In the Classroom/En classe

An EAP Course for Chinese MBA Students

Patricia M. Raymond and Margaret Des Brisay

This article describes an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course for Chinese Master of Business Administration (MBA) students. Unequal English language learning opportunities overseas means that many otherwise excellent candidates are denied access to graduate programs at Canadian universities. Consequently, the Second Language Institute at the University of Ottawa decided to make ESL training estimates based on scores from the Canadian Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST) for a group of Chinese applicants to the University of Ottawa's MBA program. Thirty-four candidates participated in an innovative EAP course that combined teaching language, study, and acculturation skills, whereas some candidates were also required to complete 240 to 480 hours of Intensive Four Skills English before undertaking the EAP course. Successful completion of the EAP course constituted fulfilling the requirements for admission into the MBA program. Teaching staff from both the Faculty of Administration and the Second Language Institute provided input into the EAP course.

In recent years the massive expansion of international business has led to increasing numbers of international students taking master's courses in business, finance, banking, and accounting. At the same time, unequal English language learning opportunities overseas means that many otherwise excellent candidates are denied access to such master's courses at Canadian universities. Universities are increasingly seeking ways to permit the gradual admission of international students who may not meet the English as a Second Language requirements when they initially apply. Such students may be admitted on condition that they take English language improvement courses concurrently with their academic courses or on condition that they take a certain period of full-time ESL instruction before beginning their program.

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course implemented for a group of Chinese applicants to the Faculty of Administration's MBA program is a discipline-specific (business) language course supporting an academic program (Johns & Dudley-Evans, 1991).[1] It provides 240 hours of full-time specialized ESL instruction before the MBA. The development of the EAP course as well as its follow-up are described here.

Needs Analysis

EAP students' needs generally fall into several areas: language skills, academic skills, and acculturation skills as well as immediate social language needs (Stoller, 1999).

The language and academic skills to be taught in the EAP course were initially identified by consulting the following sources:
- The Academic Administrator for the MBA program (a Chinese bilingual who is a graduate of the MBA program);
- The Faculty of Administration's MBA Handbook for a general overview of the MBA, a 15-month modular program with courses in both common core and specialist subjects;
- Current MBA course outlines obtained from professors in the program. (These outlines include content, objectives, reading materials, assignments, and methods of evaluation);
- Case studies and reports produced by former MBA students (on file in the Faculty).

Consultation of these sources led to the identification of the following needs: language skills (reading, business and academic vocabulary, speaking, listening, and writing); academic skills (note-taking, test-taking, and metacognitive strategies for extensive reading); genres (production-based case studies, essay exam, surveys, memos, questionnaires, and comprehension-based business reports and journals, articles from newspapers relating to the field of business, and university textbooks).

Testing for Language Proficiency

Candidates for an MBA program with its high linguistic demands must possess an advanced level of ESL proficiency. Few are already at this level. The Canada Test of English for Scholars and Trainees (CanTEST) was chosen to diagnose proficiency levels to make unconditional and conditional admission decisions. The CanTEST measures listening, reading, writing, and speaking (optional) proficiency. CanTEST scores are reported as Bands from 1 to 5, with most Canadian universities accepting an average of 4.5 as evidence of a level of proficiency adequate for full-time academic study. Normally CanTEST scores are used for making yes-no admission decisions and not for making training estimates. However, in the course of monitoring the progress of Chinese students at the Canada China Language Centre in Beijing from 1984 to 1993, considerable CanTEST data had been collected, which facilitated the making of conditional as well as unconditional estimates (Des Brisay 1992a, 1992b).

In the first half of 1998, 179 potential candidates for the MBA program were tested at several sites in China.[2] On the basis of their test results, candidates were placed in four categories: A (no ESL required), B (EAP required), C (240 hours Intensive Four Skills and EAP required), and D (480

hours Intensive Four Skills and EAP required, see Appendix A). In making our training estimates we kept in mind that individual gains following language instruction can vary greatly (Des Brisay & Ready, 1991).

The Chinese students were all graduates from fields such as accounting, computer science, commerce, and engineering. Because few had experience in business administration or related fields, it was assumed that they had little familiarity with business administration English. For these reasons it was decided to introduce content related largely to business theory and practice. The language and academic skills as well as the genres (for both comprehension and production) required of these students were used as the springboard for EAP curriculum design.

