

Teaching Business English as a Second Language

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Introduction

It is becoming increasingly apparent that those students who choose to enroll in both economic and commercial courses are becoming increasingly motivated to buttress their professional knowledge; however, what do they take with them upon completion of their elected course work? More to the point: What are the learner outcomes? Do the current English course offerings meet with the expectations of these eager young adult learners? Toward the aim of better understanding such, this author undertook the design and administration of a methodological instrument consisting of some forty-one different items; the results of which should shed considerable light into these questions and related concepts. In particular, I shall focus on *the fifth category* of the respondent questionnaires, which, I assert, lend credence to three key points, underscoring the content-expectations of the student participants—covering nearly ninety-four percent in total:

1. To master daily English conversation; to learn the structures; to strengthen their pronunciation, listening and speaking skill-sets.
2. To acquire the knowledge that lends to active problem solving combined with a heightened sensitivity to the existence different thought-patterns

between Japanese peoples and those from other cultures.

3. With the aim of arriving at an enhanced understanding of, and appreciation for, the various challenges, which confront Japanese in an ever expanding era of global business.

It then follows that with better understanding of the above noted points should lead to greater insight into various students' motivations, thereby ensuring greater instructor-facilitator awareness of such. Then, if acted on, students can in turn benefit in the way of improved learner outcomes.

Content of English Classes

This section is comprised of the *content constitutes* of the English classes and corresponding results: resolution; to establish new English subjects; to afford the students an opportunity to develop and strengthen their interest in learning English. One of the skillful techniques pertains to examples of content that delineates functional-notional meaning as such pertains to a previously specified business English methodology; thereby better ensuring success for the purpose of intercultural business communication.

- A. This section specifies the contents of English classes and accompanying results; respondents comprised seventy-nine in total.

Category 5:

What sort of content do you wish to learn?

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Comparative business culture between Japanese and those of other nations. | Yes | No |
| 2. To acquire the knowledge that lends to problem-solving and a heightened awareness cultural sensitivities, as such pertains to the differing patterns of thought existing between Japanese and those from other cultures. | Yes | No |
| 3. To arrive at an enhanced understanding of the various challenges Japanese often confront in the global business context. | Yes | No |

4. Historical themes which have contributed to the shaping of various business cultures. Yes No
5. To master daily English communicative discourse for purpose of conducting business. Yes No
6. To master daily English communicative discourse for the purpose of socializing. Yes No
7. To master English communicative discourse for specific purposes (ESP). Yes No
8. To master English thematic-content pertaining to current affairs. Yes No
9. To master English for vocational purposes. Yes No
10. Other undeclared reasons Yes No
11. Which courses do you like best? Put into numerical order those courses which you feel most eager to register for.

Category 5: Results

Item (Q)	Yes	No	Incomplete	Ranking Preference
1	48 (61%)	26	5	5
2	65 (82%)	12	2	2
3	59 (75%)	15	5	3
4	36 (46%)	38	5	7
5	45 (57%)	30	4	6
6	74 (94%)	4	1	1
7	17 (26%)	56	6	9
8	57 (72%)	17	5	4
9	32 (41%)	42	5	8

Q 10 The science of law of the United States of America translation of words (American songs) (1)

Q 11 Which number do the students want to acquire the knowledge as 1st, 2nd, etc.

Table 1

Item (Q)	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Total	Rank
1	11	1	3	0	15	5
2	6	15	4	4	29	2
3	7	8	12	3	30	1
4	1	2	3	1	7	7
5	4	4	5	3	16	4
6	11	6	5	2	24	3
7	0	0	0	1	1	9
8	1	5	7	0	13	6
9	1	1	3	1	6	8

It merits noting that this figure demonstrates the elected interest of students with respect to choice of course, (e.g. 11 students chose course number 1 to be their first, etc.).

Table 1 reveals to us that “the contents of English classes of interest” means that comprised of English subject area students need to master completely *first, second, and third*.

Table 2

First	To master daily English communicative discourse for purpose of conducting business.	94%
Second	To acquire the knowledge that lends to problem solving and a heightened awareness...	82%
Third	To arrive at an enhanced understanding of the various challenges Japanese often...	75%
Fourth	To master English thematic-content pertaining to current affairs.	72%
Fifth	Comparative business culture between Japanese and those of other nations.	61%

Table 2 shows us that judging from each number of the total students, they have chosen the third item (71%), and second item (69%), and the sixth item (57%).

