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THE TEACHING OF BUSINESS ENGLISH AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL IN JAPAN

An Experimental Teaching Method for Better Communication

Takao Mukoh

This paper gives an overview of “business English,” being taught at the college undergraduate level in Japan with particular emphasis on everyday foreign trade practices and simple, standardized letter forms. To improve the students’ proficiency in all business communications including cases of joint ventures, plant machinery exports, overseas production, technology transfers, distributorships, agencies and, of course, conventional foreign trade practices, the writer introduces his experimental classroom techniques, all conducted only in English, to facilitate the students’ ability to think in natural English and organize their letters or telexes according to the business situations involved.

Part I describes the typical college textbooks on “business English” or “foreign-trade English” and outlines the classwork generally carried out when using such books. Part II challenges the aptness of “business English” as generally accepted in Japan in contrast to the established concept of “business communication” by means of English. Part III describes the writer’s experimental classroom activities for better business-English training. These activities have proven effective in turning out able communicators for any and all business situations, not merely routine foreign trade-oriented communications. Part V is the conclusion.

PART I. COLLEGE TEXTBOOKS ON “BUSINESS ENGLISH” IN JAPAN

The writer may be open to criticisms for drawing a generalization on rather limited information sources on how “business English” is being taught

according to textbooks at the college level in Japan. Nevertheless, a quick review of nearly twenty textbooks on college business English plus the information given the writer by teachers of other colleges confirm the situation as the writer describes it. As there are usually two stages, elementary and advanced, they will be discussed separately.

1. Elementary Stage

(1) Textbooks

The initiate in business English is, invariably, ushered into (i) elementary foreign trade practices and (ii) the related “standard” letters and other standardized documents such as bills of lading, letters of credit, bills of exchange, marine insurance policies and general conditions of sale.

The commonly accepted processes of foreign trade practices seen in most textbooks are (i) inquiries to find overseas business connections, (ii) export/import inquiries, (iii) replies to such inquiries, (iv) offers, firm offers and counteroffers, (v) consummation of sales contracts, (vi) shipping (including a once-over of air-freight and marine container transportation) and shipping advices, and (vii) claims.

It must be added that, in the first part of the textbooks, items such as (i) components of business letters (inside address, date line, salutation, subject line, complimentary close, attention line, signature identification, copy line, enclosure line, etc.), (ii) basic expressions particularly utilized for conventional business letters, and (iii) 5C's (correctness, clarity, conciseness, completeness and consideration; sometimes 6C's, 7C's or 8C's instead) and other communication principles which came from the United States are shown to acquaint the initiate with the basic information with which to go into various stages of foreign trade practices.

Also seen are chapters devoted to information ancillary to foreign trade basics including (i) credit information requests and replies, (ii) INCO Terms, (iii) the Uniform Custom and Practice for Documentary Credit, (iv) marine insurance, (v) social letters, (vi) telexese, (vii) market reports and (viii) distributorship/agency agreements.

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These surprisingly comprehensive textbooks on foreign trade practices—and the related, specialized English called “business English”—are expected to give a general view of routine foreign trade operations for duties at trading companies (“*shosha*”), but nowhere else. Therefore, those who study using the text books cannot cope with communication situations in their specialized line of business not clearly shown in their college-day textbooks. Neither can anybody not in *shosha* use sample letters and expressions given in the textbooks, because they are all devoted to *shosha*-type communications.

(2) Classwork

After lectures are given on the introductory chapters referring to (i) letter layout with important components, (ii) basic foreign trade-oriented expressions, (iii) perfunctory 5C's (6C's, 7C's or 8C's) which denote the imported American business communication principles, and (iv) admonition against the use of so-called “old-fashioned expressions,” the students are shown a few sample letters for each stage of foreign trade transaction. Since the detailed background of the transactions behind such sample letters are usually not given in the textbooks, the students are, more often than not, asked to translate each letter, purportedly written by native speakers of English and skillful Japanese correspondents, into Japanese to ensure that they are made familiar with the contents and purpose of the letter. Expressions unfamiliar to the students are explained by the teacher according to the notes given below the letter.

Then come “useful (or recommended) expressions” often loaded with trite phraseology commonly seen in business letters written by Japanese people. These expressions, if not accompanied by Japanese translation, are then translated by the students into Japanese, whereupon the students are encouraged by the teacher to memorize, for doing the exercises in the textbooks, the sample letters and “useful expressions.”

The exercises at the end of each chapter become the students' homework for the following week. For easy translation into English, a few lines in Japanese related to the chapter are given as an exercise; such lines usually are too short to make up a full letter. This fragmentary translation does not encourage the students to compose and type up a full business letter, complete

with reasonably concrete business information. Thus the students are given no opportunities to think out a reasonably sound letter plan, on the basis of which they could practice-write a letter or a telex message, complete with all business details.

At the end part of the textbook is given telexese with extremely abridged words (e.g., ADRS=address; ARFO=after receipt of firm offer; BEF=before; and BTR=better) dwarfed for economy in telex transmission time and cost. This telexese befits *shosha* communication between a head office and its overseas branches or affiliates but is not adopted nowadays by enterprises in areas other than foreign trade for fear of serious misunderstanding which might arise from clipped telex transmission.¹

2. Advanced Stage

A variety of business English textbooks, which serve both for advanced study at colleges and for self-study by those already in business, are found. One prominent group is characterized by the so-called "case study" approach, another by its voluminous, all-embracing hand-book style, still another by specific fields of study such as telex and telegram communications.

