BUSINESS AND MILITARY ESP TEACHING ACTIVITIES, WITHIN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

The world of teaching has always reminded listeners that “the most important language in the world is the one spoken by the client”. As this message has not always been heard, let alone promoted the survival and growth of many teaching activities is beginning to hinge on the ability to compete on a worldwide basis. Leaders in teaching have stressed the importance of foreign language study for the entire community of business professionals. Teachers of foreign languages shall have to make use of methods to develop an interest in and an understanding of the world outside our own, that do not necessarily rely on direct experience. A major charge will fall on the educational system, both formally in undergraduate and graduate courses, and informally through a variety of continuing education programs. The study looks at the best ways that can make our students get basic communicative ability, cross-cultural comprehension, an introduction to basic business, military and technical vocabulary.

KEYWORDS: business, teaching, language skills, communication, technical vocabulary

The world of business and advertising has always reminded us that “the most important language in the world is the one spoken by the client”. While this message has not always been given the proper attention, let alone promoted the survival and growth of many businesses is beginning to hinge on the ability to compete on a worldwide basis. Leaders in government and business have emphasized the importance of foreign language study for the entire community of professionals.

At the same time, the work force has been challenged with more and more opportunities to live and work abroad for longer periods of time. The new business professional working for a multinational firm or even for a small or medium-sized
company will be called upon to deal with the world from his or her own desk, to be well acquainted with the foreign affairs, and to communicate and cooperate better, without having spent a significant amount of time abroad. But where does this level of knowledge come from?

We shall have to make use of methods to develop an interest in and an understanding of the world outside ours, that do not necessarily rely on direct experience. A major charge will fall on the educational system, both formally in undergraduate and graduate courses, and informally through a variety of continuing education programs. Educational institutions and companies will have to find new ways to interchange education and training for experience. The language approaches of the past will not cover the needs of the future anymore. We live in a world full of rapid changes and so should the learning styles and activities be. Thus, a language lesson should consist of a sequence of activities that lead toward the lesson goals or objectives as quickly and as smoothly as possible. According to Jack Richards and David Bohlke [1], the structure of a lesson is determined by how you deal with three essential stages of a lesson: openings, sequencing, and closings.

The openings are very important as they focus the students’ attention on the lesson – here is the time when the teachers make connections to previous learning by activating previous knowledge, try to get the students interested in the new lesson, select the most appropriate learning strategies so that the learners can actively participate in the lesson. A successful opening can include:

- asking questions to assess the learners’ background knowledge or to develop ideas related to the topic;
- using brainstorming and discussion activities;
- showing a video clip related to the lesson theme;
- giving a short test;
- doing or showing something unusual to arouse students’ interest in the lesson.

As for the sequence they state that “A common lesson sequence found in many traditional language classes consists of a sequence of activities referred to as P–P–P: Presentation, (new language items are introduced), Practice (students complete guided practice activities using the new language), and Production (students take part in freer, more open-ended activities using the new language)”. When planning a lesson the teacher should also have in view the different stages of the lesson: “easier before more difficult activities”, “receptive before productive skills”, or “accuracy activities before fluency activities”.

The end of a lesson is also important: the students feel that they understand or not what was presented to them. You as a teacher will know if your lesson reached its goals or not. The classroom climate is very important. Senior suggests the following ways in which teachers can create an effective classroom climate [2]:

- respect and care about the students as human beings;
- establish a businesslike yet nonthreatening atmosphere;
- communicate appropriate messages about the academic subject matter;
- give the students some sense of control with regard to classroom activities;
- create a sense of community among the students.

Senior takes into consideration other ways in which teachers can create a positive classroom climate – for example, by using humor to create an informal class atmosphere, by building rapport with the students through discussing common interests and concerns, by showing that they are friendly and approachable and are there to help their students, creating a safe learning environment for students where
they are not afraid to take risks or make mistakes, establishing professional credibility and a sense of purpose in lessons, and establishing appropriate norms of classroom behavior.

All the teachers have noticed that if the content of a lesson is too difficult, students may become bored and distracted. If the lesson is too easy, on the other hand, students may feel insufficiently challenged. Thus, the strategies we use can make a difference. We may start a lesson with whole-class teaching, then pair, group or individual task solving.

