



## INTEGRATING CULTURES INTO BUSINESS ENGLISH FOR GLOBALIZATION

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### ABSTRACT

To foster the globalization of college ELLs with business majors, develop their multicultural awareness, and improve their English language proficiency in the content areas, the author conceptualized semiotics into the course of Business English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by integrating English language arts, multicultural literacy, and curriculum in business. Students' English proficiency, multicultural competency, and successful communication with real people in the business world were achieved.

**Keywords:** globalization, ELLs, semiotic triad, ESP, multicultural literacy.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Statement of Problem

Traditionally, the course of English for Business was delivered by instructors from the English Department at this institute in Taiwan. Grammar-Translation Approach supplemented with drills was the major strategy in instruction. The assessment was determined by students' ability in translating vocabulary words and phrases from Chinese into English, and vice versa. But the students' high scores in this course did not really indicate that they were able to communicate with real people in the authentic world of business. To overcome the curriculum deficiency, new approaches were required.

#### 1.2 Objective

The author conceptualized semiotic theory into the instruction of the course of Business English. The goals were to develop students' English language proficiency as well as multicultural competency and business knowledge for successful communication with the real people in the authentic business world for globalization.

### 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE SEMIOIC TRIAD

The creation of meaning is a biologically determined need of the living organism, and all living things communicate by exchanging signs (Eisner, 1978). Any item, whether natural or artificial, that is to have meaning can be employed as a sign (Langer, 1978). The world in which we are living is perfused with signs (Eco, 1990) and call for interpretation (Gallagher, 1992). Semiotics is the study of signs and the action of signs (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Languages, arts, music, dance, drama, cultures, etc. are all signs that humans created to mediate the world (Cunningham, 1992; Deely, 1994; Salupere, Torop, & Kull, 2013; Sebeok, 2001; Suhor, 1984; 1992). In this study, the semiotic triad (Siegel & Carey, 1989) comprises three signs or sign systems: languages, cultures and curricula. These three signs are interwoven as a semiotic web (Sebeok, 1979) for human's survival and flourishing (Colapietro, 1993).

#### 2.1 English Language Proficiency

##### 2.1.1 ESP (English for Specific Purpose)

Like the other prevailing approaches that integrate language and content, ESP is one of the integration programs defined as English for Specific Purpose. Based on Ariza (2009), Nordmeyer & Barduhn (2010), CBI (Content-based instruction), EAP (English for academic purpose), CLIL (Content and language integrated learning), and ESP, all describe similar practices in the instruction of English that integrate content areas including art, business, culture, drama, health, medicine, music, etc. This study is focused on English instruction that integrates multicultural knowledge and business content.

##### 2.1.2 Additive Literacy & Multiliteracy for College ELLs

Additive literacy (Bauer, 2009) asserts that learners' first language (L1) and second language (L2) are interdependent and affect literacy development. Additive literacy supports the interchange of L1 and L2, and provides learners with opportunities to expand L1 and L2 literacies simultaneously. Educators like Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps (2013), Ariza (2009), and Au (2006) cherish learners' primary language (L1) as a valuable asset and bridge to English proficiency (L2) for comprehensive input and assessment of learners' literacy in the primary language as well as English.

##### 2.1.3 Holistic Approach in Language Education

Based on cognitive and psycholinguistic principles, McNutt (1984) believes that language learning is an ongoing process, and cannot be segmented. That is, learning is not broken down into discrete segments or skills; learning may take

place in or out of school. Each time when learners encounter potentially new information, they assimilate and accommodate that which is relevant to them, and their knowledge increases.

Although several curricular models have emerged at the college level to integrate language and content and, thereby, facilitate students' transition from ESL to college courses, most programs still rely on a skills model to develop students' proficiencies. Blanton (1991) perceives that the skills model is inadequate for a number of reasons: it deprives students of the linguistic and intellectual immersion necessary for language acquisition and cognitive development to take place. Blanton (1991) declares that only a content-oriented curriculum can meet these needs. A whole language approach, which is text-based and student-centered, is a viable alternative to various models, both traditional and new.