Acculturation
Acculturation skills help students to understand the culture of the academy and corresponding expectations (Stoller, 1999). Lunchtime conversation groups with language monitors allowed the students to explore some of the cultural adjustments they would have to make. (See timetable in Appendix B.) A Friday afternoon social program (ciné-club, table sports) provided content for developing social language skills. Weekly meetings with a teacher, the Academic Advisor from the Faculty of Administration, and the EAP program coordinator gave the students the opportunity to examine difficulties they were experiencing with the program. Team work, peer evaluation, library procedures, and the acknowledgment of sources in their written work were stressed during class. (See modules in Appendix C.) All students had to take a computer literacy course that provided an introduction to word-processing and e-mail as well as exposure to various software programs that the students could use in their academic study.

Student Placement
Nineteen Level A students began their MBA program in September 1998. Fourteen Level C students arrived in October 1998 for their 240 hours of Intensive Four Skills training. Twenty Level B students arrived in January 1999, at which time they were grouped with the Level C students for the EAP course. (See EAP timetable in Appendix B.) The director of the MBA course from the Faculty of Administration stipulated that all incoming MBA students had to pass the EAP course in order to begin the MBA program on March 8, 1999.

EAP Course

The students needed to read a chapter or more of a set textbook before each lecture or discussion group in order to follow a lecture or to participate in a discussion. They had to read articles from business journals and business reports in order to write summaries and critical analyses and to gather

information for case studies and projects. They were required to participate in group and class discussions, conduct surveys and solicit the answers to questionnaires, and make oral presentations. They needed to listen to three-hour lectures and take notes. Further, they needed to write memos, reports, case studies, surveys, questionnaires, and essay exams. Their reading and writing skills, along with their ability to make oral presentations, were deemed the most essential for their success in the 15-month MBA program.

Weekly feedback from both the Level A students already in the MBA and the Level C students in the Intensive Four Skills course guided the planning and development of the EAP course. For example, during the weekly meetings with the Academic Advisor, the EAP program coordinator, a teacher, and several student representatives, it came to light that Level A students perceived the amount of assigned reading in their MBA courses as a major difficulty. Therefore, reading would indeed have high priority in the EAP. Level C students in the Intensive Four Skills course appeared to have a strong grammatical foundation, but their oral skills were generally quite poor. Consequently, much practice would be needed in pronunciation and oral skills in the EAP.

An important aspect in the planning and development of the EAP course was the ongoing needs assessment of both groups of students, those already in the MBA (Level A) and those preparing to enter (Level C).

In order to deliver the 240 hours of EAP training required for students to be admitted into the MBA by March 8, 1999, an eight-week, 32-hour-a-week schedule was drawn up.[3] (See EAP timetable in Appendix B.) Because the Level C students had already been in an Intensive Four Skills format, it was decided to maintain this familiar format for the EAP course in January 1999.

The language and academic skills and genres identified above were presented in an academic context, with content mostly related to business theory and practice. The skills were grouped into six modules:
1. Reading and Writing,
2. Memo and Report Writing,
3. Oral Communication,
4. Listening,
5. Oral Presentation, and
6. Pronunciation.
A summary of these modules is presented in chart form in Appendix C.

Guest speakers provided opportunities for genuine content-area listening with discipline-specific vocabulary, note-taking in real time, question periods, and interaction with people from the Ottawa business community. These speakers included engineers from Nortel, business consultants, and financial planners. They served as models in how to structure a presentation, use audiovisual aids, and handle questions from the floor. Clennell (1999) has argued that EAP courses need to focus on the interactive nature of

PATRICIA M. RAYMOND and MARGARET DES BRISAY

spoken discourse. Through interactions with these speakers the students could observe a range of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies as demonstrated in topic introductions or closures, timing, and the handling of interruptions. All these guest lecturers' presentations were videotaped and audiotaped (with permission) for use in the Oral Presentation and Listening modules.

Ongoing program assessment and modification were continued through weekly meetings of educators and students. Any language, academic, or acculturation problems arising could then be dealt with immediately. For example, during the second week of EAP classes the students requested help with study reading skills. To this end Class Study time was provided. (See timetable in Appendix B.)

