CHAPTER 18
Preliminary Guidelines for Designing an LSP Mandarin for Business and Tourism Course for Beginners
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1 Introduction

As of 2015, no Mandarin for Tourism courses are currently offered in colleges in the United States, although universities in China, Hong Kong, and Thailand do offer Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) courses in this regard. The field of English as a second language (ESL) for tourism is, of course, much more highly developed, and could serve as a model for LSP courses in other languages. For example, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Examinations Board has published standards for novice and intermediate certificates in Written English for Tourism (WEFT) as well as Spoken English for Industry and Commerce (SEFIC) (LCCI, 2014). No equivalent standard, however, exists for Mandarin Chinese, aside from qualification exams used in China for professional certification in tourism-related careers.
The main difference between English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses for tourism versus LSP for tourism courses relating to less commonly taught languages (LCTL) is that English, being a dominant *lingua franca* worldwide, is typically learned by native speakers from an early age. Thus, vocational ESP courses for tourism assume intermediate or advanced levels of general English skills. This means that ESP courses for tourism can more easily accommodate an integrated approach to language learning and the use of authentic materials. In contrast, with LCTL, it is often the case that students begin studying the language rather late in their careers, often having no background or only novice language skills when they are already pursuing degree programs for specific vocations or fields. To the extent that an LSP course can be useful for beginning learners, then, it must balance general content (e.g., pronunciation, essential points of grammar) with learning materials tailored to the students’ specific needs. For example, the vast majority of textbooks used for teaching Mandarin in non-LSP, general courses tend to teach dialogues relating to college life, with topics such as introducing yourself, making friends and engaging in general conversations about family and hobbies, and dormitory life. Such content, however, would not be useful in preparing emerging professionals for the customer-centric interactions called for in the tourism and retail industries. To this end, this proposal is regarding a Chinese Language and Culture for Business and Tourism (CHNS 131) course currently under development at Kapi‘olani Community College (KCC) in Honolulu, Hawai‘i.

1.1 Institutional Background

Located next to Waikiki, which is a central hub for tourism in the state of Hawai‘i, KCC has a number of related programs including Associates degrees in hospitality with a concentration in Hospitality Operations Management in the Hospitality and Tourism (HOST)
program. Students in this program typically pursue careers in hotel and resort front offices, concierge services, housekeeping, and retail sales. The target audience for CHNS 131 includes first- and second-year college students pursuing degrees related to hospitality, tourism, and business who would like to add practical second-language experience with Mandarin Chinese for their career development.

Two of the main questions regarding the viability of this course are whether HOST students with little to no prior experience with Mandarin would benefit from a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) curriculum, and whether the LSP component for tourism and retail should be introduced after students have already gained some basic understanding of Chinese via the general-purpose Chinese 101 and 102 first-year courses. A needs assessment has not recently been conducted for CHNS 131. Given this limitation, this proposal outlines a number of design factors for needs assessment as an immediate next step. Anticipated student learning outcomes, materials, and means of assessment are also proposed, subject to the specific findings of the needs assessment.

The CHNS 131 course is designed to involve five classroom hours per week, as well as five hours of independent or language lab work per week. As a beginning-level Mandarin Chinese class, it is designed to develop oral communication skills through drills and individual practice in forming Chinese sentences. Some units of the course will also include cultural information that forms part of the language, but the main content will cover vocabulary and situations appropriate for the hospitality and retail industries. Adopting a communicative approach, it will emphasize questions and answers and situational role-playing. In this course,
students will study the basic structures of Mandarin Chinese with an emphasis on listening and speaking skills, with limited coverage of reading skills, and very little course content involved in the writing of Chinese characters. The course will teach standard Mandarin Chinese, using listening examples produced by speakers of both the Beijing dialect that is standard in Mainland China, as well as the guoyu dialect that is standard in Taiwan.

This course is planned as an elective for the Associate in Arts and Associate in Science degrees at KCC, with a specific focus on students in the Business and HOST programs. The CHNS 131 course would be situated within the department of Languages, Linguistics, and Literature (LLL) at KCC, and would be taught by faculty having Masters or Doctoral degrees in East Asian Languages and Literature (EALL) or similar fields, with experience teaching non-LSP courses in Mandarin at the beginner and intermediate levels.

