The “Business” of Business English

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1．Introduction

The idea of “Business English” as a type of English related to yet distinct from general English is longstanding. In the early 20th century several books on the subject appeared. Some of these were manuals and dictionaries to help non-native English speakers cope with the demands of engaging in transactions, such as “Course in Business English” (Berlitz, 1907) and “First Book of Business English” (Chambonnaud and Texier, 1911). Notably, many Japanese writers contributed to these early endeavors in the field. Examples of these are Takeshi Ukai’s “Practical Business English in English & Japanese” (1901), Yukimasa Kobayashi’s “Training in Business English for Advanced Students” (1905), and Kiyohiko Miyahita’s “English Business Correspondence” (1909).

Other early books targeted native English speakers, generally focusing on business writing, such as “How to do business by letter and training course in business English composition” (Cody, 1908), the lengthily titled “Business English and correspondence; a practical treatise on the methods by which expert correspondents produce clear and forceful letters to meet modern business requirements (Barrett, 1914), and “Practical business English: a textbook on commercial correspondence for junior and senior high school students” (Mason, 1925).

Using these and many other textbooks, students continued to learn English over the years with a view to gaining enough competence to use it to conduct business. However, in the last decades of the 20th century, new focus was placed on conducting research on Business English in order to more effectively assess the needs of learners and the communicative conventions of the business world.

This Business English research is one sphere of **English for Specific Purposes** (ESP), a field that includes other areas such as English for Academic Purposes, Legal English, and Nursing English. The ESP Journal (now called English for Specific Purposes) was launched in 1980 and its first issue included a paper on “Cohesion in Business Discourse” (Johns, 1980). The abundance of research related to business communication has increasingly informed Business English teaching methodology, leading to more precise and accurate instruction of students.

What skills do students need?

2. Needs assessment

In designing a Business English course, it is common to make an **assessment** of the students’ communicative needs. Students who are already working are often well aware of the gaps in their English workplace abilities. However, students who are not yet employed may have only a vague notion of the needs ahead of them in their careers. In such cases, research related to the linguistic demands of the business world can be useful in designing the curriculum for a course.

Chan (2014) submitted questionnaires to 215 professionals in a range of careers in Hong Kong in order to gather information related to workplace language needs and challenges. The questionnaires revealed that internal e-mail, followed by external e-mail, reports, websites and letters were the most common written necessities (see Table 1). The most common spoken workplace essentials were telephoning, informal meetings or discussions, formal meetings or discussions, presentations, and conferences (see Table 2).

On the other hand, the greatest written challenge in workplace communication was business plans. Other difficult written responsibilities included business publicity, contracts, proposals, and persuasive texts (see Table 3). Regarding work requiring speaking, press briefings topped the list of challenges, followed by business negotiations, video conferences, conference calls, and business meetings (see Table 4).

In order to develop a short intensive Business English course at a Japanese

Table 1. Most common written workplace language needs

Internal e-mail
↓
External e-mail
↓
Reports
↓
Websites
↓
Letters

(Adapted from Chan, 2014, p. 383)

Table 2. Most common spoken workplace language needs

Telephoning
↓
Informal meetings / discussions
↓
Formal meetings / discussions
↓
Presentations
↓
Conferences

(Adapted from Chan, 2014, p. 384)

company, Cowling (2007) similarly contacted former students of the course who were now using English in their work, asking open-ended questions about their communicative needs. In addition to common Business English areas such as negotiations, meetings, placing orders, and making phone calls, respondents also mentioned describing business trends, which they noted they were often called upon to do in reports, presentations, and discussions. The respondents further noted that small talk with foreign business people was difficult.

