

CHAPTER 13

Developing a Business Chinese Reader

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1 Introduction

We are proposing to develop a “Business Chinese Reader” (BCReader hereafter), intended to provide users who plan to work and live in China with authentic reading material. As opposed to existing business Chinese readers in the market, which are actual textbooks, this BCReader is composed of selected reading texts from a variety of sources. The primary goal is to provide a comprehensive perspective of the reading needs of second language users of Chinese living and working in the Chinese-speaking world.

1.1 Institutional Background

This project was initially proposed following a request by a publisher who has successfully published the *China Law Reader* (Foster, Yajima, & Lin, 2012), which is

considered one-of-its-kind in the area of Chinese for legal purposes. This project also comes from instructors at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa (UHM) with experiences in teaching business Chinese for nearly a decade. Since 2007, the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures (EALL) at UHM has had an established Chinese for Business Professionals program where a three-track (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) course series is offered for students from a variety of majors and discipline interests. Each track of the business Chinese course has a curriculum with a two course syllabi and selected supplementary material. However, these textbooks come with very limited exercises for each of the four basic language skills. Authentic reading texts from the real world are especially rare, although there are a few pseudo-authentic readings modified for classroom use. The compilers of the proposed BCReader feel that the development of such a reader may substantially complement the existing textbook for the reading parts. This BCReader may also serve departmental program needs. The Chinese Section of EALL has recently received Chinese Language Flagship funding to train students to a professional level of Chinese proficiency, emphasizing language skills needed in the workforce. The BCReader will help facilitate Chinese Flagship students in achieving a targeted reading proficiency level during their capstone year or year studying abroad. The target audience of this BCReader will be learners with ACTFL Intermediate and above levels of Chinese who are interested in using Chinese for business or professional situations and who wish to improve their reading skills to the next level.

The compilers consist of three faculty of EALL at UHM: Haidan Wang, Jing Wu and Xue Xia. They all have the experience in teaching business Chinese ranging from two to ten

years. Haidan Wang also has been conducting research in teaching Chinese for business or professionals since 2006.

2 Needs Analysis

The publisher's interest and faculty's experience have initiated the demand for the development of this reader. A needs analysis (Wang, 2011) and program evaluation (Wang, 2013) have also revealed the necessity of supplementing authentic materials for classroom instruction because business Chinese textbooks in the market are less pragmatic in terms of the authenticity of the reading materials (see Wang, Tschudi, & Jiang, 2007). Based on their experiences, the compilers feel that the proposed BCReader may be particularly useful for heritage students at different levels of Chinese proficiency. Compared to their speaking proficiency, these learners lack equivalent reading proficiency, especially business Chinese literacy and exposure to work/ living environment-related texts. Providing the BCReader during their business or professional language training will definitely enrich them with large amounts of real-world reading, therefore widening the perspective of their knowledge of business Chinese and culture.

Besides the needs stated above, a literature review is necessary to research existing readers in other business languages on themes used, organization of materials, and types of sound components. It will also be beneficial to survey the potential users (e.g., the college business Chinese learners or professionals working and living in China) about essential content. Identifying thematic topics besides the ones assumed useful by compilers will help triangulate stakeholders' needs (Brown, 2001). The requesting publisher has also expressed an interest in

conducting a survey of potential users in American colleges with programs offering business Chinese courses. We will follow-up with the publisher to discuss the survey's design, distribution, and eventual results, as well as future steps. In addition to the above, the authors are planning to survey stakeholder needs at both the local and national level. Specific stakeholders include:

- Current students enrolled in Chinese courses here at UHM via questionnaires each semester in business Chinese courses
- Connections with alumni who have taken the business Chinese course series at UHM
- Flagship students studying abroad or returning from their capstone year
- Students who have had the experience of studying abroad
- Any professionals with experiences of living and working in China
- Professional networks such as Chinese Language Teachers Association in the U.S., and the annual CIBER (Center for International Business Education and Research) Business Language Conference network in order to obtain a broader view of this project and the issues related to it.

3 Student Learning Outcomes

This BCReader is intended to offer users an opportunity to read a large variety of authentic, printed material covering a wide range of themes that users might confront when working and living in Chinese-speaking environments. It is also intended to equip users with the skills to comprehend various types of Chinese texts at ACTFL Intermediate and above levels. Therefore, the following intended student learning outcomes are proposed. It is expected that, upon completing studying this BCReader, learners will be able to:

1. Recognize vocabulary, set phrases, structures, and main components of Chinese texts presented in all units, thus broadening and deepening their knowledge of Chinese texts in business, as well as other social and living/working situations
2. Develop the ability to identify and recognize key vocabulary and structures illustrated in the reading texts
3. Recall and locate instructed language forms in new texts, and appropriately interpret their meanings in both linguistic perspectives and cultural implications
4. Comprehend various written communications in the workplace such as email correspondences, notifications, posters, signs, letters, etc.
5. Comprehend and summarize various formal business documents with a variety of text forms and difficulties covered in this reader, such as business plans, business licenses, balance sheets, business contracts, etc.
6. Develop cross-cultural awareness, distinguish cross-cultural differences through various reading activities, and identify nuances and cultural implications contained in the texts

4 Materials and Curriculum

The BCReader is organized by topics and is composed of twenty-seven thematic units, sequenced by overall textual difficulty and modes the learners might encounter during their residency and work experience in Chinese-speaking environments. The major content will range from business or professional-related subjects to everyday life topics, such as advertisements, communication, house rental, delivery service, public transportation, business cards, business letters, company structures, business documents, and so on.