Freeman & Freeman's (2004, 2014) whole language principles, and McNutt's (1984) five basic components of a holistic language learning processes were implemented in this study: (a) experiences emphasizing oral language, (b) reading and writing together, (c) individualized reading and writing, (d) discussing written language, and (e) strategic lessons within a holistic framework. The four literacy skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing should be interwoven into a cohesive whole. A holistic approach sees language learning as a whole, which is not divisible in a meaningful way for teaching. This approach contrasts with the atomistic approach to language, which attempts to analyze language into parts, such as grammatical structures or functional exponents, and later becomes the content of the syllabus. When holistic approach is implemented in the classroom, it provides a framework of meaningful content-based instruction in language.

#### 2.1.4 Pragmatics: Teaching Natural Conversation

Most ELLs have little opportunity to engage in appropriate linguistic behaviors outside the classroom, which results in a growing awareness that simply exposing ELLs to grammatically appropriate sentences is inadequate (Bardovi-Harlig, 2011); the author added activities for Pragmatics: Teaching natural conversation (Houck, & Tatsuki, 2011). Students learned the following interactional activities in authentic language patterns like expressing gratitude (Bardovi-Harlig & Nickels, 2011), saying apologies (Lieske, 2011), paying compliments (Carduner, 2011), taking turns & talking naturally (Carroll, 2011), and performing pragmatic competency in telephone conversation (Wong, 2011). Through this kind of authentic discourse, the college ELLs develop functional literacy (Dolly, 1998).

## 2. 2 Cultural Competency

Magrath (2015) claims that the study of a second language is the study of another culture, language and culture are intertwined. Through the study of English language, ELLs gain a knowledge and understanding of the target cultures; consequently, culture is integrated into the course of Business English.

Semiotics of culture (Salupere, Torop, & Kull, 2013) defines culture from semiotic perspective and as a type of human symbolic activity, creation of signs and a way of giving meaning to everything around. Culture determines people's thought, ideas, patterns of interaction, and material adaptations to the world around them (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012). This course focused on understanding and learning cultural diversity (Ariza, 2009; Bennett, 2011). Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan, has developed herself as one of the international cities like Tokyo, Shanghai, Singapore, and Hong Kong since two decades ago, and everyone walking on the street feels that he/she is a citizen of the global village where people of diverse race, linguistic, culture and religion come together. To foster the students' global awareness, and increase knowledge of different cultures, the author as cultural mediator (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012) integrated multicultural education into the curriculum of Business English with two cultural approaches (Bennett, 2011; Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012): Cultural-general approach and Cultural-specific approach. The interchange of these two approaches was to develop the universal understanding of all cultural groups, and to avoid biases and stereotypes.

## 2. 3 Content Literacy in Business

Most students plan to work in the area of accounting, auditing, banking, economics, finance, insurance, management, marketing, restaurant, technology, tourism, international trade, and some students plan to attend graduate schools in business. Most students took these basic level courses in their first language (L1) when they attended vocational high schools, and worked for two years in business. The author took advantage of this by inviting students to use their familiar content knowledge in their primary language (L1) as the comprehensible input (Au, 2006; Dennis, 2010; Nordmeyer, 2010; Shapiro, 2010) and to translate that prior knowledge into English as content literacy (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013).

## 3. METHODOLOGY: THE SEMIOTIC TRIAD OF ESP IN ACTION

### 3.1 Participants

3.1.1 Students. Usually there are 100 students (2 sections) in this class during freshman year. Most students hold a diploma in business from vocational high schools, and had working experiences in business for at least two years. Their English language proficiency varied from Limited, Intermediate and Advanced levels (Ariza, 2006). Yet most students were mature and were highly motivated.

