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Review of Maruyama, Doi, Iguchi, Kuwbara, Onuma, Yasui, and Yokosuka, Writing Business Letters in Japanese

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again, fairly random information about work conditions is presented as factual; nowhere are students asked to consider other target-culture sources that might offer other perspectives on this kind of intercultural clash. Instead, students are asked to discuss the German text as though it represented the opinion of *all* Germans. I would argue that the future viability of foreign-language education will increasingly depend on our ability to portray culture not as fact, but as a strategic and affective process. Even the new sections of the PWD are based on negotiation abilities, not on reified information.

These problems extend to the cross-platform CD-ROM featuring contextualized lessons, which connects audios of native-speaker readings with texts and full-color, full-screen images. The program is easy to navigate and offers students additional computer-graded listening text exercises. Exercise results can be printed or saved on floppy disk for later review by the teacher. In spite of its ease of use, it still focuses on vocabulary and business terminology, not on strategic negotiations and higher order thinking skills.

German for Business and Economics has significant strengths in bringing together a wide variety of topics that have multi-level adaptability. Business German teachers will appreciate the broad treatment of major German business topics and terminology, which are illustrated with ample exercises. The linguistic content is remarkably well-selected and accurate, which adds considerably to the value of the textbook as a main resource in upper-division business German courses. Teachers should note that the spelling reform is not yet accommodated in this edition. Setting aside its reticence to break out of four-skills paradigms and treat culture as a strategic and affective process, *German for Business and Economics* is an excellent foundation for students wanting to prepare for the PWD.

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Maruyama, Doi, Iguchi, Kuwabara, Onuma, Yasui and Yokosuka.
Writing Business Letters in Japanese. Tokyo: Japan Times, 1999.

Learning Japanese business letters is unquestionably a daunting task for a student of Japanese, for it encompasses all aspects of the Japanese

language and cultural specifics. In essence it is a compendium of the language usage, society and the thinking pattern of the Japanese people in addition to the common practice of the Japanese business community. But the intricacies of Japanese business letters or, rather, the Japanese epistolography, are further complicated by time-honored conventions and onerous stylistics.

Unlike English business letters, which require clarity, conciseness, correctness and courtesy, a typical business letter in Japanese also abounds in many ritualistic elements and polite circumlocution that seem non-essential, strange and superfluous to a Western reader/practitioner. Therefore, reading and writing a business letter in Japanese requires a total familiarity with Japanese culture and tradition. It is also essential to have a complete command of all elements of the extremely complicated Japanese language, especially the written language of “kakitotoba,” as well as “kango.”

This book comprises the main forms of communication in business: internal operational, external-operational, and personal. These three categories are adequately supplied with examples provided by practitioners/teachers. Therefore it is comprehensive and authentic.

However, if this book is also designed for students with an intermediate level of proficiency, though too ambitious and optimistic as stated in its preface, it is essential to add a section with a brief explanation of the conventions, and the characteristics of epistolary styles (the strict adherence to “ki-sho-ten-ketsu” formulaic structure, etc.). It would also be extremely beneficial to add a quick-start drill section to familiarize the readers with the honorific speech and stereotype expressions.

The following are some cultural and corporate/societal explanations that would enhance the value of this book.

On page 15, an order form for business cards is shown. It would be beneficial to show an organizational chart along with some explanations of different titles. One thing that comes to mind is the fact that in a Japanese corporate organization chart, ranks and administrative positions, in most cases, coincide with age. One example would be when a person is promoted to “kacho” or section chief, he/she must be at least forty years old. When someone looks thirty-five years old with that title, he/she must be a shrewd business practitioner, having earned that title.

Another case which would enhance the contents of business writing with some cultural background information is on page 80, “writing a message to announce a year-end gift.” “Ochugen,” and “oseibo” are customarily practiced in the middle of July in the Tokyo area and in the middle of August in other parts of Japan and at the end of the year. In business, a host company sends daily necessity items such as a set of wine bottles, a coffee set or gift certificates to a client company. The objective is to show appreciation for business transactions and favors extended throughout the year. When clients receive a gift, they do not need to reciprocate the gift by giving another gift. Also it is a common practice to place “noshi paper” on the gift to purify the gift.

Another example is about “announcing personnel appointments” on pages 268 and 269. The following information would give some legal aspects in a Japanese corporate society. Some Japanese resumes have a column to write about family members. This also signifies that interviewers can ask questions regarding the candidate’s family members. Although asking about personal matters in a job interview is illegal in the US, this is not the case in Japan. For this reason, candidates should not feel offended to answer questions relating to their family members.

It is also a common practice for the applicant to write a resume by hand rather than prepare it in printed form. In Japan, the saying that “your writing is a reflection of your personality” is still cherished. It is believed that a neatly written resume reveals the good character traits of the writer. With these anecdotes, the value of the book would be enhanced and the reading would be enjoyable.

In conclusion, this is a highly valuable and user-friendly reference of its kind. It is very gratifying to find that a small group of dedicated professionals have ungrudgingly taken their time and made efforts to develop a useful and informative reference book for an area of language study which is generally neglected and to publish it in book form.

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