Based on the results in figures one and two, I would like to provide some suggestions as to how we best facilitate the improvement of students’ English abilities. First, toward the end of their fulfilling the requirements, I have classified the items (No.1 – No.9) into three large groups: (A: No.6); (B: No.1, 2, 8); (C: No. 2, 3) in business English.

B. As previously cited, item number 6 pertains to the mastery daily English communicative discourse for the purpose of socializing—e.g. acquisition of structures, correct pronunciation forms, greater accuracy in listening, and speaking skill sets. Suggestions pertaining to such course content should

aim:

1. To ensure the utmost collaboration between the chairman of the English department and departmental members;
2. To ensure the greatest opportunity for exhaustive efforts toward the memorization of basic sentences; drill and practice at pronunciation;
3. To ensure adequate review of subject content in a timely fashion;

With respect to the usual English classes, the aim should be to:

1. To encourage them to memorize the basic grammatical sentences in the first term: ten or fifteen key sentences or phrases for each grammatical section, coupled with regular min-assessments thereby ensuring learner accountability.
2. To encourage them to memorize five or six substantive and important sentences.
3. To ensure adequate facilitator preparation time for lessons is paramount in that at such ensure greater productivity in-lesson time.

In other classes (specialized courses taught in Japanese language) *entry words and technical terms* should be translated into English as much as possible, thereby ensure clarity of understanding coupled with ease-of-use. All faculties need to maintain a presence of mind for opportunities to enhance a student's vocabulary and corresponding knowledge of such.

C. These items, *one – comparative culture; two – to acquire knowledge* – are best suited for those students at the entry level, and can be explained drawing on the facilitator's own experiential learning. Whereas, *eight – thematic content learning*, should be taken every class toward the aim of ensuring familiarity with English in its totality. Reading English newspapers is really important if the students are to grasp the inner workings of the

various structures, not least that of acquiring a contextualized sense of the content. In so doing, students will come somewhat closer to achieving a more complete understanding of global business affairs-in-context. However, it is worth noting that the topics or themes of newspaper or article content need to be of a current nature, thus ensuring topic-familiarity; relatively simple for learners to understand; and, of interest to them—that is if they are to ply their intrinsic motivational instincts.

D. In business English, item (B) *two* – *to acquire knowledge* – is based on the general culture course in English; (C) *three* – *to arrive at an enhanced* – pertains to the specialized subject in English. In both figures one and two, the lot of students (82%) is really interested in both items *one* and *two*, with seventy-five percent, item *three*. Judging from the result of item *eleven*, they have chosen item *three* as the first subject and item *two* as the second subject. As the junior and senior students have more substantive technical knowledge, this business English subject should be provided for them, and is likely more effective as well.

To teach students business English, facilitators/instructors need to be both knowledgeable in and experienced with current business practices in foreign cultures, thereby ensuring greater confidence and enthusiasm in their young learners.

For the last couple of decades, our world and the business environment we are in has changed very significantly. Due to the invention of the Internet and dramatic advances in our technologies, we now can communicate business matters with associates from all over the world much more conveniently. Being able to communicate or speak in English is in much greater demand due to this change in our business environment. Today, many international or

multi-national Japanese corporations have headquarters or business partners in North America, Mexico, Europe, and many other countries and often, business deals are made in English. Yet, during the process of making or finalizing deals, Japanese-businessmen are often faced with various dilemmas due to the following reasons. Such problems include mainly lack of understanding for the differences in cultures and decision making processes among various nationalities, and simple lack of understanding English. In order to be able to successfully finalize our business deals or speed up the process of making companies' decisions or directions which is also a matter of cost, we must understand not only the spoken language or English but also the differences in our cultures and above everything else, we must not be afraid of communicating our opinions and thoughts to others who are non-Japanese speakers.

When finalizing international business deals, we first place our opinions on the negotiation tables and exchange ideas among various personnel attending the meetings. During this process, Japanese are often found to be just sitting at the table and listening to what others have to say. This is the scene we can observe in the class rooms in Japan. Students usually sit quietly in his/her desk and listen to his/her teachers and this is what teachers and our society expect to see from so called, "good students." This is not a typical style carried out in the class rooms in the U.S. Students are allowed and encouraged to speak up their opinions, express their feelings, and to ask questions whenever they arise. Teachers do not consider such students bad students or distracting to his or her classes, rather, such students are highly valued by teachers and viewed as more motivated students; students who are eager to learn. Because of this, usually Americans and other nationalities that grew up in similar cultures are the only ones expressing their opinions. What Japanese businessman often do is that they continue listening and wait for his or her turn to speak or ask questions but by the time his/her turn comes or by the

time speakers complete expressing their thoughts, either somebody else has asked different questions or even changed the topic and Japanese end up losing his/her opportunities to express his/her opinions and thoughts. Depending on how important it is regarding the subject, Japanese often bring back the previously spoken topics which many understood as an already done deal. This stretches the pre-designated meeting time and takes a considerably long time and slows down the discussion process and Americans feel this is absolutely inefficient way of utilizing valuable time. This is a concept based on the Western ideal that "time is money."

