

Paper Presentation:

“Teaching Business Mandarin with Chinese Culture Inputs”

A case study of “Daily Business Mandarin Course” at UBC Continuing Studies

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I. Introduction

Learning a new language means to learning and to getting to know a new culture as well. Students can benefit from language learning through discovering different patterns among languages systems and differences among cultures. The purpose of this presentation intends to discuss the close links and effective outcome between language teaching and cultural inputs by using the Business Mandarin teaching course conducted in UBC Continuing Studies. It also assesses the importance of cultural inputs with language teaching in helping students master the target language easily and effectively. It has been established that beginners can learn Business Mandarin well if we use effective teaching methods, proper teaching materials and motivational inputs in teaching.

II. The link between culture and language teaching Over the past decades, a considerable number of studies have been conducted on the culture and the language teaching. Culture has been defined as the models for living, day- to-day living patterns or the learned and shared human patterns. “These models and patterns pervade all aspects of human social interaction” (Damen, L. Culture Learning: The Fifth Dimension on the Language Classroom’ 367).

Language is thought to be the primary tool for expressing cultural perspectives and related social practices. The study of a new language provides opportunities for students to gain insights into the nature of language, linguistic and grammatical concepts, and the communicative functions of language in society, as well as the complexity of the interaction between language and the culture (Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century’ 47).

In our daily life, one cannot learn grammar and new words of a target language without understanding that target language’s culture. Both culture and language are very important for students at all levels of language learning. The two are inseparable in the process of language learning and teaching.

III “Daily Business Mandarin Course” in UBC Continuing Studies

a) Purpose of developing the teaching material

With the rapid economic development and the largest population in the world, China has been closely watched for its large market. More and more people in the world are beginning to learn Mandarin, especially Business Mandarin, as China emerges into the mainstream world of finance with membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO).

As recently as just five years ago, it was very difficult in North America to find a suitable Business Mandarin textbook which combined both real world Chinese business language teachings and cultural inputs. To fill this void, I began to write a teaching manual named “*Daily Business Mandarin-for anyone wanting to do business and travel in China (With CD)*” for the purpose of providing students with a practical and easy to understand method of learning Business Mandarin.

To meet this rapid increase in demand for Business Mandarin on the west coast of Canada, three years ago I created a new course named “*Daily Business Mandarin*” for UBC Continuing Studies. Up to now, we have trained over two hundred students, mostly business people (including CEO/CFOs), lawyers(attorneys), government officials, Business Management students and private business people interested in doing business or traveling to China. The Globe and Mail-Report on Business recommended this course to professionals in its Executive Education Guide in October 2005.

b) The content and the format

There are 10 lessons, mainly for people who finished level I Mandarin study. In terms of the content, the lessons cover many aspects of daily life related to business, such as: making an appointment by phone, the main types of business organizations in China, establishing a business relationship, inquiring about stocks and the markets, inquires and offers, buying and selling and entertaining guests. There are four appendices attached to the teaching material. These appendices deal with Chinese national holidays, samples of a business fax and letter, dealing with emergencies, useful websites and contact numbers in Canada and China. It gives students a general but useful foundation for a first time business trip to China. The lessons focus mainly on the practical usage of business Mandarin for trade and business process.

In order to introduce the culture and business hints in an interesting way, a fictional Canadian business person “Mr. Smith” is the main character in the teaching material. The context is that he is taking a business trip to China for the first time. By following his business trip in a conversational way in each lesson, students learn specialized business vocabulary, commonly used phrases, and basic sentence patterns. By practicing “situational conversations” based on our real social and business situations, the students can improve their levels of conversation, listening skills and understanding of the social and business customs of Mandarin speaking people.

The purpose of this format is to stress the communicative approach in language teaching. Through practicing this teaching method, we can stimulate the students’ strong desire,

potential and interests to learn and improve their communicative competence in the real social and economic world.

c) The pedagogical approaches

For a long time, there has been a saying that only people with high level Mandarin knowledge can learn Business Mandarin. In my 15 years of teaching Mandarin, it has been evident that people with limited knowledge of Mandarin level I and above can master Business Mandarin if we use effective teaching methods, proper teaching material and the motivation in teaching. In my teaching, I use the following class format:

1) Culture and business hints and role-playing

Each lesson I use 10 minutes introducing Chinese culture and business hints based on the related contents in the text. Then I ask the students to practice the language contents by role-playings in groups and in presentations. e.g. Sample process:

Introducing Chinese way of exchanging business cards

- After learning and practicing the Chinese greetings - “Xing4hui4!” “Xing4hui4!”, the students learn how to exchange business card in Chinese way- with both hands and lettering facing up. It is impolite to write on the back of the card you have just received.