Communicative needs may vary depending on the specific occupation. Gray (2010) conducted a survey of the oral communication needs of 146 accounting firms in New Zealand based on 27 oral communication skills. Listening **attentive-**

Table 3. Greatest challenges in written workplace communication

Business plans
↓
Business publicity
↓
Contracts
↓
Proposals
↓
Persuasive texts

(Adapted from Chan, 2014, p. 385)

Table 4. Greatest challenges in spoken workplace communication

Press briefings
↓
Business negotiations
↓
Video conferences
↓
Conference calls
↓
Business meetings

(Adapted from Chan, 2014, p. 387)

Table 5. Most important oral communication needs for accountants

Listening attentiveness
↓
Listening responsiveness
↓
Conveying attitude of respect and interest
↓
Asking for clarification / feedback
↓
Speaking on the telephone

(Adapted from Gray, 2010, p.64)

Table 6. Least important oral communication needs for accountants

Giving presentations with visuals
↓
Giving presentations without visuals
↓
Socializing
↓
Giving specialist presentations
↓
Providing training or coaching

(Adapted from Gray, 2010, p.64)

ness and listening **responsiveness** topped the list of vital skills. Closely related and also highly evaluated were being able to show respect and interest, and asking for clarification or feedback when needed. Telephone skills were likewise deemed important (see Table 5). Conversely, presentation skills were not considered significant for accountants, particularly presentations with visuals. Socializing and providing training or coaching received similar low appraisals (see Table 6).

Such studies make it clear that to the degree possible, a close assessment of the actual current or future needs of students should be undertaken in designing a Business English course. Communicative demands may differ widely according to the precise work engaged in. Moreover, a balance must be struck between addressing the skills that are used frequently with those which may be called into play less often, but which may nonetheless be crucial yet challenging.

What are the best words for business?

3. Corpus studies

One central approach to investigating Business English involves the use of **corpuses**, large collections of spoken or written English. Corpuses are mainly

used to examine the frequencies of various business words. They are also used to inspect **collocations**, that is, to find out what words tend to be used in conjunction with other words. Doing so allows researchers to supply teachers and students with a more detailed understanding of the differences in function and nuance of similar words, and to enable instructors to focus on teaching students words most likely to prove useful in business contexts. Several examples of corpus use in Business English research will demonstrate the value of such investigation.

Example 1

One way that corpuses may be used in Business English is to probe the answers to questions of **nuance** and **usage** posed by learners. Walker (2011) makes use of the Bank of English (BoE) Corpus of 450 million words to show how corpuses can be used to answer specific questions from learners. Walker envisions the following situation:

> *Doctor T is a senior manager working in a large manufacturing company with its head office in Germany. He is 47, German, and responsible for Human Resources and Training throughout the company. The German company has recently acquired a British auto-parts manufacturer and Doctor T has been asked to visit this newly acquired subsidiary to meet the management and address the workforce. In order to prepare for the visit Doctor T has booked 40 hours of one-to-one training with an experienced English teacher. He wants the teacher to help him prepare the presentation he will give to the native speaker workforce. The presentation is about the structure of the German parent company, its Human Resources policies and ethos, and its management style. The German company prides itself on having a very 'flat' structure and an inclusive decision-making style. (…) Doctor T turns to his teacher and asks "Should I say I "run", "manage" or "head", the Human Resources Division, or should I use a phrase like "I am responsible for", or "in charge of" instead?* (Walker, 2011, p.104)

This may seem a rather lengthy description of "Doctor T" and his work situation, but assessments are dependent on a variety of factors; linguistic judgements cannot be rendered in a context-less vacuum. In order to answer the hypothetical

query, Walker lists the ten most frequent collocations of each of the five words or phrases in the BoE corpus (see Table 7). An analysis of this type of simple collocation-frequency ranking makes several things plain:

1) **Run** is associated with power, and is more often associated with things, rather than people.
2) **Manage**, while sometimes used with people, is more often used with non-human bodies. It is also often related to monetary matters.
3) **Head** collocations divide up into two main noun categories: structures and activities.
4) **Responsible for** is associated with function, such as a position in a company, or accountability, often in negative contexts, such as death.
5) **In charge of**, on the other hand, is not linked to accountability. Its top 10 collocations are almost exclusively linked to non-humans. The collocation with "country" suggests that, like "run", it is associated with power.

