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# INTEGRATING METHODS AND STRATEGIES FROM LANGUAGE TEACHING AND BUSINESS STUDIES IN LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC BUSINESS PURPOSES COURSES

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## **ABSTRACT:**

It has been argued that acquisition of skills in the use of foreign languages is comparable to the development of competence in other skills (Drew & Ottewill, 1998). The foreign language learner must actively participate in the learning process and practice the skills required in order to achieve success. Thus, learning to communicate in a foreign language emphasises experimentation and concrete experience. On the other hand, abstract conceptualisation, reflective observation, and the development and testing of theories and ideas are more important for business studies. However, language studies and skills acquired are often related to the development of the soft applied skills of business communication and workplace competence. This paper argues that the two approaches to learning foreign languages and acquiring business competence are complementary and supportive. This can be accomplished by providing in two ways. First, courses in Languages for Specific Business Purposes can be offered that draw on an interdisciplinary approach based on recent studies in business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999, 2002, 2003; Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Planken, 2005; Poncini, 2003). Second, one can provide communicative activities, such as case studies and simulations emphasizing conceptual models and reflective observation, as well as language teaching related to business discourse situations and the strategic nature of the communicative event.

## **KEYWORDS:**

languages for specific business purposes, language learning strategies, business methods, interdisciplinary didactic model, language teaching, language pedagogy, language for specific purposes

## **INTRODUCTION**

It has been argued that acquisition of skills in the use of foreign languages is comparable to the development of competence in other skills (Drew & Ottewill, 1998). The foreign language learner must actively participate in the learning process and practice the skills required in order to achieve success. The first priority of language learners is to become competent communicators in as wide a variety of situations as possible so that their language skills may be transferred and used in real-life communicative situations (Vande Berg, 1997). Thus, learning to communicate in a foreign language means carrying out a variety of communicative tasks in the language classroom which place emphasis on active experimentation and concrete experience which are more effective for rapid language acquisition (Leaver & Willis, 2004; Nunan, 2004).

On the other hand, business competence is usually linked to the acquisition of hard pure skills such as mathematics and the hard applied skills such as accountancy (Macfarlane, 1994). Business studies therefore place more emphasis on abstract conceptualisation, reflective observation, building conceptual models and the development and testing of theories and ideas (Drew & Ottewill, 1998). Studies have shown that the business curriculum places far less emphasis on teaching the soft pure skills such as psychology and sociology and the soft applied skills such as personnel management, effective communication and dealing with cultural diversity (Bikson & Law, 1994; Black, et al., 1999; Cousineau, 2008; Vallerand, 2008). Foreign language studies and the skills acquired would seem to have the most in common with the soft applied domain of business communication, intercultural competence and workplace competences. With this in mind, business students may be uncomfortable with the fact that understanding concepts is secondary to the experimentation and risk-taking necessary to apply concepts to foreign language learning.

Currently, being a professional means dealing with increased internationalisation and communication, working in teams and mastering the acquired expertise. Harvey (1993) found that employers gave specialist factual knowledge low ratings and attributed employers' low satisfaction with problem-solving ability to the inability of graduates to apply their knowledge to practical situations. Employers expect graduates to have certain content knowledge as well as the skills to solve problems, analyse, synthesise, coach, lead, present and evaluate. Pedagogical experts have generally agreed that the primary objective of higher education in terms of learning outcomes is the acquisition of effective communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving ability (Dochy, et al., 2003; Harvey, 1993). Thus, higher education is challenged to implement instructional practices that integrate domain-specific knowledge with transferable, generic academic skills (Dochy, et al., 2005). Bowden and Marton (1998) agree that "educational goals such as communication or problem-solving ability necessarily must be related to communicating something or to solving some particular kinds of problems" (p. 97). In other words, communication skills should be developed within a content area.

Drew and Ottewill (1998) base their analysis of learning styles on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model. According to the authors, language learners learn through active experimentation and concrete experience while business students prefer to learn through abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation. This has major implications for undergraduate programs combining language and business since the different components of the program require students to be flexible learners. It is worth noting, however, that the study of languages in this study refers to the traditional foreign language curriculum and not to courses in Languages for Specific Business Purposes (LSBP). The authors conclude that instructors must raise students' awareness of their respective learning styles so that students become adept at adjusting their styles to respond to the different components of the undergraduate curriculum.

Building on these conclusions, this paper argues that these two approaches, experimentation and concrete experience for learning foreign languages, and abstract conceptualisation and reflective observation for acquiring business competence, are complementary and supportive. One way of accomplishing this is by providing courses in LSBP that draw on an interdisciplinary approach suggested by recent studies in business discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999, 2002, 2003; Louhiala-Salminen, 2002; Poncini, 2002). Another way is by integrating second language teaching strategies and business methodology, both of which contribute to the specificity of LSBP courses, thus ensuring that one meets the needs of both learning styles.

We begin with a short review of the literature underpinning the value of LSBP courses for business studies. These results, along with Drew and Ottewill's analysis (1998) of Kolb's learning styles model, serve as the framework for this paper in which we intend to analyse four issues in LSBP teaching at the undergraduate level. First, the opposite nature of the two approaches may be tackled by integrating second language teaching methods and strategies into Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses. Second, three teaching methods for business studies, each designed to encourage the acquisition and development of practical workplace competences, will be examined. Third, the advantages of integrating Computer Mediated Communication technologies in collaborative learning projects for language and business studies will be discussed. Finally, a correlation will be drawn between the learning objectives of LSBP courses and business graduate employees' workplace needs and uses of oral communication.