Each unit includes two parts: (a) texts and (b) exercises. The text section will consist of three to five carefully selected original pieces, containing representative content and formats that the developer can consider and encompass. Each reading text will have underlined key words and expressions with subscript numbers in the reproduced text that are juxtaposed with the original authentic text. For longer document texts in the latter part of the reader, the authentic texts will not be reproduced since the text format is clear enough to read. Instead, select words and expressions will be directly underlined and subscripted in the original texts. Pinyin and English explanations will be provided next to each listed word or expression. Cultural notes will follow the expression list, illustrating cultural connotations or implications that are embedded in the texts. Structural and linguistic patterns will be listed and explained if they are commonly seen in the same thematic texts. Styles and formats with culture connotations of certain business-related exchanges and documents will also be presented and described in detail.

The exercise section will consist of three to five selections with less difficult texts in terms of linguistic components and cultural content. The major forms of exercise tasks will ask learners to: (a) explain the meanings of circled or underlined parts in the texts for exercise purpose; (b) identify words or expressions containing certain meanings or functions that are introduced in the text section and explain their meanings in the texts; (c) address detailed information from the text passage; (d) summarize lengthy texts; and (e) explain the cultural implications in English.

5 Assessment and Evaluation

Because we consider the BCReader as a reading package tailor-made for specific community learners (Orr, 2002) with Intermediate-Low ACTFL Chinese reading proficiency in colleges or universities, we are planning to assess the learning outcomes through several different approaches. First, we will group two to three units that are thematically related and form a unitary test. For instance, the business card (Unit 1) and invitation card/letter (Unit 2) can be tested as a mastery unit. The format may be similar to that of exercises, with either authentic or pseudo-authentic new texts, highlighted words, set-phrases, expressions, and structure patterns explained and practiced in the BCReader text section. This allows learners to explain the meanings and cultural connotations (outcomes 1 and 3). Test items should always be presented in new texts, but contain words and expressions that are familiar to learners. Learners will be asked to identify and explain the meanings of parts or sections that convey the tested information (outcome 2). Similarly, paragraph length texts or discourse texts can also be used to assess comprehension of workplace communicative exchanges, and documents in formal business settings. Additionally, various assessment approaches can be used in conjunction with the reader, such as summarizing, listing related details, and identifying cultural connotations and nuances. (outcomes 4-6).

Evaluation of the draft version of this reader will be conducted by seeking feedback from (a) college professors or researchers whose expertise includes language teaching (especially Chinese) for specific (business) purposes or teaching and testing readings, especially extensive readings, (b) teachers of business Chinese in other colleges who are interested in field-testing this BCReader draft, (c) users/students using this BCReader for extensive reading purposes, (d) non-native speakers who work and live in China or any Chinese speaking communities, and (e)

book reviewers for systematic and specific suggestions. All these can be conducted in the form of questionnaires, online surveys, or focus-group interviews. Revisions to the reader will then be made by synchronizing all constructive suggestions and comments, followed by one or two more rounds of field-testing conducted by the authors.

6 Conclusion

This project will benefit business Chinese instruction using rich authentic materials covering the widest range of perspectives that learners may need when living and working in China or Chinese-speaking areas. This product, the BCReader, will be the sole book in this field, and is truly needed for supplementing classroom reaching, and individuals' self-study. It is an innovative attempt to redevelop the concept of a business language reader, where authentic and culturally-rich content is needed. The BCReader may also serve as a module or source of reference for other business language reader development.

The limitations of the BCReader are related to the selection of texts as well as the exercise design. First, there are questions about the number of texts per unit. In other words, are the three to five texts in each unit adequate for all themes, or should we make the number of text pieces in each unit vary so that a substantial amount of necessary text is included in related themes or units? Secondly, we wonder if the material organization formats are adequate to make users fully exposed to what has been covered in the texts. Does completing the texts and exercises along with other activities actually ensure learners or users of this BCReader will achieve all the proposed learning outcomes? This raises questions about how we can collect feedback from users effectively, and thus enhance the quality of the BCReader. Lastly, we

wonder about whether or not we need to open an online forum for such exchanges during the field-testing period and potential problems using authentic materials (Day 2003, 2004).

We are also concerned with the potential users. In other words, we wonder whether or not there will be enough interested users for this reader in order for it to reach publication. To better assess this, we are planning to discuss our project with a few more publishers besides the publisher whose interest initiated this project. We are also preparing a short proposal that will highlight the potentials of this reader, such as its uniqueness in the field. We would also promote this reader in professional conferences such as the aforementioned annual CIBER business language conference, the CLTA annual conference in conjunction with the ACTFL annual conference, as well as other opportunities or venues that the publisher may propose.

Through the development of this project, the authors of this reader have learned that needs analysis may be the most important part for this type of language for specific purposes project. With limited manpower—especially when the authors are also working full-time—we have to rely largely on our own experiences and presumptions of what might be useful to learners. This may reduce the usefulness of this project. However, everything must have a beginning. Our hope is that this proposal can serve to contribute our own enthusiasm about this project and share our experiences with colleagues developing similar projects.