Walker concludes that it would be advisable that the German avoid "run" and "in charge of" since doing so would better suit a less hierarchical management style. Additionally, because "run" is often used with non-human elements, using "run" could give his listeners the impression that he views them as cogs or robots rather than people. "Head" or "responsible for" are likely to convey the desired impression. In this way, corpuses enable instructors to provide information

Table 7. Top 10 collocations of five words/phrases in the BoE corpus

RUN	MANAGE	HEAD	RESPONSIBLE FOR	IN CHARGE OF
Risk	Business	Team	Deaths	Case
Business	Economy	Government	Actions	Policy
Country	Money	Investigation	Death	Affairs
Company	Affairs	Inquiry	Shareholders	Investigation
Show	Club	Department	Loss	Project
Campaign	Investment	Group	Attack	Team
Club	Portfolio	Committee	Policy	Country
Government	Company	CIA	Development	Operations
Place	Team	Commission	Murder	Operation
School	Finances	Company	Safety	Development

(Adapted from Walker, 2011, pp. 105-107)

to students based on detailed data rather than intuition or surmises founded on less thorough examination of differences.

Example 2

Business English corpuses further allow researchers to pinpoint what words are particularly **salient** in business contexts, compared to those used in general English. Nelson (2006) uses a corpus to identify key words in Business English and then similarly investigates the difference between near-synonyms by making use of a corpus. While Walker (2011) uses a corpus of general English, Nelson makes use of his own Business English Corpus (BEC) of roughly one million words, and compares it with the British National Corpus (BNC) Sampler, of two million words of general English. In doing so, Nelson was able to observe which words are more frequent in the Business English corpus compared to the general English corpus, suggesting that they are particularly **relevant** in business contexts.

Nelson (2006) found 1,000 such key words and discovered that these words fell into five semantic groups: people in business; business activities; business actions; business description; and business events / entities. He then chose to engage in an in-depth analysis of the collocations of 50 words comprising 10 words from each of the five semantic groups.

After choosing the 50 key words and slotting them into the five semantic groups, Nelson further examines the **semantic prosodies** of each of the words in each category, noting which words were associated with what kinds of other words. Table 8 shows the semantic prosodies of the business description category.

Such semantic slotting not only enables learners to understand the types of words that team up with these business descriptions, but also to notice easily the differences between the semantic prosodies for various words. One comparison of particular interest is that of the semantic collocations of “global” and “international”, words that may seem interchangeable but which in fact differ in their semantic prosodies. What is first evident from examining Table 8 is that while both “global” and “international” associate with business activities, company / institutions, and people, only “global” is used in conjunction with economic / financial indicators and

products / services. Conversely, only "international" is related to size /significance.

Even when two words may be used in tandem with the same types of words, their relative frequencies may vary. Nelson (2006) tallied the frequencies of semantic pairing of the same two words, "global" and "international", with the categories they shared in common: business activities, company / institutions, and people. Thirty-five percent of the occurrences of "international" in the corpus collocated with a company or institution, but only 17% of the "global" tallies did. On the other hand, "global" was twice as often associated with business activities than "international" was. Both collocated with people at roughly the same rate (see Table 9).

Comparison of words in a Business English corpus and a general English corpus can also reveal that some words may be used more frequently in certain ways in general contexts as opposed to business contexts. Nelson (2006) observes that while 56% of the semantic prosodies for "global" in the BEC are related to business characteristics or qualities, the most common type of pairing with "glob-

Table 8. Semantic prosodies of business descriptions

Associations / Key words	Business activities	Extremes	Company/ institution	Economic/ financial indicators	Money	Products/ services	Size/ significance	People
High		*			*			
Big			*		*			*
Low		*						
Global	*		*	*		*		*
International	*		*				*	*
Local			*			*		*
Competitive		*			*			
Corporate	*	*			*			*
Strategic	*							
Financial			*					*

(Adapted from Nelson, 2006, p. 227)

Table 9. Relative frequencies of semantic prosodies for "global" and "international"

	Business activities	Company / institution	People
Global	18%	17%	6%
International	9%	35%	5%

(Adapted from Nelson, 2006, p. 228)

al" in the British National Corpus Sampler of general English related to climate, with a frequency of 26%. Thus, the same word "global" has different frequencies of association in Business English than it does in general English.