In pursuing these objectives, we hope to improve the learning experience of undergraduates who combine the acquisition of foreign language skills with those of business studies. It is also hoped that an emphasis on integrating strategies and methods will lead to increased proficiency in both disciplines and encourage more business students to include the study of foreign language in their business programs.

## **LANGUAGE AND BUSINESS**

Numerous studies over the past twenty years have pointed out the need for relevant foreign language studies for business degree programs, in particular for International Business (Kaplan, 2005; Sauber, et al., 2005; Vielba & Edelshain, 1997) and Tourism and Hospitality Management programs (Leslie, et al., 2002; Villena-Alvarez, 2005). According to students (Coleman, 1994;

Grosse, 2004; Grosse, et al., 1998; Robbins, et al., 1998; Roberts, 1992), managers (Hamori, 2008; Pène, et al., 2006), employers (Coleman, 1994; ELAN, 2006; Enderwick & Akoorie, 1994; Grosse, 2004; Lehtonen & Karjalainen, 2008) and recruiters (Grosse, et al., 1998; Hedderich, 1997; Korn/Ferry; Vande Berg, 1997), business degree programs integrating foreign language studies allow students to gain a competitive advantage and companies to perceive an added value upon hiring students with foreign language and intercultural competence. The growth of international business activity and the exchange of people, products and services means that the role of languages and language training in management programs is increasingly important in order to operate in a multilingual environment.

However, other studies have found that foreign language competence is not perceived as important for business studies. In a comparative survey of UK and continental European MBA programs, Vielba and Edelshain (1997) found that the majority of UK business schools did not consider language teaching compatible with management courses, but European schools disagreed. They considered the acquisition of foreign language skills as vital for managers, asserting that language competency is important for communication and finding jobs, even though they felt more strongly than the UK schools that English is the primary language of international business. In fact, European business schools outnumbered the UK schools two to one in actively supporting language teaching as an integral part of an MBA program.

The UK schools' main reasons for not supporting language courses were timetabling and time constraints in MBA programs, language skills not perceived as core management skills for international business, no demand for languages because many schools perceive English as the language of international business, and institutional regulations prohibiting teaching in languages other than English. Similar findings have been reported for time constraints (Coleman, 1994; Reuben, 1994), language studies as less important than core business courses (Koch, 1997), the business community places little value on foreign language skills (Vande Berg, 1997), the complacency of Anglophone countries (Coleman, 1994; Enderwick & Akoorie, 1994; Koch, 1997; Vande Berg, 1997), the bias towards language departments which offer studies in literature and

literary criticism (Vande Berg, 1997), and the lack of flexibility and variety in LSP programs based on needs analyses (Coleman, 1994). The results of these surveys indicate that the majority of business schools believe that language acquisition should take place outside the business school and academic framework.

## **LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE MULTINATIONAL**

With the growth of international business and the installation of multinationals around the world, knowledge of foreign languages is not just necessary for sales, marketing and export operations (ELAN, 2006), but equally important for corporate management and control, as well as enhancing socialization within the firm (Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002). The free exchange of information relies on a cooperative atmosphere, an understanding of the context and the social norms reinforced by confidence in communicating with others and a personal engagement in the

situation (Marschan-Piekkari, et al., 1999). Communication is language-dependent; therefore, sufficient foreign language skills are not only necessary to accomplish business across international boundaries, but also to ensure effective horizontal communication within the multinational.

Marschan et al. (1996, 1997) found that knowledge of languages is a key factor in formal and informal information flow in organisations. Language can serve as a barrier, a facilitator and a source of power in multinationals. Language is perceived as a barrier to effective communication between units, and between units and the head office. Directors from the head office visit subsidiaries much less often if they do not speak the language of the subsidiary (Marschan-Piekkari, et al., 1999). Lack of foreign language competence and confidence has a negative effect for both the head office and employees in terms of control and coordination of operations. Language also acts as a facilitator for employees who speak the company language as well as the language of the subsidiary. These employees have more opportunity to travel, attend training sessions and to network, thus gaining a higher profile within and without the organisation (Marschan-Piekkari, et al., 1999). In addition, language can facilitate cooperation among units which share the same language or languages that are linguistically related (Poncini, 2003).

Macdonald (1996), however, has pointed out that one of the key functions of the organisation is the treatment and exchange of information. Organisations do not prosper if they are unable to deal effectively with information. Accordingly, language is power and individuals may take on the counter-productive role of gatekeeper (Macdonald & Williams, 1992) when they filter information into the company and distribute this information to certain individuals within the company. In this way, language is construed as a source of power and may have a negative effect on the organisational structure of employees in the multinational.

Language boundaries are increasingly felt within organizations and internal communications have been identified as critical success factors in a competitive world (Marschan-Piekkari, et al., 1999). Often contacts with other units of a multinational are oriented to employees who speak the company language and can transmit the information to other units. Communication may be filtered through one person in particular whose superior language abilities create dependencies throughout the company social network. Knowledge of two or more languages allows an employee to act as language intermediary with superiors and the head office. The employee may gain access to sensitive information not usually available to an employee at that level of the organisation. Thus, an individual can gain an influential position by mastering special knowledge and developing a network of highly important contacts within a multinational.

