

Teaching Communication Skills for Advanced Business Majors at the University Level

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1. Introduction

At Chuo University, four programs are offered for students, who are interested in passing some of the official qualification examinations and/or improve one's skill, and the class size of these programs is rather small compared to other regular courses. The four programs, which emphasize practical learning, are (1) Accounting Program, (2) Business Innovation Program, (3) Financial specialist program, and (4) Business Communication Program. These programs are open to students, who are enrolled at Flex Plus-One course; however, students, who belong to Flex course, can also take the courses of these programs when the courses are not full of Flex

Plus-One students, and the courses they passed are treated as electives. Certificates of these programs are given only to Flex Plus-One students, who earn 16 credits of each program. Students can take the courses of all the programs but can get only one Certificate.

2. From Business Communication Program to Global Business Program

Based on the educational and academic achievement of Department of Marketing and Trade, Faculty of Commerce, Chuo University, Business Communication Program is offered, and this program is offered for students, who are interested in doing business overseas and/or want to be actively involved in international business by using Business English as a means of communication. Students, who are interested in obtaining MBA (Master of Business Administration) overseas, are also the target of the program. In order to further improve the program, Business Communication Program is going to be renewed to Global Business Program. This new program offers courses, such as International Business Negotiation, Management Communication, Intercultural Communication, Business Report Writing, and Theories of Business Communication (this will be offered from the second semester of 2015), and the language for their instruction is in English. The main language for instruction is in Japanese for the following two courses: Business Presentation in English (Business Presentation in English I & II will be renewed to one course from the first semester of 2015) and English News by Nikkei Inc. (this will be offered from the first semester of 2014).

The development of the means of transportation and information technology, the world has been getting smaller and smaller since people, goods, money, and information can move even more easily and freely. Business, therefore, has been becoming a lot more internationalized and the role of Business English as lingua franca has been getting much more important. In order to be competitive in the global market, Global Business Program will lead the students, who demonstrate advanced level of achievement in reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills at general English classes which

the students study at their first and second year at the university, to a higher level.

The curriculum of the direct related courses is as follows: (1) Required General English Classes, which meet twice a week, for first and second year at the university throughout the academic year; (2) Business English I (Introductory English for international trade) for first-year students at first or second semester; (3) Business English II (Business Communication) and Business English III (Advanced English for international trade) for second-year students at their first semester, and Theories of Business Communication for second-year students at their second semester; (4) Business Presentation and Story-telling in English and English News by Nikkei Inc. for third-year students at their first semester; (5) Management Communication, Intercultural Communication, and Business Report Writing for third-year students at their first or second semester; and (6) International Business Negotiation for third-year students at their second semester. The language for instruction is mainly in Japanese for Business English I/III, and in English for Business English II.

2.1 Business English I (Introductory English for International Trade)

This course meets twice a week (90 minutes each) and offers four credit. The purpose and the goal of this course is to teach the basic theories of export and import business, fundamental skills of writing and reading business correspondence in English between exporter and importer, that is international business correspondence including writing business letters, fax, email, etc., advertising and publicity, legal documents, technical documentation, and trade-related documents in order to promote and conduct export and import business smoothly. Fundamental use of Business English, technical terms and idiomatic expressions used in export and import business are taught. The use of Business English is taught in relation to the following business stages: (1) to find a business partner overseas; (2) to establish a business relationship; (3) to conclude a business contract; and (4) to execute the contract.

Business writing, taught at Business English I, mainly features five theoretical items such as completeness, correctness, conciseness, clarity, and proper tone. First, completeness means that all the necessary information for both sides should be presented appropriately depending on the situation and/or the content of the message. Logic is important but logic is not everything. Second, correctness means that correct grammar and vocabulary are used. Some words can mean different when they are used singular or plural. Accurate expressions on words, phrases, quantity, weight, price, date, etc. are taught in this course. Third, conciseness means to use compact expressions. Long expressions, difficult words and phrases should be avoided as much as possible. Fourth, clarity is to use clear expressions. Abstract and ambiguous expressions should be avoided depending on the situation and/or content of the message. In principle, one main idea in one paragraph is the rule, so only one single sentence in a paragraph is acceptable in business writing, especially in writing letters, email, and fax. The logical development of paragraph writing with consistency in content is one of the focused points to teach the students. Proper tone is to use appropriate tone in accordance with the situation. For example, if the fact is more important than the performer, who takes the action, or when the sender of the message does not want to make the subject of the expression clear, passive voice is used. Depending on the relationship with the other side or the situation (friendly or difficult), the ways to change the degree of politeness, the expression, the development of logic is taught to the students. In general, negative words and expressions should be avoided and positive words and expressions are highly recommended.

In this way, at Business English I, the students will learn a higher level and go beyond the level of English they learned at high school.