A typical case study book² gives twenty-one cases focusing on letters referring to: overseas joint ventures, production-status information, operation manuals, agency announcements, distributorships, service-bulletins, price lists, exhibitions and other promotional activities, export financing, import/export operations, insurance and other foreign trade-oriented issues. In this particular example, a case is given on a silver platter; Japanese lines are pre-planned for instant translation into English, supplemented by a series of expressions commonly used for cases similar to the one given. Most books of this kind do not positively help the students think about given business situations with a creative mind.

A hand-book style,³ by nature, sweeps over the wide range of English used for business, in one case including (i) foreign trade correspondence basics, (ii) all phases of import/export-related communications, (iii) social correspondence, (iv) telecommunications, (v) advertisements, (vi) business

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conversation, (vii) miscellaneous business information of foreign-trade terminology, etiquettes, foreign exchange rates, and telecommunication fees. Much above being discarded after a business English course, the handbook can survive the reader's entire business life, if conscientiously kept updated.

A book devoted to telecommunication⁴ is another type worthy of a mention. Following the basics on telex and telegram communications, a book gives some seventy cases, each case showing a few alternative examples. The cases are all taken from a variety of routine import/export transactions.

In all three foregoing types, one finds a common denominator: Japanese-to-English translation without much room for positive thinking by the reader.⁵

PART II. "BUSINESS ENGLISH" VERSUS BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

Almost without exceptions,⁶ college textbooks in Japan on "business English" refer to the particular types of correspondence directly related to everyday foreign trade practices along the conventional flows of exports/imports, spiced with brief chapters on telecommunications and social correspondence thrown in. Hence a question: Is English for business to be confined to English used exclusively for the narrowly defined "foreign trade" meaning the basic forms of selling to and buying from overseas counterparts goods?

1. English for Business

(1) American Definitions

According to Aurner,⁷ business communication is a medium of exchange made up of all forms of correspondence, written or oral, used for the purpose of carrying on and bringing to completion business transactions. The English of business is, Aurner defines, that application of the language which, in conversational, well-planned talk writing, works toward the practical end of

bringing about a favorable action resulting in, or leading toward, a mutually profitable business transaction.

The writer, with his life-long experience in well-diversified forms of written and oral communications in English in a variety of fields, such as ocean shipping, port services, foreign trade, patents, trademarks, technology licensing, franchising, joint ventures, plant and machinery export activities, and arbitration, is convinced of the aptness of the foregoing Aurner definitions.⁸

(2) Japanese Definitions

Nevertheless, as noted above, Japanese textbooks generally refer only to a specific type of English, of which the use is qualified to daily foreign trade operations. Quite apparent is that foreign-trade English, replete with foreign-trade terminology, is only part of the entire domain of business English. The other parts are, for instance, English used for foreign exchange banking, marine/land/combined transportation, insurance, joint ventures, overseas production,⁹ technology licensing and franchising, to point just a few.

The ubiquitous rationale in Japan is that, unlike the United States where business correspondence is centered around domestic sales, business English for Japanese is almost exclusively foreign trade-oriented in view of the fact that Japanese manufacturers' advances into overseas markets, developing of natural resources overseas, joint-venture manufacturing overseas and the like are all supported by *shosha*'s know-how and experiences. Hence, business English in Japan means foreign-trade English for *shosha*, it goes.

It must be pointed out, however, that (i) *shosha*'s role in international commercial arenas has markedly declined due to arduous efforts independently made by high-tech manufacturers without substantive support from *shosha*,¹⁰ (ii) the manufacturers have different approaches to their overseas' activities (such as direct overseas production, joint ventures, plant machinery exports, technology licensing, and patent operations) from the all-too-familiar *shosha*-business style known as the "right-to-left" or "playing-both-ends-against-the-middle" designed to hedge all business risks,¹¹ and (iii) all non-*shosha*-oriented communications for international business have, according to the respective characters of activities involved, their own features quite apart from the *shosha*-style communications. True, an employee of an ocean shipping

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company must learn shipping-and combined transport-related communications including cryptic telexese; a technology licensing counsellor must learn legal and business communications in English needed for all licensing negotiations; and those joining banks should be initiated into banking English. This is because their college training in “business English”—for all intents and purposes, foreign-trade English—cannot be expected to answer the need for effective communications in these specific fields, which, of course, are none the less important than *shosha* business nowadays.

2. Authors and Teachers of Business English

The *shosha*-style, routine foreign trade correspondence—much standardized—has long been advocated, written in textbooks, and also taught by ex-employees, commercial science scholars specializing in foreign trade, and teachers of English. The first group with *shosha* experience is biggest in number.¹² As publishers are generally very reluctant to publish business-English textbooks solely in English due to the poor English proficiency of college students, the result is the texts in Japanese containing only foreign trade-related sample letters and recommended English expressions, topped off with translation exercises from Japanese to English. Classes are conducted in Japanese, of course. Thus the students are not given any opportunities to think in English for effective business writing—away from the “form” letters—and for making comments or asking questions in English, with the result that the students cannot acquire any ease in oral business conversation in English, let alone in writing extemporaneously to meet a particular business situation.