Recent research into business discourse and genre theory has focused on contextual discursive analyses and language strategies used for negotiations, meetings, emails and business correspondence. These studies found that in order to facilitate and promote effective business communication in authentic business contexts, language serves strategic (Poncini, 2003), situational (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson, 1999; Nickerson, 2005; Poncini, 2002, 2003), face-saving (Charles, 1996; Planken, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2000; Vuorela, 2005) and code-switching functions (Louhiala-Salminen, 2002; Poncini, 2003). Thus genre theory and discourse analyses have many practical implications for language teaching methodology as they help define a core curriculum for LSBP courses in terms of linguistic input based on categories of written and spoken text and typical formal and contextual features.

As we have seen, there is abundant literature recognizing the value of foreign language skills as a stipulation of professional expertise. Language ability is required for professional communicative functions, as well as facilitating formal and informal information flow in the multinational. Foreign language competences, therefore, need to be considered core management skills for business programs. So why are business programs reluctant to promote languages for business and why are business students reluctant to study foreign languages? In an attempt to answer these questions, we now turn to an investigation of the learning styles of language and business students. Teaching methods from second language acquisition and business studies will be proposed in order mutually to benefit the needs of both. By focusing on teaching and learning strategies, we attempt to enhance the image of language teaching and acquisition, and LSBP courses overall, in order to convince administrators, colleagues and students of the benefits of foreign language acquisition for business studies.

## **DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES**

Instructors should not assume that all learners use the same strategies to acquire knowledge. Drew and Ottewill (1998) claim that language students learn through active experimentation and concrete experience while business students prefer an approach based on reflective observation and abstract conceptualisation. The second language curriculum has much more in common with the soft applied skills and developing workplace competences than the hard-applied skills of the business program. Language students need to learn while actually doing something that can be transferred to real-world situations. They are willing to take risks in order to communicate and do not overly worry about grammatical rules and accuracy. Understanding the underlying concepts of the grammatical system of the language is secondary to the application of these concepts. In this respect, they are more comfortable with active learning methods.

On the other hand, business degree programs deal mainly with the hard-pure and hard-applied skills. Business students rely on developing and testing theories, on building conceptual models and on analysing quantitative data. In other words, business students need to know about something or to know how to do something without actually having necessarily experienced doing it. For example, mastering the concept of masculine and feminine nouns may be facilitated for business students by learning that endings often indicate the gender of the noun. In this way, a business student may be pleased to discover that all nouns in French ending in *-age* are masculine. Upon testing this theory however, that same student may be rather troubled to learn there are exceptions to this rule: *rage* and *plage* are feminine. So the business student wants to know why. As second language teachers, we must be prepared to answer that question. In addition, business students are more comfortable with lectures. As a result, the participatory nature of communicative language classes may either put them off or persuade them that language learning is not a serious activity (Coleman, 1994).

Although these learning styles appear to be conflicting, business programs have taken initiatives and designed programs to encourage the acquisition and development of practical workplace competences by drawing on pedagogical methods and strategies that promote active learning. Studies have found that students who were shown how to use strategies, obtained better

results than those who had not received this instruction (Viau, 1994). In respect to teaching methods, an attempt to bridge the gap between the humanities and business has been made. The following section provides an analysis of the learning process and explains how that process applies to language instruction.

## **COGNITIVE PROCESSING SKILLS**

Most students come to class with certain established attitudes and values that may be so stereotyped that the students fail to develop an understanding of the complex phenomena to which their attitudes apply. Thus, one role of the instructor is to encourage sensitivity to other points of view and increase understanding of the phenomena to which the attitude applies. Second, many students approach all courses the same way and do not realise that different disciplines have different discourse structures, different forms of argument or different ways of approaching and solving problems. Therefore, domain specific learning strategies as well as general learning strategies have to be explicitly taught since a core component of strategic learning is the ability to access a wide variety of cognitive learning strategies to deal with ways of thinking within the subject domain and ways of approaching specific tasks of the content area (Weinstein, et al., 2006). Learners are active processors of information. Learning strategies help students organise, integrate, acquire and remember knowledge by creating new information networks in their memory (Cockrell, et al., 2000; Dochy, et al., 2005; Hmelo-Silver, 2004).

Instructors can influence students' strategic learning by clearly explaining how each assignment relates to course goals so that students can choose appropriate strategies. Guided practice through questioning to find out what and how students think, and if the strategy chosen was the most effective process to reach certain goals, provides opportunities to practice and evaluate strategies. The aim is to foster strategic learners who can take responsibility for their own studies in order to reach their learning goals.

As previously stated, it is important for language students to actively experiment with forms and structures by using them in real communication situations. Typically, learning activities performed in the foreign language classroom, such as role plays, discussions, debates, simulations and task-based methods, engage students in active learning experiences that are highly valued, since they allow language learners to gain fluency. However, Skehan (1998) found that fluency is attained at the expense of accuracy and complexity. According to VanPatten (1990), students' cognitive processing capacity is limited. Since students must prioritize where they allocate attention, they are not able to process meaning and form at the same time. Therefore, in order to promote accuracy and complexity, tasks and activities that raise students' consciousness are effective ways of focusing students' attention on language structures.