2.2 Business English II (Business Communication)

Business English II will become a four credit course and meet twice a week (90 minutes each) from the first semester of 2015. At present, Business English II is divided into two courses - Business English II (Business Communication I), which meets once a week (90 minutes) at the first semes-

ter and Business English II (Business Communication II), which meets once a week (90 minutes) at the second semester. They both give two credits to students. Students learn Business English, which is used at international business, particularly at meetings. Business English I is a prerequisite of this course, so this course is limited to students who have already passed Business English I. Students are divided into groups, and they will mainly learn how to do business meetings, interviews, etc., in order to especially improve their listening and speaking skills.

2.3 Business English III (Advanced English for International Trade)

The purpose and goal of this course is to teach students advanced writing and reading of business correspondence, which will be used at export and import business. In order to take this course, students need to pass Business English I or to have equivalent knowledge and skill of it. Considering the tight curriculum at Chuo, students can take Business English I and III simultaneously. The students will learn the following: (1) The style and format of business letters, fax and email; (2) Market research and how to find a business partner; (3) Credit inquiry; (4) Inquiry; (5) offer; (6) Order; (7) Trade terms; (8) General terms and conditions; (9) Letter of Credit; (10) Bill of Lading; (11) Shipping; (12) Claim and complaint; (13) Settlement of account. As can be seen from the above overview of topics learned in the classroom, this course is characterized by setting learning scenes, which can also be observe at Business English I and II.

Concerning the training of writing skills, the procedure goes as follows: (1) A topic is given by the instructor as homework; (2) Students bring the assignment to class; (3) The instructor collect and correct it, and then return it the following week to the students; (4) The students are divided into groups of two to four persons in the group. The students learn from each other by exchanging information among the group members and among different groups. For correction, I distribute a "Composition Correction Chart," which shows the students how to correct the writing by referring to the numbers in the chart. When I feels that it is difficult or complicated for the

students to just show the numbers, I will write the instruction in a word or a sentence for the students. In general, therefore, actual correction is not written in the students' paper but just the numbers are mentioned. In this way, the students need to think themselves to correct their original writing.

Regarding reading, technical terms and expressions on export and import trade, finding the main topic in each paragraph, and translating to Japanese polite expressions are taught to students. Japanese polite expressions, which should be used in doing business in Japan, are also learned through Japanese to English translation activities as well. Business English III is to further enhance the contents of Business English I.

2.4 Program Lecture III (Nikkei English News by Nikkei Inc.)

This four-credit course (180 minutes per week) will start from the spring semester of 2014, will be offered only in the spring semester, and third and fourth year students can take it since the level of English is more difficult than General English, which is offered for first and second year students.

This two-credit course (90 minutes per week) used to be Program Lecture IV (Reading Nikkei Weekly I/II/III/IV/V/VI) until fall semester 2013. The course was available from second to fourth year students. Reading Nikkei Weekly I/III/V were offered at spring semester and Reading Nikkei Weekly II/IV/VI were offered at fall semester. Students could take the course for six consecutive semesters.

Even though the content of the news article changes every week, the level of the material basically stays the same. With this reason, this course is going to be offered to the students only once in their university life.

The students learn the grammar, organization and logic of written news in English, present the content of the news and give their thoughts or impression in class, have small group discussion in class in order to improve communication skills and to learn the current issues in English. At the first lecture of this course, a guest speaker from Nikkei Inc., who is deeply involved in news in English, is invited, and gives tips on how to read English news effectively. The students are required to read the articles before class, which are selected by the instructor every week.

The acquisition of vocabulary, terminology and style in business, economics, and law, speed reading and extensive reading, and finding topic sentences and keywords are the main learning points for the students. Students can also refer to articles written in Japanese not only to further understand English but also to learn more on current issues of business by combining additional information.

2.5 Program Lecture III (International Business Negotiation)

This course (90 minutes per week) used to be a two credit Program Seminar IV (International Business Negotiation). From fall semester 2013, this course is modified to a four credit Program Lecture III (International Business Negotiation), 180 minutes per week. Keidanren, a comprehensive economic organization with a membership comprised of 1,300 representative companies of Japan, conducted a survey to its member companies and found that many companies place value on personnel, who has leadership, is able to solve problems and to build consensus with a practical ability to negotiate at the international level. Understanding of the negotiation theory should be well-balanced with practicality through training. Considering this perspective in order to fulfill the needs of the society, the two credit course was modified to four credits to further improve the quality of the course. At universities and graduate schools of the western world, some case studies and simulations of negotiation take three hours consecutively. In order to offer similar level of training like western higher educational institutions, Program Lecture III (International Business Negotiation) is decided to be offered at once a week, 180 minutes in succession.

The instruction is given in English, and the objective of the course is to teach theoretical and practical aspects of negotiation. In the classroom, through learning negotiation theory and practicing simulations or case studies conducted in class, productive and effective ways of doing negotiation is emphasized. Students will experience at least eight simulations or case studies. Most of the simulations or case studies are one versus one, but at least one assignment is group vs. group negotiation. Students are required to write the same number of papers on the simulations or case studies they ex-

perienced in class in English or in Japanese. The students need to write the outcome, the original goal, the strategies, the methods, the techniques, and their interpretation of their own achievement regarding the simulations or case studies they experienced.

