

Business Language Column

Finding Success in Business Language Teaching

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Taking the first plunge into business language teaching is daunting but rewarding. A decade ago, at the university where I teach, only two language programs offered a business language course, and most language faculty were skeptical about developing business language courses in the languages they taught. Today there are new business language courses in Arabic, Chinese, German, Korean, and Russian, and several other languages, such as Japanese, Hebrew, and French, offer business language “modules” in their courses at various levels. How this great turn-around -- from skepticism to success -- occurred, is the subject of this issue’s Business Language column.

In the November issue of this column one year ago, I raised the question of how language teachers, untrained in business, can feel confident designing and teaching a business language course (see [Yes You Can \(Teach Business Language\)](#)). Through practices such as *focusing on cross-cultural communication* and *starting with easily accessible business topics* such as marketing, even those of us without a business degree can become effective business language teachers. Having observed my colleagues’ -- and my own -- transformation over the past several years, I can add a few more valuable strategies, many of which hold true for whatever kind of new pedagogical project a teacher plans to take on.

It all began when our school started the planning process for applying for a grant from the Department of Education to establish a Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER)¹. The proposal included extensive and enthusiastic plans for business languages, and our language faculty had to commit themselves to developing full business-related language courses and modules in their language programs. At first, the faculty were ambivalent and a little unsure of their own ability to tackle the task.

Once the grant came through, however, those same faculty not only embraced this work but are quickly becoming leaders in business language materials development for the languages they teach. Each has a different story about what inspired and helped them most in this endeavor, yet there are five common strategies that brought them success.

Collaborate. Nearly all of our business language course and materials developers have chosen to find a collaborator in their language program to help them in their work. Working in teams of two, each person brings a different set of skills and ideas to the table. In this unfamiliar area, they

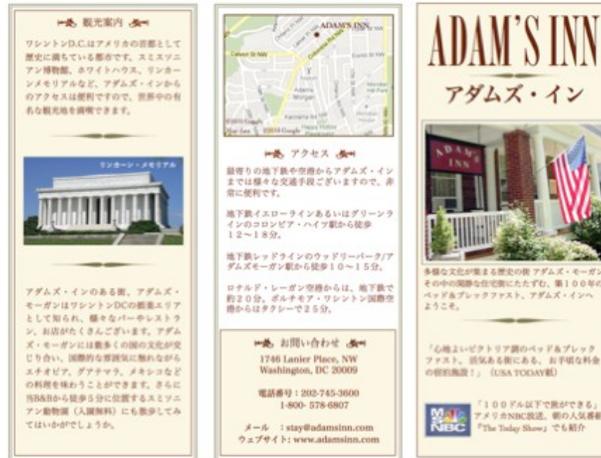
¹ For more information on CIBER grants, see the [CIBERweb](#) site and see my past NCLRC *Business Language* columns, in which CIBER support of business languages is a common theme.

build on each other's strength and encourage each other along the way. In developing my Business German module on [Green German Business](#), I was fortunate to collaborate with a colleague with training and experience in business. I turned to her with business questions, and she relied on me for information related to appropriate language level input, etc. Although working with a business specialist is not always an option, just having a partner to work with is a boon.

Start small, then build. Rather than beginning with a large concept and mapping out the overall plan from the beginning, effective developers start small and build from there. For example, the Russian course developer team, totally new to business language teaching, decided first to take on the development of a single unit. For that unit, they selected familiar content and grammar (namely travel and verbs of motion) and gave it a business slant, transforming it into a unit about business travel. Having gone through this process, they built up their knowledge as well as their confidence to take on more, and they are currently finishing up the Business Russian textbook, which they plan to offer in an online version. For more on this project see the [GW-CIBER Business Russian](#) course website.

Apply for funding. A great deal can be created for business language courses at little to no cost. For projects that involve travel, e.g., creating video-based materials, teachers can seek monetary support through resources like the [Business Language Research and Teaching \(BLRT\) Grant](#), supported through eight CIBERs. After participating in our CIBER workshop on writing business cases, several colleagues in Spanish applied for the BLRT grant to write a business case featuring local celebrity chef José Andrés. By winning this competitive grant, they were able to justify their time and effort spent on the extra work.

Get students involved. When you develop and teach with your business language materials, students can directly and indirectly assist in the process. Their indirect help comes in the form of feedback on the course and materials, what they learned best and where they struggled. Direct help comes from the work they produce, which can be used (with students' permission) for the next group of students taking the course. In the Japanese business module, for instance, students' final project was to produce a brochure in Japanese to help market a local (Washington, DC) bed and breakfast establishment to potential Japanese tourists. These brochures can serve as samples or even models in next year's class, for learners to analyze critique, aspire to, or improve upon.



Sample of Business Japanese student-created brochure

Learn from your colleagues. Much like the advantages of collaborating with a language partner from your own program, the benefits of learning from other business language teachers can't be overstated. When developing your own course, connect with others (across languages) and find out what they have done, ask to use their materials or ideas, giving them credit as well as feedback. An invaluable resource to connect with other business language teachers is the [Network of Business Language Educators](#) (NOBLE), which we will feature in an upcoming *Business Language* column.