Example 3

Communicative needs are further greatly influenced by whether the interlocutors are working for the same company or not. Hanford's (2010) Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC) one-million word corpus of spoken English distinguishes between **internal** and **external** meetings. Handford (2010) finds the frequency of words in the corpus often diverge significantly based on which environment they occur in (see Table 10).

While "customer" and "need" are ranked relatively similarly, occurring as the fourth and 11th most frequent word in internal meetings, and the 10th and 7th in external meetings, respectively, the frequency of other words varies considerably. For example, "sales" is ranked 7th in internal meetings, but 145th in external meetings. Handford (2010) suggests that while internal meeting *discuss* things like sales, external meetings *do* these business activities; rather than discuss sales, selling itself takes place. Additionally, words that might have negative connotations such as "issue" or "problem" were used more frequently in internal meetings, with a ranking of 22 and 26 compared to 65 and 94 in external meetings. When "problem" is used in external meetings it is twice as commonly used

Table 10. Rankings of words in internal and external business meetings

Word	Internal meetings	External meetings
customer	4	10
sales	7	145
need	11	7
price	16	90
business	18	88
order	21	8
issue	22	65
month	23	44
problem	26	94
information	35	102

(Adapted from Handford, 2010, pp. 106-110)

in the phrase “not a problem” than it is in internal meetings.

Handford’s analysis makes it plain that the actual words used may vary depending upon whom one is speaking to in business situations, beyond matters of politeness. Students of Business English must be sensitive to these differing contexts.

Example 4

Corpus studies have also pointed to weaknesses in existing Business English textbooks, which may be created based on the author’s **intuition** rather than research. Skorczynska (2010) investigated whether 56 business metaphors introduced in a Business English textbook corresponded to metaphors found in the Corpus of Business Periodical and Journal Articles (BPJA), a one-million word corpus. Skorczynska further made a manual search of a 93,122-word sample of the BPJA for metaphors not included among the textbook metaphors, and the frequency of the metaphors found in this way was similarly investigated.

Table 11. Textbook business metaphors appearing 10 or more times in the BPJA

Type of metaphor	Textbook metaphors	Occurrences in BPJA
War	Fight	88
	Battle	75
	Campaign	60
	Attack	47
	Capture	41
	War	39
	Raid	28
	Weapon	24
	Tactics	18
	Mission	13
	Territory	12
Health	Recover	108
	Suffer	91
	Robust	58
	Healthy	43
	Terminal	12
	Ailing	11
Sports	Hurdle	11

(Adapted from Skorczynska, 2010, pp. 36-37)

Table 12. Corpus metaphors not in textbook

Type of metaphor	Metaphors	Occurrences in BPJA
War	Fire	49
	Beat	46
	Kill	27
	Survival	20
	Defeat	18
	Ally	17
	Army	15
	Bomb	14
Health	Hurt	57
Sports	Game	207
	Player	103
	Winner	31
	Race	28

(Adapted from Skorczynska, 2010, pp. 36-37)

Skorczynska found that 28.5% of the metaphors introduced in the textbook were not part of the corpus at all, and many appeared less than 10 times in it. On the other hand, several business metaphors in the BPJA were not included in the textbook. Table 11 shows the types of metaphors and the number of their occurrences in the BPJA. Only 18 of the 56 metaphors from the textbook occurred 10 or more times in the corpus.

Skorczynska (2010) further observes that while the metaphor "key player" was introduced in the textbook, it only appeared in the corpus twice. On the other hand, the corpus included four occurrences each of "global player" and "tech player" and two occurrences of "local player", suggesting that limiting the "player" metaphor to "key player" may be too restrictive.

What formats are used in Business English?

