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Colleges taking care of business
By MADELEINE COOREY

LANGUAGE courses have changed dramatically in the past five years, becoming more business-orientated and less academic.

Private language colleges catering to people wanting the linguistic and social skills to do business in Asia have flourished.

Demand for language courses can tend to wax and wane with economic trends.

Ms Carol Waites, head of modern languages at the University of NSW Institute of Languages, says about five years ago so many people wanted to learn Japanese they created a boom in the language.

"People were fighting each other in the corridors to get into a class," she said. A freer economy in China has now made Mandarin a more popular language, Ms Waites said. She said universities and private language schools were becoming more practical by giving as much importance to the interactive skills of listening and speaking as to reading and writing.

"I have seen all of them in the last five years change quite dramatically . . . they've changed mainly in their language teaching methods," she said.

Languages schools were "operating at a much more communicative level than before when it was much more an academic approach in some of the languages". People were also studying languages for social reasons, such as a holiday or to communicate with a spouse or partner from a different cultural background, which meant an academic focus was not necessary, Ms Waites said.

Among the growing number of suppliers of language courses are the old established institutions like the Workers Educational Association and adult education classes.

Within the universities language teaching is also taking a more corporate look, with groups such as Insearch Language Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney, which claims to be one of the largest centres in Australia teaching English to overseas students and Asian and European languages to Australians.

Insearch has joint venture schools or representative offices in China, Indonesia, Thailand, Japan and Kuwait.

Also popular are specialised schools such as the Tokyo Language and Culture Centre and Japanese Travel Bureau, or the National Korean Studies Centre.

Among the private colleges providing courses in language and culture for the corporate sector is Corporate Language Communications, which began in 1994.

Its director, Mr **Michael Bula**, says there is a growing need to provide corporate language skills.

He says the most popular courses are Indonesian, Portuguese, Mandarin, Vietnamese and Thai and French, German and Spanish.

Managing director of the Lorraine Martin College Mr Arvid Petersen said English language courses had been growing rapidly with the influx of students from Asia, Europe and South America.

The college had offices in Sydney, Brisbane and Cairns because about 70 per cent of all English language students were in NSW and Queensland.

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