Therefore, typically, Japanese form alliances among themselves and represent their opinions or thoughts on the discussion tables to Americans. To many Japanese, this is much faster method for making decisions and a much more efficient way to communicate their thoughts or opinions as a group because they can pre-arrange and decide such things within relative Japanese members in advance. Yet, this is often very ineffective because many times, such decisions get either overturned or opposed after discussions are made and thoughts are discussed with Americans. Americans often see this act carried out by Japanese as very sneaky and it discourages them from cooperating or working as a team. This is an aspect we Japanese can understand even though we grew up in a different culture. In Japan, many times, upon making business deals, we often take business clients golfing, drinking, or simple social events in order to build personal level of trust. Once trust is built among two parties, deals are finalized and signed. Similarly, in the U.S., if there is a trust built already among people discussing matters, the discussion process would go much faster and much more efficiently as well as effectively. This is human nature. If we can understand each other based on trust or through socializations, we do not need to explain as much in order to communicating our thoughts to the person. Hence, Americans do value

personal level of trust as much as Japanese and it is very important for us to recognize that in order to achieve successful business talk. However, there are several social differences between Japanese and Americans that must be considered.

Although Japanese avoid arguments, to many Americans, it is a normal process to go thoroughly debate a topic before making any decisions. To be more specific, I am currently working for a Japanese company in the U.S. and Mexico and see the Japanese avoiding arguments quite often. The result is clear. Japanese are the ones usually getting frustrated and feeling that their opinions are not accepted and ignored by Americans. Meanwhile, Americans are unable to figure out what went wrong and why the Japanese members are angry. Showing aggression is considered immature in the U.S. and unprofessional. This would lead them to lose respect for such Japanese and they would simply feel that they would not like to continue working with such personnel any longer. We are all different from each other and have different prospects. Even in Japan, opinions do not match always with our superiors yet; we almost never oppose what has been said by our superiors. We Japanese simply follow orders given from the upper management or accept what our superior has to say and never question whether or not it is right or whether or not there is another applicable approach to attack the issues. However, to many Americans, this is something that they can not grasp or understand. In America, people with different opinions or people who can express or have different point of views are highly valued in the corporations. Many management class personnel feel that the diversity in the opinions or point of views gives them competitive edge over their enemies or competitors. They simply do not see any justifications or merit in hiring people with the same opinions. Frequently, even if everyone agrees, someone will play "Devils Advocate" which means they argue the other side to see if all possibilities

have been considered. Again, what Americans look for is the people with a capability to express different opinions or who can suggest something different and/or someone who can improve the company's operational methods. Therefore, if all the employees have the same opinion and not motivated enough to bring in fresh and new ideas to the company, managements often feel that within the turbulent business environment, nothing can be done or changed. Trust can be born and built through heated discussions or arguments quite often. By throwing different opinions at each other, sometimes, very heated discussions could occur but by the end, Americans feel that they have accomplished open discussions. If differences in opinions are still observed by the end, it is absolutely acceptable with Americans. They simply feel the necessity of continuing discussing the matter.

Conclusion

In conclusions, in order to raise work force applicable to the global market environment, we must make changes in the way our class activities are conducted. We need to change the way how we teach our students. We must get students involved with class discussions more instead of having to continue the lecture style. With students getting involved with more discussion type classes, we will be able to raise and grow personnel for the 21st century's global business environment. Students can pick an article they want to read from presented on materials or articles periodically, and make a presentation in criticism of that article and encourage discussion. In the course of this trial, we teachers must give them opportunities to think freely as well as critically and we shall never judge their opinions. We should present different prospects or points of view so that they can see the same thing from different angles but what we must not do is to criticize what students have to say or feel. With this in mind, Chiba Shohka Daigaku should take a lead on a brand new

educational program others have not tried in Japan. By providing such curriculums, very different from other schools, we would gain the competitive edge over other school for the 21st century's new global business environment and our students would be the best prepared to meet those challenges.