3. “American Business Communication” Referred to in Japanese Textbooks

The nature of Japanese college textbooks on business English being as it is, it is important to see how American-made business communication principles and methods are viewed by Japanese authors.

(1) Criticisms against “American-style” Business English

Some Japanese authors criticize “over-familiar” American English used in American sales letters. However, what are termed as the “over-familiar expressions” are not clear. ¹³The reader is admonished against the use of slang expressions for novelty; whereas, the use of natural, respectable, intelligent, semi-formal English normally noticed in American business letters finding their way here into Japan do not appear to fit such sub-standard pictures to the best of the writer’s knowledge. Some other authors, naturally, are cautious enough to refrain from casting doubt over the American business letters and maintain—perhaps due to their years of study and/or teaching in the U.S.—that there is not so great a gap among the kinds of business English in the U.S., the United Kingdom and Japan as before, a fair observation.

(2) American Concepts Introduced

The American communication concepts of the late 1940s and 1950s have evidently landed in Japan. The fundamental principles for better business-writing—correctness, clarity, conciseness, completeness, concreteness, courtesy and consideration (the last two items are particularly for business communications, while the rest apply to any form of communication) are explained in many textbooks.¹⁵ “You consideration,” a step away from the “consideration” concept, is advocated by Prof. Ozaki.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the American concepts are, unfortunately, not thoroughly demonstrated in actual sample letters in the textbooks, largely because the books follow the long-established, stiff form-letter style which leaves no space for lively and more effective business communication eagerly sought for in the international business arenas of today.

While on the subject, a mention must be made of the “you attitude,” which tells correspondents to think about the readers first. According to one textbook,¹⁷ the use of “you” in place of “we” is recommended (“you will be pleased to know” instead of “we are pleased to announce”). This, however, might lead the students toward the blind use of “you” in place of “we” under all business circumstances, for want of the “feel” of the language. (Which is better, “we found a billing mistake in your invoice” or “you made a mistake in your invoice”?)

(3) Sample Letters (from the U.S.) Praised

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In certain textbooks sample letters purported to have been written by Americans are praised highly as being “free from formality,” “practical and down to earth.” Many such sample letters betray the authors’ retouching strokes—with idiosyncratic space-fillers. Such “American letters,” however, are often the products of the writers not armed with business communication principles and business psychology. It must be added, in the passing, that, on top of letters from the U.S., many samples are shown as having come from or being addressed to businesses in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and other countries under the former British suzerainty. One might ask if business English is to be used for communication *worldwide*, or simply with native speakers of English, a crucial question!

(4) Need for Improvement

As we have noted in the foregoing, some textbooks criticize the “American-style” business English, while others recommend the American business communication principles. Some give “American-style” business letters, though poorly written, lavish praise, while others denounce what they call “American-style” letters as overfamiliar and unfit for the Japanese. In the era when better communication in business by means of English is sought after to cope with the need for communication throughout the world on a much wider scope than the conventional foreign trade, it is of truly crucial importance for us teaching business English to improve the so-far-established teaching methods amply exhibited in the textbooks.

PART III. AN EXPERIMENTAL CLASSWORK

In view of the current status of business English- and business communication-related textbooks for Japanese colleges, junior colleges included, the writer has, over a period of seven years, experimented in business English courses with encouraging results. A firm believer in the American business communication principles and natural “talk-language” for all business communications, the writer attempts to show in this chapter that his students, not particularly business-oriented, are capable of well-planned, effective

business writing once they have penetrated the barrier of the “sense of business” through interactive classwork conducted solely in English.

1. Students for the Training

Junior students, usually around 15 to 25 in number, study in the writer's basic business English class, while senior students, around 10 to 15 in number, take the writer's advanced business communication seminar. These students are from the English department of the language-oriented university the writer is associated with. Though most of them join a variety of businesses upon graduation, they have no particular access to business-oriented, elective courses such as foreign trade practices or international trade theories. In their freshman year they were initiated into free writing in the writer's English composition class and are aware that positive thinking in English is the only key to writing freely in English to create business letters, that all courses of the writer, whatever the subjects, are conducted only in English (with scribbles in Japanese on the black-board if urgently necessary). By the junior year those who report to the writer's class have already developed reasonable communicative skill both in written and spoken English, thus making it possible for the writer to teach at an academic level similar to that of colleges in the U.S.¹⁸

The writer has been reassured by what his students have accomplished in his classes that good communicative skill in English—not necessarily the technical knowledge on international commerce—is essential for studying effective business communications, which are above the standardized, routine letters and telexes for everyday foreign trade practices. The students, if armed with ample communicative ability in English and common sense, can be stimulated into all-purpose, effective business communications in the forms of letters, telex messages, business reports, agreements and the like if (i) basic communication principles (including the principles particularly required for business; i.e., consideration and courtesy, and (ii) business psychology, are taught, as amply proven by the writer's students.

