

Global Business Languages

Volume 17 *Innovation and Tradition*

Article 12

12-31-2012

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Recommended Citation

Sacco, Steven J. and Hammett, Joseph (2012) "Rich Dad Poor Dad: An Entrepreneurial Approach to the Teaching of Business French," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 17, Article 12.
Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol17/iss1/12>

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RICH DAD POOR DAD:
AN ENTREPRENEURIAL APPROACH
TO THE TEACHING OF BUSINESS FRENCH

ABSTRACT

US higher education has focused on the development of new cadres of employees to the near exclusion of entrepreneurship as a career path. In this article, the authors describe an entrepreneurial approach to the teaching of Business French. The senior author served as the course instructor while the junior author was a student who completed the course. To provide an entry into the world of global entrepreneurship, the senior author selected the French translation of Robert Kiyosaki's *Rich Dad Poor Dad*. In parallel with the reading of *Rich Dad*, students completed a series of entrepreneurial course activities. Selected activities are described from the perspectives of both authors. The article ends with students' feelings about (1) entrepreneurship, (2) future career plans, (3) the theme of the course, and (4) the use of Kiyosaki's *Rich Dad Poor Dad*.

KEYWORDS: Business French, international business, entrepreneurship, case studies

INTRODUCTION

Catastrophic economic changes have taken place as we business language educators maneuver through the second decade of the third millennium. Job security has become a myth. Downsizing or rightsizing is impacting millions of American workers, many of whom are our former students. Our graduating students and alumni face structural changes in the labor market as never before. "Every individual has to contribute significant value and impact" (Friedman and Mandelbaum 2011, 379) and even then these qualities may not be enough. "No one is safe," warns George Clooney's job eliminator character in the film *Up in the Air* (2009).

Despite the "gloom and doom" of the job market, business language educators continue to thrive at the forefront in preparing students for the global

marketplace. To illustrate, Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011) asked four types of global employers of low-skilled, high-skilled, blue-collar, white-collar, and green-collar workers what they were looking for in an employee. The answer from all firms was almost identical: companies desperately seek “critical thinkers, tacklers of nonroutine complex tasks and collaborators who thrive on working in global teams” (376–78). Business language educators have developed these skills and more in our students for decades. One purpose of this article is to describe activities that will further enhance these critical skills; the other is to highlight a skill we can develop even more acutely: the development of entrepreneurs in our business language classes.

US higher education has focused on the development of new cadres of employees to the near exclusion of entrepreneurship as a career path. Few US college and university students graduate with any knowledge or experience in entrepreneurship. Career services programs at US institutions of higher education focus on employee development skills such as resume development and job interview enhancement. Few career services programs collaborate with university centers of entrepreneurship to offer students business plan development, tips in securing funding from venture capital firms, or opportunities to develop and concretize innovative ideas.

“STUDY HARD, GET GOOD GRADES, AND YOU’LL FIND A HIGH-PAYING JOB”

An informal poll of the students in my classes every year reveals a 20 to 1 ratio favoring employment over entrepreneurship. Few students pursue entrepreneurship as a career track, in part because of parental, educational, and societal conditioning. The career mantra “study hard, get good grades, and you will find a high-paying job with great benefits and a retirement package” is what many of us have heard from childhood.

Kiyosaki (with Lechter 1997) has also identified fear as a major deterrent to becoming an entrepreneur. Orman’s 1999 work *The Courage to Be Rich*, which offers a step-by-step guide for potential entrepreneurs, is in essence a guide to conquering one’s fears. Hill’s seminal 1937 work *Think and Grow Rich* (rev. by Ross Cornwell in 2004) illustrates in every chapter how the great entrepreneurs of the early twentieth century conquered their fears to amass their fortunes.

