the importance of designing clear instructional objectives and activities tailored to students' needs. Involving all stakeholders in needs analysis has helped me to ensure the proposed course will meet the expectations of all parties in evaluation.