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2. Basic Course for Juniors (all in English)

(1) Objectives

The basic course's objectives are (i) to initiate the students into the world of international business communication in English where the prospect of immediate or future business gains are the chief motivating factors, (ii) to acquaint them first with the common communication principles and second with the additional principles for business communications, (iii) to analyse so-far-taken-for-granted sample letters and recommended expressions found in their textbooks, and (iv) to write their own creative versions of such samples and expressions, entirely free from stock phraseology found in abundance in actual business letters going out from, and coming into, Japan.

(2) Classwork

For the classwork (i) college textbooks on foreign trade English with well-organized explanations on elementary foreign trade operations and (ii) the writer's book on stock phraseology (as a reference book) are used. The foreign trade information therein serves as the backdrop of the sample letters shown in the textbooks. At the beginning of the course and from time to time thereafter strong emphasis is placed on (i) communication principles (basic: correctness, clarity, completeness, conciseness and—most important—concreteness; business: courtesy and consideration), (ii) aesthetics of letter format (for attracting the reader's attention, first of all), (iii) absolute absence of conventional "translation" exercises, and (v) active question-and-answer and comment sessions which can draw the entire class into lively discussions.

Following the writer's brief lecture on a given stage of foreign trade operations, an appointed student reads out a sample letter or a cluster of expressions recommended in the book for use in letters, and opens up a class discussion by airing his first comment, which is then followed by ready comments made by the student's classmates who probe the letter or expressions from the perspective of the communication principles. Each commentator must be ready with reasons for the comment and, quite naturally, with suggestions for improving, or rewriting in entirety, such sample letters or expressions. The students are evaluated with respect to (i) positiveness (no

student is permitted to remain silent), (ii) logical thinking, (iii) business sense, and (iv) homework, all geared to effective business communication in English.

After a discussion on a given sample letter or recommended expressions, a handout showing the writer's tentative version which covers most of the students' comments is distributed to the class. The writer's version, of course, is instantly put to a critical class discussion. This method calls for everybody's—the teacher's and students'—concentration conducive to thinking freely in English for effective business. Upon discussing a few sample letters, the class is given homework to rewrite one of the sample letters—of which the writer's alternative version was withheld during the class—for the following week (a few students are asked to make presentations).

Now about exercises. Exercises given in the textbooks at the end of each chapter for Japanese-to-English translation are treated in an unconventional way in the class. The Japanese lines are supplemented, or at times replaced, with concrete pieces of information enough to make one exercise, mainly intended for one-paragraph writing and therefore not conducive to organized letter planning, into a full letter or a telex message. The students are required to submit their writing, complete with real inside address, attention line, subject line, salutation and all other trimmings for a complete letter or a telex message (unlike the curt, incomplete telexese).

One more essential thing: during the discussion session over sample letters and recommended expressions, the writer clarifies the often-different business policies of manufacturers, who are proud of their high-tech products' quality and prestige and have no recourse to "pass the buck" to somebody else involved. This clarification helps those who intend to join manufacturers—and also other businesses such as banking, shipping, insurance and franchising, because it convinces them that (i) *shosha*-oriented sample letters are but a small part of business communications of today, and (ii) each business has its own ways of communication which can best be accomplished on the basis of the all-embracing communication principles.

(3) Class-discussion Example

The following letter, written by a manufacturer of electronic typewriters, who passed a letter of inquiry from overseas to its export agent, a *shosha*, for a

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direct answer to the overseas inquirer, can lead to a heated class discussion.

1	Osaka, September 6, 1986
2	Anchetta Appliance Corp.
3	Manila, P.I.
4	Gentlemen:
5	We thank you for your letter of recent date about your interest in
6	our CONON Electronic Memory Typewriter, Model No. CON
7	WP7A. This product is one of the recent products developed by our
8	R & D Department, and has become so popular in the United States
9	that recently substantial quantity has been shipped on a regular basis.
10	As to our exports to the United States, however, Minami & Co.,
11	Ltd., a big trading concern headquartered in Osaka, is representing
12	us. We have sent your letter to them for their reply, so we expect
13	that they will write you direct and give you the necessary information
14	and a quotation on FOB Kobe basis.
15	Thank you again for your interest in CONON products. If we
16	can be of any further help, please do not hesitate to let us know.
17	Yours sincerely,
18	CONON ELECTRONICS CO., LTD.

Students' comments on the components of the letter

(a) Line 3: The inside address must be a full address; the name of the country should be "The Republic of the Philippines" to respect the reader's nationalistic sentiment.

(b) Between Lines 3 and 4: The attention line should show the name of the person who signed the Anchetta letter, especially if Anchetta is a large corporation with many departments and sections; otherwise, the letter could be easily lost.

(c) Between Lines 4 and 5: The subject line should clearly show what the nature of the letter is, to save the reader trouble.

(d) Line 17: This first letter to Anchetta does not merit the use of

“Sincerely”; it is more appropriate to use “Very truly yours” and the like.

(e) Below Line 18: A few components are missing: (i) the signature line with the signer’s name and official title, (ii) the signature/stenographic identification, and (iii) the enclosure line for this letter’s copy to be sent to Minami & Co. (the reason therefor will be given below).

