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ABSTRACT

Business terminology should be included in foreign language instruction because of: (1) the need to be able to operate in an international business arena; (2) an increasingly linguistically diverse population; (3) real-world communication needs; and (4) business transactions being part of daily living. Language instruction must be made more relevant to secondary school students, and business-related language functions can provide the reinforcement of language skills needed to move students up the proficiency scale. Introduction of business and economic terminology is best accomplished through units, not specialized courses, at this level. Teachers must become more knowledgeable about this terminology in order to teach it, and inservice training is available in a variety of forms. Techniques used in economics, such as the case study, may be useful in the second language classroom. Instructional materials taking this approach are currently available for direct use or adaptation by the teacher. A 28-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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# Proficiency-Guided Business Units in High School Foreign Language Classes

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During recent years with the development of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1985), much has been said about professionally oriented types of activities for secondary school classrooms. (Omaggio, 1984, 1985) Most of the attention has focused on the oral proficiency guidelines since that is where the testing procedure has been most visibly developed. The functional trisection consisting of three components, function, content/context, and accuracy, provides the basis for curricular development and instructional strategies. *Accuracy* has historically been the basis for the curricular and instructional concerns, particularly in the areas of grammar and pronunciation. That component, therefore, will not be dealt with in this article. We will concern ourselves with the appropriate *functions* or uses of language as well as the content, with *business contexts* being the focus of the article.

Most of the students in secondary school modern foreign language classes are at the novice or intermediate levels. The functions at the intermediate level of oral proficiency call for the student to be able to narrate and describe and to be creative with the language. The content (context) requires the student to be able to handle routine travel situations with a moderate degree of accuracy. Since it is the purpose of this paper to make a case for the inclusion of business content in high school foreign language classes, and to suggest some ways in which high school teachers can organize and implement this type of content, the focus will be on developing proficiency in several skill areas using the levels below *superior* of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines as the guiding principle. (Higgs, 1984)

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Many foreign language educators might question whether it is appropriate to include business content at any level, be it secondary school or college curricula. However, no one would question that the first few encounters a traveler will have in a foreign environment will be of a business nature. Upon deplaning in a foreign country, the first experiences will be those of having to exchange money or using the cash exchanged at the airport in the United States in order to tip a baggage man or a taxi driver. This only leads one to the hotel where another business encounter takes place. The fact of the matter is, we are already teaching a lot of business vocabulary in our classrooms, but we often fail to identify the various contexts in which this can or will need to be used. Even more serious is our reluctance to simulate situations in which students realize the business or commercial value of their second language experience.

If one is seeking a rationale for the inclusion of business terminology in a foreign language classroom, one only has to reread some of our best sources such as Paul Simon (1980) in *The Tongue-Tied American*, and Ricks, Fu, and Arpan (1979) in *International Business Blunders* to realize that the American population has a need to be able to operate in this arena. A recent collection of works related to foreign language instruction and business entitled *Foreign Languages and Intercultural Trades: A Global Perspective* (Spencer) provides a strong justification from business and government officials as well as educators encouraging our profession to begin meeting these needs.

In the southern part of the United States we are seeing an increasing need for individuals who will be able to deal with the ever-increasing Spanish-speaking population. The Spanish-speaking population in Florida is not the only one that will be an important need for marketing personnel to consider since other coastal regions are now finding a growing population. It is mandatory that we educate the population toward the value of Spanish in the real trade world of the South, with the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

A third reason for inclusion of business content in secondary school classrooms is the basis such consideration will give for the development of real-life activities such as those encouraged by Bryan (1986) in another article in this volume (p. 143). If we can identify real-life situations, we can provide activities that develop separate skills of listening, speaking, reading, or writing or some combination of them. The real world is our environment: listening to directions over a loudspeaker in an airplane or in an airport, reading instructions for putting together a new machine, or asking for a room with precise specifications in a hotel, or writing a note to a friend.

A fourth reason for the inclusion of business content in a secondary school classroom is a motivational one. Our capitalistic society is based on

free economic exchange, and business interactions are an activity that is common to all students. For example, all students have made purchases of one kind or another and have heard the interaction between the clerk and themselves. Students have read business letters if only to order special make-up materials or request baseball cards or perfume from a mail-order company. These kinds of experiences can serve as a background for a positive experience with business terminology and activities.

On a national scale the Joint Council for Economic Education has been able to encourage more instruction in economics in secondary schools. (Clark and Barron, 1981) It is the southern region that demonstrated the greatest increases in the numbers of students receiving instruction in economics in the three years prior to 1981. It would be a simple matter for teachers to tie in chapters from texts such as *Principios de Comercio* (Rodriguez de Roque, 1976) for interdisciplinary activities to take place. Anna Ochoa, past President of the National Council on Social studies, and Lorraine Strasheim, past President of the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages have advocated strengthening the interdisciplinary bonds between the social studies, of which economics is but one example, and foreign languages. They encourage joint planning; class exchanges; joint classes, fairs, and festivals; and student projects with joint supervision. (Ochoa and Strasheim, 1983) In South Carolina, one semester of economics is required of all seniors, an opportune time to introduce economic terminology and career orientation for a large group of students planning to go on to state universities where two years of a foreign language will be required for admission by 1988.