Research has shown that instructors who focus students' attention on form are more effective than those who do not. However, teaching grammar does not mean presenting a set of rules to be memorised, even if business students might prefer this approach. Being more accustomed to the lecture approach, business students are reluctant to participate in active learning activities and are often frustrated that their language progress is impeded without having first assimilated the

concepts. While knowledge of concepts may be necessary for success in other areas of the business curriculum, knowledge of the underlying concepts of the language, although satisfying the need for abstract conceptualisation, only leads to acquisition of inert knowledge. We agree with Larsen-Freeman (2001) that teaching grammar refers to developing skills which enable students to use grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully and appropriately. The “why” in grammar instruction must be emphasised; rules are static while grammar and its instruction are dynamic processes.

In order to benefit from various strategies and methods adopted from language teaching and business studies in the LSBP class, instructors need to encourage both business and language students to adopt a flexible approach to their learning styles. The following sections present strategies and methods which can be used to accomplish this in LSBP courses.

## LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

One way to enhance students’ noticing is through *input flooding*. Texts and tasks are chosen in which the high frequency of a particular structure renders that structure more salient and therefore promotes noticing of that feature.

Another way to highlight certain relevant features is through *consciousness-raising* tasks which ask the students to induce grammatical explanations from the data they have been given. Trying to induce rules that are not readily apparent may also contribute to more effective learning because detailed instruction and metalinguistic feedback then become necessary in order to correct student errors. It follows that this second type of approach, or a deductive approach, may be more desirable at times when the rule is not readily apparent or when students have a particular cognitive style that is not well suited to language analysis. Recent studies in second language acquisition have found that teaching rules and having students articulate rules and explanations increase accuracy (Hu, 2002), and using oral tasks that target these explanations is more efficient for noticing forms (White & Ranta, 2002). Students’ metalinguistic awareness can be improved by having them verbalise rules and explanations. By focusing attention on typical, but more especially on atypical forms, and increasing metalinguistic knowledge of these forms, the acquisition and use of accurate structures becomes automatic.

To give an example, the irregular feminine and plural forms of many French adjectives and nouns are often problematic. One example is adjectives ending in *-al*, such as *spécial*. In this case, the feminine singular and plural forms are regular: *spéciale* and *spéciales*. The masculine plural form is *spéciaux*, which, however, lacks saliency for most students and errors result from interlanguage interference. Intermediate level language students might appreciate knowing why a rather unusual form exists, although they are probably more interested in practicing the new form. On the other hand, business students will be delighted to learn that the reason for this unusual form can be explained in economic terms of time saved or “time is money”. When copying books during the Middle Ages, scribes abbreviated the *-us* sequence to a simple *-x* in order to save time, perhaps space as well (Perret, 2008). By providing metalinguistic explanations during the input and cognitive processing stage, both learning styles are addressed and students are more likely to take up the form.

Another strategy used to heighten student awareness of form is *input processing* (VanPatten, 1996). Instead of working on rule learning and rule application, input processing activities require learners to notice language properties while carrying out activities that use the structure in meaningful contexts. Communicative tasks are particularly useful as a vehicle for input processing. Students can be encouraged to use target forms while carrying out the task, thus generating output that draws feedback from the instructor and other students.

When students communicate, high-level cognitive processing occurs (Leaver & Willis, 2004) which allows students to self-regulate or verify their hypotheses on how the structure is formed or what meaning they have produced when they use a certain structure. Consequently, *output production* is crucial because it forces the students to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing, in other words, to aim for accuracy and complexity in addition to fluency. Once again, feedback is important to encourage modifications and corrections.

Students may also participate in *collaborative dialogue* (Swain & Lapkin, 2001) during which speakers engage in problem-solving and knowledge-building. Students provide support for each other and develop their interlanguage while carrying out communicative tasks such as summarising oral listening exercises or preparing an oral report. Co-regulation in collaborative learning and student-led group activities is a valuable high-level cognitive tool (Volet, et al., 2009) which also promotes grammar development.

Before proceeding, it is important to emphasise that these strategies must relate to meaningful practice. Although business students may not perceive the value of being engaged in the learning and acquisition process, instructors could explain that simply providing them with inert knowledge means that this knowledge is not available for spontaneous use for communicating and problem solving. Memorised knowledge may be recalled when specifically asked to do so, say, on a test, but this is not the goal of learning languages and LSBP. From the instructor's point of view, motivation is enhanced when students are able to interact in meaningful ways. What follows are some suggestions for integrating business methods with these strategies in LSBP courses.

## **BUSINESS STUDIES METHODS**

### ***THE CASE STUDY***

One teaching method that corresponds to both styles of learning is the case study. LSBP has borrowed the case study from business studies methodology as it promotes real-world applications, stimulates discussion and meaningful writing assignments, provides opportunities to practice various speech acts including questions, summary, analysis, comparison and hypothesis (Grosse, 1988; Ulrich, 2000). Then again, studies have suggested modifying this method for the LSBP classroom. Esteban and Cañado (2004) advocate implementing a series of stages over a longer period of time than is usually the case in business courses. By presenting the case study as a series of tasks, language students will not be overwhelmed by the amount of information they need to assimilate and business students have the opportunity to learn the vocabulary and structures before proceeding to the next task.