Students’ comments on the body of the letter

(f) (Old-fashioned expressions) Line 5: “We thank you”; Line 10 “As to our export”; Line 16 “do not hesitate to let us know.”

(g) Line 5: The “recent date” should be clarified.

(h) Lines 5 and 6: This part should go to the subject line.

(i) All products must be the fruits of efforts made by the Research & Development Department. Is any particular mention of R & D necessary?

(j) Line 8: What does “substantial quantity” mean in concrete terms? Does it attract the reader?

(k) Lines 11 and 12: When did Conon send the Anchetta letter to Minami & Co., and in particular, to whom? The “so-we-expect” attitude is irresponsible; Conon should (i) instruct Minami & Co., probably by a copy of this letter, to reach Anchetta direct, and (ii) make it doubly sure to receive a copy of Minami’s letter to Anchetta. Otherwise, Anchetta might have to wait in suspense for weeks for the reply which may or may not come.

(l) Lines 15 and 16: A typical example of space-filler without an ounce of sincerity. Conon should give to Anchetta permissible technical information (brochures and user’s manual, for instance), if not the export quotation and other sales terms.

The writer’s version

The comments from the class do not just refer to the trappings of business letters, but go deep into the crucial questions of (i) how Conon can satisfy Anchetta’s interest at least now, without a long wait and (ii) how Conon can secure Minami’s prompt communication with Anchetta. Hence, the writer’s alternative:

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September 6, 1986

Anchetta Appliance Corporation
Don Publo Building, 1324 Amorsolo Street
Makati, Metro Manila
The Republic of the Philippines

Attention of Mr Rodoriguez P. Sanches,
Manager, Office Machine Sales

Gentlemen:

CONON Electronic Memory Typewriter, CON WP7A
Your Letter No. 868022 of August 25, 1986

Thank you very much for your interest shown in our newest product, CONON Electronic Typewriter, Model CON WP7A. A light-weight, noise-free personal typewriter with its ample memory of 6,000 bytes and five different typeface discketts, WP7A is rapidly becoming popular in North America. For the past two months, we have already exported some 80,000 units to the United States and Canada.

We have our exclusive export agent, Minami & Co., Ltd. of Osaka, who handles all our exports to North America. We have forwarded your August 25 inquiry letter to Minami & Co., requesting their prompt reply to you on the export terms, with a copy to us. The person in charge of export for us is:

Mr Minoru TAKABATAKE,
Manager, Export No. 4 Section,
Electronic Appliance Department
Telex: 5623-268 Phone: 06-325-7823
Facsimile: 06-325-7931

Thank you again for your interest. Enclosed are WP7A's technical specifications and a copy of the user's manual. If you need further technical information, please telex us any time.

Yours very truly,

CONON ELECTRONICS CO., LTD.

Ichiro TANAKA, Director

Enclosures

Copy to: Mr Minoru Takabatake, Electronic Appliance Department,
Minami & Co., Ltd.

(3) Results

Throughout the course, the students are encouraged (i) to think in English, (ii) to analyze and comment on the texts' sample letters and recommended expressions from the viewpoint of friendly and positive approach for fruitful business results, (iii) to write creatively their own, improved versions of the sample letters and recommended expressions, and (iv) to tackle text exercises according to live, concrete business situations which are added to the exercises or modified as necessary. In other words, the students are constantly pressrued into "writing their own textbooks" with emphasis on the American-born communication principles, sound business policies and natural, "talk English," all of which apply to any business situation outside foreign trade practices. The students, upon finishing this course, is qualified to take the senior-year advanced business communication seminar.

3. Advanced Course for Seniors (all in English)

(1) Objective

The advanced course, a seminar-type course in extensive business communication, has the following objectives: (i) to improve the students' business writing skills in a wide variety of business-oriented situations including, but by no means limited to, those of foreign trade practices, in the international business arena, and (ii) to initiate them into international commercial agreements, technological English and English word-processing.

(2) Cases for Business Communication

The students are given, a week before the class, a handout which describes a business situation requiring written, or in one case oral, communication. The cases for the 1986 academic year are as follows:

(a) "Bank Terminology" (a reply to an inquiry from Europe about the free booklet "Bank Terminology" which is out of print)

(b) Construction elevator trouble (a reply to an inquiry from the U.S. on a used construction elevator manufactured by a Japanese manufacturer)

(c) A letter of recommendation (a referee's letter on his former

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subordinate applying for a position with an American subsidiary company in Japan)

(d) Applying for a position (a letter of application for a junior manager's post with an European subsidiary company in Japan: essentially a sales letter)

(e) Japan Technical Training Institute (a reply from a technical training center for overseas engineers, informing an American firm that the class is full)

(f) Sunglasses (a letter to an European sunglass manufacturer asking for a lower price)

(g) Telex wording (an inquiry by telex about the illegible words in a telex message from overseas)

(h) *Yukata* export (a reply to an inquiry from a U.S. company)

(i) Translation of user's manual (a letter granting an European distributor permission to translate the manual)

(j) Automatic food-processing plant (a letter urging the R.O.K. agent to sell a plant without further discounts)

(k) Announcing the establishment of a new company (a letter announcing a shift from a U.S. subsidiary company in Japan to a fully independent manufacturer)

(l) Washington-state wines (a reply to an inquiry from the U.S. on the export of Washington wines to Japan)

(m) Canadian scholar on a sabbatical (a letter from a college declining a scholar's offer to teach during his one-year sabbatical)

(n) Welcome speech (an officer of an electronics manufacturer making a speech to a group of Asian dealers and introducing to them a new computer model)

(o) Seeking a technology license (a manufacturer inquiring to an European prospective licensor about the latter's "final licensing decision" which is long overdue.

