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ABSTRACT

One business French teacher's technique for incorporating both authentic materials and oral skill development into the course curriculum is to have students read current French magazine articles and summarize them orally for the class. Students must select articles on recent business developments in France, or the United States when related to French business, and do background research to provide context for the article topic. During the oral report, they must report on this research and field questions from other students. This activity commonly generates considerable class discussion. Each student must also write a resume of the article in French. The technique has been found useful because it promotes student awareness of French business, enriches course content for all students, develops oral skills, is flexible and can easily be incorporated into class planning, and can be tailored to student ability. The teacher can assign more than one article per course if desired. (MSE)

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USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AND
ORAL ACTIVITIES TO SUPPLEMENT
THE BUSINESS FRENCH COURSE

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Too often the typical business language course becomes a nine to fifteen-week long vocabulary exercise with students diligently memorizing specialized terminology associated with the business world, analysing "sigles", translating from one language to another and back again, writing business letters, etc. Although this kind of intensive vocabulary study is a useful activity for expanding the students' knowledge of the subject matter, it does not enhance the students' oral skills or expand their awareness of developments in the business world they are learning. It does not give them a sense of the importance of applying their work in foreign languages to a business career. Stone and Rubenfeld (1989) have found that the vast majority of business majors do not pursue language study in college even when they have studied a language in high school. They suggest that this is because the students believe that language study is more difficult than other course work and, more importantly, they do not see the relevance of language study to their own career development.

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A strictly vocabulary building approach to business language is likely to increase rather than reduce this misconception. When study focusses on the terminology and workings of the bank, insurance companies, the various departments of a business, transportation, etc. without looking

at the actual current business climate in the target country especially as it relates to the American business world, students tend to have difficulty imagining themselves fitting into this foreign environment and see no relevance of what they are learning to their own personal careers. Yet Stone and Rubenfeld stress that a positive attitude toward a language and its speakers and the culture it reflects encourages the students to achieve higher levels of learning that language.

Speaking activities in the business language course are often quite limited because of the nature of the content of the course. Rusterholtz (1990) has noted that these are often limited to the students' answering questions on the reading material. Occasionally the students are given group problem-solving exercises to increase their opportunities to speak. They are sometimes given dialogues to perform, but as a rule not many students are able to perform orally in front of the class.

I have developed a technique similar to one of Rusterholtz's. She assigns her students articles to read taken from L'Express, L'Expansion, or Le Monde. The students then report on these articles in class. My technique focusses more on the content of the reading material, requiring the students to present articles that discuss recent developments in the business world in France or in the U.S. when that development is related to French businesses. I also require more background study from the students so that they find out more information than is contained in the article and analyze the importance of that information. When the students present the article, they must be



prepared to field questions from the other students.

Thus, I assign the students to read an article in French about a current business event in France or in the U.S.: a new product coming on the market, the establishment of a subsidiary of an American company in France or vice versa, the financial condition of well known French companies, the transplanted of an American enterprise onto French soil, etc. I establish five criteria for the article to be used:

1. It must be as current as possible.
2. It must be about a French business or an American business with connections to France.
3. It must be about a high profile or well-known business or else be associated with a high profile American business.
4. It should be a product that is unusual, high tech, or of interest to the other students in some other way.
5. It must be in French.

The students may choose their own article if they wish or I will choose one for them. Common sources for these articles are L'Express International, Le Monde, Le Journal Français d'Amérique, France-Amérique, Paris Match, or any other French newspapers or magazines the students happen to find. The only criteria for the sources is that they be current and in French. I insist that the companies be high profile or the products unusual or high tech in order to capture the interest of the other students. I find that these American students are more interested in companies they have heard of, in high technology,

and in events that are likely to affect them personally. For example, the student presentation on Air France's plans to offer bargain rate seats in order to compete with American companies peaked their interest because they are interested in flying to France. The student presentation on Euro-Disney interested the students because of the possibility of their getting employment in France, etc.

After the students have read the article, they are to prepare a résumé of the article in French. They are also instructed to research in the library to find out as much as information as they can about the business or the product. Then they are to make inferences about the significance of the event or this product for French economy and culture. For example: what is the importance of the product in the French economy or culture? How will the development or loss of the product or business affect the French. What does this particular event or product suggest is happening in the French economy or culture at the present time?

The students then give a five to ten minute presentation in French before the class in which they present the summary of the article they have prepared and their analysis of the importance of the event to the economy or culture of France. They are encouraged to find or develop visual aids to help generate student interest and to present the information visually to the class. This enables the students to use their imagination more freely. The girl who presented the article on Euro-Disney delighted the class by appearing in a Mickey Mouse costume. Her

analysis of the difficulties Euro-Disney is experiencing with employees and attendance led to a very revealing discussion of the tremendous cultural differences between the French workers and the American managers especially in their attitudes towards customer service and meeting strangers and the differences in the French and American attitude towards theme parks in general.