**Whole-class teaching** involves teaching all the students together to focus students’ attention quickly on a learning task. **Individual work** comes when the students are reading or listening to a text, or completing written exercises in a textbook. **Pair work** provides opportunities for interaction being a means of promoting both accuracy and fluency in language use. **Group-based learning** increases students’ talking time. The teacher should monitor group performance by:

- pausing regularly to visually survey the class as a whole, each group, and individual students;
- keeping visits to each group short so you can continuously observe everyone in class;
- giving students feedback to note when they are on track as well as off track;
- looking and listening to see what they are doing when students seem to be going in the wrong direction;
- intervening to guide students back to the point at which they could do the work themselves.

Richards and Lockhart [3] cite a number of strategies that teachers can use to maintain the pace of a lesson:

- avoid needless or overly lengthy explanations and instructions, and let the students get on with the job of learning;
- use a variety of activities within a lesson, rather than spending the whole lesson on one activity;
- avoid predictable and repetitive activities where possible;
- select activities that are at the right level of difficulty;
- set a goal and time for activities. Activities that have no obvious goal or conclusion or in which no time frame is set tend to have little momentum;
- monitor the students’ performance on activities so that they have sufficient time to complete them – but not too much time.

Learner-centered teaching is more effective than other modes of teaching for several reasons – for example [4]:

- It is sensitive to individual needs and preferences.
- It encourages construction of knowledge and meaning.
- It draws on and integrates language learning with students’ life experiences.
- It generates more student participation and target language output.
- It encourages authentic communication.
- It breaks down barriers between in-class and out-of-class learning.
- It opens up spaces for discussion of motivations, learning preferences, and styles.
- It encourages students to take more personal responsibility for their learning.
- It challenges the view that learning is equivalent to being taught.

Richards and Lockhart [5] identify different styles of classroom participation as well:

**Visual learners.** These learners respond to new information in a visual fashion and prefer visual, pictorial, and graphic representations of experience. They
benefit most from reading and learn well by seeing words in books and workbooks, and on the board. They take notes during lectures to remember the new information.

**Auditory learners.** These learners learn best from oral explanation and from hearing words spoken. They benefit from listening to recordings and from teaching other students, and by conversing with their classmates and teachers.

**Kinesthetic learners.** Learners of this type learn best when they are physically involved in the experience. They remember new information when they actively participate in activities, such role plays.

**Tactile learners.** These learners learn best when engaged in hands-on activities. They like to manipulate materials and enjoy building, fixing, or making things as well as putting things together.

**Group learners.** These learners prefer group interaction and classwork with other students, and learn best when working with others. Group interaction helps them better learn and understand new material.

**Individual learners.** Learners of this type prefer to work on their own. They are capable of learning new information by themselves and remember the material better if they learned it alone.

**Dependent students.** These students need constant support and guidance to complete tasks. They tend not to favor group work and often depend on the teacher or other students to tell them if their learning has been successful.

**Phantom students.** These students do not draw attention to themselves, although they generally work steadily on tasks. They rarely initiate conversation or ask for help. Most times as they are so silent, the teacher may not know them well.

**Isolated students.** These students set themselves apart from others and withdraw from classroom interactions. They may avoid learning by turning away from activities such as pair or group work. They are reluctant to share their work with others.

**Alienated students.** These students react against teaching and learning, and may be hostile and aggressive. They create discipline problems and make it difficult for those around them to work. They may require close supervision.

The teachers of foreign languages should find the learning styles best suited to develop the four skills needed for a good communicator in a more and more challenging labour market.

This challenge represents an exciting opportunity for foreign language teachers at all educational levels. The question of how and where to provide training in cross-cultural communication skills relevant to today’s global communities provides incentive and inspiration for thoughtful classroom pedagogy. Through meaningful curriculum design started in secondary schools and carried out in colleges, universities, we can provide students with the skills, and enthusiasm to make the most of the international opportunities and responsibilities that will later come their way.

Trying to introduce an innovative program for the modern language department we discussed with experienced executives from various fields of activity to identify the areas of foreign language study they considered of major importance for students. They repeatedly reiterated basic communicative ability, cross-cultural comprehension, an introduction to basic business, military and technical vocabulary and, wherever possible, experience abroad.