(p) Exclusive fashion design license (a letter to an European fashion designer's counsel, maintaining the reasons for an exclusive license in the Japanese market)

(q) Partial shipment of TV lenses (a Japanese manufacturer asking a European lens maker for the prompt shipment of components)

(r) Hand tool label instructions (a Japanese manufacturer instructing its U.S. distributor on the modification of a label)

(s) Sample porcelainware, not free (a Japanese exporter declining to give away expensive samples)

These cases, taken from various sources and modified or else based on the writer's own experience, do not deal with common-place situations usually found in college business-English textbooks. These cases require a high degree of planning letters and telex messages on the bases of communication principles, business policies and natural "talk language" the students studied in their junior year. Some of the cases accompany letters purportedly written by communication specialists which do not satisfy the students, who are asked to write their own versions.

(3) Technical and Legal English, and Word-processing

Besides the foregoing communication cases, the students are given handouts of the following technical and legal papers for the following week's spot-translation accompanied with their own explanations on unfamiliar technical and legal terms: (i) technology licensing agreement in English, (ii) distributorship agreements in English and (iii) U.S. Patent specifications. The students are often given help from the writer on legal points when making their presentations. Also the class is given basic instruction on English word-processing by means of a processor.

(4) Classwork: Cases

As noted in the preceding item (3), a handout describing a business situation which requires written, or in one case oral, communication is given to the class as an assignment for the following week. If the handout is accompanied by a letter which need improving for effective communication, the letter is subjected to a discussion. Thereupon the most effective letter/telex plan is discussed by the class.

The following week, two pre-designated students (they usually volunteer for presentations) make individual presentations. The students' writings, made into handouts and distributed to the class, are read aloud first by classmates; upon reading, each student making a presentation is required to explain his letter plan briefly. Thereupon the class is open for discussion.

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No student is permitted to remain silent; on frequent occasions the students, once on the platform, find themselves under cross-fire of grueling questions and comments from the class, which are all centered around the basic principles of communication for effective business predicated upon sound business policies and business psychology. Through this discussion period, both the student on the platform and the rest of the class learn ways of logical persuasion (every student is required to be courteous and diplomatic in driving home his point, though). In many cases, the student making a presentation explains the particular business circumstances with which he has supplemented the assignment information.

When the class turns to the writer with questions to clarify the points raised, the writer explains such points from a realistic business perspective. The discussion session then ends and is followed by the writer's overview and his own version of the communication (a handout), which—as is the case with the third-year business English class—is exposed to the class's question-and-answer session to stimulate the class with desire for effective, positive business writing.

(5) Example Case for Classwork

The following is the Case of the "ARCTIC SUN" Sunglasses. The assignment handout shows a draft letter addressed to an overseas manufacturer of optical goods from a Japanese importer of sunglasses.

(Date and inside address omitted)

1 Gentlemen:

2 Thank you for your letter of February 2, 1986 and samples. We
3 are delighted to find that the quality of the "Arctic Sun" Sunglasses is
4 the same as your advertisement showed us.

5 However, taking the possibility of large scale sales in
6 consideration, we are sorry to say that your prices quoted this time
7 are high. Since the prices will meet competition, we should like to
8 remind you of the market scale you eventually obtain.

9 We do hope to order the goggles in large quantities in the
10 future. Therefore, we would like you to make efforts in price
11 revision so that we can make a trial order for our pilot sales
12 campaign.

13 We will appreciate your prompt reply.

14 Very truly yours,

(Note) Any Japanese in business who can write this much is a “good correspondent” in foreign trade. However, this letter does not satisfy you. Your task is to write with concreteness to attract the other party’s serious attention and to make the party react favorably to your letter immediately.

Students’ comments

- (a) Subject line, attention line, signature line and signature/stenographic identification: All missing.
- (b) Line 5: The “possible large sales scale” is not concrete.
- (c) Line 6: The high “quoted prices” should be substantiated with concrete price information with respect to the competitors’ prices.
- (d) Line 7: The competition should be concretely described.
- (e) Line 8: The market scale should be clarified with concreteness.
- (f) Line 9: This “carrot” is not attractive for want of concreteness.
- (g) Line 10: How much effort must be made is not clear.
- (h) Line 12: How soon? By when does the company need a reply?

The students are then asked by the writer to write a better, more effective version of the sample letter in their own words, without becoming captives to the sample letter.

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Student's version (1)

February 20, 1987

Weismann Werke AG
Bundeskazierplatz
Bonn-Center HI-701
5300 Bonn 1
Federal Republic of Germany

Attention: Mr. Adolf M. Alexander,
Export Manager

Gentlemen:

Your Quotation of February 2
on "ARCTIC SUN" Sunglasses

Thank you very much for your quotation of February 2 with samples. We examined your samples carefully and learned that your "ARCTIC SUN" Sunglasses meet the quality advertised.