3.1.2 Faculty. Since content area teachers can teach content courses better, it is more appropriate for a professional whose major is business than an instructor in English language to teach the Business English course using holistic approach (Freeman & Freeman, 2004, 2014). Based on his professional knowledge in business content like accounting, banking, finance, marketing, management, and international trade, and his academic experiences in foreign language learning using

Grammar-Translation Approach when he was in Taiwan, and later whole language principles in the US, the author implemented holistic approach in the instruction of Business English.

### **3.2 Design of curriculum.**

The author designed the curriculum so that cultures and contents were embedded in the weekly lessons of English for Business. He grouped students according to their English proficiency, professional experiences and cultural interests. He believes that learning is a social process (Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Short & Burke, 1985) and ideas can flourish when students work collaboratively to negotiate problems in the case studies.

## **4. INSTRUCTION IN ACTION – ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY**

Within the framework of holistic approach (Ariza, 2009; Blanton, 1991; Freeman & Freeman, 1992; 2008; McNutt, 1984), additive literacy, and pragmatics for teaching natural conversation (Houck & Tatsuki, Eds.), activities and strategies like read-aloud (Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2009) and think-aloud (Oczkus, 2009) were included for phonemic awareness, word recognition, reading fluency, reading and listening comprehension through teacher's model, students' role play, and reader's theater in the Authoring Cycle (Short & Burke, 1985).

### **4.1 Principles in Holistic Approach**

4.1.1 Learning proceeds from whole to part (Principle 1). Usually the author initiated his teaching by introducing the content and followed by using "meaning vocabulary" (Roe, Stoodt-Hill, & Burns, 2007) – the vocabulary in the content area. Content-specific vocabulary (Freeman & Freeman, 2004, 2014) are words that are strongly connected with a specific topic that cut across discipline and appear in textbooks. Because the knowledge of vocabulary words contributes to the comprehension of the topic, in addition to direct instruction for correct word meaning, correct pronunciations, and correct spelling, the author added a variety of vocabulary activities and strategies, like graphic organizers, structural analysis, semantic mapping, concept mapping, and quick write (Reutzel & Cooter, 2008) to deeply and widely define the vocabulary words in business and expand students' word knowledge towards comprehension of content area concepts (Brozo, & Simpson, 2007; Roe, Stoodt-Hill, & Burns, 2007). Moreover, the author presented the vocabulary words in a specific context so that students would know how to use the new vocabulary words correctly in writing and speaking for effective communication.

4.1.2 Lessons should be learner centered (Principle 2). Learning is the active construction of knowledge by the students, and instructor is facilitator providing scaffolding activities (Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2009). In the inclusive classroom, differentiated instruction (Chapman & King, 2003; Cooper & Tomlinson, 2006; Walpole & Mckenna, 2007) for intensive intervention, or small group instruction was applied (Ariza, 2009).

4.1.3 Learning should have meaningful purpose for students now (Principle 3). The author delivered the lessons to meet students' immediate needs with real people in a realistic business environment. He included audio-videos in the lessons so that students could figure out the contents related to the communication behaviors with real people in a real-world setting regarding the different situations in banking (loan, trust, credit cards, etc.), investment, funds, insurance, finance (Viney, 2008), travel, hotel, and other interpersonal skills with business people from diverse linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds (Au, 2006). Through the read-aloud strategies, the college ELLs improved their pronunciation of the new vocabulary words and learned the language patterns for oral and written proficiency.

4.1.4 Learning takes place as groups engage in meaningful social interaction (Principle 4). The author managed the class following "The Authoring Cycle" (Short & Burke, 1985) so that each student in the small group might be fully engaged in the activities like role play and reader's theatre so that they could put the content of Business English into practice.

4.1.5 In a second language, oral and written languages are acquired simultaneously (Principle 5). Translation-grammar approach focuses on the translation in writing. But the author strengthened oral practice in all his lessons with the expectation that all students can communicate orally as well as in writing.