- By practicing greeting “Xing4hui4”, the students are introduced the different tones indicating different meaning-Xing2hui4- indicated “bribe” in Mandarin.

- Asking the students to make their own business cards (their names, titles and phone numbers) both in Chinese and in English.

- By practicing in Mandarin the exchange of their business cards in class.

Introducing “guanxi(connection or network)” and “face”

“Guanxi” and “face” are two important concepts in Chinese social life. When introducing the two concepts, I gave the students a classroom task by asking:

- If your company sends you to China to set up a new brunch of the business, you do not have any connection there, how do you start to set up connections (Guanxi) in China?

- Have you experienced any situations where you caused a Chinese person to lose face? What kind of actions can cause a person to lose face in China?

2) Focusing on “real” situations

Use “realistic”, authentic materials taken from the real world, which is relevant to the students’ needs. Each lesson by bringing the real Chinese telephone cards, China’s bank application form and Chinese currency etc. to the class, I ask the students to put what he or she learned in class (including the culture) into practice “situational conversation.” This implies the use of appropriate grammar, body language, facial expression, tone of voice and intonation.

3) Visual teaching

As a new challenge, I also ask the students to use Internet access in class to get live information about the Chinese stock market when teaching Lesson 8-Enquiring about Stocks and the Market. This can be difficult for some students as not all are familiar with stock symbols, let alone the Chinese stock code system. In any event, I teach the students how to access the websites of Chinese stock exchanges in Mandarin, and learn how to check real stock codes for Chinese companies. This makes the lesson come alive in a vivid and practical way.

IV. The feedback from the students (Questionnaire)

In order to satisfy the needs of Business Mandarin learners as well as improve my teaching material and teaching skills, I have conducted questionnaires after each term. One of the questions is “Do you think the business hints and culture section that was introduced each class was helpful in understanding the target language as well as Chinese culture?” Here is some of the feedback from the students:

Do you think the business hints and culture section that was introduced each class was helpful in understanding the target language as well as Chinese culture?”

1”I think the ‘hints’ in each chapter is great for those who do not know Chinese culture”
2	(DBM textbook) Very good and practical. The situational conversation is very useful.
3	Very helpful lessons, practical to us for travel
4	Yes, I enjoyed learning about the culture as much as the languages
5	Yes, -absolutely useful practical tips
6	Extremely helpful. Created contents and makes the lesson more interesting.
7	Very much-they provided interesting content and helped us to remember the words.
8	Yes, they were interesting facts and it is good to know some of the things to do or avoid when dealing with people in China.
9	Yes, the culture hints were very helpful and important to the class; I think they will be valuable.

10	Yes, they were helpful.
11	Yes, it is very important for westerners to have a basic understanding of Chinese language and culture understanding.
12	Shopping tips class was great!
13	Much firmer grasp of Mandarin, more knowledge of social and business etiquette.
14	I really enjoy the culture hints.
15	The textbook is good-the lesson dialogue is relevant to actual situations encountered in China.
16	Great fun, relaxed atmosphere, useful for business /work
17	Yes, it was very useful information for visiting China

Up to now, I have received a great deal of feedback from my students, saying that business hints and culture brought them great value in mastering the language and understanding Chinese people and China.

V. Conclusion

Teaching Business Mandarin with cultural inputs is a new challenge to language instructors. According to my teaching practice at UBC Continuing Studies and other professional training, putting cultural and business hints with language teaching in class is an effective teaching method, which makes the language learning class more interesting, is welcomed by the students no matter what the purpose of their learning and what career they are in.

By teaching cultures and business hints with the target language, we can avoid or reduce cultural misunderstanding. For example, one of the students ,not knowing white flower indicates a funeral in Chinese culture, sent white flowers to her business partner's mother when she visited Vancouver. After learning Chinese cultural customs, she said she would never again buy white flowers as a gift.

By giving the business people more knowledge and confidence before they goto China for business or business trips using some of the Mandarin theyhave learned, we help the students reduce "language anxiety". Many of my students have gone to China after taking this course. One of the students told me that he had taken my teaching material with him to China; he tried many sentences from the teaching material and had communicated with local Chinese business partners successfully in many situations.

In summary, teaching Business Mandarin with business hints and cultural inputs enhances the students' understanding of business communications in China, daily business conversation, business customs and negotiation strategies. There is no doubt that this creative teaching method-teaching Chinese language with cultural inputs has played an important role in student's better understanding of Chinese language and the culture.

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