However, our regular customers say that your prices are around 10% higher than those obtainable from American sources (price range: ¥9,000—¥15,000 per unit).

As we expect large sales in Japan this coming spring-summer season, we would like to make a counteroffer for 100,000 units of "ARCTIC SUN" Sunglasses (20,000 units for each of the ten kinds) at the prices of ¥9,500 to ¥15,500 per unit, CIF Kobe.

Please take such a large quantity into consideration and make at least a 5% discount.

We are looking forward to your telex information by June 23.

Yours very truly,

OSAKA OPTICAL TRADING CO., LTD.

TM/pr

Taro Momoyama, Director

Students' comment (1)

- (a) 1st paragraph: The source of advertisement is not clearly given.
- (b) 2nd paragraph: The price information given by the customers is not concrete (no names of the American sources are cited; no actual prices are given, either).
- (c) The counteroffer prices are not specific (for the ten different kinds of sunglasses).
- (d) No future possibilities are mentioned at all.

Student's version (2)

February 20, 1986

Weismann Werke AG
5300 Bonn 1
Bonn-Center HI-701
Bundeskazierplatz
FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Attention of Mr. Karl Becker, Director

Gentlemen:

Your Letter of February 2, 1986; Our
Counteroffer on "ARCTIC SUN" Sun-
glasses

Thank you very much for your quotation of February 2 with samples. As we have found all of our seven regular customers in optical business interested in your products, we telexed you this morning the following counteroffer:

500 dozen of "ARCTIC SUN" Sunglasses
US \$ 70.00 per unit, CIF Osaka
Shipment: late March, 1986

The price you quoted is about 20% higher than those of your competitors (Dunhill, U.K.: US \$ 69.50; Hasta Manana, Spain: US \$ 40.00-52.00).

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If you come down to US \$70 per unit, we estimate that somewhere around 6,000 units may be sold through our channels from May to August this year. The rationale: (1) the new coloring method and up-to-date design of the bridge may interest the young in Japan and (2) the trust in German products (such as BMW cars) is strong here. This, of course, would never be possible without our aggressive promotional campaign.

If the 70 dozen sell well, we would consider increasing our next order this coming October to 1,000 dozen. We hope you will accept our counteroffer.

Please give us a telex reply by March 5. With best regards,

Yours very truly,

mitsutomo corporation

TM/hy

Taro Momoyama, Director, Imports

Students' comment (2)

(a) 1st paragraph: Is the confirmation of a telex message absolutely needed? Is it not possible to write a telex message containing all information in this letter in compact English?

(b) 2nd paragraph: The prices of the Spanish sunglasses are not clearly shown according to the specific kinds (gold-plated rims, stainless rims, variable-tint glasses, etc.); also the price terms are not clear (FOB, C&F, CIF, Free Carrier at Osaka and the like).

(c) General impression: Rather well-organized.

The writer's version

February 20, 1986

Weismann Werke Aktiengesellschaft
5300 Bonn 1
Bundeskärzplatz

Takao Mukoh

Bonn-Center HI-702
Federal Republic of Germany

Attention: Dr Heinrich P. Boedecker,
General Manager

Gentlemen:

Your Letter of February 2, 1986
on "ARCTIC SUN" Sunglasses

Thank you very much for your February 2 quotations together with three pairs of sample sunglasses. Your samples are of the exact quality and workmanship as shown in your catalogue and specification sheets.

Provided that your prices are competitive enough, our tentative sales plan for the ARCTIC SUN Sunglasses for the coming spring-summer season is as follows:

Gold-plated rim, regular #2501, 2508	3,000 pairs (A)
Stainless steel rim, deluxe #3405	10,000 pairs (B)
Plastic rim, regular #4905, 4917	15,000 pairs (C)

This plan hinges on your prices, because our reasonable margin must be included in our prices to cover heavy promotional campaign costs.

As you know well, Kleindienst, Oppenheimer, Justin Ouellette and other prominent European sunglasses have won solid popularity in Japan. Their quotations we have obtained through certain channels are, as the enclosed invoice copies show, 15 to 18 percent lower than yours. While we may consider placing emphasis in our promotional campaign on the higher quality and workmanship of your products, your brand—still not popular in Japan—requires that your price tags be 20 to 23 percent lower than the competitors'.

Therefore, if your prices are within the following ranges, we would consider a prompt trial order for the May sale:

(A) DM 110-120 CIF Osaka	(Arrival at Osaka: by April 15)	480 pairs
(B) DM 95-100 CIF Osaka	(Arrival at Osaka: by April 15)	600 pairs
(C) DM 80- 85 CIF Osaka	(Arrival at Osaka: by April 15)	720 pairs

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We look forward to your telex by March 1. With best regards,

Yours very truly,

MOMOYAMA OPTICAL CO., LTD.