4.1.6 Learning should take place in the first language to build concepts and facilitate the acquisition of English (Principle 6). Since the students' major is business and they have already developed content area knowledge in their first language (L1), it is easy for them to transfer that knowledge into the content area in a second language (L2). If students know a concept in the first language, they can easily acquire the vocabulary words for that concept in a second language (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; 2014; Hickman & Pollard-Durodola, 2009). This principle worked very well for the vocabulary development and content comprehension by using the students' first language as a bridge to English literacy (Au, 2006). This principle also provided students comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) for further learning.

4.1.7 Learning potential is expanded through faith in the learner (Principle 7). Most college ELLs were very conscious of their accents and grammatical errors and were hesitant to try a new language. The author perpetually encouraged the students and eliminated students' affective filters like fear, worry, and anxiety (Krashen, 1982). The class really enjoyed the meaningful interaction through role play and reader's theatre.

### **4.2 ESOL Methods and Strategies**

In this study, teaching and learning activities were within the framework of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013; Ariza, 2009; Au, 2006; Bennett, 2011; Richards, Brown, Forde, 2006). Under the umbrella of whole language, the following strategies were implemented for developing oral language, phonics, word identification, meaning vocabulary, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and business writing (Reutzel & Cooter, 2012):

Retelling Story (Contents)

Reader's Theater: read-aloud, choral reading in storytelling.

Audio/Visuals – DVD, films, music, songs,

Interactive Strategies – Jigsaw, group project, debate, role play, and reader theatre

Language Experience Approach (Ashton-Warner, 1965): Story (content) sharing, writing and reading.

#### **4.3 Differentiated Instruction to Meet Students' Diverse Needs**

4.3.1 Minimal English speaker. Students demonstrate very little understanding and cannot communicate meaning orally. Intensive intervention started from phonics (Norton, 2007) with focus on phonemic awareness to explain the correspondence between letter and sound, and language experience approach (Ashton-Warner, 1965) on writing with the process of decoding (translating message from letter to sound) , and encoding (translating message from sound to letter). The author posted the tips in the classroom for multisensory learning in thinking, speaking, writing and reading:

If I can see it, I can think it

If I can think it, I can say it

If I can say it, I can draw it

If I can draw it, I can write it

If I can write it, I can read it

(Chapman & King, 2003; Lu, 2010)

4.3.2 Limited English speaker. Students demonstrate limited understanding, and communicates orally in English with one or two-word responses. Instruction focused on vocabulary (Templeton, Bear, Invernizzi, & Johnston, 2010) and fluency in terms of reading-aloud, choral reading and sharing reading.

4.3.3 Intermediate English speaker. Students can communicate orally in English, mostly with simple phrases or sentence response with significant grammatical errors. Instruction focused on fluency and comprehension.

4.3.4 Advanced English speaker. Students understand and speak English fairly well, but make occasional grammatical errors. Instruction focused on comprehension and writing.

But all students were required to actively participate in the activities in "The Authoring Cycle" (Short & Burke, 1985) so that students with different life experience and prior knowledge may see with different eyes, listen to different drums, speak with different voices, and think from different perspectives toward critical thinking.

#### **4.4 Survival Languages for Business**

The author encouraged students to take and pass one foreign language and survey <http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages> for free lessons on the basic level of foreign languages like Japanese, Korean, Hindi, Spanish, French, Thai, or Arabic for greetings, apologies, compliments, and telephone conversations, etc.