2 Needs Analysis

Designing and completing the needs analysis will be the immediate next step in developing this course. The needs analysis will ideally include interviews and surveys of a broad range of stakeholders, including HOST faculty and students, as well as industry professionals in Waikiki and Oahu in the areas of hotel front operations, concierge services, retail management, guided tour operations, and customer service. Some possible companies to approach in this regard include the Hilton and Sheraton hotels, the DFS Galleria Waikiki, the Polynesian Cultural Center, Hanauma Bay, the Waikiki Aquarium, Starbucks, Ala Moana Center, and other local stores and restaurants. In approaching these companies, in addition to conducting interviews about their specific needs with regard to bilingual English-Mandarin employees, it would also be
beneficial to establish a board of professional advisors and mentors for the course who may be willing to help with job-shadowing field study activities (see Materials and Assessment sections below).

For industry professionals, some specific questions to ask in interviews include: (a) to what degree do you have a need for non-native speakers of Chinese with skills in Mandarin for your business operations, now and in the foreseeable future; (b) if your business does have such a need, what are some typical types of interactions that your employees would have with Mandarin speakers; (c) are there any specific topics, items of merchandise, and/or travel activities that your Mandarin-speaking customers tend to be interested in; and (d) would it be appropriate for your employees to have novice-level skills in Mandarin, or would it be necessary for them to have intermediate or advanced skills? The interviews could be complemented with a survey of industry professionals requesting them to rate various situations involving use of language (e.g., asking directions, arranging a schedule, calling for a taxi) according to their likely degree of usefulness in daily interactions with Mandarin-speaking customers.

For HOST faculty and students, the interviews and surveys would focus on (a) their level of interest in taking the CHNS 131 course, should it be offered, (b) their thoughts on whether an LSP course on Mandarin for tourism and retail should be designed for beginner levels, as contemplated in this proposal, or whether it would be considered more useful as an intermediate CHNS 231 course for students who have already completed the general CHNS 101 and 102 curriculum, and (c) the career aspirations of students, for reference in preparing language learning materials that fit with the types of work they are training for.
It is possible that the results of the needs assessment may point to a preference for both a beginning-level CHNS 131 and an intermediate-level CHNS 231 course, or for an intermediate-level course only. It may even indicate that an LSP course is not necessary at all until advanced levels, in which case HOST students would continue to take the traditional CHNS 101 and 102 courses.

3 Student Learning Outcomes

Subject to the results of the needs analysis, tentative student learning outcomes (SLOs) for CHNS 131 have been proposed. These outcomes have been adapted from those in use for the general-purpose CHNS 101 curriculum at KCC, while adding industry specific contexts such as restaurants and airports, which are not otherwise covered in the general curriculum, while also reducing the scope of outcomes relating to reading and writing. Upon successful completion of CHNS 131, students should be able to:

• Understand a number of short utterances in Chinese in areas of immediate need
• Comprehend sentence-length utterances in situations where the context aids understanding, such as in a restaurant or store, at the airport, or on a bus
• Comprehend simple questions and statements about retail sales, addresses, time, interests and daily travel activities
• Obtain the main ideas of tailored speech likely to be encountered by tourists and business professionals
• Make short statements and ask simple questions by relying on memorized utterances
• Create sentences based on recombination of learned vocabulary and sentence patterns
• Carry out tasks involving a variety of activities such as greetings, inquiring, telling time and date, telephoning, shopping and dining
• Identify a limited number of characters and read for instructional and directional purposes standardized messages, phrases or expressions
• Interact with Chinese speakers in culturally acceptable ways, employing appropriate greetings, mannerisms, and understanding basic implications
• Understand aspects of Chinese culture
• Use modern technology such as the Internet and e-mail to research topics about China

In addition to the above, students who complete the course should be able to attain approximately the Novice-High level on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL-ETS) proficiency scale.

4 Materials and Curriculum

Currently, there are no beginning-level or intermediate-level textbooks for Mandarin LSP courses specific to the tourism and retail industry. Mandarin LSP textbooks for tourism for advanced speakers do exist (e.g., Liu, 2003), but these are meant for use in training tour guides who will be introducing and discussing a wide variety of information in tour group situations. More useful for the purposes of the course under discussion in this proposal are beginning-level textbooks for business (e.g., Zhou & Gerber, 2007) and informal phrasebooks for tourism-related Mandarin published online (e.g., Zhou, 2012). Such materials could be used as references for preparing vocabulary lists and dialogues for CHNS 131, however, it is likely that the textbook would need to be developed largely from scratch, since LSP Mandarin texts for business include
a number of language use situations like commercial negotiations and conducting meetings which would be of little use for students planning on careers in the tourism industry.