Kiyosaki, Orman, Clason (1926), and Hill among others have identified a third impediment to becoming an entrepreneur: the lack of financial education at home and at school. How can our students become entrepreneurs if

they do not understand the complex financial world of cash flow, monetary leverage, investments, residual income, and tax shelters? Most students do not realize that the rich make money work for them, while the poor and middle class work for money. These principles of financial literacy are illustrated in detail in their books, most of which employees have never read.

Our version of advanced Business French at San Diego State University addresses financial literacy, fear, and the development of entrepreneurial dreams within a semester-long course. It also reprograms students to view entrepreneurship as a viable career path.

FRENCH 423

French 423 at San Diego State University is a Business French course that traditionally prepared International Business majors to complete semester-long coursework abroad at EPSCI (École des Practiciens du Commerce International), part of the prestigious Groupe ESSEC, in Cergy, France; the École Supérieur de Commerce de Toulouse, and the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. International Business majors were required to complete four courses (three in French) among existing courses in finance, marketing, management, and economics. SDSU's International Business majors traditionally competed for grades alongside their French classmates. For decades, French 423 culminated in students taking the Paris Chamber of Commerce certification exams as the course's final exam. In spring semester 2012, we found that virtually all International Business majors had recently completed their coursework abroad. This unique opportunity allowed an experiment with a new approach to teaching French 423.

This new version of French 423 explores the world of entrepreneurship in a global context. The course's textbook is the French translation of Robert Kiyosaki's seminal work *Rich Dad Poor Dad* (1997). *Père riche père pauvre* (2001) introduces students to the world of entrepreneurship, beginning with the author's business attempts in his teens and detailing the development of his financial education and real estate empires. Students learn the basics of financial education and the options available to them as potential entrepreneurs. All discussions of the text are conducted in French.

French 423 incorporates *praxis* as a major component of the course. Students mostly work in teams on simulated global business activities in French as they are introduced to entrepreneurial options, such as cross-cultural consultants, franchising, network marketing, and real estate speculation. The simulated global business activities include the following:

1. Establishing personal goals and prioritizing weekly activities using the French version of Stephen R. Covey's 2004 *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*;
2. Identifying and enumerating personal and professional dreams;
3. Designing and registering a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC);
4. Assisting a French media company to transform popular French TV commercials for use with an American audience;
5. Assisting a French multinational firm—Bull HN—to enhance synergy between its French and US software design teams;
6. Designing online language and culture programs for US and French companies;
7. Designing an expatriate manual for US families planning to move to France for business purposes; and
8. Creating cross-cultural workshops and case studies designed for US and French companies.

These global entrepreneurship activities sharpened students' French-language skills through daily discussion, intensive writing, the reading of French current business and political events, and the design and use of PowerPoint presentations.

COURSE ACTIVITIES

1. *Reading Père riche père pauvre*. In lieu of using a traditional Business French textbook, I decided to adopt one of the seminal works of entrepreneurship, the French version of *Rich Dad Poor Dad: What the Rich Teach Their Kids about Money—That the Poor and Middle Class Do Not!* (Kiyosaki and Lechter 1997). Amazon.com sells the French version of this work for student use. Linguistically, *Père riche père pauvre* (Kiyosaki and Lechter 2001) is stocked with much of the key business lexicon featured in best-selling Business French textbooks such as Berg's 1999 *Parlons affaires! Initiation au français économique et commercial* or Le Goff's 1994 *Le Nouveau French for Business*. More importantly, *Père riche père pauvre* describes Kiyosaki's six lessons of entrepreneurship.

Kiyosaki relates the story of his youth when he was influenced by two key adults: his father, an academician with a strong educational background (Stanford, University of Chicago, Northwestern University) and his best friend's father, a multimillionaire entrepreneur, armed only with an eighth-grade education. Both "dads" were charismatic, powerful, and influential. Both supported a good education for their children. Both, however, differed

in their views of the role of money and the role of government. Kiyosaki's "poor dad" viewed the "love of money as the root of all evil" while his "rich dad" stated that "the lack of money is the root of all evil" (Kiyosaki and Lechter 1997, 13). His "poor dad" advised him to study hard, and get good grades to find a high-paying job with great benefits" (Kiyosaki and Lechter 1997). Instead, Kiyosaki's "rich dad" instructed him in the art of financial self-reliance to live independently of market and governmental forces. At age nine, Kiyosaki decided to listen to his "rich dad" about the role of money.