4. Genre analysis

Corpus analysis functions best in investigating word frequencies and collocations across a large data set as described above. Genre analysis, on the other hand, works well in scrutinizing an entire segment of communication in a much smaller data set. Genre analysis typically involves a **move-structure** analysis, as well as other communicative aspects such as politeness and discourse length. Doing this type of analysis enables researchers to explore how whole communicative situations are played out, and to observe differences based on culture or genre in similar types of discourse. The following are examples of two ways in which genre analysis is used in Business English research.

Example 1

Vergaro (2002, 2004) has analyzed differences in Italian and English communication in types of discourse that are often highly formulaic: letters requesting overdue payment and sales promotion letters. Particularly in the **face-threaten-**

ing act of money chasing, Vergaro (2002) found several differences between the two sets of data. As Table 13 shows, the Italian letters consisted of five moves: address the issue; give reasons to justify the action; solicit payment; warn or state consequences; and closing salutation. The English letters (see Table 14), on the other hand, generally included at least nine moves, five of which usually were not present in the Italian data: opening salutation; subject; give details; express availability; and end politely. While giving reasons to justify the action served as a **preparatory move** before soliciting payment in the Italian data, such statements of grounds for action were a **supplementary move** in the English data, only present in 17% of the letters. The English data also sometimes included a move playing down the receiver's behavior. Finally, the warning moves in the English data appeared before or after soliciting payment, whereas they almost always fell after the solicitation in the Italian letters.

Vergaro (2002) observes that the English letters make use of positive polite-

Table 13. Move structure of Italian payment-request letters

Address the issue
↓
Give reasons to justify action
↓
Solicit payment
↓
Warn / state consequences
↓
Closing salutation

(Adapted from Vergaro, 2002, p. 1218)

Table 14. Move structure of English payment-request letters

Opening salutation
↓
Subject
↓
Address the issue
↓
Give details
↓
(Give reasons to justify action)
↓
[Warn]
↓
(Play down receiver's behavior)
↓
Solicit payment
↓
[Warn]
↓
Express availability
↓
End politely
↓
Closing salutation

(Adapted from Vergaro, 2002, p. 1220)

ness strategies in the "play down receiver's behavior" and "express solidarity" moves, and seem additionally more **recipient-oriented** through the provision of details of the outstanding payment. She suggests that a letter of the Italian sort might appear curt to English readers, while the English letters might appear oddly attentive to Italians.

Example 2

Connor et. al (2002) analyzed 99 job application letters created by Belgian, Finnish, and American students in English as part of a class assignment . The letters were examined on the basis of move structures identified by Connor et. al (1995), shown in Table 15. Connor et. al (2002) found cross-cultural differences related to three moves. Explaining how the applicant knew about the position, stating a desire for the position, supporting arguments for the application, and requesting contact or an interview were moves utilized by an average of 91% of the letter-writers of each country, and hence may be considered **requisite** moves. Conversely, expressing appreciation, offering further information, and making reference to the attached resume were included by an average of 33% of the letter-writers, and therefore more **discretionary** sections of the job-application let-

Table 15. Move structure of job application letters

Explain how you learned of the position
↓
State desire for consideration for the position
↓
Provide supporting arguments for the application
a) Neutral arguments
b) Arguments based on what would be good for the company
c) Arguments based on what would be good for the applicant
↓
Indicate desire for an interview or further contact
↓
[Express appreciation]
↓
[Offer to provide more information]
↓
[Reference attached resume]

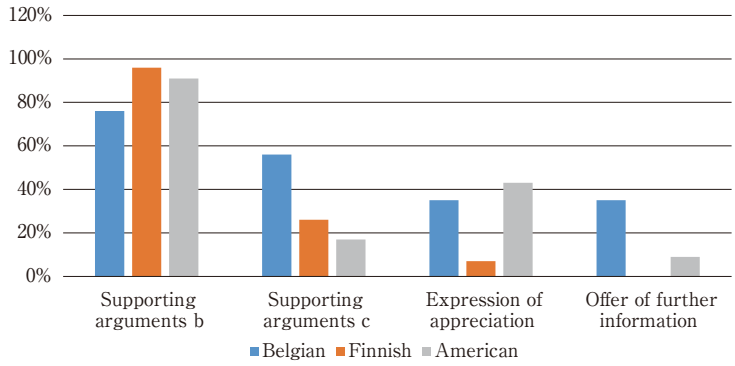
(Adapted from Connor et. al, 1995, p. 464)

ters. Differences between the writers of the three countries emerged in the **supporting arguments** for the application, expressions of appreciation, and offers to provide further information (see Graph 1).

