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Preparing Students at All Levels for the World of Business in High School and College Language Classes

Patricia W. Cummins, SUNY College at Buffalo

Teachers in intermediate and advanced language classes prepare students wanting to use language in a practical setting. Questions arise concerning how to integrate cultural knowledge, vocabulary, and the familiarity with business situations that students look for in the everyday language class in which the teacher is not a business language expert. This article provides some helpful tips on what to include. In addition, it suggests where to obtain handouts and information on business-related topics.

What is language for business?

Language for business includes business writing, business vocabulary and related documents and practices, and economic geography. Many topics are familiar to teachers and students, as in examples for each of these three that are provided below.

As a member of the steering committee of the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) Commission on French for Business and Economic Purposes, my examples of resources come from French. However, pedagogical suggestions apply more broadly. Similar types of resource information are available from special groups working within the American Association of Teachers of German and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. Their associations may be contacted for information.

Business letter writing

When teachers introduce business letter writing into a language class, they usually find that students need a comparison with a business letter in English. In a first day's activity, teachers will need about 15 minutes to go over the following:

- parts of the letter (English and target language)
- differences in punctuation
- special phrases
- indication of enclosures
- secretary's initials
- content and vocabulary for the take home assignment
- advice on language usage or grammar that may be reinforced by this assignment (as appropriate)

While almost any book on letter writing or a major textbook on language for business will contain examples, I included an example for French in the bibliography at the end.

Depending on the level of the class, the teacher can provide more or less complex situations. Ordering a book or applying for a job are simpler assignments, while making a complaint is more advanced. Letters may go through several drafts, with pre-writing activities to go over letter format and to determine the right information to include. For a more polished letter, work in pairs and small groups allows for student reactions to each other's papers before a final draft is submitted to the teacher. The teacher may decide to grade only the final draft herself, or she may give ungraded feedback to an earlier draft.

As students become familiar with what goes into a business letter, opportunities for improving communication skills as well as grammar and vocabulary continue to play their usual role in the classroom. Reinforcement of grammar being taught can be worked into the prewriting activity, and student discussion among themselves reinforces their knowledge of the content of the letters at the same time as it makes them comfortable talking about practical matters using new vocabulary.

Business vocabulary and related documents and practices

Information and documents are available either in resource books, like those listed in the bibliography, and from French, Canadian, and American resources cited at the end of this article.

Many topics are possible in the area of business vocabulary, documents, and practices. Opportunities to combine the three occur when we look at a topic like banking:

In-class activities on checking, savings, and changing money promote communication and help students understand the similarities and differences in American and foreign banking activities.

Checking. As class preparation, make copies of both an American check and a foreign check that you have photocopied with permission from a source book or acquired from a bank. Have one foreign check that is filled out and provide (or draw) another for students to fill in. A 15 to 20 minute activity consists of:

- Ask a student to make comparisons in the two checks (size, abbreviations, signatures, explanations)
- Have them practice writing out numbers for an imaginary check (a good opportunity to review numbers if appropriate)
- Ask how they would cash a check (endorse the check, present identification, deposit part and keep part, etc.)
- Ask them to determine in groups what checks they or their families may have written recently — after the group work, have a group leader report on checks that were written recently by group members (answers may be real or imaginary, as the purpose is to promote communication)

Savings. As class preparation, be sure to have appropriate vocabulary and photocopies of deposit or withdrawal slips or other documents. (If this is difficult, you may decide to draw your own or merely talk about savings accounts.) The best way of obtaining documents and information is by contacting a foreign bank directly.

A 5-minute in-class discussion may include:

- Ask students to discuss in pairs what they are saving for
- Go over deposit and withdrawal slips or other documentation or merely make a comparison with an American bank's practices

Changing money. Provide students with vocabulary on exchanging dollars for foreign currency and ask them to role play being a foreign teller and an American customer exchanging a traveler's check for local currency. Depending on the level of students, add complications concerning needing a piece of identification, asking for the denominations in which students would like to receive the foreign currency, or looking at exchange rates in the newspaper. Students can even describe the reason for the customer's trip to the foreign country.

As in the case of banking, instructors can compare and contrast American and foreign postal services or determine the foreign equivalents of corporations and partnerships. In the latter case, students may relate such discussions to letter writing exercises in which they place an order or seek employment. The steps are generally the same: use a textbook or a resource book with sample documents or special information, acquire permission for photocopies according to your school's procedures, or supplement your materials with documents provided by embassies or chambers of commerce like those listed below. The added effort in securing documents or researching textbooks is usually a one-time effort that can reap benefits for as many times as the materials are used.