Kiyosaki's initial message is designed to challenge the notion that a good education and good grades will make people financially secure and successful. The author uses his father as an example of someone who worked hard, lived frugally all his life, but still struggled, and died leaving a legacy of debt to his family. (For Kiyosaki and others, "job" equals "just over broke.") The author immediately proceeds to the basics of financial literacy. The key concept in financial literacy is knowing the difference between assets and liabilities. To illustrate, Kiyosaki argues that owning a home is not an asset since the bank is the owner; a house becomes an asset when the owner rents it to someone and creates a monthly cash flow. Paying oneself first by saving a tenth of one's income before paying bills creates investment capital for the purchase of real estate or stocks. Acquiring assets and living frugally are the best strategies for attaining financial independence. In addition to teaching financial literacy and strengthening French-language skills, Kiyosaki's seminal work serves as a platform for students to apply its lessons in their own lives.

2. *Objectifs de la semaine*. Successful entrepreneurs regularly highlight and prioritize goals and activities for the day, week, month, year, and even for their life. Like entrepreneurs, students are overwhelmed with "too much to do and too little time" (Tracy 2007, 32). Tracy states in *Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time* that "an average person who develops the habit of setting clear priorities and getting important tasks completed will run circles around a genius who talks a lot and makes wonderful plans but who gets very little done" (32). However, Tracy reports that only 3% of adults regularly put in writing their vision, goals, and activities.

Goal setting instills self-discipline, clarity of purpose, a focus on proactivity, and repugnance for disorganization and procrastination. Most

importantly, goal setting increases productivity, the life's blood for any entrepreneur. It is for these reasons that *Objectifs de la semaine* is the first lesson of entrepreneurship that each Business French student receives in the class.

Time management literature has compiled a multitude of methods of goal setting. Tracy (2007) espouses the completion of the hardest tasks first (which he calls frogs). Additionally, Tracy warns readers to resist the temptation to complete the easiest tasks first. My own personal favorite system emanates from Stephen R. Covey's seminal book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, which prioritizes activities ranging from A (A1, A2, A3, etc.) to C (C1, C2, C3, etc.).

In *Objectifs de la semaine*, students are asked to take 15 minutes on a Sunday evening to plan their week in terms of goals and activities. *Objectifs de la semaine* is due every Monday morning at 8 a.m. Based on Covey, students list in French their goals for the week. These might include . . .

- Get an A on my Marketing 376 test;
- Turn all my assignments in on time;
- Go to the gym three times this week;
- Lose one pound, etc.

Next, they transform their goals into activities to complete. Top priority activities (A1, A2, A3, A4, etc.) usually include test preparation, job interviews, and lab assignments to complete. B1, B2, B3, etc. are second-tier activities in terms of importance. They might include meeting with their research team, reading 125 pages in *Madame Bovary*, running three miles Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, calling their parents. C1, C2, C3, etc. activities often include reading and responding to all emails, doing the laundry, washing dishes, taking out the garbage, going grocery shopping, etc.

Preparing *objectifs de la semaine* provides students with an additional opportunity to practice their written French in a business context. Grades are based on the thoroughness of the planning of their week in addition to the quality of their French. No late work is accepted. Feedback addresses their grammar and spelling in addition to reactions to their activities and goals for the week.

It is evident from the students' responses that this activity was beneficial:

"The *objectifs de la semaine* [weekly objectives] was one of the central activities within the FRE 423 course. This was also one of the most beneficial habits that I have learned during this course."