Belgian letter-writers were less likely than their Finnish and American counterparts to use supporting arguments based on what would be good for the company, such as a move in an American letter stating, "I have a strong desire to work in some way with an international system, and although I am sure that positions at your institution are very competitive, I am sure I can be of benefit" (Connor et. al, 2002). Seventy-six percent of the Belgian students used this type of supporting argument, while 96% of the Finnish students and 91% of the U.S. students did so.

On other hand, the Belgian students were more likely to make an argument based on what would be good for them as applicants, such as, "With my current university studies in economics I would like to focus my career on marketing projects where I can further build on my organizational skills and experience in working with subcontractors both nationally and internationally," written by a Belgian student (Connor et. al, 2002). Although 56% of the Belgians used this type of argument, only 26% of the Finns and 17% of the Americans did.

Just 7% of the Finnish students made an expression of appreciation in their letters, but 35% of the Belgians and 43% of the Americans did so. Regarding of-



Graph 1. Frequencies of job application letter moves
(Adapted from Connor et. al, 2002, pp. 182-184)

fers to provide further information, 35% of the Belgians made use of this move. However only 9% of the U.S. students did. (The researchers did not include the frequency for the Finnish students.)

Example 3

Method of **transmission** may also influence the number of moves included. Flowerdew and Wan (2006) analyzed 25 tax computations letters of an international accounting firm. Of the 25 letters, 16 were faxed and nine were posted. Table 16 shows the move structure of the tax computation letters. The researchers found that while all of the posted letters contained all of the moves, less than half of the faxed letters contained an opening salutation or a solicitation of action.

Flowerdew and Wan (2006) further analyzed politeness strategies of the letters and observed the use of **personal references**, including the use of first name of addressee in the opening salutation as well as the use of "I" and "you" throughout. They suggest that such "interactivity", relatively uncommon in business letters, may indicate a way of demonstrating that the business relationship with the client is valued. The only diversion from this style occurs in the "Solicit action" move, which makes use of the plural first-person reference ("we"). Flowerdew and Wan posit that this shift is a means of **depersonalizing** the imposition implicit in a solicitation.

Table 16. Move structure of tax computation letters

Opening salutation
↓
Subject
↓
Actions taken
↓
Discussion of issues
↓
Solicit action
↓
Express availability
↓
Closing salutation

(Flowerdew and Wan, 2006, p.141)

How is Business English tested?

5. Testing

Language testing can allow employers to assess the abilities of potential employers. Tests can also serve as a goal for learners to work towards and a means of evaluating their progress. There are a number of well-established Business English tests. Some of the most widely known are described in Table 17.

As with all language tests, issues of **validity** are a concern. That is, does the test measure what it claims to? In the case of tests of language for specific purposes, including Business English, other issues are also raised. First, there is the issue of the **overlap** between general English and specialized English. As Davies (2001, p.138) notes, even occupations which require extremely **formulaic** types of language, such as the language used by air traffic controllers, will, in cases of emergency, require a broader linguistic proficiency. Similarly, those engaged in astrophysics research will need not only competency in the language of such research, but also have enough general capability to arrange to participate in academic conferences and so on (Davis, 2001, p.138).

A related issue is that of the difference between "knowing" a language and "performing" an activity through use of the language. Jacoby and McNamara (1999) observed a **disparity** between scores on an occupation-specific English language test and the evaluations regarding communicative ability on the part of the supervisors who actually worked with the test-takers. This suggests that language tests may be lacking in deeper communicative skills beyond surface linguistic appraisals. Jacoby and McNamara propose greater investigation of "indigenous assessments" when considering the measures of learner proficiency. Douglas (2001) builds on Jacoby and McNamara (1999), recommending that tests related to language for specific purposes should derive from an analysis of the target-language use on the job.