The fact of the matter is that we are seeing an increasing need to make our language instruction real to secondary school students. Sisney and Morgan (1985), in a one-semester economics course in Louisville, have taught economic theory and practices, provided career knowledge, provided seminars with government officials, and done everything possible to relate economics to the real world. Just one kind of relevant cross-disciplinary activity that could be provided by a foreign language teacher would be to locate a business person who speaks a foreign language and have the students prepare questions to ask in the foreign language directly to the speaker. Since asking questions is an intermediate function, the activity would be appropriate and certainly realistic. The same questions could be asked to a person knowledgeable in content from any area: literature, cultural anthropology, sociology, etc. We already provide students with educational terminology by the very language we use to conduct classroom activities in the foreign language. (Jarvis and Lebrado, 1984) We have been including the terminology necessary to describe the literary works we read in advanced classes. (Steiner, 1972) As for cultural anthropology, the

activities suggested in texts such as Ned Seelye's *Teaching Culture: Strategies for Intercultural Communication* require students to acquire vocabulary and concepts not common to our grammar text books. It should not be unusual, therefore, that an area of human endeavor such as business be utilized for its vocabulary building potential in secondary classes. A decade ago, career education was the watchword for secondary education. Have we forgotten so quickly the needs of secondary school students to be involved in activities that give insight into the professional areas where a high percentage of our college students seem to be moving? While the main objective of our secondary school foreign language classes still remains the development of language skills, the movement towards proficiency points out that vocabulary from all the above-mentioned areas needs to be integrated into our materials and activities so that the student can deal with an ever-broadening arena of contexts. If it takes more time than we have in secondary classes to move students up the scale in oral proficiency from intermediate-low to advanced, we will need to allow enough reinforcement of the functions within the intermediate range to be able to maintain that ability. A variety of contexts of the type that can be provided by business-oriented activities will provide the basis for upward mobility on the proficiency scale. High school programs that leave everything for the colleges to do will not build the motivation necessary for students to want to continue with the language. If there appears to be no internal motivation to learn the language, students will be satisfied to turn around and repeat the same course on language analysis offered by colleges at the beginning and intermediate level. On the other hand, the student who has a broad base of experience with language contexts including literary, cultural, and economic, will enter into the college environment much more ready to deal with the overall curriculum offered. Foreign language in this aspect can be a highly humanistic experience since it can touch upon all major disciplines.

The approach for the introduction of business/economic terminology into secondary school classroom is organized by the unit then, not by specialized courses. It is appropriate to see such courses developing at the college/university levels, but such an idea would be totally inappropriate for secondary school programs. How are secondary school teachers to learn the vocabulary in order to prepare the units? In the first place, it is certainly possible that some younger teachers have been able to capitalize on the availability of the courses mentioned above. It is also possible that experienced teachers may have taken advantage of programs abroad<sup>1</sup> or

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on abroad programs write Louise Harber, Program Coordinator, Estudio International Sempere, Box 5409, GCS, NY, NY 10163

may have acquired knowledge through reading<sup>2</sup> or may have caught a special course in the evening for business men traveling abroad. The collaborative organizations<sup>3</sup> piloted through the efforts of Claire Gaudiani have brought together teachers from the high schools and colleges and universities. These are the places where ideas of this nature can germinate and result in a local in-service program in the language for a day or two, which would have a college professor or a business person knowledgeable in French, German or Spanish who could provide instruction and the opportunity for questions and answers in the language to help teachers grow in their knowledge and skills. Similarly, summer courses (Fryer, 1984) organized for the benefit of secondary school teachers or evening courses could provide the same kind of help but in a more extensive nature.

Teachers could be encouraged to experience some of the same vocabulary development exercises that are suggested to economics teachers (Brown, 1979) such as scrambled word exercises for novices. Advanced students could stretch themselves into the superior level with hypothetical situations based on actual market prices. Students can use the business section of a foreign newspaper to predict and practice.

Other techniques used in teaching economics can be employed in the foreign language classroom with special units. One such approach is the case study as described by Cabib (1983). If a social studies class is directed to figure out how the stock market works, they are given \$50,000 in play money and allowed to invest it. The case study conclusion is open-minded. The students become aware of the value judgments involved in setting economic policies and reach their own decisions. A series of books is available, which provides case studies in several foreign languages. (Balfour, 1982) These are excellent for students who can read at the intermediate level. Creative teachers or students can make up their own case studies. In the final analysis the most important facet leading to success in the language acquisition process of either teachers or students is the willingness to get involved. Perhaps the three most important factors necessary for beginning the implementation of business content units in secondary schools are equivalent to three factors that Robert Kohls views as the most important skills necessary in *Survival Kit for Overseas Living* (1979). They are 1) a sense of humor, or an ability not to be too embarrassed or discouraged; 2) a low goal/task orientation, or not setting

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<sup>2</sup>For more information on business texts write South Western Publishing Co., 5101 Madison Rd., Cincinnati, Ohio 45227.

<sup>3</sup>For information about foreign language collaboratives originally established by Claire Gaudiani, contact Ellen Silber at Marymount College, Tarrytown, NY 10591.

our goals too high to be attainable; and 3) an ability to tolerate failure. Certainly foreign language teachers are not business specialists, nor should they be. But if they are willing to laugh at themselves in the learning process, to set realistic goals for business language usage for themselves and their students, and if they are willing to accept their own errors and those of their students along the way toward the acquisition of the business language knowledge and skills, they can provide a realistic environment for their language students. These same students will someday find themselves in an international marketplace where the learning process may have been as important as the actual language skills acquired.

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