### **5. INSTRUCTION IN ACTION – CULTURAL COMPETENCY**

#### **5.1 Cultural-general approach (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012)**

Activities based on this approach are: the exploring the sampler of cultural groups (Ariza, 2009) for the tradition, value, religion, languages, family of people of diversity, and the inclusion of multicultural literatures and multicultural movies. Since literature plays a considerable role in the development of understanding across cultures (Norton, 2007) – to get rid of xenophobia, the fear or mistrust of people from different culture, and to foster students' cross-cultural awareness (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2007), the author required students to survey multicultural literature by the writers and illustrators of the target cultures for accuracy and authenticity yet without bias or prototype. He specifically recommended the multicultural literatures by Eve Bunting. The multicultural literature helped students understand their business partners better and increases their business opportunities. Students can find information of movies, arts, music, dance, theatre and festivals about people from different cultural groups by surveying the web side of National Association of Multicultural Education [www.nameorg.org/resources](http://www.nameorg.org/resources)

#### **5.2 Cultural-specific approach (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012)**

Activities based on this approach were to prepare business students to become more knowledgeable about the people from culture diversity. The author assigned students in small groups to interview and observe people who were foreign exchange or international students on the campus, or potential business partners like Americans, European, Muslims, Hispanics, Indians, Asians, etc. whom they met in international trading exhibitions in Taipei. The students explored their history, religion, customs, habits, politics, value, culture, society, tradition, behavior, food, dressing, and etiquette, and shared with the whole class using jigsaw (Ariza, 2006).

Both approaches were implemented in this course to free students from the cultural bounds and develop their multicultural competence (Lum, 2007) by accepting and appreciating the differences that lie between people of different cultures (Bennette, 2011).

### 5.3 Multicultural Movies Expedite Second Language Acquisition and Culture Awareness

#### 5.3.1 The Limit in the Classroom

Bardovi-Harlig (2011) assured that most ELLs have little opportunity to engage in the appropriate linguistic activity outside the classroom, and which results in a growing awareness that simply expose ELLs to grammatically appropriate rules is inadequate. Thomas (198) noticed that many language learners frequently experienced difficulties with both “sociopragmatic failure” which occurs when learners produce socially inappropriate behaviors, and “pragmalinguistic failure” when learners do not express themselves in a linguistically appropriate manner. This is the reason that nonverbal communication skills (Cherry, 2014) obtained from watching movies were included in this study, while there has been very little research on second language acquisition (SLA) learning with movies (Gibson, 2014, Gormly, 2013).

#### 5.3.2 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that deal with norms of conversation (Grice, 1989). Generally, pragmatics was defined as the study of how language is used for communication in various social and cultural context (Ariza, 2009; Ellis, 1995; Reutzel & Cooter, 2012). It covers a wide range of linguistic phenomena like deixis, conversational implicature and presupposition, illocutionary acts, conversational structures, and repair (Ellis, 1995), but is particularly concerned with appropriateness, with regard to what is said in a particular context and how it is said.

#### 5.3.3 Nonverbal Signals in the Movies

Magrath (2014) confirmed that language is the first concern in teaching communicative competence. Grammar, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and speech are all vital skills needed; however, the language behavior in “live” authentic situations” is not well rehearsed in the textbooks. Magrath (2014) called it “paralinguistics” or “nonverbal communication tips” (Cherry, 2014) like kinestics, gestures, head movement, eye contact, facial expression, stress, tone of voice, etc. These nonverbal signals make communication more meaningful and more effective.

Multicultural movies provide ELLs opportunity to learn both cultures and literacy skills in listening, speaking (Hoffner, 2003), writing movie scripts (Hoffner, 2003), reading, thinking, and the nonverbal signals that expedite second language acquisition, and enhance more effective communication in the authentic business world.

## 6. INSTRUCTION IN ACTION – CONTENT LITERACY IN BUSINESS

Most students planned to work in fields such as accounting, banking, economics, finance, auditing, insurance, management, marketing, restaurant, tourism, technology, international trade, or graduate schools in business. Most students took these courses in the basic level in their first language (L1) when they were in the vocational high school, and had working experiences in business for at least two years. The author took this advantage by inviting students to use their familiar content knowledge in their primary language (L1) as the comprehensible input (Au, 2006; Dennis, 2010; Nordmeyer, 2010; Shapiro, 2010) and to translate the existing knowledge into English as content literacy (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013).

