

CHAPTER 12

Chinese for Working Professionals: A Textbook for Intermediate-High to Advanced Learners

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1 Introduction

This case study examines the development of a textbook on “Business Chinese for Working Professionals” for ACTFL Intermediate-High to Advanced level Chinese learners who are interested in improving their linguistic skills and acquiring related business knowledge that would benefit their career when communicating in Chinese. The main impetuses of this project are to cater to learners’ needs from a broader perspective and to facilitate learning using technology. The target audience for the textbook is working professionals that includes Chinese learners (e.g., college students) with or without prior job experience. This textbook is expected to be suitable for any learner who uses Chinese in the workplace. In order to keep this textbook up-

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to-date, we plan to use software such as Blackboard or Sakai, as a platform, which will enable us to upload teaching materials and replace any outdated sections. The textbook will cover themes and topics reflecting the ongoing changes in many aspects of business Chinese for professionals, such as economy development, business etiquette, or culture. Authentic materials will be adapted from a variety of sources such as *China Daily*, www.caixin.com, and the *Financial Times* in Chinese (www.ftchinese.com).

1.1 Institutional Background

Working as business Chinese teachers in American colleges for over a decade, we have observed the need to develop a textbook for business Chinese. In the Department of Asian Studies at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill), “Chinese 443 – Business Communication in Chinese” has been offered to undergraduate students for the advanced study of the Chinese language for the past three years. It is a regular, semester-long course for Chinese majors, and students of different majors and minors. The course has been popular among the students whose backgrounds and majors are diverse. A lack of updated and technology-embedded business Chinese textbooks available on the market, however, is a constant problem.

Similar concerns have been identified in the Chinese Section in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, which has been offering two intensive courses—third year (Fall) and fourth year (Spring) *Business Chinese for Professionals*—to advanced-track students since 2007. Each is a semester-long, eight-credit course. This advanced course series attracts undergraduate and graduate students with a wide

range of majors, including accounting, anthropology, Asian studies, biology, business administration, computer, economics, engineering, finance, general business, international business, management, mathematics, political science, psychology, public administration, sociology, and secondary education. The third-level course uses *Chinese for Managers* (Zhang, Zhang, & Wang, 2005) as the main textbook. The follow-up volume of this series by Zhang, Zhang, Liang, Lai, and Li, (2005), originally selected as the fourth-level textbook, has been identified as either outdated or no longer interesting to the majority of students. A hybrid course has been since created in an attempt to cater to the demand for a suitable textbook and a supporting course platform. This hybrid model has been repeatedly used and updated over the course of the last three spring semesters.

According to a 2013 survey of fifty universities, colleges, or institutes, conducted by the University of Michigan CIBER (Centers for International Business Education and Research), the number of American post-secondary schools that are planning to or are interested in starting a business Chinese program has grown significantly over the last three years, from six to 26 (a 330% increase). This survey also shows that 87% of business instructors developed their own teaching materials along with chosen textbooks to meet the needs of their diversified learners. This is particularly the case for upper-intermediate and advanced level business Chinese curricula (Wang 2014). This is due to the fact that business Chinese instructional materials often consist of “generic readings or fictitious conversations”, or are “based purely on content and approaches fabricated by textbook authors according to preconceived notions of the needs of the textbook user” (Wang, 2011, p. 28).

2 Needs Analysis

In order to profile and probe the needs of students at UNC-Chapel Hill, one author conducted surveys in 2010 on those students who took 300-level Chinese classes, many of whom might take a business Chinese class in the future. Thirty-one non-heritage students participated in the survey, with 24% majoring in Chinese, 22% in business, 16% in global studies, and 52% in other subjects including double majors. Eighty-five percent of participants surveyed indicated they were minoring in Chinese. Although there were numerous requests from heritage students for a business Chinese class, the department was unable to offer such a class at this level at this time due to financial and faculty restrictions. It was expected that the majority of students planned to take the course as a requirement to complete a language course, as well as to satisfy their own curiosity. All of the students wished to learn more regarding business Chinese and culture; however, when asked about their knowledge of business Chinese classes, 55% of the students chose the answer, “I don’t know”. This unexpected answer demonstrates that the term “business” can be defined as broadly as “profession”. Students also made suggestions on topics, which could be included in a business Chinese class, such as the Chinese economy, working with Chinese businesses, business etiquette, China’s influence on Asia and the world, dealing with government, and interview skills. When asked about what skill(s) they expect to improve by taking a business language class, 55% of students hoped to improve their oral proficiency, which they considered most important for their future career or life.

At the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, a needs survey and analysis are always conducted at the beginning of each Fall semester when the advanced cohort starts its upper-intermediate (third-year) level course. Students at these levels indicate their preferences for topics and

functions such as “answering questions in a job interview”, “giving opinions in a company meeting”, “talking about the company and work with colleagues”, “discussing popular topics in contemporary China,” and “global issues on economics, environmental, and technology”.

When planning any business foreign language course, we should also consider the interests of companies who wish to hire employees with solid cross-cultural and communication skills. Prior experience leading MBA students to work with international companies in China taught us that many international businesses believe there is a deficit of employees trained in business, as well as cross-cultural and intercommunicative language skills (Borst, 2005). These skills include speaking, reading, and writing under the target of cultural context and global setting.