When introducing different teaching methods for LSBP courses, it is important to ascertain the students' familiarity with the method by questioning the students or providing an orientation to the method. Language students often need explicit instructions about methods such as case studies. Business students, on the other hand, will need to be told the benefits for language acquisition. These explanations also correspond to the business student's learning style by providing concepts and reasons that are more abstract in nature. Although business students may not be comfortable with the fact that the instructor assumes the role of facilitator rather than a knowledge dispenser (Coleman, 1994), both groups will benefit if the use of case studies in the language classroom is felt to be justified.

Deductive approaches, such as providing vocabulary lists, and inductive approaches, such as asking students to develop their own lists, are useful strategies in general, but especially for business students who prefer to know what they need to master before proceeding to the next stage. Input flooding can provide guided activities focusing on selected language functions, such as expressing opinions, justifying arguments, agreeing and disagreeing, clarifying, asking questions, stating problems and finding solutions, all of which are relevant in the business discourse context. The instructor should explain the use and purpose of these language functions so that grammatical features assume a clear relationship to the content of the message. Input processing in the form of pre-task practice helps to familiarise students with these structures so these forms become more automatically accessible during the activity.

A final suggestion to put students more at ease during output production is to have students participate in collaborative dialogue instead of simultaneously working as a class. Studies have shown that students are more willing to cooperate, provide more in-depth analyses and have less anxiety about communicating their results to the entire class if they are able to work in small groups first (Esteban & Cañado, 2004; Jackson, 2002). Business students in particular often feel intimidated using a foreign language in an LSBP class with language students also present.

Kreber (2001) argues that by combining concrete experience and abstract conceptualisation with internal reflection or active experimentation, learning may become truly experiential. Case studies have the potential to transform concrete or abstract learning tasks into knowledge, to create genuine experiential learning for LSBP students and to foster student growth in critical thinking and self-direction. While case studies are useful for teaching practical business skills in the LSBP classroom, other studies have found that students are less engaged during the cognitive tasks linked to analysing the problem posed in a case study (Lohman, 2002). Other studies have found that problem-based learning is more efficient in preparing students for professional work (Pastirik, 2006), improves problem-solving skills needed by professionals to handle the increasingly ill-structured nature of professional work (Lohman, 2002), develops metacognitive skills and self-directed learning (Dochy et al., 2005, Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Downing et al., 2009) and promotes better retention of acquired knowledge (Dochy et al., 2003). With all this in mind, we now turn to a discussion of problem-based learning methodology for LSBP courses.

## ***PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING***

Problem-based learning (PBL) was developed in the 1960s at McMaster University in Canada. PBL initially was intended as a teaching method for medical education, but was subsequently extended to disciplines such as law, economics, psychology, education and the liberal arts. Instructors, particularly in professional programs, praise PBL for training students to be highly motivated, self-directed learners who can integrate knowledge across subjects, reason critically and work collaboratively with others (MacKinnon, 1999). PBL starts with real-world scenarios or problems common to professional practice and asks students to solve them through a process leading to the development of metacognitive skills. Simply defined, metacognition is “thinking about thinking”, but metacognition also involves “knowing how to reflect and analyse thought, how to draw conclusions from that analysis, and how to put what has been learned into practice” (Downing, et al., 2009, p. 610). It follows that if we teach students about constructed and strategic knowledge, they will be able to take responsibility and control of their own learning processes and become self-directed, autonomous learners.

There are several differences between case studies and PBL. Case studies are written as well-structured scenarios, whereas PBL presents ill-structured problems or problems without a single correct solution because the exact nature of the problem is not clear, nor is enough information provided in order to solve the problem without doing further research (Hmelo-Silver, 2004; Lohman, 2002). This type of problem is also referred to as a project case study (Ainsworth, 2005) where students receive incomplete information and must actively construct knowledge in collaborative groups in order to solve the problem. Although business students in LSBP courses may feel at a disadvantage without having concrete material to work with, the downside of providing full information is that students continue to rely on memorisation to perform well academically (MacKinnon, 1999). When implementing PBL with business students (who prefer knowing all the information in advance), instructors must avoid directing students to specific resources or lecturing on content. The instructor acts as facilitator and guides the learning process by questioning and encouraging students to engage in critical thinking processes, and by keeping all the students involved in the group process (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). It is therefore important that PBL use an inductive approach when first setting out the ill-structured problem, followed by a deductive approach through hypothesis generating. Consciousness-raising tasks may also be used to focus attention on forms necessary for carrying out the various tasks.

In addition, case studies emphasise the goal, or solving the problem, and are oriented toward expert knowledge and a range of acceptable conclusions provided by the instructor. The skills students acquire enable them to apply their new knowledge to similar, well-structured situations. On the other hand, PBL is a learner-centred approach that emphasises the process of solving the problem, not just attaining the goal. The knowledge acquired allows students to apply the problem-solving skills and cognitive skills they have learned to solve future problems which are ill-structured or unfamiliar (Lohman, 2002).

Student-centered approaches are key to helping students think beyond biases and stereotypes [...]. These approaches invite students to examine issues through their personal involvement – cognitive, emotional, and behavioural – with the content. As forms of inductive learning, these approaches enable students to discover general principles and ideas from themselves as they examine the specifics of particular

experiences. Such discovery learning often proves less intimidating to students and meets less resistance than knowledge that seems to be imposed by the teacher. Instead, students are themselves creating knowledge from their experiences (Crawley et al., 2008, p. 213).