MBA Project EAP Workbook

The MBA students from China were graduates of different disciplines unrelated to business. Although these students were all at a high-intermediate level of English proficiency, they had no previous Western business experience. For this reason it was decided that the materials developer would produce an in-house MBA Project EAP Workbook with general business content. This workbook contains extracts from MBA course outlines and textbooks, newspaper articles related to business and business reports, all of which are authentic data,[4] vocabulary exercises, text-type exercises for reading and writing, summary writing exercises, and some material for oral communication. Its activities are varied so that it can be used in the classroom in conjunction with the six modules developed for the EAP course. A second reason for the workbook was concern that because of the intensive and accelerated nature of the EAP course, any one textbook, business or otherwise, chosen at the outset of the course would soon become too limited for the students.

Coordination and Staffing

In order to minimize overlap in teaching, the six modules were double streamed. Stream 1 contained Memo and Report Writing and Reading and Writing; and Stream 2 included Oral Communication, Listening, Pronunciation, and Oral Presentation. One teacher and one teaching assistant were assigned to each stream. (See EAP timetable in Appendix B.) In January 1999, 34 Chinese MBA students at Level B were placed in two groups of 17. Thus each group had two teachers and two teaching assistants.

Timetabling allowed both groups to attend the weekly guest lectures and to participate in the social program on Friday afternoons. There were final exams (in reading, writing, and listening), a final report, and a final presentation. All the students passed all the modules of the EAP course and were accepted into the MBA on March 8, 1999.

Follow-up Developments

In April 1999 the Dean of the Faculty of Administration requested that a teacher who had taught the EAP course serve as a language advisor to the Chinese MBA students. This teacher was to spend 25 hours per week attending MBA lectures with the students and consulting with them after these lectures. The materials developer was chosen because of her familiarity both with the students and with the EAP course.[5] Because these EAP students were now full-time graduate students at the University of Ottawa, they were eligible to take advanced-level, credit ESL courses at the Second Language Institute. Many enrolled in advanced ESL writing courses in May and September 1999 and in January 2000. Both the Faculty of Administration and the Second Language Institute continue in their support of these students.

Anecdotal evidence from recent meetings with these students reveals that those who took the EAP course (Level B) felt more confident and motivated as students than those who went directly into the MBA (Level A) although the latter had a higher level of ESL proficiency. In fact the A group continued to have the edge as far as language is concerned but generally felt less prepared. The students who took the EAP seemed to have a headstart in developing the learning strategies and skills necessary in a Canadian university context as well as a feel for the underlying Western business culture in which they might one day have to function. Research is needed to examine this question. Data from a written questionnaire about the EAP program and its personal outcomes for the students are currently being collected.

The second cohort of Chinese students at level C arrived in January 2000 for their 240 hours of Intensive Four Skills course. The EAP is scheduled to begin in April in preparation for the MBA in June 2000.

Conclusion

Universities are increasingly seeking ways to permit the gradual admission of international students who may not meet the ESL requirements when they first apply. The EAP business course for Chinese MBA students described here demonstrates one way of doing this. This course is designed to provide the needed specialized language skills, academic skills, and acculturation skills for incoming MBA students. It also represents a collaborative effort by the Faculty of Administration and the Second Language Institute at the University of Ottawa to meet international students' needs in one of the fastest growing areas of EAP development: business English.

Notes

[1]Johns (1997) argues that English for Specific Purposes is the conventional term used to designate specific purposes language programs in an English as a Foreign Language setting. In ESL

settings the term EAP prevails. Because the university of Ottawa is an ESL setting the term EAP is used throughout this article.

[2]Logistics prevented the oral component of CanTEST from being administered.

[3]The students needed time to obtain their study visas for Canada and the Faculty of Administration assigned March 8, 1999 as their admission deadline.

[4]St. John (1996) defines genuine data as "not written for the purpose of teaching nor ... vastly modified" (p. 13).

[5]Maggie Madden compiled the MBA Project EAP Workbook. She taught in the EAP program, attended the weekly meetings, and served as the pedagogical advisor to the MBA students.

References

Clennell, C. (1999). Promoting pragmatic awareness and spoken discourse skills with EAP classes. *ELT Journal, 53*(2), 83-91.

Des Brisay, M. (1992a). *Technical report on CanTEST version F for CIDA/St. Mary's.* Unpublished research report. Halifax, NS: St. Mary's University.

Des Brisay, M. (1992b). *Technical report on CanTEST version G for CIDA/St. Mary's.* Unpublished research report. Halifax, NS: St. Mary's University.

Des Brisay, M., & Ready, D. (1991). Defining an appropriate role for language tests in intensive English language programs. In S. Anivan (Ed.), *Issues on language program evaluation in the 1990s* (pp. 15-25). Anthology series 27. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre (RELC).

Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes.* Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Johns, A.M. (1997). English for specific purposes and content-based instruction: What is the relationship? In M.A. Snow & D.M. Brinton (Eds.), *The content-based classroom* (pp. 363-366). New York: Longman.

Johns, A.M., & Dudley-Evans, T. (1991). English for specific purposes: International in scope, specific in purpose. *TESOL Quarterly, 25*, 297-314.

St. John, M. (1996). Business is booming: Business English in the 1990s. *English for Specific Purposes, 15*(1), 3-18.

Stoller, F. (1999). Time for change: A hybrid curriculum for EAP programs. *TESOL Journal,* Spring, 9-13.

Appendix A
University of Ottawa CanTEST Levels Required

Group A: Total scores of 14 or more on the three skills tested
No ESL required
Students with these scores are normally admitted into the MBA program without being required to take additional ESL although it should be understood that they will be minimally qualified. In most cases, they will not be handicapped in any serious way by their level of English. Because speaking proficiency was not tested, it may be that some would profit from an advanced speaking or pronunciation credit course.

Group B: Total scores between 13.5 and 11.5
240 hours of English for Academic Purposes (EAP)
The EAP course focuses on improving reading and writing skills and, where necessary, speaking skills, particularly pronunciation. Stronger students in this cohort might be allowed to audit courses in Administration as part of their EAP program.

Group C: Total scores between 10 and 11
240 hours of Intensive Four Skills plus the 240 hour EAP course
These students need an upgrading in general English before taking the English for Academic Purposes course.

Group D: Total scores below 10
480 hours of Intensive Four Skills plus the 240 hour EAP course
These students need a minimum of 480 hours of ESL before beginning the English for Academic Purposes course.

Appendix B
EAP Course Timetable: January 11 to March 5, 1999

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-10:00	Oral Presentation Teacher 1	Reading and Writing Teacher 2	Memo and Report Writing Teacher 2	Oral Communication Teacher 1	Pronunciation Teacher 1
10:00-11:30	Guest speakers	Reading and Writing Teacher 2	Memo and Report Writing Teacher 2	Listening (lab) Teacher 1	Oral Presentation Teacher 1
11:30-1:00	Lunch/ Conversation groups	Lunch/ Conversation groups	Lunch/ Conversation groups	Lunch/ Conversation groups	Lunch/ Conversation groups
1:00-2:30	Listening Teacher 1	Memo and Report Writing Teacher 2	Study time with TA 2	Reading and Writing Teacher 2	Social program
2:30-4:00	Reading and Writing TA 2	Listening lab with TA 1	Oral Communication TA 1	Reading and Writing Teacher 2	Social program
4:00-5:30	Study time with TA 2	Oral Communication TA 1	Oral Communication TA 1 until 5:00	Weekly meeting until 5:00	

PATRICIA M. RAYMOND and MARGARET DES BRISAY

Appendix C
Summary of EAP Modules

Modules 1-3

Title	Reading and Writing	Memo and Report Writing	Oral Communication
Hours per Week	6 Teacher 3 Teaching Assistant	4.5 Teacher 2 Teaching Assistant	1.5 Teacher 3.5 Teaching Assistant
Objectives	*In reading:* - to know how to access library resources - to understand core business vocabulary - to understand the meaning of terms used in exams, assignments and essay questions - to analyze text coherence and cohesion - to recognize an author's Message, Audience and Purpose (MAP, Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998) - to undertake independent study *In writing:* - to produce summaries, short essays - to identify audience and purpose - to write grammatically correct sentences - to produce various text types (e.g., description argument) - to learn from feedback from written tasks	- to observe conventions of layout and order in genres such as memos, executive reports and longer projects - to produce the components of a report (executive summary, introduction, recommendations, main body, evaluation and conclusion) - to acknowledge sources in compiling bibliographies and incorporating graphical information - to undertake an investigation of a business related topic and to produce a word-processed report of 2,500 words	- to practice participating in and leading discussions - to put and respond to questions in formal discussions - to participate in debates - to conduct oral interviews, surveys, and questionnaires - to develop techniques of conversation management - to build self-confidence in ability to understand and be understood - to develop an awareness of register