2.6 Program Lecture III (Business Presentation and Story-telling in English)

This course used to be divided into Program Lecture IV (Business English: Presentation I) and Program Seminar IV (Business English: Presentation II), which both met once and 90 minutes a week and offered two credits each to third and fourth year students. From spring semester 2015, these courses will be modified to a new course, offering four credits to third and fourth year students with 180 minutes of instruction in a sequence.

The goal of the new course is to give presentations in English at business settings. When giving presentations, students use expressions learned at Business English I/II/III plus useful expressions in giving presentations, use PowerPoint for presentation, have two written examinations made from the textbook, and do shadowing or synchronized speaking with topics on presentation. Shadowing or synchronized speaking is graded every week, so attendance is very important for the students. To register this course, it is recommended for the students to pass Business English I/II/III before taking this course ; however, students can take this course and the three Business English courses simultaneously. The fundamental instructions on how to use PowerPoint is omitted because of limited time for instruction. It is prerequisite for the students, therefore, to learn the basic use of PowerPoint.

Shadowing or synchronized speaking is to instantly repeat what the students have heard without looking at the written text. Speaking aloud what they have heard without doing any translation is the basic training of simultaneous interpretation. Most of the junior and senior high schools in Japan do not provide training of oral English because this skill is not tested at entrance examinations in many cases. The oral aspects of English is vital in doing business at an international level, so shadowing or synchronized speaking is adapted in this course in order to improve oral proficiency of the

students. Shadowing or synchronized speaking is an active and dynamic learning method. Students recognize and understand the meaning of the words and/or expressions by listening (input of language), memorize them at ultra, short-term level, and immediately repeat the sounds heard (output of language). Shadowing or synchronized speaking is a typical active learning method and is relatively a stressful method, because it requires much higher level of concentration than just reading aloud the text.

PowerPoint is one of the good tools to cover the weaknesses. Pronunciation, accent, grammar, logic, etc. can be supplemented by the visual support of PowerPoint. The presentations required to students are as follows: (1) description or explanation; (2) comparison; (3) illustration and persuasion; (4) call for action; and (5) self-PR. Depending on the content, five patterns of presentation will be adapted by the presenter as follows: (1) time (starting from the past, or starting from the future); (2) spatial and geographical; (3) a combination of cause-outcome; (4) problem-solving; or (5) topics. Adapting deductive or inductive reasoning, analogy, cause and effect, and to make their presentation logically and persuasive, students strengthen their level of persuasion. The instructor teaches the students pronunciation and the rate of speech, which is understandable for the audience, appropriate ways of giving eye contact, the use of body language and attitude. Japanese are not used to give effective eye contact like westerners, so the students are encouraged to pretend as if they are looking at the audience. The speaker just turns his/her face to the audience even though he/she is not directly watching them. This way the student will gradually get used to look at the audience, and by repeating this activity, the student will be able to give eye contact to the audience little by little. When the student is not used to give eye contact to other people, the instructor tells the student that he/she does not have to look at the eyes of the audience directly but just look up and pretend that he/she is looking at the audience. The presenter can refer to his/her notes when giving a presentation in order to avoid having any fear of memorizing what to say; however, the student needs to look at the audience especially before he/she is going to show the next slide, and it is of course recommended not to rely too much on the written note.

The reason why the word “story-telling” is added to the title of the new course is that storytelling explores expressiveness and can make the students ability to communicate their thoughts and feelings in an eloquent and rational manner. Storytelling can remind the students that listening is important and spoken words can be powerful. Verbal proficiency on discussion and negotiation can resolve interpersonal conflict peacefully. To express one’s thoughts and feelings clearly by taking into consideration of the situation and the feelings of both people, who are communicating, can be trained by offering the art of storytelling. By the art of storytelling is applied to presentation, it encourages the students to use their imagination. Imagination enables the students to think of new and creative ideas and can strengthen their self-confidence and motivation.

2.7 Program Lecture III (Theories of Business Communication)

This new course will start from fall semester 2015, offering four credits to second, third and fourth year students with 180 minutes of instruction in a sequence. The instruction will be given in English. Managing oneself and others, establishing or maintaining business relations, team activities, and topics especially on cross-cultural management are the main topics of this course.

2.8 Other Courses of Global Business Program

Management Communication (a two-credit course), Intercultural Communication (a two-credit course), and Business Report Writing (a four-credit course) are taught in English by a Professor invited from abroad, and are available for third and fourth year students. For a while, the system to invite a visiting professor from overseas and these courses will remain the same in the curriculum.

Additional courses have not been discussed yet, but they all depend on the cooperation of other faculty members. Teaching a new additional course of Global Business Program means extra, heavy work for the instructor. Moreover, giving lectures in English is a lot of work for non-English speakers. The possibility of having more courses of Global Business Program can-

not be easy. It is vital not to rely too much on visiting lecturers and visiting scholars to maintain and improve the program. Cooperation and dedication of the full-time faculty members, who have been enjoying tenure track, are inevitable.

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