### 6.1 Techniques for Change Agency

The author delivered the techniques for change agency (Dormant, 1986, 1997; Lu & Ortlieb, 2009) in the curriculum. The goal was to help students develop leadership skills to be able to implement innovation in their future business community. They learned how to be innovative, to know the market, to meet the market demands, to anticipate possible resistance from their coworkers, to convince them and change them from opposing to supporting, and to successfully implement innovation in the business community.

### 6.2 Worldview & Globalization

To broaden students’ worldview, the author included articles from Time magazine for current global issues taking place in the remote corners on the earth but that have immediate and severe impact on our daily lives universally. For example, *Doomsday at a glance* (Crowley, 2012) predicted life after the fiscal cliff in US; *The earthquake in Japan* (Walsh, 2013) caused the nuclear contamination of the ocean and the air; *A new border crossing* (Calabresi, 2013) might reform US immigration from the issuing of new Work-Visa; and *How Wall Street won* (Foroohar, 2013), etc. By surveying articles from Time magazine using the Internet, students’ English vocabulary words increased, and the immediate connection with the world became possible (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012)

## 7. INSTRUCTION IN ACTION: ASSESSMENT

### 7.1 Formal and Alternative Assessment

In addition to the formal tests in English language proficiency like vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, sentence patterns, writing, and translation, the author included the following alternative assessment tools to evaluate students’ cultural competency, and content knowledge.

- Reports from interviewing and observing people of diversity
- Survey of multicultural literatures
- Survey of multicultural movies

Survey of recent global issue  
 Group Activity like role play, reader theatre, and  
 Students' self-reflection on what they learned in this course: Languages, cultures and contents

### 7.2 WIDA (*World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment*)

Students' performance in terms of formal and alternate assessment in their English language proficiency, cultural competency and content knowledge in business met the primary learning outcome. The author planned to adopt WIDA (World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) (2009) for English for Business in the near future. WIDA can be used as a resource guide for designing and assessing English Language Proficiency in five levels (entering, beginning, developing, expanding, bridging, and reaching) for the four language domains - listening, speaking, reading and writing. WIDA has five standards for the English language proficiency: ELLs' communication for social and instructional purposes, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies spanning the K-12 spectrum. Instructors may manipulate The CAN DO Descriptors to design and assess the integrating of English across contents.

## 8. SIGNIFICANCE

### 8.1 Critical literacy & School literacy

Students coming back from practicum and homecoming alumni brought with them positive comments on the content and activities that they learned in this course. They testified that the course helped them to transfer smoothly from a school setting to the authentic world, and prepared and qualified them for global competition using language skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while enhancing their interpersonal language proficiency toward academic language proficiency (Freeman & Freeman, 2008).

### 8.2 Integration across the Curriculum

Recent research in successful integration of English across various content areas reveals a significant pedagogical "short cut." To students whose first language is not English, teaching them content knowledge through English as a medium may develop their content knowledge and English language proficiency simultaneously (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013; Ariza, 2009; Au, 2006; Nordmeyer & Barduhn, 2010). The author, according to his experiences in integrating business and medical science, is confident that the integration can be extended to English language arts, math, science, social studies, technology, and even to medical science. In a changing society (Cushner, McClelland, & Safford, 2012), effective English language educators have to conceptualize the semiotic triad integrating the signs of languages and cultures across the curricula in order to move toward globalization.

### 8.3 The Power of Social Media in Language Acquisition

To spark curiosity and engage the interest of the young generation, educators must reach them through what they find interesting. Social media is a powerful tool educators can use to deeply access the learning potential of these youth (Crumpler, 2014). For ELLs, social media enables them to have interaction and dialogues with peers, teachers, and native English speakers, and the author actively incorporated social media like you tube, and multicultural movies in his lesson plans to enhance second language acquisition (Gibson, 2014; Lu, 2014).

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