“The *objectifs de la semaine* forced me to organize and prioritize my weekly agenda. This activity more than any other activity within the course was applicable to not only my other courses, but also the entirety of my daily and weekly routine. The structure put forth by Stephen R. Covey in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* made it easier for me to plan and prioritize my weekly schedule and in doing so allowed me to more efficiently achieve my weekly goals and successfully accomplish all that I hoped to have accomplished during the week.”

“This activity extends above and beyond the scope of the FRE 423 course. I know that this habit that I have learned during the course will be an important tool not only in my professional career but also in my private life. With this habit, I will not only be able to efficiently accomplish my weekly goals and activities but also in doing so have more leisure time at my disposal.”

Not all students were pleased with *objectifs de la semaine*, some calling it “busy work.” Another student questioned the strict deadline. A third student preferred another method of time management, which I encouraged her to use. The two students who were displeased with *objectifs de la semaine* had an opportunity to replace it with another class activity. It should be noted that these two students repeatedly turned in their class work late, which is typical of students who do not employ a time management system.

3. *Actualités économiques*. Every week, students were asked to select, read, and critique an article from a Francophone daily newspaper dealing with an economic or political theme. The primary goal of *actualités économiques* was to upgrade one’s knowledge of the economic or political scene of a Francophone country. Students sent the Web link for each article along with their summaries in French. *Le Monde* and *La Presse de Montréal* were the most popular new sources selected and read. Many students followed France’s presidential elections, the EU’s financial crisis, France’s reaction to Syria’s internal upheaval, innovative French companies, and the International Monetary Fund. The instructor provided feedback on the choice of articles and language skills used in the summaries.

Joseph Hammett’s perspective:

“The weekly activity *actualités économiques* asked us to choose a newspaper article written in French dealing with an aspect of business (economy, politics, finances, etc.) and write a short summary of it. I believe that this activity was one of the most beneficial activities and crucial to successful

entrepreneurship. In order to be a successful entrepreneur, one must be aware of, and understand, the economic climate around them. This activity instilled the habit of reading articles related to business on a regular basis. Although one article a week will not suffice for the in-depth knowledge and understanding needed to become a successful entrepreneur, this activity is an effective transition into the habit of regularly reading business-related newspapers.”

4. Consulting Project: At the Heart of Bull HN. Consulting is an entrepreneurial option for many of our students majoring in international business—once they acquire adequate experience. Consulting firms abound, designed to solve global business problems. For this project, I divided the class into consulting teams of four students. Their task was to analyze Bull’s global research and design dilemma and provide Bull with a strategic program of activities and decisions to solve the dilemma.

To summarize the dilemma, Bull HN is a multinational computer company headquartered in France. Bull’s problem, as stated in the video *At the Heart of Bull*, is the lack of synergy between its French and American production and design teams. The American Bull employees speak little or no French and possess little knowledge of French culture. Bull’s French employees find themselves working with their American counterparts in English, which puts them at a disadvantage.

Both teams possess different views about the process of research and design. The American team works rapidly to get a product to market as soon as possible. Conversely, the French team prefers deliberate research and beta testing. Both strategies frustrate the two teams. The Americans accuse their French counterparts of “analysis paralysis” while the French deplore the need for product recalls due to the rapidity of bringing a product to market.

The French 423 student teams worked for several weeks to configure and finalize their strategic recommendations and action plans. All teams were required to present their case via a PowerPoint presentation in French. Representing Bull HN, I interrupted each presentation *à la française* seeking clarification and providing critique as the French often do. Even though the video (*At the Heart of Bull*) is dated, the student teams acted as if Bull’s synergy issues were still in play.

The student consulting teams generated excellent ideas and action plans to enhance synergy between Bull’s French and US teams, one of the best being the recommendation for future hiring practices. One team recommended that Bull hire international business majors graduating from leading pro-

grams in the US and abroad. New hires should possess multilingual skills (French and English), international business acumen, and multi-country work or study experience. Another team recommended job shifting in which key US personnel would complete assignments in France and vice-versa. In-country mentoring, a housing exchange, a foreign language training program, and pre-departure training were other recommendations provided by the consulting teams.