Student feedback on this method of learning bears this out. Most students indicate that PBL helps develop essential communication skills, increases knowledge retention due to opportunities for discussion and facilitates thinking about the material rather than simply memorising it (Cockrell, et al., 2000; Pastirik, 2006). Students are able to share and discuss findings, brainstorm, reason critically, handle conflict, cooperate with others, set their own goals and manage time efficiently. An even more significant finding is that students perceive gains in confidence, attitudes, knowledge and transferable skills, such as how to chair meetings, which is an important function for group management (MacKinnon, 1999). In this respect, collaborative dialogue can promote higher levels of student achievement, develop critical reasoning skills and encourage student engagement in situated cognitive experience (Cockrell, et al., 2000). As well, Dochy et al. (2005) find that students' perceptions of this method are equally positive across disciplines.

Finally, selecting good quality problems is key to group functioning and influences the amount of time spent on self-directed learning (Moust, et al., 2005). Students are more motivated when they value what they are learning and are engaged in personally meaningful tasks. Good quality problems often require multidisciplinary solutions (Hmelo-Silver, 2004) which is an added bonus for the LSBP class. The authors conclude that if students have better insight into the rationale of PBL, and the principles and instruction underpinning PBL, this will enhance students' acceptance of PBL and therefore optimise the learning effects. Once again, this supports our argument that students need explicit instructions to be comfortable with the method, as well as reasons why the method will help them attain their learning goals.

## ***THE SIMULATION***

The use of simulations is widespread for second language teaching because the method makes extensive use of communicative activities and role-playing. As previously noted, active experimentation and development of workplace competences are usually the preferred learning modes of language students. Since effective teaching recognises that effective learning takes place when students are active participants, many business schools are implementing activities, such as simulations, which get the students thinking and participating. Consequently, simulations have been adopted for teaching functional areas of business such as Human Resources, Marketing and Policy because they are based on real-world scenarios and combine features from case study methodology that allow students to gain experience in business contexts. The following is an example of a collective bargaining simulation used to teach labour relations management in a first-year business course.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper participated in the simulation while enrolled as a student in the course.

The students begin by reading the scenario entitled *Collective Bargaining: A Canadian Simulation*. Collective bargaining teams of 4-5 members, either union or management, are formed and union and management teams matched up into collective bargaining groups. Each team meets formally to designate roles and delegate tasks such as researching the industry, analysing financial information and preparing the spreadsheet. The meetings culminate in the team's Initial Team Strategy Report. The Strategy Report outlines the team's initial bargaining position regarding negotiable clauses such as wages, benefits and other selected issues. The report also establishes what union teams will demand or what management teams will offer, and how much each is prepared to move on the initial demands or offers before settling on their final position. The Initial Team Strategy Report is handed in at the end of the first bargaining session.

Two labs are devoted to actively bargaining during which team members take notes for the Final Bargaining Strategy Report. Group meetings are required outside of labs to review the outcome of each week's bargaining and prepare for the next bargaining session. The Final Bargaining Strategy Report contains the spreadsheet and either an outline of the agreed-upon contract. In those cases in which the bargaining group was unable to reach a settlement and is in a strike or lockout position, the team's final offer or demands. The report also includes a description of the strategies and tactics the team utilised in dealing with its counterpart at the table, which strategies and tactics proved most successful in moving the negotiations along, and which strategies and tactics proved to be an impediment to negotiations. The Final Report is submitted a week after the final bargaining session.

Since the simulation was a requirement of a first-year business course, knowledge of second or foreign language communication skills was not necessary in order to successfully complete the tasks.<sup>2</sup> Even so, for the language specialist, the simulation provided a fascinating experience in researching a business problem and using situated business discourse for negotiating and attending meetings. On the other hand, the business students did not seem to benefit in this respect. Although all bargaining groups were present during the first round of negotiations, fewer groups seemed to take part and less negotiating took place during the second round. Since groups conducted mainly quantitative research and comparisons of the industry and similar companies, with some qualitative research of market trends, most communication in the bargaining sessions was based on costs. The financial expert entered numbers and calculated costs in the spreadsheet on a laptop during the bargaining sessions. Nevertheless, the language expert felt that the team had accomplished the goals of active participation and concrete experience in achieving the objectives of the simulation.

Therefore, it was quite a surprise to learn that the group received only a mediocre grade on the assignment. It was even more surprising to learn that the evaluation was based almost entirely on the financial analysis. If the cost to the company fell within a certain range, the group received an A, outside of that range, a B or a C. Very little, if any, of the final mark was attributed to the initial and final strategy reports, the research and the actual process of collective bargaining. We then realised why astute groups of business students chose few items to negotiate, negotiated few benefits for the workers and kept costs low for the company. Although the simulation allowed for

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the author was the only Anglophone in a team of union representatives that also included one Hispanic and two Asian students.

both active experimentation and abstract conceptualisation, business students focused on acquiring the hard pure and hard applied skills, which they deem more important in business situations, while the language specialist focused on the soft pure and soft applied skills necessary for working with and relating to others, and risk-taking.

