



Title of Report: Language Skills for Japanese Executives

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1. Identify and describe the training program.

This case report describes an English language training program for Japanese executives. The original contract at this particular corporation was for fifteen weeks. The clients were divided into two groups (Beginning [Group A] and Intermediate [Group B], as determined by a grammar placement test and an oral proficiency interview). Classes were 1.5 hours long for one evening per week per group. One primary instructor and an assistant instructor taught the two groups. Each of the instructors has held an MA TESOL degree for over twelve years.

2. Describe the target audience.

The students were seven male, high-level Japanese executives (Senior Directors and above) who work in engineering, research and development, management, and sales. They were between the ages of thirty-seven and sixty-five years of age, and had recently arrived in the United States to work for three to five years for the San Diego location of a wireless consumer product company.

Industry sectors involved include vendors, wireless provider customers, and a North American office comprised of predominantly English-speaking colleagues. They work within an environment that strives to retain the corporate culture of its headquarters in Japan. The client is the sales, marketing, and service branch of that corporation, which creates wireless consumer products.

3. Describe the needs assessment procedures utilized to develop the program.

Excelsior English representatives met with the human resources and training representatives of the US office of the corporation to interview staff members about the specific needs of the newly-arrived Japanese employees. Procedures included gathering data via (1) an initial one-on-one conversation with each participant, (2) a writing sample, (3) the results of a grammar test, and (4) a subsequent and more formal oral proficiency interview.

Unplanned, casual, ad-hoc interviews often occurred with the participants' colleagues in

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the hallway as well, with the Japanese workers present, thereby creating more community and the sense of support for their language development and practice. Additionally, these conversations provided an opportunity for Excelsior English staff members to gather 360-degree feedback from native English speakers who interacted daily with the Japanese executives. Occasionally meetings were scheduled to discuss needs on a deeper scale as the program progressed.

4. Explain the English language training program's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The main goals included assisting the Japanese participants in comprehending and communicating more confidently, clearly, and culturally appropriately in a North American technical environment. The program was unique in the experience of Excelsior English, as the client company is essentially a Japanese company committed to retaining the same philosophy, culture, and protocols in the US as it practices in Japan.

The goals of the participants themselves were to be able to express their intentions more readily and accurately in English. They also wished to comprehend and respond more successfully to native speaking employees and colleagues.

Objectives for the course included:

- To have a sufficient range of language to be able to successfully discuss project status updates, deadlines and deliverables with internal and external customers with a degree of fluency;
- To be able to use expressions and phrases of different types of pragmatics, including stating and asking for opinion, interrupting, clarification (echoing back), delaying or re-working decisions, and summarizing next steps and action items;
- To have a sufficient level of listening comprehension in a variety of professional and settings and the skill set for asking for clarification or repetition when necessary;
- To be able to write emails, reports and presentations for internal customers highlighting project scope and progress;
- To activate and expand the range of vocabulary and idioms for discussing topics both related to their industry and to their lives outside of work; and
- To be able to successfully participate in business meetings and other social and professional arenas, thereby building the participants' confidence in their abilities in



English.

5. Describe the teaching methods and training procedures used in the program.

The teaching method was student-centered, instructor-led, and largely communicative, evolving quite organically week-to-week. Excelsior English staff members surveyed the needs of the executives weekly, and considered existing business English textbooks and publications to supplement the training.

Ultimately, we decided to move forward with our usual practice of creating custom materials to fit the specific needs of the beginning and intermediate groups. Classroom activities included role playing expected work-related tasks and functions, such as participating more assertively in conference calls. Participants also role-played, delivering clear, top-down status updates and talks rallying employees; describing past, present and future goals and action items; and leading employee performance appraisal meetings.

6. Describe the teaching materials used in the program.

Excelsior uses a blend of authentic materials as determined by real- and just-in-time needs (the participants' own upcoming emails, reports, presentations) as well as pronunciation, voice, and breathing exercises. Brief integrated refresher grammar lessons were also created as necessary.

