

Business Language in Focus Column

Looking Back, then Looking Forward

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Summer 2012, exactly three years ago, I was asked to write a feature article for the July/August issue of *The Language Resource*. The article, “Going global: Connecting foreign languages with business” kindled the spark, and shortly thereafter I started a regular column called Business Language in Focus. In this final issue of *The Language Resource*, we’ll take a retrospective look at what we’ve covered in those three years in this column and invite you to continue the journey in a new context this fall.

Three short years - three major themes

Over the course of three years, there have been 18 Business Language in Focus columns. Several articles were co-written (including this one) with Anna Helm, my long-time collaborator and Co-Coordinator of GW-CIBER’s Business Language Programs. While these columns have covered a wide range of languages (German, Russian, Japanese, etc.) and specific topics, it’s possible to identify three general themes or categories that the majority of articles falls into:

1. Successful business language programs or courses;
2. Specific approaches for teaching business languages;
3. Additional resources in support of teaching business languages.

Join us for a brief trip down memory lane to recall what has been covered in each area!

Successful business language programs or courses

Several articles provided readers with descriptions and commentary on specific programs or courses that have been developed by forward-thinking colleagues. One example is Melissa Swarr, who introduced a course in the area of language for the professions, with the goal of [Linking language directly to the workplace: Spanish for Healthcare](#). She saw a need in her community and developed the course to help students get the appropriate language skills for their future career.

Another article featured a Russian professor who went [From Doubter to Believer in Business Language Teaching](#). Rich Robin at the George Washington University started out skeptical that students of Russian would be able to take on the kinds of content or master the complex interactive skills necessary to “do real business” in or with the language. Fortunately, he remained open to learn from experienced colleagues in business language workshops, and he became not only a convert to the idea but an expert in his own right, and readers got to view his video chapters to see just how far he has progressed in this area.

Specific approaches for teaching business languages

Another set of articles delves into specific methodologies, tools, and content areas that synergize with commonly held goals for teaching business languages. The key notion here is that there are myriad areas of expertise and methodological capabilities already

possessed by language and literature teachers that can be directly applied in teaching business languages and cultures. The hurdle for most is to first identify them and then productively integrate them into the field of business language teaching.

One area of such overlap is the deployment of business cases, which are, at the core, stories that transpire within the context of business, with a protagonist -- often a manager or other decision-maker in a firm -- who faces a dilemma that needs to be faced using information presented in the business case. One article argued directly that [The Case for Teaching with Business Cases](#) is strong due to the pedagogical overlap with literary analysis and its potential for interactive teaching strategies, such as role plays, in which students are placed into the decision-making position of the protagonist of the business case in question. For anyone who is interested in learning more of about business cases and their benefits, the [GW-CIBER e-Handbook on Teaching with Business Cases](#) is a helpful introduction.

Having highlighted the common framing in methodology between business cases and literary analysis, it is important to acknowledge that at times it is necessary to stretch the boundaries and acquire new skills that are squarely planted in the disciplines of business and economics. The article [Teaching with Charts and Graphs to Reach Common Core Goals](#) presents the benefits of transitioning to using informational texts and supporting graphs and charts to support the achievement of Common Core goals. [How to Create Charts/Graphs for Use in the Business Language Classroom](#) can be intimidating at first glance, but mastering a few simple steps will go a long way.

In addition to solid methodologies and tools, it is also of essence to consider what topics interest, engage, and motivate students in their pursuit of mastery of their foreign business language and culture. One topic that meets these criteria is green business and sustainability. The article entitled [It's So Easy Being Green: Addressing Environmental Sustainability in the Business Language Classroom](#) argues precisely that. These topics are now one of the governing discourses of our time. With this prevalence and interest, a multitude of resources have emerged that provide ample opportunity for interactive, technology-based, and culturally rich learning for business language learners.

Additional resources in support of teaching business languages

Aside from the excellent programs, courses, and teaching methods for business languages that we have covered in this column, we have also featured outstanding resources that provide support to teachers interested in delving into business language and culture. The flagship journal [Global Business Languages](#) was the topic of the column in summer 2013: [Global Business Languages: A Valuable Resource](#). It continues to be published through Purdue University and serves as one of the premier journals for articles relating to languages for specific purposes, which includes business but also science, law, etc. Skimming through current or back issues provides ideas and inspiration for business language teaching methods and research.

We introduced you to the valuable [website](#) of the Network of Business Language Educators (NOBLE) in fall 2013 in the article [Business Language Networking through](#)

[NOBLE](#). NOBLE’s mission is to work with K-16 teachers who would like to develop courses or programs “that integrate the study of foreign language and culture across disciplines, particularly professional schools and career academies.” Founder Mary Risner is still hard at work on the site, offering professional development information, as well as opportunities like the NOBLE [Webinar](#) series. There you can learn about upcoming webinar topics and view recordings of past webinars. Following NOBLE on Twitter is a good way to get daily nuggets related to foreign languages and the professions.

The next chapter

Omnipresent in this column all three years was arguably the most important resource for business language and culture education: the Centers for International Business Education and Research. This Department of Education grant program has made possible many of the new courses, materials, programs, and conferences reported on in this column (see e.g., [Business Japanese Immersion Seminar: Intensive Learning from and with Colleagues, Students, and the Business Community](#) and [Snapshots from the 2013 National Conference on Business Languages](#)).

The recent competition for the new grant funding, described in the column last fall, brought [Good News for Language Teachers: A New Grant Cycle for Centers for International Business Education and Research](#). That article points to several opportunities for you, dear reader, to stay connected and involved. GW-CIBER, the authors’ oft referenced home institution CIBER, has committed to continuing this column on its website as part of its [Business Languages Program](#); watch the website for updates or write us at ciber@gwu.edu to receive the latest column by email.