TM/pr

Taro Momoyama, General Manager, Sales

Enclosures

After a brief discussion of my version, the class is convinced that (i) concrete information interesting to the reader can motivate the reader, (ii) price tags in the domestic market should be treated differently from the CIF prices (mark-ups for imported goods can be substantial in fancy or high-tech goods), and (iii) all competitors' price information, if substantiated, can be a good piece of evidence for driving home one's point.

(6) Video-taking

Twice in an academic year, the classwork is video-taped for analysis of the classwork progress. This also trains the class to discuss effective communication with clarity and persuasiveness in front of the TV camera.

(7) Results

Throughout the course, the class learns (i) "creative" approaches to effective business communication by skillfully utilizing limited information given and "creatively" expanding such information using sound business psychology, (ii) the communication principles, sales-letter principles (AIDA: Attention, Interest, Desire and Action)¹⁹ and business psychology are essential in any type of communication for international business, and (iii) whatever business the students will be joining, they have promise of becoming able communicators in English if they study, through years of experience, their specific business operations thoroughly. Simultaneously, their logical thinking and oral expression in English improve markedly.

PART V. CONCLUSION

As discussed earlier, the teaching of “business English” at the college level in Japan today is largely confined to correspondence in English for foreign trade practices to train would-be *shosha* employees; however, in light of the growing demand for communication in English for all international business activities, not just those confined to foreign trade operations, a way must be found to train college students to be able to communicate effectively based on established communication principles and the natural use of English. The need exists irrespective of whether the students are contemplating joining *shosha* or any other type of business operation.

The writer’s experimental teaching in business communications in English demonstrates that, first given ample communicative proficiency in English, college students of any major can develop into able correspondents, or more generally communicators, who can adequately use English in all business situations. What precedes such practical business communication training conducted in English is, of course, the need for high schools and colleges (especially during the first two years of the students’ college life) to train their students to be able to communicate sufficiently in English. Otherwise, college “business English” courses will remain inadequate English-to-Japanese and Japanese-to-English translation classes only related to *shosha*-style English.

There is a growing need to transform the conventional “business English” courses currently being taught in Japan at the college level into “effective business communications in English” courses if we hope to train the students to become effective communicators who will be able to maintain and facilitate the further advances of Japanese international business activities.

Notes and References

1. *Shosha* people are often found using the KDD-originated “Telex Mate,” a plastic sheet listing dozens of abbreviations for telex communication, while many non-*shosha*

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- enterprises use plain, natural English for their telex messages to keep away from possible misinterpretation and resultant misunderstanding coming from the over-use of clipped and cryptic telex wording.
2. T. Suzuki, *Case Studies on International Business Communication* (Kenkyusha, 1976) et al
 3. S. Morisawa et al, *Practical English Handbook*, 2nd ed. (Taishukan, 1986)
 4. S. Haneda, *Terekkusu to Denpo no Eigo* (English for Telex and Telegraph) (Taishukan, 1979)
 5. Exercises in textbooks, more often than not, are supported by the teacher's manuals, which contain all translation answers to the exercises to save the teachers from "thinking."
 6. A prominent exception in this regard: Ryue Yoshida, *A Guide to Better English for Business* (Sogensha, 1970). This textbook is designed to improve the students' basic skill in business communication and goes much further than foreign-trade communication.
 7. R. A. Aurner, *Effective Communication in Business* (South-Western Publishing Co., 1950), p. 13
 8. The Aurner definition is quoted in: Katsumi Ito, *New Business Writing in English* (Nan'undo, 1979) p. 1
 9. As for overseas production, the three Japanese automakers, for example, have their own assembly lines in Tennessee, Kentucky and Ohio states in the U.S. Their daily communication needs overseas can never be met by limited knowledge of foreign-trade English—translation-style—only.
 10. Takao Mukoh, "Business Communications in English for Japanese Manufacturers" in *Osaka Gaidai Eibei Kenkyu*, Volume 14 (Osaka Univ. of Foreign Studies, English Department, 1985) p. 139; p. 168
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 140
 12. The dominance of ex-*shosha* people in the "Business English" world in Japan is amply attested to by the fact that the Japan Business English Association (membership: 187) has many college teachers with *shosha*-experiences, who form the majority of the association members.
 13. Mikito Nakamura et al, *Standard Business English* (Eihosha, 1976) p. 18
 14. Y. Usui et al, *English for International Business Communication* (Seibido, 1984) p. 1
 15. E. G., Katsumi Itoh, *New Business Writing in English* (Seibido, 1984), p. 1; K. Shimazaki et al, *Boekijitsumu to Eigotsushinbun* (Foreign Trade Practices and Correspondence in English) (Shinozakishorin, 1978) p. 4
 16. S. Ozaki, *Technique of Business Letter Writing* (Shogyo'eigo Shuppansha, 1964)

Preface

17. Shimazaki, p. 4
18. In American four-year colleges, business communication courses are for juniors or seniors. The writer is convinced that business communication in English cannot be learned by any student, English-speaking or otherwise, unless and until the student has been armed with appropriate communicative ability in intelligent English.
19. Aurner, pp. 309–310
20. K. Ohsawa, in his book *Ikasu Bijinesu Retaa* (Effective Business Letter) (Interpress, 1978), advocates thinking in Japanese the fragments of business letter and “translating such ideas into English (pp. 13–15).”