Examples of materials included:

- *Azar's Fundamentals of English Grammar, Intermediate*
- Handouts (grammar points, exercises and quizzes)
- Exercises catalyzed by the executives' emails or reports. We would discuss a commonly repeated error relevant to the whole group, such as using present tense where present perfect would be more appropriate
- Listening activities adapted from Sweeney's *Communicating in Business: A Short Course for Business English Students* and its Student CD set
- Pronunciation activities created by Excelsior English (including recording participants for future feedback) and/or adapted from Lane's *Focus on Pronunciation 2* and its accompanying audio CDs
- Weekly quizzes reviewing grammatical and idiomatic topics from the prior session
- Vocal Warm-Up and Breathing exercises (via handouts and in-session practice) similar to those used by actors, singers and news broadcasters.

7. Explain the content of the English language training program.



A. What written and spoken genres are covered in the training program?

Emails, telephone interactions, announcements, performance reviews, professional conference presentations, weekly meetings, and status updates were all addressed in the program.

B. What communicative functions are covered in the training program?

The key communicative functions covered were expressing opinions, arguing and agreeing, interrupting, persuading, negotiating, clarifying, providing oral instructions, getting information, making and declining requests, criticizing, complimenting, and delegating.

C. What speech events are covered in the training program?

We ascertained that the participants would need to use English at trade shows, and conferences (both face-to-face and remote). They would also participate in weekly conference call meetings with three offices, staff meetings, meetings with customers and vendors, supervisory meetings with individual employees, and in-house training programs given by the English-speaking human resources and training staff.

8. Explain the delivery mechanisms employed by the program.

The delivery mechanisms were primarily face-to-face interactions in a small conference room with a white board, projector, laptop, voice recorder, and DVD player. Activities also included ongoing email conversations among class members with editing and correction given by the instructor. In addition, there were suggested resources for self-study online and working through relevant grammar and vocabulary exercises using the class materials. The materials included handouts and pronunciation and grammar texts with accompanying CDs, which provided a supplementary audio component corresponding with the exercises in each chapter. Learning strategies and plans were developed for continued self-directed study.

9. Explain the assessment procedures used in the program.

Assessment procedures consisted of pre- and post-program recorded oral interviews, pre- and post-program writing assessments, and weekly reviews and quizzes. We also held meetings with corporate training staff. In addition, 360-degree interviews were conducted at the midterm and end of program. In these meetings we assessed the participants' progress, shared the results, and checked in with them about their goals and sense of progress toward those goals. As well, when meeting with corporate training staff at the midterm, we adjusted content and/or direction as determined necessary by the staff and English instructors. At the program's end, we shared the participants' progress, our recommendations for next steps, and evaluated the program together as a whole.



10. Explain the program evaluation mechanisms used.

Two separate program evaluation forms were administered to the participating Japanese executives and the human resources and training staff. The results of the evaluation will be incorporated to improve the program, should an extension or second session be requested in the future.

11. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this English training program.

The participants' differing English proficiency levels, travel commitments, and conference schedules created some inconsistency and lack of momentum. Determining exactly what types of communicative functions the executives needed to succeed was challenging at times because of what the intermediate group members called "Japanese thinking." Confirming action items, deadlines, and goals as related to a project roadmap are still areas that present opportunities to improve.

12. Describe the successes of the program and explain how they are documented.

The following sources of information indicate the success of the program:

- There were reports of more confidence in speaking during weekly meetings and casual conversations.
- The participants took more initiative and ownership of emails and presentations. That is, they required less support from bilingual staff to edit documents before sending them out.
- One of the later-discovered goals was to coach the executives so that they could rely more upon their own words when delivering more critical presentations on their own (without the aid of a translator or interpreter). Decreased reliance on bilingual colleagues assisting the Japanese managers in meetings was reported as happening more and more.
- The participants demonstrated increased cultural awareness and competence, including deeper understanding of what North American audiences expect in terms of directness, delegation, teamwork, and individual validation.
- They also came to understand that democratic decision making, encouragement, suggestions and congratulation are all elements of performance appraisal.
- The participants demonstrated more eye contact and confidence in giving weekly status update presentations at meetings.