Economic geography

Economic geography is a natural extension of normal course material about the foreign

civilization, but for business purposes the emphasis is on the present. In the case of French, German, and Spanish, the place of target countries in the European Economic Community or in the North American Free Trade Agreement are among the topics covered in both target language news magazines and special publications available from both embassies and chambers of commerce. Other topics in similar sources include:

- major industries of the target country
- agricultural products of the target country
- the economic importance of particular regions (chambers of commerce of particular regions or cities will gladly send packets to language teachers)
- the relative importance of major cities — political importance of some (including both country capitals or regional centers within Europe's Common Market), geographic prominence as ports or other transportation centers, financial centers of a country, cultural centers, and so on.
- labor unions, political parties, and the abbreviations used to designate them

Economic geography topics lend themselves to out-of-class projects, which range from summaries of readings to group projects that result in class presentations. Some teachers reinforce economic geography by giving passages from readings as dictation exercises. Overall, economic geography topics help students become familiar with useful vocabulary and information that they will be able to apply, whether working for multinational or foreign companies doing business in this country or abroad, or even traveling as tourists and wanting to appreciate their vacations more fully.

Resources for French for Business

1. Direction des Relations Internationales et Direction des Examens; Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Paris (CCIP); 28, rue de l'Abbé-Grégoire; 75279 Paris; FRANCE.

The Paris Chamber of Commerce (CCIP) is the body responsible for giving the study of

language for business its present status among language teachers, both through its international exams, its workshops, and a whole range of bibliographic and support services. They consider that French for business is the French used by "l'honnête homme du vingtième siècle." The CCIP's Bulletin de Liaison, a quarterly publication for foreign teachers of business French, is available to teachers or schools. It contains helpful information on all the topics mentioned, although it does not draw comparisons with American practices. Write for a free copy before deciding whether to subscribe. Photocopies of documents and materials are usually allowed for educational purposes.

For those who develop a serious interest in business French, ordering a complete bibliography of available books on the topic from the CCIP is another good investment; a list of pedagogical materials including this bibliography is available upon demand.

Workshops are open to both college teachers wanting to prepare students for CCIP exams and to secondary teachers wishing to integrate aspects of language for business into their courses. Limited scholarships are available through the French Cultural Services.

2. The Cultural Services of the French Embassy and of the Quebec Government provide a variety of information free of charge. They promote the use of videos and films whether through their own offices or elsewhere. They also have information on workshops and grant opportunities that are not limited to French for business. They also can supply addresses for those seeking information in France or Quebec that is best solicited from banks or companies; in some cases they will connect you with a commercial attaché. Services vary from one office to another, and linguistic attachés are extremely helpful in identifying ways to obtain the resources teachers need. Addresses in New York include: French Cultural Services; French Embassy; 972 Fifth Avenue; New York, NY 10021 and Quebec Government House; 17 West 50th Street; New York, NY 10020.

3. *French for Business and International Trade* is a newsletter edited by Professor Maurice Elton; Department of Foreign Languages; Southern Methodist University;

Dallas, TX 75275. It includes useful information and practical tips aimed at the American French teacher. Its prime audience is teachers who prepare CCIP exams, but its information is useful for French teachers in general. At present, subscriptions are free.

4. The AATF Commission on French for Business and Economic Purposes is preparing a two-volume series on business French that will serve as a how-to guide on the teaching of business French in any kind of class. Its first volume will be available in 1994. The AATF address is 57 E. Armory Avenue; Champaign, IL 61820.

Bibliography

Teachers of business French generally agree that no one book provides all information they need. Attempts to address economic geography in particular assure that a book is dated shortly after it is published, and so news magazines like *L'Express* and *Le Point* or business magazines like *L'Expansion* or *Le Nouvel Economiste* are the best sources for such topics. These are available in most university libraries. As for books on Canadian and French business practices, I suggest the following books currently in print: Besnard, Christine, and Charles Elkabas. *Pratique des affaires et correspondance en français*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1990. (especially good for a Canadian resource)

Dany, Max et al. *Le français de la banque*. Paris: Hachette, 1978. (a good reference for teachers, part of a series on French for business — it is rather detailed if you want only a 20-minute exercise)

Fontenay, Hervé de. *Français, Inc.* Montréal: Editions Etudes Vivantes, 1990. (mastery of French within the context of French for business)

Le Goff, Claude. *French for Business*. Paris: Hâtier, 1989 (March 1992 *French Review* describes it in a review; it is a book used by some teachers preparing CCIP exams)

Note: Major publishers of foreign language textbooks routinely include publications on letter writing, economic geography topics, and textbooks that cover business topics.

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