One innovative approach to the CHNS 131 course materials and content could be the inclusion of a site-specific field project in which, during the latter half of the semester once the students have some basic communication skills, they would have a job-shadowing experience at an actual place of business in the tourism or retail industry in the Waikiki area. The specific sites and businesses involved in this project would be selected on the basis of relationships with individual industry professionals who are contacted in connection with the needs assessment. The job-shadowing project would be designed as a low-stakes experiential learning activity, where students would observe how Chinese is used on a daily basis in customer interactions. After the job-shadowing experience, students would write reflective papers on the connection between foreign language skills and career development, and would note vocabulary items and phrases that they heard being used. There are, of course, at least two factors that could limit the usefulness of such job-shadowing projects: (a) the possibility that the student goes to a site for job-shadowing, but does not observe any use of languages other than English during the scheduled time; and (b) the possibility that the student does observe Mandarin being used, but is not able to comprehend the content of such interactions. These factors could be partially mitigated by mentioning such concerns to the industry professionals and working with them to see if project schedules could be arranged so as to maximize the likelihood that interactions in Mandarin could be observed during the scheduled times (e.g., arranging for job-shadowing when a hotel is reasonably certain that a Chinese tour group will be checking in, or at a department store information desk where Mandarin-speaking customers regularly inquire about basic
information). Integrating this project-based approach with language learning in a context that is directly relevant to the students’ intended careers may also lead to increased motivation.

5 Assessment and Evaluation

At the beginning of the semester, the Mandarin skill levels of students will be assessed through individual interviews and a brief in-class survey. It is expected that students will have little or no experience with the language, with the exception of heritage speakers, who are quite numerous among the student population at KCC and who may have some basic familiarity with conversational Mandarin, though not necessarily with pronunciation that is equivalent to a standard dialect. During and after each unit, assessment of student learning for CHNS 131 will follow the pattern of most beginner-level foreign language classes using assignments and quizzes, which will need to be adapted for a curriculum that focuses primarily on listening and speaking. Most of the quizzes will take the form of individual oral assessments and partner or small-group role-plays. Because assessment of language performance on the basis of oral interviews and role-play observations could involve a high degree of subjectivity in scoring, clear rubrics will be prepared for the learning outcomes associated with each unit being assessed. Individual rubrics for each quiz will also serve to make the assessment process clearer to students; instead of receiving a percentage grade, they will receive specific and immediate feedback on what aspects of their foreign language skills (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, pitch contour tones, volume, body language) need improvement. The end-of-semester assessment for the course will likewise be based on a final exam via oral interviews and role-plays.
Due to the innovative nature of this course, as an LSP course at a beginner level, it will be vital to conduct ongoing evaluations of whether students’ needs and learning outcomes are being met, whether the course materials are appropriate and sufficiently focused on the specific areas of tourism and retail, and the degree to which the job-shadowing field experience projects contribute to student learning and motivation. To make this evaluation process tractable, only one or two student learning outcomes will be chosen for evaluation each semester, while evaluation of the materials and field project curriculum will be done on an ongoing basis.

6 Conclusion

This proposal in the development of CHNS 131 is an ongoing endeavor, which has benefitted tremendously from interactions with experts and other colleagues through such opportunities such as a summer institute sponsored by the National Foreign Language Resource Center and the National Resource Center East Asia at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. In preparing this LSP project for the institute, I learned a great deal from lectures and workshops on needs assessment and materials development. Prior to this, I had mistakenly imagined that the needs assessment would focus only on the degree to which there was an institutional need for the course, in terms of finding adequate enrollment. In fact, I discovered that I knew very little about the details of curriculum development and course design coming into the institute.

One limitation of this project, in its current iteration, is its inchoate status as a set of guidelines for a course that has not yet been developed. My hope is that, in sharing these preliminary ideas for course design, likeminded colleagues may gain ideas and insights for their
own LSP courses. To that end, I hope to continue to gather feedback, criticisms, and comments on this proposal to help continue to guide it forward.