

CHAPTER 11

Business Chinese for Local Businesses

Chun-Yi Peng

City University of New York

1 Introduction

This report proposes a Chinese course for business purposes aimed to help students understand and communicate in Chinese in simple business settings. Currently, many business Chinese courses are designed for corporate settings alone (i.e. for advanced learners of Chinese who wish to work for businesses in China). Alternatively, there are not many courses available for non-Chinese speakers who plan to work in overseas Chinese communities. In particular, at the community college level, students are usually not well equipped with basic communication skills in a foreign language at the level required to function in the workplace. This proposal, therefore, is designed for students working for local Chinese businesses, who are looking to acquire basic and hands-on communication skills they can put to use in the workplace.

1.1 Institutional Background

The context for this course is at the LaGuardia Community College, a community college located in New York. Many community college students in New York are working full-time, and a lot of them are working for local ethnic businesses owned by Chinese immigrants. In order to accommodate students' needs, this course will primarily be focused on local businesses instead of corporate settings. The goal of this course is to give community college students hands-on Chinese skills and knowledge that they can put to work immediately while accommodating their hectic work schedules.

This course is targeted at beginning Chinese learners, especially students with less than two years of Chinese second language learning. Potential students will be required to have completed at least one semester of Chinese in order to enroll in this class. Students will be equipped with not only linguistic but also non-linguistic skills, such as understanding cultural traditions and cross-cultural communication, as well as deciphering colloquial and idiomatic expressions. Topics would include talking to a colleague, working in a warehouse, taking orders from customers, and writing business emails. The proposed course would be offered as a Saturday class to better match the schedules of potential learners.

2 Needs Analysis

The first design stage of this course involves the identification of stakeholder needs. As the outcomes of the course will directly influence students' work performance, it is important to understand stakeholder needs before the course is carried out. The stakeholders of this course include the language instructor, students, as well as potential employers and customers of local Chinese businesses. In order to conduct an effective needs analysis, I will first develop an online

survey to explore the needs of the stakeholders and assist in shaping the materials to be covered in the course. The purpose of this analysis is not only to outline general linguistic and cultural competence for people intend to work in local ethnic business, but also to identify what exact phrases and expressions should be covered in the proposed Business Chinese course. The following are some example survey questions:

- What do you think would be some of the most useful Chinese phrases to know if you work in a local Chinese business?
- If you own a restaurant or a grocery store, what do you want your employees to know about your business?
- As a frequent shopper at a local Chinese grocery store, what are the things you buy most often?
- As an instructor, what would be the best approach to build up students' communication skills?

In addition to surveying local business owners and customers, I will also approach students and instructors from other schools that have taken similar classes to collect feedback.

3 Student Learning Outcomes

While the results of the above needs analysis will inform specific student learning outcomes (SLOs), expected goals for the course were tentatively identified through discussion with experienced Chinese teachers. The short-term goal for the course is to equip students with hands-on communication skills that they can use at work, and the long-term or ultimate goal is to motivate students to continue studying the Chinese language and pursue the next level of

learning. By the end of this course, we hope students will be equipped with both linguistic and non-linguistic competence. Linguistically, we decided to focus more on speaking and listening, instead of reading and writing, with potential SLOs identified as students being able to:

- Expand their vocabulary specific to business context
- Communicate in a business setting
- Understand business etiquette
- Understand business communication on the phone (e.g. taking orders or reservations)

In addition to the linguistic component, this course will also give students the cultural competence they need for working in a local Chinese business. The learning outcomes listed below are based on general customers' experiences of shopping and eating in Chinatowns. These outcomes address the differences between Chinese and American cultures. After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Communicate across cultures (utilize pragmatics in different cultural contexts)
- Decode/decipher some colloquial and idiomatic expressions
- Understand certain cultural behavioral conventions (sitting arrangement at dining tables, in cars, etc.)
- React appropriately in cultural contexts

4 Materials and Curriculum

Since the proficiency level of the target students for this course is beginning to intermediate, the course will be taught mostly in English. In addition, as most of the potential students will be working full time throughout the semester, the amount and difficulty of the

homework assignments should be carefully planned. Therefore, in terms of materials, I will research existing curricula and compile materials suitable for this course, as most of the available business Chinese materials will be above the proficiency level of our target students. One potential resource is *Startup Business Chinese* (Kuo, 2006), and this can be used as a helpful reference, but students will not be required to purchase the book. Other potential resources will likely have to be developed, such as compiling a word list of Chinese metaphors.