A survey more explicitly details the frequencies with which business and engineering students and cadets, other than linguists, use language skills:

a. Listening and speaking (telephone; conversation with one person; travel; receiving and entertaining foreign visitors, formal meetings and presentations, international military operations) – 61 %;

b. Reading (reports; correspondence; brochures, manuals, technical journals, memos) – 19 %;
c. Writing and listening (letters, telegrams, formal meetings and presentations, instructions) – 20 %.

We found these skills useful in planning curriculum and developing teaching strategies appropriate in an institution that seeks to combine specialized knowledge and skill in a professional field. The observations and suggestions that follow are based on my own experience in English classes and are designed to help students become “operational” at all levels of proficiency. They provide a change-of-pace supplement to the traditional study of foreign language, culture, and civilization through business-related activities that are simple, effective, creative, and fun.

The standard elementary-level foreign language textbook presents a predictable, quasi-universal plot. The young student goes abroad to study, arrives at the airport, finds his or her suitcase, lives with a family, makes numerous friends, talks a lot about day to day topics, window shops, tours the country. One does not usually go to a bank to ask about the exchange rate, to cash a traveler’s check, or to open an account, let alone answer or speak on the telephone, make an appointment, prepare for an internship interview, write a formal letter seeking information from a hotel or a business firm, seek out or rent an apartment. Communication skills and grammar-and even a favorite traditional elementary textbook-can be enhanced by supplementary activities that develop the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing, while building on the professional’s need to give and ask basic information [6].

It is not necessary to reach the intermediate or advanced level to introduce professionally oriented language training. Short dialogues that involve making a telephone call, arriving for an appointment, making formal introductions, or reading a telex can be written and even videotaped by the instructor and presented to students at the beginning of language study. That is exactly what many students are or will be doing today, and they need a vocabulary that is appropriate to their interests and their work as well. Cadets, working in a military field, also need a target oriented vocabulary which should and could be implemented istarting with their first year of study, vocabulary which creates a communication bridge in their future career.

A language course could be also complemented with a list of questions that might be asked at a job interview: what is your name, address, phone number? where do you come from? What’s your profession? where do you work? how long have you worked there? where does your family live? what do you like about your studies and your work? what do you like to do in your free time? Depending on their level of ability, students can be asked to first listen to and then imitate the instructor’s sample answers, write out answers at home, and then practice asking and answering these questions in pairs, improvise answers on the spot in the classroom, or make a tape or video recording of their responses and receive specific coaching in pronunciation, intonation, and the use of “pause” words. Another useful variation, which works especially well with shy students, is to ask them to work in small groups. With the threat to their ego lessened—for after all, they are now someone else—they feel free to use more imaginative utterances in developing the vocabulary they are given.

Listening comprehension can be further developed by recording a variety of native speakers who answer interview questions or by giving them a task to prepare followed by an impromptu or briefing speech that may be recorded to be discussed later on in class. Cultural commentary could be added as students compare their own answers to these questions and others: what do you like to eat? when do you eat it? what do you do after work or at weekends? Finally, the
questions could be used for written or oral testing. The written version of these questions constitutes the base for a personal profile sheet, a document that may well be required as part of a job application. The oral test could be set up as a simulated interview with the instructor or with two students participating and the instructor observing.

Another distinct way to prove the relevance of foreign language training, especially as an integral part of a curriculum, is to cooperate on joint projects containing both a foreign language component and material relevant to another specialized discipline. The student gains the best of two worlds: the expertise of a professional and the linguistic and cultural insights of the foreign language teacher. Military students, cadets hear of the problems involved in establishing multinational operations; what better way to complement these issues than by adding human and cultural factors, impressing on students the need to listen and communicate effectively?

Short literary texts, slides of art and architecture, recordings of music, and even cartoons snaps can also give language students insight into the development of a country’s cultural traditions and national mannerisms. There are some fascinating parallels and juxtapositions for those willing to seek them out. The ability to read cultural signs is a valuable skill. We need to do all that we can to encourage students to keep asking questions and to explore the cultural codes of other peoples through reading, through interviews, interaction and, best of all, through experience abroad.

All of us teaching foreign languages have much to offer in terms of training and experience abroad. By the same token, we can learn a valuable lesson in teamwork from those in the business, engineering and military world. Our final aim is intellectual growth. We simply cannot afford to isolate ourselves and work by ourselves. We need to market foreign language skills by showing students where those skills can lead and how they can enhance their careers. This is how we can change foreign language training into an attractive process with long term effects.

REFERENCES