### ***COMPUTER MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES***

The didactic model proposed in this paper emphasises the integration of language learning strategies and business studies methods through an active, individualised learning process in a rich and complex learning environment. The learning goals of this didactic model aim at preparing undergraduates for functioning in complex, ill-structured environments in society and/or business. These goals can be further enhanced through the use of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) to support learning in interdisciplinary teams. Collaboration between students, and between students and instructors, is significantly enhanced through strategic incorporation of CMC technologies such as videoconferencing, email, blogs, wikis and electronic discussion spaces into the curricula. Target language video and audio programming, and Internet sources for video, audio and text, provide rich, relevant material for discussion as well as access to international web sites and culture (Lafford & Lafford, 2005). Internet pages also provide access to a wealth of authentic texts, particularly to specialised publications for LSBP that allow instructors to draw on a huge bank of specific teaching materials, and students to choose from a wider range of information related to issues and problems.

Working and learning in teams is also associated to societal and professional development, both of which stress communicative ability and cooperative and collaborative learning (Van Weert & Pilot, 2003). Within an interactionist theoretical framework of learning, CMC provides students with the opportunity for social interaction. This interaction may be in written or oral form. Written tasks provide students with opportunities to read and write in comprehensible language and to focus on form and content. Oral tasks allow students to acquire the ability to negotiate new roles and identities. Identity construction and socialisation are inherently linked with language and communication skills. Intercultural projects enrich students' knowledge of another culture and provide context for viewing one's own culture from another group's perspective (Kern, 2006).

Workplace activity is conducted through communication and social interaction enabling employees to learn and acquire new skills (Crosling & Ward, 2002). Thus, a critical aspect of the students' classroom learning experience relates to the social nature of the learning process. Teaching methods must consider this social dimension by creating learning communities that combine language and business studies. Positive learning environments engender a feeling of competence and confidence which allow students to have fun during the pursuit of learning goals (MacKinnon, 1999). This sense of community is a powerful source of motivation and is reflected in increased student commitment to the group in performing roles. Students develop a sense of ownership about the knowledge they have acquired through collaborative group work. They also reflect on the progress of their thinking and reasoning skills in new social contexts, which contributes to metacognitive awareness (Cockrell, et al., 2000; Downing, et al., 2009).

CMC technologies enable new forms of discourse, new forms of authorship and new ways to create and participate in communities. They encourage the use of numerous genres related both to the particular medium and to the particular social and cultural contexts of a given act of communication (Kern, 2006). In addition, by choosing and structuring tasks so that students are required to communicate ideas among interlocutors who are connected to each other through computer technologies, CMC facilitates contact among non-native speakers and with native speakers of the target language.

Nevertheless, tasks must be structured to emphasise accuracy and complexity. Studies have demonstrated that CMC language is often less correct, less complex and less coherent than other forms of language use due to simplification, typing economy or simply being inventive (Herring, 2001). Face-to-face oral tasks have to be modified in CMC environments in order to take advantage of interactional benefits. Learning in an interdisciplinary context derives from the particular uses of technology. Technology-based teaching for any discipline is not a method of itself, but should serve various pedagogical approaches and their learning objectives. For example, Internet resources may be enhanced in the classroom through careful integration of CMC into pedagogical thematic learning projects that capitalise on the use and benefits of technological resources (de Serres, 2005). Virtual learning environments, designed for marketing and tourism studies, immerse students in the workplace and provide unique opportunities to support active, collaborative learning communities (Alberola Colomar & Gil Guzmán, 2009)

Although CMC has been found to be beneficial to SLA because it provides rich input and the opportunity for social interaction, other potential benefits of CMC are increased participation among students, and increased quantity and quality of student output. But the real benefit to business students may lie in the fact that CMC is viewed as less threatening than face-to-face interaction, thus reducing language anxiety. During CMC sessions, students are less inhibited than in oral class discussions and feel more confident in writing. They are more willing to take risks experimenting with ideas during online discussions and to try out new hypotheses (Smith, 2004). In other words, they are participating in active experimentation and concrete experience.

## IMPLICATIONS

It is impossible for instructors to provide individual lessons to address each learning style. Instead, instructors can ensure that students are aware of learning strategies and the reasons for implementing different methods for teaching course content so that students can adapt to using different strategies in different learning situations. Instructors need to explain what the method consists of before using the method and each time a method is used throughout the course. The strengths and weaknesses of the method in relation to the program also need to be explained. For example, certain methods are useful to promote active learning, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, deep learning and longer retention. For example, using PBL, instead of the case study method, benefits long-term retention and the ability to transfer skills to other real-world, ill-structured problems.

However, there may not be any best method to achieve learning goals. The drawback of using methods and strategies from different disciplines is that each discipline may continue to work in isolation. This was found to be the case during the simulation exercise. Business students still key on the hard pure and applied skills emphasising results, while language learners value the soft pure and applied skills focusing on relations and processes. One suggestion to bridge this gap is to provide more LSBP courses in languages and business studies. As well, we need to promote these courses to students who wish to deal in a professional context and who would be interested in enrolling in a language course for professionals. Dual degree programs combining language with business studies would offer distinct advantages for both. LSBP should not simply co-exist with the other components of business, but the two should enjoy a complementary, mutually beneficial relationship.