Title	Reading and Writing	Memo and Report Writing	Oral Communication
Hours per Week	6 Teacher 3 Teaching Assistant	4.5 Teacher 2 Teaching Assistant	1.5 Teacher 3.5 Teaching Assistant
Content/ Materials	- genres illustrating text types taken from business textbooks and journals - examples of cohesive devices/ logical connectors at sentence level and beyond - extralinguistic features of written discourse (color, layout, illustrations) - grammar topics such as determiners, passives, mode, nominalizations - authentic texts from newspapers and business journals - textbooks in business - administration - MBA course outlines	- academic and business reports and memos with: Title, contents Executive summary Introduction (background, aims, objectives, MOVES (Swales, 1991) Recommendations Main body Conclusion (evaluation, speculation, references, bibliography, appendices) - surveys and questionnaires - reports and projects from business journals 1991) - guidelines produced by professors in the Faculty of Administration	- formal vs. informal expressions - rules of conversation such as turn-taking, intervening - discussion and debate - field work (conducting and recording interviews)
Textbooks	MBA Project EAP Workbook	MBA Project EAP Workbook	MBA Project EAP Workbook
References	The Language of business English: Grammar and Functions and its Workbook by N. Brieger & S. Sweeney, Prentice-Hall, 1994 Reflecting on Writing: Composing in English for ESL Students in Canada by E. Hall & C.S. Y. Jung, Harcourt-Brace, 1996	Business and Administrative Communication by K.O. Locker, Irwin-McGraw Hill, 1998 Impact: A Guide to Business Communication by M. Northey, Prentice-Hall, 1990	Speaking Effectively—Strategies for Academic Interaction by J. Kayfetz with M. Smith, Heinle & Heinle, 1992 Reflections: Developing Proficiency in English by P.M. Conway, Pippin, 1995
Evaluation	4 written assignments 60% mid-term 15% final reading exam 10% final writing exam 15%	mini report (1,000wds) 20% 2 memos (750 wds each) 30% final report (2,500 words) 50%	debates 30% peer evaluation 30% field work reports 40%

PATRICIA M. RAYMOND and MARGARET DES BRISAY

Modules 4-6

Title	Oral Presentation	Pronunciation	Listening
Hours per Week	3 Teacher	1.5 Teacher	3 Teacher 1.5 Teaching Assistant
Objectives	- to develop a knowledge of patterns of organization in spoken texts - to acquire a sense of audience - to develop an awareness of nonverbal communication in self and audience - to develop strategies for handling questions from the floor	- to improve the production of individual sounds - to improve use and production of the stress patterns, intonation and rhythm of English - to develop auditory discrimination skills - to develop awareness of pronunciation weaknesses	- to identify the most common registers in English and use appropriately - to identify, analyze and evaluate different text types - to identify the attitude of a speaker toward topic and audience - to understand various linguistic and extralinguistic clues in texts and to improve comprehension of texts where there are few such clues - to understand rapid discourse on familiar topics - to understand the gist of rapid discourse on unfamiliar topics - to take coherent notes of the salient points of a lecture or other oral text
Content/ Materials	- oral texts (audiotapes, videotapes, and live speakers) and exercises illustrating patterns of organization used in formal speaking: - examples of text organization patterns, discourse markers, rhetorical devices - visual aids - responding to an audience - presentation tasks and activities - techniques for assessment and evaluation of self and others	- prosodic and articulatory features of English that cause particular difficulties for Chinese speakers e.g., vowels, some consonants, stress, linking, reductions	- listening and note-taking strategies - grammar of spoken English, particularly of reduced forms and suprasegmental features - taped excerpts from lectures or conference mostly within the field of study - news broadcasts, interviews from radio material - content of lectures by guest speakers

Title	Oral Presentation	Pronunciation	Listening
Hours per Week	3 Teacher	1.5 Teacher	3 Teacher 1.5 Teaching Assistant
Textbooks	*Presenting in English* by M. Powell, Language Teaching Publications, 1996	not prescribed	MBA Project EAP Workbook
References	*Business and Administrative Communication* by K.O. Locker, Irwin-McGraw Hill, 1998	*Accurate English: A Complete Course in Pronunciation* by R. Dauer, Prentice-Hall, 1993 *Teaching American English Pronunciation* by P. Avery & S. Ehrlich, Oxford University Press, 1992	
Evaluation	final presentation 100%	not separately evaluated; considered to be a part of Oral Communication module	class assignments 60% mid-term 20% final 20%

PATRICIA M. RAYMOND and MARGARET DES BRISAY