When the students complete their presentation and/or demonstration, the other students are required to ask questions or make comments. Thus considerable class discussion is generated. The background information the students have researched usually enables them to answer any questions the other students may have. The student making the presentation enjoys in effect the position of being the "expert" for the day on that particular subject. The other students must pay attention and ask questions because they will have some of the information from the presentation on the next quiz. Finally, the student provides me with a written copy of the summary of the article from which I make up a question to be added to the next quiz.

This technique enables the student to develop his oral skills while, at the same time, enriching the other students' knowledge of real current events happening in the French business world. These presentations give a clear cut picture of trends in the French economy as well as culture. For example, the number of articles presented by the students on the profit losses in the French automobile, communications, and aero-space industries make it clear to the students that the French economy is suffering from the same recession as the American economy. By the same

token, the number of articles on the development of high technology in the French aero-space and medical research industries demonstrate the importance the French^s place on scientific research and technological developments. Articles on the establishment of joint business ventures between French and American businesses help the students understand that there truly is a "world economy". Articles on strikes in the French business world help the students understand typical ways the French solve labor disputes, etc.

This technique is very useful because of its flexibility. The teacher can spread the presentations out over the course of the quarter or semester. Each presentation takes only 5 to 10 minutes of class time although occasionally the class discussion will take longer. A class of thirty students can be done at a rate of 3 a week for 10 weeks or 2 a week for 15 weeks or the presentations could be done all at once in three or four days depending on the size of the class.

The technique is also useful because it can be "tailored" to the ability of the students. Weaker students can be given shorter articles from less technical magazines. Stronger students can be given longer, more difficult articles. Using visual aids helps the weaker students to feel more confident because they take the attention of the audience off the speaker and often they break the ice. Sometimes a student has to go to great lengths to get a visual aid related to his topic. One student who was presenting an article on the status of women in

the French workplace brought a picture of a model in a bikini and proceeded to explain how this woman would not succeed in the French corporate world. Another student who presented an article on a new French trend of creating culinary delights with flowers brought some flowers to class and asked the question: "Is this what you would have for lunch?" Often the articles themselves provide pictures the students can use. Occasionally students report on important business ventures not taken from the newspaper or magazines. One student, who was also a professor of economic at USU, presented a collaborative project he was working on in a North African country with a French-speaking company and gave the students insight into the kinds of work their own university does in other countries. If there happen to be foreign students in the class, I permit them to present an important business venture in their countries to acquaint the students with other cultures. Thus one year A Moroccan student presented the oil-drilling company he works for in Morocco to the class; he compared its structure to that of the imaginary French business we had been studying in the text.

The teacher may assign the students to do as many as these presentations as he or she would like depending on the size of the class. I have not been able to allow more than one presentation per student in my classes but a teacher with a smaller class may wish to assign two or even three depending on the length of the quarter or semester.

This technique provides an opportunity for the students not only to practice their speaking skills, but also to provide

additional, more current information, more authentic materials to the class and thus to enrich the content of the course. Adding information from the presentation to the next quiz forces the students to listen carefully, to ask questions, and to take their friends' presentations seriously. Timid students find it difficult to be in front of the class for such a long period of time, but they also find that their fellow students are interested in what they have to say and the visual aids help them relax as well.

I have found this technique very useful for offering students more opportunity to speak in class. This is not the only oral work I require of the students; they also participate in spontaneous dialogues based on real-life business situations, in problem-solving group activities related to advertising, the legal structures of French businesses, and the development of the balance sheet. Some students even lead the class in the question and answer period on material in the text. All students participate in imagining and presenting their own "business" in France at the end of the quarter. But I feel that this single, individual oral task is the most rewarding for the students in terms of their contribution to the class work as a whole. These presentations help keep the course focussed on the authentic world of French business and sensitize these American students to the very real possibility of their participating in it. Through these presentations, the students realize how "global" the American as well as the French economies really are and they develop a greater appreciation for the relevance of language and

culture study to their future careers. This technique helps enhance the objective of LSP courses as identified by Grosse and Voght (1991). They note that the field of LSP has reflected the major trends in second language education such as a curriculum based on the learner's needs and purposes in using a language, the use of culturally and linguistically rich authentic materials to provide relevant and interesting input in a content area, and the integration of language, cultural, and content instruction.

I have found that this technique helps sensitize the students to the relevance of international business studies and to the value of foreign language skills. Thus it gives the students the incentive to continue their language study as they prepare for their business careers.

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