The class will primarily concentrate on students' oral communication skills instead of reading and writing skills. Potential activities include: (a) role playing (i.e., learning how to react in real life situations); (b) having guest speakers in person or via Skype, such as business owners or corporate administrators (HR staff); (c) video clips to demonstrate interactions in business contexts; (d) class discussions (e.g., students will be paired up and share their thoughts with their partner and then share their thoughts with other groups); (e) language partners (e.g., pair Chinese students with Chinese learners); (f) teasing apart linguistic and business skills; and (g) communication in daily-life settings (e.g., at the Chinese dinner table). In terms of the syllabus, a situational-functional syllabus centered around business settings seems most appropriate. An example of how this might look is displayed below:

1. Local restaurants and grocery stores (external settings)
 - taking orders
 - interacting with customers
 - taking customer complaints
 - talking on the phone (general inquiries about opening hours, locations, etc.)
2. Local businesses (internal settings)

- organizing inventories
 - regular meetings
 - warehousing
 - helping customers
3. Looking for a job
- job interview: introducing yourself and your career goal
 - writing a resume
 - writing a cover letter
4. Social occasions
- business lunches
 - cultural and idiomatic expressions

5 Assessment and Evaluation

5.1 Assessment

This course will incorporate both achievement and diagnostic assessments to ensure that students meet their targeted outcomes. In terms of achievement, since this course does not resemble regular language courses, which meet one hour a day and three to four days a week, unconventional assessment tools will be deployed to measure students' learning outcomes, such as oral proficiency interviews (OPIs), role-plays, and presentations. These assessment tools will assess students' oral communication skills and how they react to various contexts. The purpose of the OPI is to assess a student's general proficiency in responding to questions in a familiar context. It is crucial that interview questions be made based on the teaching materials. Role-plays will assess students' overall reactions to culture-specific contexts. Finally, presentations will

measure students' ability to organize and articulate ideas in simple Mandarin. These three measurements will complement each other in assessing students' abilities in listening, speaking, and integrated speaking—for which students will have to listen to or read the questions before they can answer the question orally. A rubric will be designed for each of the aforementioned assessments (see Appendix A). Students will also be given completed rubric papers with results, feedback, and peer review.

Diagnostic assessments are especially important for the purpose of this course as well, since most students are working full-time during the week and can easily fall behind if they are not motivated enough. For diagnostic purposes, instead of measuring students' knowledge and proficiency, I will adopt interviews and self-assessment questionnaires.

Students will have regular interviews with the instructors in order for the instructors to gauge students' progress and potential issues in relation to their learning outcomes. Instructors will give students advice and help them switch to other classes if necessary. A self-assessment survey will be conducted after the mid-term exam. This will be an opportunity for students to not only assess their own learning outcomes, but also to give feedback about the course. It should be noted that if native or heritage speakers register for the class, they should be required to do extra or more advanced assignments so that the assessment is fair for everyone.

5.2 Evaluation

This section describes how I will gather information to measure the effectiveness of the course. Evaluation measures will be utilized from both the instructor's and students' perspective.

From the instructor's perspective, the most obvious way is to look at student performance for their final projects (e.g., oral proficiency interview and role-play). Students' oral performances will reflect the effectiveness of this course. The instructor's feedback (both to the students and to the department) can also be a useful source for evaluating the usefulness and effectiveness of the course. From the students' perspective, evaluation data will be collected by giving students an evaluation survey at the end of the course. It will follow the regular institutional survey questionnaire for general course evaluation used at the college. In addition, instructors will be encouraged to keep a journal while teaching the course or to produce a reflection paper at the end of the course so that subsequent instructors or course coordinators can make improvements based on previous experience.

6 Conclusion

The development process of the course has helped me to rethink what makes great materials for foreign language learning, specifically language for specific purposes. As an L2 English speaker, I learned most of my English in a classroom setting before I first studied in Australia, where I ended up working for a local cafe. Once, I was looking for a dust pan, and I immediately realized I did not even know how to say 'dust pan' in English even after 10 years of English learning. What struck me was that foreign language learning can be rather domain-specific; I was able to read college textbooks in English but did not know how to say 'dust pan'. That experience inspired me to propose this course, because I found that most of the existing Chinese curriculum and learning materials are for academic purposes and many of them are not particularly useful for daily life communication.

Some caveats must be included about the limitations and constraints of this course. Language and vocabulary in the classroom setting are often simplified or tailored to students' language proficiency. Therefore, they may not truly reflect what students hear in real life. In addition, limited class time and limited access to native speakers are always constraints for any kinds of language learning. Students should be encouraged to access resources outside of the classroom.

Likewise, while much of the course is designed for students whose native language is English, given the diversity of the study population in New York City, instructors should take advantage of the linguistic diversity in the classroom and encourage students of non-English speaking backgrounds to share their learning experiences. Non-English speakers may have different developmental constraints than English speakers, and the ultimate goal of this course is that everyone can benefit from a diverse learning experience and be motivated to continue the study of Chinese.

Unlike many traditional Mandarin courses that talk about family, school life and history, this course concentrates on oral communication skills that can be immediately put to work, which is one of the greatest potential benefits of this class. Ultimately, this proposed course is for community college students who are looking for courses that serve very practical purposes.

Appendix A

Article presentation rubric

	Criterion	Requirements	Point Value
Language ability and content	Vocabulary	Be able to use vocabulary relevant to business contexts, be able to express ideas clearly	____/5
	Pronunciation	Be able to make the distinction of the four tones in Mandarin and produce understandable speech	____/5
	Grammar	Be able to use grammatical structures correctly, be able to use different grammatical structures to express ideas	____/5
	Depth		____/5
format	presentation	Images and sound files are relevant, well-explained, and easy to read/see; information on slides is explained, not read.	____/5
	length		____/5
total:			____/30

5=exemplary; 4=good; 3=satisfactory; 2=needs work; 1=inadequate