In addition, we analyzed students’ tests, class discussions, observations, and meetings with instructors from other institutions in order to gather content information. From these different sources of information, we believe the development of a textbook consisting of authentic materials for intermediate-high to advanced Chinese language learners as well as instructors who will teach business classes at this level is a worthwhile endeavor.

3 Student Learning Outcomes

Based on the above analysis, we decided that the proposed textbook “Chinese for Working Professionals” could be used for a one-semester program for language learners who have completed at least two years of Chinese studies or its equivalent. The objectives are to: (a) have learners improve on business/workplace proficiency in terms of accuracy, fluency, and

complexity; and (b) enrich learners' knowledge of the globalized world, business etiquette, and socio-cultural customs found in authentic readings and writings.

In alignment with the textbook objectives stated above, we have created a set of expected student learning outcomes (SLOs) for our textbook project. Upon completing the textbook, learners will be able to:

1. Comprehend authentic reading and listening materials with appropriate ACTFL proficiency levels (Intermediate-high to Advanced-mid) accordingly
2. Interpret and demonstrate awareness of cultural nuances and complications appropriately in forums, discussions, and written assignments
3. Discuss, debate, and analyze materials critically with oral application of one's academic knowledge in Chinese
4. Summarize listening, reading, or research-related materials in written and spoken forms
5. Conduct and present individual or group projects and case studies
6. Write linguistically and culturally appropriate business texts

4 Materials and Curriculum

The proposed textbook will be organized by eight thematic units including: cross-cultural communication in a global setting, employment trends and corporate culture, marketing and advertising, effects of globalization, e-commerce and social media, energy issues, environmental sustainability, and eco-tourism. The goal of these will be to provide learners with workplace negotiating/networking skills, as well as the ability to write résumés, business letters, emails, and

marketing proposals. Simulated real-life collaborative tasks and projects will be adopted to encourage teamwork and individual involvement using the target language.

The text is structured around key communicative objectives that will improve students' comprehension of authentic materials. This includes access to reliable online newspapers/magazine reports, analytical articles, emails, TV shows, and news stories that provide engaging contexts for language practice and culture learning. Throughout this textbook, learners are directed to a project-based approach containing a series of real-life tasks and case studies. Doing projects and case studies promotes interest, enhances problem-solving skills in the target language, and also familiarizes learners with different speaking activities such as presentations and brainstorming, which are necessary for many careers. Skills such as adeptness at communication, organization, and teamwork are also developed, which are considered critical in the global economy.

5 Assessment and Evaluation

This project is to produce a textbook for college students or users of equivalent level, so rubrics for each skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) will be provided in the teacher's manual to supplement the assessment needs of potential users. Diagnostic assessment is suggested to be conducted in the form of students' needs analysis, surveys, or questionnaires for related language and content courses that students have taken prior to using the textbook. The assessment of student learning will be focused on their achievement of linguistic and business content knowledge in a broad sense. The linguistic knowledge will be assessed in the form of ongoing quizzes, unit tests, and exams that cover all four skills (e.g., SLOs 1-6). The

content knowledge will be assessed in the form of email-writing, end-of-unit projects, case studies, summaries, reports, essays, presentations, business plans, and marketing proposals pertinent to students' interests as well as their linguistic ability (e.g., SLOs 5-6). These forms of summative assessment will integrate both linguistic and specific content. It is expected that teachers will have a great deal of flexibility in terms of utilizing these assessments, such as combining these into a single portfolio or other form of alternative assessment.

To ensure textbook material development can be accomplished in a timely and effective manner, we will field-test the pilot units on both campuses starting from Spring 2015. We will continue to exchange teaching experiences, issues, and our reflections through frequent Skype meetings. Feedback can also be collected from end-of-course student evaluations or monthly journals about material and content. We will also conduct more field-tests of our materials in national and international workshops/conferences such as the CIBER Annual Business Language Conference and the Chinese Language Teacher Association Annual Conference, in conjunction with the ACTFL Annual Conference and other seminars of related fields.

6 Conclusion

We believe the textbook “Chinese for Working Professionals” profiled in this report is innovative in its project-based and case study approach that will engage learners in real-life tasks and business scenarios that will enhance students' linguistic and cultural competence. The text selection is based on authentic sources, exposing learners to practical listening and reading materials to better prepare them for future professional jobs.

While the textbook can potentially fulfill interested students' and instructors' needs, we are also concerned that this textbook may contain some outdated knowledge by the time it is published. We hope that using technological platforms such as *Blackboard* and *Sakai* can help keep content up-to-date, accessible, and affordable to users. We also hope that the potential publisher can support or supply a multimedia application for the textbook, including online workbook activities, which can keep the textbook sustainable in the long run.

Through collaboration and attending workshops, we have had the opportunity to launch this textbook project idea into the first stage, which is to start writing the textbook professionally. By designing and piloting two units of the proposed textbook in the above-mentioned two universities in spring 2015, we will be able to collect and analyze the data of students' feedback to revise these two units and later incorporate a wider assortment of business and job-related content that can be tailored to meet a variety of interests and proficiency-level needs. For future business language textbook or course developers, it is important that learners' needs analysis be the top priority from which student learning outcomes are maximized and teaching materials and methods are developed. Furthermore, a reliable and valid tool for evaluating a business language textbook or course should be considered so as to sustain a steady growth of any language program. Bearing these essentials in mind, we will continue work on this textbook with our greatest effort, and progress it to its final stage