Hammett's perspective was typical of the comments made by the class:

“The BULL-HN consulting activity was the capstone of the practical activities of this course. This activity most closely resembled the types of tasks that we will be expected to perform in the field. Not only was the activity itself an excellent training for the field, but also the manner in which the activity was carried out by the professor. Instead of the normal professor-student dynamic, in this activity the professor played the role of an executive of BULL-HN, who was responsible for choosing the most effective plan to streamline the intercultural development of the company. This activity allowed us to exhibit our skills in intercultural relations and also was an excellent simulation of the competition of the business world.”

5. *Analyse des spots publicitaires.* Imagine viewing a 45-second TV commercial featuring an Air France flight. The camera zooms in on a mountainside where a man and a woman, enjoying their vacation, lounge by a pool that overlooks the ocean several hundred feet below. A palette of blues, reflecting the swimming pool, sky, and ocean, radiate from the scene. The pilot verbally prepares the two passengers for the upcoming landing, his voice soothing as if he were on vacation. The words “Seats 8A and B” are superimposed above the pool lounge.

One student team needed to address the following questions: Is this an effective commercial for an American audience? Why or why not? What makes the commercial effective? What strategies did Air France employ to seduce its audience? Are there more effective strategies that could have been used?

Many Business French courses feature cross-cultural analysis of Francophone TV commercials (Martin 2006, for example). French 423's student teams analyzed the French-language ad campaigns of ...

1. US products or services, such as Weight Watchers (“Tu veux ou tu veux pas”) and Special K and;
2. French products and services in the US, such as Air France.

Analyse des spots publicitaires was the second of two opportunities for student teams to simulate the scope and breadth of actual entrepreneurial consulting teams. Students selected and prepared their analysis culminating again in a PowerPoint presentation in French to the class.

Hammett's perspective:

"A central goal in this course was to gain practical experience in the field of international business. The advertisement activity allowed me, as well as my fellow students, to practice activities that we might be asked to do later on in the field and allowed us to gain practical experience alongside theoretical knowledge. The activity, which asked us to analyze a French commercial and then explain why or why not this commercial would be effective in the United States, gave us a platform to use our learned intercultural (Francophone-American) knowledge in a simulated real-life business activity. Another valuable facet of this activity was the presentation of the commercial. Being completely in French, this presentation was an effective training for similar tasks that we might be asked to do in the field."

6. *Creation of case studies.* The analysis of case studies is the most significant pedagogical activity that US business schools have contributed to the millions of students majoring in disciplines ranging from accounting to management. Case studies are also popular in the business language classroom. The design and development of case studies is a great activity for students who hope to become global business consultants. As consultants, their case studies will assist their clients in better understanding global business problems.

In our class, students read and analyzed "Hydro Quebec and the Cree: A Public Relations Nightmare." The case study examines the conflict between the two as Hydro Quebec pushed to expand its dam building efforts in northern Quebec. This case served as a model for one student to create her own case study. In "Florence Cassez: Injustice in Mexico," the student discusses the conflict between Mexico and France due to the arrest and 60-year sentence of a French citizen. Below is a summary of the case:

In 2003, Florence Cassez arrived in Mexico and soon began a relationship with Israel Vallarta. She returned to France in the summer of 2005, but Vallarta contacted her and she returned to Mexico. Florence Cassez was arrested on Thursday, December 8th, 2005 in Mexico City alongside Vallarta. She was detained overnight, and then moved to Vallarta's house early the next morning, Friday, December 9th, 2005. The Mexican Federal Police staged an arrest that morning during which TV crews of Mexican

networks broadcast and reported live. Vallarta was accused of being the leader of the kidnapping gang “Los Zodiaco” and Cassez was presented as a member of the gang.