Table 17. Representative tests of Business English

Name of test / Provider	Description	Levels offered
TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication)	Two sections : Listening and Reading Listening : Statements related to photographs; Questions; Short conversations; Short talks Reading: Incomplete sentences; Text completion; Comprehension of short texts All multiple choice	1
BEC (Cambridge English Business Certificates) / University of Cambridge	Four sections: Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking Reading: Graphs or charts, messages, emails, business publications Writing: Create two pieces of writing, ex. letters, reports, e-mails, proposals Listening: Interviews, discussions, presentations Speaking: Conversation with another test-taker	3
EBC (English for Business Communication) / City and Guilds	Two sections: Reading and Writing Reading: Demonstrating an understanding of written business communications ; Completing and extracting information from business documents Writing: Writing concise letters, writing memos in response to instructions or situations, drafting documents or reports	3
SET for Business (Spoken English Test for Business) / City and Guilds	Speaking only Part 1: Giving personal business-related information Part 2: Communicating in everyday, business-related situations Part 3: Exchanging information to perform a task Part 4: Prepared presentation	3
EOC (English for Office Skills)/City and Guilds	Three sections: Listening, Reading, and Writing Listening: Spell difficult words in a given context transfer a spoken message into written form Reading: Demonstrate an understanding of a written passage identify and correct grammatical errors in a written text proof-read documents, with and without access to the original Writing: Distinguish correct word forms for a given context provide appropriate punctuation to a given text	2
BULATS (Business Language Testing Service) Online Speaking test	Speaking only Interview Reading aloud Presentation Presentation with graphic Communication activity	1
BULATS (Business Language Testing Service) Online Writing Test	Writing only Write a short e-mail, letter, message Write a letter or report	1

(Adapted from official test websites)

Test providers continue to revise tests based on research, improving the means of assessment. In the end, however, it is important to recognize that tests, while a useful instrument in evaluating proficiency, may not necessarily provide a full picture of a learner’s communicative ability.

6. Conclusion

For more than a century, Business English has been a subject of importance for learners wishing to cope effectively with work-related English needs. In the past, much of the materials created were based on the writers’ intuition and personal experience, but from the 1980s more emphasis has been placed on conducting research in order to provide more accurate and precise instruction. Major areas of such research include needs assessment, corpus analysis, and genre analysis.

Needs assessment focuses on ascertaining via surveys and interviews the actual language needs of the workplace. Such research has revealed particularly useful and/or problematic skills for learners. At the same time, it has become clear that requisite skills may vary greatly depending on the exact type of work the employee engages in.

Corpus analysis has been able to shed light on issues such as divergences between general English and Business English, critical differences in nuances between near-synonyms, gaps between textbook instruction of business metaphors and English metaphors actually used in the business world, and disparities between the language used in internal and external meetings.

Genre analysis, on the other hand, typically uses a smaller sample of language than in corpus analysis, engaging in a close analysis to investigate, for example, what types of moves are used in the discourse and in what order. Such research has shown various differences in the writing of letters and job applications, and helps enable learners to become aware of more effective ways to put forth their work objectives in English.

Testing is another area of Business English research, in order to ensure appropriate means of assessing learners’ competence. Two issues in particular have received attention: 1) the need to assess general English skills along with occupa-

tion-specific skills, and 2) the necessity of confirming that good test scores correspond to real-world assessments of test-takers communicative abilities. When discrepancies are found, it is important that tests are accordingly revised so that the tests truly can serve as reliable indicators of the language skills of those seeking employment.

Business English is a complex field, as multiple variable influence the effectiveness of communication. Nevertheless in the last several decades a greater awareness of the issues affecting Business English has emerged, enhancing the instruction Business English teachers can provide for learners. Ultimately the target must always be the positive response to the question, "Does it work in the given business situation?" This is indeed the "business" of Business English.

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