Changes in the nature of work in contemporary organisations indicate that teamwork is a fundamental tool for achieving flexibility and adaptability, and enabling the workforce to remain competitive. The literature on business studies clearly indicates that oral communication is an important aspect of the workplace and that business graduate employees require effective skills in this area if they are to have successful business careers. Crosling and Ward's study (2002) of workplace oral communication needs for business students examined the importance and frequency of oral communication in the jobs of graduates, the people with whom they communicate orally and the forms that this communication takes in the workplace. The findings indicate that oral communication pervades the workplace and is either very important or important for recruitment, job success and promotion. The most frequent forms of oral communication mentioned are informal work-related discussions, following instructions, informal social conversations and building relationships with supervisors. Almost all employers indicate that participating in meetings is vital for job success, while employees emphasise the importance of actively engaging in meeting discussions and giving oral presentations. In addition, the survey confirmed that recruiters look for exceptional interpersonal skills, but find that graduate employees receive little preparation for working in teams and building relations with fellow team members. The authors' recommendations, therefore, come as no surprise for LSBP course instructors:

In our view, the university should focus on extending the generic skills acquired at school to skills such as those required for group presentation and discussion, individual presentation, an ability to be assertive when presenting one's views, and the ability to work successfully in groups or teams, optimally of cross-gender, cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary nature, in the completion of projects. The role of employers would be to adapt these acquired skills to a more job focussed work environment (Crosling & Ward, 2002, p. 54).

We believe this is precisely what LSBP courses attempt to do by implementing methods such as case studies, PBL and simulations, which rely heavily on team work, collaborative dialogue, presentations and discussions, as well as consciousness-raising language tasks such as expressing opinions, arguing one's position, stating problems and asking questions. For example, the benefits of giving formal presentations include learning to prepare and organise the relevant points of a topic, presenting arguments and explanations with supporting evidence, providing experience in maintaining an audience's interest and attention, elaborating on an issue, practicing enunciation,

well-modulated speech, appropriate body and facial language, and increasing confidence. Formal presentations in LSBP courses provide experience in all this, *plus the ability to do so in a foreign language*. This combined experience has important implications for students, LSBP courses and programs.

First, in order to enhance the language learning experience for business students, an explicit, planned program-wide approach to skill development for both students and instructors needs to be developed and implemented. For those academic institutions that want to support teaching LSBP, there is a need to provide language instructors with training in business content knowledge so that they can deliver relevant, appropriate content in their LSBP courses. Teacher training is of the utmost importance for augmenting instructor confidence and ensuring the success of LSBP courses.<sup>3</sup>

Second, an orientation to the program, its components and progression should be provided at the earliest moment possible to help students with planning. During this orientation, it should be emphasised that learning to speak a foreign language can be used to complement and reinforce the development of oral communication skills in the student's native language. Students should gain a clear understanding of the aims of the program, the types of jobs and careers for which students are being prepared and what employers are looking for.

Finally, more extensive dialogue needs to take place between language and business instructors at the program design stage. Issues include the planning and development of a shared program and the opening up of channels of communication in order to plan a coherent strategy. In this way, problems such as timetabling and progression through the curriculum of both disciplines can be ironed out. Interdisciplinary discussions need to emphasise pedagogical principles which enhance students' learning. Teaching methods and strategies should encourage students to take advantage of the learning process, not just memorise course content. Our objective is to educate students who are capable of adjusting to the different demands of the program components and of transferring this knowledge to the workplace.

## CONCLUSION

Languages combined with business studies require students to be flexible learners. Instructors cannot assume that language students and business students all use the same strategies to acquire knowledge. Students need to be encouraged to be adaptable in their approach to learning and in their ability to transfer one component of the program to other components. Instructors also need to regard the components of the program as complementary and supportive. By providing communicative activities emphasizing the learning process, as well as language teaching related to the strategic nature of the communicative event (Filliettaz & Bronckart, 2005), LSP courses can provide this transfer and integration of components (Dlaska, 1999).

We argued that foreign language study needs to be a fully integrated component of business studies in order to create a total learning experience. Business and language studies should establish shared goals and collaborate across disciplines and functional areas. Course and program

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<sup>3</sup> I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for emphasising the need for teacher training as a contributing factor of a successful program.

development based on research into business discourse situations is fertile ground for promoting such an interdisciplinary approach.

The bias toward literature associated with language studies needs to be removed. This is a difficult prospect if language courses proposed to business students for their program requirements continue to be the traditional language and literature courses. The solution is for LSBP instructors to develop LSBP courses in collaboration with business program developers in order to offer an integrated program in business communication studies. Students need to be made aware of the merit and value of these courses and their work-relatedness.

Furthermore, attention must be given to teaching methods and explicit reasons must be elaborated for their use in a particular learning situation, for example the development of metacognitive skills or their relation to real-world workplace situations. These tactics help students become effective learners throughout the program and beyond. LSBP courses that integrate communicative language learning strategies with methods such as case studies, PBL and simulations provide a coherent, interdisciplinary program. In addition, social and cultural learning communities are created which enhance motivation, cooperation and a sense of ownership of the acquired knowledge.

The purpose of this paper has been to discuss the implications of different learning styles and suggestions for using methods and strategies from language teaching and business studies in order to address business students' reluctance to take foreign language courses. Although we advocate an interdisciplinary approach, this study has not attempted to address methods of assessment for evaluating both the language components and the business content in LSBP courses (Douglas, 2000). Studies of evaluation methods for this approach are necessary for continued program and curriculum development. Nor have we investigated the issue of integrating intercultural knowledge in our interdisciplinary approach, although previous studies have confirmed that intercultural competence is gained through language studies. Further research in business discourse contexts would inform strategic teaching of foreign cultures as well as correspond to our interdisciplinary didactic model for teaching business language and communication.

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