The Attorney General of Mexico, Daniel Cabeza de Vaca, admitted to a staged, televised arrest. The Federal Police claimed that three victims were held hostage in the ranch where Cassez lived. On April 25th of 2008, Cassez was condemned to 96 years in prison. She was charged with: organized crime, illegal deprivation of three people’s liberty, and possession of firearms used exclusively by the army. On March 2nd of 2009, Cassez’s sentence was reduced to 76 years in prison. To conform with Mexican legislation, her sentence was then reduced to 60 years, which is the limit of incarceration. That same year Cassez claimed that the Strasbourg Convention, signed by Mexico, would allow her to be transferred to a French jail. A committee of legal experts from France and Mexico was set up to study the requested transfer, which was finally denied. In France, Cassez would not have had to complete 60 years in jail as in Mexico.

In August of 2010, the lawyers for Florence Cassez filed an appeal with the Mexican Supreme Court, arguing that the arrest of Cassez was unconstitutional and that the rights of their client had been violated.

7. Mission impossible. Marketing American products in France or in a French-speaking country is an activity that many of my former students complete as employees for their companies. Consulting firms, owned and managed by students in the future, can also accomplish this same task.

A modification to this activity challenges students to market a US product that has questionable value in France. Will Thompson, from the University of Memphis, introduced me to this activity, which he uses in his international MBA classes. We challenge our students to market the following products in France: *Chia Pets*, *Snuggies*, Oscar Mayer’s *Lunchables*, and Hormel’s iconic product, *Spam*.

CONCLUSION

French 423, using an entrepreneurial approach, was a huge success the first time it was taught. I used course evaluations, and Joseph Hammett interviewed several classmates to ascertain course strengths and weaknesses. We used the following factors to determine success in the course.

1. Did the course impact students’ feelings about entrepreneurship?

On the first day of class, I asked students if they planned to be entrepreneurs, employees, or a combination of the two in ten years. Two of 22 stated that they would become entrepreneurs, while 20 stated they would become

employees. On the last day of the class, the results differed significantly from the first day of class. Four said that they would become entrepreneurs; twelve, a combination of the two; three stated they would be strictly employees, and three stated no preference.

Many students still are daunted by the task of becoming entrepreneurs. That may account for the selection of entrepreneur-employee as their career choice for more than half of the class. The selection of this combination may also be attributed to two factors: many students love their major, which may be directing them to careers as employees. Second, students have heard my story and the story of several colleagues as professor-entrepreneurs and may have viewed that combination as a more comfortable choice of career path. One of their favorite anecdotes related the story of a German professor who was also a real estate magnate, owning over 200 apartment units while teaching Goethe, Business German, and other German courses.

Three students adhered to their earlier choice of employee, and three were unsure.

2. Was the use of *Père riche père pauvre* effective and should the instructor use it again?

Twenty of 22 students recommended that I use *Père riche père pauvre* in future French 423 classes. Additionally, they demonstrated strong positive feelings about Kiyosaki's book. Below are three of the most representative positive comments:

"I support your efforts to use this text in future French 423 classes. The lessons I got from the book are those that I've never heard or learned before in my life. I'm glad that I read *Rich Dad* when I was relatively young. ..."

"This book is a font of enormous motivation for a student. It doesn't matter if students are majoring in business or not because the book has tools and advice for anyone. Schools don't teach the importance of financial education but this book teaches it well."

"It's the best book I've read in four years of college."

"For me it was a big help because I have a lot of debt and I have problems with shopping. The book inspired me to be more responsible with my finances."

Two of 22 students expressed strong negative comments:

“When I read *Rich Dad*, I felt Robert’s approach was insulting. He makes it look too easy and criticizes anyone who doesn’t want to be an entrepreneur ... In the future, I would use *The Richest Man in Babylon* if you can find it in French.”

“It’s an interesting book but its focus on real estate and stocks is a little tiresome (particularly in this economy).”

In response to the student’s suggestion, I am trying to find the French translation of Clason’s *The Richest Man in Babylon* to use as a supplemental text for the next French 423 class in spring 2013.

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